



The Upper Keys first public electric generator plant located behind McKenzie's drug store (Now the Copper Kettle Restaurant) in Tavernier, FL circa 1944

History Talk, Spring 2004, Page 432

**The Historical
Preservation Society
of the Upper Keys**
P.O. Box 2200
Key Largo, FL 33037

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HISTORY TALK

FROM THE UPPER FLORIDA KEYS

Issue 27 THE KEY LARGO CIVIC CLUB EDITION Spring, 2004

NEW MEMBERS



Photo by Four Winds

Shown above are eleven new members welcomed into the Upper Keys Kiwanis Club last Friday evening. They are, left to right: Homer Byrum, Tavernier; Donn Hinton, Key Largo; Walter Dinsmore, Key Largo; Hugh Rhodus, Plantation Key; Cliff Miller, Plantation Key; Mr. Grayson; Gov. Shore; George Pittsinger, Islamorada; Richard Roberts, Islamorada; Albert Cornfield, Plantation Key; Ralph Martin, Plantation Keys; and Rev. L. S. Lacey, pastor of the Keys Baptist Mission.

Above photo from the *Homestead News*, October 28, 1954. *See page 424 for story.

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1907

Henry Morrison Flagler

By Jerry Wilkinson

Most of you know that I do re-enactments of Henry Flagler. I collect printed stories of whom I consider to be a great man. Below is an article that was passed on to me that was printed in the Norwalk Reflector, an Ohio newspaper, on January 8, 1907. It was written by James B. Barrow, former editor of the Cleveland Leader and titled "An interview with Henry Flagler." There are not many printed interviews with Mr. Flagler. I find it conforms with the normal biographies; however, it does contain some personal philosophies of wealth and its uses.

JW

"I was born in a little village south of Rochester, and near the town of Canadagua, New York. My father was a Presbyterian preacher whose salary was \$400 per year. All the training I ever got at school was obtained before I was 14 years old. At that time I concluded that my Mother and Sister needed the lean pay which my father received for preaching. So I left home and walked 9 miles to the town of Medina, carrying a carpetbag in my hand. I got aboard a freight boat on the Erie Canal and went to Buffalo, where I took a vessel for Sandusky, Ohio. Arriving at Sandusky, I pushed on to the little Ohio village of Republic.

When I got there I had a five franc piece, a French coin which passed in this country for a dollar; five cents in silver, and four copper pennies. The five franc piece is at home in my desk. I have kept it all these years, imitating the man in the bible who had but one talent. I went to work in a country store for \$5.00 a month and my board. In 10 months my pay was increased 40 per cent or about 50¢ a week. I worked hard and saved my money. I never earned more than \$400 per year when I was employed by others.

Fostoria, now a thriving Ohio city was near by. In those days it was called Rome. The father of Charley Foster lived there and had a store. He was known as the Pope of Rome. Charley clerked for his father and he and I were said to be the best salesmen in Seneca County. Charley made a fortune, became governor of his state, and secretary of the treasury in General Benjamin Harrison's Administration. But

business and politics are unlike and he died poor. When I had accumulated a little money I moved to Bellevue, a small place in the next county, and went into the grain business.

John D. Rockefeller was a commission merchant in Cleveland, and I sent him a good many carloads of wheat, which he sold as my agent. I also had an interest in a distillery. It was immensely respectable in those days to manufacture and sell liquor. The distillery gave me an outlet for considerable grain. Nevertheless, I had scruples about the business and gave it up.

I made \$50,000 in Bellevue. Then I went to Saginaw and tried to manufacture Salt. At the end of 3 years I had lost my little fortune and owed \$50,000 to about 5,000 Irishmen who had been working in the salt factory.

My relatives by marriage and a half brother loaned me enough money at 10 per cent interest to pay my debts, and I moved to Cleveland and engaged in the grain and produce commission business.

John D. and William Rockefeller, and Samuel Andrews had started a small oil refinery in Cleveland on the side of a hill. When the second refinery was built, in 1867, Stephen Harkness, who was related to me by marriage, backed me for \$100,000 in a partnership with Mr. Rockefeller and his associates. Other little refineries sprang up and we bought them. Our business was developed rapidly, and in 1870 we closed our partnership and organized the Standard Oil Company. We worked night and day, making good oil as cheaply as possible and selling it for all we could get.

At first the capitalization of the Standard Oil Co. was \$1,000,000. When we bought out Lockhart, Frew and Company in Pittsburgh; Warden, Frew and Company of Philadelphia; and Charles Pratt & Co. of New York, paying them in Standard shares at \$450 each, we increased our capital to \$3,500,000.

John D. Rockefeller said recently that a good many able businessmen were doubtful of the success of the Standard. This is true. Some of the men whose refineries we bought wanted cash instead of Standard stock. A number of those who took money were not particularly friendly to us later on. You see, we limited our annual dividend to 15%, kept our surplus in the treasury, and eventually were justified in raising our Capital from \$3,500,000 to \$70,000,000.

I think young men have more opportunities than ever, although competition and the massing of capitol make it more difficult to get into and develop large enterprises. The ways to success are many and the prices are various. To succeed may cost one's health, or it may mean separation from one's family and friends and banishment to the desert, the mine or the forest. But no matter the way and no matter the price, success always demands unremitting toil, self denial and enthusiasm. I sometimes feel as if I should like to address myself to the young men of the country, but I fancy they would think me to be old fashioned and self satisfied.

There are hundreds of thousands of young men all the time but only a few of them ever come to great success. Why is it? I have been given many answers. But who supports all the saloons in this country? Certainly not the rich. And the theaters? Not the wealthy, but the men who get from \$500 to \$5,000 a year. It is improvidence that stands in the way of the average American. I hesitate to say it, but I recollect when I wore a thin overcoat and thought how comfortable I should be when I could afford a long, thick ulster [Irish overcoat]. I carried a lunch in my pocket until I was a rich man. I trained myself in the school of self control and self denial. It was hard on Flagler, but I would rather be my own tyrant than have some one else tyrannize over me. The cost of living, of course, has increased, but if economy were practiced by those who work for wages, there would be less complaint about the changes which have taken place in business conditions. If money is spent for personal uses, to promote idleness, luxury and selfishness, it is a curse to its possessor and to society. Wealth brings obligation, moral and governmental. It has but one legitimate function, and that is its employment for the welfare of the nation. The man who builds a factory or digs a mine serves his country."

1954

Florida Keys Section, Homestead News

October 21/28, 1954 Edition

By Jerry Wilkinson

For some time I have been conscious that I have been too preoccupied with collecting more ancient

Upper Keys history. Larry Wiggins of the *Homestead Leader* recently discovered some copies of the defunct *Homestead News* in their morgue.

This newspaper ran a Florida Keys Section once a week and there were copies from October 1954 to 1958. Realizing an opportunity to preserve modern history, my wife, Mary Lou, and I made several trips and copied all the Florida Keys Sections that the *Leader* had on file. These articles also partially ignore another part of our history - businesses.

Therefore, in each issue I will be printing selected articles from each copy beginning with the first that we found, October 21, 1954.

Another significant thought is that this time period was just after unincorporated Monroe County began growing. In 1940, all but 755 county residents lived in the City of Key West. In 1950 the number living outside of Key West had grown to 3,524. In the period of these articles, by 1960, the number grew to 13,965 - a huge percentage. Then in 1970 it grew to 23,274, in 1980 to 38,806, in 1990 to 53,192 and in 2000 to 54,757. Please note the small growth in the past decade. More on the population growth in another issue.

JW

Selected articles as originally printed:

Homestead News, Keys Section, October 21, 1954

- Joe Pinder To Be Florida Keys Road Patrolman -

Joe B. Pinder is now receiving training under Monroe County Sheriff John Spottwood's office and by December 1, is expected to become operator of the Keys Road Patrol.

Pinder is a member of the Pioneer family by that name, who settled in Islamorada several generations ago.

Until recently he was associated with his father in the conduct of the Frigidaire Agency at Islamorada.

Homestead News, Keys Section, October 21, 1954

- Bathing Beach and County Park Being Readied On Key Largo -

Monroe County is to be the recipient of four and a-half acres of ocean front land, located directly in the rear of Key Largo's fabulous Rod and Reel Motel which faces on U. S. No. 1.

ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

This publication is produced quarterly by the Historical Preservation Society of the Upper Keys, incorporated in the State of Florida on July 7, 1976. COPYRIGHT © 2004. A monthly newsletter is also mailed to members. Subscription is automatic with any membership listed below.

MEMBERSHIP

The Historical Preservation Society of the Upper Keys is a non-profit Florida Corporation and is tax exempt under Internal Revenue Code section 501(c)(3). Preserving and passing on a rich cultural heritage to future generations may well be as good of an investment as you can make. Annual dues are: Family \$20, Supporting \$25, Contributing \$30, Patron \$50 and Life \$300. Your assistance will be appreciated. Please mail your tax exempt memberships fees and receive this publication free.

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Please write to: Jerry Wilkinson, 38 East Beach Road, Tavernier, FL 33070 or e-mail jerry@keyshistory.org or gail@keyshistory.org. Back issues are available for \$3 including shipping. Visit our web site at:

www.keyshistory.org

This gift property is being deeded by Charles Creiter of Miami, for use and development of a County Park and public beach.

County Commissioner Harry Harris told the NEWS that he considers this gift one of the most needed and welcome adjuncts for progress on the Keys.

The park and beach are expected to be ready for use the coming winter season.

Another beach, located on the Gulf side, back of Matecumbe School, is being restored for public use as a bathing beach.

Development of this project was brought about through the efforts of Key Largo Civic Club.

[The Rod and Reel Motel is now the Key Largo Inn Travel Lodge at MM 99.2; therefore, the Creiter property is not Harry Harris Park. Subsequent articles will follow this gift.]

JW]

Homestead News, Keys Section, October 21, 1954

- Starlite Theatre Offers Two Free Performances For Grand Opening -

The public is invited to attend the Grand Opening of the Starlite Open Air Theater on Key Largo for two FREE performances Saturday night, October 23, when the famous movie "Key Largo" will be shown. The theater is located opposite [across the highway from] the Key Largo Post Office.

The first performance will start at 6:45 p. m. and the second will follow. Admission is absolutely FREE.

Seating 350 people, the new theater is an innovation in such amusement establishments. It is constructed with a concrete block wall and has a removable roof of canvas, which will be used when needed.

Jeff Gautier and Jim Huddleson, both of Key Largo are the owners, and will operate the first theater on the Upper Keys, the only one of its type ever built.

Three changes of program will be run each week and the owners promise the public first rate, high type movies from now on.

Following the opening, Sunday and Monday, October 24 and 25, "Flame and the Flesh" with Lana Turner, will be the feature.

[Just south of the Key Largo Cafe, MM 99.5 - JW]

Homestead News, Keys Section, October 21, 1954

- Plantation Yacht Harbor Now Under New Ownership and Manager -

Sale of the fabulous Plantation Yacht Harbor on Plantation Key has been announced and the new president Al Cornfield of Miami with the new manager Ralph Martin, are busy directing alterations for added facilities.

Cornfield is Exalted Ruler of the Miami Elks Lodge and Martin is former manager of the Drum on Coral Way, Miami and the Silver Slipper Supper Club. They are both widely known throughout Dade County.

Plantation Yacht Harbor is one of the most complete vacation spots in the Keys, having a 60 unit, entirely air conditioned Motel, Swimming Pool, Yacht Basin, and well appointed restaurant. . . in fact, everything for the vacationer.

Homestead News, Keys Section, October 21, 1954

- SCIENTISTS GO ON AUDUBON TOUR -

Sixty scientists from Miami went to Tavernier Wednesday for an Audubon Tour. Leaving and landing at Tavernier, the group was entertained by the Ladies Auxiliary of the Tavernier Fire Department, with three delicious, home cooked meals. The tour was conducted by Herb Alley.

Homestead News, Keys Section, October 28, 1954

- Sunday "Operation Barracuda" Spots All Planes During Afternoon -

Monroe County Civil Defense Director Claude Lowe attended a meeting last Wednesday at International Airport in Miami, which set into motion "Operation Barracuda;" The Ground Observers Corps, a national organization set up by the U. S. Air Force for civilian airplane spotting, conducted the operation under direction of Captain Walburn, Commanding Officer of Miami Filter Center and Col. Lawrence Walter, Commander of Group 1, Air Patrol of the Center.

All observer posts throughout the Florida Keys were under constant watch from 2 to 6 p. m., Sunday, with planes flying from Miami to participate.

Operation Barracuda is said to have cost approximately \$50,000 to conduct.

Homestead News, Keys Section, October 28, 1954

- Test Wells Remove More Than 17 Inches Of Stagnant Water In 19 Hours

Monroe County Anti Mosquito Control Board is starting to drill 50 drain wells in the low areas, from Matecumbie to Big Pine Key.

About 20 feet deep, the wells are being drilled in an effort to move stagnant water. Sample test wells have proven very satisfactory on Lower Matecumbie, which show that 17 3/4 inches of water were removed in 19 hours.

The sanitary landfill for a garbage dump site has been chosen on property belonging to Alonzo Cothron on Lower Matecumbie.

Signs will be erected, directing users to the site, which is expected to be in operation by December 1. Directing work of the Monroe County Mosquito Control is Bill Warner. The board has a total of \$20,000 which will be used on the program; of which the state gives \$8,000 and the county, \$12,000.

Homestead News, Keys Section October 28, 1954

- Meow Club Members Prowl On Monday and Refuse To Wash -

A group of attractive Florida Keys women have decided not to work on Mondays, in fact, they are going to be absent from home and have a day "all for fun" every week.

They have organized under the name of the "Meow" Club and each week they will go to luncheon together at some restaurant between South Miami and Key West. Fifty cents each will be deposited into a club fund and when it reaches \$300, members will give a big blowout to which they will invite their husbands. Absence from meetings automatically drops a member.

Members say, "no washing on Monday, clear the highways, for we are on a prowl."

The first luncheon was held at Whale Harbor Spa and next Monday Sherrard's Dixie Belle Inn will be the scene of the get together.

Homestead News, Keys Section October 28, 1954

- Keys Man Wants Exclusive Keys Garbage Collection -

Monroe County Officials are rather upset about Homestead resident L. S. Faircloth running a garbage

collection business on the Upper Keys, which they say he is hauling to the Florida City Garbage Dump.

Faircloth has no license they report, and they have a keys resident who has mortgaged his home for high standard trucks which meet all the requirements of the County Health Department.

Prudy Roberts of Islamorada has received a letter from the Monroe County Health Department informing him that his garbage collections trucks meet all requirements and that his permit will be forthcoming just as soon as necessary forms are processed. Roberts wants to buy Faircloth out, informants report.

Homestead News, Keys Section October 28, 1954

[*The photo is at the top of page 417. JW]

- Keys Kiwanians Welcome 11 New Members -

The Kiwanis Club of the Upper Keys welcomed eleven new members at a dinner meeting last Friday evening at Harry's Place in Tavernier.

District Governor Mike Shore, paid his official visit to the club and praised the organization as of the best in the entire 11th district comprising 14 clubs. He said the Keys Club ranks at the top for success in 1955.

The club has already started plans for a Junior Kiwanis Club, which is expected to be in operation within the next month. It also sponsors Boy Scout Troop No. 258 and does a great deal of other work among boys of the area. Dr. Harvey Cohn is chairman of the Junior Kiwanis Committee.

Among visitors for the occasion were South Dade Kiwanis president Paul Vann and Key West president Ralph Faraldo.

Homestead News, Keys Section November 4, 1954

- PUBLIC LIBRARY SOON TO BE ON UPPER KEYS -

It is rumored in the Upper Keys that Wilbur Bacon of Miami, who is an official of the Miami Kennel Club and who has a new home at Buttonwood Shores, is sponsoring a public library for the area.

The library will be housed in the Key Largo Civic Club building and will be open daily, for the benefit of the general public.

A committee composed of Mrs. Harold Mayhew Mrs. Jack Shope and Mrs. Paul Brie are soliciting volunteers to keep library hours.

The library is expected to be ready for opening by November 15.

Homestead News, Keys Section November 11, 1954

- Lower Matecumbie Has Building Boom -

A building boom is now in progress on Lower Matecumbie, with 19 new homes under construction at the present time.

Sixty nine other prospective homeowners have obtained permits, many of whom will start construction within the next 30 days. The homes will range in price from \$14,000 to \$60,000.

Among owners now building homes on the ocean at Lower Matecumbie is Preston B. Bird of Homestead, who is a Dade County Commissioner.

Included in the improvements of the area is 1800 feet of inland waterway already constructed, the channel of which is 60 feet wide.

Homestead News, Keys Section November 11, 1954

- WHALE HARBOR SPA TO OPEN SATURDAY NITE -

Whale Harbor Spa, located at Whale Harbor on the Florida Keys, will open for the season next Saturday, November 20, with a Smorgasbord, it has been announced by the popular manager Al Lucky.

Whale Harbor is renowned for the many nationally known figures in many industries and amusements, who visit there.

Arthur Godfrey, probably the best known of Radio and TV artists in the country, always brings his wife to Whale Harbor for their wedding anniversary and is expected to "repeat the performance" before long.

[Many businesses would close during the summers because of lack of summer residents. JW]

1750 LEAD CLOTH SEAL By Denis B. Trelewicz



The reef about 12 miles south of Carysfort Light Tower is a trove of numerous shipwrecks that have occurred over the last 300 years. The ravages of nature and the erosive effects of sea water have all but consumed the battered remnants of the ships that whacked the reef leaving only scattered trails of ballast stones. A close examination of the waters along the reef line reveal on occasion other items than ballast stones such as ship's fittings [mainly encrusted wrought iron], bronze spikes and pins, copper sheathing nails, and segments of copper and lead hull sheathing. For the most part the ships that bilged on the reef were thoroughly salvaged by early wreckers who operated along the Upper Keys in the late 1700's and throughout the 1800's. The wreckers literally salvaged everything that had any use or value. When they finished, not much was left.

Notwithstanding, sometimes small items were over looked and some of these have been recovered by latter day salvors who rummaged about the reef line looking for worth- while artifacts. In the Spring 2003 issue of *HISTORY TALK from the Upper Florida Keys*, I described a "Papal Bull," a lead seal, found by Roger Hoke, a resident of Tavernier, some 30 years ago on the site of a wreck believed to be of the Spanish Brig, *CORRERRO* that bilged on April 2, 1829. The lead seal was cast during the reign of Pope Benedict XIV who was the Pope from 1740 to 1758 suggesting that perhaps the item may have been on board a vessel that wrecked on the reef sometime during this period. [It is realized that the seal may have actually been on a ship that wrecked at a later time period.]

Another item, a lead cloth seal, also found in the vicinity of the Maitland Restoration slab, is pictured at the beginning of the article. Archival

research I have conducted has turned up some information pertaining to the background of the item which raises an interesting point that the seal may have been on an English ship that was lost on the reef sometime in the 1700's. According to Mr. Geoff Egan of the British Museum in London [Egan is a renowned authority on lead seals] in a private communication that this type of seal was affixed to cloth manufactured in England and probably dates to the mid 1700's. Further, Mr. Egan indicated that the design is the same as ones with the initials of the South Seas & Fisheries Company, which lasted until 1853. He also noted that this Company in 1750 sold off most of its trading rights. The Company did last until 1853.

The South Seas & Fisheries Company had several offshoot companies and possibly this seal is from one of them. According to R.R. Aspinall of the Museum of London he informed that "the fact that the seal was found in the Florida Keys is consistent with the trading pattern of the South Seas & Fisheries Company which was with Spanish possessions in the Americas."

As of this date, I have not been able to determine the meaning of the initials found on the seal. One possibility for the initials "SH" suggested by a researcher I retained in the United Kingdom, Mr. Tim Hughes, they could belong to Samuel Hannay. Hannay was appointed Provost Marshall of West Florida in 1766 and an agent there in 1767. [Florida was a British possession during the period of 1763 to 1783.] Mr. Hughes further noted that Hannay was apparently involved in transatlantic trade.

It is interesting to note that as a result of the English victory in the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1714) that was concluded by the Peace of Utrecht, Spain conceded the "asiento" ¹ to the Jamaica based British South Seas Company for thirty years. According to Ms. Kathleen Deagan ² English merchants, as had the French merchants before them, generally abused the "asiento" privilege and they made more than the permitted single ship to enter Portobello, Veracruz and Cartagena. English goods entered the Spanish colonies in greatly increased volume between 1713 and 1739 when the outbreak of war between Spain and England ended the "asiento" granted to the English.

Footnotes:

¹ The "asiento" was an exclusive monopoly granted by Spain to foreign merchants the right to trade a certain amount of merchandise each year. With the beginning of the Bourbon dynasty in Spain, the "asiento" was awarded to the French Guinea Company in 1702.

² ARTIFACTS OF THE SPANISH COLONIES OF FLORIDA AND THE CARIBBEAN, 1500 1800, Vol 2 Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington and London.

1970s

Bulldozer Uncovers Treasure On Plantation Key By Art McKee, Jr.

The following is excerpted from an article published in the December-January, 1975 issue of Long John Latham's Treasure World, entitled, "The Deadly Pieces of Eight" written by the late Art McKee. McKee gave an autographed copy of his article to Nancy Cain of Islamorada who passed a copy on to me, for which I am grateful.

G.S.

"It was a hot, sultry day in the Florida Keys. The bulldozer operator climbed down from his disabled piece of equipment with a look of disgust on his face. It was about noon — time for lunch. He wandered along the beach, waiting for his helper to return with the pickup truck containing his tools.

Suddenly, he saw some blackened squares of metal lying exposed on the newly cleared sand. Picking one up, he noticed it apparently had a corner missing, and was oddly heavy. Rubbing the surface with his thumb, he saw vague markings and decided the piece was some sort of coin.

The dozer operator had been instructed to clear a growth of stunted brush from a sand ridge on Plantation Key. The 75-foot-wide ridge was about 15 feet above sea level. Obviously, a fierce hurricane had washed it up some 75 feet inland from the water's edge. Since he was to remove only brush and roots, the operator made only a shallow cut some eight to ten inches deep with his dozer blade.

He was almost finished when the dozer quit cold.

While grading the area, he had noticed his blade turning up a large number of conch shells and pieces of dead coral along with the beach sand. This meant the hurricane had churned up the beach and shallow water so forcefully that it left only bare, jagged rock along the Atlantic shoreline of Plantation Key.

The dozer operator, after finding that the blackened squares were marked, nonchalantly picked up another four pieces which were lying exposed on the sand. Kicking up the loose sand with the toe of his shoe, he uncovered several more of the blackened objects.

Just then he noticed the pickup truck bouncing along the temporary road to the beach site. He showed the pieces to his helper, then scratched one with a file, exposing bright metal. After both men kicked up the area, they found a total of 50 of the little discs.

Rubbing one, they made out a date, 1732. Then they saw what proved to be the mint mark, O/M, and the assayer's "F" mark, as well as the Spanish coat-of-arms consisting of lions and castles and a cross. The pieces were eight-reale Spanish silver coins—actual pieces of eight!

Suddenly, they had a visitor. A neighboring worker wandered over and joined them in a frantic search. All three men were on their hands and knees tearing into the loose sand with their fingers. Six hands grabbed for a single coin, and the men laughed as they realized the sight they presented — grown men digging in the sand like excited kids.

The entire area, about 10 to 15 square feet, was thoroughly searched. None of the coins were found deeper than 4 to 6 inches under the sand. Finally, they abandoned the search as darkness fell and counted up their find — 74 coins in all.

A silver one-reale coin turned up, while the rest were pieces of eight. Though most weren't dated, several coins showed the date 1732, while others were dated 1733 and marked with the Mexico City mint mark, OMF.

What was the origin of these ancient coins? Surely they were not part of a buried treasure, for they were in relatively shallow sand. It would have been simple to dig a deep hole in the sand if someone really wanted to conceal the coins. There was no sign of a treasure chest, moldy pouch or bag. However, money bags secured with drawstrings were

commonly used in the early days....

Was there a connection between the coins found on the beach and those from the offshore [1733] wrecks? The archives in Spain revealed...[a] clue.

In 1715, another Spanish fleet of 11 ships wrecked just offshore, between what is now called Sebastian Inlet and the town of Stuart....a court of inquiry investigating the disaster revealed certain facts which possibly apply to the discovery of the 1732 coins.

Officers involved with the 1715 shipwrecks testified that many crewmen gave up trying to save the grounded ships, which were only a few yards off the beach. Some of the crew, after stuffing their pockets with gold and silver coins, jumped into the roaring surf, only to drown. Their corpses...were later found on the beach where the storm washed them.

We may assume that the coins found on Plantation Key were from the body of some crewman who perished in the high waves, just as other sailors had died in the earlier hurricanes. His body washed ashore, carrying with it pocketfuls of coins. Or, the coins could have been in a small money bag which would have disintegrated after years of exposure on the beach. A small portion of a human skull was found on the beach, lending credence to the theory [of the drowned victim].

Note: McKee's theory is sound, as this site was apparently not one of the camps and forts established by the Spanish to salvage the wrecks. Those sites, according to Bob Weller in his book Galleon Alley (Crossed Anchors Salvage, Lake Worth, 1995) were at Tavernier Key, Indian Key, Long Key, and Grassy Key.

Pictures with the article include several of the coins and one of a posted sign that reads "Attention — This area contains irreplaceable elements of Florida history. Persons digging or otherwise molesting this area are subject to prosecution under Chapter 67-50 of the Florida Statutes."

1840

Dr. Henry Perrine's Last Known Letter Before the Indian Key Massacre

**Edited & Annotated by
Gail Swanson**

Introduction:

Henry E. Perrine, son of Dr. Henry Perrine furnished this letter to the Miami Metropolis, and the paper printed it in the May 4, 1900 edition. Perrine was 13 at the time of the attack and was about 73 at the time of the printing of his father's letter in the paper. Some details as to Perrine's instructions for getting mail to the Keys and his financial accounts have been omitted here, and I have placed some explanatory remarks in brackets.

G.S.

Indian Key, S. F. [South Florida]
17th July, 1840

[To]
Dr. Ralph Glover
No. 2 Ann Street, New York

Dear Sir:

Without an answer to my No. 1 of the 18th, ulto. [ultimo, last month], I again address you. Mr. [George W.] Somarindyck [Indian Key resident] will be the bearer of this letter, and he will communicate to you many circumstances of great importance for the speedy settlement of the Florida Keys, and the consequent expulsion of the Murderous Savages.

First and foremost I wish to encourage the private school first established by the native Bahamians at Key Vacas... [Arrangements for mailing the *Cultivator* agricultural magazine for the school follow.]

I see in the papers great accounts of the operations of the Daguerreotype and also of a process by which the pictures can be immediately reproduced as from a lithographic stone. For God's sake collect and transmit all the information you can get on these subjects both to my brother in Princeton and to me at Indian Key...Somarindyck's samples of silks [apparently being delivered with the letter], cocoons and silky cotton should excite much notice in the newspapers of the agricultural value of the Florida Keys...Drop a line to Durant and request him in my name to visit the samples and advise the best disposal of them for public purposes. Durant has always preached and published the only true doctrine concerning silk culture in the United States, and he

will be greatly gratified by these ocular demonstrations of the superlative superiority of South Florida for the perpetual production of raw silk and of Silky Cotton!

I have six bushels of select seed of the best Sea Island Cotton for gratuitous distribution to all persons who will plant them the present year in South Florida. Three of the notables at Key Vacas have each commenced with a dozen plants of Manilla Mulberry, furnished by Mr. [Charles] Howe [Indian Key resident], and with a pint of Sea Island Cotton seeds furnished by myself. I am also to advance money to all who will import for themselves the best plants from the Bahamas the present summer....

By the newspapers of New York I perceive that 80,000 Multicaulus at auction in your city, could not be sold at \$ 25.00 for the whole or at less than \$ 1 per 1,000 trees! Indeed, I am told they cannot even be given away in the north cities for planting in the northern states; hence, now is the very time when they should be planted to the largest extent on the Florida Keys for bonafide silk culture in South Florida. The yankees, Goodyears, [Amasa Goodyear, his son Amasa Jr. and wife], imported two great boxes of Manilla Mulberries, half of which are planted on their own improvements on West Matacumbe [Lower Matecumbe Key] and on Lignurd Veto [Lignum Vitae Key].

On the advertising cover of the *Cultivator* you will see the means adopted by Mr. Howe and myself to excite the planting of so many acres as possible during the present year. The next island westward of West Metacumbie is here called Long Key, on the charts, Cayo Viboras or Vipers Key [the Spanish name for the Key], and is in full sight of Indian Key. But you were not aware of the fact that there is a prairie of several hundred acres on the north side of Long Key. [Jacob] Housman intends to plant it this summer for his own benefit, but of course will not occupy it, if he undertakes the actual settlement on the mainland, either under his proffer to Congress or his contract with me.

Now I suggest for your consideration, the enterprise of planting the prairie with *Morus Multicaulus* and sweet potatoes this autumn by contract. Get any one or ten men to plant by the job one to ten acres each, even if you have to pay double the price of the actual labor. I am willing and anxious to get grown, even on public lands, any valuable

plants at double the cost of the same labor in the northern states. Indeed, I am willing to give two acres of my grant for every acre on the public lands which shall be planted by any person for his own benefit during the present year on any island of the Florida Reef.

The more information I acquire concerning my selected site east of Cape Sable the better I am pleased with the location. The nearest hammock to the opening into the prairie is a beautiful grove of live oaks. The nearest woods to the eastward along the sea shore are celebrated among the Bahamians for the quality and quantity of wild cinnamon trees. You know they have long made money by shipping and selling the barks.

Mr. Howe is also more and more gratified with our increasing knowledge of the additional advantages of the fortunate location, and before next mail I trust that we shall have growing in Everbloom Prairie a few plants of every kind known in the preparatory nursery on West Metacumbie. If Congress adjourns without subserving the objects of the Memorials of the actual residents of Dade County [which then included the Upper Keys], I trust that such men as you will get up thousands of similar memorials in your city to be presented on the first day of next session. Nevertheless emigration to the Florida Keys should commence in October next, because the first settlers will have the best selections, and because their previous settlement will strengthen their claims to the liberal compensation by Congress in the grants of lands.

I hope that Professor Rafinesque and the Shaker Society will each adopt my advice to pray Congress to grant them each one Cape Sable out of the three Capes at the Southwest extreme of the peninsula. Mr. Howe, myself and our children visited these three prairie capes the last week in April; we planted M.M. on the northwest Cape and Middle Cape or Cape of Royal Palms: and obtained abundant fresh water by digging four feet within 150 yards of the sea. The easternmost cape (where the fort was) is called by the Bahamians the Point of Main and its projection affords the shelter against the westwards, which is the only wind that could raise the sea in the channel along the seashore of Everbloom Prairie. Six or seven feet of water extends through 12 to 15 miles of this eastern channel, according to the Bahamian dwellers, and one runs close along the

prairie seashore. The Bahamians are hence highly delighted, because, say they, every man can have his own vessel come up to his own dwelling. But I find my pen is running astray; suffice it to say that I shall be among the very first settlers on the [mainland] south coast this very summer, and at the very latest, next fall.

Whether [Jacob] Housman makes his settlement under a Congressional Act or under my cession of 5000 acres, the month after his settlement is established I can establish another settlement of native Bahamians alone.

Give us arms and ammunition, withdraw all U.S. troops from South Florida and the actual residents of Key Vacas and Indian Key will suffice to protect settlements of small cultivators.

Very respectfully yours,
Henry Perrine

Three weeks later the Indians attacked Indian Key. Dr. Perrine was one of those killed. His dream of a life's work of introducing useful tropical plants to South Florida went unfulfilled. Today only the place name of Perrine in the southwest Miami area and one notable introduced plant remain as a memory of him. From the Manual of the Southeastern Flora (1933) by John Kunkle Small, another botanist briefly at the Florida Keys is this:

"Agave sisalana Perrine...Sisal...Hammocks, pinelands, and cultivated grounds, peninsular Florida and the Keys, escaped from plants originally introduced from Yucatan. First planted in our range on Indian Key where the descendants of the original planting still grow. One of the more important fiber-plants...used maily for making twine."

1825

**Grounding on Alligator Reef:
Wrecker's Court Case Summary
Contributed and Annotated
by Gail Swanson**

The Niles Register [a national newspaper]
October 28, 1826

(excerpted)

LAW CASE—SALVAGE. We copy from the *New York Daily Advertiser* the following summary of the decision pronounced by Judge Lee, of Charleston, S. C. in the case of the British ship *Isabella*, grounded on the Florida Reef. The suit was brought by J. [John] W. Johnson and others on a claim for salvage.

The *Isabella*, on her voyage from Jamaica to Glasgow, was found aground on a part of the Florida Reef, called the Alligator, on the 26th of August last. The owners of the wrecking vessel *United States* discovered her from Key Tavernier, 15 miles off, and set sail and reached her about 9 o'clock. Two men in a canoe had already boarded her, [probably early residents of nearby Indian Key] who pretended to be pilots, and agreed with Captain Munn, to relieve her [from the reef] for \$ 1,500. They had intended to get her off at high water, but were disappointed; and when Capt. Bissell, of the *United States* arrived, [the two men] contracted with him to co-operate, for \$ 1,000. They had taken charge of the *Isabella*. She was soon lighted and got afloat; but she afterwards touched, and then grounded within the reef, on a lee shore which would have been very dangerous if the wind had increased. The *United States* was filled with her cargo, but the ship would not float; and here, in the opinion of the court, Capt. Bissell's contract entirely failed, and all claims were nullified, as his schooner and the boats abandoned her Aug. 30th.

In this juncture Capt. Johnson, of the wrecking vessel *Emeline*, came at signals from the *Isabella*, lightened her and took her to the Gulf Stream. The court will not allow Capt. Bissell's claim, as Capt. Munn [of the *Isabella*] made no contract with him, either as pilot or salvor...yet the court will not restrict his claim to that of the freight of the goods he took out, but allow him \$ 500. for partly lightening the ship several times, and recovering one of her anchors; taking it out of the amount to be allowed Capt. Johnson, whose labor was reduced by it....

The respondent [Capt. Munn] insists that Johnson's services were rendered as a pilot and not as salvor. But he has no [pilots] branch, although often acts as a pilot. He is a wrecker; his two vessels cost him \$ 10,000, and the business is very hazardous

and uncertain....The *Isabella*'s condition is represented in a contradictory manner by witnesses. She and her cargo were worth \$ 84,000. It is probable she could not have been insured for forty-eight hours for a premium far exceeding what the court awarded — \$ 8,500.

The conduct of wreckers is spoken of as very reprehensible in some respects; but it is necessary that they should not be obliged to give up their business, as it is on the whole of eminent importance.

Notes:

I requested the National Archives, Southeast Branch, to look for the actual court case, but the response was that the Charleston cases of that period were burned in the Civil War.

*John W. Johnson was the son of the notorious Charles Johnson (see my article "Carysfort Reef Grounding & the Key West Bubbas" in History Talk issue 21). Nancy Jameson, former Director of the Oldest House/Wreckers Museum of Key West has pointed out to me that Johnson's vessel, the *Emeline*, was named for his sister, Emeline Johnson Watlington, once a resident of Key West's "Oldest House."*

1830

H.M.S. *Calypso* on Elbow Reef & at Indian Key on Christmas Day Gail Swanson

An extract of a letter from Key West dated December 17, 1830 was printed in *The Georgian* January 31, 1830. The writer was Capt. Alexander Thompson:

"On the 25th instant [this month] at 5 a.m. I discovered a ship in distress in what is called the Elbow of Carysfort reef, which proved to be HBM ship *Calypso*, Richard Paton, Esq. Commander, from Vera Cruz and Havana with the mail...."

The log of H.M.S. *Calypso* for Christmas Day, 1830, is extant in archives in London. I found it during my trip there in October, 2002. Some words could not be read, and the many abbreviations not used in my transcription here.

Ship's Log

Christmas Eve

"PM [Noon] Moderate breezes & fine weather the land bearing from NNW [?] to [?] 4:15 the extremities of the shoal NE 3/4 E 5 miles..."

Christmas Day

"AM [Midnight] Moderate breezes & fine weather. At 4 cloudy with slight showers, supposing ourselves in the centre of the Gulf [of Florida]. Altered our course 13 NNbyE. At 4:45 found the ship strike supposed to be on the Florida Reef, found 2 1/2 fathoms water. At 5 found 3 fathoms. Anchored with the small bower [anchor]. Hoisted out the boats. Sounded round the ship. Stood [?] in 5 fathoms of water, fired a gun for a pilot. Daylight saw several small vessals running towards us who offered us assistance _____ none every man a pilot took on board a pilot 6:30 weighed & runned [?] down of Indian Kay and anchored in 3 1/2 fathoms in getting under weigh the pilot vessal run afoul of our stern & carried away the life buoy, hoisted the boats & prepared for sea. 10:30 weighed & made sail over the reef _____ Noon Indian Kay N by W 5 to 8 miles dismissed the pilot & made sail."

Sources: John Viele of Cudjoe Key found and gave me the newspaper article. The log of the ship is at the Public Record Office, London, filed under ADM 51/3085.

1810

The Wrecking of the *Reliance*: A Death on Carysfort Reef Gail Swanson

This article was discovered and sent to me by historian John Viele of Cudjoe Key.

G.S.

Royal Gazette [Bahamas], December 5, 1810

"Arrived *Venus*, Mispice, master, with crew and materials of the ship *Reliance*, Armstrong, master, [which] foundered on her passage from Honduras to London. The ship *Reliance*, belonging to the house of Messrs. Edward Allen and John Violet, Plymouth, England, Armstrong, master from

Honduras, bound to London, with a cargo of mahogany, left the former place on the 3rd of November and at 2 o'clock on the morning of the 1st December struck on the Carysfort reef, but went off immediately, when it was discovered she was bilged, and in expectation of her sinking immediately the captain and crew took to their boats, and were picked up at 3 o'clock next morning by the sloop *Venus*, Capt. Mispice, from this port, bound to New Orleans, and arrived here yesterday; we are sorry to state that the mate, Mr. Wadlew Allen, was unfortunately drowned, having remained on board the ship after she was carried in and brought to anchor, she having overset during the night in consequence of the quantity of water in her hold. The sails and rigging were brought to this port in the *Venus*."

1806

The Wrecking of the *George* On Matecumbe Key Gail Swanson

There has been great confusion among the mapmakers as to which of Upper and Lower Matecumbe Keys was known as "Old Matecumbe" and "Young Matecumbe" by the Spanish.

This time of ordeal of Capt. Williams was discovered and sent to me by historian John Viele of Cudjoe Key.

G.S.

Royal Gazette [Bahamas], October 3, 1806

"Loss of the ship *George*, Capt. Williams

The *George* belonged to Levi Coit of New York and George T. Philips of New Orleans, and was bound from New Orleans to Nantz with cotton, logwood, indigo, &c. She was cast away on Old Maticumba on the night of the 20th of September—ship bilged, and sunk in a few minutes—crew and part of the cargo saved, and brought to this port by several wrecking vessels.

Capt. Williams informs, that he was boarded on the 19th ultimo off the Havanna, by his Majesty's frigate *Anson*, Capt. Lidiard, who detained Captain Williams 19 hours."