

USS SHARK

Florida Keys Sea Heritage Journal

VOL. 4, NO. 3

SPRING 1994

OFFICIAL QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF THE KEY WEST MARITIME HISTORICAL SOCIETY

From Slavery To Freedom And Success Sandy Cornish and Lillah Cornish (circa 1793-1869) - (circa 1813-1870's)

By Lewis G. Schmidt
Copyright 1995

Trapped in the institution of slavery in the first half of the 19th Century, Sandy and Lillah Cornish migrated from the area of Cambridge, Maryland to Florida, through their labor freeing themselves from the bonds of slavery, and eventually locating in Key West where they achieved success and respect and lived out the remainder of their lives.

The Cornish¹⁷ name is well known to Black history and relatively common in the area of eastern Maryland and Delaware. Samuel Cornish, who was born free in Delaware in 1795, "was the first black man to undergo the normal exacting training and testing procedures required of Presbyterian ordination... After being licensed to preach, Cornish spent six months as a missionary to slaves on the eastern shore of Maryland". He later founded the first Black Presbyterian Church in New York City, and was the first African-American journalist.¹⁸

Joshua Cornish, born about 1790, immigrated to Liberia with his family in June 1835, and won awards for best farming. In 1842, he returned and recruited other members of his race for an immigration to Liberia.²⁰

Other than general areas of birth, ethnic origin, and the fact that in time they were contemporaries, there is no known connection between Samuel, Joshua and Sandy Cornish. All were born in the last



Uncle Sandie from "After The War", Whitelaw Reid; Moore, Wilsbach & Baldwin, 1866. Engraved for the book by W.G. Jackman.

(Continued on page 12)

Society News



KWMHS President Ed Little and Park Ranger Carolyn Wiley at Fort Jefferson during the Society's trip in November 1995

Lectures and Fields Trips by John Viele

No Name Key Walking Tour

Led by environmental educator and No Name Key resident, Jeannette Gato, a group of intrepid Society members hiked the wilds of No Name Key in early April 1994. Braving a burning sun and voracious mosquitoes, they heard descriptions of the Key's early history, visited the site of the first highway ferry landing, and examined several old homestead sites deep in the woods.

Dr. Tindall on Early Key West Physicians

At the Society's annual meeting on April 25, 1994, Dr. Herbert Tindall related fascinating tales of medical care in Key West's early days (1822-1845).

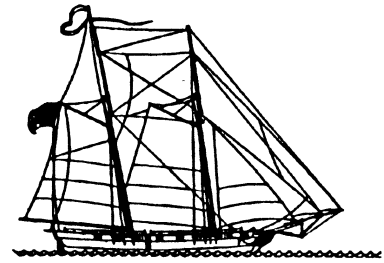
Among the colorful pioneer physicians he told about was the multi-talented Dr. Lacey who had also served as county auctioneer, notary public. At one time he ran for the state legislature and at another acted as second to William McRea in the famous Hawkins-McRea duel.

Richard Drew on Keys Hurricanes
Hurricane researcher Richard Drew was guest speaker at the May 1994 meeting. He provided interesting historical data on hurricanes that have visited the Keys since the days of Columbus. He also presented a scenario of events that could be expected for a hurricane striking the lower Keys today and discussed Monroe County evacuation plans and procedures.

NEW MEMBERS

Wilbert Baumler, Summerland Key; Arthur & Janice Drinkwater, Key West; Kitty & Jack Hake, Big Coppitt Key; Roger & Winnie Hofstra, Bay Point; Robert

Morin, Key West; Pierre Moulton, Key West; Edsel K. Rintala, Key West; Bob Watson, Key West; Ray Woods, Clearwater, FL;



The Florida Keys Sea Heritage Journal is published quarterly. Subscription is available through membership. Copyright 1992 by the Key West Maritime Historical Society of the Florida Keys, Inc. The art on the masthead, the *USS Shark*, was drawn by Bill Muir.

Editor: D. O. Christian Rieger
Production: Tom Hambright
Staff: Joseph Albertson, Bob Elliott, Ed Little, Bill Muir, John Viele

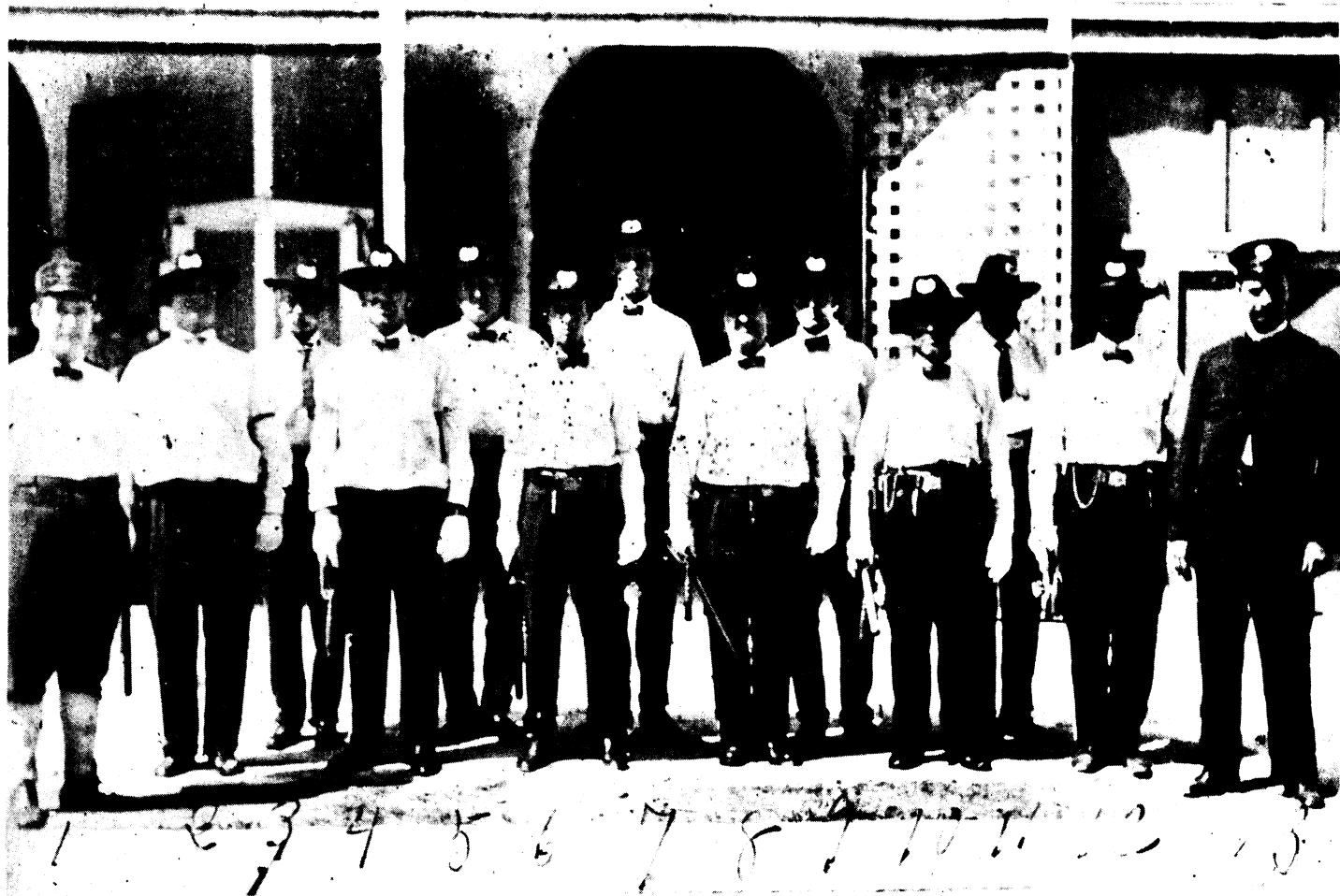
Letters and articles are welcome. Please write to: Editor, Florida Keys Sea Heritage Journal, KWMHS, P.O. Box 695, Key West, FL 33041 The KWMHS headquarters are located at 631 Greene St, in space donated by Key West Seaport, Inc. Appointments recommended. (305) 292-7903.

KEY WEST MARITIME HISTORICAL SOCIETY BOARD OF DIRECTORS

President: Edward J. Little, Jr.
Vice President: Bob Elliott
Secretary: Rob Kunkel
Treasurer: Lynda Hambright

Joseph Albertson
Douglas Gregory
Tom Hambright
Sylvia Hnat
Leonard Lucas
Corey Malcom
Dean McClure
Carl Nettles
Dave Sanford
John Viele

Crime And Punishment In Old Key West



Key West Police force about 1900. Identified in the photograph are 1. Whitmore Gardner, 2. Eddie Albury, 3. Richard Hicks (future sheriff), 4. John Kirschenbaum, 5. Jim Bissell, 6. Ray Shehee, 8. Bill Fagan, 10. Tom Pent, 12. Jim Hopkins and 13. Frank Albury. Photo credit Monroe County Library.

By Tom & Lynda Hambright
Copyright 1995

During most recent elections many campaign promises have been made about reforming the criminal justice system to put criminals in jail and having them serve their full sentence. Has society deteriorated or is today a repeat of history with more people and a more permissive society? A murder case in Key West, early in this century, has all the elements of the failure of the justice system much as today except it ends in a violent display of frontier justice.

The story begins, in March, 1904, when Key West Police Officer Clarence K. Till is killed in the line-of-duty while answering a disturbance call at a coffee shop. The following article describes the crime as was reported in the Jacksonville newspaper The Florida Times-Union of March

15, 1904. "Key West, March 10.—Police-man C.T. Till was shot down in cold blood by "Dutchy" Melbourne Monday night, backed by a crowd of drunken chums. The entire town was indignant when the news of the murder was spread.

"The affair began in a coffee shop where Melbourne, Will Cash, Arthur Sheppard, George Roberts, Harry Wellcott and others were raising a disturbance. One of the members smashed a show window, and the proprietor summoned a policeman. Officer Till responded and Melbourne, having admitted that he had broken the glass, Till attempted to arrest him, when Melbourne grabbed him, the others joined in and severely beat him and took his pistol from him.

"During the fracas Harry Wellcott received a blow on the head intended for

Arthur Sheppard, who dodged it. Finally the officer was thrown to the floor and Arthur Sheppard took his pistol and gave it to Melbourne. Officer Till received a cut across his forehead from ear to ear, it being the intention to scalp him. This is said to have been done by Will Cash. The officer being disarmed, extricated himself from the crowd and went to Mayor Trevor's house, a short distance away, and ask for a pistol, giving the Mayor an account of the affair. The Mayor gave him the pistol and he borrowed another from a neighbor, and went toward the corner of Division [Truman Avenue] and White Streets. By this time the gang had made their plans, and as soon as the officer came up, Melbourne opened fire on him. The first shot took
(Continued on page 4)