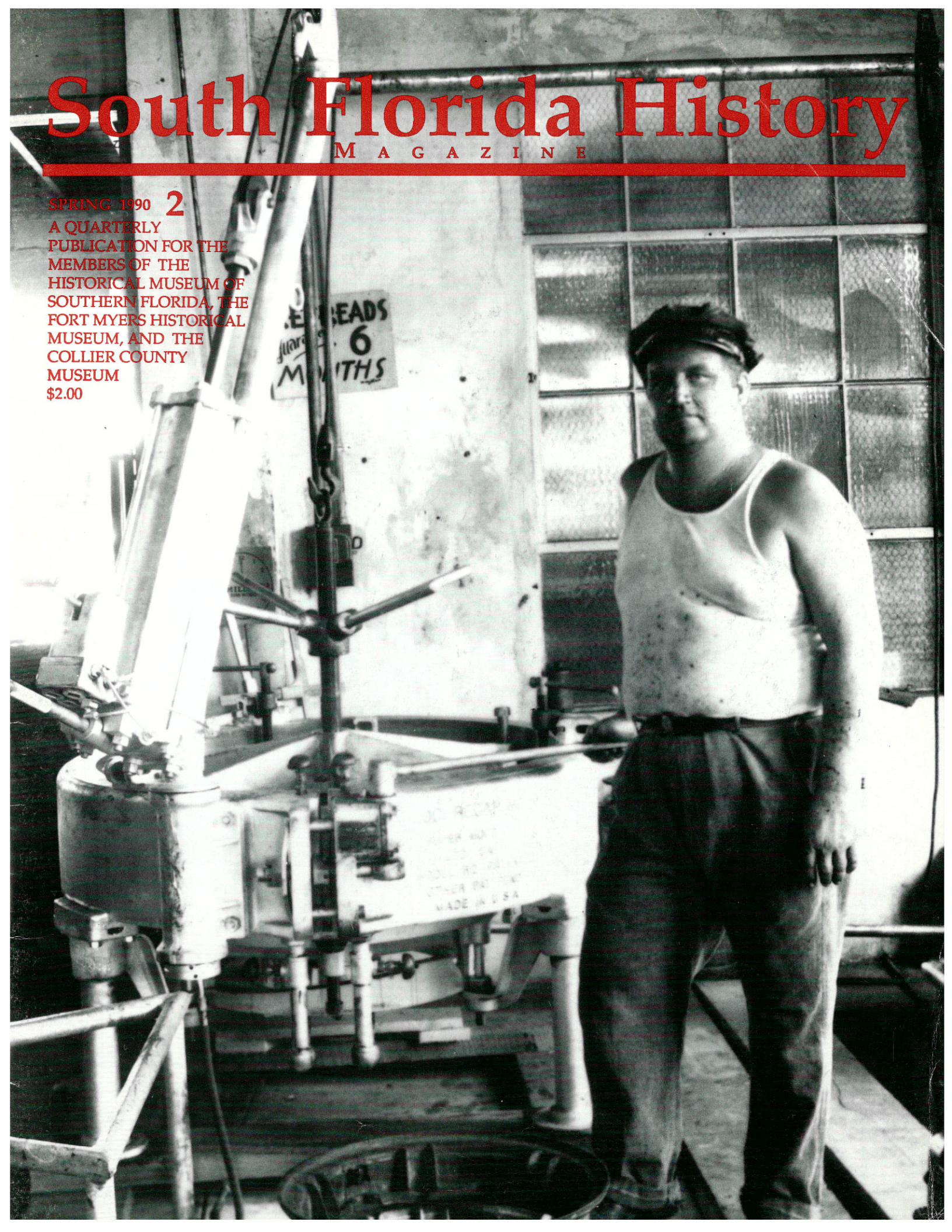


# South Florida History

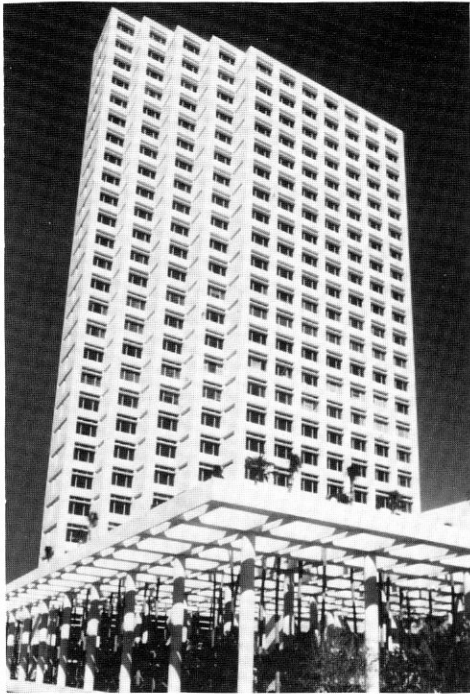
M A G A Z I N E

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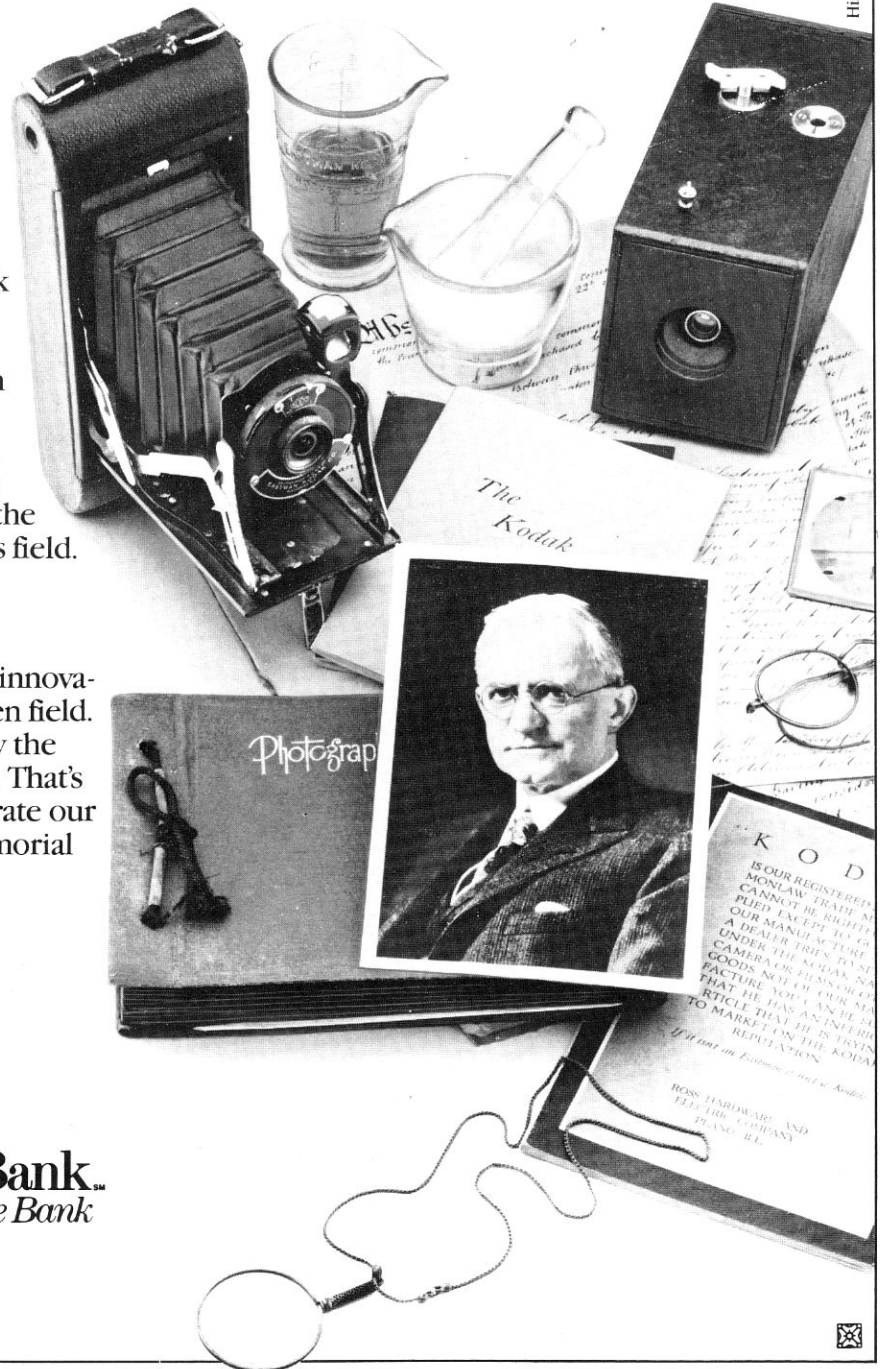
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**THE HISTORICAL MUSEUM OF SOUTHERN FLORIDA**

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In 1919 Miami's "Tomato King," Thomas J. Peters, envisioned a three story hotel with 100 rooms on the island of Bimini.

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This reprint from Kennedy's *Palmetto Country* explores the folk ways of the Florida Keys in the late 1930s and early 40s.

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**On the Cover:** A worker at Joe's Tire Shop standing by his recapping machine. In this issue's **Through the Lens**, we examine everyday life in South Florida. See page 22.

## Contributors

Emily Perry Dieterich is a member of the private historical research firm, Research Atlántica, and a frequent contributor to Historical Association publications. Her most recent article was about Coral Gables' real estate auctioneer Doc Dammers.

Jane S. Day, also a member of Research Atlántica, led the highly successful Historical Museum tour of Bimini. Her last article for the Museum examined Hemingway's days in Bimini.

Stetson Kennedy headed the Florida Writers' Project unit on folklore, oral history and social ethnic studies for the Works Progress Administration, between 1937 and 1942. Among the results was *Palmetto Country*, what Kennedy called, "a sort of barefoot social history of Florida."

# South Florida History

M A G A Z I N E

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### Editors

Stuart McIver  
Tim Schmand

### Advisers

Lee Aberman  
Marie Anderson  
Jeanne Bellamy  
Dorothy J. Fields  
Arva Parks  
Thelma Peters, Ph.D.  
Elizabeth Peeler  
Yvonne Santa-Maria  
Zannie May Shipley

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## Editor's Notes

by Tim Schmand

Something extremely interesting happened while we were putting together this issue of *SFHM*. As we reviewed the articles and photographs a common thread emerged, a thread that seemed to tie together everything we're attempting to do with the magazine, if not physically, at least spiritually. Two articles featured in this issue and **Through the Lens**, speak to us of the past and bind together individuals, communities, and events in a way that we have found very fulfilling.

Jane S. Day's article, *The Bimini Bay Rod and Gun Club*, explores another facet of South Florida's ongoing relationship with the Bahamas. While discussing the article with Jane we learned that it would not have been possible without the support and assistance of Dr. Thelma Peters. For those of you who are not familiar with Dr. Peters, she is a long time supporter of the Historical Association and someone whose life has been intimately involved with the history of South Florida and the Caribbean. We developed the sense that Dr. Peters had become Jane's mentor. She provided Jane with more than basic research and information, she imparted the spirit of discovery and exploration that is essential to bringing history to life. We have had the pleasure of spending an afternoon with Dr. Peters. Her knowledge of history transcended a discussion of names and dates - in her view people made history. We tend to agree.

In the early 1940s the United States was in the midst of the Great Depression. A federal government

program, the Works Progress Administration, had been organized to provide work for people possessing a wide variety of skills. Workers, ranging from bricklayers to actors, found themselves employees of the federal government. Fortunately for Florida, one such employee was Stetson Kennedy. Stetson was involved in a folklife research project which resulted in the publication, in 1942, of *Palmetto Country*. This wide ranging study focuses on folklife and traditional lifestyles from the Panhandle to the Keys. The University Presses of Florida, who recently reprinted the book have graciously allowed *SFHM* to reprint a section. The excerpt published here comes from the chapter *Fisherfolk* and focuses on the Keys. As this issue of *SFHM* goes to press, Brent Cantrell, Folklife Researcher for the Historical Association, is in the Keys picking up the thread of Stetson's work - exploring the Keys Folk. The information gleaned through his research will be featured in the next *SFHM*, an issue devoted entirely to traditional life in South Florida.

This issue's **Through the Lens** will not appeal to those people who feel that history is a dated version of *The Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*. Ignoring the rich, the famous and the infamous, we attempted to gather images that explored every day life in South Florida. We feel moderately successful. The photographs examine the work place, educational institutions, and recreational activities. In future issues, as the photographs reveal themselves, we will return to this theme. Enjoy.

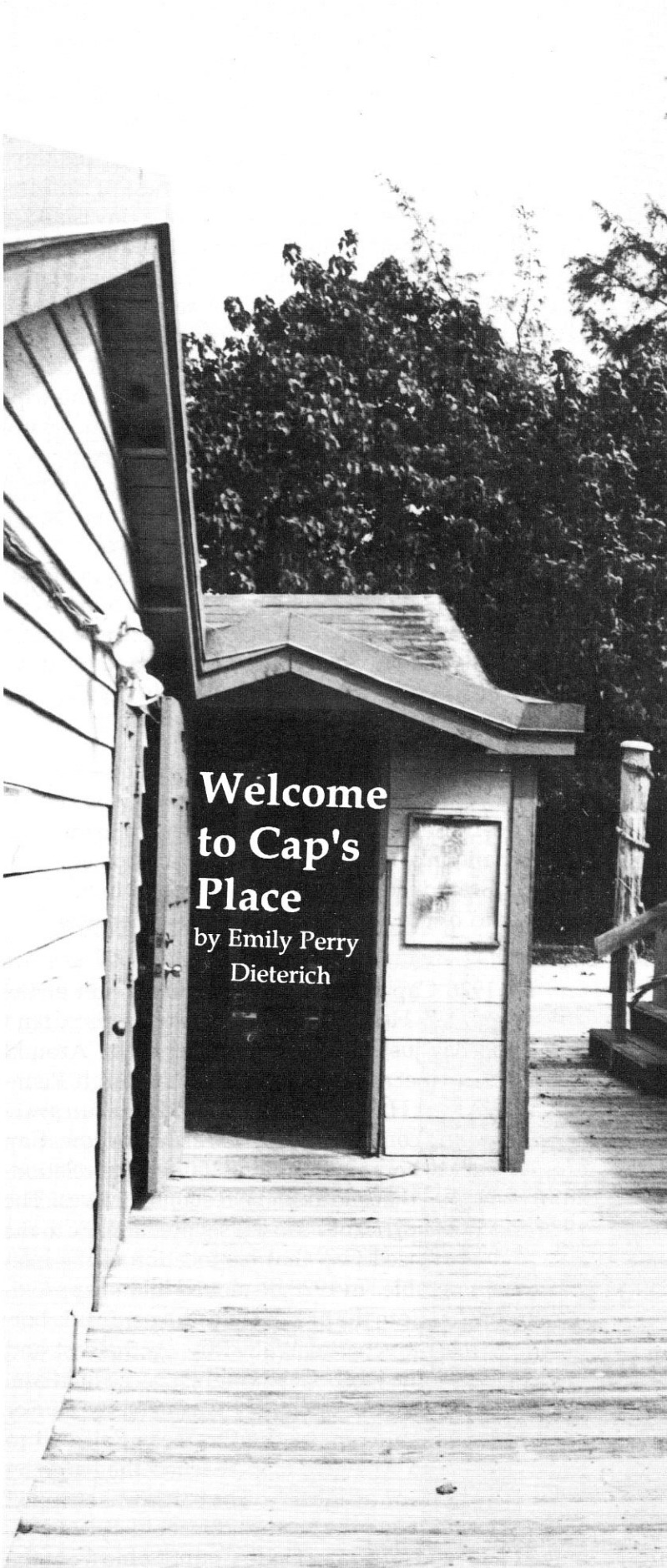


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The 1926 hurricane put an untimely end to the Roaring Twenties in South Florida. Whatever remained of the real estate boom came to an abrupt halt on September 19, 1926, when the monster storm ravaged the lower end of the peninsula. Although South Florida rallied quickly, it may have been plunged into a depression a good three years before the rest of the country. Prohibition, however, was not allowed to dampen the spirits of the boom or the bust. Many South Floridians frequented speakeasies and took up bootlegging. Rumrunners bought liquor in Bimini, Bahamas, which they easily smuggled into South Florida. Tourism was encouraged during the lean years by legal and illegal gambling. Most local officials turned a blind eye to these activities. Al Capone moved to Miami in 1928 and these somewhat innocuous forms of entertainment suddenly assumed a more sinister character.

Also in 1928, a local institution in Broward County, Cap's Place, was established. Originally known as Club Unique, the restaurant was a popular supper club and gambling casino in the 1930s and 1940s. Cap's Place was owned by Captain Theodore Knight, one of the earliest settlers in the Lighthouse Point area and a colorful character in Broward County's history.

Eugene Theodore "Cap" Knight was born in 1871 in Cape Canaveral, Florida, either inside or very near the Canaveral Lighthouse. He was descended from a family of seamen. His grandfather was Captain Mills Olcott Burnham, a Vermont Yankee who transferred in 1837 from the Federal Arsenal in Watervliet, New York to the Arsenal of the South, near Jacksonville. Duval County had just been organized and Burnham, a powerful man, served as the first sheriff of the county. In 1853 Burnham became keeper of the Canaveral Lighthouse and later served in the Florida State Legislature. Cap's father, Captain J.A. Knight also served as keeper of the Canaveral light beginning in the early 1870s until his death in 1892.

Lured by the call of the sea, Cap ran away from home when he was 13-years old and worked as a messboy on a lighthouse tender. He worked his way up to mate and eventually to Master of Morgan Line Steamers which sailed



The powerful Hillsboro light served as a beacon for Eugene Theodore "Cap" Knight when smuggling rum during prohibition.

between New Orleans and New York. By the time Cap retired, he had been at sea for more than thirty-five years.

Cap's younger brother, Thomas, was born in 1879 and followed in his father's and grandfather's footsteps. At the age of eighteen, Tom became assistant keeper of the Canaveral Lighthouse, a position he held for eight or nine years. Subsequently, Tom transferred to Jupiter where he served as keeper of the Jupiter Inlet Lighthouse, which had been erected four years earlier. Reportedly Tom would signal Cap as he passed by in the night on a steamship.

Cap's first marriage was to Bertha Lydia Armour, the daughter of James Arango Armour, keeper of the Jupiter Lighthouse from 1866-1906. The marriage produced three children but ended in divorce sometime prior to 1914.

In 1916 Cap married Lola Saunders, originally from Cross Creek, near Ocala National Forest. Shortly after

completing high school Lola secured a contract to teach the children of lighthouse employees and fishermen at the Hillsboro Inlet. One of the first teachers in the area, Lola conducted classes in the Coast Guard Station next to the lighthouse.

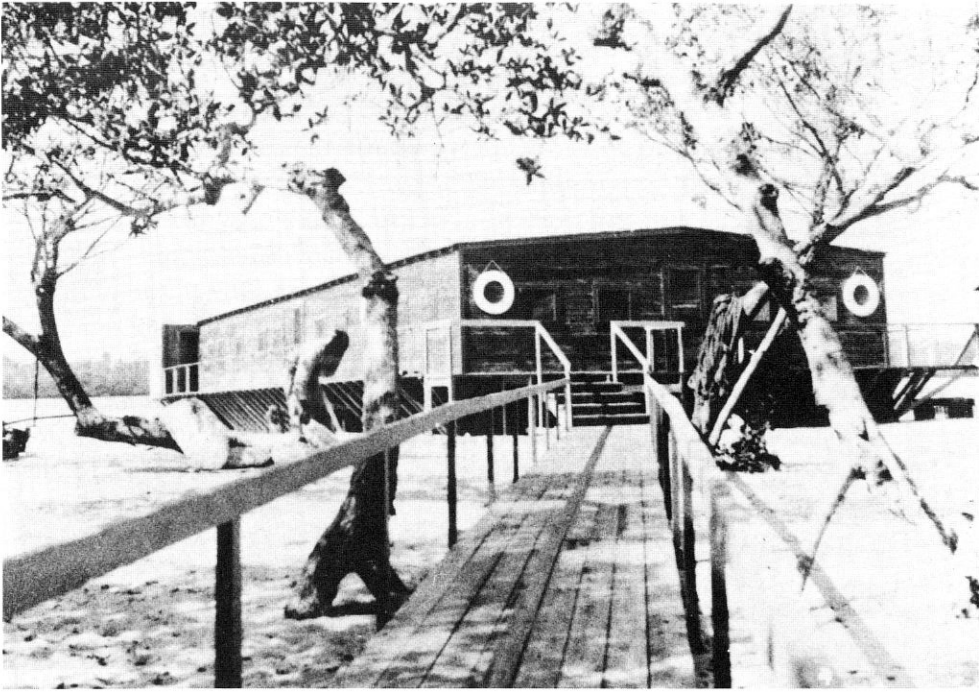
With the advent of Prohibition in 1919, Cap and Lola became involved in the profitable business of rumrunning. Cap picked up whiskey in Bimini, a tiny island in the Bahamas about 50 miles from Florida, and brought it back to his base near the Hillsboro Inlet. This location was ideal because of its isolation, easy access to the Atlantic Ocean, and protection by heavy vegetative growth. The powerful Hillsboro Light served as a beacon during the dark nights when Cap made his trips from Bimini. Cap's liquor runs were always successful and he never got caught. He was a skilled navigator, had faster boats than the Coast Guard and several area residents suggest that his brother flashed warnings from the lighthouse when the coast was clear.

The contraband whiskey came packaged in burlap bags, known as "hams," which Cap tied to buoys with a long rope and sank in Lake Placid. When a customer ordered a bottle, Cap rowed out to a buoy and filled the order. In a 1973 interview, Lola Knight recalled the rumrunning days:

Cap would get his liquor in great sacks from Grand Bahama. Many a night I would haul those sacks of liquor up the beach to the car and take it into town to Cap's customers . . . Scared? We were never scared. I'm not afraid of the devil himself, and neither was Cap.

By 1926 Cap decided to settle near Tom at the Hillsboro Inlet. He built a small store on a spit of land in Wahoo Bay just opposite the lighthouse. Around that time Cap met a young man from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Albert Hasis, age 16, who had also run away from home and come to Florida to seek his fortune. Cap and Al quickly became friends. A father-son relationship developed that endured the rest of their lives. The 1926 and 1928 hurricanes caused severe damage to the area and convinced Cap that his location at the inlet was too vulnerable. In 1928 he moved inland approximately half a mile to the present site on a peninsula bordered by the Intracoastal Waterway on the east and Lake Placid on the west. Cap bought a barge in Miami for about \$100 which reportedly was used by Flagler during the construction of the Overseas Railroad to Key West. With Al's help Cap beached the barge by floating it ashore on a high tide. The barge was stripped of its iron fittings and the cabin and machinery were removed and sold as scrap. Dade County pine from the





Cap's Place in 1928.

newly opened Pompano Lumber Company was used to build an enclosed structure on top of the barge. By 1929 Club Unique was open for business.

The restaurant was an immediate success and lived up to its name in several ways. One reason for its popularity was the delicious and unusual food. Club Unique offered the freshest seafood: all types of fish, crab, lobster, grouper chowder, and green turtle steak. A specialty of the house, hearts of palm salad, was made from Sabal Palm trees imported from the Everglades around Lake Okeechobee. Turtle egg pancakes were served with guava jelly, and homemade seagrape jelly accompanied hot rolls.

In addition to an outstanding menu, Club Unique offered select guests the added attraction of gambling, which was illegal in Florida at the time. Private memberships to the "supper club" were sold for twenty-five cents. Slot machines lined the hallway between the dining rooms and kitchen. A Wheel of Fortune hung in the bar, complete with curtained alcoves for private dining. Other games of chance included blackjack, dice games, *chemin de fer* tables and a roulette wheel. During the 1930s, gambling interests who controlled the action told Cap to "spruce up the place." Cap laid red carpeting in the front dining room and it

became known as the Poinsettia Room. The money counting room was located at the south end of the Poinsettia Room with a private exit to the east. Although insects are often troublesome in South Florida, screens were seldom used. Windows were covered, however, with dark cloth to keep out prying eyes.

Another reason for Club Unique's popularity was its remote location and rustic atmosphere. Originally the restaurant was accessible only by water. Until 1953 the main entrance to the restaurant was from Hillsboro Beach, to the east across the Intracoastal. Guests flashed their car lights to signal an employee who paddled a rowboat across the waterway

and transported them back to the restaurant. Once guests arrived at the island retreat, they were ushered into dining rooms filled with souvenirs and artifacts collected by Cap. Fishnets served as curtains and parts of ships, rope, driftwood and harpoons hung haphazardly from the ceilings. The walls were lined with shark jaws, rattlesnake skins, and Cap's collections of mugs and coins. Al built the bar, made of bamboo from the Everglades and polished wood from the decks of ships. The bar is dominated by a large, carved wooden bow-sprit from a Spanish galleon, and other curios scavenged from the sea.



Al Hasis behind the bar he built at Caps Place.



Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill ate in the yellow room at Cap's Place in January 1942.

As much a part of the original decor as the wooden bow-sprit, Chef Sylvester Love came to Cap's Place in 1940. He began as a dishwasher and worked his way up to chef. Cap taught him the "special way" of Knight cooking and each meal was always prepared to order.

Perhaps the most famous visitors to Cap's Place arrived in January, 1942. Prime Minister Winston Churchill and President Franklin D. Roosevelt held a series of secret war conferences at the Hillsboro Beach estate of then Secretary of State Edward R. Stettinius. Among those attending the strategy sessions were General George Marshall, Lord Beaverbrook, Admiral William "Bull" Halsey and other high officials. The Stettinius Villa was located across the Intracoastal, on the ocean side, just a short walk from Cap's boat landing. Cap was asked to cater food and deliver groceries to the dignitaries. On one occasion, Churchill and Roosevelt dined at Cap's Place. Captain Bruce Bennet supervised the logistics of transporting Churchill, Roosevelt (and his wheelchair), and the rest of the entourage in a boat to the restaurant. Bennet's greatest fear was overloading the boat or tipping it over. The guests dined in the "yellow room" and enjoyed a meal cooked by Sylvester and served by Cap in his bib overalls and denim shirt. No doubt Cap offered Roosevelt and Churchill a refreshing change from the stress of a world at war.

Cap's Place was popular with local residents and tourists alike. Among the celebrities who dined there were artists, sports figures, movie stars and socially prominent people. A partial list includes: Joe DiMaggio, Susan Hayward, Casey Stengel, Jack Dempsey, James Montgomery Flagg, Kate Smith, Myrna Loy, Henry Flagler, George Jessel, George Harrison and the

Vanderbilt Family. Among the many guests during 1945 was a young woman named Patricia McBride, on vacation from Minneapolis. Pat met and fell in love with Al Hasis and within weeks they were married. Al and Pat made their home in one of several cottages built by William Kester, a wealthy real estate developer. They both took jobs at Cap's, which marked the beginning of a lifelong involvement with the restaurant. Cap and Lola built a house on stilts over the water, which is now a boathouse, and called it home for more than thirty years.

Cap had other business interests besides the restaurant. He ran a fleet of commercial fishing boats which handled an estimated half a million pounds of fish a year. Cap owned a wholesale fish market in Pompano and managed a fish camp in the Everglades until the late 1940s.

During the next decade Cap's Place began to feel the effects of political and developmental pressures. Gambling continued to be popular throughout the 1940s, reaching a high point during "the Hot Money Winter of 1946-47." However, a congressional investigation of illegal activities in Florida caused Senator Estes Kefauver to "put the clamp on casinos" in 1951. This action put an end to the weekly visits of mobster Meyer Lansky and his men to collect their percentage of the winnings at Cap's Place.

In 1954 several local business men made an offer to buy out Cap and transform the island into the area's first yacht club. The project was tentatively called the Hillsboro Yacht Club and boasted 30 dues-paying members. A *Miami Herald* article reported that Cap would be named "honorary commodore" and be allowed to operate his restaurant until 1955. It is doubt-

ful whether Cap would have sold out, but the developers disagreed among themselves and the proposal was withdrawn.

During the early 1950s, developer R. E. Bateman conceived the City of Lighthouse Point from "a jungle and a blueprint." The land was originally owned by William Kester who sold it in 1951. In 1956 the area's 107 residents voted to incorporate as a town. The town became the City of Lighthouse Point in 1957, fifty years after the founding of the Hillsboro Lighthouse. When the second section of the city was platted in 1953, Cap Knight Bayou was officially labeled on the map.

Cap's name made the newspapers in 1962 when he was arrested and charged with possession of illegal turtle eggs. According to the *Ft. Lauderdale News*, "the law stormed ashore at Cap's Place and conservation agents raided the restaurant where they uncovered 240 turtle eggs," used in the making of pancakes. Although turtles were listed as an endangered species, Lola Knight told reporters that Cap had been serving them for 36 years. Cap was released on \$100 bond and "gave his word" to the agents that he would not buy turtle eggs again.

Cap died in 1964 at the age of ninety-three and is buried in the Pompano Beach Cemetery. Lola, Pat and Al continued operating the restaurant and the Hasis Family eventually assumed ownership. Lola retired in the mid 1970s and moved to Palatka, but maintained an interest in the restaurant until her death in January, 1989.

Cap's Place has a personality all its own. It has stood through the pioneer days, Roaring Twenties, Prohibition, the Depression, world wars, and times of peace. Cap's Place echoes the voices of the many celebrities and local folks who have dined there. Even the buildings represent early settlers' ingenuity in adapting to the climate with locally available materials. Known as Vernacular architecture, this style relies on the builder's experience to create a useful and practical building. Cap Knight was a practical man who played an important role in the area's history. Described by historian Wesley Stout as an "outstanding character of Broward County," Cap Knight was truly a legend in his own time.

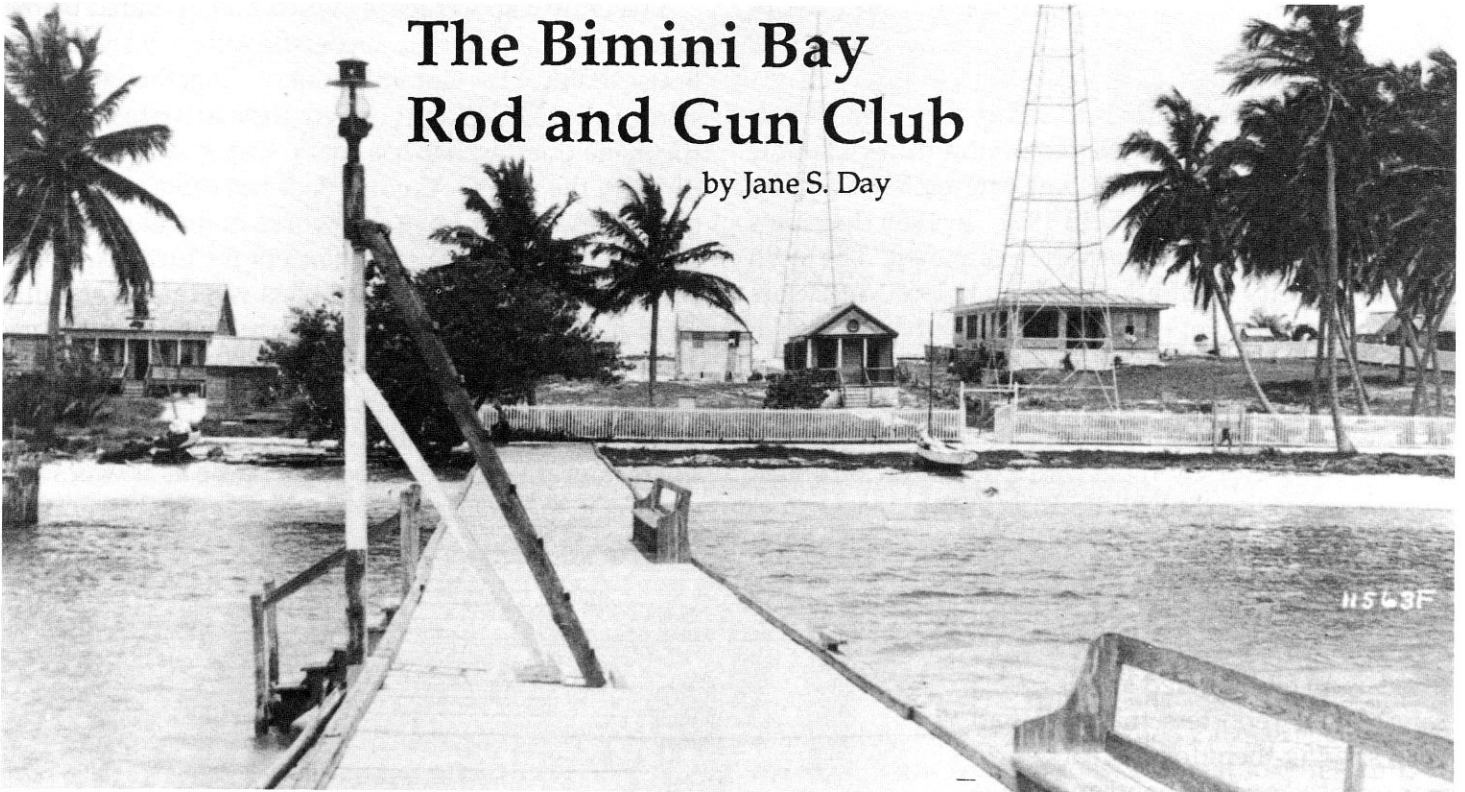
Presently Cap's Place is owned and operated by the oldest Hasis son, Tom, a successful attorney and Lighthouse Point City Commissioner. Together with his sister Talle and his brother Ted, they strive to maintain the same quality that has made Cap's such a success through the years. A motor boat has replaced the row boat but Sylvester Love still works in the kitchen. The menu is basically the same (except for turtle egg pancakes of course). Cap's Place has weathered assaults from the natural elements, governmental regulations and developmental pressures. The area around Cap's Place has recently been subdivided and extensively developed but fortunately the ambience surrounding the restaurant remains much the same as it was sixty years ago, when Pompano was just a whistle stop on Flagler's railroad.



Cap relaxing in his bib overalls in 1955.

# The Bimini Bay Rod and Gun Club

by Jane S. Day



The government dock and wireless station on Bimini. In 1919, when Tom Peters decided to build the Bimini Bay Rod and Gun Club, the island had a population of 610.

Despite the veto of President Woodrow Wilson, the United States Congress passed the Volstead Act in 1919. As the 18th Amendment to the Constitution, the Volstead Act banned the sale, manufacture or transportation of intoxicating liquors throughout the country. The act also prohibited the import and export of all beverages that contained more than one half of one per cent alcohol. For the city of Miami this created a problem. The Miami City Directory estimated that more than 150,000 tourists would visit the "Magic City" during the year 1919. Hotel owners needed a way to quench the thirst of winter visitors. Some South Floridians turned to bootlegging and rumrunning. Thomas J. Peters, "Tomato King" and owner of Miami's Halcyon Hotel, devised a more ambitious scheme. Peters and a group of friends from the Miami Anglers' Club joined forces to create the Bimini Bay Rod and Gun Club.

While the laws of the United States banned the liquor trade, the Bahamas, under British rule, suffered no such restrictions. Although many Americans were buying alcohol legally in the Bahamas and importing it illegally to the United States, Bimini Bay Rod and Gun Club promoters proposed building a resort on the island of Bimini, 45 miles east of Miami. There anyone who would cross the Gulf Stream could partake of alcoholic beverages on the right side of the law. A

*Miami Daily Metropolis* article dated July 17, 1919 summed up the motives of the Miami men who inspected the site:

One of the chief objects of the plan is to make it convenient for people at local hotels to get to a bar without transferring their winter residences to Cuba. The local hotel and apartment house contingent rather fear that Havana is going to make a much stronger competitor for Florida resorts now that the United States is dry, and they want to head off the impending rush to the "pearl of the Antilles" by enhancing the attractiveness of the British isle nearest off shore.

Bimini, Bahamas, the island closest to Miami was an economically poor outpost of the British Colonial Empire with a population in 1919 of only 610 people. The island had no tourist facilities, so to enhance Bimini's attractiveness, Tom Peters planned to build a large three-story resort with one hundred rooms on a ridge overlooking the blue waters of the Gulf Stream. The hotel grounds were to extend from the ocean side of the island to the clear protected harbor of Bimini Bay. No expense was to be spared and estimates to build the Rod and Gun Club ranged from \$80,000 to \$125,000 for the completed project. By using a tech-

nique devised by historian Donald C. Gaby to understand equivalent costs, this dollar amount is equal to a capital investment of between \$1,536,000 and \$2,400,000 in 1990 dollars. Until this time, only the yachts of the wealthy and an occasional charter from Florida, brought any visitors to the island. With the development of the Bimini Bay Rod and Gun Club, and the advent of American Prohibition, however, the sleepy character of Bimini was changed forever.

From the beginning, plans for the hotel were overly ambitious and optimistic. Early newspaper articles described a resort complete with tennis courts, walkways and gardens. Negotiations were underway to buy more land on South Bimini for a golf course. There would be gambling supervised by "Honest" John Kelly of New York and a French chef would supervise the kitchen. An orchestra was scheduled to perform in the ninety-foot ballroom. Around the ballroom was a

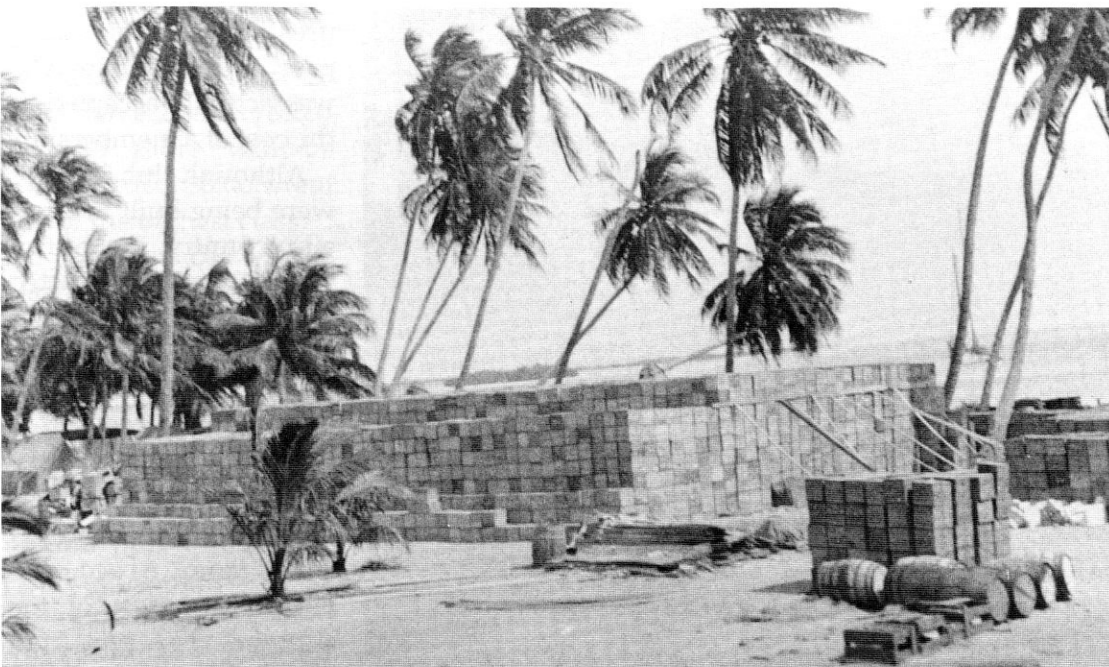


**Unloading cases of whiskey.**

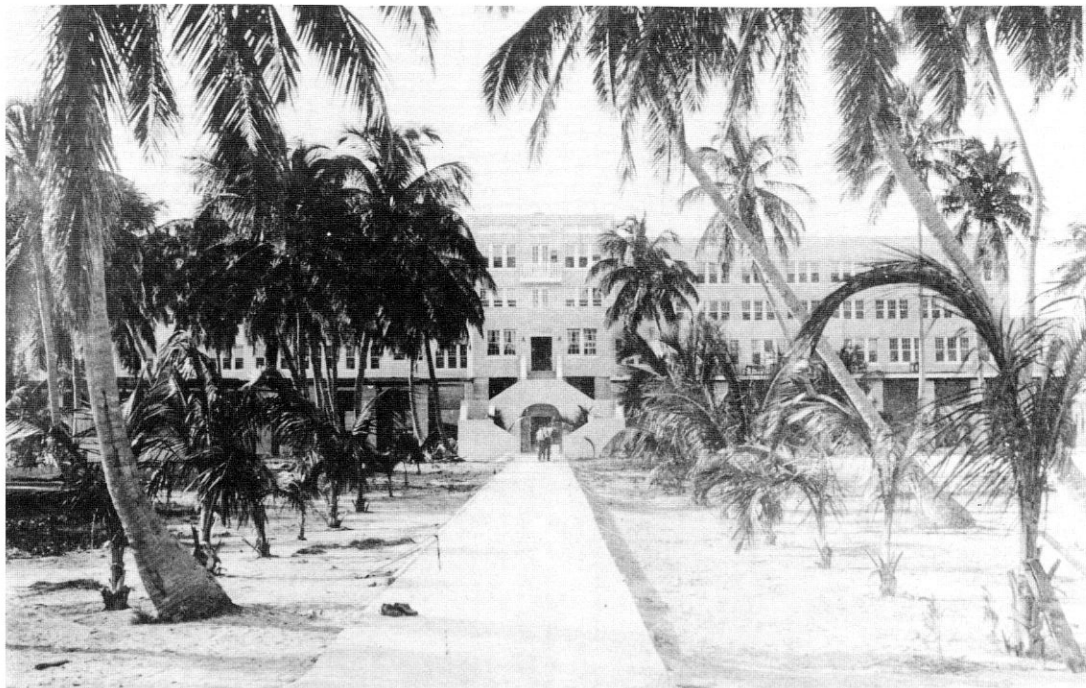
fourteen-foot dining concourse that could seat five hundred diners. The hotel would have the first ice making plant in the Bahamas. Engineering plans for the structure called for an artesian well, four electrical plants, a water filtering facility and a wireless radio station to communicate with the Halcyon Hotel in Miami.

On the grounds, sportsmen could enjoy fly fishing in a specially constructed bait casting pond and George

H. Hillman, an expert from the famous gun manufacturer, Winchester Arms, was hired to set up a rifle range, traps and archery for the guests. A suggestion was even made to stock the entire island of Bimini with game birds for the marksmen's pleasure. Someone suggested importing flamingos to beautify the hotel gardens and fisherman Charles Thompson, one of Tom Peters' partners, planned to set up an aquarium "with strange monsters



**The proprietors of the Bimini Rod and Gun Club laid in an ample supply of liquor, seen stacked here on the beach, for their guests.**



The Bimini Bay Rod and Gun Club, 1925.

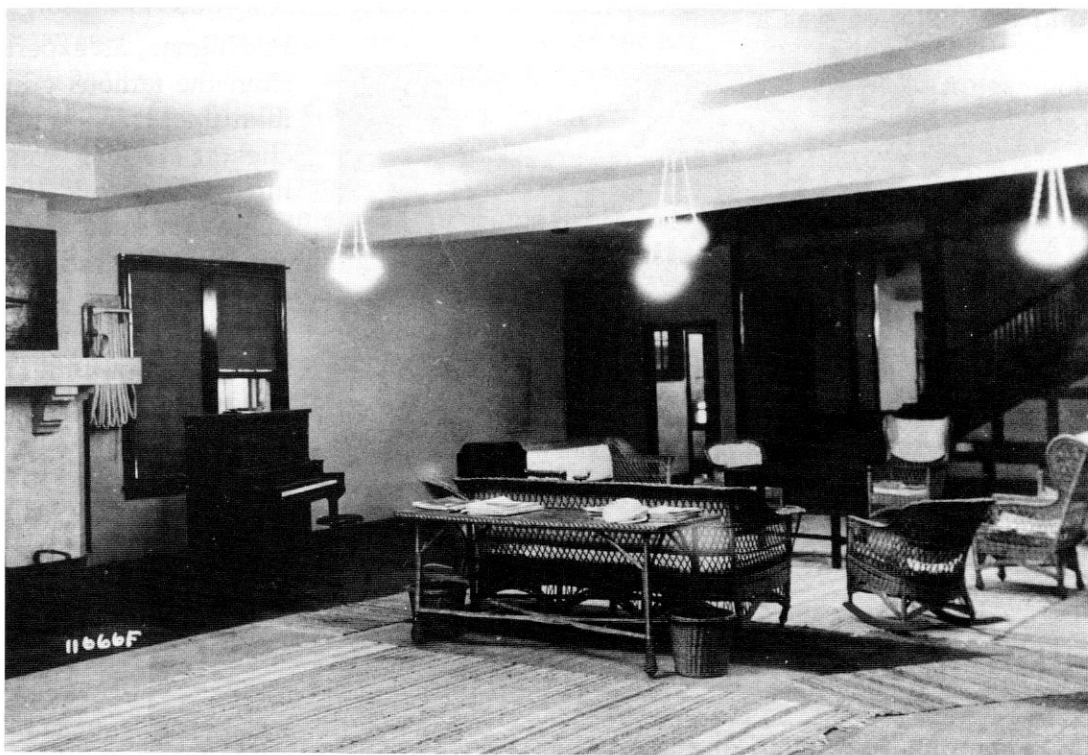
of the sea" to amuse members. With shooting, fishing, boating, tennis and golf, the *Miami Daily Metropolis* on August 20, 1919, speculated that the "Bimini Bay Rod and Gun Club would be the greatest sports center of the South Atlantic." At the start of the "Roaring Twenties" the Bimini resort had become the largest tourist project in the entire Bahamas.

Admission to the Rod and Gun Club was exclusive and memberships were limited. A charter for the group was obtained from the British government and

Buffalo, New York, had been diagnosed by his physicians as having a terminal disease and given two years to live. After a trip to Bimini, Treat was reexamined and told that his prognosis had changed and his life expectancy was increased to three years. Mr. Treat attributed this improvement to his island vacation where he "partook of the conch broth and climate and came away much heavier and healthier." He immediately applied for ten memberships in the Bimini Bay Rod and Gun Club for himself and his friends. By January of 1920 the

Club had received over 790 applications. No figures are available, however, to substantiate who was actually accepted or the cost of a membership.

Although club facilities were being built in a foreign country, the principals of the operation acted as if Bimini were a suburb of Miami. The need for passports was eliminated by a special request to Congress and the Bahamian government. Some lumber for the project came from Abaco, Bahama, but most of the supplies were sent from South Florida. The kitchen equipment ar-



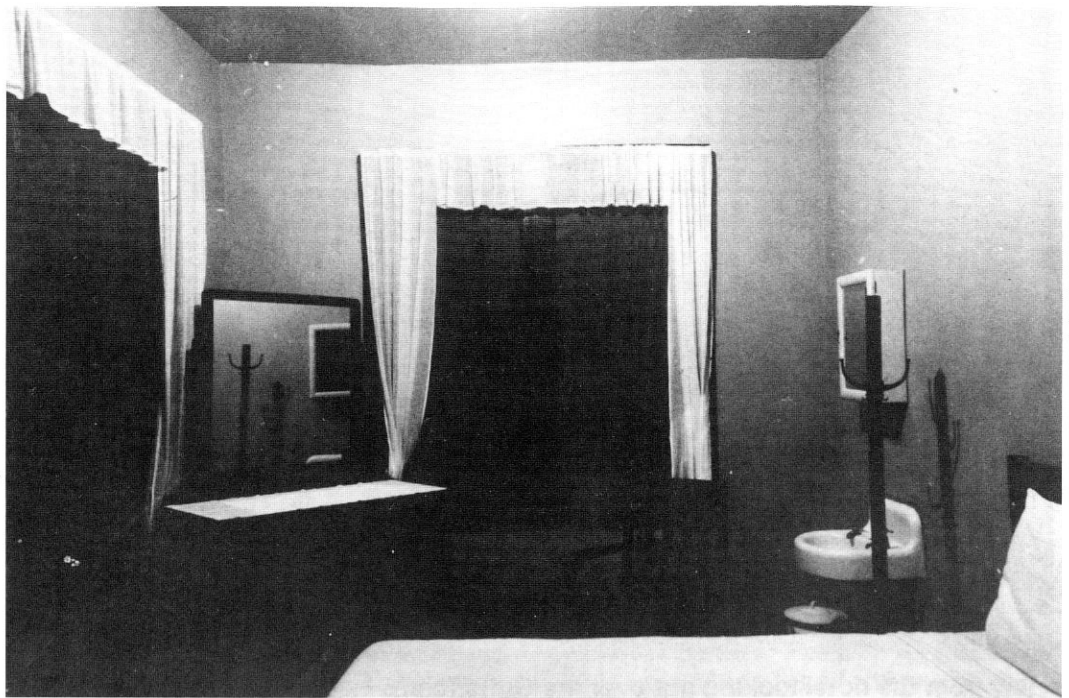
The rattan furniture and up right piano in the lobby of the Bimini Bay Rod and Gun Club.

rived in Bimini on a four masted schooner from Miami supervised by Minnie March, the manager of Tom Peters' Halcyon Hotel. The officers of the club made inspection trips to Bimini once a week to check on construction and the payroll was delivered weekly by seaplane from Miami. In February of 1920, the *Miami Daily Metropolis* noted that "the (payroll) trip to Bimini was made in less time than would have been required for a swift automobile to go to Fort Lauderdale and return." Even Miami's 1920s census required a trip to Bimini.

*The Metropolis* reported on January 24, 1920, that "one hundred and twenty-five enumeration blanks will be carried to Bimini for the Miami workmen who are over on the island building the new clubhouse of the Bimini Bay Rod and Gun Club."

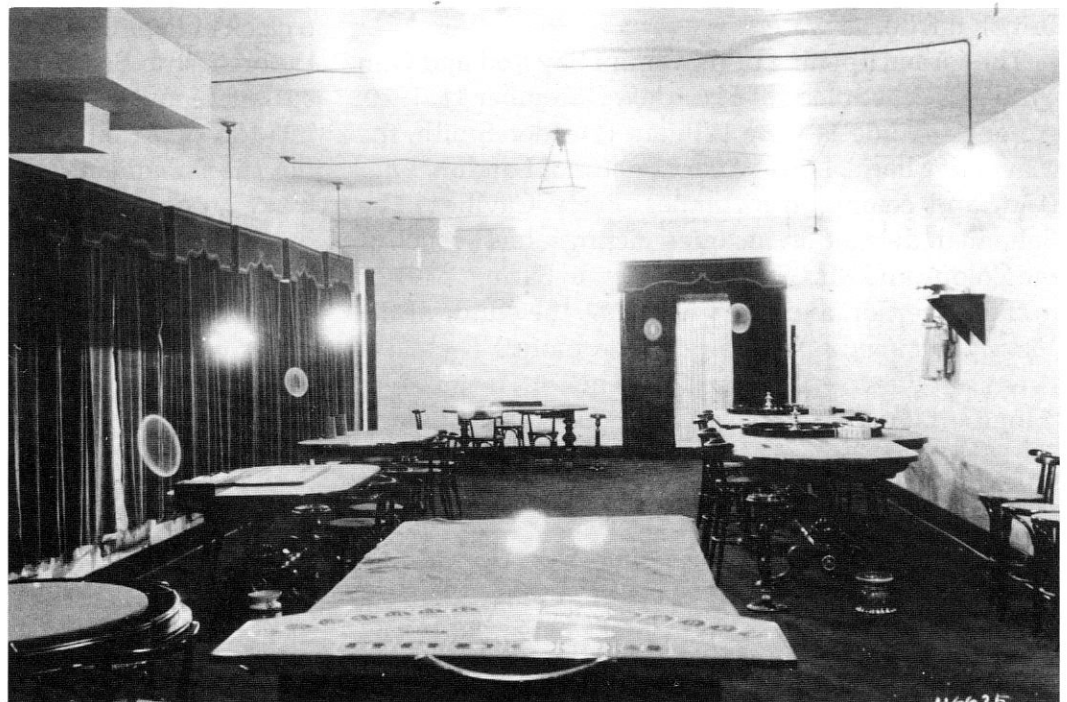
Despite the flurry of activity on the Bimini site, construction delays caused by lack of materials and bad weather postponed the official opening of the Club. Even though the building was not finished, anxious members arrived anyway. *The Nassau Guardian* reported that "20 tents have been erected and 50 more will be shipped to construct a tent city of the highest class. . . All conveniences will be had in these tents, there being floors, telephones and electric lights as well as all other things that make for convenience."

Liquor was also being stacked on the beach at Bimini, and throughout prohibition the Rod and Gun Club was linked to rumrunning. Charles Vincenti, President of



One of the 100 guest rooms Tom Peters built overlooking the Gulfstream.

Baltimore's Triaca Liquor Company, imported 36,000 cases and 12,000 barrels of whiskey to Bimini in 1919 in order to get them out of the "dry" United States. With the permission of Tom Peters and the colonial government, Vincenti opened a liquor warehouse on the grounds of the Rod and Gun Club. His stay in the islands, however, was short. In March of 1920 while working in Bimini, Vincenti was assaulted by U.S.



"Honest" John Kelly would supervise the gambling at the Bimini Bay Rod and Gun Club.



View from the hotel looking out over the Gulfstream.

Internal Revenue agents and kidnapped to Miami. A boat chase ensued and club member Charles Thompson overtook the revenue men twelve miles from the Florida coast. Despite his expert navigation, Thompson was driven off at gun point by the U.S. agents and Vincenti was transferred to jail in Baltimore. The British Colonial government was outraged. No extradition papers had been served and the U.S. government was clearly acting inside the Bahamas. Eventually Vincenti was freed and American agents were told to stay out of British territorial waters.

The formal opening of the Bimini Bay Rod and Gun Club was scheduled for Saturday, December 11, 1920. Among the guests were William Prudden Smith, the Mayor of Miami, Lord Waldorf Astor of London, England, and champion swimmer, Percy Caville. The Bahamian delegation included Acting Chief Justice of the Colony and Mrs. Soloman, Captain Baring, advisor to the Governor, and Mary Moseley, the editor of the *Nassau Guardian*. Of course, club promoters Thomas J. Peters and Charles Thompson attended. The gambler "Honest" John Kelly and his wife arrived "accompanied by their Pekinese dog, which conducted itself with becoming dignity on its first airplane trip to the island from Miami." *The Metropolis* published a formal announcement of the opening and suggested that despite Bimini's island atmosphere "business suits or full dress will be appropriate for ladies and gentlemen." The menu for the opening banquet included caviar, green turtle, native lobster cutlets, milk fed chicken, asparagus tips, hearts of lettuce and petit fours with Neapolitan cream. After dinner, guests were offered demi-

tasse, cordials, mints and cigars. The price was ten dollars.

Following this Grand Opening celebration, the Club planned a week of sporting events: a light and heavy tackle fishing contest, trapshooting, bait casting, archery, tennis, and even a harpooning contest under the supervision of Captain Charles Thompson. The program of events also listed amusements for unathletic guests. These included the Dance of the Palms performed in the ballroom, a native swimming con-

test and high diving exhibition, and an evening of open air native campfire dances and folk songs.

In spite of such lavish plans, the festivities at the Bimini Bay Rod and Gun Club did not go completely as promised. Mary Mosely reported in the *Nassau Guardian* that the dedication ceremony scheduled for Saturday night never took place. The boat, *Mystery J*, did not arrive from Miami with the orchestra and many of the guests until about 8 p.m. The ceremony had been scheduled for 4 o'clock followed by the banquet at 6 o'clock but neither of these events could begin without the orchestra. Because of the delay the formalities were cut short and the dinner was late. A more serious incident occurred on Sunday when the seaplane carrying the Bahamian delegation back to Nassau had to make an emergency landing on water. Although no one was hurt the accident proved to be an ominous sign for the Bimini Bay Rod and Gun Club.

Despite the luxurious building, and the money that was invested, the business aspects of running the Club had serious problems. Bimini itself is made up of two islands, North and South Bimini, that are separated by a channel which is approximately 100 yards wide. Beyond the channel and between the two islands is a protected harbor. When construction started in 1919, the channel leading into the harbor was only nine feet deep. Club owners asked the British Colonial government to deepen the channel to sixteen feet so that larger yachts could enter the protected water. There is no evidence, however, that this work was ever completed. In fact, in 1924, Commissioner Henry Duncombe wrote in his report to Nassau that, "The deepening of the



harbour entrance commenced the first part of the year which proved to be a complete failure." Failure to deepen the entrance restricted the size of boats that could enter and hampered the delivery of supplies and passengers, particularly in bad weather.

Promoters of the Bimini Bay Rod and Gun Club also attempted to solve the mosquito problem. In order to maximize use of the Club, owners wanted to make it a year round resort. To do this they needed to eliminate the pesky insects that descended on the island when the summer winds were calm. Again, reports in the press were encouraging:

"The use of the island as a summer resort will be made possible by the eradication of the mosquito, the sand fly and the house fly under a contract with J.B. Cromley, who was a leading member of the force which made the famous mosquito eradication in Panama... His work on the island has been so successful that he has been recommended to the British government as chief of sanitation for the entire Bahama group."

In actual fact, there was no solution and the mosquitoes remained.

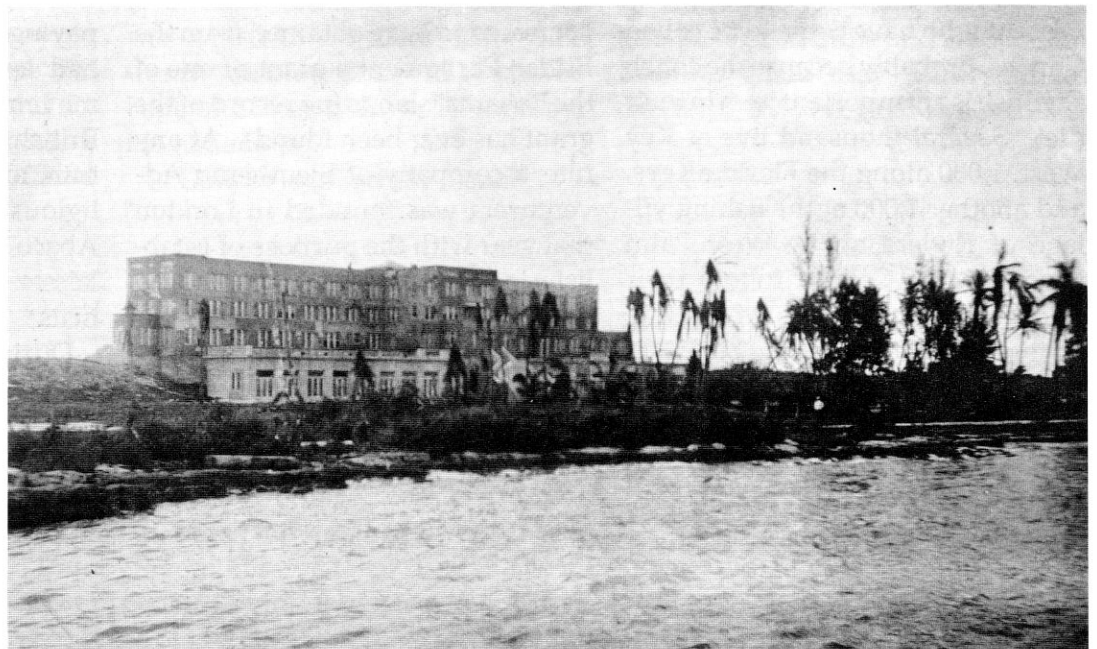
Finding transportation that would be reliable in adverse weather was the most serious obstacle the Club had to overcome. Peters and his group had to make travel to Bimini inexpensive and comfortable if they ever hoped to fill a one hundred room hotel. Several ships were bought and run by the Club while others were operated by independent companies such as the Miami-Nassau Transportation and Trading Co. A regular daily schedule was established immediately, but in 1920 the combined capacity of the two most advertised ships was only fifty passengers. Other boats were added to the routes over the years but the hotel was never filled. In 1925 the round trip fare to Bimini by boat was advertised in the *Metropolis* for \$15. Although this was considerably less than the \$40 fare to Havana it was still expensive. When

converted to 1990 dollars the fare becomes \$288. Bimini was a rich man's resort in 1920 and the hotel was too large to cater to only this elite group.

The ocean was also an obstacle to tourism during the winter season. Van Campen Heilner, an Associate Editor of *Field and Stream* magazine who lived on Bimini for a time during the twenties, wrote in his book *Salt Water Fishing*, "Those that came (to the Rod and Gun Club) were so seasick after several hours of crossing the Gulf Stream that they immediately went to bed to recuperate and when they got up it was time to go home."

Seaplanes became an alternate means of transportation. Thomas J. Peters made one of the first commercial flights to Bimini on December 3, 1919, bringing greetings to Bimini's Commissioner Sands from Mayor William Prudden Smith of Miami. *The Miami Herald* noted that this was "the first time that the local customs and immigration offices had been asked to officiate in the clearing of a flying machine for a foreign port." Realizing the importance of seaplane transportation the Rod and Gun Club bought their own plane. Called the *Big Fish*, their new seaplane was painted with fishing scenes and was scheduled to make two trips to Bimini daily. The Aero-Marine West Indies Airways also advertised trips to Bimini three times a week. Their plane the, *Columbus*, carried ten passengers in "two cabins with upholstered wicker chairs, removable plate glass port holes, mahogany paneled cabins, electric lights and convenient ladder for embarking and disembarking." -According to the company's advertisement, the

(Continued on page 27.)



Mosquitoes, transportation problems, and finally the 1926 Hurricane spelled the end of the Bimini Bay Rod and Gun Club.

# Keys Folk

by Stetson Kennedy

## Editor's Comment

In the late fall of 1989 a package arrived at the Historical Museum of Southern Florida, attention Editor *South Florida History Magazine*. It contained one of the University Presses of Florida's recent releases, a reprint of Stetson Kennedy's *Palmetto Country*. First published in 1942 as part of the American Folkways Series, edited by Erskine Caldwell, *Palmetto Country* continues to be a fine exploration of Florida and Floridians. *SFHM* was given permission to reprint a section of the book for our readers. The photographs are from the Historical Museum of Southern Florida's collection. The words are Stetson Kennedy's.

## Conch Talk

*Conchy Joes, all they know  
Is after supper to the crawls they go, Talkin  
bout fish and turtle too,  
Mark my word, you'll find it true.*

*Went a-fishin, fished all night;  
Grapple got hooked, fish wouldn't bite;  
Hard times, nothin to do—  
Lost my grapple and mainsail too.*

In South Florida there are some 5,000 Anglo-Saxons of Bahamian descent who have come to be called Conchs, probably because the conch shellfish is an important item in their diet. Several thousand live at Key West, 1,000 along the Florida Keys, and another 1,000 at the fishing village of Riviera above West Palm Beach. Most Conchs follow their traditional occupations of fishing, sponging, turtling, or boat building, but in Key West they also hold a host of other jobs—from that of mayor on down. Any Key Wester likes being called a Conch—provided the context is not derogatory.

In some ways the story of the Conchs is typical of the region's fisherfolk, yet it also has many exceptional aspects. Their saga began in 1646 when Captain William Sayle,

oft-time Governor of the Bermudas, professed to have obtained from the British Parliament a grant of one of the Bahama islands (no record of the grant has ever been found). At any rate, a company of Eleutheran Adventurers was founded in London that year with the purpose of establishing a colony in the New World "where every man might enjoy his own opinion or religion without control or question."

Captain Sayle led the Adventurers to the Bahamian island which had been named Segatoo by Columbus. They changed its name to Eleuthera, but it later became known as Abaco. Thus was founded, forty-two years before Jamestown, one of the first Anglo-Saxon settlements in America. Probably no colony was

ever established with broader (more anarchic) concepts of freedom.

Most of the Adventurers were cockney fisherfolk, and their fishing and turtling expeditions carried them to many islands of the West Indies and along the Florida coast and Keys. At first they sold their catches at Havana, and later at Key West. Settlers in New England once became fearful of the Adventurers' welfare, and sent them a cargo of food. In return the Adventurers loaded the ship with braziletto wood, which was sold by the New Englanders and the money donated to an institution which later became Harvard University.

As time passed there came to be many Negroes on Abaco, many of them runaway slaves from West Indian plantations. Later, when England abolished slavery, British ships dumped the human cargoes of captured slave ships onto Abaco and other Bahamian isles. Considerable miscegenation between the whites and blacks took place.

One of the oldest stories about how the Conchs got their name says that it was given to them when they stoutly told the British authorities that they would "eat conchs" before paying the taxes which the Crown had levied against them. As the movement for independence of the British West Indies gained momentum, many revolutionaries and religious zealots sought refuge in Abaco, contributing further to the laissez-faire propensities of the colonists.

During the American Revolution, Abaco and other Bahaman isles received a large influx of Tories from the rebelling colonies. In 1783 the British commissary-general at New York reported that "near a thousand souls" were ready to embark for Abaco, and other refugees left at the same time for Cat Island. Later in the year, eight companies of British militia were evacuated from New



York and transported to the Bahamas, And no less than 1,500 British Loyalists left St. Augustine for Abaco and new Providence islands.

A popular factual legend recalls how the Bahamas were recovered from the Spanish in 1783. Major Andrew de Veaux, a provincial officer from South Carolina, sailed on his own initiative from St. Augustine with two brigs, each mounted with twelve guns and manned by "fifty reckless and desperate adventurers and a few negroes." Arriving off Nassau at night, they slipped quietly ashore and overpowered the Spanish garrison in the fort. This was done by rowing ashore with all fifty of their men, and then setting up straw dummies in the fort. The men then hid in the bottom of the landing boats, which were rowed back to the ships; out of sight on the seaward side of the vessels, the men sat upright again and rowed back to shore. This process was repeated many times, much to the apprehension of the watchful Spanish forces in the distance.

When De Veaux ordered the Spanish governor to surrender, the Governor first refused, but changed his mind when De Veaux sent a cannonball over the Governor's mansion. The Spaniards were 500 strong, had seventy cannon and six galleys. The adventurers, having captured Nassau without official

British sanction, hoisted a flag with a conch shell rampant on a field of canvas. Ironically, nine days before this incident Spain had signed a treaty ceding the Bahamas back to England.

During one such unsettled period when the ownership status of the Bahamas was in doubt, an American ship stopped at one of the smaller islands. Not knowing what flag to raise, the islanders returned the American salute by hoisting a conch shell on a pole—and ever since then they have been called Conchs."

Another bit of "Conch talk" tells a tale of the Civil War, during which Key West enjoyed the distinction of being the only Southern city to remain in Federal hands for the duration. Many Key West Conchs served as blockade runners for the Confederacy; but with most of the Federal fleet stationed at the Island City, they had a difficult time. Altogether, 149 blockade runners were captured and brought into the harbor, and the consequent bottling up of the Gulf was undoubtedly a large factor in the ultimate defeat of the Confederate States. The story tells of a Conch blockade runner who was hailed by a Federal ship. The Conch displayed no flag, so the Federal officer demanded to know his nationality.

"Conch," replied the Conch.

Being new to the area, the Federal officer thought the Conchs must be some breed of West Indian. Anxious to avoid difficulties with any independent nation, he allowed the blockade runner to proceed.

Probably that was the closest the Conchs have ever come to achieving national identity. Yet Bahaman postage stamps continue to bear the imprint of a conch shell.

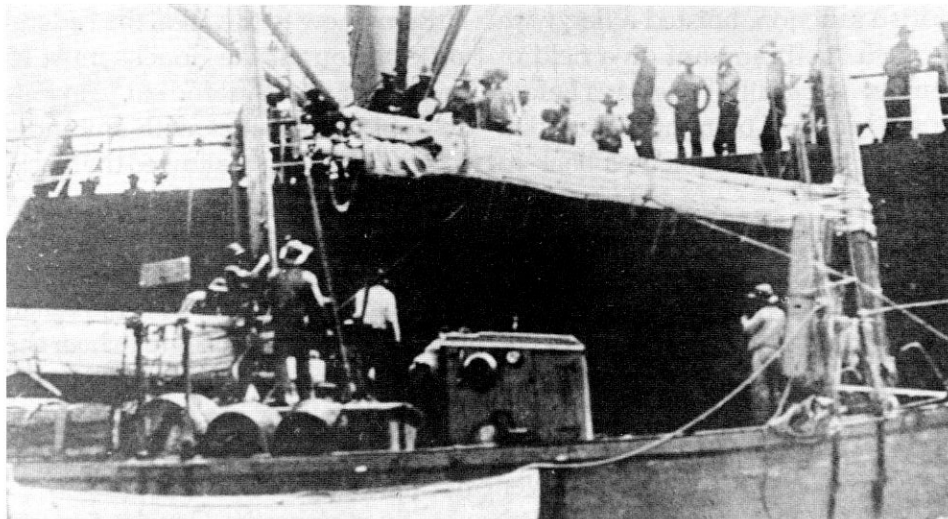
### "Wreck Ashore!"

Ever since the Conchs first arrived in the Bahamas they have been identified with the salvaging of wrecked ships. As more and more ships ran afoul of the jagged reefs along the Florida Straits, the Conchs migrated to the Florida Keys, establishing their headquarters at Key West, Tavernier, Marathon, and Plantation Key.

Besides wrecking, they fished, cut mahogany, and cultivated pineapples and their favorite fruits "sour and dillies" (limes and sapodillas). The fragrant half-wild Mexican limes they grew were in such great demand as a scurvy preventive on sailing vessels that the ships were known as "lime juicers." The limes were also pickled in brine and shipped to Boston, where they were sold to children. By 1942 the Keys were



Key West, 1881.



**Wreckers waiting to begin salvaging a vessel.**

supplying ninety percent of the limes grown in the United States.

The Conch settlements on the Keys were completely isolated except by boat transportation until the completion of the Overseas Railroad in 1912, and until that time some of the natives had never seen ice. The Conchs developed a means of communicating from key to key by blowing plaintive blasts on conch-shell bugles, and it was in this way they let it be known that a ship had gone on a reef.

The cry "Wreck ashore!" was a familiar sound in old Key West, where a close watch of the sea was kept from the miradors on the housetops. Echoed from quarter to quarter, the cry seemed to electrify the population, and the streets rapidly filled with Conchs running to their boats. There was keen competition among the owners of wrecking vessels because—according to the laws of salvage—the first captain who could get a line aboard a stranded ship was appointed wrecking master and was awarded the largest share of the spoils. Often the race of the wrecking fleet was more exciting than any regatta, as the various craft vied with one another in the teeth of heavy gales.

The accusation has often been made that wreckers in various

parts of the world are little more than pirates and that they deliberately lured ships onto reefs. There seems to be no evidence that this ever occurred among the Florida wreckers, who are entitled to credit for the lives they saved.

Wrecking had a profound influence on Key West, for the ships came from the four corners of the earth, their holds loaded with everything that the commerce of the world afforded. The city became a bazaar of salvaged goods, and the colorful auctions attracted merchants from Havana, Mobile, New Orleans, Charleston, and New York. In 1846 alone the wreckers recovered \$1,600,000 worth of shipwrecked property. In those days Conch women were frequently attired in costly but water-stained silks, and their homes still contain salvaged articles.

Key West's most popular legend recalls how, in the heyday of the wreckers, the good Squire Egan was conducting services on a Sunday evening in the upstairs auditorium of the county courthouse. As he held forth in all earnestness, he suddenly saw, from his vantage point in the pulpit, a large vessel go hard aground on a reef.

As master of the wrecking vessel *Godspeed*, Squire Egan was very anxious to terminate his sermon

and get to his ship. But knowing that a number of the wrecking masters were in his congregation, he gave no sign of his discovery, but instead waxed more eloquent. Exhorting his congregation with great vehemence, he left the pulpit and strode down the aisle. Upon reaching the doorway he quoted the Scripture as follows: "Know ye not that they which run in the race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run that ye may obtain!" Then with a loud cry of "Wreck ashore!" he dashed for the waterfront, with the other wrecking masters hot on his heels. But to the *Godspeed* went the prize.

Wrecking reached its peak during the first several decades of the nineteenth century and continued to be a profitable enterprise until steam replaced canvas, and until the system of reef lights began blinking warnings to mariners in 1852. Yet today the reefs are as sharp and treacherous as ever, and one battered wrecking tug occasionally leaves her berth to rush to the aid of a stranded vessel.

The sinking of numerous United Nations' ships along the Florida coast by Axis submarines caused a revival of the wrecking business, and the wartime prices paid for scrap metal also inspired the Conchs to salvage old shipwrecks.

### **Sponger Money**

For decades Key West was the center of the United States sponge fishing industry, but that position was captured by Tarpon Springs when the Greek spongers there began using modern diving equipment. Key West's Conchs adamantly cling to the hooking method of sponging, in the belief that the diving shoes worn by the Greeks destroy the fertility of the sponge beds. Greek divers who ventured into the Keys area had

their boats burned by the militant Conchs and the Florida Legislature eventually prohibited diving for sponges in Key waters.

In 1940 and at intervals thereafter, a blight destroyed up to ninety percent of the Key sponges. Though the U.S. Bureau of Fisheries succeeded in determining the microscopic organism which caused the blight, some Conch spongers preferred to believe that the blight was caused by a crystalline slime, by streams of "black water" washed by heavy rains from the Everglades, or by underground streams of fresh water released into the Gulf by volcanic action.

With characteristic individualism, the Conchs have refused to organize a cooperative market such as the one which gives the Greek spongers their great marketing advantage. When World War II brought a construction boom to Key West, the comparatively attractive wages led many old-timers to abandon sponging and accept laboring jobs for the first time in their lives.

But in the old days the small coffee shops along the Conch Town waterfront resounded with the singing of:

#### *Sponger Money*

*Sponger money never done, sponger money,  
Look at my hand—my hand look new,  
Cause I don't want no other money  
But sponger money.*

*Look in my trunk and see what's there, sponger money,  
One hundred dollars was my share, sponger money,  
I'm gonna take away your wors, sponger money,  
I'm gonna buy you fine new clothes, sponger money.*

*Then when we go out on the street, sponger money,  
You'll be lookin nice and neat, sponger money,  
Then all the boys will envy me, sponger money,  
Then all the girls will fall for me, sponger money.*

*Money don't make me you know, sponger money,  
Sponger money ever flow, sponger money,  
Tell ev'rybody in town, sponger money,  
Me and my gal gon dance en down, sponger money.*

*Sponger money never done, sponger money,  
Cigarmakers on the bum, sponger money,  
But I'll treat them just the same, sponger money,  
Keep them boys from feelin shame, sponger money.*

*Look in the corner, see what's there, sponger money,  
Champagne, whiskey, gin, and beer, sponger money,  
Tell ev'rybody that you see, sponger money,  
We're gonna have a shivaree, sponger money.*

Negroes who were spongers in the Bahamas have added such Negroid verses as these to the song:

*Round and round the barroom,  
Foolin round the barroom,  
Runnin round the barroom,  
Them Nassau gals like tigers,  
Tigers, tigers, tigers  
They tear you down like tigers,  
Tigers for sponger money.*

*Grate your potato, grate your potato,  
Put a piece of pumpkin in it,  
To make it yellow, sponger money.  
Baygrass was the weddin bed,  
Seaweed was the bolster, Sand bank was the pillow,  
Them Nassua gals like tigers,  
Tigers for sponger money.*

Though Negroes are tacitly barred from doing their own sponging in Key West, a number of them—natives of the Bahamas—are commercial fishermen. They continue to sing their Bahaman songs, which, like those of convicts, often reflect their longing to go home:

#### *Hoist Up The John B. Sail*

*Hoist up the John B. sail,  
See how her mainsail set,  
Send for the Captain ashore.*

*Captain and Mate got drunk,  
Open the people's trunk,  
Stole all the people's junk,*

*The Captain raise cain up town,  
Up come Policeman Brown,  
Who took the Captain down.*

*The Judge he was sorta kind,  
Scold him for drinkin wine;  
"Let you off light this time."*

*The Captain told the Mate,  
At nine o'clock to lock the gate;  
Run, run before it's too late!*

Chorus:

*Let us go home, oh, let us go home,  
To see my Darlin, let us go home.*

As boat builders the Bahamans—both black and white—are justly famous, particularly for that seaworthy creation, the Nassau dinghy.

### *Bellamena*

*Bellamena, Bellamena,  
Bellamena in the harbor;  
Gonna put Bellamena on the dock,  
Gonna paint her bottom black, black.*

*Oh, the Mystery, oh, the Mystery,  
That boat she tote the whiskey;  
Gonna put the Mystery on the dock,  
Gonna paint her bottom black, black.*

*Oh, the Maisie, oh, the Maisie,  
That boat she sets me crazy;  
Gonna put Maisie on the dock,  
Gonna paint her bottom black, black.*

Man's difficulty in obtaining a house and land has inspired this striking comparison with the crab:

*Crab is a better man than man  
Cause he got his house and land;*

*Crab don't need no helping hand  
To get his house and land;  
Crab can play about the sand  
And build his house and land.*

Insects make their inevitable appearance in:

*Mosquito had a spree,  
Sandfly went to sea;  
Poker [gallinipper] stand behind the door,  
And throw breakers on me.*

### **Conch Eats Conch and Grunts**

On days "when the wind is walkin right" Key waters are "as crystal as gin"—to use expressions of the Conchs. On such days conchs can be sighted at great depths on the sea bottom. Conch spongers, peering through their glass bottom buckets, are able to bring up conchs with their sponge hooks from depths as great as sixty feet. But almost all Conchs are excellent swimmers and capture their conchs by diving for them.

Some prefer to eat their conch raw, as soon as it is caught. With a chisel or screwdriver they pierce the



**This Keys family posed for Claude Matlack's camera, circa 1930.**

shell near the spiral tip and sever the muscle that binds the flesh to the shell. Grasping the protruding "heel" of the conch, they draw out the mass of flesh. Strips of the best parts are pared off and dipped over the side of the boat to season them with the salty sea water. Then the strips, perhaps still squirming a bit, are chewed and eaten with great gusto. It is popularly believed that raw conch is a powerful aphrodisiac.

Conch is also eaten raw as a salad, with a dressing of lime juice, olive oil, vinegar, salt, and pepper. Few Conch homes are ever without their bottle of "sour"—which is nothing but lime juice; it is even said that a Conch without sour will gladly swap a bottle of whiskey for a bottle of sour, and no questions asked.

Conch meat is also served in sandwiches and prepared as steaks, but the most popular conch dish is chowder made with tomatoes, onions, garlic, salt, and hot pepper. Conch in all these forms is served in most Key restaurants and is even more in demand than another Key delicacy, the turtleburger, made from ground green turtle meat.

Countless Florida souvenir shops along U.S. Highway 1 maintain heaps of conch shells which they sell or give away to customers. Other shops make the shells into attractive lamps and similar curios. This market for conch shells so depleted the supply of conchs that the Florida Department of Conservation has been forced to restrict the business. Strange to say, the Conchs who supplied the conch shells believe that they bring bad luck and will not allow the shells to remain in their houses.

"Besides conchs, grits and grunts is our favorite eats," the Conchs say. "We can't afford much else, but even if we could, I guess they would still be our favorites." The grunt, it should be explained, is a small bottom-feeding fish (*Haemulon plumieri*), which derives its local name from its habit of emitting loud grunts upon being pulled from the water. In other parts of the region this fish is known as a croaker. The

grunt's popularity is by no means confined to the Conchs—it is one of the region's most important food fishes. In Key West, waterfront markets keep their grunts and other fishes alive in pens along the docks. Customers peer into the water, point out their preferences on the fin, and the fish are scooped up with a dip-net.

A story which bears out the Conch's preference for grunts is told about an old-time Conch wrecker who became so prosperous that he took his wife to New York City and established residence at the Waldorf Astoria. His wife soon tired of the hotel's rich French cuisine and told her husband that if he did not wire Key West immediately for "a sack of grits and a barrel of grunts," she was going to return to the Keys "where she could get some decent eatin." The grits and grunts were sent for, and, in keeping with the tradition of American hotels to cater to the whims of their guests, were cheerfully prepared and served by the Waldorf.

### "Where The Blues Is Runnin"

The Riviera Conchs did not migrate from the Bahamas until about 1918. They settled on Singer's Island in Lake Worth opposite Palm Beach, where they lived until driven off by a real estate boom, and then took up residence in Riviera. Some of them are still British citizens, and retain a patriotic feeling for the Crown Land, as they call it. Most of them are natives of Abaco, and they often sing:

*I want to go to Abaco, do-ma, do-ma,  
Cause Abaco is a pretty place, do-ma, do-ma-ma;  
You see them gals with the wire waist, do-ma, do-ma,  
The wire waist and the figure face, do-ma, do-ma-ma.*

Other of their folk stuff harks back to London, as in:

*Biddy, biddy, pass my old gold ring  
Till I go to London—back again  
To seek out Simon, who's got the pawn.  
When I eat my rotten egg, aint gon give you none!*

Although their Conch Town is situated in a white neighborhood, the Conchs are compelled by their neighbors' prejudices to remain socially apart. About 1935 a group of white Riviera residents launched a campaign to have the Conchs subjected to the segregation laws affecting Negroes, but the movement failed. Some Riviera parents, however, withdrew their children from the school attended by the Conchs.

Conch women are highly skilled at handicrafts.

Hats, purses, rugs, table mats, and baskets are woven from palm fronds, and colorful flowers are made of seashells and fish scales. The Riviera women meet one afternoon each week at their Community Club, which they use as a workshop and recreation center. Finished articles are displayed for sale to tourists, and the handmade quilts are given to the neediest families in the community.

Some of the Riviera Conchs attend the Pentecostal Church of God, Carl L. White, pastor. An interview found Reverend White at his home, strumming a guitar and singing a hillbilly tune. He told how he had completed the fourth grade in school and left his home in the mountains of North Carolina to work with his father in sawmills through Georgia, Alabama, and Florida. He learned to preach at a Church of God Bible Conference at Winona, Florida.

"The Conchs prefer my church to their old Episcopal Faith because of the better benefits and moral values derived," Reverend White declared. "The Pentecostal Church of God will have nothing to do with the works of Satan. We strictly forbid dancing, frolicking, face paint, bobbed hair, too much jewelry, loud clothes, men and women bathing together on public beaches, imbibing alcoholic liquors, attending movies, shorts on women, all forms of gambling, belonging to any secret order or club, and so on. Anyone charged with breaking any of these laws is summoned before a church council and given a chance to defend themselves and their actions, also to repent and be saved.

"The Conch is God-fearing honest people. Them that has, gives. When the blues [bluefish] is running they give handsome contributions to the church—from one to five dollars. There is one man who doesn't come to church, but he gives contributions in lieu of his sins. They are all like a bunch of children seeking guidance in a strong hand; they trust practically everybody. They have been betrayed and gyped right and left, which accounts for their impoverished condition."

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At the end of May 1990 the University Presses of Florida will come out with two additional reprints of Stetson Kennedy's work. The books *The Klan Unmasked* and *Jim Crow Guide : The Way It Was*, will sell for \$16.95 and \$14.95 respectively. *Palmetto Country*, which sells for \$14.95, and both of the above mentioned books will be available from the Historical Museum of Southern Florida's Indies Company Museum Store.

# Through the Lens

When we first discussed running photographs of everyday life in this issue's **Through the Lens**, we had given little thought to the difficulty involved in such an undertaking. The presence of the camera changes everything. What would have been just another Wednesday, or worse, Monday, to the people pictured here was elevated to something else because of the photographer.



Bathers enjoying the surf in Sanibel, Florida, 1908.



A quiet time on Northeast Tenth Street, Miami, Florida, circa 1910.





Occasionally people look fondly to the past and long for the "good old days" - as long as those days didn't include laundry day.



Keeping with the style of the real estate development, the 1922 Hialeah baseball team wore jerseys styled after Seminole hunting blouses.



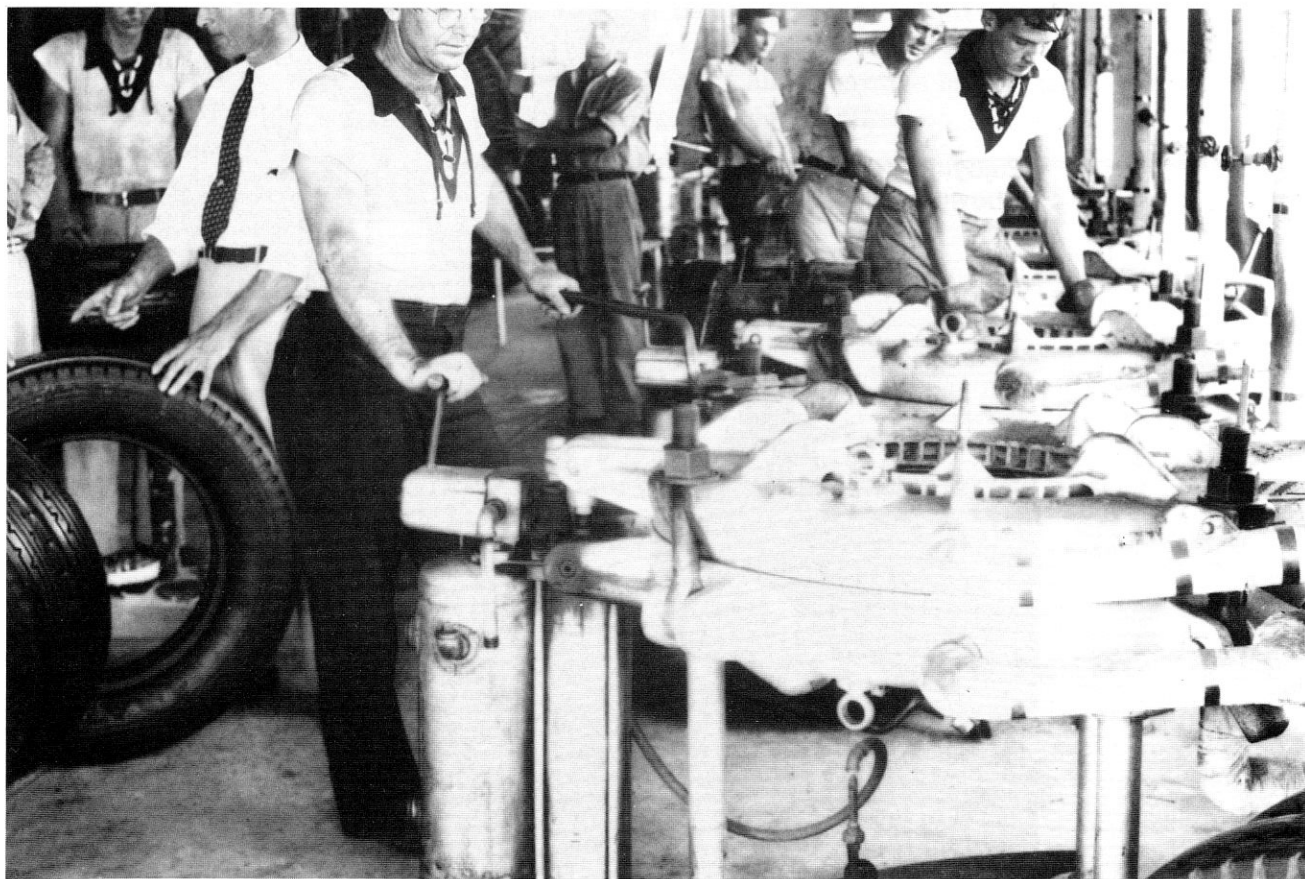
A customer examines a towel in the Callaway Mills showroom, circa 1940.

Unloading bananas at the Port of Miami, 1948 .





Coca-Cola delivery cars preparing for a morning run, 1942.



Workers at Joe's Tire repair, circa 1940.



Mounted policeman, at the Miami Yacht Basin, ruining someones's day in 1948.



Enjoying a game of pool in a bowling alley, 1966.



Celery harvest, 1942.

(Continued from page 15.)

plane had two 400 H.P. motors and flew at seventy miles per hour.

Although seaplane travel was convenient, and faster than most boats, the planes still did not carry enough passengers to make the hotel a success. There was just not enough interest in a Bimini weekend. In his 1922 dispatch to Nassau Commissioner Duncombe wrote, "I regret to report that the tourist season proved a failure. The hotel opened in January and closed in April and from the appearances as the year closes it will not be opened at all in 1923." The situation grew worse. By 1924 even most of the rumrunners had left Bimini for lawless Gun Cay a few miles to the South. Commissioner Duncombe complained, "The last case of whiskey has been taken out of bond and the tourists do not come. The hotel has proved a white elephant and the port of North Bimini is practically dead to all commerce and industry." The days of the Bimini Bay Rod and Gun Club were numbered.

As the situation deteriorated Thomas J. Peters took over more control of the Club and it was renamed Hotel Bimini. Peters bought a one hundred and seventy foot steam yacht called the *Esmeralda* from the Fleishmann family in an attempt to alleviate the transportation problems. He reopened the hotel in March of 1925 but by the following September it was closed again. Finally in 1926 the Bimini Bay Rod and Gun Club was destroyed in the terrible September hurricane that also devastated Miami. Dr. Thelma Peters, who married Peters' son, Thomas Jr., was visiting Bimini on her

honeymoon when the storm hit. Dr. Peters recalled those terrifying events in an *Update* article entitled "Hurricane Honeymoon" published in August, 1975. The young couple was rescued and returned safely to Miami but visited Bimini a few months later to assess the damage. According to Dr. Peters, the hotel was so badly vandalized that it was "picked like the bones of a chicken!" The town of Bimini was also devastated. Seven people were killed, fifty-two homes were destroyed and the radio tower that linked the island to the rest of the world was demolished.

The once grand hotel was never rebuilt. Even before the storm, costs had exceeded all expectations and escalated to \$200,000 (\$3,840,000 in 1990 dollars). With hurricane damage added to the rest of the Club's problems Tom Peters was blown from the Boom to the Bust. The Bimini Bay Rod and Gun Club exemplified the optimism of the "Roaring Twenties" in Miami. For South Floridians it was a place to escape the regulations of prohibition. For Biminities it was an opportunity to improve their local economy. And for Thomas J. Peters, a successful Miami businessman, it was a vision of Bahamian tourism that matured before its time. Although the Bimini Bay Rod and Gun Club failed during the 1920s, Bimini's history and its growing tourist industry have been linked to South Florida ever since. Today the small remaining ruins of the once large hotel have been incorporated into the vacation home of the Clarke Daniel family. The ghost of the Bimini Bay Rod and Gun Club lives on in local legend and the American connection continues.



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# WTMI Gets Into Some Rowdy Bars

Flauti  
Oboi  
Clarinetti In [A La]  
Fagotti  
Corni In [A La]  
Trombe In [D Re]  
Timpani In [A E La Mi]  
Violino I  
Violino II  
Viola  
Violoncello  
Contrabbasso

Fl.  
Ob.  
Cl.  
Fu.  
Cor.  
Tr.  
Timp.  
Vi. I  
Vi. II  
Vie.  
Vic.  
Cb.

Allegro con brio (♩ = 72)

These bars open the last movement of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony. Aaron Copland called it "the apotheosis of the dance." We don't seriously suggest you can dance to it. But the way it rollicks along, you may not be able to sit still to it. WTMI broadcasts this rowdy music in a variety of interpretations. One month it may be Mr. Ormandy's; at other times those of Bernstein, Boult, von Karajan, Monteux, Reiner, Steinberg, Stokowski or Toscanini.

(PSSST! There are some bars in Richard Strauss' *Salome* we wouldn't dare print anywhere.)

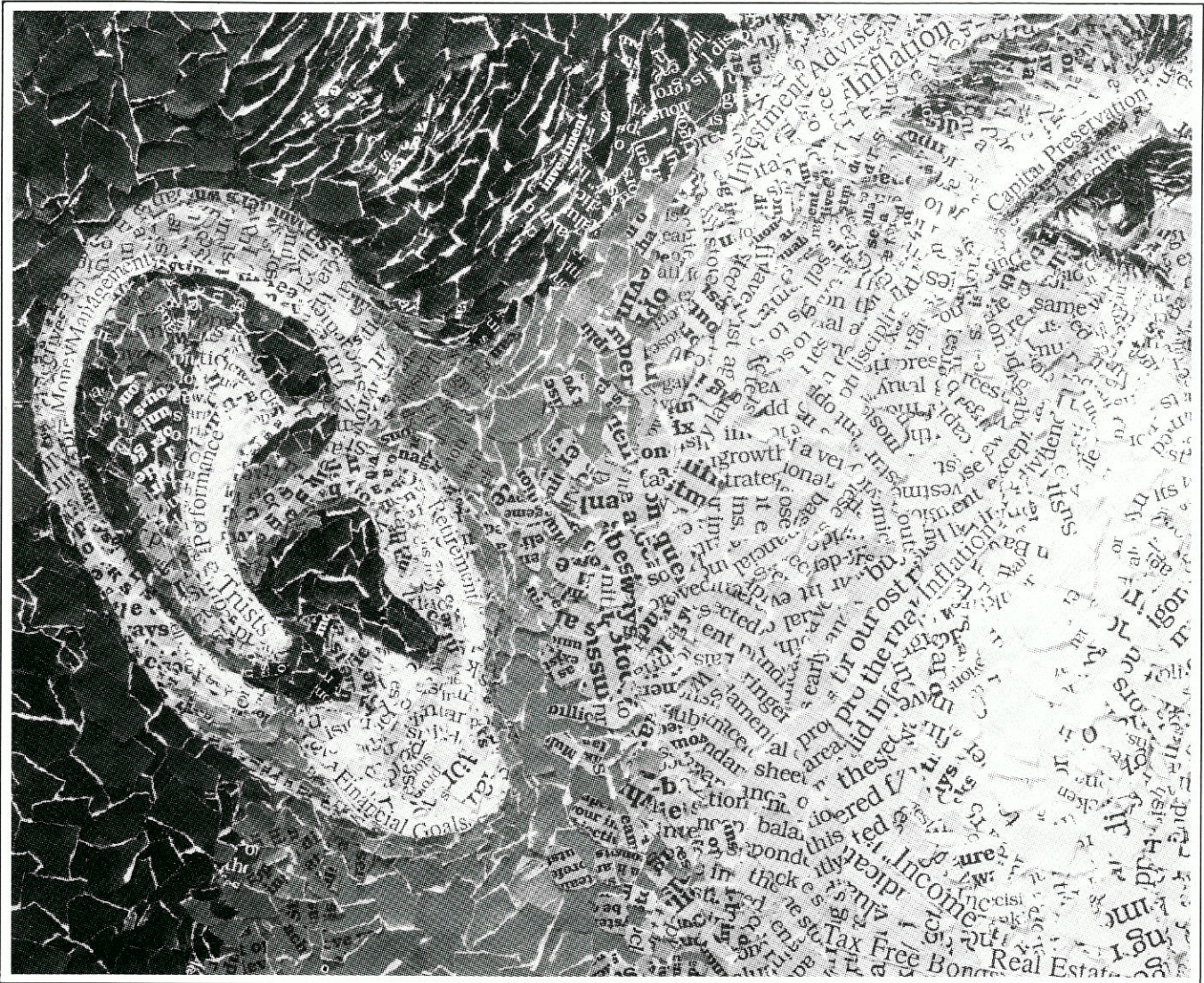
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