

USS SHARK

Florida Keys Sea Heritage Journal

VOL. 25 NO. 2

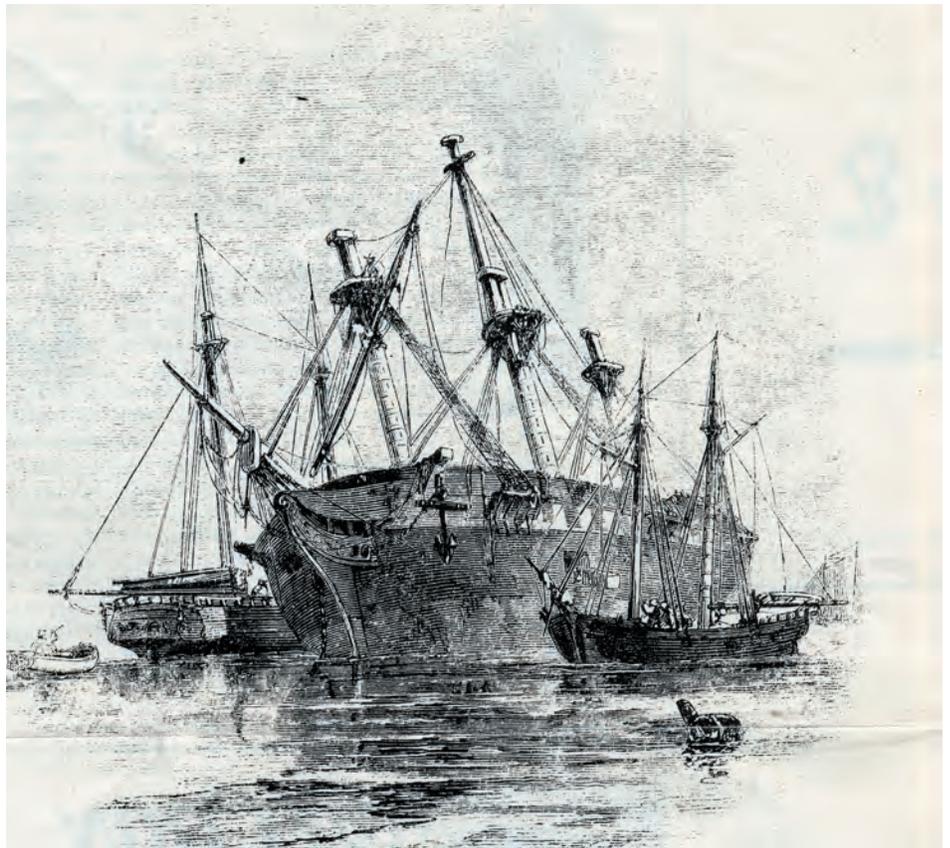
WINTER 2014/15

OFFICIAL QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF THE KEY WEST MARITIME HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Florida Keys

Reprinted from the "Putnam's Monthly." Vol. VII, December 1856, No. XLVIII. "The Florida Keys."

The labors of an insignificant insect have dotted the sea, around the southernmost portion of our republic, with coral islands, or keys, of all dimensions, from the extended area of Key Largo, to a minute clump of mangroves, hardly larger than an ordinary-sized breakfast table. But these islands are indebted to the coral insect for their first foundation only. As soon as they reach the surface, the industrious architects cease their labors, and all further growth is dependent on other causes. These are many and various. A plank, torn from a wreck, and tossed about by the winds and waves for many days, may at last rest upon the surface of the coral. Sheltered from the waves by this slight barrier, the insects spread a broad flat rock under its lee, which soon becomes covered with sand and earth, thus forming the first rudiments of a soil. This spreads and elevates itself—the first piece of wreck, perhaps, catches another, and a larger bulwark against the violence of the waves is erected, till



Key West wreckers at work. Photo credit: Monroe County Library.

quite an extent of ground has risen like magic in the very midst of the ocean.

This soil, teeming with the elements of fertility, does not long remain barren and useless. Perhaps some sea-bird, wearied with its protracted flight over the stormy waters, may pause for an instant on this welcome resting-place. A

seed, borne by the bird from some more favored spot, drops upon the luxuriant soil, thirsting to receive it, springs up, blossoms, and bears fruit. Other birds rest in the branches of the newly-born tree, and scatter the seeds of other and different plants. Protected still more from

(Continued on page 3)

SocietyNews

by Tom Hambright

The Monroe County History collection over the years has collected a number of original letters. Some are part of a large collection and tell a story, some are single or a few that are not connected to a large story. Following is one of these orphan letters from a military man in Key West in 1862.

Mr. Richard M. J. Long
Hanoverville, Pa
Northampton County
Penn

Key West, Florida
May the 12 1862

Friend Richard

I will take the opportunity to write a few lines to you and let you know that we are well at present time and hoping you all the same further I received your letter on the march sometime and I was very glad to hear from you and further I let you know that We went to the island of Key West, Florida. We left in Virginia on the 22 of January 1862 and marched to after Alexandra Railroad. There we took the cars to Alexandra. It is a town where Elsworth was shot and there we took a steamship to Washington and there we took the cars again and arrived in Annapolis State of Maryland on the 24 of January and there we took the large steamboat Oriental on the 27 January and started at 4 o'clock in the afternoon and came to forts Monroe the next evening there we anchored until the next morning then we started with the fair wind again and I wish you

could see the large fish which we have seen what they call hog fish and another kind they call sharks and we arrived in Key West, Florida on the 4 of February at 8 o'clock morning and when we came here to this place we found it awful hot and plenty of mosquitos but still not as many as we have now and so we pitched tents and camped there until the 10 of March then our Company moved in Fort Taylor and here. We are drilling artillery and infantry further you stated in your letter that you think I would not get many sleigh rides – I did barely see any snow. We had a little snow in Virginia the deepest was 1 inch deep and we had and there but here they never seen no snow yet their water was never froze yet that is what their citizens says and I believe it further I let you know that we received the news that Yorktown is taken and New Orleans is taken to and when we received the news from New Orleans all the vessels was trimmed with 60 or 70 different flags I tell you it looked nice and we fired 35 cannons off if that fighting keeps on that way and that we win every battle it will soon be settled.

We expect to be home until the 4 of July. The other night we was fishing with the net and made three hauls which we had enough for the whole company so I must come to a close excuse my bad writing for it was done in a hurry. Don't forget to write and direct to

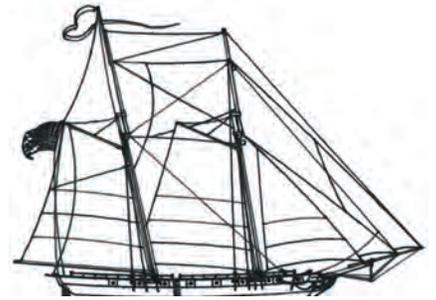
Key West Florida
Company F47 P.V.
Care of Capt H. S. Harte

I remain your Friend
Ruben Kein

New Members

Michael de Bettencourt, Key West;
Thomas Callahan, Key West;
Marie Geranian, Key West; Shelly

Green, Key West; Lynn Schwubert,
Marathon; Victoria Scudder, Key
West.



The Florida Keys Sea Heritage Journal is published quarterly. Subscription is available through membership. Copyright 2015 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: 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.

Key West Maritime
Historical Society
Board of Directors

President: Corey Malcom
Vice President: Bill Verge
Secretary: Andrea Comstock
Treasurer: Tom Hambright

George Craig
J. Gregory Griffin
Bill Grosscup
Mary Haffenreffer
Sheri Lohr
Bruce Neff
Wendy Tucker
John Viele
Robert J. Wolz
David Harrison Wright

(Florida Keys from page 1)

disturbing influences, by the barrier it has itself provided, the land grows, like the vegetation upon it; until miles upon miles of territory are rescued from the empire of the sea. Such is a brief and simple sketch of the most usual method of formation, wherever the coral insect builds. Around the coast of Florida, however, most of such changes took place many hundreds of years ago, and now, while some keys increase in extent, others diminish. The cause of this lies in the numerous currents, which the tides, in their intricate windings through so many islands, unavoidably excite. Thus a portion of one key may be slowly and steadily washed away. The particles of earth, however, are not lost, but serve to swell its more fortunate neighbor, which, in its turn, may be robbed at some part, to benefit a third.

It is both instructive and amusing to observe the gradual increase of some—how they stretch out long narrow points like arms, striving to pull more land from the bottom of the ocean. At first we see nothing but a long bank, which is almost hidden by the sea at high-tide, and reveals itself as a soft mass of mud and shells, when the waves retire. Finally, sometimes at the very extremity, sometimes in the middle, a combination of currents heaps up a mass above the highest level of the water. As if some unseen hand had planted them, for no eye beholds whence they come, a million points of mangrove emerge from the mud. Perfectly straight, and hardly thicker than a quill, they bear a fanciful resemblance to the growth of the human beard. They soon lose that appearance, however, for the uniform stem forks and divides again, grows and puts forth leaves, until the whole surface of the mud

gives place to a fresh and lively green.

This beautiful green meadow—for such from a distance it appears—loses much of its charm as we approach, and possesses none at all should we be rash enough to trust ourselves upon it. The mingled mass of pulverized coral, sand, and shells, that forms the soil, is not only extremely soft and treacherous, but the young mangroves, spreading out into a chain of arches, trip up the unwary foot in a moment. Any thought of running over such a surface would be rash, in the broad light of day, but at night would become simply ridiculous. On a fair average, the fugitive and his pursuer, too, would have the task, not only of picking their way, but of picking up themselves at every other step. However, as the level of the mud, which is almost as uniform as the water around it, gradually rises, a short grass springs up, and the earth dries and hardens. The mangrove arches, like many nobler structures, fall into ruin, as the plants increase in height, till the scene assumes the appearance of a grassy level, dotted thickly with mangrove bushes, seldom more than six or seven feet high.

These changes may all be observed at one spot, as the edges of most keys gradually shade off from their ancient forest-covered center, to their muddy and daily-increasing circumference. We speak of a central forest, for other and larger trees spring up and unite with the mangrove in sheltering the interior from the scorching rays of the sun.

Indeed, most of the keys are covered with a dense growth of the various woods, though, here and there, we encounter plains of the most exact level, carpeted with a short ash-colored grass, and spotted thinly with low mangrove bushes,

or single trees. The lagoons in the islands are very abundant in such localities. These are strictly ponds; for they scarcely deserve the name of lakes. The water finds its way into them by subterranean channels. Some are as salt as the ocean, while the brackish water of others proves that the rain has a large share in their composition. But the term lagoon is often more broadly applied. Many keys contain large interior spaces filled with water, which enters from the ocean outside, through a narrower or wider channel, as the case may be. If these are so extensive as to deserve consideration, they are honored with the name of sounds, but, if small and unimportant, are merged under the general term, lagoon.

The shore of the keys varies much. On one side it is generally rocky—the grass and soil ceasing at a line that denotes the high-water-mark. When the tide recedes, a greater or less space of the rock is left bare, amounting, sometimes, to several hundred feet. The other side is either covered with mangroves, whose arched and interlaced stems grow far into the water, and form a dark green fringe, entirely concealing the land or it is a bank of mud, into which one may sink above his knees. These two appearances designate the character of the shore, whether it grows or wastes away. No key increases in every direction. The numerous currents, set in motion by the tides, while they heap up sand and shells on one side, endeavor to carry away soil from the other. But here the rocky foundation of the keys preserves them. It is only at high-tide that the water can sweep off the earth above, and during the comparatively long period through which the tide ebbs and again rises,

(Continued on page 4)

(Florida Keys from page 3)

all its strength is wasted on the iron surface of the rock. Still it makes an impression even there; for we find the coral worn and honey-combed in a thousand places, and changed to a dark slate-color by the sun and air. Thus, the increase and diminution of the keys are not in the same ratio; and, perhaps, at some distant day, the sea may be driven from every inlet and channel, and all the keys become consolidated into one.

In the numerous sounds, that cut up the interior of many keys, this difference of shore is very striking. One side may be rocky, up to the limits of the tide, where the ground rises abruptly, and, covered with short grass, extends back to the edge of the woods. The few yards thus left open afford excellent walking-ground for the most delicate foot. We push on, and turn the point. The aspect of the other shore is hidden by the forest, until we reach the very extremity of the dry land. No sooner does the knowing eye catch a glimpse beyond this curtain, than all hopes of a pleasant excursion, if such were ever entertained, are abruptly disappointed. Perhaps the shore may be veiled beneath a thick border of mangroves, whose green leaves touch the water, and are clearly reflected in its crystal depths. What a lovely shore! How charmingly the dark green of the mangroves contrasts with the brilliant mirror that bathes their feet. And they are beautiful to view from a distance, or to float by lazily in a boat. But let the unwary explorer endeavor to pass, by wading, as the writer once did, not, however, to gratify his curiosity. He will find himself not only up to his waist in water, but knee-deep in a coarse mud, filled with shells of all sizes. If the shore be not thus treacherously fair, it throws aside all disguise, and

boldly presents I itself as it is—an unmitigated mud-bank.

The sounds, to which we have just referred, perfectly represent, in miniature, the great oceans and gulfs of our earth. One, in particular, about twenty miles northeast from Key West, offers every variety of shore, shoal, and channel. The large key that contains it, and which rejoices in the sweet name of Sugar-loaf is almost dissolved out by the sea. The entrance is by two creeks or winding channels, on opposite sides of the island. The smaller would be a treasure, could some enterprising Yankee transport it north, as an inexhaustible magazine, from which to draw unfailing supplies of superior romantic scenery, at so many dollars the square yard. Though the distance, between the outer sea and the sound into which it pours, is barely half a mile in a straight line, the creek winds for the distance of two miles. In some places it is several yards wide, in others so narrow, that a boat passes with difficulty, while its depth varies from three or four feet to as many fathoms. Its banks are ornamented with every charm of Florida scenery. Here we have tall trees, arching overhead, in green and whispering domes, until the hot beams of the sun are completely excluded; and our boat floats on, in an atmosphere of the most delicious coolness. We hear the splash of the water, among the million arches of the mangroves that line the banks, echoing and reechoing in a continuous murmur. A more sleep-compelling sound cannot be imagined. The breeze outside is somehow caught by the trees, at the mouth, and a welcome current of cool air follows our upward progress. We emerge into the open sunlight. The current hurries us on more rapidly, for the depth has become less, and one

is a sure index to the other. The banks are covered with bushes, on many of which we may see shells, high in air. They are adventurous shell-fish who adhered to the plant, while it was yet imbedded in the mud, and, as it rose, soared aloft with their supporter. We may find their parallels elsewhere than in Florida. Again we have a ghastly forest of dead trees. Thousands of white skeleton limbs are twisted into every imaginable shape. At night, especially, when thrown into strong relief by the cold light of the moon, they present forms of horror, numerous enough and fearful enough to terrify a hundred children. We speak thus moderately, as we doubt whether a larger number could be found on all the keys.

The creek, at the other extremity of the sound, is broader, and less winding. Beautiful grassy slopes, with a few trees scattered here and there, to break the monotony of an extended meadow, border its banks. The water, though deep, is still so clear, that the shells and seaweed, nay, even the smallest fish swimming along the bottom, may be easily perceived. Outside, extensive shoals prolong its windings, and show plainly the process of its formation.

Near the former creek, resides the Robinson Crusoe of the key—Happy Jack. He was originally a sailor, and a member of a certain band, that meandered over all the keys, and lived where and as they could. Their names, as least of the most distinguished, were as follows: Jolly Whack, Paddy Whack, Red Jim, Lame Bill, and old Gilbert. Whether Paddy and Jolly were brothers, as the similarity of their surnames would seem to indicate, remains doubtful, as the history of the family is shrouded in as deep obscurity as the origin of



Key West in 1855 looking from the corner of Front and Simonton Streets. Photo credit: Monroe County Library.

the Pyramids. Red Jim was certainly not an Indian, for the Floridians have little in common with their savage foes; but, to hazard a conjecture, gained his sobriquet from the color of his hair. Lame Bill's prefix needs no interpretation. Nor is the patriarchal title of old Gilbert, or ancient Gilbert, more obscure. On the whole, Jack's appellation seems to us the happiest of the six. However different their names, and varying their dispositions, they all united in a common love. The fragrant goddess of whisky absorbed the affections of their guileless hearts.

As whisky is one of those articles with which the coral insects, unfortunately, have not yet supplied the keys, these ardent devotees were frequently obliged to resort to the town of Key West, for outward and visible manifestations of the spirit within them. They necessarily went down sober, for the want of liquor sent them; but it was no less a matter of course that they should return drunk. Skillful sailors as they were, and favored by Providence with moderate breezes, and smooth seas, oftener than they deserved it, nevertheless, it sometimes happened,

that the winds blew and the waters rose, just when their skill deserted them. Three or four scores of such excursions, and three or four such mischances thinned their numbers rapidly, till, at length, only Jack was left.

Jack was always disinclined to the world, and Key West, probably, did not elevate his opinion of human nature. So he settled himself permanently on the key we have just described, and bent his energies to trapping deer, and raising fruit. He is still alive, and likely to live. His solitude is not so uncompromising as Robinson Crusoe's, for the crowds of spongers" and fishermen, that swarm around all the keys, give him sufficient company, indeed, more than he desires.

Now, having disposed of Happy Jack, let us briefly allude to the vegetable kingdom as it exhibits itself on the keys. Here, however, we are not to look for the grand and the picturesque. There are no mighty trees, whose ages may be reckoned by centuries, and whose giant trunks, seamed and weather beaten by

a thousand storms, resemble the massive columns of some old stone temple built for an ancient and forgotten god. The reason is obvious. The keys themselves are essentially things of yesterday—southern plants growing from the bottom of the ocean. It would be absurd, then, to expect the hoariness of an antediluvian forest, in these newly-born woods. But, like Daniel Lambert, what they want in height, is amply made up in thickness. A dense under-wood chokes up almost every passage, composed of every variety of wood in different stages of growth, from the first tender shoot to the complete tree. Old age and decay have also their representatives in the skeleton-like dead trees that thrust their gaunt limbs in our faces at every turning. The ground is, in some places, covered with dead leaves, in others, strewn with masses of rock, or hidden beneath a long prickly grass.

No breeze ever finds its way into these deep recesses. The hot beams of the sun fall almost

(Continued on page 6)

(Florida Keys from page 5)

perpendicularly downward, on a body of stagnant air, which in summer becomes heated to the last pitch, until the additional caloric radiated from the burning earth, forces it to rise into a comparatively cooler atmosphere. These solitudes are not condemned to utter silence. Beside the occasional cry of a bird, swarms of mosquitoes and gigantic flies make the forest vocal with a melody fearful to the traveler's ear. Indeed, these two pests are found in such numbers here, that, unless they feed upon each other, the wonder is how they exist.

Of the mangrove—the pioneer of vegetation—there are two varieties—the red and the black. Both, like the pine, are a species of evergreen, and both, like that tree, need no very fertile soil to support them. The red mangrove is distinguished by its spreading roots, which run out in long arches, dropping, at intervals, a perpendicular branch, like a pillar, to bear their weight. The trunk rests upon these arches, often at some distance from the ground. Near the shore, the foundations of the roots are hidden by the water, which rises, at high-tide, almost to the level of the main trunk. When the trees are large, and grow closely together, the roots interlace themselves in the most inextricable confusion, and form a raised platform on which one may walk without wetting the feet. The bark is light, and smooth, the leaf small and thick, without serrations. The salt air, on which they live, is, so bound up with their constitution, that we generally find small particles of salt crystallized upon the upper surface. The wood is reddish brown, firm, and heavier than water. Used as firewood, it answers very well, burning slowly, but giving an intense heat.

Nature has bestowed upon the red variety a means of propagating itself, denied to the black. The larger trees are continually dropping small twigs into the water, which are carried away by the tide. They float wherever it please chance to send them, till they come to any place so shallow that their lowest extremity can reach the bottom. Here they are firmly anchored, for wherever these “bobs” —so called from the bobbing motion given them by the rise and fall of the waves—once touch, there they stick fast, and take root. Thousands of such twigs may be seen “bobbin’ around” the shores of the keys, ready, wherever they have an opportunity, to plant themselves and extend their race.

The black mangrove differs very little from the red, except in the color of its wood; which, as the name denotes, is almost black. Its roots are not arched, like those of the red variety, but in every other respect there is a general likeness. Neither kind attains to any great height—twenty feet is usual, forty, perhaps, the limit.

The mangrove is indisputably the tree of the keys. It precedes the rest, and is, probably, more abundant than any other. There are many small islands, scattered throughout the channels, between the larger keys, which are so thickly covered with mangroves that the earth is entirely hidden, and landing rendered impossible. From a distance they appear like a regularly shaped mound of the darkest green, rising from the water, and seeming to float upon its surface. The Floridians call them mangrove keys par excellence, as they are made of nothing else.

The pine comes next. Some keys possess tolerably extensive pine barrens, as they are termed, though we think the name an unjust

reflection on one unfortunate tree, for the land is not more barren there than on most other places. The keys are not gardens, by any means. Though the pines never equal the height of their northern brethren, and would look like bushes beside the gigantic pines of California, still, they are the loftiest wood on the keys.

Then we have the palmetto, the famous soft wood, used for the erection of Fort Moultrie, in the Revolution, and celebrated for its power of resisting balls. It rises, a straight, branchless, trunk, for about twenty or thirty feet, and at the top expands into broad leaves, something like an enormous umbrella.

Oak, also, is to be met with, though for purposes of tanning it is not indispensable, as the bark of the red mangrove well supplies its place.

An almost endless list follows, of which only a few deserve our notice. The handsome yellow wood, very well adapted for violins, gunstocks, or any ornamental work, is often sent to England, where it brings a high price. We have only space to briefly mention the mahogany madeira, the mastic and princewood, the stopper and the torch, both black and white. The lancewood sometimes occurs in the middle of the forest. It is excellent for axe-handles, the shafts of carriages, or, indeed, for any purpose in which great strength and elasticity are required. The pigeon plum bears a small black plum, hardly bigger than a cherry, but very sweet. The iron wood, almost as firm and hard as iron, has also a fruit much resembling the pigeon plum, though far inferior in flavor.

The bay cedar is a variety of the common cedar, but its leaves are fewer and larger. The inner bark is

said to possess remarkable medicinal virtues. It is intensely astringent, and probably imitates the arnica montana of the homoeopaths in many of its properties. Whatever these may be, they are almost utterly unknown at the north. The wild sapadilla must not be overlooked. Its snowy bark, spotted with stains of the liveliest crimson, appears as if some wounded deer had rubbed against it, in passing, and left the date of his passage written in blood. The berry is about the size and shape of a walnut, and, like the whole tree, emits a milky juice, on being cut. Another tree, or rather bush—for it scarcely deserves a loftier title—very similar to the last, is the seven-year apple, as the Floridians call it, though why we confess ourselves unable to guess; for its small hard apple punctually makes its appearance every year.

That hard and heavy wood, the lignum vitae, though seldom seen among the keys, occurs on one so plentifully as to bestow its own name upon it. But the largest of the keys, and the key, too, that furnishes the most numerous varieties of wood, indeed, many which are found nowhere else, is Largo, a long narrow island about seventy miles northeast from Key West. It is about twenty-five miles in length, and of a breadth diminishing from five miles to barely three-quarters. The soil is more fertile than on any other key, and its productions are consequently more abundant and various. A few scattered live-oak trees grow here, and the wild tamarind, which, though seldom exceeding forty feet in height, is often more than two feet in diameter, affords excellent ship timber.

Largo is peculiarly adapted for the cultivation of tropical fruits. The lime, the lemon, the sweet orange, the sugar-cane, the large yellow citron, would flourish here like the

scriptural, bay-tree. The banana, too, and the cocoa-nut help to swell the number of its gifts to man, though, as yet, very few men have taken advantage of its liberality.

Sweet potatoes are raised on several keys, wherever a small settlement of one or two families has been made. On Matecumbe, a key near Largo, the Irish potato has been planted, and after several seasons, still retains its original qualities without changing into the sweet. It is astonishing on what a slender support these sweet potatoes will flourish. We have often seen a space between two barren rocks entirely filled by an enormous potato, which seemed to have absorbed all the soil near it; for when taken up the rock beneath was left bare.

The hemp plant of Florida, sometimes termed sea-soil hemp, from the preference it seems to exhibit for marine situations along the coast, hardly yields to the celebrated Manilla in those qualities that constitute its excellence—strength and durability. A single strand has proved able to sustain a weight of six pounds, while a fibre of Manilla hemp breaks under a strain of four or five pounds. It is cultivated on Key West to some extent, though the prevailing ignorance, as to its valuable properties, has, as yet, prevented it from becoming an extensive article of commerce.

The entire height of the plant varies from ten to eighteen feet. Near the root, long thick leaves spread out, attaining often a length of five feet, with a breadth of ten or twelve inches. The fibrous structure of these leaves forms the hemp, like the bark and leaves of our common hemp plant, and needs only to be treated in the same manner. From the center of this cluster, which resembles a palmetto tree, could we conceive its trunk to be

completely buried beneath a pile of sand, a tall straight shaft rises, and expands into a tuft at the summit. Here we find the seed in the shape of shoots, arranged symmetrically around the trunk. These fall to the ground after reaching a certain stage of development, and serve to propagate the plant; for, like the little mangrove “bobs,” wherever they touch the ground they take root and flourish.

Largo is the only key that can furnish a respectable wild beast. Black bears have been seen there, though they are not very numerous. On one occasion, when two men landed from a boat to attack a large fellow, near the beach, he pursued them to their boat, compelled them to vacate the premises, and quietly took his seat in the stern, while the discomfited hunters made the best of their way ashore by swimming. Deer are found on most of the keys. Although the animals themselves are rarely visible, their footprints cover almost every spot where the soft mud will admit an impression. They are rather a degenerate breed; though occasionally a fair specimen is encountered. They have a great fondness for exploring points and peninsulas, and advantage of this harmless peculiarity is often taken by the hunter. The raccoon is not so shy; indeed, they are very often caught alive by an active man, as they will suffer their pursuer to approach within a few feet. The tradition of man’s cruelty has evidently never been spread among them.

Rattlesnakes, moccasins, and water-snakes, are rather too plentiful for comfort; and land and sea-birds, of all kinds and descriptions, help to make the air populous.

The numerous channels, that wind in all directions through the

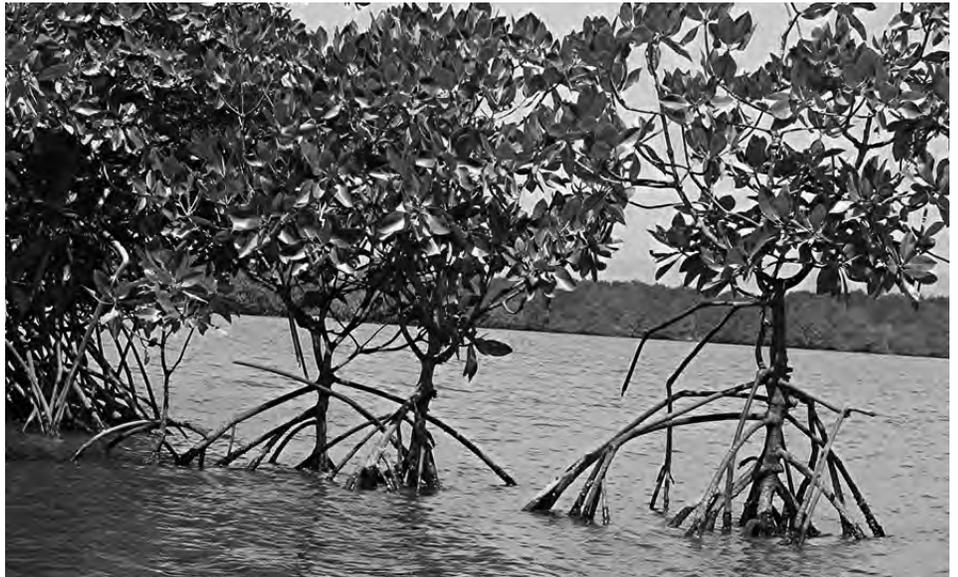
(Continued on page 8)

(Florida Keys from page 7)

keys, are generally well supplied with fish, that in number and variety emulate the birds. There is the grunt, very much resembling our common perch, and so called from the peculiar sound it makes, when taken out of the water. A stranger need only catch one, to perceive at once how well-merited is the name. The grouper, the jackfish, the lordly barracouta, and many others, are all abundant, though swarms of sharks, swordfish, and sawfish, do their utmost to thin their numbers. Sharks are decidedly too frequent visitors; and as they prefer the deeper channels, through which vessels are obliged to pass, or where they must anchor, if they design remaining any time, the pleasure of bathing becomes alloyed with a slight shade of peril. Still, in reality, there is not much danger, as the sharks, unless they have tasted human blood before, are usually more afraid of us than we of them—if that be possible. Young sharks, not more than a foot long, are found in the lagoons.

Throughout the whole extent of the keys, the water seldom exceeds four fathoms in depth, and is ordinarily much less. There are many bays several miles across, whose depth, in no place, is more than five feet, and, sometimes, hardly reaches as many inches.

Perhaps only in Florida can a person behold the nearest point of land a mile distant, and yet have hardly sufficient water around him to drown a child. An extraordinary low tide would expose leagues of what is now hidden by the ocean; and a slight elevation of the land, should some earthquake ever cause such a phenomenon, would join many keys that are now separated by a broad sheet of water.



The edge of a mangrove forest: Photo credit: Monroe County Library.

All kinds of sea-weed, shells, and sponges, carpeting the bottom of the sea, may be readily seen through the clear, shallow water. There are two varieties of sponge—the false and the true. The true sponge preserves its integrity, when laid out upon the beach to dry, while its treacherous image, under similar circumstances, passes away like the water that moistens it. Many of the inhabitants of Key West are “spongers,” in a different sense from the barroom acceptance of the term. Sponges are worth from thirty-five to forty cents per pound; though an inferior kind brings only ten cents. Formerly, they were much less profitable, as twenty-five cents was esteemed a fair price. Though shells occur in millions, yet really beautiful specimens are not so readily met with. The best are found near Caesar’s Creek, which bounds the northern point of Key Largo.

We have already alluded to the intricacy and difficulty of the navigation among the keys. This is increased by the irregularity of the tides, which resemble those of a river, in the varying epochs of high-water, at different places. For instance, suppose that, about half way up an inlet, it is high-

water at twelve o’clock. A mile nearer the sea, the time of high-tide will have already passed, and the ebb commenced; while, a mile higher up, the tide is still rising, the time of high-water has not yet come. Thus, were we to draw an imaginary line of high-tide across the mouth, we should find this line to steadily sweep up the channel, from the sea, for about six hours, and return during the other six. It would not long retain its uniformity, however, for a thousand shoals, and other impediments, would delay its progress in some places, and hasten it in others. The greatest variety of currents would be formed, which would mutually act and react to produce a still greater confusion. We may easily imagine how difficult it is to calculate the precise state of the tide at any point, without actual experiment—the only method, in fact, to be relied on.

There are many pilots in Key West, who have made this navigation the study of their lives; and yet the journal of their voyages, if they kept one, would frequently contain this item, or something very like it “Ran aground on such a day; got the vessel off: ran aground again, etc., etc.,” while the smaller

craft run ashore with the greatest equanimity, and if the tide be low when the accident happens, coolly wait till it rises and floats them off. If the tide is at its highest, the crew are forced to leap overboard, and shove the light vessel off by their own strength. They are used to it, however, and seldom grumble.

Many of the vessels that cruise about the keys are wreckers. These are generally small, fast-sailing schooners, or sloops, that keep a vigilant lookout for the various accidents that are constantly occurring on the reef. If the natives, with all their skill and experience, find it difficult always to preserve themselves from misfortune, we may judge how liable are strangers, unacquainted with the labyrinthine channels of the reefs, to have their voyage interrupted by unseen rocks and shoals. The wreckers--for the name is applied indiscriminately to the vessels and their crew--endeavor to unite the practice of Christian charity towards the unfortunate with a laudable and careful regard to their own interest. Thus, they will not only do their best to get your ship off, if aground, or to assist her into port, if she be leaky or otherwise disabled, but their very worst to wring from you the utmost amount of salvage that your liberality will allow, or a decision of the admiralty court compel you to give.

This is to be expected—as good Samaritans are not more numerous in the extreme south than further north, and the wreckers make it a matter of business, not of feeling. Still, their exertions deserve praise, as they have saved immense quantities of valuable property—property that without their assistance, would be now unprofitably stored at the bottom of the ocean, instead of being sent to its destination, or sold at auction in

Key West.

Key West, their rendezvous, and the principal settlement on the keys, is a well-known town, of between three and four thousand inhabitants, situated at the western extremity of a key bearing the same name. The population is composed of Americans, English, Spanish, and French, in varying proportions, with also a large infusion of black, brown, and yellow ingredients. A peculiar race, not so well known to the world in general, is found here. A large portion of the people in Key West are vulgarly called Conchs, these are Bahamian emigrants, who have left the government of Great Britain for our own freer institutions, and wisely prefer Key West to the Bahama islands. They gained this peculiar name from the circumstance that, during an insurrection in the Bahamas, the insurgents placed the figure of a large conch-shell on the flag beneath which they fought--a very appropriate emblem, as most of them are fishermen.

Key West is the nest from which issue swarms of wreckers, who lie in wait at every point, and, as certain highly respectable birds are attracted by the most distant scent of blood, assemble with marvelous rapidity at the faintest report of a wreck. Indeed, the system of wrecking may be said to have built up Key West, and new materially helps to support it. Almost every prominent man on the island either is or has been connected with wrecking; and though the profits are necessarily uncertain, yet, in many instances, they are great. The amount of salvage, in every case, is determined by an admiralty court, established for that purpose, and, in the course of a year, the aggregate swells to a formidable sum. During the year 1854, sixty-four vessels were either wrecked

on the Florida reef, or put into Key West for assistance on their route. The united values of vessels and cargoes, as computed from the best authority, amounted to \$2,242,454, while the salvage was \$88,921.87, and the total loss incurred by the ship-owners no less than \$432,167.42. For the last year, the number of vessels, though not the extent of losses, has rather increased: eighty vessels, valued at \$2,844,077; salvage, \$100,495; and entire loss, \$417,300. This shows, at least, no great diminution every year, in spite of the strenuous exertions made by government to place buoys and light-houses on every dangerous spot. But when we consider how mightily our commerce spreads and grows through each succeeding year, and remember the vast number of vessels launched by the enterprise of our citizens, we shall find that the proportion of ships lost, to those that arrive safely at their destined port, becomes annually less.

And, in fact, though beacons were erected on every shoal between Cape Florida and the Tortugas, and each dangerous passage accurately marked out, the wreckers would still have employment. The frequent calms, after violent winds that excite strong currents in the ocean, place ships completely at their mercy; and, sometimes, a captain beholds his vessel drifting on a shoal, without the power to do anything but foresee his fate. The water may be too deep to anchor, and with a current of two or three knots an hour, setting steadily towards the bank, all efforts to avert his fate would be utterly useless. He must make up his mind to view his ship lying helpless on the sand, with as much philosophy as he can muster, and wait for the coining of the wreckers, whose eagle eyes he may be sure will not long overlook him.

HURRICANE AT SEA

(The following article was extracted from the “*Sailor’s Magazine*,” Vol. 33-34 of October 1861 by John Viele)

Vicissitudes of a Sailors Life

By a Nautical Correspondent of the Independent

“Nat, I believe we are going to have a hurricane.”

“Why, what makes you think so, Captain?”

“Why, look at my journal for the last three days; do you note how steadily the barometer has gone down? With the fine weather we have had, it means that mischief is near us; whether we get caught or not remains to be seen.”

I was master. Nat was a youngster of nineteen, and a passenger – the mate lay in his berth dying of yellow fever – two men out of six (my whole crew) were also down with it. The brig was deeply and badly laden. Weak from a recent attack of fever myself, I little relished a hurricane being added to my trouble. Sea-room was scarce – Double-Headed Shot Keys on one side, Florida Reef on the other, with but a sixty-miles channel between them. The wind for the last three days had been southwest, baffling and very warm. In the afternoon and evening of Aug. 26th, it struck in suddenly and strongly from the northwest, with sharp squalls. Reduced sail accordingly. At midnight, made Elbow Key Light [on Cay Sal Bank], and wore ship to the north-northwest – barometer 29:50 at 8 a.m. The morning of the 27th, sighted the Florida shore, and immediately wore ship to the south-southeast. Brig under close reefed topsail and mainsail, and reefed foresail. During the forenoon, the squalls increased in strength and

duration, while the constantly falling barometer told me there was more coming. At 1 p.m., I knew the brig was in mid-channel, and that, the wind being northeast, if she was then hove to, she would make a “dead drift” to the southwest, and not approach the land on either side unless through the agency of currents. Every sail was taken in and bound tightly to the yards.

Short-handed as we were, I was obliged to join the men in their labors, and with a little coil of spun-yarn on my arm, I bound every sail to the yard which showed the least sign of “puffing.” Having made everything snug, and nothing more to do, I took the liberty of looking about me. The sea was rising as if by magic, not the long, lazy grand ocean swell of the Atlantic, but the short, sharp tumult of the Gulf Stream. It seemed, and I believe really was, impossible for any vessel to ride such a sea as that; ours did not at all events, for the sea soon began to load her, and her decks being full, even with the rail, made it impossible for the men to work at the pumps. This state of affairs made it necessary to cut away the bulwarks. Calling the second mate and one man to the break of the poop-deck, I made an earing fast around my waist, and giving them the end of it, I descended to the main deck, and watching my chance dashed out board after board with an ax. Three times was I washed clear over the side into the water to leeward, and hauled in again before I had accomplished my task. Tired, startled, exhausted nearly to death, I threw myself flat upon the deck and rested. Few, I fancy, know the meaning of the word *rest*: only twice in my life have I known it myself – times of fright, emergency and danger, when the strong will forced the human machine beyond

endurance. Then, oh how sweet rest is! then even death is not too great a price to pay for it!

In a few moments I was myself again – frightened, certainly, for I never expected to see another sun rise; but no one knew it but myself. I gave my orders coolly, to keep the men pumping whenever there was a chance, and walked aft to look at the watch; it was a quarter to 3 p.m. Creeping up to the weather-side, and holding my nose over the rail, I tried to peep to windward. “Can it blow any harder than this? was the question I involuntarily asked aloud.

I thought I would look at the barometer. Creeping to the stairs, I slid down, almost fearing to do so. I looked – 28:90! I screwed the slide to mark it. The second mate was bending over the mate, trying to catch his last words. The poor man was sending a message to his wife, and died in a few moments afterwards. Upon deck again; must watch everything. Pumping was now out of the question. The sea was no longer *high*, but ran like high breakers on a beach, which the terrible wind caught with giant strength, and dashed down on the brig’s main-deck by turns at a time. Masses of clouds were rising to windward, which, spreading to the zenith, would burst on us with a roar and a deluge of water, in rain and spray, enough to appall the stoutest heart. After they were passed the sun would shine out gayly and clearly for a few moments, and I would think, perhaps this is the worst.

So the weary, long hours passed away. I was in truth afraid to look at the barometer again, so I staid upon deck and hoped. At half-past five a cloud arose in the eastern

This structure, an illustration of which we give below, was designed by I. W. P. Lewis, civil engineer, of Boston, and erected under the superintendence of Lt. G. W. Meade, Top. Engineer U. S. A., assisted by W. C. Dennison, of Boston, and James W. James, of Philadelphia. It is constructed almost wholly of iron, of which material over four hundred and fifty tons have been used, and it has cost the sum of \$100,000. Sand Key, upon which it is built, is the most southern point of land in the United States, and distant from the city of Key West nine miles, and from Havana, Cuba, eighty miles. The key is a barren sand bank, thrown up by the action of the waves, and contains an area of one acre. This sand, seen in the sun, has a white, glaring appearance, dazzling to look upon. Near the centre is the Light House, which is mounted upon seventeen wrought iron piles; they are screwed into the loose rock, and stand at the distance of ten feet, and at the surface form an inner square of sixteen feet, and an exterior square whose side is fifty feet. These piles are surrounded by coupling boxes, which receive the pillars that rise at an angle of seventy-eight degrees, and extend to the lantern deck, which is sixteen feet square. These pillars are connected together by rods or braces, and together form a complete network of iron, each piece having its own appropriate duty to perform, and necessary for the perfect safety of the whole. Upon the top of the first series of pillars is placed the keeper's dwelling—quite beyond the reach of the highest wave which can reach about it. It is large, well arranged and ventilated. There are nine rooms each twelve feet square, with good accommodation

for the keeper, his family and attendants. Around the dwelling runs a gallery, forming a fine promenade. From the centre room rises the cylindrical tower, built—as is the dwelling—of ribbed or corrugated iron. It contains the stairway to the lantern, having in all one hundred and twelve steps; at the upper landing is the watch room, containing the machinery for the revolving of the light, the spare lamp, oil, etc., and above is the Fresnel Illuminating Apparatus, which is of the first order. There is a fixed octagon frame of lenses below; above, a conical section of prismatic lenses, and in the centre a revolving frame, also of octagonal shape, having in each alternate side a lens of great magnifying power, which exhibits a flash of intense brilliancy for ten seconds every two minutes, preceded and followed by a partial eclipse of twenty-five seconds' duration, and a bright light of one minute. The focal plane is one hundred and ten feet above the level of the sea, and the light can be seen from the deck of an ordinary sized vessel at the distance of eighteen miles. The height of the structure from the heel of the centre pile to the summit of the tower is one hundred and thirty-two feet. This Light House is now in charge of Capt. Latham Brightman, of Key West, who is a competent man and well fitted for his responsible station. As will be observed, the construction of this Lighthouse is of the most thorough character, and bids fair to do effective service in the navigation of those dangerous passages along the reefs of Florida. In our engraving, it will be seen, the islands beyond bound the harbor of Key West, which city is seen to the right of the picture. We say, success to every light house that throws its gleams over the trackless path of the mariner!



Sand Key Lighthouse. Photo credit: Monroe County Library.

quarter – so dark, so opaque, that my first thought was a whole new continent had arisen from the sea. I jumped down into the cabin and looked at my old friend again; 28:50 was the news it told me. The mate lay dead upon his mattress, his lower jaw dropped, and his eyes frightfully staring. “Cover that man up,” I said, and jumped up on deck again. Slowly, majestically that vast bank rose as if it would sweep the whole world clear of all that impeded its progress. It *burst* upon us! All that had passed before was but little in comparison; the poor brig seemed as nothing – over, over, over she went, till her yard-arms were buried six feet in the water, and her lee-side up to hatch-coamings were submerged. The second mate grasped my arm and yelled in my ear, as nearly as I could distinguish,

(for the clamor was so great I could only guess what he said,) “My God, we are gone!”

It was now half-past six, and dark. Clinging to the rail, hearing the dismal noise of the wind, and seeing nothing but the lurid glare of the water, which was one phosphorescent sheet, we stood listening to the gale and waiting for—*death*. That was a time for thinking! Never was I so spiritualized as then. Commencing in life at my first whipping, (the first thing I can remember,) every incident passed before me in review; and, strange to say, the most ludicrous were the most vivid and longest dwelt upon. In the meantime the wind was blowing. Who of my readers ever heard the wind *blow*? I have often read of the wind *roaring* in the most violent hurricane. Don’t say *roar*,

say *tear*. A heavy cannon ball in passing through the air, sounds like tearing new strong cloth. Imagine ten thousand cannon balls flying close by your ears, and you have some idea of the awful clamor of a hurricane.

Nine p.m., a sudden and decided lull, the sea suddenly running up into long grand swells, and the brig righting to a great extent. Set the storm-trysail, and sounded the pumps. Owing to their being full of froth, they gave wet line all their length. Manned them and set to pumping; kept the other at work. Took a long look at the barometer – 29:00. I felt better. At midnight, after taking my turn at the pump, I went to the cabin, and laid down on the settee, completely exhausted, more from extreme nervous tension
(Continued on page 12)

(Hurricane from page 11)

than from hard labor. I thought of Mazeppa's horse –

“For many a verst,
Panting as if his heart would burst,
The weary steed still staggered on”

Poor Nat came out of his room pale as a ghost. “What *was* that awful noise Captain?” “That! why it was the wind, Nat.” “Well,” replied Nat, “I never knew wind could make such a noise as that.” “Nor I either,” said I, “but I know it now.” I went to sleep. My last thought was, “Where is the brig? Is she near land? She ought to be in mid channel.” If not, no man could tell till morning.

I was in the middle of a happy dream of boat-sailing on the Connecticut River, when the second mate jumped down, shook me violently by the shoulder, exclaiming one word, “Land!” and before I could reply was on deck again. Of course, I was not long after him. As my head emerged from the companionway, I noticed a light on the lee beam, and that the water was white as milk. The light I doubted about, but that we were in white water was sure, and either on the edge of Florida Reef, or inside the Double-Headed Shot Keys, and on Salt Key Bank. In either case I must make sail and get to the southeast as soon as possible.

The crew were all on the weather side of the poopdeck, each one exclaiming to the other, “We are ashore!” and “Where’s the captain?” It was *very* dark, and still blowing a heavy gale, and the sea running very high, and giving indications of breaking, and I had no doubt but the brig’s time had come, and probably ours also. Working my way forward, I came in contact with the black stewardess – she had joined in the

general stampede, and was making as much noise as the best man of them. I happened to be to leeward of her, and I well remember the comical wish passing through my mind, that if we were going across the dark river together, the distinguished trait of the African race, which she possessed in an eminent degree might be left behind.

Sail was made on the brig immediately. I gave the men directions not to wait to cast off gaskets, but to cut everything. They worked as only men will work to save their lives, and I could scarcely believe my ears when I heard the topsail-sheets come rattling home. While they were setting the headsails, I was cutting the stops off the main-sail, and in a short time she was steering off shore under close reefed sails, taking whole cataracts of water over her fore-castle. Having put all the sail on her that she would bear, I had the lead passed forward – “Forty fathoms, and no bottom.” “Well done old girl,” said I, “you are well out of this scrape.” Daylight came and found us about three miles from the reef, on and over which the sea was breaking horridly. The gale was moderating fast; more sail was made, and we were soon well off shore. Now we were greatly annoyed by large birds, which, as soon as daylight came, flocked on board of us by dozens, gasping from thirst and exhaustion. If picked up and thrown overboard, they would immediately fly back and dash down anywhere about decks, and fight us if we attempted to move them. They were smart birds, without doubt, but the hurricane had been a little too much for them. At six a.m., buried the mate. The single pump had been constantly going from the time the gale moderated, and it was still kept going. At noon, the weather moderated to a pleasant breeze; a

ship passed us steering southwest, with top-gallant sails set. She spoke us, and reported that she had carried the same sail all the night before. So much for our vessel being in the wrong place.

Upon examination, I found the brig was so badly strained, and making water so fast, that I should be obliged to go into Key West and repair. I laid off and on Sand Key Light during to night of the 28th and the next morning, put the wheel up and went in over the reef, took a pilot, and in an hour we were anchored off the wharves.

An old friend of mine met me as I landed, and asked me to his house, and to make it my home during my stay in Key West. Accordingly, as soon as I had made arrangements for hauling the brig in, and had been through the custom house, I repaired to Mr. H -----, and took dinner with him. After dinner Mr. H ----- said, “Don’t you want a nap, captain?” “Yes,” said I, “I would like a short one.” He showed me to a bedroom, and I was soon under the mosquito bar, the sweet trade wind blowing softly through the lattice of the window, and rustling the branches of the cocoa nut tree in front of the house. I thought, “This is pleasant, and quite a contrast to yesterday,” and went to sleep. In a few hours, just as the sun was setting Mr. H ----- called me to supper, and I got up and ate it feeling quite refreshed. This is my version of the story; but Mr. H ----- said that he called me to supper, and my answer was, “Let me alone, I don’t wish for any;” that I slept all night; that he got the same answer at breakfast, the same at dinner, and that it was supper-time the next day when he was able to get me up. But I would not believe him, and I have not been able to realize yet that I did not get up the first time he called me. At all events, I had a good sleep.

Fishing Among the Florida Keys

From the "Illustrated Magazine of Sport Travel Adventure and Country Life." Edited by Caspar Whitney. February 1904. by William C. Harris.

The exodus of angling tourists to southern waters, particularly to those of Florida, does not occur until about the middle of January; the few knowing ones, however, who annually go to that section do so much earlier, or, if restricted in time or pocket, defer their visit until April and remain, as a rule, during the month of May. They have found that in the months of October and November and in those of the early spring the best results for the rod will be the rule and the climatic conditions more propitious for enjoyment. I have never found the temperature oppressive during these months even in Southern Florida, or on the coast of Texas, or anywhere along the Gulf from Key West to the Rio Grande. In fact, nearly every day a refreshing southeast trade wind sets in early in the morning and does not die out until twilight, with the resultant lessening of the temperature of the night.

In an experience covering the winters of nearly a third of a century, the heat was not oppressive except infrequently and only then when a land breeze prevailed, which seldom does at points or, the coast where the best fishing is found. From Ponce Park, one hundred and twenty-five miles south of Jacksonville, to Key West there is hardly a mile of water that is not fruitful to the rod, unskillful as its handler may be.



A catch made from the houseboat Evergaldes in the 19320s. Photo credit: Monroe County Library.

Commencing at the first-named point, I have visited and fished twenty-nine bars and channel-ways in a cruise to Key West covering sixteen days, and at all of them, with an average of three rods on duty, no failure was made in scoring at least fifty to one hundred fish in a morning's fishing of two hours' length, and a similar score in the afternoon's fishing of the same duration.

No tarpon fishing was followed and only two tides on the entire cruise were allotted to bonefish, the warrior, so called, of the shallow bars. Most of the fish that were taken and cooked were those known as panfish, averaging about a pound in weight, although five and six pounders were frequently caught and immediately returned to the water.

So great was the variety and quantity taken that the larder was filled twice every day with fresh food, and at no consecutive meal was served the same species, except rarely,

when the favorite of one of the voyagers was served after being cooked by a different method than usual.

It may be of interest to many anglers to know the names and edible quality of the fish caught, as well as the methods, tackle and lines in use for their capture. We fished twice daily, the forenoon for a dinner supply and in the afternoon for the next morning's meal. The yacht was usually anchored under the lee of a key, with the feeding-grounds of the fish within a mile or less of our anchorage. The tackle, of which there were all kinds on board, usually taken in each of the fishing-skiffs was a tarpon rod, natural bamboo or Japanese cane, a fifteen or eighteen thread Hall line, no leader and all sizes of sinkers and hooks, the latter running from No. 1 to 10 of Harrison, Sproat make; a lighter rod of similar bamboo, No. 6 Hall line and no leader. These constituted, with the addition of free-running
(Continued on page 14)

(Fish from page 13)
reels of various sizes and makes, the daily outfit.

Light tackle would be ineffective in waters where the quarry might be from a half pound to a hundred or more in weight. In fact, when fishing and catching grunts of a pound as fast as the hooks could be baited and the lines cast, a huge jewfish or a sleepy sawfish, weighing several hundred pounds, would not infrequently seize the bait, or, still more likely, a big shark of similar size would either take your bait or seize a smaller fish that had previously taken it. At or near Indian Key, it was a frequent contest as to which would be the most agile, the rush of a shark at a hooked fish, or the muscles of the fisherman who hauled it in, hand over hand. On several occasions when a hundred or more were hooked, more than half of them were captured by sharks before the smaller quarry could be boated.

The fish especially esteemed for the table were pompano, Spanish mackerel, mangrove snappers, yellow-tails, porgies, Margate fish, trigger-fish, and after passing Ragged Keys, about fifteen miles south of Miami, which is three hundred and sixty-six miles below Jacksonville, we never failed to catch a daily table supply of these fish, and it was a choice menu from which to select a boiled, baked, broiled or fried appetizer.

In addition to the above species, many others were taken daily; for there are about six hundred varieties of fish in Florida, a majority of which are caught in the waters extending from Miami to Key West, about one hundred and fifty miles, and the lower half of Biscayne Bay. The section covering Indian Key and Bahia Honda Harbor is

doubtless the best fishing-ground in America for salt-water fish.

Some idea may be had of the abundance of all species when it is stated that three rods in my presence boated on April 7th of last year at Bahia Honda, with single hooks, two hundred and fifty-two fish in about three hours and forty minutes. Of these there were one hundred and thirty grunts, all of which, with many of the other species, were returned to the water, the fishermen only retaining for food a pompano, a porkfish, a Spanish mackerel and two mangrove snappers. This grand score in so limited a time could only be made with the assistance of two boatmen, one in each skiff, who baited the hooks, unhooked the fish and then immediately returned them to the water.

So varied is the coloration of the groupers that no indisputable recognition of species could be obtained from a specific description of the color, however minute it might be of each fish, for I have found extreme variations in the same species. It is possible, however, that the following notes may aid in the differentiation of them

The rock-hind grouper is of olive gray color, mottled with dark clouds, with a number of irregular whitish blotches all over its body. The Nassau grouper is of pale olive gray with four irregular transverse bars of dark brown on its sides; the red grouper is one of the most beautiful of the family, resembling somewhat in coloration the Nassau fish, but the warm browns on its sides, according to some authorities, are richer in tone with a more mellow diffusion of tints.

Many anglers prefer a boiled or baked grouper to any other table fish, except, perhaps, the pompano, of which it is asserted that when eaten frequently the flesh palls upon the palate.

The most universal and popular bait in South Florida waters is the crawfish, not the tiny one of the fresh-water streams, but the huge crustacean of the Keys; the shell is removed and the flesh sliced in sizes suitable for bait; unfortunately they can seldom, if ever, be found in sufficient numbers for the purpose north of Miami on Biscayne Bay. When prawns (large shrimp) can be had, they prove to be very seductive to all species of fish. Mullet, the meat of the Conch; cut pieces of any kind of fish; clams; fiddler crabs, especially for sheep's head; hermit or soldier crab for bonefish; live minnows for sea trout and many other fish, particularly for barracuda and tarpon, are all in general use, the live minnow, I think, not to the extent that it should be. Artificial lures are not held in high esteem.

The grunts, the Margate fishes, the sailors' choice and porkfish are all of one family, technically known as the "Roncos or Grunts," of which there are about fifty-five species in American waters. Several of them are found in the Pacific Ocean in shallow water, but the pigfish, quite numerous at times in Hampton Roads,

EDUCATION PROGRAM

SPONSORS

\$100 OR MORE

LINDA & LAWRENCE ABELE

TOM & KITTY CLEMENTS

PRUDENCE CHURCHILL & LAWRENCE PLUMMER

BETTY L. DESBIENS

BUD DRETTMANN

JOHN & BEATRICE DUKE

SHIRLEY FREEMAN & HARVEY SERVER

CELESTE ERICKSON

DR. ELIAS GERTH

MARY HAFFENREFFER

TOM & LYNDA HAMBRIGHT

HARRIGAN FOUNDATIONS, INC.

JOHN H. JONES

LAURA LYNNE KENNEDY

EDWARD B. KNIGHT

TOM KNOWLES

TOM & BARBARA MARMION

DR. WILLIAM R. PLOSS

LARRY & GRETCHEN RACHLIN

JUAN L. RIERA

JUDITH & JAMES ROBERTS

SOUTHERNMOST HOTEL IN THE USA

ED SWIFT

KIMBERLY & GARY WALWER

ROBERT J. WOLZ

Virginia, and occasionally caught by line fishermen along the New York and New Jersey coasts, and less frequently as far north as Massachusetts, is the only northern representative of the grunt family, the other species living in warm seas. The most distinguishing mark on the common grunts is a series of narrow, irregular lines on the head, and sometimes on other parts of the body, of different colors—hence the name of yellow grunt, white grunt, black grunt, etc. They are not a choice table fish and they were not cooked on the yacht, as the earthy flavor of their flesh made them as distasteful as that of the black bass often is when taken from a river after a freshet which washes the soft soil from the bottom and banks.

The snapper family, scientifically known “Pagrus or Snappers,” is a numerous one in the waters of Florida. They are ill fierce fighters and when hooked in shallow water near the banks, are very difficult to restrain from entangling the line in the roots of the mangrove trees. The gray or mangrove snapper is the strongest and most game of any southern fish of its size, which may reach eighteen, but the average is two pounds.

The pompano family includes not less than two hundred different species, nearly all of which are good edible fish, not excluding the dry and bony cavalle which the Conchs of Key West consider one of the best for the table.

There are in all more than four hundred species of the sea bass family, some of which, notwithstanding their technical name and classification, have been born and thrive in fresh waters, one or more showing no inclination to visit the salt estuaries or the sea. The white bass or fresh-water striped bass, as it is sometimes

called, and the yellow bass are the most striking exemplars of these land-locked or non-migratory fresh-water fish even when a free run is before them to salt water. Included in this numerous family is the striped bass and the sea bass, with both of which the fishermen of the northern Atlantic coast are familiar, but when we remember that with these comparatively small but interesting game fishes of the north is associated the big jewfish of the Atlantic and Pacific coasts, growing up to five hundred pounds, and that at any moment either a pigmy or a leviathan may seize the bait of a Key fisherman, he cannot be justly ostracized by the craft for the use of heavy tackle in catching ordinary panfish.

The only fishes of the sea bass family listed on the schedule of scores above given are the jewfishes and the groupers, both of which are frequently caught, the latter particularly. There are several species of them, which are known to the Key fishermen as the rock-hind, Nassau grouper, red grouper, black grouper and the “gag” and “scamp” groupers. About a dozen species in all are found along the Florida coast, but those named are most frequently taken by hook-and-line fishermen, and some of them, known to the layman as simply “groupers,” reach a weight of fifty pounds. The jewfish, as stated, which is also classified as a grouper, reaches a weight of more than a quarter of a ton, but to the ordinary fisherman it is a jewfish or Warsaw and he knows it by no other name. The groupers as a class may be recognized by the apparent absence of scales, which are often embedded in the flesh; largemouth; gill cover with two strong spines, and their large front teeth.

BUSINESS MEMBERS

ALLEN COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY
GENEALOGY CENTER
900 LIBRARY PLAZA
FORT WAYNE, IN 46802 260-421-1223

COASTAL SAILING ADVENTURE, INC.
28555 JOLLY ROGER DRIVE
LITTLE TORCH KEY, FL 33042-0839 295-8844

CONCH TOUR TRAINS, INC.
601 DUVAL ST.
KEY WEST, FL 33040 294-4142

DR. FRED COVAN
1901 FOGARTY AVE. SUITE 2
KEY WEST, FL 33040 305-294-7522

DEWOLF AND WOOD
ANTIQUARIANS ON THE GREEN
P.O. BOX 425
ALFRED, MAINE 04002 207-490-5572

FRIENDS OF ISLAMORADA AREA STATE PARKS
P.O. BOX 236
ISLAMORADA, FL 33036

DR. ELIAS GERTH
2505 FLAGLER AVE.
KEY WEST, FL 33040 305-295-6790

HISTORIC FLORIDA KEYS FOUNDATION
510 GREENE STREET
KEY WEST, FL 33040

HISTORICAL PRESERVATION
SOCIETY OF THE UPPER KEYS, INC.
P.O. BOX 2200
KEY LARGO, FL 33037

KEY WEST ENGINE SERVICE, INC.
P.O. BOX 2521
KEY WEST, FL 33045

KEY WEST TENNIS
1305 REYNOLDS STREET
KEY WEST, FL 33040 561-445-7805

KEY WEST WOOD WORKS
6810 FRONT STREET STOCK ISLAND
KEY WEST, FL 33040 296-1811

MEL FISHER MARITIME HERITAGE SOCIETY
200 GREENE ST.
KEY WEST, FL 33040 294-2633

OLD TOWN TROLLEY
6631 MALONEY AVENUE
KEY WEST, FL 33040 296-6688

PIGEON KEY FOUNDATION
P.O. BOX 500130
MARATHON, FL 33050

RIERA TOURS
P.O. BOX 522026
MIAMI, FL 33152 305-446-2712
JUANR377@GMAIL.COM

A.R. SAVAGE & SONS, INC.
701 HARBOUR POST DRIVE
TAMPA, FL 33602 813-247-4550

SEASTORY PRESS
305 WHITEHEAD STREET #1
KEY WEST, FL 33040 296-5762
SHERI@SEASTORYPRESS.COM

SOUTHERNMOST HOTEL IN THE USA
1319 DUVAL STREET
KEY WEST, FL 33040 296-6577

ST. LOUIS AUTOMATIC SPRINKLER CO.
3928 CLAYTON AVE.
ST. LOUIS, MO 63110 314-533-7710

DONALD E. YATES, P.A.
LAW OFFICE 611 EATON STREET
KEY WEST, FL 33040 305-296-2261



Map of the western part of Key West by the Army Corps of Engineers in September 1861. Photo credit: Monroe County Library.

Key West Maritime Historical Society
P.O. Box 695
Key West, FL 33041

NONPROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
KEY WEST, FL
PERMIT NO. 30