

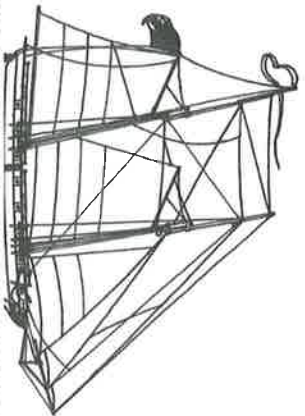
# Florida Keys

## Sea Heritage Journal

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USS SHARK



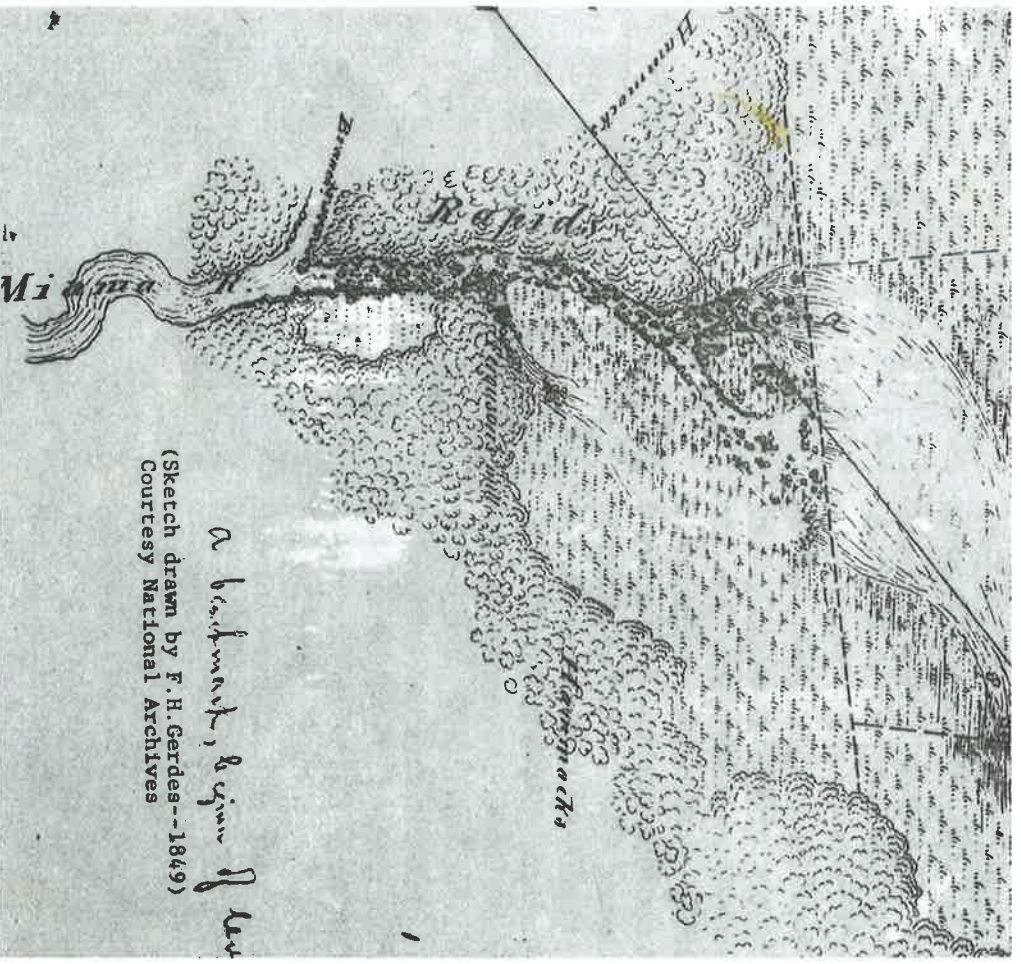
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## Key Wester Strikes Gold

By Mary L. Haffner[er].  
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Thomas Jefferson Ferguson was born in New York State in 1814. His name appears on an 1844 Dade County, Florida, list of jurors along with that of his older brother, George Washington Ferguson. The brothers had a homestead and a mill with 25 employees at The Falls on the Miami River. The mill manufactured arrowroot from the wild coontie or compuy plant. As the largest enterprise in Dade County, in 1850 it shipped as much as 300,000 pounds of arrowroot via Key West to other American ports. Indian hostilities forced the mill's abandonment in 1852.

Thomas married Rosalinda Corcoran, born and raised in County Monahan, Ireland. As a young woman she worked as a housekeeper. Rosalinda emigrated to the United States in 1832. She lived in Key West with her and Thomas's children: Cecelia, Isabella, and young Thomas. In 1849 Thomas joined the stampede for gold in California. While his wife and children barely survived in Key West, Thomas struck gold, and made further fortunes selling dry goods to the miners, buying large tracts of land in small towns,



*Sketch of the Miami River and Ferguson's Mill in 1849 by F.H. Gerdes. Photo credit: Monroe County Library.*

and making successful investments in others' mining companies. Thomas eventually returned East to enrich his family. Other Key Westers went West to find gold, but we have no evidence that they met with any success. Sending letters by sea between Key West and San Francisco and Sacramento required much time and great expense. (Thomas mentioned  
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