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The Origin of the Florida Sponge Fishery

W. N. WITZELL
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... I drink no more than a sponge.
— Francis Rabelais, 1495-1553

What has holes, and still holds water?
— Children's riddle

Introduction

Sponges were used domestically by Key West, Fla., pioneers soon after the town was settled in 1822 (Collins, 1887). Fortunately, around 1852, it was discovered that Florida sponges were able to compete with imported sponges from the Mediterranean, and they soon became commercially successful (Moore, 1910). These Florida-caught sponges were shipped to markets in New York and sold for domestic cleaning and personal hygiene, as upholstery stuffing and packing material, and for cleaning military cannons.

Sponging quickly became the most important fishery in Key West and, next to the manufacture of fine cigars, was the second most important industry in the Florida Keys (Townsend, 1900). Key West maintained the Florida sponge monopoly until 1870 when vessels began fishing along the west Florida coast (Rathbun, 1887). The sponge fishermen during this early period were almost all Bahamian citizens of African descent (Cobb, 1904), who fished Florida waters for both sponges and sea turtles and enjoyed the economic opportunities in America that did not exist in the Bahamas at that time (Moore, 1910; Witzell, 1994).

The traditional Florida sponge fishery flourished for years and remained impor-



Sponge crawls and sponge fleet at Anclote Keys in 1904. Photo credit: J.N. Cobb

tant, both culturally and economically, until 1905. Then the introduction of hard helmet diving at Tarpon Springs forever changed the fishery (Collins, 1887; Rathbun, 1887; Schroeder, 1924). This paper describes the origin of the Florida sponge fishery from 1852 until the advent of helmet diving in 1905.

Biology

Thousands of sponge species are found throughout the world thriving in habitats ranging from shallow tropical seas to the deep polar abyss. The sizes, shapes, colors, and appearances of the various species are as diverse as their habitats, where they provide shelter to hosts of small fish, worms, shrimps, crabs, and mollusks. Tropical sponges also provide an important food source for hawksbill sea turtles, *Eretmochelys*

imbricata, (Witzell, 1983). Live commercial Florida sponges appear like slimy dark brown or black lumps that were said to "resemble heads of decayed cabbage" (Ruge, 1889), and are firmly attached to the rocky substrate in shallow coastal waters by fibrous connective tissue.

Sponges are primitive multicellular colonies that resemble strange terrestrial plants. There are three principal components of a sponge: small chambers, a system of canals, and a fibrous skeleton that makes up most of the body. The fibers are joined together in a complex framework that supports the soft, loosely connected tissues and are pierced by many small pores (page 10). These pores open into chambers that

(Continued on page 10)

Society News

Lectures and Field Trips

By John Viele

March 8

Captain Ed Crusoe, senior bar pilot Key West; Dan Probert, Chairman of the Key West Port Advisory Board; and Julio Avel, Key West City Manager gave a presentation on the port of Key West, its past, present and future. Capt. Crusoe discussed the history of the port from pirate and wrecking days up to its emergence as a cruise ship port. Dan Probert explained the functions and objectives of the Port Advisory Board, and Julio Avel gave a presentation on the cruise port and its economic impact on the City of Key West.

April 12

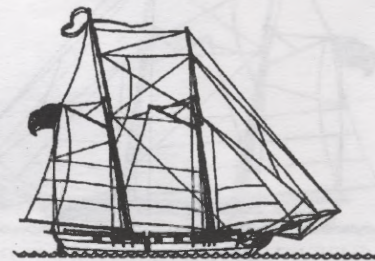
Angus Konstam, author, historian, archaeologist, and former chief curator of the Mel Fisher Maritime Heritage Society Museum presented the true story of pirates to a standing-room-only audience. He explained how and why seamen gravitated

into piracy, how pirate crews functioned, discussed the careers of some famous pirates, and touched on many other interesting aspects of piracy.

A general meeting of the membership followed the speaker's presentation. Individual board members described the activities and accomplishments of their committees over the past year. The following individuals, proposed by the nominating committee, were elected or reelected to serve on the board of directors: Philip Carney, G. Jack King, Dean McClure, John Cryer, John Jones, Arthur Skelly.

At a subsequent meeting of the board, the following officers were elected:

President – Ed Little
 Vice President – Don Lowe
 Treasurer – Lynda Hambright
 Secretary – Corey Malcom



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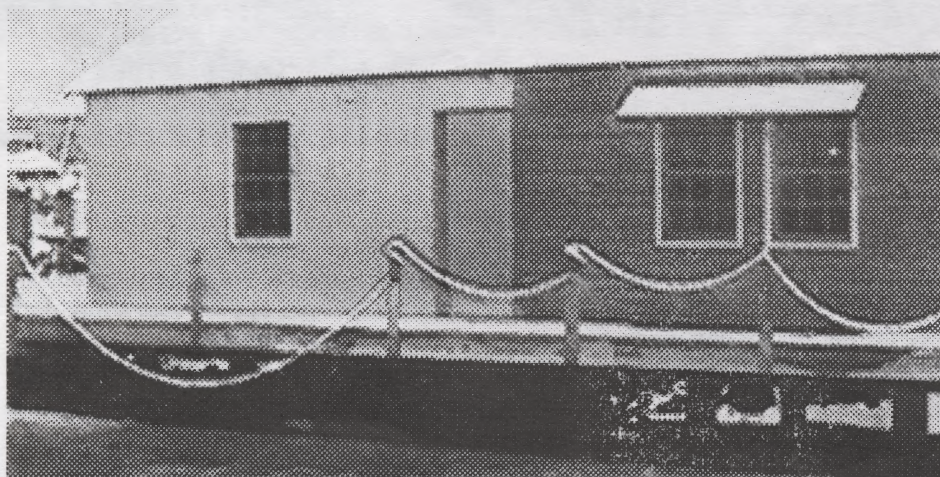
Letters and articles are welcome. Please write to: Editor, Florida Keys Sea Heritage Journal, KWMHS, P.O. Box 695, Key West, FL 33041 (305) 292-7903.

KEY WEST MARITIME HISTORICAL SOCIETY BOARD OF DIRECTORS

President: Edward J. Little, Jr.
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Turtle Cannery



Above is the rebuilt Turtle Cannery at Key West Bight. KWMHS has supported the Key West Bight Project from the beginning and was instrumental in the City of Key West receiving the state grant that rebuilt the cannery. The Society is now working with the City of Key West to install a maritime history display in the cannery.

New Members

Pauline and David Guzek, Key West; Tom Kemper, Key West; Gerald O'Reilly, Key Largo; Larry Rachlin South Orange, New Jersey; Art Skelly, Sargarloaf Key and Tom Trump, Key Largo.

Civil War Days in Key West

By Lewis G. Schmidt

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PART 4

(Mid June thru December 18, 1862)

"On June 20, 1862, the bark *Adventure*, three days from Havana, Cuba, put into Key West, Fla., in distress. She was quarantined for ten days and lay at the station for three days longer than the official term. About this time four of her crew, sick with fever, were taken into the Marine hospital, where one died and the others recovered." If was believed that yellow fever arrived with the *Adventure*, and the resulting epidemic was responsible for many deaths. "On July 27 a soldier of the 90th New York was attacked, and the disease afterwards spread through the garrison, which consisted of 448 men, yielding 2 cases in July, 153 in August, 137 in September and 39 in October, or a total of 331 cases, 71 of which proved fatal."

On June 29, "A man of our regiment [90th New York] was suddenly missed a few days ago and some thought he had deserted until this morning his body was found a few rods back of camp Horribly putrefied having lain in the sun so long exposed to this warm climate. It is sad to think of death under such circumstances."

At Key West on June 30, Pvt. John Eppler of the 47th Pennsylvania's Company A died from typhoid fever. The 44 year old weaver from Easton had been one of the seven men, with a hospital steward, left behind in the hospital when the 47th left for South Carolina. He was the first of the eight men to die.

At Key West "In July we had an epidemic of yellow fever, though every precaution was used to prevent it, such as strict quarantine, use of quinine and whiskey, and avoidance of the hot sun and night air... Fortunately we had a fine hospital, and everything needed for the sick, and had it not have been that the command had hardly recovered from the epidemic of typhoid fever, leaving the men in a very debilitated condition, many who died would have recovered. As it was, the mortality was not great, when it is taken into consideration that the troops were not acclimated. The people of Key West behaved nobly toward our sick, by doing everything possible for their comfort, and in a great many cases they did much good." In July, for the first time during the Civil War period, two cases of yellow fever and two



The cemetery at the Army Barracks, Key West. (Now on White Street by the Navy's Peary Court housing complex.) Photo credit: Monroe County Library.

deaths were reported in the Department of the South.

During the period July through October, 331 cases of yellow fever were reported in the 90th New York out of a total aggregate strength of 448, resulting in 71 deaths.

Ten members of the military establishment would die at Key West in July, as the start of the yellow fever season would begin near the end of the month. Five members of the 90th and four of the 91st New York, and two men from the 47th Pennsylvania. Three men would die at the Marine Hospital.

It was quite cool at Key West on July 1. In the morning, Henry Crydenwise and "Brother McCook the methodist preacher" went turtle hunting. They "sailed about twelve miles to some small sand islands where we landed... The island was almost covered with wild birds of which we shot about a dozen. We built a fire in the sand and cooked our dinner consisting of coffee, ham, some of the birds we shot, crackers, &c. We then layed down on the sand and rested, picked up shells, shot birds and one thing and another until evening when we prepared to watch for turtle... During the night four nice large ones came up and we just turned them over... one of the smaller ones... weighed 299 lbs... and are worth five cts per lb... I had mine brought up to camp and this morning we butchered him. The flesh is very much like that of a fat young

beef. There were about fifty to eat of him and today we had turtle steak and for supper turtle soup... When we cut him open we found one hundred and forty large eggs with shells... These I sold for 6 cts per dozen... Then there were four or five hundred without shells that had not come to maturity. Both large and small ones are good to eat and I sold them all getting about ten shillings for them."

What remained of the 90th New York at Key West was paraded through Key West in the morning of July 4. Just as the regiment reached the edge of the city it started to rain and the men returned to camp wet and muddy after the march. Unfortunately for Henry Crydenwise, who was on guard later in the day, "The provost marshal allowed the sale of liquor on the 4th and the affects were soon painfully visible... there were several fights... One man was so pounded and cut up that he was covered with blood from head to foot. Another was stabbed in the side, another had his thumb part of it cut off and received a cut in the head. A sailor resisted the guard and received a bayonet wound in his side... At night we had to more than double our guard. When you see the affects of rum drinking... I can hardly restrain my indignation. I wish it was the law to hang every man who sold a glass of liquor."

(Continued on page 4)

(Civil War from page 3)

"We had a rainy day the 4th and the Salors and men that live on the island fought all day long and till about two oclock at knight we had to turn out the Regiment to keep them from killing one another two of our men got Stabed but they are both around now."

"Friend Roe and I have just returned from a ramble up to the head of the island. Away back in the woods where an old gentleman [possibly Old Sandy] has a melon patch. He also raises sweet potatoes. We go up there once a week or so and have a regular melon feast and bring back some sweet potatoes to bake."

It was reported that yellow fever claimed its first victim on July 28. "The yellow fever became epidemic about the 28th of July" with the death of 36 year old John Bronson, recorded the St. Paul's Episcopal Church Records in Key West. "The Rector of the Parish the Rev. Osgood E. Hemil was taken with it the 10th day of Aug. A great many, number unknown, died during his sickness", and Judge Marvin took over some of the graveside ceremonies. At least 12 members of the community were listed on the church records as dying from "y.f." between July 28 and September 3. One person was buried at the South Beach Cemetery, and the remaining eleven were buried in the City Cemetery. At least five were members of the US Navy. Other churches and segments of the community may also have had similar exposures to the disease.

Concern was expressed for the men while on duty in the heat of the day, and orders were issued that between the hours of 9 AM and 5 PM, only duties of an "absolute necessity" were to be detailed, and then sentries must have sentry boxes. Coffee was to be served to the guard at least once during the night, and a ration of whiskey and quinine in the morning. Straw hats were to be issued to the men, they were to receive fresh vegetables with meats roasted or boiled, and they were to bathe at least twice each week.

The Provost Marshal was experiencing trouble again with the large number of sailors ashore. They were obtaining liquor from unknown sources "and of course become noisy and troublesome". It was requested that the number be restricted at any one time, and none be allowed ashore after 9 PM.

Orders were issued requiring that the streets and public grounds were to be kept clean and free of decaying animal or veg-

etable matter. Owners or occupants must keep their premises clean. Any cases of yellow fever were to be removed to the "Barracoons", and enlisted men were barred from the city except while on duty, with officers to visit as seldom as possible.

Dying at Key West in August, probably most if not all from yellow fever, were 26 members of the 90th New York, five members of the 47th Pennsylvania and two men from the 91st New York, 33 men in all. Dying at the Marine Hospital were an additional 17 men, five members of the crew of the *Sparkling Sea* and three members of the crew of the *St. Lawrence*. There were 153 cases of yellow fever reported in the Department of the South in August.

On August 1, Flag Officer Lardner, aboard the Flagship *San Jacinto*, reported that "It is with the greatest regret that I am obliged to report that the yellow fever has broken out in this ship. There are 9 cases on the surgeon's report to-day, and 2 have previously died of that disease... There is no proper hospital for contagious diseases at Key West... I shall hoist my flag on the *St. Lawrence* for the present." Concern was expressed for the possibility of carrying the disease to Pensacola.

"I regret to say that, contrary to all my expectations and hopes, the yellow fever has at last made its appearance among us. The first case appeared in Fort Taylor, on Friday last, and five deaths on shore have been reported up to this writing. It has also appeared in the harbor. Two cases from the *San Jacinto* died, and three other cases are reported on board her... In consequence of the *San Jacinto* being infected, she will leave tomorrow morning for Boston, Flag Officer Lardner shifting his flag to the *St. Lawrence*... The United States steamer *Tahoma*... sailed this morning for Tampa Bay, where she will remain during the sickly season. The bark *Ethan Allen* sails tomorrow for the same destination... We can form no idea what will be the course of the yellow fever here... Every precaution will be taken... The weather is warm, but not uncommonly so; but we have had much calm weather, which may have served to help it along."

It was reported on August 20 that "We had some excitement the other day caused by the quartermaster taking about twenty negroes from their masters and setting them to work for Uncle Sam... I wish you could have seen the darkies. They were as jolly a set of fellows as I ever saw... They tell us in the North that the negroes are igno-

rant and incapable of taking care of themselves. Now this is utterly false. Most of the slaves pay their masters twenty five or thirty dollars for their time and then work and take little jobs or carry on business for themselves and make money at that. There are nearly as many blacks as whites here and they dress as well and I think are about as wealthy as the whites... I would just like to see a man whipping a negro I would try the virtue of my sword if he did not stop it."

Writing on August 26, Henry Crydenwise of the 90th New York reported that "It is sad to think of the havoc this disease has made in about two weeks. Six eight or ten would be buried in a day. When we went to bury our lieutenant as we were coming out of the grave yard the hearse was going in with two more corpses, but the fever has almost entirely abated now... We are now in the new barracks and have beautiful quarters... we have had no mail since the 13th... the next mail that leaves here will carry sadness to many hearts."

The worst was yet to come for the 90th New York Regiment. Although 27 members of the regiment were buried in the Key West Post Cemetery in August (along with 5 from other units), another 36 would receive burial there in September (along with 7 other burials). In all, 89 members of the regiment were buried in the post cemetery while the unit served at Key West in 1862.

Because of the quarantine, the Quartermaster General's Office in Washington directed that all steamers sailing from New York and bound for the Gulf will "be prepared to drop a mail at Sand Key light house, where a boat will board them from the fort in Key West... It will make it necessary for the steamers to lay off Sand Key if they arrive there during the night, but still it is important to keep up communication with Key West and the Tortugas."

At Key West on August 29, Pvt. John Powell Jr. of the 47th Pennsylvania's Company D died of yellow fever, just two days short of one year from the date he was mustered in. Pvt. Powell was the 25 year old "nurse" that had been left behind at Key West by the regiment to care for the seven members of the regiment who were sick at that station as the unit headed north to South Carolina. He was the last of the eight men to die, and survived the last of his seven charges by just two days. All eight men had been lost to disease within the two and one half months since the regiment had left, and none of unit's mem-

bers left behind would be alive at Key West to greet the unit when it returned in December. Family records report that the young man died while on guard duty, but this would seem unlikely.

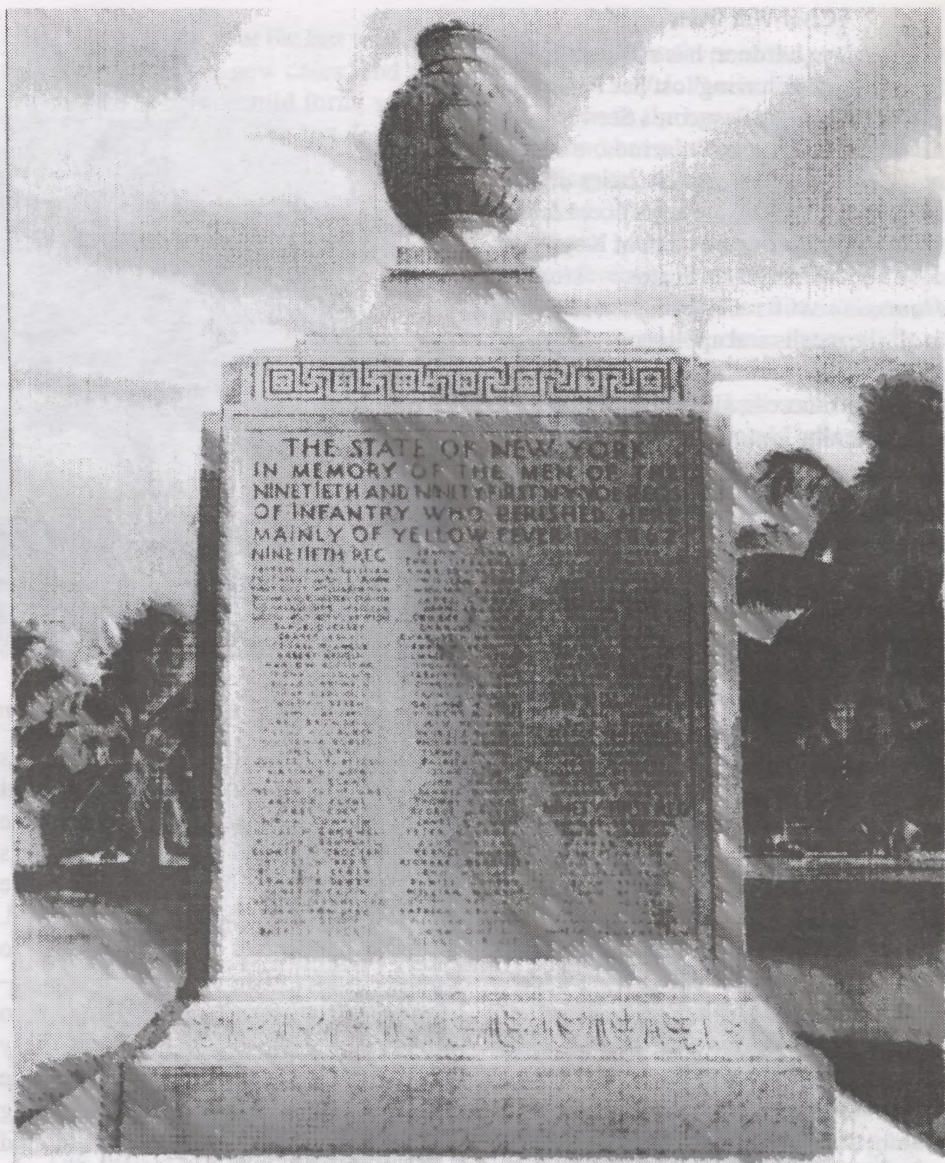
Pvt. Powell was buried in grave #89 of the Key West Post Cemetery, and his remains were one of the few that retained their identity when they were relocated to Barchancas National Cemetery, where they are buried in Section 17, grave #120.

September at Key West would see the deaths of at least 44 men, probably most if not all from yellow fever. One member of the 1st US Artillery, two members of the Engineer Battalion, one prisoner of war, and 40 members of the 90th New York Regiment. Twenty-seven men died at the Marine Hospital, eighteen of them members of the crew of the *St. Lawrence*.

“The yellow fever raged for two months at Key West; the entire city was a vast hospital, and there were two hundred deaths within four weeks from the dread disease.” The garrison at Key West suffered 34 deaths from August 12 to September 1. There were 137 cases of yellow fever reported in the Department of the South for September.

On September 5, Col. Morgan also took action in regard “to the employment of persons of African descent...The men of his regiment have been doing work that should have been done by the Negroes of Key West; the consequence is that they are now unfit to perform the necessary duties. African labor has been sought for...This has been met with such an adverse feeling by the residents of Key West, that the Colonel has determined to end this matter at once and forever. By his order all negroes who seek employment, will be put to work and their wages paid...those who are not for us are against us. No more trifling with traitors and secession sympathizers... While some of our commanders have been fooling with the branches, Col. Morgan has struck a final and sealing blow at the root.” The Colonel cited a War Department order of July 25 as his authority, and further justified it as a need resulting from the “prevailing epidemic”.

“Slavery is now, here on our island, being brought to the test of the late order of the President, and the Quartermaster’s Department are employing such negroes as are needed for laborers, nurses for the sick, and for all or any purpose of labor...A custom long in vogue here has prepared the negro for this—they having been allowed to hire their own time and make what they



The monument in Bayview Park in memorial to Union Soldiers that died in Key West during the Civil War. Photo credit: Monroe County Library.

could, paying to master a portion of their earnings. This latter obligations the darkey proposes to ignore for the future...an able negro man of middle age was a few days since offered for sale at \$200, without meeting a purchaser.”

It was reported on the 13th that “There seems no abatement of the yellow fever in our midst, and new cases continue to take the places in the hospitals made vacant by the deaths constantly occurring there. Some of them are so filled with patients that it is quite impossible that they shall receive all the care and treatment that is necessary. The Marine Hospital is kept constantly filled, and is now without any resident physician, the late incumbent, Dr. D. A. Lewis, of Philadelphia, having died of the fever on Monday, the 1st inst. Since then the hospital has been attended only by the Fleet Surgeon from the flag-ship *St.*

Lawrence, Dr. Hurner, whose extensive cares forbid his giving all the attention desirable.”

“The deaths at this Hospital average three daily out of forty-five patients. Our Northern doctors are not easily induced to adopt the practice which has, from long experience, become universal here and elsewhere among yellow fever, of giving, in the very first symptoms of the disease, a large dose of calomel—say fifty grains—which in most cases, when accompanied by a hot mustard bath producing perspiration, checks the fever, and the patient recovers. Some of our navy surgeons give but eight or ten grains of calomel, their patients fall away, and as a last resort, they are sent ashore to the Marine Hospital, where most of them soon die.”

“The frigate *St. Lawrence*, flag-ship of
(Continued on page 6)

(Civil War from page 5)

Commodore Lardner, has suffered greatly from the fever, having lost her Paymaster and his clerk, the Surgeon's Steward, and nineteen sailors and marines, and this morning there are forty-six cases of sickness reported aboard." Flag officer Lardner and the *St. Lawrence* were at Key West.

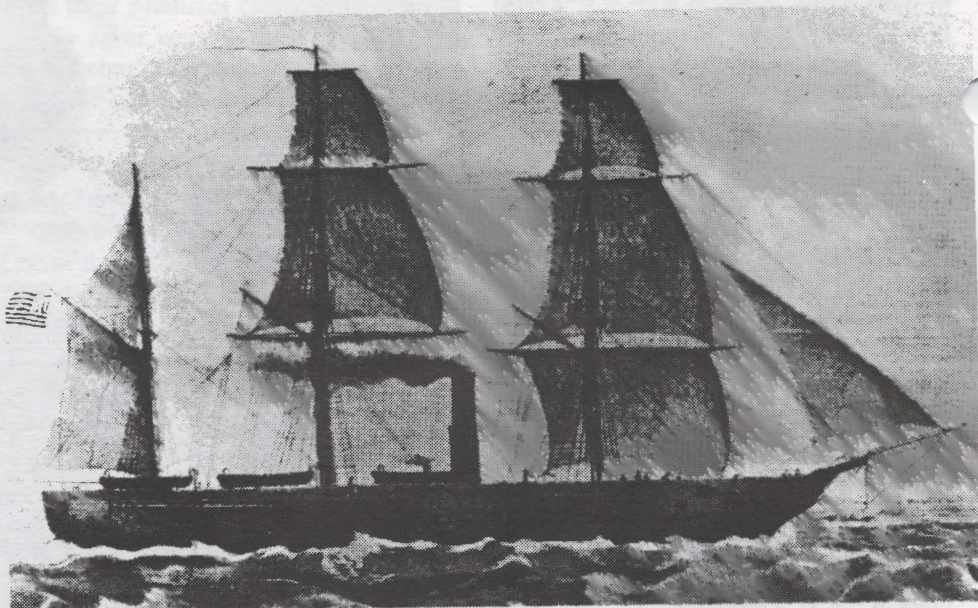
"The United States steamer *Huntsville*...still remains in port, subjected to all the means and appliances calculated to eradicate or ward off the epidemic, but with small success, all cases still continue, and yesterday I attended the funeral of her Chief Engineer... who died after an illness of only thirty hours... The *Huntsville* has lost three of her officers and four men by fever. This morning there is a marked change in the weather, with a cool fresh breeze from the northwest."

"A large amount of captured property has been condemned and sold here during the season, of which the following vessels are a part, viz.: schooner *Mallory*, \$1150; schooner *Curleto*, \$3200; schooner *Bygorry*, \$2300; schooner *Magnolia*, \$237; schooner *Victoria*, \$135; schooner *Agnes*, \$1000; schooner *Lucy*, \$516; schooner *Julia*, \$2[?]?5; schooner *Ida*, \$260; schooner *Princeton*, \$2[?]?0; schooner *T.C. Bee*, \$1650; schooner *R.C. F[?]?a*, \$1540; schooner *President*, \$310; sloop *Elizabeth*, \$160; barque *Pilgrim*, \$605; slave barque name unknown, \$2000. There are now eight prize vessels in port to be disposed of, and among them are three steamers that will be sold here in the latter part of October. The *Swan*, *Reliance* and *Union*—all good towing boats."

"The following vessels are now in port": Barques *Adventure* and *Nazarene*, brig *Miller*, schooners *W.C. Bebee*, *Sarah Jane*, and *York*; *Edna F. Kerr* for New York; *Curlew* for New Orleans; *Dudley* from Nassau; US schooner *Wanderer*; US gunboat barque *Pursuit*; schooner *Tortugas* from Port Royal and schooner *Union* from Fort Jefferson.

Stationed at Key West on September 15 were the *Huntsville*, "Yellow fever on board"; steamer *Magnolia*; frigate *St. Lawrence*; and guard ship *Eugenie*. The bark *Pursuit* was cruising between Tortugas and Cape San Blas; and the sailing vessel *J.S. Chambers* between Tortugas and Cuba.

Sometime around the middle of the month, "a mass meeting was held at the salt ponds, and after a few most eloquent addresses, by the shining lights of these descendants



USS San Jacinto. Photo credit: U.S. Naval Institute.

of Ham, a declaration of Independence was read, and the conclusion arrived at, that white man was as good as a nigger if he only behaved himself, all of which was received with shouts of applause, and entire assemblage rose, to a man, woman and child, and with one accord determined to be, to do and to suffer in the protection and maintenance of their unalienable rights, to do jus as dey please, and allow the military commander ob die post, to do de same. The entire audience then sang that most touching and appropriate Sam Massa's in a cold, cold sweat." The reporter continued in the same satirical vein in a lengthy article reported in the Key West newspaper, even though preceding columns were in sympathy with the theory of equality of races and colors.

In addition to several other yellow fever deaths reported in the New Era of September 20, the newspaper listed the names of 49 yellow fever victims who had died at the Marine Hospital since July 1, at least 16 from the *St. Lawrence*.

Finally, on Tuesday, Henry Crydenwise wrote home and confessed "The evening of the 5th I was taken with the yellow fever and have just returned to my quarters to day... a family with which I was acquainted said that if I had the fever I must come there instead of going to the hospital so when I was taken they carried me to their house... I was missed, watched, attended and fed as an infant, and every wish anticipated... from 10 to 25 have fallen from each company."

Henry never mentions the name of the family at this time except to say they were

from New York, "This is one of the first families of Key West", and the husband has a business on the mainland. The wife and three daughters, aged about 24, 20 and 16 maintained their home in Key West. The oldest daughter's husband was a Lieutenant in the Navy. In a letter dated November 23, he answers a request from his parents for the family's name and writes "Their Sir name is Welhington [?]. Then there is Emma, Maria, Mercy Floela."

At Key West, Christian Boye wrote: "The yellow fever is still here, among the troops and man of war sailors, they dy daily, how many is not know to the public, of our citizens, that is regular citizens, not one has died." Mr. Boye was concerned about his 16 year old son returning to Key West, since the young man had been gone six years while attending to his schooling, and was "as far as the acclimation is concerned, a perfect stranger, and you may take sick a few days after your arrival."

"The abolitionists are determined at any hazard to let the slaves free, without compensation for his loss, they are also determined to make the South, an wilderness and give the 'Nigger' more privileges, than the white man—for instance a 'Nigger' had an old grudge against you, he meets you on the street, he abuses you, if he thinks he can whip you, he will do so, then he gets the 'Provost Marshall', informs against you, that you not only was the aggressor but also spoke treason against the U.S. Etc. Whatever you, as a White man may say, is of no account, the 'Niggers' word is taken

in preference to a dozen respectable White men—You are not allowed to make a defence, you are locked up in the fort, and kept there until it suits the Military authorities to set you adrift.”

“Col Morgan commanding here, he belongs to the 90th [New York] Regt. has issued a proclamation, declaring all slaves free, he claims that his orders come from Headquarters, which I construe the President. Now, I think Mr. Lincoln had as much to do with this proclamation to set slaves free, as you [his son] had. Col M. has made no difference between the best Union men and the most justly suspected Rebels. We share all alike, all my slaves have run away.”

“Lem and his wife Pricilla, they have stuck to us, and are the only ones I got in the yard, your friend William took the lead...every person owning slaves are in the same fire...The U.S. Government may allow us a small compensation and probably, your children may get it. My dear son, those slaves of mine, were worth to me a year ago, seventeen thousand dollars and there was some 10 young ones among them who increased in value every day. My yearly income from them was not less than from \$2000.00 to \$2500.00...Key West is no place for you unless it is to learn bad habits.”

At Key West, the yellow fever epidemic would shortly run its course, as five men would die in October, all members of the 90th New York. Six men would die at the Marine Hospital, three of them members of the crew of the *St. Lawrence*. There were 39 cases of yellow fever reported in the Department of the South for October.

“The chaplain told us of some very sad scenes during the ravages of yellow fever at Key West, which must have been terrible to witness. Four paymasters and five surgeons died on the naval vessels, and it was very fatal among the sailors; four and five days was the length generally of the course the fever ran.”

Orders were issued that all persons over 18 were to report to headquarters by October 15, with a list of their real estate holdings and a statement of the number and value of the slaves they owned.

On October 16 it was reported that within the last 10 days, yellow fever appeared to be “abating on the island”, although the navy’s vessels continued to suffer from the “most malignant form” of the disease. In order to insure the safety of the garrison, it was suggested that a hospital be established on another key, to avoid bringing infected patients to the Marine Hos-

pital in Key West. “For the last week there have been but four new cases, and those have been in a very mild form, yielding readily to treatment. The last death from the disease was on Monday last at the hospital. The weather is now cool and pleasant, with frequent refreshing showers.”

There would be two burials in the Key West Post Cemetery in November; one each from the 90th New York and 120th Ohio. Three men would die at the Marine Hospital, two of them members of the crew of the *St. Lawrence*, who lost at least 26 crew members since August 22. Surgeon Cornick reported “to Dr. Crane that there was now no yellow fever on the island, and that the command was in good health.”

On November 26, “The ladies of Key West presented our reg’t [90th New York] with a nice flag and gave us a sort of entertainment consisting of cake, apples, oranges and lemonade. The cake was frosted and ornamented in grand order...speeches &c.” The day was observed as Thanksgiving Day and there were meetings in all the churches, both morning and evening. The guard had a busy time in the evening with all the drunken sailors, and all were ordered back to their ships at 9 PM, but many refused to obey and six were arrested. Henry Crydenwise had given some of the berries he received from home to his “adopted mother” in Key West, who later returned some to him in “a saucer of the blackberrys, stewed in the nicest order.”

“The officers at the barracks gave a Thanksgiving dinner for [the five women from the Tortugas]...with the proverbial roast turkey and good things suggestive of the North, combined with all that a tropical country afforded. The menu was made with complimentary names given to the Army and Navy officers, and each lady had it as a souvenir stamped upon her handkerchief. The officers of the 90th New York gave a ball for us, inviting the officers from the *Huntsville* and *Magnolia* making a very gay affair.”

Henry Crydenwise reported that “A fire also broke out in the engine shed or house and burnt the house together with two or three cars and I think spoiled the engine. There is a train of cars running along the side of the island to draw stone from the upper end of the island to fortify or strengthen the fort and for the use of the Engineer corps.”

“In December 1862, Fleet Surgeon G.R.B. Horner reported that twenty-four East Coast Blockading Squadron ships had suffered

cases of yellow fever in the previous five months. The *J.L. Davis*...had reported sixteen cases in the last month...Two serious cases had been left at the Key West Marine Hospital, and two other crew members had died.” One man would die in December at the Marine Hospital in Key West. Yellow fever would not return and be a major problem at Key West until 1864 when new troops were on station in the area.

“Almost within a stones throw of the [Light House] Barracks lives an old darkey by the name of old Sandy who is said to be the richest man on the island (see Key West Maritime Historical Society Quarterly Volume 4, Number 3, for the story of Sandy and Lillah Cornish). He owns about 20 acres of land & cultivates nearly the whole of it. He raises about 3 or 4000 pounds of grapes and all kinds of fruit which the island produces. Some of the officers thought of boarding there, but when they discovered that they charged 50 cents a meal they thought the better of it. Board is very high here. You cant get anywhere for less than a dollar a day. I [Peter Eltinge] get two meals out and take one with the men.”

The 47th Pennsylvania returned from the South Carolina Lowcountry to Key West on December 18, 1862. A correspondent of the New York Herald reported that when the steamship arrived in the port with the famous old 47th Pennsylvania on board to relieve Col. Morgan’s 90th New York Regiment, and they heard that Col. Good would take over command of the whole post, that he and the ship’s storekeeper threw their hats up in the air in happiness. “It was good news to hear that someone was coming to relieve Col. Morgan, but for it to be our old friends Col. Good and his regiment from St. John’s and Pocotaligo, was almost too good to believe, but it was true.” He reported that during his long stay at Key West he had never seen everyone so happy, the citizens following the regiment to its camp with cheers and greetings, and the ladies waving their handkerchiefs. “All this a sign that the 47th was very welcome.”

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financing without tariffs on Southern trade.

The North had to protect its industrial expansion with high tariffs where Southern agriculture needed free trade (Kennedy and Kennedy, 1994), so the North invaded the South to force the South back into the Union and under the U.S. tariffs. The war did not actually start at Fort Sumpter, but at Bull Run, where the North invaded the South, to force the South back into the Union.

It is important to differentiate between the causes of secession and the causes of the war. The causes of secession were the causes of an action (secession) by the seceding Southern states, and were not the same as the causes of the war. The causes of war were the causes of an action by the Union states, the invasion of the South, which created a war, to force the seceded states back into the Union. The Union, having slaves of its own, did not invade the South over slavery.

Many people on the Union side went into the war with the idea of preserving the Union. A smaller minority thought they were abolishing slavery. The vast majority of people in the North did not favor abolition. (Jones, H., 1992) However, New England industry needed that slave produced cotton; and the North needed revenues from tariffs. There was also a patriotic feeling in the North against secession, similar to the anger today of veteran's groups against people burning American flags. (Jones, H., 1992) Ninety percent of the Confederate soldiers did not own slaves, and were not fighting for slavery, but to defend their country, against the northern invader. (Kennedy and Kennedy, 1994) At least 38,000 Blacks fought in the Confederate Armed Forces in integrated units, most fought in the same reason the white Confederates fought, to protect against invasion. Union records show over 3,000 black Confederate soldiers fighting at Gettysburg. (Smith, E.)

Rollins (1994) quotes Dr. Lewis Steiner witnessing 3,000 combat armed black Confederate soldiers. Barrow, Segars, and Rosonding (1995) estimate 50,000 to 30,000 black Confederates overall. According to Cornish (1956/1987), Frederick Douglas stated "There are, at the present moment, many colored men in the Confederate Army doing duty, not only as cooks, servants and laborers, but as real soldiers, having muskets on their shoulders and bullets in their pockets, ready to shoot down loyal troops and do all that soldiers may do to destroy the Federal Government."

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Frederick Douglas found Jim Crow laws and practices throughout the north (McFreeley, 1990). In the "National Anti-Slavery Standard" of September 23, 1847, Frederick Douglas protested the "Jim Crow Laws" and "Black Laws" of the Northern state of Ohio, which tended to place black people outside of the protection of the law, at the mercy of whites (Meltzer, 1991). In the "North Star" of September 29, 1848, Frederick Douglas claimed African Americans were "Slaves of the Community" in the Northern states as opposed to being "Slaves of the individual" in the Southern states. (Meltzer, 1991) The North does not appear to be blameless.

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Three days before the Emancipation Proclamation took effect, General Robert E. Lee freed 194 slaves of the Curtis Estate, and later made arrangements to free all the other slaves with which he had connection. (Jordan, 1996)

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appear to have freed the slaves. Certainly it did not free the slaves in the Union states, or those other areas under Union control. Such an executive order had no legal effect in the seceded states, as these were foreign countries. From a practical effect, slaves did obtain freedom from the Proclamation if they escaped from a seceded state to a Union state (where they found themselves still considered contraband); or if they escaped from one Union area to a different Union area and passed for a slave from a seceded state. (Franklin, 1963)

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The slaves in the northern states almost got left behind. Due to the political lobbying efforts of the small abolitionist movement and the persistent lobbying of Frederick Douglas, slavery was finally abolished by the 13th Constitutional amendment in 1865, 2 years after the Emancipation Proclamation. The 14th Amendment, giving equal protection of the law, was passed long after the war was over, in 1868, with New Jersey, Ohio and Oregon rescinding their ratification. (U.S. News and World Report, 1970) Frederick Douglas lobbied hard for voting rights (McFreeley, 1990), resulting in the 15th Amendment being ratified in 1870, 12 years after the Emancipation Proclamation.

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(Continued on page 15)

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Of interest, New York, under New York City Mayor, Fernando Wood, almost suc-

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(Sponge from page 1)

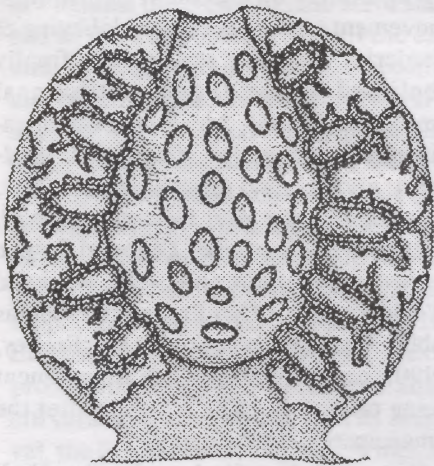
are lined with layers of flagellated cells that are constantly in motion. This motion creates a vacuum that sucks water into the chambers and is expelled through the osculum at the top. Microscopic particles of planktonic food and oxygen are brought in with the water and are ingested by the cells in the chambers. All sponges require large quantities of water to live, and a specimen 15 cm in diameter may pump over 375 liters/hour.

Sponges are able to reproduce sexually through the production of eggs and sperm or asexually by budding and regeneration. In shallow waters, sponges are able to restore themselves when damaged by violent surf and strong currents, and a large specimen may be cut into pieces that will grow into individual sponges under proper conditions. It is owing to this regenerative power that sponges were experimentally cultivated.

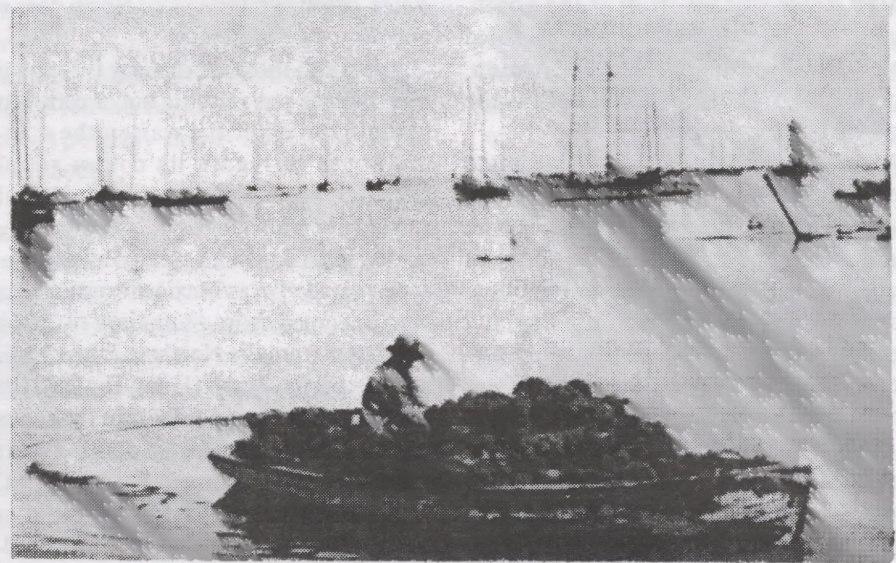
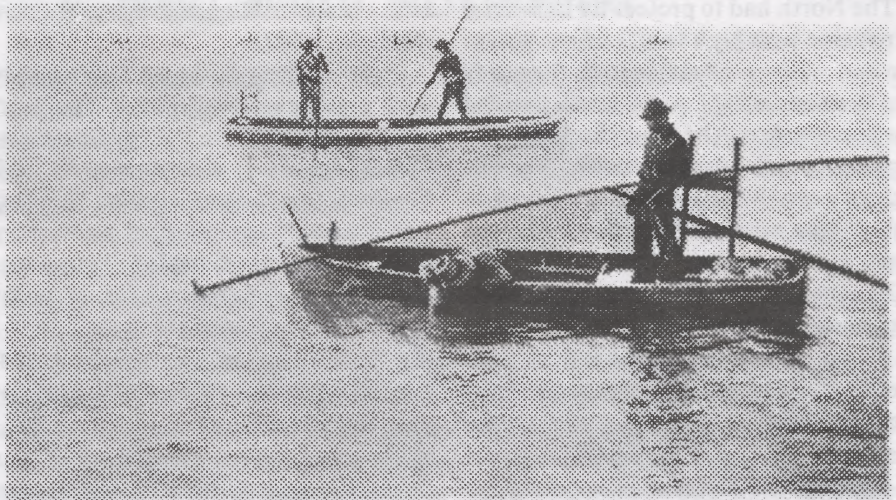
The skeleton of a good commercial Florida sponge is compressible, resilient, tough, and capable of absorbing large quantities of water. Water absorption is determined by comparing the dry and wet weights. A good sponge is capable of holding water 25-31 times greater than its dry weight. There were apparently several Florida sponges that met these requirements and were commercially used in the early fishery, the most important species being the sheepswool, *Hippiospongia lachne*. The other sponges were a combination of many unidentifiable species commonly called yellow, grass, velvet, and glove sponges.

Sponge Fishery

The sponge fishing grounds were originally described as two separate geographical



Section through a sponge showing the small chambers, canals and fibrous skeleton. Photo credit: P.S. Galtsoff



Top: Florida sponge skiff with sculler at the oar and the hooker looking for sponges through the glass box. Photo credit: Monroe County Library. Bottom: Landing sponges for auction at Key West. Photo credit: J.N. Cobb.

types, covering three separate fishing grounds (page 11): the keys fishery and the bay fishery (Collins, 1887; Rathbun, 1887; Brice, 1898). The keys fishery extended south from Key Biscayne to Key West and included all the Florida Keys and associated reefs, bays, and sounds. The bay fishery is located in two areas: Anclote Keys to Cedar Keys, and north of the Cedar Keys to St. Mark's in Apalachee Bay. The depths typically fished in this early fishery ranged from 2 to 15 m over coralline hard bottom or coral reefs, covering an area of just over 3,000 square miles. The Florida sponge fishery was conducted year round, weather permitting, but the principal season was during the calmer summer months. The larger vessels from Key West made 2-month trips three or four times a year to the bay grounds, and smaller vessels made several 1-month trips to the keys

grounds (Cobb, 1904). Bay boats based in Tarpon Springs and Apalachicola averaged five trips a year, each lasting 2 months.

The sponge fishery vessels (page 13) were beamy, shallow draft, center-board schooners and typically ranged from 5 to 35 tons (Collins, 1887; Rathbun, 1887). The Key West sponge fleet consisted of 86 vessels in 1879, increasing to 119 in 1895, and were reportedly the pride of Key West because they were trim and fast (Rathbun, 1887). The vessels built at Key West were designed to travel in the shallow Florida waters and were framed with a local red wood called "maderia" and planked with yellow pine. The spars were either hard pine, spruce, or white pine. Each vessel, depending on size, carried a number of small 4-5 m skiffs (page 13). These skiffs had the greatest beam and lowest freeboard amid-

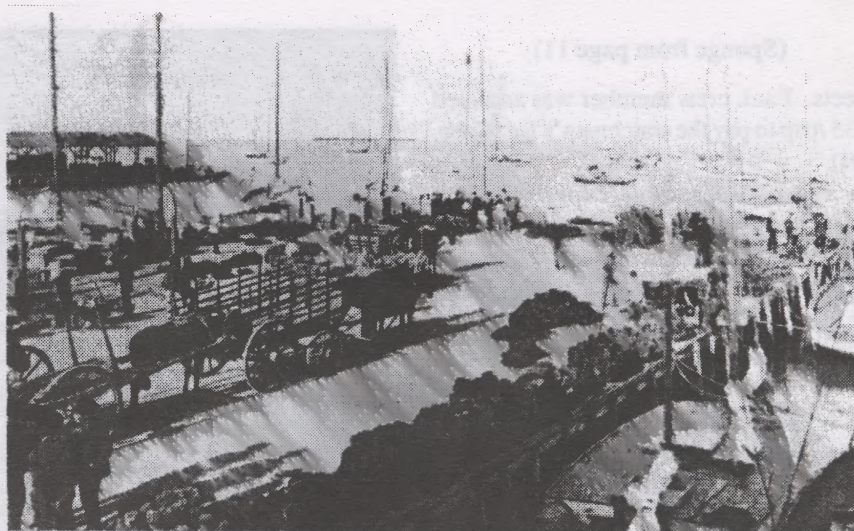
ships, which made it easier for the “hooker,” the man who hooked the sponges from the bottom with a special hooking device.

The vessels sailed to the sponge grounds, and the skiffs were deployed soon after breakfast at dawn. Two men were usually in each skiff, one sculled the skiff across the shallows and the hooker watched for sponges. In calm water the hooker could easily see the sponges on the bottom, but when the wind disturbed the surface he would dump some nurse shark liver oil onto the water to smooth out the surface and improve his visibility. For deeper, or murky water, the hooker had a water tight box fitted with a glass bottom that he used for seeing underwater. The glass box was introduced in 1870 and soon became extensively used throughout the fishery. The hooker carried a 3-7 m wooden pole with a three-pronged iron claw (page 12) attached to the end. With this device, the hooker cautiously hooked the sponge, carefully detached it from the substrate, and brought it to the surface for the sculler to unhook and store in the skiff bottom. The dexterity with which these fishermen wielded these long heavy poles to grapple grapefruit-sized sponges under several meters of water must have been remarkable. The sheepswool sponge was supposedly the most difficult to detach from the rocky substrate, while yellow sponges were the easiest to detach. When a small sponge was attached to a large one it was pulled off and thrown back in the water. It was believed that these sponges did not reattach, but rolled around on the ocean floor with the currents and were called “rolling Johns” (Rathbun, 1887).

The hooker spent long hours on his knees peering through the glass box while his partner slowly sculled the skiff (page 10). A large sponge was often fastened to the



Florida Bay and Keys sponge fishing grounds. Photo credit: the Author.



Top: Silent sponge auction at Key West. Bottom: Silent sponge auction at Anclote Keys. Photo credit: J.N. Cobb.

hooker’s chest to act as a cushion while he leaned on the gunwale. In spite of this, the long hot hours, days, and weeks of this awkward position often resulted in painful injuries (Moore, 1910). The hard labor under a scathing Florida sun, combined with the ubiquitous mosquitoes and gnats, must have been torturous. The fisherman’s only recourse was to cover up as much as possible and wear wide-brimmed hats.

The sponge fishermen started work at dawn, returned to the vessel at noon to unload and have lunch, then fished until dark when they returned to unload again and have supper. The cook maintained the vessel in the vicinity of his skiff fleet, prepared the sponges on deck for processing, and prepared meals on a stove that was boxed up on deck between the masts. The sponge fishermen undoubtedly took every opportunity to ensure a profitable trip by maximizing fishing effort, and they apparently fished sea turtle nets nearby while sponging (Witzell, 1994).

Fresh sponges placed on the deck of the vessel quickly died and began to decompose, oozing a pungent “gurry” that constantly drained across the decks and through the scuppers. Consequently, although these vessels were quite handsome, their foul odoriferous nature undoubtedly made them unwelcome guests at many anchorages (Rathbun, 1887). Once a week, usually Friday evening, the vessel would stand inshore and unload the catch into shallow enclosures called sponge “crawls” (page 1). Here the sponges soaked while the previous week’s catch was beaten with a short wooden club called a bruiser” and cleaned. The sponges were then strung on rope and hung on the vessel’s rigging to dry. A watchman was detailed to watch these crawls during the vessel’s absence to thwart thievery. The watchman’s lonely vigil on some remote key likely was filled with long hours of abject boredom, punctuated with the summer heat and biting

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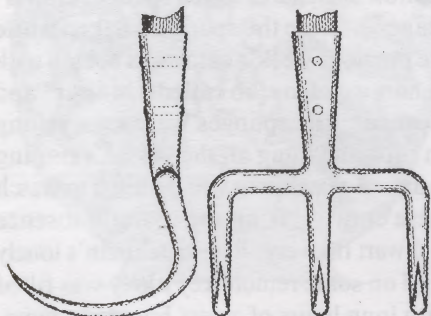
(Sponge from page 11)

insects. Each crew member was assessed \$0.35 /trip to pay the watchman's fee (Cobb, 1904).

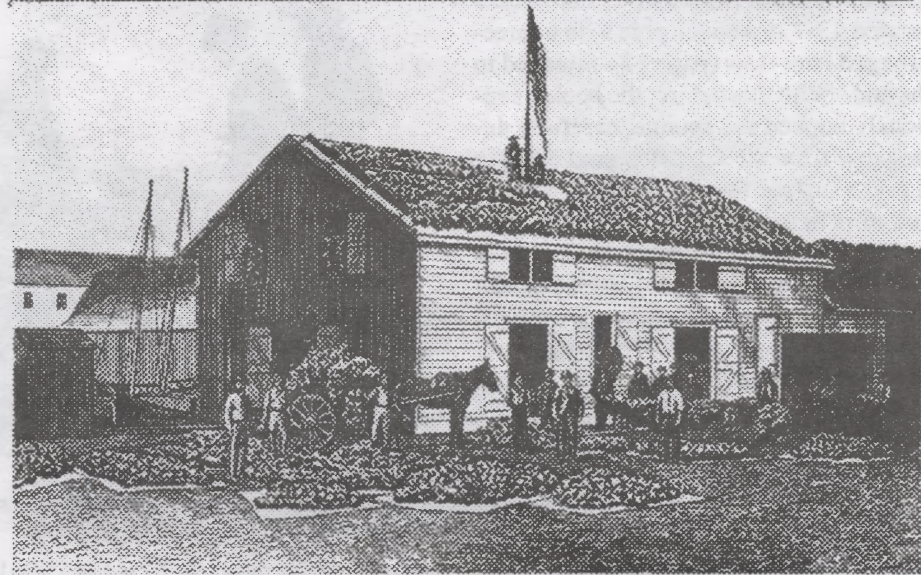
A successful sponge expedition depended on the abundance of quality sponges, good weather, clear water, and the expertise and stamina of the hookers. The sponge fishery was adversely affected by "poisoned waters" which appeared off the Florida west coast in 1844, 1854, 1878, and 1880. This was described as long streaks of noxious discolored water that drifted lengthwise with the tide killing fish and sponges (Collins, 1887; Rathbun, 1887). Initial theories suggested that this was either swamp water from the mainland or due to volcanic gas, but today it sounds suspiciously like red tide. Additionally, natural and man-made disasters made the expeditions challenging, such as the September 1897 which hurricane sank many Key West sponge boats or when prowling Spanish warships forced the fleet to land their catches at Tarpon Springs (Cobb, 1904).

The vessels landed their catch at Key West (page 10) and sorted the sponges into piles according to size and grade. The dealers would then assemble on the wharf to examine the various lots and then submit a written bid to the vessel owner, who sold them to the highest bidder (page 11). Since the vessel owners furnished the complete outfit, including provisions, they were entitled to half of the gross profits. The rest was divided equally among the crew, with the captain and cook receiving an extra bonus.

The auction winner hauled the sponges off in a cart to a large airy warehouse where they were cleaned, trimmed, and thoroughly dried (pages 12 and 13). They were then graded and packed into bundles for shipment to New York, Philadelphia, and St. Louis. Unfortunately, several dealers



Three pronged iron sponge claw. Photo credit: H.F. Moore.



Top: Warehouse where sponges are cleaned and baled for shipping to the northeast markets. Bottom: Sponges drying after suction. Photo credit: R. Rathbun.

became greedy and were accused of unethical practices that were secretly conducted behind closed warehouse doors. These consisted of "liming" and "sanding." Liming was a bleaching process which consisted of soaking the sponges in a solution of lime and seawater to improve their appearance in the marketplace. Although this was a good marketing strategy, the process injured the structural integrity of the sponge and they quickly fell apart when used. Sanding was a fraudulent practice that involved soaking sponges in a saturated solution of seawater and fine sand in order to increase the weight of the sponge bales to be sold in the northeast. Sanding could increase the weight, and subsequent value, of a bale from 25% to even 100%. Needless to say, both of these illegal acts were eventually exposed and discontinued (Rathbun, 1887). Dealers also

had a tendency to fill the center of the processed sponge bales with inferior grade sponges that could not have been sold otherwise.

Table 1.--Reported Florida sponge landings and value.

Year	Weight (kg)	Value (\$US)
1904	144,880	376,185.00
1903	171,422	447,346.00
1902	157,349	344,422.00
1901	179,426	492,740.00
1900	189,661	567,685.00
1899	138,075	367,914.00
1897	150,389	286,040.00
1896	107,190	273,012.00
1895	138,856	386,871.00
1890	166,367	438,682.00
1889	143,591	381,087.00

Decline of the Sponge Fishery

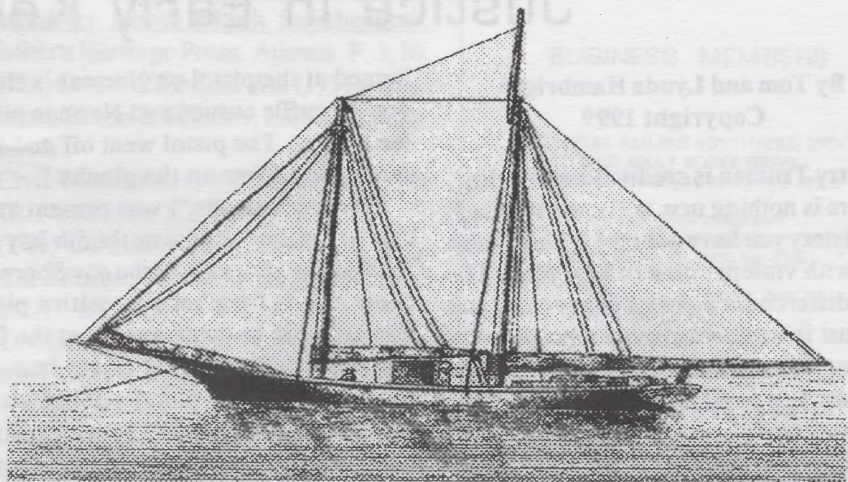
The Florida sponge fishery increased steadily from its inception and quickly became the dominant fishery in Key West (Table 1). Florida sponges were also exported to overseas markets as early as 1870 (Stevenson, 1896). However, by 1887 there were fears of overfishing, and experiments were successfully conducted involving artificially propagating sponges from cuttings (Collins, 1887; Rathbun, 1887; Brice, 1898). A small cutting, properly attached to the bottom in a suitable habitat, would supposedly produce a marketable-sized sponge in a year. Although there seemed to be much interest and limited success in propagating sponges, no commercial enterprise was ever formally initiated and the fishermen slowly moved into deeper water in search of new grounds. Spinging was so intense that in 1899 the surplus catch of exceptionally large sheepswool sponges were sold to the U.S. and British armies and navies for cleaning guns (Smith, 1901).

The fishery seemed to have plateaued near the turn of the century, as supplies could not meet demand, and Florida enacted legislation that prohibited diving for sponges or taking sponges less than 4 inches in diameter, protected prospective sponge cultivators, and placed a \$25 fee for non-U.S. citizen sponge fishermen (Brice, 1898). In spite of this legislation to protect the fishery, Smith (1898) felt that the inshore sponge grounds were heavily overfished. Fortunately, the introduction of Mediterranean hard-hat diving in 1905 at Tarpon Springs opened deeper sponge beds unavailable to hooking, and the Florida sponge fishery flourished until the sponge blight in 1939.

Florida's sponge fishery never fully recovered from the 1939 sponge blight before the introduction of artificial sponges in the 1950's which affected the sponge market. Today, some Florida sea sponges are still harvested by hook and sold to specialty bath shops, tourists, and to home improvement centers as paint applicators.



Typical Florida sponge skiff. Photo credit J.W. Collins.



Top: Typical Florida sponge vessel. Photo credit J.W. Collins. Bottom: Sponges drying at Key West sponge yard. Photo credit: J.N. Cobb.

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Justice in Early Key West

By Tom and Lynda Hambricht
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Harry Truman is credited with saying, "There is nothing new in the world except the history you have not read." This is also true with violent crime in Key West. The only differences between the present and the past is we now have more people with greater firepower. In 1830, when Monroe County had a population of only 517, Norman Sherwood had a disagreement with a man named Jones at Abraham Butcher's grog house in Key West which led to Sherwood killing John Wilson, his friend and partner. The murder occurred on July 5, 1830.

Justice was swift and final in early Florida. The Sherwood case was delayed only because court met twice a year, in May and November. Sherwood was arraigned on November 9, 1830. He was tried for murder on November 16 in the Territorial Court with Judge James Webb presiding. A number of witnesses and Sherwood gave statements. William R. Hackley recorded the case in court and noted it and the results in his diary.

Hackley recorded the statements given in court of Abraham Butcher, Edward Bassett, Dr. Henry Waterhouse and Norman Sherwood.

Abraham Butcher: "About the 5th of July, prisoner and Jones had some words. Prisoner went off to his boat and returned with a pistol in his hand. Prisoner came to the door of the defendant when the defendant told him he should not come in with a pistol. He begged to let him have some grog. Defendant told him he should not come in without he would discharge his pistol. Defendant made a bet with Norman that he could not hit a flag that was flying. Norman fired off the pistol and immediately went to his boat and returned in a few minutes with a pistol on his shoulder. The defendant told him he should not come into the house with a pistol. He, Norman, observed that, "I would look foolish if he was to shoot me." Bassett persuaded me to let him come in and that we would endeavor to take the pistol from him. We gave him some grog when he held the pistol on his shoulder and said he would kill any man that would attempt to take the pistol from him. Wilson was asleep in the house being disturbed by the noise came in and

lunged at the pistol on Norman's shoulder. A scuffle ensued and Norman pulled the trigger. The pistol went off and Wilson settled down on the planks."

Edward Bassett: "I was present at the time at Butcher's house on the 5th July last. I saw in the after part of the day Sherwood come ashore from his boat with a pistol. Butcher said he could not shoot the flag. Norman fired and went to his boat and returned with the pistol cocked on his shoulder and said that whoever approached him he would be the death of. I don't want to hurt you Bassett or Butcher but whoever approach me I will shoot."

Dr. Henry Waterhouse: "On the 5th July, Bassett called on me to go to Butcher's house that a man was badly wounded. Saw Wilson lying dead on the floor. On opening the body found the shot had penetrated into the body missing the lung and damaging the eight and fractured the ninth rib. While examining the body someone brought Sherwood into the house and he said he did not intend to kill Wilson but intended to kill Jones who had wronged and abused him but Jones had not come in his way but Wilson lunged upon him and attempted to take the pistol from him. Wilson said he should not shoot anyone. He gave Wilson fair warning to keep off that he would shoot anyone who attempted to take the pistol from him. That Wilson came and attempted to wrest the pistol out of his hands when he shot him. Sherwood declared that he had no anger against Wilson at the time."

Norman Sherwood: "It was not his intention to shoot Wilson. He loaded the pistol to shoot Jones. He intended to, but Jones had not come in his way, when he was in the room Wilson came towards him and attempted to secure the pistol. He gave Wilson fair warning to keep off that he would shoot any man who approached to take the pistol away. That he came on seized the pistol or attempted to seize the pistol and I shot him. He said that he held Wilson no animosity."

William Hackley in his diary had the following entries about the Sherwood case.

November 16: "The case of the Territory of Florida vs. Norman Sherwood for the murder of John Wilson on the 5th day of July last by shooting with a pistol loaded with buckshot came on today. The prisoner being anxious for trial did not make

use of his right of peremptory challenge to the full extent allowed by law. I was requested by the Judge to take down the evidence in the case and did so. The trial was protracted till near two. I left the courthouse before the jury retired. The jury brought in a verdict of guilty."

November 19: "At 4 P.M. went up to the courthouse to hear judgment of death pronounced on Norman Sherwood. The Judge made a most impressive charge and fixed the second Friday in December for the day of execution. The Judge was so affected that he could hardly get thorough the sentence and many of the bystanders also were much affected. The prisoner indeed shed a few tears but was not much moved with the hearing of his doom. He walked back to the jail and I am given to understand expressed but little sorrow saying that he could die only once."

December 6: "I hear that two days since Norman Sherwood took a dose of poison which was conveyed to him by some one but it was not sufficiently powerful to cause death. He is however sick from the effects of it and I think that if he can obtain the means he will commit suicide before the day appointed for his execution for which I would be sorry as the execution of a felon will, I think, have a beneficial effect on this community."

December 7: "I was verbally summoned

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by Mr. [Key West Marshall P.B.] Prior to turn out as one of thirty men to guard the prisoner from the jail to the gallows. I shall not attend as I am unwilling to see a man hung. It was a mistake as to Norman's taking poison. He is perfectly unconcerned and says that it makes no difference to him whether he dies today or ten years hence, he is perfectly hardened and ought to suffer the end of a felon."

December 10: "At ten o'clock A.M. Norman Sherwood was taken from the jail to the gallows erected near the road out from the court house to the West and, in pursuance of the sentence of the law was hung by the neck until he was dead. He said nothing at the gallows and died stubbornly and did not even change color."

(Slaves from page 9)

ceeded from the Union (The Annals of America, 1976) not to join the South, but to separate itself from the military despotism of the Union government (where civil rights had been suspended) (Civil War Times, 1995), and achieve greater economies of trade.

Abolition of slavery was a very fortunate end result of the Civil War, but it was not the cause of the war. Free trade and economic differences were the real causes. The North, having won the war, rewrote history to make itself look good. The current terminology is called, putting a "spin" on things; emphasizing minor things, and deemphasizing major things, to create a different picture. One can only wonder, what were the feelings of the 500,000 slaves in the Union that were not freed by the Emancipation Proclamation. One is faced with the inescapable conclusion that Abraham Lincoln did not free the slaves. Frederick Douglass did.

It was not the very minority abolitionist movement, nor the might of the Union Army that ended slavery. It was a window of political opportunity that enabled black people themselves (Frederick Douglass) to obtain freedom. The constant lobbying of Frederick Douglass (in a racially bigoted Washington, D.C.) got the 13th Amendment passed, ending slavery.

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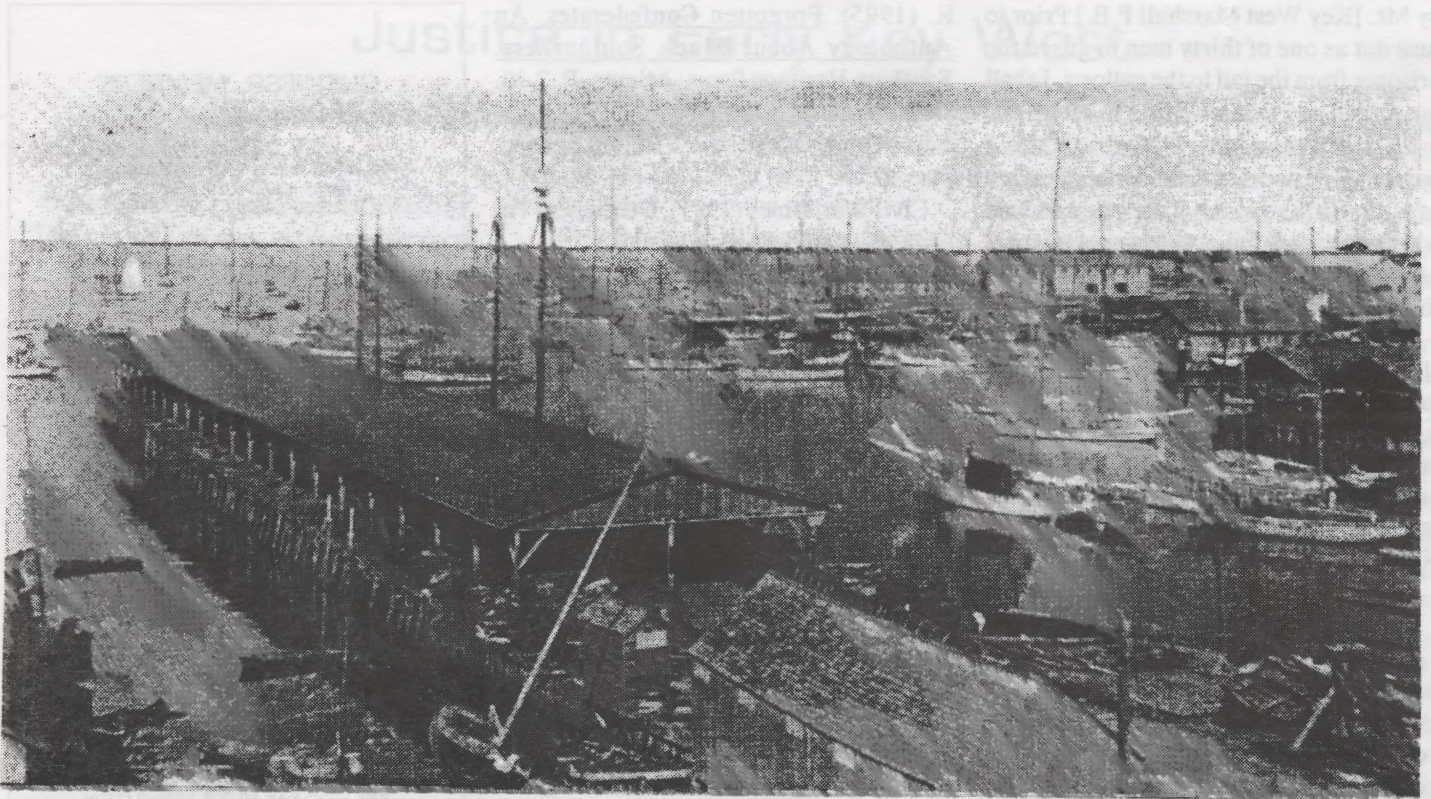
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