

USS SHARK

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Travel in The Keys in 1870s

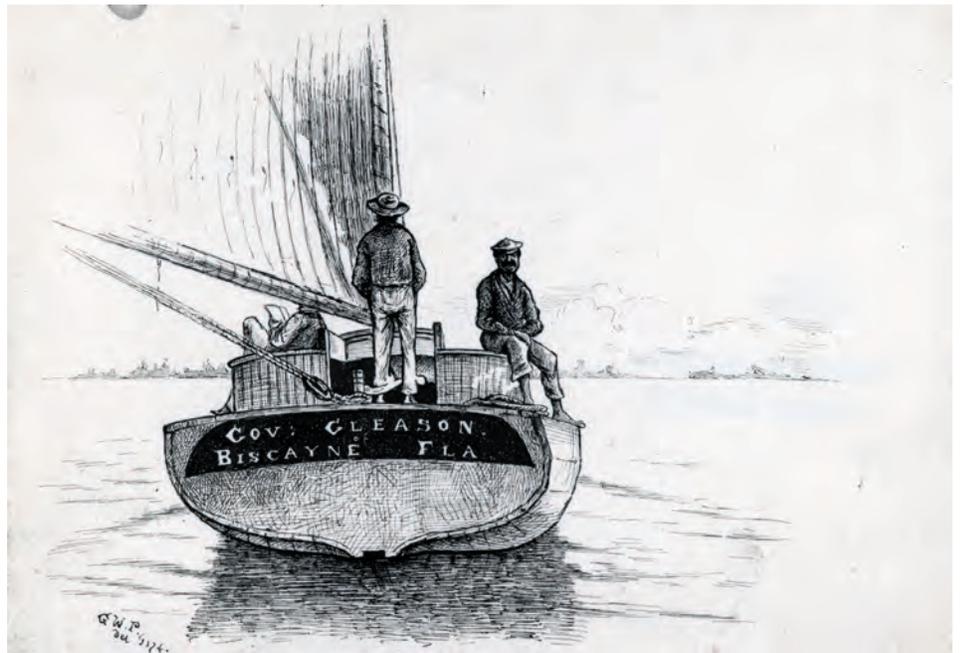
By John Viele.

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This article appeared in the
Island Navigator in 1993

Two young men, George Parsons and a friend he called "Ros," arrived in Key West by Mallory Line steamer in November 1873 just after news of the **Virginus** affair had been received. They were on their way to Biscayne Bay to stay with a friend. Ros was ill with rheumatism and it was hoped that the warm sunshine and outdoor living there would restore his health.

The transportation situation in the Keys in the 1870s had not improved much in the 50 years since Key West was first settled. If a traveler wanted to get to another Key or the mainland, he either had to have his own boat, charter one, or take his chances on the mail boat which ran between Key West and Biscayne Bay on a regularly-irregular schedule. Through a diary that George Parsons kept, we are fortunate to have a first-hand view of what it was like to be a passenger on an 1870s inter-Keys-Biscayne Bay mail boat.



Drawing by Geo Potter in January 1874. Gift Dr. William M. Stairght.

Soon after arriving, George found the captain of the mail boat, a black man named Andrew Price, and negotiated passage to Biscayne Bay for himself and Ros for \$5 each. Indicative of how sacred the mail schedule was, George had no difficulty in persuading the captain to defer his departure until the following morning.

The two young men, having found that the principal place of entertainment in town was a roller

skating rink, had no regrets over leaving after only one night's stay. The mail boat was a broad-beamed schooner, about 30 feet in length, named the **Governor Gleason** (William H. Gleason had been Lieutenant Governor of Florida from 1868 to 1872 and held, or had an interest in, the mail contract between Key West and Biscayne Bay). There were three other passengers in addition to George and Ros. One

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Society News and Notes

by John Viele



Corey Malcom speaking on April 20. Photo credit; Ed Little.

January 19 “History of Weather Forecasting in the Keys” Presented to an overflow audience by John Rizzo and Chip Kasper, meteorologists with the Key West Weather Station.

February 16 “Radio Operator on 125 ft. Ketch in Antarctica” John Lohr told of his experiences in the 1970s as radio operator and communications expert aboard the sailing vessel **Hero** plying the most violent stretch of waters in the world between Tierra del Fuego and Antarctica.

March 16 “Discovery of Sunken Bronze Warship Rams” Dr. Jeff Royal, Director of RPM Nautical Foundation discussed finding sunken bronze rams off the coast of Sicily, the remains of three ancient warships involved in a Roman-Carthaginian naval battle in 241 B.C.

April 20 “A Slave Ship Letter from 1819” Corey Malcom, Director

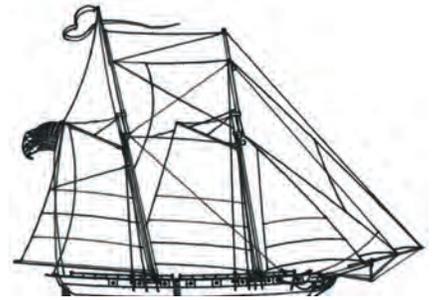
of Archaeology for the Mel Fisher Maritime Heritage Society, told the story he discovered behind a letter in the Society’s archives. The letter was written aboard a slave ship off the coast of Africa in 1819. Through careful and extensive research, Corey was able to determine the name of the ship and many details of her voyage. His study revealed that Pardon C. Greene (Greene Street Key West) was involved in the African slave trade.

May 18 “Key West and the Civil War” Tom Hambright, Monroe County Historian, and head of the Key West Library Florida History Department, told of the unique part Key West played in the Civil War. The only southern port to remain in Union hands, Key West became the headquarters of the East Gulf Blockading Squadron. Ships of the squadron captured 199 blockade runners and brought them to Key West for adjudication.

New Member

Linda & Lawrence Abele, Tallahassee; Rick Andersen, Key West; Michael Blades, Key West; Ben Edwards, Big Pine Key; Breanne Erickson, Key West; Beau Kirkpatrick, Key West; Lulu Buffett

Lulu’s Restaurant, Gulf Shores, AL; Premiere Racing, Inc. Marblehead, MA; Matt Reid, Key West; Edward D. Salazar, Key West; Dave Smith, Key West; Alan Teitelbaum, Key West; James S. Welch, Key West.



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Editor: Tom Hambright

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

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History Of The U. S. Naval Magazine

In 1945 Lt. (jg) Winfred R. Hoey compiled a report of over 600 pages on the Naval Air Station Trumbo Point (Seaplane Base), Naval Auxiliary Air Station Boca Chica, Satellite Naval Air Field Meacham and support facilities. Following is the history section of her report on the Naval Magazine Fleming Key.

I Chronology

A. Date Established

13 October 1941: Established and placed under administrative command of the Commanding Officer Naval Air Station, Key West, Florida.

B. Officers-in-Charge

13 Oct 41 to Sep 43: Lt. Comdr. Martin Nyburg, USN (Ret)

Sep 43 to Apr 44: Lt.(jg) Leonard H. Crain, USN

Apr 44 to date: Lt.(jg) Ralph C. Wilson, USN

C. Transfers of Command: None

Since its establishment, Naval Magazine has been sponsored, equipped, operated and maintained by the Bureau of Ordinance. The Officer-in-Charge, however, is administratively and militarily under the Commanding Officer, Naval Air Station, Key West.

II. NARRATIVE

A. Background

(I) Function in the Aeronautical Organization

Under the Commanding Officer Naval Air Station, Key West, Florida, the Commandant Seventh Naval District, and the Bureau of Ordinance, Naval Magazine, Key West, services, stows, maintains and supplies ammunition for all activities in the Key West area, including aircraft and shore bases as



Fleming Key from the northwest with the dredge in the turning basin on September 23, 1941. Photo credit: U.S. Navy.

well as surface and submarine craft. Included amongst Naval activities served are NAS, Naval Station, Section Base, and Forces Afloat.

It comprises 32 magazines in five groups, plus a depth charge testing building and one garage building with office spaces and quarters for six men. (The Air Station has utilized, on an average, three of these magazines.)

(II) General Data: Geographical and Topographical

The Magazine occupies 230 acres of land, about 2 miles in length, on Fleming Key, located to the northwest of NAS, Key West, and connected to it by a small bridge. This Key originally comprised two small mangrove keys, one about 20 acres and the other of about five, situated a half a mile off shore. Typical of hundreds surrounding Key West, these have been built up in the course of years by spoil from the ships' channel serving Key West. The rest of Fleming Key is man-made, being largely created by

spoil from the dredging of NAS's seaplane channels from July 1941 throughout 1942, the construction of the Magazine area taking place concurrently. The material obtained for fill was a mixture of coral rock and silt.

Sharing the Key with the Naval Magazine, which is set off by 20, 800 feet of steel fence, are, outside the fenced area, NAS's Boathouse, Marine Transportation Shop and Service Building, and finger piers for crash and utility boats.

To the west lies the Naval Fuel Depot.

(III) Acquisition of the Land

Fleming Key, including both its original and its man-made portions, lies within bounds of Public Lands reserved for Navy Department use by Executive Order of the President NO. 4060 of 11 August 1924. Most of its area was created in 1942 by spoil dredged from NAS's seaplane landing and takeoff area, the dredging operations being financed

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by the Appropriation Act of 1942.

As early as 1940, Fleming Key, conditional upon dredging, had been cited as the most suitable spot for bomb storage for the Key West area. According to Cmdr. G.B. Hoey, Chief of Staff of Naval Station, Fleming Key and East Martello Tower had been used for this purpose.

Recommendation that the dredging material be used for building up Fleming Key to permit its employment for ammunition storage was contained in a letter of the Commanding Officer, Naval Station, on 15 May 1941. A BuDock's letter of 11 June 1941 stated: " Since the provision of a site for magazines is of the utmost importance, it is requested that the runway dredging operations be scheduled so that Fleming Key may be built up to the requested size at the earliest possible date. By this procedure the construction of the magazines can go on while the balance of the dredging is still proceeding."

The site was preferred because it was adjacent to the Air Station, for which its principal storage was needed and where speed of service to planes was vital, and yet it was also easily accessible to ships from the Naval Station and Section Base, which could be supplied at a more leisurely pace.

To care for the ships, dredging was also scheduled to provide a 15-foot depth of water along the south side of Fleming Key to permit a connecting channel and turning basin with finger pier and pile dolphins to make that area accessible by water. A dock was constructed here, where vessels and barges could lie for loading and unloading ammunition.

(IV) Construction of the Base



Fleming Key looking south on November 3, 1941. Photo credit: U.S. Navy.



Fleming Key from the west on December 13, 1941. Photo credit: U.S. Navy.

Twenty of the present 32 magazines were built between August 1941 and January 1942 under the same contract with Mackle Leach Construction Company, NOy 4849, by which the major part of the Air Station was constructed. The others have been added since, as occasion demanded.

No sooner had dredging started (July 1941) than construction of the

20 magazines got underway. The Appropriation Act for 1942 allotted \$250,000 under the Navy's 15,000 plane program, for Ammunition Storage Facilities in Key West as follows: 9 high explosive magazines, 3 fuse and detonator magazines, 1 small arms magazine, 1 combine small arms and pyrotechnics magazine, 1 inert storehouse, and

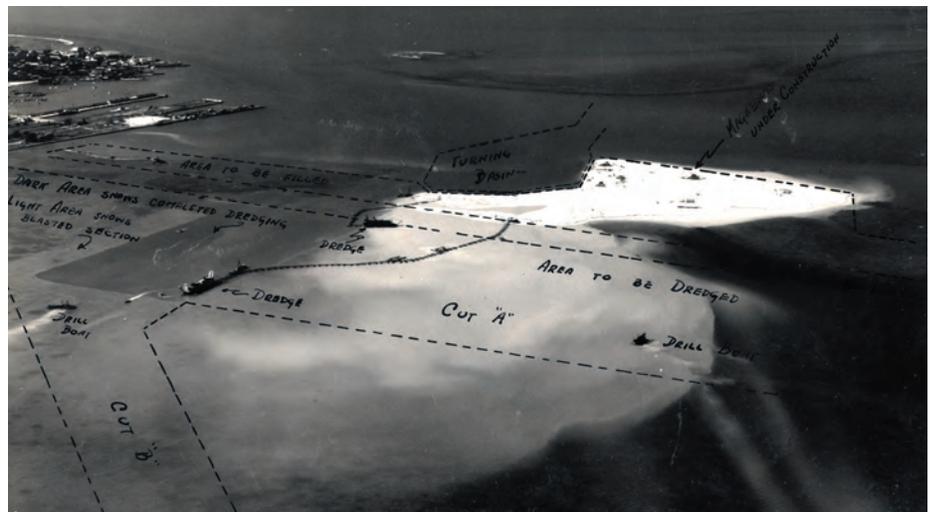
1 smokedrum storehouse. These, with three additional magazines for high explosives and one for fuses and detonators, all got underway in August 1941 and were ready for use by January of the following year. Five more magazines (2 fuses and detonators, 1 high explosives, 1 fixed ammunition, and 1 pyrotechnics) were begun early in 1942 and completed that August, and two additional ones (1 high explosives, 1 Disbursed Torpedo Storage - later changed to small arms) were finished in the spring of 1943, all of these still under the old Mackle Leach contract. In October 1943, three further high explosive magazines were added under a new contract, NOy 6492 with Mackle and Co; and by March 1944 the final magazines (1 small arms, 1 one pyrotechnics) were erected by the same company under NOy7944. Most of these structures were steel and concrete construction of the igloo type.

A garage for handling ammunition equipment (including generator plant and guardhouse with office space and quarters for six men) had been ready in September of 1942, and a Depth Charge Testing Building was put up in November of 1944 (the latter by Paul Smith, contractor, NOy 9429).

Concurrently with erection of these structures, other public works projects were being undertaken. A wooden bridge, 278 feet long, was placed across the channel between the Air Station and Fleming Key in July 1942. A month later a bulkhead and unloading dock were completed on the south side of the Key. About the same time, to prevent erosion from the swift tide which had formerly flowed over this area now dredged to form the Naval Magazine, a four-inch, 20-foot wide concrete mat was set in for shore protection on the turning basin, and within a few months, \$21,000 worth paving was laid down also for shore protection.



Fleming Key from the southeast on December 13, 1941. Photo credit: U.S. Navy.



Fleming Key and seaplane landing area from the northeast on November 21, 1941. Photo credit: U.S. Navy.

In May of 1943, the Magazine area was fenced, a sentry house located at its entrance, and the whole section camouflaged. Sewage and electric systems were installed by the Army and part by the Navy, between 1942 and 1945, and water distribution and telephone by the Navy in 1944. When completed, the Magazine was served by approximately three miles of roadways.

While the Navy was building its magazines, the Army also was

using Fleming Key during 1942 and 1943 as an observation post for harbor defense under special permission of the Secretary of the Navy. In connection with this, the Navy, under the original Mackle Leach contract, installed the foundations of a Fire Control or Observation Tower (described in the contract as an "Engineer's Tower" a wooden tower on concrete and pile foundation for use as triangulation

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and fire control purposes”). On 28 April 1942 the Secretary of the Navy granted a revocable permit to the Army to construct an observation tower on this site, and this was accomplished by 9 March 1943 under the direction of Lt. Philip R. Smith, U.S.A. From then until a year later, men of Battery B stood a 24-power watch in the tower. The Navy Department also granted the War Department permission, on 12 (21?) October 1942 and 1 January 1944 respectively, to raise the Searchlight towers on the Key for the use in conjunction with the Army Air Force at Boca Chica, Fleming Key being one of the Army’s three tower locations in the Key West area (the other two: Stock Island and Ft. Taylor). Thus the Army located a 120-foot steel tower with mobile 60-inch anti-aircraft Searchlight and accessories 150 feet south of the first tower, and erected a 50-foot steel tower 100 feet north of the observation tower, with a 60-inch and portable seacoast Searchlight on top. The second anti-aircraft Searchlight tower was put up a year or so later. Also on the Key was an Army barracks, capacity 28 men, built June 1943 to accommodate the man on observation duty. These barracks were vacated in early 1944 when the Harbor Defense program was abandoned, and since March 1944 they have served to house men of the Coast Guard Dog Patrol who arrived to guard the Magazine area. The 60-inch portable searchlights have since been removed along with one of the 120-foot towers, but not the foundations, so that they can readily be replaced upon need. The other 120-foot tower still remains on the Key, and within the past year discussion of moving it has arisen frequently in that it’s height is a menace to seaplanes. Recently,



Fleming Key from the north on January 14, 1941. Photo credit: U.S. Navy.



Fleming Key from the north on February 14, 1942. Photo credit: U.S. Navy.

however, according to the Naval Inspector General’s report of March 1945, the matter has been dropped because transferring the tower elsewhere in the vicinity would not only approximate the cost of a new tower but also would simply transfer

the menace to another locale instead of eliminating it.

Other buildings, of temporary “Dallas hut” construction, were erected by Coast Guard personnel in the summer of 1944, for office, storage and recreation purposes.

Cost of construction of the Naval Magazine approximated \$750,000, some \$438,000 of this going toward the magazines themselves and the rest toward other public works projects, utilities and services. The only Army building in use by the Navy today-the barracks-is valued at \$1,150. Most of the Coast Guard huts were put up for a minor sum; their Operations Building, including dog dispensary, ran about \$1,000; the 35 dog kennels were provided with the dogs without local cost.

B. Functions and Use

(I) At Time Of Establishment, 13 October 1941:

The U. S. Naval Magazine was established to maintain, stow and supply ammunition for all surface craft, shore bases and aircraft in the Key West area.

(II) Place in Chain of Command

The Magazine has remained since the inception under the administrative command of the C. O., NAS, although all technical matters and equipment were under the jurisdiction of BuOrd. This arrangement was made because of the Magazine's proximity to the Air Station because it's principal storage and service were destined for the Air Station. According to the Naval Inspector General's report of March 1945, administrative and operating relations between the Air Station and Naval Magazine are excellent.

(III) Changes in Functions: None

(IV) Present Status

As of March 1945, the amount of ammunition and equipment handle per month average 2,000 tons.

There is no record of the number of personnel required to fulfill this task at the beginning of the Magazine's history, but by the end of December 1944 and also by March 1945, there were 3 officers, 20 enlisted and five civilians



The U.S. Army spotting tower on Fleming Key. Photo credit: U.S. Navy.



U.S. Coast Guard dog kennels on Fleming Key. Photo credit: U.S. Navy.

employed. Previously, the average number of officers had range from 4 to 5. The present compliment is considered an absolute minimum. The only personnel facilities provided are the 28-man barracks now occupied by the Coast Guard Dog handlers and the quarters for six men in the garage. All other personnel are billeted on the Air Station.

To carry out its work, the magaizne is organized in the following divisions: Receiving, Issue, Installation and Maintenance, and Stores.

Since November 1944 there has also been a special officer in charge of Depth Charge Testing.

The safety record of the

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Magazine has been excellent. There have been no accidents from the handling or storing of ammunition. Nearest approach to disaster came in January 1944 when a PBM, flying low over the Magazine area, hit the top of an igloo, crashed and caught fire, causing loss of 11 lives, and creating an explosion hazard which might have had serious consequences and not the fire been promptly extinguished.

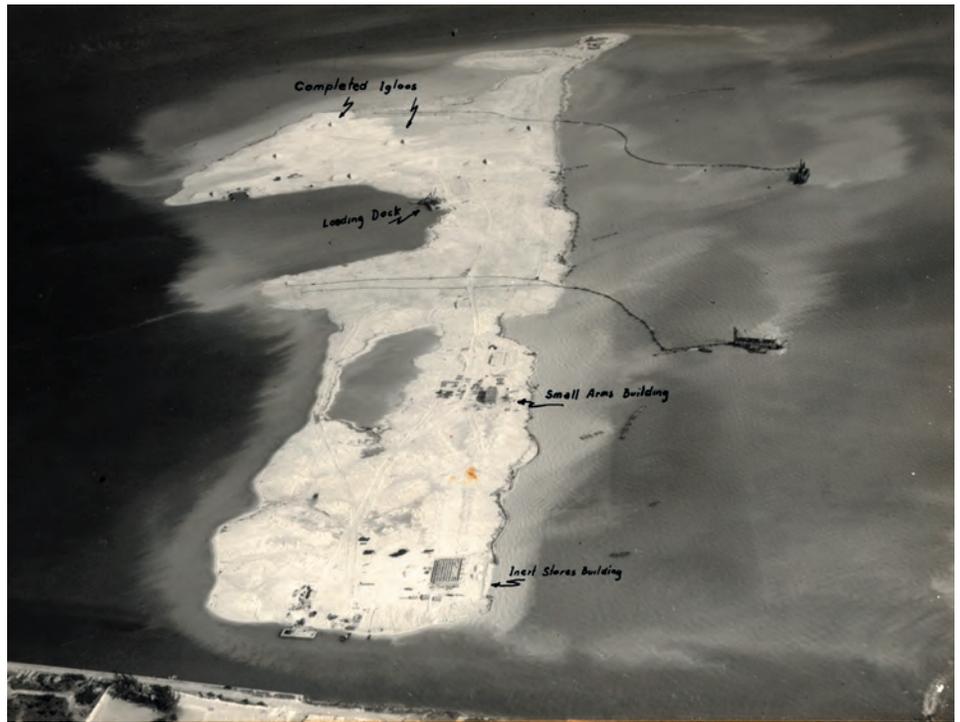
Keys to the various Magazine's are kept a key box in the office of the OOD for use in such emergencies. A Disaster Plan, drawn up for the Magazine on 10 January 1945 (in accordance with NAVORDA88-44 of 12 December 1944); it incorporates existing Naval Air Station Regulations governing action in case of fire, hurricane, air raid, and aircraft crash.

Security of the Magazine used to be the function of the blue jacket sentries, then of Civil Guards. Since March of 1944, it has been maintained by Civil Guard posted by day and Coast Guard Dog Patrol by night, the latter now comprising 35 men and 30 dogs. The Coast Guard also maintains a tower watch from sunrise to sunset. The whole Magazine area is enclosed by 20,800 feet of steel fence erected May 1943.

According to the Naval Inspector General in March 1945, Security and Safety regulations at the Magazine are rigidly complied with.

(V) Units Now Occupying Fleming Key

- a. Naval Magazine
- b. Coast Guard Dog Patrol – within Magazine area
- c. NAS, Marine Transportation – outside Magazine area
- d. Army: With the Magazine area towers formerly used by and still available to the Army.



Fleming Key from the south on February 14, 1942. Photo credit: U.S. Navy.



Fleming Key and Trumbo Point in January 1942. Photo credit: U.S. Navy.



Fleming Key in the 1960s. Photo credit: U.S. Navy.

William Hackley's Diary

William R. Hackley practiced law in Key West from 1829 to 1857. He kept a diary for part of the time he was in Key West. Here is part of the diary for April 1857 it ends when he and his family moved to Joliet, Illinois. With this the Journal printed all the diary covering the 1850s. In future issues we will publish the diary for 1830 and 1831.

Saturday, April 4. [1857]
Rose at 4:30 and walked on the beach, returned home and bathed. At 8:30 A.M. barometer, 29.49, thermometer 74, wind northeast .05, clouds 2 with haze. Anderson killed the calf and sold it, it weighted about 75 pounds and sold after paying Anderson \$1.80 for his work and what we sent to Alexander Patterson and kept ourselves for \$11.55. Matilda went up to the Salt Pond with Mrs. Tift and the ladies from Mr. Herricks and I went to Stephen Mallory's and sat till 10. Matilda got home at 12. Mosquitoes are numerous.

Sunday, April 5. Rose at 4:30 and walked to the Salt Pond, returned home and bathed. At 8:30 A.M. barometer 29.47, thermometer 77, wind southeast 2, clouds 4. Stephen Mallory and Douglas came to my office about 10 and remained until near 1 and we consulted about the water lots and concluded that Mallory was to draw up the supplemental bill.

Monday, April 6. Rose at 4:30 and walked to the Salt Pond. At 8 A.M. barometer 29.40.5, thermometer 79, wind southeast 3, clouds 1. Filed a petition in the Probate Court praying that Nicholas Smith pay overall the property in his hands belonging to the estate of



William Beve@ly Randolph Hackley. Photo credit: Jane Jones.

John George Linax, next Monday is set for the trial. Made a motion in the United States District Court that Martin Hilyard be admitted to take the oath of citizenship which was granted, he paid me \$2.50. Sold my bathhouse to old Cathleen and she paid me \$8.00 on account, she is to have it for \$12.00. I took \$2.00 of the money the calf sold for and Matilda took \$5.50 in silver for home expenses some had not been paid yet. Matilda and I took tea and spent the evening at Captain Cornelius Curtis. Just as we got home the steamer **Isabel** was in sight and we went to Alexander

Patterson's and I went to the wharf after Aletta and it was after 11 before we got to bed. Weather warm.

Tuesday, April 7. Rose at 5:30 and went to the Post Office and got papers but no letters except from G. R. Potter asking for information but he did not send any money which I answered at once dunning him again. At 10 A.M. barometer 29.50, thermometer 73, wind northwest 4, clouds 6. Bought eight yards of blue flannel from Bowne and Curry for sack coats, cost \$3.00. Read papers.

Wednesday, April 8. Rose at 4:

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(Hackley from page 9)

30 and walked to the Salt Pond, returned home and bathed. At 8 A.M. barometer 29.53.5, thermometer 76, wind southeast 5, clouds 9. Bought 10 pairs of blankets from Charles Tift at \$3.00 per pair. Sold Mr. Cullin of St. Louis my Gutta Percha walking cane for \$2.75 the same I paid for it. Read papers.

Thursday, April 9. Rose at 5:30 and bathed. At 7:30 A.M. barometer 29.48, thermometer 77, wind east southeast 3, clouds 5. Packed a barrel with side saddle and my thick coats and some boots and shoes. (Marked no. 3.)

Friday, April 10. Woke at 4:30 and found it was raining and lay till it was light, did not bathe as I do not like to bathe unless I walk first. At 8 A.M. barometer 29.35, thermometer 77, wind east northeast 2, clouds 9. Wrote Mother telling her that I expect to leave Key West in the early part of May, also to P. Williams asking him to write to Winer Bethel about any unfinished claims in his hands. Yesterday evening Ellicott came up to look at my furniture and said he would take all the chairs, one bureau and a work table and would let me know whether or not he would take several other pieces of furniture. In the afternoon the steamers **Isabel**, **Tennessee** and the Propeller **R. Waterman** for Mobile came in about the same time. The workmen from the Fort went on in the **Isabel**. Rain in the afternoon.

Saturday, April 11. Rose at 4:30 and walked on the beach, returned home and bathed. At 8 A.M. barometer 29.36, thermometer 74, clouds 3. Pleasant morning. Bought a piece of red flannel \$5.00 and a piece of Canton flannel for \$3.50. Read Knickerbocker magazine.

Sunday, April 12. Rose at 4:30 and walked on the beach, returned

home and bathed. At 8 A.M. barometer 29.32, thermometer 72, wind west 1, clouds 1. Read papers. Knocked the partitions out of my gun box and filled it with books, put the guns (apart) into one of the bookshelves, packed the magazine, filling up with books.

Monday, April 13. Rose at 5:30. During the night had a heavy rain storm from the west southwest with a fresh breeze and blew hard all night. At 8 A.M. barometer 29.34, thermometer 74.5, wind west northwest 8, clouds 4. Attended the settlement of Nicholas Smith in the matter of the Lenax Estate for the Estate. Read papers and packed some books.

Tuesday, April 14. Rose at 4:30 and walked to the Salt Pond, returned home and bathed. At 8 A.M. barometer 29.50, thermometer 70, wind north northwest 2, clouds 3. Packing my books all day and got them nearly all in the boxes. H. Fleming employed in preparing tops for the boxes. Winer Bethel and Welch were in the room nearly all the morning. Philip Fontane sent me a memo of balance that he thinks the balance amount \$1,914.55. I do not believe that to be a correct amount and must have the account in full it is all barred by the statue of limitations and I will have my own time to pay.

Wednesday, April 15. Rose at 4 and walked to the Salt Pond, returned home and bathed. At 8 A.M. barometer 29.55, thermometer 71, wind north northwest 3, clouds 2. Finished packing up books. Got \$100.00 from Frederick Filer fee in the matter of the Linax estate. Wrote to William Bellemann on the subject in the afternoon felt quite unwell as if a cold was coming and took three dozes of camphor. Mr. George Allen came in and sat till 9.

Thursday, April 16. Rose at 4:30 and walked to the Salt Pond and

on my return found Catalan who was to work today and dressing without a bath went to the office and set him to work screwing on the tops to the boxes. I felt unwell and put on a flannel undershirt as I think that I took a cold getting into a perspiration day before yesterday and as I have to work in packing up I wear it as a precaution. At 8 A.M. barometer 29.44, thermometer 69, foggy. I could not do much as I felt too unwell but helped a little and marked the boxes as fast as the covers were screwed on.

Friday, April 17. Rose at 4:30 and walked on the beach, returned home and bathed. At 8:40 A.M. barometer 29.47.5, thermometer 73, wind north northeast 2, clouds 3. Yesterday by the **Governor Anderson** Mr. Teagarden sent me Pulto's Home Practice and Guernsey Home Practice. a lot of medicine but no letter. I feel a lot better but am thirsty, an unusual thing with me. The ship **S.R. Mallory** came in about 4 P.M. Packed sheets and towels in the ice box and blankets I got of Tift in a box numbered 38. Feeling badly all evening.

Saturday, April 18. Rose at 5 and went to the market, felt very unwell. At 9 A.M. barometer 29.45, thermometer 77, wind east 3, clouds 2. Rode up to the Barracks with Colonel John H. Winder to show him corners of the United States grounds. At home all evening waiting for Dr. Maxwell, the new doctor for the hospital, who will take the house I am in and will probably take a part of my furniture. Cleaned the old dining table with Pennington's Polish which answers beautifully. Walked to the Fort with Matilda. I feel somewhat better though still badly. Hatty went to Captain Cornelius Curtis's to stay, they want us to

break up housekeeping at once and go to them. Mrs. Curtis seems to feel very badly about our going.

Sunday, April 19. Rose at 4 and walked to the Salt Pond, returned home and bathed. At 8 A.M. barometer 29.37.5, thermometer 79, wind south 2, clouds 1 with haze. Dew last night.

Monday, April 20. Remained at home all day, packed one barrel with the china I got from Robert Campbell for the map. The old medicine chest and sheets and clothing, barrel number 4. One piece of coral, boots and sundries, marked trunks and boxes.

Tuesday, April 21. Rose at 4:30 went to market but got nothing, returned home and bathed. Read papers. Made out my accounts against Philip Fontane but could not do much on account of visitors. The steamer **Isabel** came in about 4 P.M. No letter from Mother.

Wednesday, April 22. Rose at 4:30 and went to the market. Packed a cask with jars, shells, tin ware and etc. At noon packed a box of books and one of the boxes of china ornaments, lamp shades, two of comforters, and two boxes of Hatty's papers. In the afternoon packed another box with sundry clothes, ticking and etc. Took tea at Captain Cornelius Curtis'. Alexander Patterson quite sick with Cholera Morbus.

Thursday, April 23. Rose about 6:30 having overslept myself. Finished packing the box I was packing last evening, numbered it 41 and packed a barrel with my liquor case, two pairs scales and tin ware. At 9 A.M. barometer 29.38 thermometer 72, wind northwest 3, clouds 7. Since Monday it has been blowing a norther with pleasant weather, the wind every day backed a little to about west northwest but good back at night. The steamer

Fashion came in about noon and I saw John Smith in the evening; he is going to take General Harney to New Orleans in the morning. I cannot get ready to go by him. Packed the cedar chest. Put the parlor clock and the one from the office in it and filled it up with clothing. Got a letter from the Collector in relation to the suit of the United States vs. Hiram Benner informing me that the requisite certificates had come, I filed an order to dismiss the suit with the clerk and wrote to the Solicitor informing him of the action. Christian Boye paid my fee of \$20.00 for Benner.

Friday, April 24. Rose at 5 and went to the market. Packed a barrel of crockery, Catalan making a box for the piano. After breakfast bought of Colonel John H. Winder a check on the Bank of the Republic, New York, draw by L. Savage, Cashier of the Commercial Bank of Wilmington, NC, 3 April 1857, for \$118.81. At 10 A.M. barometer 29.50, thermometer 68, wind northwest 2, clouds 4. The **Fashion** sailed about 4 P.M. Catalan made the box for the piano and cased the ice chest. Did not pack in the evening but put my clothes in a trunk so as to send the wardrobe home.

Saturday, April 25. Rose at 5 went to the market. Packed a barrel of crockery, took down Hatty's bedstead and set Catalan to work boxing it up (It was my father's bedstead). Paid the second quarter's postage on my papers and will write Wharton when to send them. Took the aneroid home. Wrote to Samuel L. Butler, New Orleans and to Dr. Howard Hays, Glasco, Howard County, Missouri telling them that I was nearly packed up. Gave Douglass the papers in Smith vs. Smith and two letters from Mrs. Ann Smith refusing to live with her husband, written to him but no

date of the year and cannot prove receipt, proved handwriting by C.P. Williams and his wife, also by them the fact of her desertion and refusal to live with him. Packed in box 23 (Ogden Chest) old papers, seed and things out of my secretary, in box 44 Hatty's bed and etc. The old iron couch and Benner's chair which I took to pieces by taking out the piano from front and back rails and took down the wardrobe and sat it out for Bethel. In the afternoon Catalan made a box and put the secretary in it. Sent the wardrobe and two end tables to Winer Bethel. The steamer **Isabel** came in about 4. Major Sanders, Mrs. Felix Senac and Ruby, Miss Stuart and others went in her.

Sunday, April 26. Rose at 5 and bathed. Wind northeast 2, clouds 4. I have sent the boxes as fast as they were packed and put them in Tift's Number 1 Warehouse, where they are to lay free of charge. Went home about 10 and remained the rest of the day reading papers. Sold to John Bethel one sideboard \$9.00, one settee \$9.00, one chair \$2.00 making \$20.00 which he is to send me in the fall. Read papers.

Monday, April 27. Rose at 4:30 and bathed. Went to market. Packed a barrel with side saddle and clothing, number 9. Took down bureau and Catalan packed it. Took down bedstead. Settled with Philip J. Fontane and find that I owe him a balance of \$536.81, he has bought of me one cow \$100.00, lot of flowers \$10.00, knife cleaner \$6.00, leaving \$420.80 now due. Remained at home all the afternoon packing up. Sent to Winer Bethel the secretary home and bought of him a cloth Talma wrecked in the ship **Isaac Allerton** for \$9.50 leaving a balance of \$53.75 due me. The children slept at Captain Cornelius Curtis's and Alexander Patterson's,

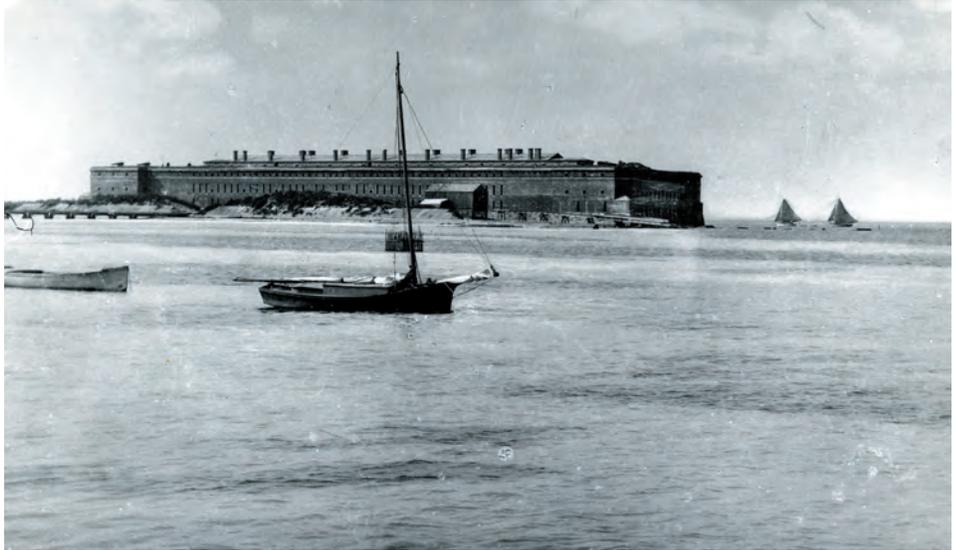
(Travel from page 1)

was a paying passenger, the other two were working their way. The crew consisted of a sailing master and the captain, making a total of seven on board, as George said, “too many entirely.”

The **Governor Gleason** had a small cabin but no bunks. There was no glass in the cabin ports and, as a result, wind and spray were free to blow in. George and Ros slept on the deck on some coats and a rug they had been fortunate enough to bring with them. The cuisine was no better than the accommodations. It consisted of “half-cooked bread, and ham and bacon.” There was so much grease and filth that the two young men decided to help with the cooking and cleaning of utensils.

The weather was fair as the **Governor Gleason** sailed out across the reef and headed up the Keys. Sometime after nightfall, the wind freshened and the sailing master recrossed the reef into Hawk Channel and anchored in the lee of one of the Lower Keys. After a short sail in the morning, he anchored again off “Lime Key” at noon. (No old chart shows a Lime Key. Parson’s reference to a “small settlement of Bahamians” near their anchorage makes me suspect that they were in the vicinity of No Name Key which was then inhabited by about 45 Bahamian settlers).

George and Ros went ashore to hunt deer which they had been told were plentiful. They stopped briefly at a settler’s cabin which George described as a “shanty.” George’s comment on the Bahamian settlers is of interest. He said they were called “Conchs, are English and intermarry and are people by themselves.” Ros soon tired and returned to the boat. George found no deer and got lost. Caught in a



A small sloop anchored off Fort Taylor. Photo credit: Monroe County Library.

storm, he finally managed to find his way back by climbing a tree and sighting the boat.

The next morning, George, just like a modern-day tourist, amazed the natives on board by taking a dip. After an all-day sail, the schooner anchored at Indian Key to deliver mail. The tiny island had been resettled since the Indian attack some 30 years earlier and had a population of over 40, most of them farmers. Probably because they arrived late in the evening and left early the next morning, George and Ros did not go ashore.

The third day’s sail took them to an unnamed key in the southern part of Biscayne Bay. George called it “Pirates Key” because the sailing master told him that his father had been captured by pirates at that same key some years ago.

In the meantime, a cold front had blown in and both young men became thoroughly chilled. George gave his ailing friend all the coats they had and suffered miserably declaring that if he got through that night, he could stand anything.

In the morning, the schooner got underway and attempted to cross the bay, but the wind and seas were so high that she began to ship solid water through the open ports and the

sailing master was forced to return to their original anchorage. They remained there for the rest of the day and the night.

To avoid a repetition of the previous night’s misery, George and Ros and some of the others went ashore and built a campfire. During the night, George was awakened by the sound of movement in the underbrush. Having been told that the Keys were frequented by bears and tigers [panthers], he was apprehensive and glad he had brought his revolver with him.

On the morning of the fifth day, all food and water on board were gone. By the time the schooner finally reached the other side of the Bay, the passengers were so famished, they ate some hastily fried flour that the captain had obtained from a settler.

The mail boat continued up the Bay and stopped at the Miami River. The following morning, the mosquitoes were so thick they had to be smoked out of the cabin. George’s final comment on the voyage seems to sum it up well: “We expected to rough it but this has been beyond anything we expected to encounter and nothing can or could be worse possibly.”

A friend offered to take George

Parsons and his companion Ros to Key West in his small, open sloop, the **Pet**. George accepted, but Ros, who suffered from rheumatism, decided to go in the mail boat despite his previous unhappy experience. Ros thought he would “fare better” on a larger boat with a cabin.

The **Pet** was a 3-ton sloop about 20 feet in length. In addition to George and the sloop’s owner, Henry, there was “young Bennett” who was to serve as pilot. The sloop was loaded with sweet potatoes and pumpkins to be sold at the market in Key West. Despite the heavy cargo, the trio had high hopes of beating the mail boat to Key West.

Departing Biscayne Bay in the afternoon, the **Pet** ran outside the Keys for about 20 miles and anchored in Caesar’s Creek (between Elliott and Old Rhodes Keys) shortly after dark. Of necessity, the men slept on deck. George rolled up in the mainsail to protect himself from the mosquitos.

The next day, the **Pet** ran down the Keys with a fresh breeze under double-reefed mainsail and jib. Along the way, they sighted two wrecking schooners. One of them approached close aboard and her captain shouted, “Any news to windward - any wracks?” George noted in his diary that “wrack” was just one of a number of peculiarities of Conch speech. For example, they would omit the letter “h” when it was there and put it in when it was not. They would substitute “a” for “e” and “w” for “v.” Thus, they would pronounce vessel “wassel.”

At some point, probably between Lower Matecumbe and Long Key, the **Pet** sailed through the Keys to the Gulf side and continued along the “inside” passage. Shortly after dark, the little sloop dropped anchor off Bamboo Key having made a respectable day’s run of 85 miles.

Bamboo Key is a tiny 9-acre

island about a mile north of Fat Deer Key (site of Key Colony Beach today). In 1874, it was the home of four brothers named Pent and their families. The brothers were sons of Temple Pent Sr., a prominent early settler of Key Vaca. Temple Pent had been employed as a pilot for Commodore Porter in the anti-piracy squadron days and later served three terms as a representative to the territorial assembly from Dade County when Dade County included all the Keys from Bahia Honda to the mainland.

The **Pet’s** crew went ashore to visit with the Pents and were treated to coffee. The brothers did a little farming on the Key, but were mainly mariners engaged in sponging, turtling, and wrecking. They had moved to Bamboo Key from Key Vaca in the late 1860s probably because it was less frequented by mosquitos. Much to George’s disgust, the Pents told him that the mail boat had passed their Key earlier in the day.

The next morning progress was very slow as the wind died to a zephyr. At Bahia Honda they attempted to sail out into Hawk Channel but were thwarted by a heavy swell and no wind. Continuing slowly along the inside passage, the **Pet**, with its 3-foot draft, ran aground time after time. On each occasion, the crew was forced to get out and push and drag the 3-ton boat into deeper water. When progress came to a stand still, George seized the opportunity to do a bit of sponging in the shallow water. He managed to get several sheepswool (the finest), grass, and glove sponges.

At the end of the day, the exhausted crew anchored somewhere in the Lower Keys and prepared to turn in. But, as the sun descended, so did the

mosquitos. Unable to sleep, the men resorted to playing cards by the light of the moon. Finally, the mosquitos became too bad for even that diversion and they rolled themselves up in the sails for a miserable, sleepless night.

On the fourth day of what had been expected to be a two-day trip, the breeze returned and they began to make some progress. This was a doubly welcome development as their provisions were now all gone. George observed that the “sponge crawls” along their way were useful aids to navigating the shallow waters of the inside passage. The crawls were enclosures made of stakes driven into the bottom and used to hold sponges waiting to be cleaned and also, turtles.

In the evening, despite the crawls, they ran aground again and were unable to push the sloop off. George was very discouraged and threatened to “get a big pair of rubber boots and walk home.” Finally, the incoming tide floated them free and, soon thereafter, they sighted the Key West light. It was midnight before they threaded their way though the many vessels in the harbor and dropped anchor.

George and Henry went ashore, “found everybody drunk” and learned that the mail boat had not yet arrived. When it finally did reach the harbor the next day, George rowed out to bring his friend ashore. He found that Ros was “about alive and that was all” having had an even worse experience than on his first trip on the mail boat. He told George that they had been aground for two days, had run out of food, and, to top it off, there had been “pretty blasphemous talk” by the other passengers. Needless to say, when the two men looked for a return passage to Biscayne Bay a few days later, they did not pick the mail boat or the **Pet**.

Woodcutters and Charcoal Burners

Forgotten Pioneers



Charcoal kiln on the Keys in the 1930s. Photo credit: Monroe County Library.

By John Viele.
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For over a 100 years, a handful of forgotten men labored in the dense, mosquito-infested woods of the lower and middle Keys to keep the housewives of Key West supplied with wood and charcoal for their stoves. The majority of these woodcutters and charcoal burners were black Bahamian immigrants, who usually lived alone or with one or two other woodmen in crude driftwood shacks.

As the population of Key West grew, the supply of suitable stovewood on the island was soon exhausted. One of the first suppliers of wood to Key West was Henry Geiger of Boca Chica. Henry employed a 63-year old black man

named Robert Allen to cut the wood which he sold for \$3.50 a cord in Key West in the 1850s.

The best-burning wood was buttonwood, a dense, hard wood from trees that grow near the shoreline on most of the Keys. A Keys traveler in the late 1800s reported that, "A log of buttonwood, when set on fire at one end, will burn to ashes before the fire goes out and generate an intense heat." Buttonwood was also used to make charcoal and, according to some sources, makes the best charcoal of any wood in the world.

The first charcoal burner for which there is any record was a man by the name of George Wilson, who was the sole inhabitant of Big Pine Key at the time of the 1870 census. Unlike most of his successors, George was a white man. The 1870 census also listed two woodcutters, both located on Sugarloaf Key.

As might be expected because of the growing Key West population, the 1880 census showed a significant increase in lower Keys charcoal burners and woodcutters. There were 13 charcoal burners, all but three of whom were black men, and six white woodcutters. The 1900 census reported only

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seven charcoal burners and no woodcutters, but ten years later there were 24 “woodmen” living between Cudjoe Key and No Name Key and nine men who were both spongers and charcoal burners in the middle Keys.

The process of making charcoal was a long, arduous, and lonely one. While buttonwood was the preferred wood, other trees such as the red mangrove could be used.

After locating a thick stand of suitable trees, the charcoal burner cut them down, trimmed the branches, and “stood up” a kiln in a cleared area. He constructed the kiln by stacking the logs in a tent-like structure, leaving a small opening at the top. He set up the large logs first followed by successively-smaller limbs. Next, he covered the entire structure with a thick layer of grass or seaweed followed by a layer of sand or dirt.

From a separately-started fire, the burner picked up glowing coals and dropped them into the kiln through the opening in the top. He closed the opening with more wood, grass and sand, thus forcing the heat to spread throughout the interior. The kiln had to be tended day and night to keep it burning slowly and evenly and to prevent the fire from breaking through at any point. The burner maintained control by strategic placement of more sand or dirt.

Depending on the size of the kiln, it would take from three to ten days to reduce the wood to charcoal. During that period, the charcoal burner, if he did not have a helper, or did not live near by, had to remain at the site, catching short cat naps on the ground or in a crude shelter.

After the charcoal had cooled, the charcoal burner packed it in sacks and loaded it aboard small sloops for transport to Key West.

A cord of buttonwood would yield about ten sacks, and a typical sloop could carry about 150 sacks.

Some idea of the extent of this trade can be gained from the narrative of a Keys cruise made in 1885. The author reported passing, in one day, eight sloops outbound from Key West, all engaged “in the stovewood and charcoal trade with the Island City.”

Charcoal burning did not completely die out with the advent of gas and electric stoves in Key West. Many Key Westers, particularly those of Cuban ancestry, enjoyed the flavor that buttonwood charcoal imparted to roasted meat, and at least one Key West coffee mill used the charcoal to give a distinct flavor to its Cuban coffee.

A few charcoal burners continued to build their kilns even into the post-World War II years. One of the last of them was Bertram Cash, a black man who came to the Keys from the Bahamas when he was 17. Bertram burned his last kiln on Cudjoe Key in 1960, having made charcoal for 40 years.

Today, those with the energy and the interest to fight their way through some of the dense buttonwood growths in undeveloped sections of the lower and middle Keys, may come upon a large circular area of barren ground, a reminder of the lonely, back-breaking, mosquito-infested days of the charcoal burners.

John Viele has been a member of the Board of Directors of the Key West Maritime Historical Society of the Florida Keys for the past 20 years. He is the author of three books on the history of the Keys published by Pineapple Press of Sarasota: “The Florida Keys – A History of the Pioneers,” “The Florida Keys, Vol. 2 – True Stories of the Perilous Straits,” and “The Florida Keys, Vol. 3 – The Wreckers.”

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