

USS SHARK

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Letters from the Bahamas.

By Mary Haffenreffer

Richard “Tuggy” Roberts was born in the Bahama Islands on June 30, 1818. His parents were John and Ann “Nancy” Roberts. By the mid-1840s he was living in Key West with his first wife Mary Lowe Roberts. He lived the rest of his life in Key West and worked as carpenter on both ships and houses. He was married three times Mary died in September 1857. He married Julia Ann Roberts on April 5, 1868 who died in 1879. He then married Sarah Louise Sawyer on June 7, 1880, who died in Key West on April 29, 1929.

After the Hurricane of 1846 Roberts and his brother-in-law John Bartlum, the famous ship builder, moved their houses from Green Turtle Cay to Key West and reconstructed on the corner of Eaton and William Streets.

Dave and Jon Richter, who are descendants of Tuggy and Sarah Roberts, donated a collection of papers that included letters from Tuggy Roberts mother and family in Green Turtle Cay to him in Key West. Most of the contents of the letters are routine family communications, but the fact the letters survived and are now in safe



Green\ Turtle Cay in the Abaco Islands in the Bahama Islands, Photo credit: Monroe County Library.

stowage in the Monroe County Library is an amazing addition to history of the Keys.

The letters are a remainder of the close relationship between Key West and Green Turtle Cay and how important the people of the Bahamas were in the settlement of the Keys.

Also in the package are some of Sarah Louise Sawyer love letters before she married Tuggy Roberts.

The letters began on page 8.

Following are transcriptions of the letters by Mary Haffenreffer .

Green Turtle Cay, 20th September
1847

Dear Son,

I now with pleasure write these

(Continued on page 3)

SocietyNews

by Tom Hambright

The Roberts Letters published in this edition of the Journal is a major addition to the Monroe County Library's History Collection as it show the close relationship that Key West had with the Bahamas and our Sister City of New Plymouth on Green Turtle Cay and the connection to the Mystic River Valley. Even with the slow communication of the day and the lack of a formal postal system families kept in touch and carried on business.

Included in the Roberts letters was the following one F Lowe Jr. at Mystic Bridge to Tuggy Roberts. Some of the first vessels engaged in wrecking on the Florida Reef came from the Mystic River Valley of Connecticut. The Mystic families followed and with the immigrants from the Bahama Island became early settlers of the Island. From this letter it can be interrupted that Tuggy and F. Lowe Jr. were either family or friends.

Mystic Bridge, Dec 8 1849

Dear Sir,

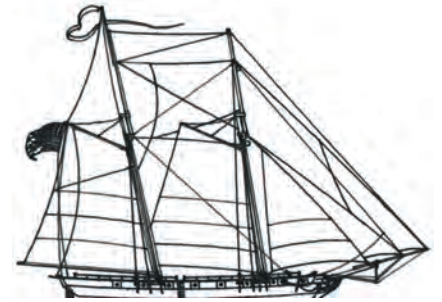
I take the opportunity to answer your letter of the 26th which came to hand on the 20th of Nov and I made the mainsail as soon as possible and sent it to New York to be sent the first opportunity.

The next time you must measure for mainsail, you must top your boom just as you want it when the sail is set and then measure from the block aloft to the sheave hole in the boom and the rest of the measure as you did before. As you will find marked in this letter, I had to guess at the angle this time and can't tell whether it will be right on the clue or not but think it will come something near the mark. I shall be glad for any order that Mr. Curry will send and will do the best that I can to make the sails and price. Also, I hope you will write and let me know how the sail sets. I have to inform you that the folks are all well at present except Gilbert, he is rather under the weather, and they all send their best to you and all friends. William buried his little girl a few days after yours was buried. She died in a fit. The folks want to see you very much. The schooner **California** has gone to California. She has carried of crew Ashby and R. Lattluna and Frederick and a number of others. She sailed on the 24th of Oct. The times is very dull in Mystic. The smacks has done nothing the last year. They laid up about half of the summer. The mainsail will cost one hundred twenty eight dollars and fifty one cents. \$128.51. The Odd Fellows have all gone away so that it is hard work to get enough to fund the lodge but we shall try to keep it agoing if we can. So no more at present.

New Member

Bud Ames, Burlington, VT; Andrew and Mary Herdan, Key West; Sue Huffaken, Key West; Robin Lockwood, Key West; Bob and

Mary Drake, Trevett, ME; Nancy Perkins, Key West; Harley Stock, Plantation, FL; Bunny and Thys Van Bourgundren, Key West.



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Editor: Tom Hambright

Letters and articles are welcome. Please write to: Editor, Florida Keys Sea Heritage Journal, KWMHS, P.O. Box 695, Key West, FL 33041 or visit our web site Keywestmaritime.org.

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(Bahamas from page 1

few lines to you, hoping they may meet you and Mary in as good health as it leaves me and the rest of the family at present. Dear Son, the times seems very long since you went away. Dear Son, but as we are separated from each other we must make ourselves satisfied. Dear Son, I should like to know if you and Mary enjoys your health there as you did here. Dear Son, we all long to see you and Mary but I don't know when we shall but perhaps it may be sooner than we expect. Dear Son, all of your brothers and sisters desires to be remembered to you and Mary. Dear Son, Richard gives his kind respect to you and Mary. Dear Son, I have sent you one hat. I would have got you two plates if I could have got any good tops. John asked Benjamin about the saw and he told him he would bring it to you. So I have no more to say at present but still remains your affectionate Mother.

Ann Roberts

Green Turtle Cay, Abaco, 12th
November 1847

Dear Son,

I now write you these few lines hoping they may meet you and Mary in better state of mind than it leaves me and the rest of your family at present? Dear Son, we have met with a very sudden Death. Your sister Ann's Thomas was going to Providence in the **Triton** and was taken with the fever going across and it blowed so severe that they could not come back to fetch him home. He was taken with the fever Wednesday night the 27th of October, and he died Friday 10 o'clock 29th of October. Dear Son, I think it will be the Death of your sister Ann!

Dear Son, I am very glad to hear that Mr. Lowe is coming here again to live; then I shall live in hopes to see you and Mary come here again if life lasts. Dear Son, all of your brothers and sisters desires to be remembered to you and Mary. So I have no more to say at present but still remains your true and affectionate Mother.

Ann Roberts

Green Turtle Cay, April 10th
1848

Dear Brother,

These few lines I hope will find you and family well as they leave me and mine at present but my Dear Brother you may think from Nature how your dear brother and sister still feels on account of our great miss. It seems today as though it was the first day and, oh, when will be the day that it will be worn of it. Is like every vessel comes we expect him but, my dear brother, we must strive and look to the Lord who has done all things for the best. HE knows how to work and when to work for the best. That is all our comfort, expecting it is well with HIM. Although painful to Nature we must strive and submit to it. Oh, my dear brother, we have to give The Lord all the praise that he has so help us to stand this great bereavement. Dear brother, I never thought to stood it so well as I have done although some days ready to give over but I must look around and see others that I am to do for that causes me to do so well as I do from day to day. My dear brother, we are so far distance from each other that we often talk about you and Mary. Hoping you may do well. Give our love to your dear wife and all the family. Wishing you well.

Richardson and Ann Russell

Green Turtle Cay, Abaco, 11th
of April 1848

Dear Son,

I now take the opportunity of writing you these few lines to let you know that we are all well at present and I hope it will meet you and Mary the same as it leaves me and the rest of the family. At present, dear son, the time has been very short since you left but it seems very long to me. Dear son, we heard the death of your uncle at Cherokee Sound about four weeks ago. Dear son, your sister Ann gives her kind respect to you and Mary and says she is still the same in mind as she was when you left. Dear son, we all give our kind respect to you and Mary and long to see you but I don't know when we shall but I hope it will be sooner than we expect. John and Betsy says when Benjamin's vessel is done they are thinking of letting Richard come down to stop. Your brother, Moses, has sent you a ball of plat. Your brother John says that Jacob is not paid a sixpence nor cut a cedar since you went away nor Tom is not paid a sixpence.

I have no more to say at present but still remains your true and affectionate Mother.

Ann Roberts

Green Turtle Cay, Abaco, 2nd
Day of July 1848

Dear Son,

I now take the opportunity of writing you these few lines hoping they may meet you and Mary as good state of health as it leaves me

(Continued on page 4)

(Bahamas from page 3)

and the rest of the family at present. Dear Son, I thought I should have had a letter but I expect you did not have chance to write but I was very well satisfied after I heard that you and Mary was well. Dear Son, I should be very glad to see you both but I don't know when I shall but I hope if it is the Lord's will we may see each other sooner than we expect. Dear son, I should be very glad to see you both but I don't know when I shall but I hope it is the Lord's will we may see each other sooner than we expect. Dear son, you are hardly ever out of my thoughts day nor night but when I think of you it makes me shed tears. All of your brothers and sisters gives their kind respect to you and Mary and say they should be very glad to see you. Dear son, little Sarah says she wants to see you and Mary. So I have no more to say at present but still remains your true and affectionate Mother.

Ann Roberts

Green Turtle Cay, 1st December 1848

Dear Brother,

I now embrace this opportunity of writing you these few lines to let you know that we are all in good health at present and I hope this will find you and your family enjoying same. Dear Brother, we are all thankful to hear you are well at present but we would be much happier to hear that you were endeavoring to prepare for a better world. That would give us great relief especially Mother. Dear Brother, we would all be very glad to see you but I don't know when we shall see each other again but we must trust to HIM who is the GIVER of all good. I hope it will

please HIM to bring us together once more. Dear Bother, you know a few more fleeting years the EYE that beholds us no more and I beg you to work while it is call day for we don't know how soon the Hour of Darkness may overtake us. Oh Brother, remember they CREATOR in the days of thy youth, seek HIM while HE is to be found, call upon HIM while HE is near before it is too late. All the family joins me in love to you and your family. Nothing more to say at present but still remain your affectionate Brother.

Moses Roberts

Green Turtle Cay, Abaco, 2nd December 1848

Dear Son,

I now take the opportunity of writing you these few lines, hoping they may meet you and Mary enjoying in as good state of health as leaves me and the rest of the family except little Sarah. She has been very sick and still sick. Dear Son, I was so glad to hear from you both that you were well. Dear Son, I should be very glad to see you but I don't know when I shall but I hope if it is The Lord's Will, we may see each other sooner than we expect. Dear Son, when I think of being so far from each other I can't help shedding tears. Dear Son, we must try and make ourselves satisfied. Dear Son, all of your brothers and sisters desire to be remembered to you and Mary and say they would be very glad to see you. Dear Son, we were very glad of the flour for we stood in great need of it. Dear Son, we would have strove and got something to send but Benjamin Curry is talking of coming down and if he does come we will try and get something to send to you. Dear

Son, John has sent you a bolt of plat. Dear Son, John Lowe has paid 1 dollar. So I have no more to say at present but hoping I still remain your true and affectionate Mother.

Ann Roberts

Green Turtle Cay, Abaco, the 12th day of February 1849

Dear Son,

I now take the opportunity of writing these few lines hoping they may meet you and Mary in as good state of health as it leaves me and the rest of the family at present. Dear Son, I was very sorry to hear of such bad misfortune in the family. Dear Son, I know it is a great miss to the family but is she was prepared to the Lord it is better than all. Dear Son, when I think of you being so far from each other, I can't help shedding tears but I hope if it the Lord's Will we may see each other sooner than we expect. Dear Son, I think you better come up and bring Mary to see if she can't get better of her sickness and I was very sorry to hear of Mary being sick. Dear Son, your cousin, Polly Sawyer, is dead. All of your brothers and sisters give their kind respect to you and Mary and says they would be very glad to see you. So I have no more to say at present but hoping I still remain your true and affectionate Mother.

Ann Roberts

Green Turtle Cay, Abaco, October 21st 1849

Mr. Richard Roberts,

My dear friend, these few lines will, I hope, come swift to your hands and find you and yours in better health than they leave me at



The house at 408 William Street that Tuggy Roberts moved from the Green Turtle Cay, Photo credit: Monroe County Library.

present. I have been very sick, the going now seven weeks and at present I am unrecovered and know not when I shall be out of my affliction. If the Blessed Lord shall see fit raise me up. I cannot say when I shall be able to you for it was a considerable time for me to get my strength being so reduced down. My best respects follow you and yours who believe me to be yours.

Most ob.,
B. E. Curry

Green Turtle Cay, October 29th
1849

My Dear Brother,

Could these lines draw us to each other, oh, happy I would feel but, alas, my Dear Brother, it is all in vain but it is great comfort to me to embrace the chance to write you these few lines hoping that you and family is well as they leave me and mine at present. My Dear Brother, it being so long since we heard from you before today

that I was afraid that something very great was the matter and you know, Dear Brother, how it is with your dear sister not able to stand trouble for that is almost carried me to my home already but, my dear brother and sister I hope it is well with you. Praise the Lord when I hear from you for I long to know from you both and to see you likewise. Your Dear Brother Richard don't enjoy very good health for he seldom sees a well day. He is troubled very much with pain in his feet and legs. He has to labor in much pain but I must strive and be contented the Will of the Lord must be done for we are all sufferers here but let us strive for a better world where our suffering will be over. We'll all join in love to each other hoping, my dear, that love to God make us a happy home after.

Richardson Ann Russell

Dear Richard, If you have sold any of them bits send me two

gallons or brandy and two gallons of good whiskey.

Green Turtle Cay, Abaco, the
29th October 1849

Dear Son,

I now take the opportunity of writing these few lines hoping they may meet you and your wife and all other inquiring friends in as good state of health as it leaven me and the rest of the family at present. It has been four months since you left this place and it appears as it is been about six months. Dear Son, I have been so uneasy since we heard the news about the Indians and we heard that Key West was burned up but I hope that it shall never be the case. Dear Son, I am drawing nigher and nigher to the grave but I hope if it is The Lord's Will we may see each other's face again and if we don't in this worlds, I hope we will meet in Heaven. Dear Son, your brother says that Mr. John Gates ask

(Continued on page 6)

(Bahamas from page 5)

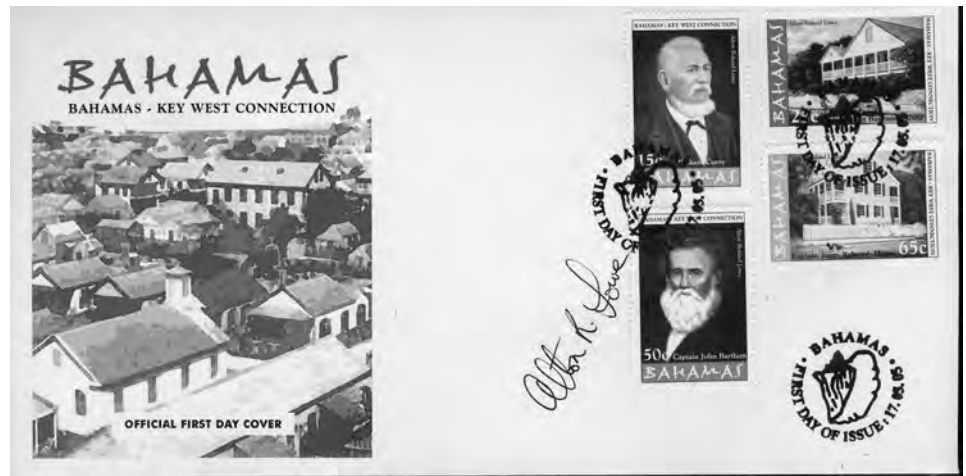
you if you would not take a little of the land for the gale made him very down hearted and he has paid 20 dollars towards it and I am going to send the titles down for you to sign and when he pays the other money I will give them to him. Your cousin, Benjamin Bethel is dead. Your brothers and sisters gives their kind respect to you and Mary. Dear Son, John Curry asks you to ask John Bartlum and his cousin William Lowe to let him get a patch of ground over to the other shore. Dear Son, Benjamin Curry been very sick and still sick. So I have no more to say at present but I still remain your true and affectionate Mother.

Ann Robert

Green Turtle Cay, November
12th 1849

Oh My Dear Brother,

How shall I begin to address you with these painful lines on account of my dear dear child Thomas whom the Good Lord that do that all things right has seen best to take him and hope that he has taken him to Himself. My dear child left his dear parents on Sunday morning like the flower of the field in good health as he look to be to go to Nassau. He was taken with a fever only one day and after that he was taken with a fit and his knowledge left him and after that he expired only 2 days and a half sickness. He had two of his brothers with him to see hi to the last of him. Oh dear brother, the thoughts of my dear child being away from us and so short a time and to be gone away from us not to be seen no more in this world the thought of it never to be forgotten by his dear parents. I suppose that the day the news came to us greater feelings never were



Stamps issued by the Government of the Bahamas to celebrate the Bahamas-Key West connections. Photo credit: Monroe County Library.

felt on no land than was felt that day by [unreadable]. Oh my dear brother, my child was beliked by everybody. They all spoke well of him and as to his parents he never thought that anything was too hard to get for them. Had our dear child been home with us that we could have strove with him and the Good Lord had seen fit to take him that we could have seen fit to take him. That we could have seen the last of him, oh what a consolation it would have been to us. Every day we expect him coming. The dear name Thomas was so often called by his dear family that the thoughts of being gone from us is so great a miss that we hardly know how to get the better of it but my dear brother I trust that the Lord for a wise purpose to bring me and my family to live nearer to the Lord. Yes, my dear brother, the Lord knows we are too strict to wound his creatures. He sees that we have not lived to Him as we ought to have done but oh my Dear Brother, the stroke is so cutting to us that I pray that it will be the means of saving me and all of my family. As for myself, when shall I ever think to come out to do as I have done. Oh, that the Lord will stand by me to give strength according to my

day. Oh when ever nature get the better of this day. My Dear Brother, having three young men grown up to be a credit to us that when John and Richard comes before us and no Thomas oh how heartbreaking it is according to nature. When will be the day that tears will fail to be dropped for him growing up to be such a help to his parents that when he made a dollar it was [unreadable] to his dear mother [unreadable] do as she seemed right. My Dear Brother, it has wounded by dear husband so much that he hardly knows how to go out to his yard to go to work any more but I trust the Grace of God will stand by him to strive as much against it as he can. Oh dear brother, my dear child's manners and ways was so natural to us that they appear right to us day and night. Oh my dear brother, you know my affection was always so great for my children that this stroke has wounded me to the very heart that how to get out of my bedroom the Lord know best that so bad at this time that my dear husband [unreadable] had to leave of work to come to my relief. We all join in love to you and your dear wife and family wishing you all well in time and happy in eternity. My dear husband's heart is so tender at this

time that on account of his painful bereavement that he obliged to fail writing. Farewell, dear brother, to you and family hoping to see you soon.

Ann Russell

1849 Nov 21st, G T Cay

My Dear Child,

It is the greatest pleasure when there is an opportunity that I can write you for I was glad when I received your letter to hear that you was well but very sorry to hear your dear wife being so very ill. My Dear Child, I know your distress of mind was very great but, my dear child, troubles is always around us more or less that we are always subject to down unto death but let us all be preparing for every event of trial. The Lord is everywhere present and ever ready to help in time of need. Oh, that I could a willingness to give HIM all my heart my dear child, I would be better satisfied. I have sent the piece of linen by Edward Roberts. If it don't suit, you can send it back. The price of it is \$4.56. All your dear sisters and brothers send their best love to you and your dear wife. Purdy is gone to Nassau to a doctor being still very poorly. Nothing more, my dear child, but remain your dear Mother.

Ann Roberts

April [unreadable] 1850

Dear Friend,

I now embrace this opportunity of writing you these few lines hoping that it may find you and your wife in better health than it leaves me at present for my troubles is still

very great. I [unreadable: document damage] that my youngest child all that I [unreadable: document damage]. Friend, I know not your four [unreadable document damage] of which you can take 1 pound [unreadable: document damage] and if you please sell the other [unreadable: document damage] pounds for me and get what you can for it a pound. Dear friend, I have sent to ask you if you would ask Mr. Scamp if he will not let me have that bit of land that is joining my shop as Mr. John Saunders wants to buy it out of spite and tell him I will give something more than he will give for it rather than not to get it and tell him that I am been waiting until my debts was paid or else I would have had it and do, if you can get it anyhow, do try and get it. Tell Mrs. Sally Lowe that the CARLTON is coming down quite shortly and I will send for the money [unreadable: document damage] when she comes. Give my love to your wife and Joseph [unreadable: document damage] and his family and all [unreadable: document damage] friends I have to say [unreadable: document damage].

Elizabeth S. Curry

Green Turtle Cay, 7th August 1850

Dear Son,

I write you these few lines hoping that you are well at present. Your sister, Mathilda, and family has had the whooping cough and your Aunt Amy's family is getting it. I have felt very troubled in my mind since I heard that your wife has not got no better of her sickness. Sarah says that you must tell Mary that she thanks her much

for cutting the apron and it suits to a tea. I should like to see you both but I expect it will be some time before I see you again but I will strive and be satisfied and you must strive and do so, too. There is nothing I can get here to send you this opportunity. Give my love to Mary and to all her family. All of your family remembers them. Love to you and Mary. Nothing more to say at present but still remains your dear Mother.

Nancy Roberts

Green Turtle Key, Abaco, 7th April 1857

Dear Son,

I now write you these few lines to let you know that we are all well at present and I hope it will meet you and Mary enjoying the same. Dear Son, I should be very glad to see you both but I don't know when I shall. You sent me word from Sandy Cay that you were coming up in the summer and I don't know when you will get here another chance so I will look for both of you by this vessel. Dear Son, I am getting very bad now for I am getting blind and deaf and Sarah is almost the same for every night she is blind and Mathilda she looks to be down in bed every day. Dear Son, this vessel is coming in a very bad time for there is nothing we can get to send you. I have sent you peas by Mr. Samuel Sawyer. Dear Son, all of your brothers and sisters desires to be remembered to you and Mary and all other inquiring friends. I would have sent you your jub and bucket but they won't carry it.

So I have no more to say at present but hoping I still remain you true and affectionate Mother.

Ann Roberts

Sarah Sawyer's Love Letters

Sarah Louise Sawyer Roberts was born in the Bahamas on February 27, 1856. She came to Key West as a girl. She had a number of suitors before she married Richard "Tuggy" Roberts on June 7, 1889. They had four children: George, Julia, Annie and Mary. When Sarah died on April 29, 1929 in the Bahama House at 408 William Street. She was survived by one daughter Annie Sharpley, ten grandchildren and one great grandchild. Included in the letters donated to the Monroe County Library by the Richter brothers were the following letters from admirers of Sarah and some of her answers.

Following are the letters transcribed by Mary Haffenreffer.

Sarah Sawyer

Dear Miss Sarah Sawyer,

I cannot longer restrain the experience of feelings which I entertain towards you and which it is my dearest hope that you may perhaps reciprocate. I have loved you from the first of our acquaintance and I shall love you always. It is the greatest desire that I have you upon this earth to be permitted to pay my addresses to you. The many occasions of true happiness which I have enjoyed in your society have taught me that with you alone rests the continuance of that happiness in the future. May I then without reserve say that I shall regard the gift of your hand as the greatest Blessing with which I could be endowed. It is due to you to say that I do not that we are young. Give me, my dear Miss



*Sarah Roberts with some of her grandchildren and her one great-grandchild.
Photo credit: Monroe County Library*

Sarah, the privilege of which I do desire and which I shall be so proud of being your living helpmate and companion. It is a true affection which I offer for your acceptance and if you give that acceptance the one effort of my life will be to prove that you have not mistaken me. Now I ask you to be your faithful lover. I am,

Your ever loving,

Albert Griffin
Key West, Fla

Nov. 24th 1875

Sarah Sawyer

Dear Miss,

I now sit to pen you a few lines. I received your last insulting letter and I was surprised at those report what I never did but by your letter you believed it and I thought more of you and that but the way you cut me up in that letter it is more and it is more than I can stand and it is more than I am going to take. I

don't see any reason you should went on so until you had got a letter from me. If I had been so I am man enough to let you know but you must listen to other's lies and you may believe others for me by these lies others reported has cost my brother and father to be against me but I don't care five cents for them that don't care for me. You said you hope that I may never come home again. You need not fret yourself about my coming home in a hurry but this one thing I pray for that I and you may meet again on earth. That is the second time you have insulted me since I have been here for nothing and I think it is to them it is time to stop it. Sarah if you want your ring and pictures send for them and you may have them with pleasure. Don't forget when you send for yours to send mine. I have heard things since I have been here but I did not pay any account to them but everything you heard you have been writing to me and after this you will not have the trouble to write. You said write your Aunt Muggy but I haven't anything to do with your Aunt Muggy. Sarah, I am sorry this is occurred but it may go so now I can paddle my own canoe. If I had intended to propose to a girl in this place I would have let you know before I had done it. Nothing more.

Albert Griffin

Green Turtle Cay,
January 15 1876

Dear Miss Sarah Sawyer,

I take the pleasure to write you hoping you will consent to my request. I love you dearly. The day that I came here and see you my love was for thee. I hope you will please ponder this over and give me an answer according to my desire.

I will stick to you while life lasts. I will be true and faithful and a dutiful husband to you if you would only consider to be my wife. Dearly I love you more than anybody else in this world. I am a poor man but I will make you as comfortable as a poor man can do. I know how to treat a woman as she ought to be treated. There is more that I can say but I think this will do. Please give me an answer as quick as possible.

Adin Roberts

Green Turtle Cay
July 15, 1877

Mr. Adin Roberts

Dear Sir,

I received your letter and now reply to it. I am sorry that I cannot comply to your request for I don't feel any mind to enter into marriage life with anyone at present. I do not think I ever shall marry. Hoping this will be satisfactory.

I remain,
Your friend,

Sarah Sawyer

Green Turtle Cay
Feb. 5th, 80

My Dear Miss,

I am accustomed to speak plainly and know little of the niceties of etiquette. Although I am not a young man do not think the worse of me for opening my heart to you abruptly without any preliminary flourishes. There cannot be anything offensive I hope in the candid declaration that I love you. If you give me the opportunity I will endeavor to prove my affection by devoting my whole life to the promotion of

your happiness. I should regard the pleasure of calling you my wife as the greatest that earth could afford. Dear Miss, I give you a week to consider over the matter as whether you could make yourself happy by becoming my partner in life.

Most sincerely yours,

Benj. C. Roberts

Green T Cay, Feb 6th 1880

Dear Sir,

You have addressed me in plain, earnest language and I feel it my duty to give a candid positive answer to your proposal without delay. I cannot accept your offer. As an acquaintance I have found your society agreeable but have never thought of you as a lover. It is, therefore, utterly impossible that I can respond favorably to your letter. Thanking you for the honor you have done me but at the same time requesting you to consider your offer finally declined. I remain your friend,

Sarah Sawyer

Mr. Michael Carey

Sir,

I read the contents of the note that I received from you this morning and I do not feel disposed for anyone paying their addresses to me, therefore, must decline you and do not feel like entering into any engagement with anyone in regard to matrimony. Trusting that you will take this for a sufficient answer. I remain,

Yours respectfully,

Sarah Sawyer

Early Key West Fisherman Used Well-Smack Fishing

By: H. C. "Hank" Klein
© Copyright 2014, H. C.
"Hank" Klein

Early Key West, Florida Fishermen used well-smacks as their fishing vessels prior to the introduction of artificial ice in the United States. The concept of well-smacks was first introduced in England in 1712. Twelve were in operation as early as 1720 in Harwich, England. The idea of well-smacks was brought to the United States by English fisherman. By the early 1800s, prior to the general use of ice on vessels in the United States most of the vessels in New England, especially those used in cod and halibut fishing, were constructed with a well in the hold in which the fish were retained alive until they could be delivered to market and sold.

The use of well-smacks, or welled-smacks, in the cod and halibut fishing began in the United States at both New London, Connecticut, and Greenport, New York about 1820. By using well-smacks, New London fishermen were able to extend their fishing all the way to the Georges Bank, off Boston in Massachusetts Bay by 1840. The fish were caught by means of hand lines and were handled very carefully being placed in the well immediately on removal from the water. Those dying before reaching market, through injuries or otherwise, were sold at about one-fourth the price of live fish.

The well-smacks running cod and sea bass, which fished off Sandy Hook and Long Island shore, had a capacity for 8,000 to 20,000 pounds of fish depending on the time of the year and the length of the trip. When the well was so full that

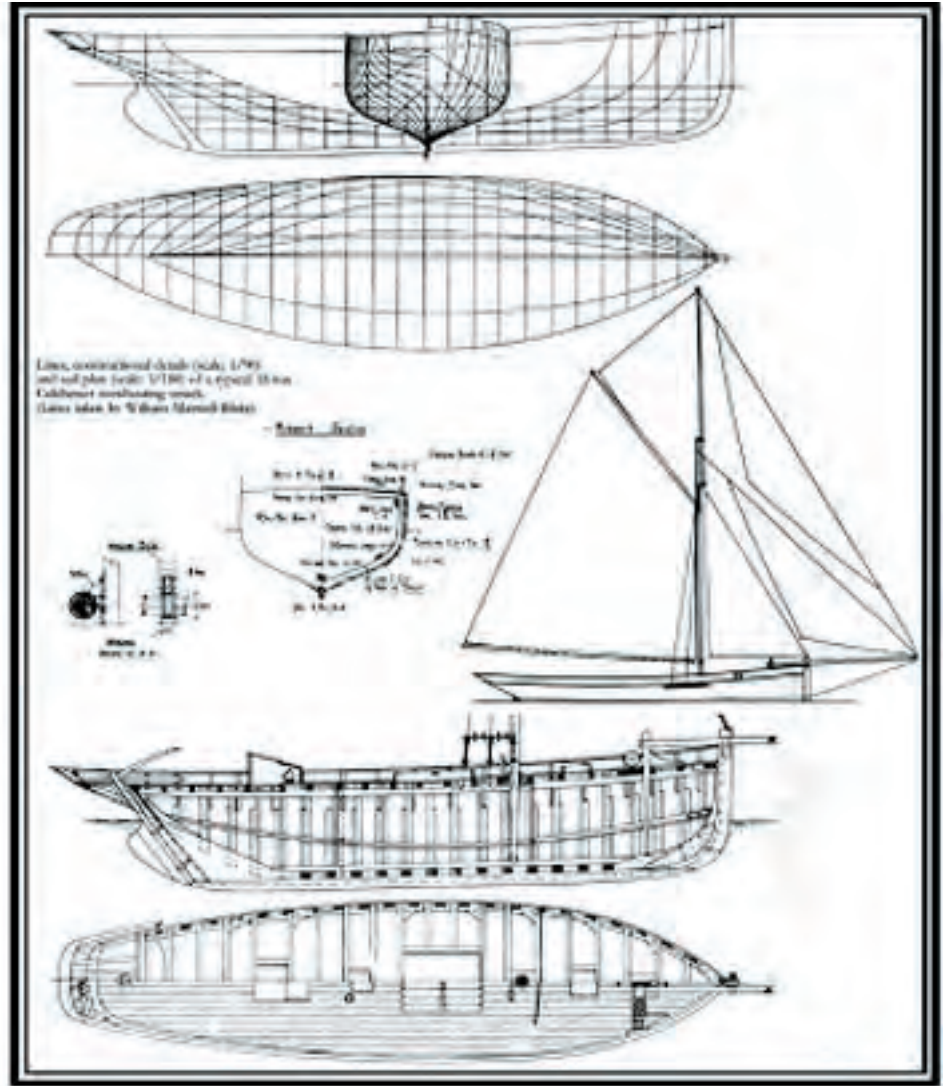


Diagram of sloop rigged New London Fishing Smack. Photo credit: The Author.

the holes could not be seen, it was considered time to sail to market to sell the catch. Normally the market where fish caught by New London fishermen were sold was the Fulton Fish Market located in the Bronx, in New York City.

Well-smacks were brought to the Key West by New London fisherman.

Well-smacks were also used in red snapper and grouper fishing in Key West, Pensacola and East Pass (Destin), Florida. The well-smacks used in Gulf of Mexico red-snapper and grouper fishing were of the same type as those in use on the New England coast. Actually most

of them were designed for New England fishing and brought to the Florida Keys and the Gulf of Mexico by New London fisherman who would winter in the Florida Keys and the Pensacola area after the United States took possession of Florida from Spain in 1822.

The well, in which the fish were placed, was situated amidships at the bottom of the hold. It extended from just forward of the main hatch nearly to the mainmast, and occupied about one-third of the length of the vessel. Typical New London fishing smacks were of a sloop rig and 39 feet to 44 feet in length, with a 13-foot beam and

a 6-foot draft. So the well would have been about 12 – 15 feet in length. The crew consisted of a master and 3-4 crew members.

The well was formed by two stout, water-tight bulkheads at either-end, 4 or 5 feet high and about 5 inches thick, extending from keelson to deck and entirely across the vessel. Midway between these is usually another bulkhead, which assists in supporting the deck and divides the well into two compartments. Leading from the well to the deck is a funnel curb, about 2 feet wide by 8 foot long at its upper end and 4 feet wide at its lower end.

The frames are usually the same distance apart as elsewhere in the vessel. However, on some smacks they are twice as far apart in order to permit the water to circulate freely and to facilitate dipping the fish from the well. About 300 auger-holes, 1-inch in diameter, were bored in the bottom planking of the well. From these holes the sea water entered freely, and was kept in circulation and constantly renewed by the motion of the boat. The sectional plan below clearly shows the construction features of the hull of a vessel with a well.

The Word “Smack” Came From the Sound the Vessel Made in the Water

The name “Smack” actually came from the sound the vessel made while sailing along. With the large number of small holes in the center section of the hull, sea water could enter the hold where the fish that had been caught could be kept alive for 7 – 10 days while at sea. The sound of the sea water entering the exiting the hull made a slapping or “smacking” sound against the hull. That smacking sound is why these vessels were called fishing smacks.



Box of freshly caught fish being loaded at Fulton Fish Market in New York City C 1800s. Photo credit: The Author.

Smaller Well-Smacks at Key West were known as “Smackees”

At Key West a number of smaller fishing vessels, known locally as “smackees,” were built for the local waters in the mid 1800s and were also equipped with wells. The smackees were manned by one or two men and operated in the nearby waters catching fish for the Key West market. These vessels ranged in length from 14 to 28 feet.

They averaged about 24 feet in length, had an 8-foot beam, and had a 4 or 5 foot draft with sharp bottom. The deep draft in relationship to the length of the vessel was necessary in order to submerge the hull sufficiently for the water to cover the fish in the well. The well occupied about a quarter of the boat’s length measured on the keel. The topside arrangements include a U-shaped cockpit for the helmsman and a small cuddy cabin forward of the live well for the crew.

On account of the great depth from which red snappers were obtained in the Gulf of Mexico, considerable difficulty was at first experienced in keeping them alive. Because the pressure of the water was so much less in the wells than

at a depth of several fathoms, the air bladder would become greatly distended and the fish would float belly up.

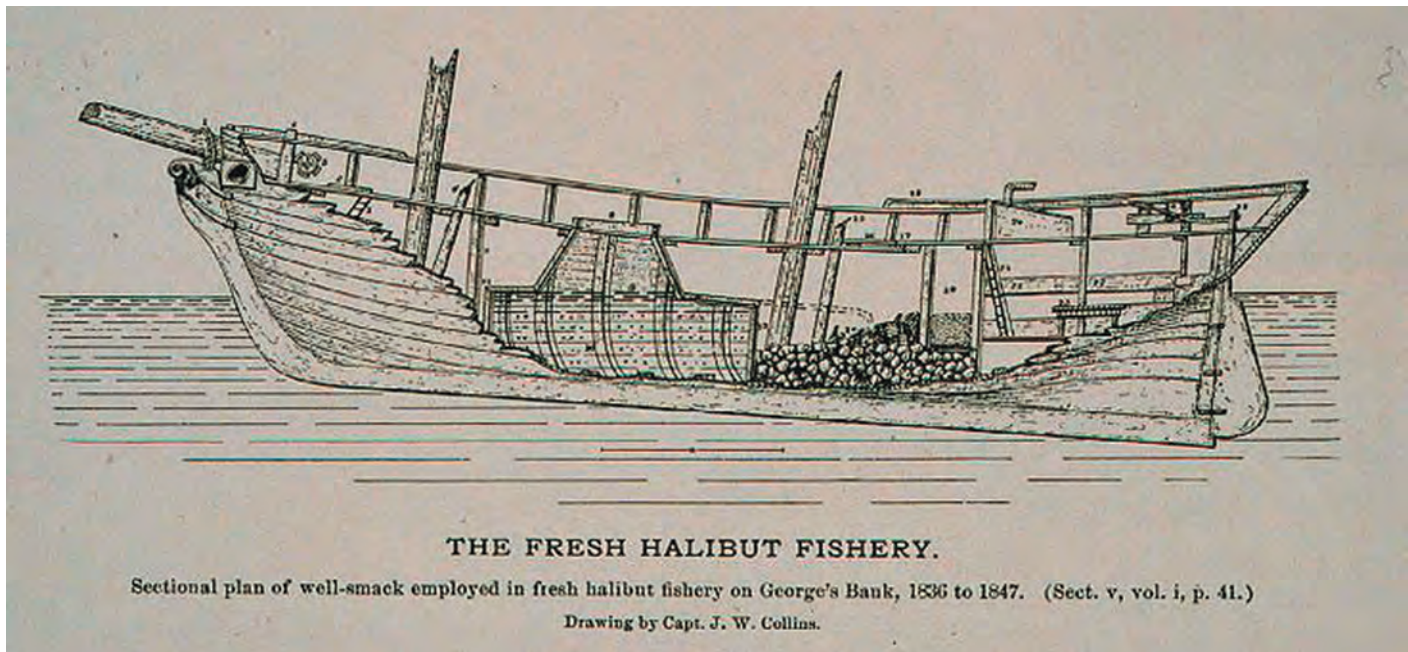
To overcome this, the fishermen adopted a practice of puncturing the air bladder as soon as the fish reached the surface. They would force a hollow metal tube ¼ inch in diameter into the side of the fish a little behind and just above the pectoral fin. This practice would relieve the air bladder of its extreme buoyancy so that the fish could control their movements in the well.

Only those red snappers taken in less than of 10 fathoms of water could be successfully held in the wells for a week or two. If caught in more than 10 fathoms of water they had to be handled carefully, and if caught in over 20 fathoms they would soon have a swollen surface, the eyes protruding, and the scales becoming loosened and standing erect.

Artificial Ice Changes the need for Keeping Fish alive in Wells

Prior to the invention of machinery to manufacture artificial ice, the importation of ice in blocks

(Continued on page 12)



Sectional Plan on a well-smack showing interior of vessel. Photo credit: The Author.

(Smack from page 11)

from the north to Florida was very expensive and hard to get. Fish and meat were preserved by salting them. Fisherman kept the fish they caught alive until they could get them to port to sell them by using well-smacks.

Once the invention of artificial ice was perfected the rules all changed. No longer did fish and meat need to be preserved by the use of salt. They could be preserved by keeping them cold or by freezing the fish both aboard fishing vessels and for transportation to far away locations.

Pensacola, Florida was the first Florida city to obtain an Ice House. The Gulf Ice Factory opened in 1881, but ran into some bad luck. The December 23, 1881 issue of the Columbus Georgia Daily Enquirer newspaper contained an article titled "Fire in Pensacola" and read:

In the April 2, 1882 issue of New Orleans Times Picayune it was reported that The Gulf Ice Factory was again in operation. It was expected to produce 20,000 pounds

of ice when in full production.

Artificial ice did not come to Key West, Florida for another decade however. In 1890 A. F. Tift and Company of Key West, Florida, which was a ship's chandlery and salvage warehouse, built Key West's first ice house in what is today the Gift Shop at the Key West Aquarium.

As artificial ice became widely available at the end of the 1800s and early 1900s, the need for and use of well-smacks in the fishing industry all but disappeared.

1 Bulletin of the Bureau of Fisheries. Volume 118. published 1899 — United States Fish Commission. pages 341-343

2 The Historical Role of Fisheries of the Florida Keys, Eduard J. Little. Jr. - Florida Keys Sea Heritage Journal, 1990

3 Columbus Daily Enquirer (Columbus, GA). December 23, 1881, page 4

H.C. "Hank" Klein has long been interested in the history of Florida and the genealogy of his father-in-law's and mother-in-law's

families (Marler and Shirah.) Both came from pioneer Destin, Florida families and both were related to Leonard Destin, founder of Destin Florida.

Klein has written books documenting his and his wife family genealogy. Hank has also contributed historical research for author Tony Mennillo's recently published book "Salty Memories along the Coastal Highway-Historic Stories of Destin and the Emerald Coast." Copies of this book containing 492 vintage photographs of Destin and the Emerald Coast can be obtained by contacting Arturo's Studio at <http://www.arturosstudio.com> or 850-585-2909 or from Amazon.com.

Klein lived in the mid-1960s at the foot of Simonton Street in Key West and for many years in Brevard, Okaloos and Bay Counties, Florida. He is now retired from his credit union management career and he and his wife (the former Muriel Marler of Destin, Florida) live in North Little Rock, Arkansas. He can be contacted at klein@aristotle.net or at 501-256-7474.

Henry J. Hornbeck's Diary

Henry J. Hornbeck was from Allentown, Pennsylvania, where he enlisted in the 47th Pennsylvania Volunteers Regiment at the age of 18. Here is his diary for June and July 1863.

Monday June 15th. Busy this morning at 11 at Quartermasters Papers. After dinner slept until 3p.m. Steamer **Nassau** loading shells & canisters all day. Latest news that Port Hudson is invested by our forces & must fall. No news from Army of Potomac. Ship **John Trucks** left wharf at 9 a.m. Visited Mrs. Garvin's tonight, had ice cream, after which returned to office. Played a trick on Jake Beck with fire crackers. Retired at 11 p.m. Slight breeze to night.

Tuesday June 16th. Today commencing to take Stock Account of Subs Stores. Wrote the Sworn Statement of Capt. Wilson of **Nonpareil** in reference to the running into & disabling the Quartermasters schooner **Nonpareil** by the steamer **Che Kiang**. Wrote a letter of information as to amount of damages sustained and amount paid by Quartermaster's Department for repairing said schooner. Gunboat **DeSoto** left harbor this morning. Took a nap in the afternoon. After supper visited Mrs. McGrath, then procured ice cream at Miss Allen's after which returned to office. Retired at 10 p.m. Slight breeze.

Wednesday June 17th Rose as usual. Chas. Martin Company B deserted last night. Busy at Commissary Papers. A small mail brought in by a pilot boat, from a steamer passing outside from the North. Received two shirts from Sister Mary and a letter enclosing photograph from Bro. John written by himself. No news of any account. After supper Ginkinger & myself

went to Miss Alien's procured ice cream, then returned to office. Retired at 11 p.m. Very warm.

Thursday June 18th. Busy all morning at Commissary Accounts. Solomon Diehl Company B died this morning in General Hospital of chronic diarrhea. Attended his funeral at 5 p.m. at U.S. Barracks, Band & Companies B & D as escort. Genl. Woodbury also attended funeral. Ship **Constellation** arrived today, with coal. She is a fine vessel. After supper took a walk about town, visited Miss Allen's procured ice cream. Weather very hot and mosquitoes very annoying.

Friday June 19th. Busy at papers in the morning. A mail arrived from North in a gunboat. rec'd two letters, One from Sister Mary acknowledging receipt of money & trunk and the other from Bro. Molton, who is at home well & hearty, contemplating a trip to Jersey. News concerning Grandmother, bad, she being very feeble, otherwise very satisfactory. Reported that Vicksburg has been taken, hope it may prove true. After supper Ginkinger & myself took a short walk, returned by 9 p.m. Retired at 10. Weather hot and oppressing.

Saturday June 20th. Busy all morning at Commissary Papers. Gunboat **Huntsville** arrived this morning. After supper took a walk about town. retired at 11 p.m.

Sunday June 21st. After dressing we mustered into service, one of the Blacks who arrived from New Orleans, into Quartermasters Department read the Anny Regulations to him, and put a Military suit on him, had fine fun, making him swear by the dictionary &c. Remained at office all day, reading. Today

being Luther Mennig's birthday, he procured a couple of bottles of port, and we drank to his health. After supper took a ride with Wm. Weiss using Maj. Gansler's carriage, After which returned to office. Retired at 10 p.m. Weather very hot. The clerk, that the new Quartermaster who was to relieve Lt. Locke, but now returns, brought with him, has made his lodging with us & also messes with us. He remains here receiving instruction, & will follow his Capt. as soon as he hears from him. His name is Frank Whiting of Mass., a Citizen Clerk, seems to be a fine young man.

Monday June 22nd. Busy at Commissary Papers. Steamer **Matanzas** arrived in port from New Orleans, but leaves for the North in an hour. Packed up Commissary Papers & sent them aboard. Also hurriedly wrote an answer to Sister Mary's letter and got it aboard to be mailed at New York. Steamer **Exact** arrived from New Orleans, having prisoners for this place & Tortugas. She returns to New Orleans this evening. After supper Lawall, Mennig, Weiss & Myself attended the funeral of a Navy Officer who died yesterday, belonging to the gunboat **Hendrick Hudson**. Our Band & Sailors as Escort, also a turn-out by the Masons, the funeral rites of which are very interesting. Visited Mrs. Garvin & procured ice cream, also visited Miss Allen, & procured ice cream, then returned to office. before returning Mennig, Watson, Whiting & Myself went in swimming off the dock. Water warm. After which retired.

Tuesday June 23rd. Steamer **Cahawba** passed outside harbor. Capt. sent in New York papers

(Continued on page 14)

(Hornbeck from 13)

dating to the 18th. News very bad, the Rebels made another raid into our State, going into Chambersburg, great excitement. Main portion of the Rebel Army reported to be at Martinsburg. things look bad. No mail received. After dinner engaged in reading Scott's Works, "The Lady of the Lake." After supper visited Mrs. McGrath, then returned to office. before retiring had a swim off the dock. Retired at 11 p.m.

Wednesday June 24th. Busy in office all day. After supper visited Mrs. McGrath, after which returned to office. Went aboard schooner **Nonpareil**, Capt. Wilson. then went to Russell House, where our Band serenaded Mr. Russell who has Just been married, also serenaded by a Calathumpian Band, making a tremendous noise. He treated all. Splendid singing by Navy Officers Returned to office at 12 p.m. before turning in, took a bath. Retired at 12 p.m. Weather warm.

Thursday June 25th. Reading most part of day. Nothing of any account. Took a walk about town after supper. Order issued from Headquarters that all extra & daily duty men, that can be spared, are to be returned to their companies, & Contrabands to take their places, We remain, two clerks being allowed in Commissary Department, Mennig & myself. Before retiring went in bathing.

Friday June 26th. Navy transport **Union** arrived from New York, dating to 18th inst. having a large mail, received nary line. Allentown papers arrived, nothing then of importance. Invasion of our State by the Rebels & their retreat, which news we had a few days ago. Chas. Martin Company B who deserted June 17th returned

again. Not having gone far, the boat being stove to pieces in which he left, and he was found on one of the adjacent Keys, by a woodman, almost starved to death, and anxious to return to Key West. He is in the Guard House. Mennig & myself took a walk to the US Barracks. Paid-off Albert Newhard for services in altering clothing. String Band of Company B out serenading to night. Accompanied them to several places, then returned to office. Whiting, McKillup & myself went in bathing. Retired at 11 p.m. Weather bracing tonight.

Saturday June 27th. Reading most part of day. After supper took a walk about the city, Took a sea bath, retired at 11 p.m.

Sunday June 28th. One of the Contrabands from La. we started to day as cook for our mess. Ablutions in Commissary Store house. A mail arrived in harbor this morning, brought in by **Pilot Boat**, from Sand Key. Received a letter from Sister Mary announcing the death of Dear Grandmother who died on the 18th inst. to be buried on Monday June 22nd. As a mail leaves almost immediately for the North, I hastily answered her letter, acknowledging receipt of the sad news, also wrote consolatory letter to Bro. John, Such is life. Remained in office all day. After supper Watson & myself visited Mrs. Garvin's, after which went to Church. After Church took a bath, Retired at 11 p.m. Very warm, no air, hardly any sleep all night. Two splendid prizes brought into harbor this afternoon, two Rebel steamers laden with cotton &c, Captured by the Sloop of War **Lackawanna** off Mobile.

Monday June 29th. Busy all day in office. Nothing of any account today. After supper took a walk about town. Rain & thunder storm tonight. Retired at 11 p.m.

Tuesday June 30th. Reading most

all day. After supper, our Band out serenading, went with them. Weiss, Mennig & myself returned to office at 12. Retired at 12.30. Weather warm. Mustered for pay today.

Wednesday July 1st. Busy in office. Today procured Henry Kramer Company B as cook for our mess. This afternoon U.S. Gunboat **Bermuda** arrived from New Orleans, having an old mail for this place, which had passed here, and had gone on there, some time ago. Received a letter from Sister Mary and also one from Albert also one from Albert Kern, enclosing his photograph, although the news is rather late. Weiss & myself took a short walk towards the barracks, accompanying Pretz & Lawall. After which returned to office. Answered Kern's letter. Ginkinger, Whiting & myself then went in bathing off the wharf. Retired at 11 p.m.

Thursday July 2nd. Busy in office all day. Wrote a letter to J. Henry Beemer Deckertown N.J. After dinner took a nap. After supper walked about town. Returned to office at 9 p.m. After taking a bath, Retired being 11 p.m.

Friday July 3rd. Reading most part of day. No news of any account. After bathing retired. Could not sleep tonight on account of the heat,

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sitting up greater portion of the night.

Saturday July 4th. Independence Day. No work in office to-day. Rose at 4 a.m. went with Ginkinger to Slaughter House, procured rations of fresh beef for our mess. Mennig & Myself went to fish market, purchased two fish. Took a cup of coffee at cafe opposite Provost Marshals Office. After breakfast Whiting & myself played a game of billiards, then witnessed the parade of 47th P. V. 5 Companies with Band & Col. & Staff. Review by the Genl. at Headquarters. Dispersed at 11 a.m. Weather extremely hot. Provost Guard quarters finely decorated. Flags hoisted at great many places. Firing squibs &c, salute by Fort Taylor & Gunboats in harbor, as usual on such occasions. Remained in office all day. After supper Ginkinger & myself visited Capt. Bell, then went with Serg't. Mink to procure ice cream at a Colored Woman's establishment, after which returned to office. Many of boys, as usual upon such occasions, being today pretty well curried. Today the **San Jacinto** relieved the **Magnolia** as Flag Ship for this port. After taking a sea bath retired at 11 p.m.

Sunday July 5th. Remained in office all day reading. Steam transport **Thomas A. Scott** arrived from New York very early this morning, bound for New Orleans, having Ordnance Stores aboard, put in here for coal. She brings papers dating to 27th but no mail. News very bad. Lee's army still in Pennsylvania making bad havoc. Before retiring went in bathing. Retired at 11 p.m. Cool tonight.

Monday July 6th. Engaged upon Commissary Papers. Reported that three Companies of our Regiment could be spared & would be sent to Pennsylvania, but I think it to be all a hoax, there being enough men in

our State to defend it. After supper took a walk about town. Took a sea bath then Retired about 10 p.m.

Tuesday July 7th. Wrote a letter this morning to Reuben P. Leisenring. Purchased a pair of breeches from Whiting. Our Cook Henry Kramer of Company B ordered back to his company by Capt. Rhoads, another burst of shoulder strap authority. After supper Weiss & myself played billiards. Retired at 10 p.m. after taking a good sea bath, off the wharf. Weather sultry & mosquitoes again at work.

Wednesday July 8th. Busy all morning at Commissary Papers also Regimental accounts. Navy transport **Union** left for the North at 1 p.m. taking a mail. Steam tug **Reaney** left for Havana, for them mail reported to be there. After supper took a walk. Went in bathing before retiring.

Thursday July 9th. Busy today, moving the office next door to Provost Marshal's office, fine place. Tug **Reaney** returned from Havana having a mail, No letters for me. News very bad from Pa. Rebels about to attack Harrisburg. The Militia confident of holding the place. Bridges &c burnt on the Susquehanna. Watson & myself took a walk this evening. Steamer **Creole** passed by this evening **Pilot Boat** brought in a paper up to July 3 reports 9000 Rebels to be Captured between Carlisle & Chambersburg. Genl. Hooker relieved from Command of Army of Potomac and Genl. Meade his successor, general satisfaction by this change. Took a sea bath tonight, retired at 11 p.m. Weather cool this evening.

Friday July 10th. Busy all Morning assisting in issuing rations, and fixing up new office. Busy in the afternoon at accounts. After Supper played Billiards with Mennig & Weiss, after which took a sea-bath then retired about 10 O'clock. Weather warm, not much sleep.

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The Russell House, with porches, in the 100 Block of Duval Street in 1865. Photo credit: Monroe County Library.

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