

# South Florida History

HISTORICAL MUSEUM OF SOUTHERN FLORIDA VOLUME 32, NO. 1, 2004 \$3.00







## Haitian Maps & Prints

### From the Collection of Edouard Duval-Carrié

An exhibition organized in collaboration with the Haitian Cultural Arts Alliance.

On display at the Historical Museum through January 23, 2005



**HISTORICAL MUSEUM**  
OF SOUTHERN FLORIDA

Cultural Plaza 101 W Flagler St Downtown Miami 305.375.1492 [historical-museum.org](http://historical-museum.org)

The Historical Museum of Southern Florida receives support from the State of Fla., Dept. of State, Div. of Cultural Affairs, Fla. Arts Council & Div. of Historical Resources, the Miami-Dade County Dept. of Cultural Affairs, the Cultural Affairs Council, the Mayor & the Miami-Dade County Board of County Commissioners; the Institute of Museum and Library Services, a Federal agency that fosters innovation, leadership and a lifetime of learning; and members of the Historical Association of Southern Florida. **Caption**—Map of Port au Prince, 1700s. Courtesy of Edouard Duval-Carrié.





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*Stacey de la Grana*

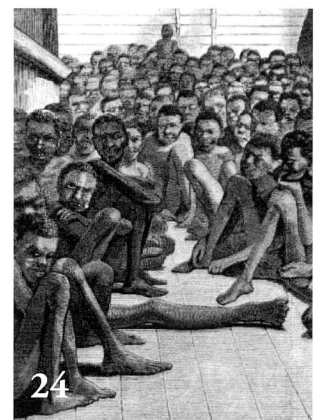
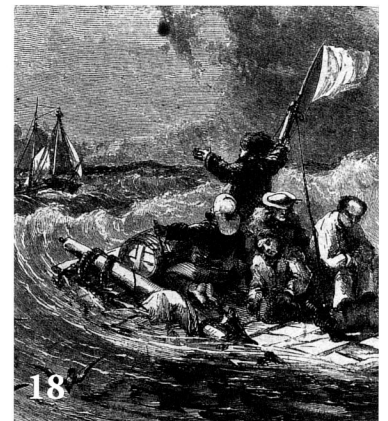
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Ambergris, a waxy aromatic substance secreted by whales, was a valuable trading commodity for the native Indian tribes of southeastern Florida, who used it to acquire valuable European manufactured goods from the Spanish, such as tools. The Spanish, for their part, believed that ambergris had no equal—neither gold, silver, pearls, nor emeralds matched its value.  
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**18** History of Wrecking  
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**24** The African Cemetery on Higgs Beach  
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*Gail Swanson*



Cover—Cotton Ship Wrecked on the Bahama Banks. *Harper's Weekly*, December 2, 1872.

HASF 2002-403-6.





When planning each issue of *South Florida History*, we try to find a theme for it—a connection between articles. On many occasions, the idea for a theme either comes from an exhibition on display at the time or a historical celebration that is taking place, for instance when the museum celebrated Cuba's 100 years of being a Republic. But at times it is difficult to find three or four

articles that pertain to that one theme. When encountered with this dilemma, we produce an issue that presents a wide array of topics. And that was the case for this issue, or so I thought. Once we began production on the magazine, we noticed that, though not intended, all three articles share one common thread: the ocean.

Travel back in time to the 1600s and discover the trade of whale ambergris (pg. 12) between the coastal tribes of southeastern Florida and the Spaniards. Learn how this waxy aromatic substance secreted by whales provided the Indian tribes with a useful commodity to obtain manufactured goods, while for the Spaniards it was a valuable resource that had no equal used as the primary fixative for perfumes in Europe.

After reading about the whale ambergris trade, continue on to explore the history of wrecking (pg. 18), an early Florida Keys industry. Learn about the occupation of wrecking, its origins in the 1600s, who made their fortunes as wreckers and what led to the demise of the wrecking industry.

In this issue, you will also find the tragic story of the African slaves buried at Key West (pg. 24) during the summer of 1860, in a cemetery that was unmarked for 141 years. Learn about the cruel commerce of human beings on the west coast of Africa, the drama upon the high seas off Cuba between slavers and the U.S. Navy and the cares of the village of Key West.

Enjoy!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sara Muñoz".

**Note**—If you or someone you know is interested in submitting an article or a book review, please contact me at [publications@historical-museum.org](mailto:publications@historical-museum.org) or 305.375.1492. Your time, energy and thoughtfulness in submitting a contribution are greatly appreciated as we strive to spread an understanding of our region's rich past. I look forward to receiving your submission.

## *South Florida History*

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# Education

by Stacey de la Grana

The **Historical Museum** of Southern Florida's education department is dedicated to teaching the public about the local history of South Florida and the Caribbean. Offering programs for children and adults, from gallery tours, lectures and panel discussions, to workshops and seminars, the education department at the Historical Museum strives to promote a better understanding of how our tropical paradise came to be.

There is a common misconception that history is only about "old things," such as prehistoric artifacts, Native American textiles, and objects that look as if they were from grandma's attic. But history is also about "new things." History is about what is happening today in our world and local communities. It is about what we see on the news, the architecture that surrounds us, the food we eat, the clothes we wear and the words we use.

Culture is a major component of history, and at the Historical Museum we base our programming on educating the public about how culture reflects history. One important thread of culture found in societies throughout the world is music, otherwise known as the "universal language." That is why this fall, the Historical Museum and Tobacco Road, the oldest bar and restaurant in Miami, have teamed up to present an exciting new program called *Live on the Plaza*, a music series showcasing some of Miami's hottest bands.

*Live on the Plaza* is the latest contribution to reviving downtown Miami as a thriving arts and cultural center. It is no secret that Miami has long been a haven for musicians from all around the world, and the education department is excited to be presenting such a vast amount of talent. In addition to music, the fall series featured poetry readings, panel discussions and a film screening. *Live on the Plaza* has not only provided an outlet for artists, but also created a new option for after-work entertainment and downtown nightlife.

Every Thursday evening, from 4:30 to 8:30 pm, guests were able to enjoy free live music from Rock 'n' Roll to Country Western to Jazz and Blues. They were able to discover how music of the past is influencing music of the present through witnessing live performances by contemporary artists.—*SFH*



Live On The Plaza artwork by Lebo.

**This spring**, starting in February, join the Historical Museum and other curious "downtowners" on the Cultural Plaza again for **Live On The Plaza**, ethnic cuisine and cocktails. *Live On The Plaza* programming will include music, lectures, film screenings, poetry readings, panel discussions and much more.



Top—Attendees enjoy ethnic cuisine and cocktails at our September 16 Live On The Plaza. Above—Ayabonmbe performs African roots music with a Haitian rhythm.

2004  
 Live On The Plaza  
 Live On The Plaza  
 Live On The Plaza



## Historical Museum of Southern Florida

**Miami-Dade Cultural Center, 101 West Flagler Street, Miami, 305.375.1492, [www.historical-museum.org](http://www.historical-museum.org).** Open seven days a week, Monday–Saturday from 10 am to 5 pm; Thursdays 10 am to 9 pm; Sunday noon to 5 pm. Closed Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Day. Discounted parking available at 50 N.W. 2nd Ave. Adults \$5; Children 6-12 \$2; HMSF members and children (5 and under) FREE.

### SPECIAL EXHIBITIONS

#### **The Florida Home: Modern Living, 1945-1965**

*On display through January 23, 2005*

Experience the residential architecture and family life in Florida during the post-World War II period. Wander through the rooms of a reconstructed house, designed by Igor Polevitzky, inside the museum and examine architectural drawings, photographs, furniture and appliances to gain a sense of how people lived 50 years ago. Among the architects featured in this exhibition guest curated by Jean-François Lejeune and Allan Shulman, along with Polevitzky, are Alfred Browning Parker, Rufus Nims, Norman Giller, Russell Pancoast and George Reed. For more information, call 305.375.1492 or visit [www.historical-museum.org](http://www.historical-museum.org)

#### **Haitian Maps and Prints from the Collection of Edouard Duval-Carrié**

*On display through January 23, 2005 (Lobby Exhibition)*

View rare pieces from renowned Haitian artist Edouard Duval-Carrié's collection of antique maps and prints as part of the Historical Museum's celebration of the Haitian bicentennial. An exhibition organized in collaboration with the Haitian Cultural Arts Alliance. For more information, call 305.375.1492 or visit [www.historical-museum.org](http://www.historical-museum.org)

#### **Programming in conjunction with Haitian Maps and Prints**

*Saturday, December 11 FREE*

Haitian Holiday Traditions—Children's activity

### SPECIAL EVENTS AND PROGRAMS

#### **Harvest Festival**

*Saturday & Sunday, November 20-21, 2004 10 am to 5 pm*

*Fair & Expo Center, home of the Miami-Dade County Fair located at SW 112th Avenue and Coral Way (10901 Coral Way, Miami, Florida)*

Be part of a South Florida tradition! For nearly thirty years the Historical Museum's annual fundraiser, the HARVEST Festival, has paid tribute to our past and to our American traditions. The ever-popular two-day celebration features over 400 fine crafts booths, living historians, folk arts, children's activities, antique/classic automobiles, delicious foods and great entertainment. Admission is \$6 for adults, \$2 for children (6-12).

#### **Twelfth Annual Miami International Map Fair**

*Saturday and Sunday, February 5-6, 2005 10 am to 5 pm*

Antique map dealers and map experts from all over the world join

this twelfth annual event for hobbyists, collectors and dealers of antique maps. Browse through a marketplace of prominent dealers showing and selling their maps or bring in your own map for an expert opinion. Maps are available in all price ranges. Admission is \$10 for adults, \$2 for children (6-12) and free for children under 6 and museum members. For more information, call 305.375.1492 or visit [www.historical-museum.org](http://www.historical-museum.org)

#### **Discovery Days on Teacher Planning Days**

Children, ages 6 to 12, are invited to spend the day at the Historical Museum of Southern Florida on Teacher Planning Days. Activities are unique and encourage children to think, imagine, create and have fun! For more information, call 305.375.1492 or visit [www.historical-museum.org](http://www.historical-museum.org)

#### **Play All Day**

*Friday, January 14, 2005 9 am to 5 pm*

Campers ages 6 to 12 get the ultimate Broadway experience through acting.

### HISTORIC TOURS WITH DR. PAUL GEORGE

#### **Magical Miami River Family Boat Tour**

*Saturday, November 27, 2004 10 am–1 pm*

Ahoy, families! Bring the whole gang on this special tour of the Miami River. Great entertainment for all ages, this maritime adventure is jam-packed with fun facts and tales about the river from the times of the Tequesta Indians to the recent discovery of the Miami Circle. See the river in action as you pass under drawbridges, and watch tugboats and Haitian freighters. HMSF Members \$34, Non-Members \$39. Children (12 years and under) special one-time price of \$20. Advance reservations required. Call 305.375.1621.

#### **Postwar Miami Home Architecture Coach Tour**

*Sunday, January 16, 2005 1–4 pm*

Return to the post WWII era when population growth and a soaring economy led to the largest residential boom Miami-Dade County had ever seen. See a variety of architectural styles from the 1940s, 50s and 60s and learn how different architects adapted their designs for tropical lifestyles. Examine the spatial elements used to fuse indoor and outdoor living such as patios, porches, glass and screen walls and the illustrious "Florida Room." HMSF Members \$34, Non-Members \$39. Advance reservations required. Call 305.375.1621.





**Collier County Museum, 3301 Tamiami Trail East, Naples—239.774.8476.** The Collier County Museum explores the people, places and everyday events that have shaped Collier County's heritage. The museum and four-acre historical park are open Monday through Friday, 9 am–5 pm. Free.



**Boca Raton Historical Society Town Hall, 71 N. Federal Highway, Boca Raton—561.395.6766.** The Boca Raton Historical Society operates a museum and gift shop at the old town hall. Hours of operation are Tuesday through Friday, 10 am–4 pm.



**Clewiston Museum, 112 South Comercio Street, Clewiston—863.983.2870.** The Clewiston Museum, founded in 1984, is a growing museum, collecting and displaying items, large and small, important and trivial, which reflect the past of Clewiston and its surrounding area. The Clewiston Museum is open 1–5 pm Tuesday through Saturday, with seasonal adjustments. No admission fee is charged; however, donations are encouraged.



**The Historical Society of Palm Beach County, 139 North County Road, Suite 25, Palm Beach—561.832.4164.** A nonprofit membership organization devoted to collecting and preserving archives and artifacts pertaining to the history of Palm Beach County and Florida. Make local history a part of your life and join as a member to help support this effort. You will enjoy lectures and special events, discounts on historical books and research fees. Office hours are Monday through Friday, from 9 am–5 pm. Research hours are by appointment Tuesday through Thursday from 10 am–3 pm.

*The above institutions subscribe to South Florida History as a benefit for their members.*

## Yesterday's Visions for Sale at the Historical Museum

A treasure trove of revealing, dramatic and scenic photographs of South Florida's past are available to adorn the walls of your home or place of business.

With more than one million photographs and postcards, there's something for everyone.

Call 305.375.1492, or stop by the Historical Museum's Research Center for further details.





## Changing Styles / Changing Dials Television Comes to Miami

*Changing Styles/Changing Dials* was a lobby exhibition on display at the Historical Museum from June 25 through September 5, 2004.

by Steven Davidson

Homes in Florida—and across America—have been TV-centered for three generations and though we don't always like to admit it, ever since television arrived on the scene it has been the focus of family life. Ironically, "TV rooms" are euphemistically called "family rooms" in builder's lingo, but family rooms are almost always centered around the family TV set. In fact, according to the United States Census, the average number of television sets in households is 2.4, and according to other sources, the number of households with three or more TV sets is just over 40 percent. While TV seems so pervasive today, it was first seen in demonstrations at the World's Fair in 1939. At the time, the entry-level television receiver was \$600, about the price of a new car. World War II ended TV equipment production, and broadcasts from 1941 to 1945 were limited because manpower and resources were directed towards the war effort. But a strong post war economy and a new "television industry" would fuel the exponential growth of television. It was not until 1946 that television would take off with the introduction of the \$375 630TS RCA Victor television set.

In South Florida, television was still three years away, but it was highly anticipated and soon after the introduction of television into our homes in Miami (as with other parts of the country), it quickly became the family's chief connection and conduit to the outside world. "As Seen on TV" was the new reality, and the home became a place to retreat to, sealed off from the outside world. With the door closed, and the TV on, the outside world could be viewed as an abstraction filtered through television, just as the weather became an abstraction filtered through air conditioning. In Florida, the introduction of air conditioning and television converged, and life has never been the same since.

By the end of 1946 there were 7,000 TV sets in the United States; two years later, in 1948 there were 148,000 sets. In March of 1949, when television came to Miami, it was estimated that there were 2,000 TV sets in South Florida. By 1950, barely 10 percent of American homes had television sets, but by 1959, 90 percent did, making television the fastest diffusion of a technological innovation ever recorded. Even the Internet's meteoric rise has not yet overtaken the pace of television saturation, and though perhaps it will rival TV's record, it will probably not surpass it.

There were some challenges, however. In every home, there was a struggle to incorporate the massive physical presence of the set into the decor, which led to the design of bigger and more elaborate cabinets. In those early days of TV, at the simplest level, there was the question of the proper room for television. In March 1949, the popular magazine *Better Homes and Gardens* asked, "Where does the receiver go?" and it provided options including the living room, game room or "some strategic spot where you can see it from the living



Typical television set, circa 1950s, with antenna, TV lamp and TV clock. Courtesy of the Louis Wolfson II Florida Moving Image Archive.





Sampling of objects from the exhibition, including TV influenced board game, TV lamp, antenna, remote control devices, TV salt and pepper shakers and TV tray. Courtesy of the Louis Wolfson II Florida Moving Image Archive.

room, dining room and kitchen.” In March of that same year, the headline in an article in the *Miami Daily News* was more direct: “Special Chairs, Sofas Planned, Rearranged Furniture Necessary With Sets.” The article provided advice but also a warning—America’s living rooms were going to change because, “Folks could sit anywhere and listen to a radio program. But not so with television. One must sit where one can see.” Within two years, by 1951, the television set traveled more freely through household spaces and in magazines ads and in homes, the TV could be found in the kitchen, living room, bedroom, kitchen, fun room, converted garage, sitting-sleeping room, music room and even the “TV room.”

For old houses or new ones, TV was a factor. To kids of that era, television was part of the family, but to parents, it was a mixed blessing—a guest bringing entertainment and enlightenment, to be sure, but also an alien presence in the home. Television changed architecture and design as well. The spatial arrangements and floor plans of houses shifted when large sitting rooms became necessary for TV viewing, or living rooms were remodeled, or at the very least, furniture was rearranged. Television also changed how and what we ate, and TV viewing required snacks, convenience and finger foods, and of course, TV dinners on TV trays in rooms illuminated with TV lamps. Yes,

TV lamps were considered a necessity at the time because of the suspicion about the technology itself: TV gave off a weird pale light that some interpreted as some kind of radiation, and folks in the '50s were always worried about radiation. Even if the set was as safe as the manufacturers claimed, staring at that light for hours was probably bad for your eyesight—or so went the reasoning of the average mom and dad. This commonly-held suspicion about television gave rise to a peculiar 1950s phenomenon: the TV lamp, a device ostensibly designed to allow TV viewing without eye strain. There were other methods to prevent glare and eye strain that were available, including television filters. One manufacturer promises that their product “protects eyes scientifically” through optical filtering. Other real technological breakthroughs happened as well.

It wasn't long before the first remote control devices came along in 1950, at first tethered to our sets, after we installed them “without the danger of electric shock” if the instructions were followed closely. Other devices, such as “Blab-Off” allowed viewers to cut the audio during those annoying commercials, or when the telephone rang. The problem consumers had with all of these variations is that those long cables often caused tripping. Then in 1955 Zenith came out with its “Flash-matic,” the first wireless TV remote. The Flash-matic used a directional flashlight to





Above—With the arrival of television came many specialized publications, focusing on TV personalities, programming, and technology. Opposite page, top—Dr. Horace Newcomb, Director of the *Peabody Awards* at the University of Georgia visits the *Changing Styles/Changing Dials* exhibition; bottom—In the 1950s and 1960s home movies were at the height of their popularity, and most homes had both a television set and a camera and projection equipment. This image is part of *The Florida Home* exhibition, which includes vintage television and home movies from the collection of the Louis Wolfson II Florida Moving Image Archive.

Courtesy of the Louis Wolfson II Florida Moving Image Archive.

activate the four control functions, which turned the picture and sound on and off and turned the channel tuner dial clockwise and counterclockwise. However, the Flash-matic had problems working well on sunny days, when the sunlight could change channels randomly. The improved “Zenith Space Command” remote control went into commercial production in 1956 and was based on ultrasound waves. This type of remote controls remained the dominant design for the next 25 years. During this period, there were continued improvements on remote control and TV sets with other styles, new technological advances and designs. Television fundamentally altered how we utilized our free time, and quickly replaced radio as it ushered in the information age, forever changing how we viewed our state, country and the world. We became the first residents of the “global village.” Although the term was coined in the late ’50s, it was then and it is now appropriate, and we have been living there ever since television was introduced.

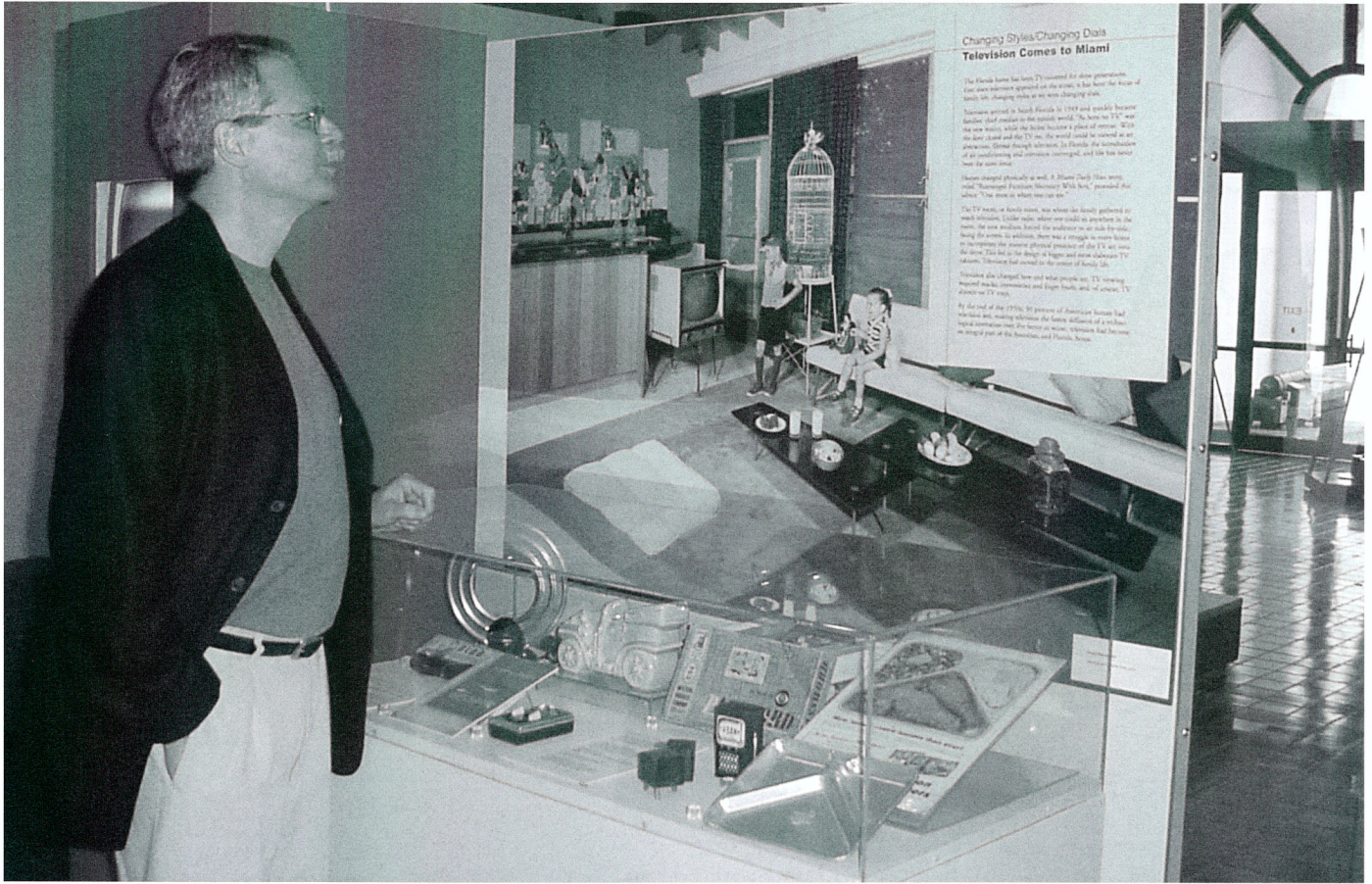
Television created the biggest consumer market ever. Advertising grew in sophistication by leaps and bounds; the 1950s saw the birth of marketing research and consumer surveys. Television programs blurred the boundaries between TV and reality by presenting a sanitized version of America.

Today, we still watch TV programs from the 1950s. “TV Land” and “Nick at Night” are among the most popular cable stations. “I Love Lucy,” “Ozzie and Harriet,” “Leave it to Beaver” and other classic programs can now be viewed with nostalgia or to get a sense of what life was like in simpler times. Interestingly, those TV sitcoms from the 1950s upheld the very values and mores that were being stretched and strained in real life. Domestic comedies were popular and emphasized the nuclear suburban white family, in neighborhoods seemingly untouched by ethnic conflicts and where mothers never needed or wanted to work outside the home. Westerns were also extremely popular: the notion of frontier living, where right and wrong were clearly spelled out, appealed to many during those rapidly modernizing times. In South Florida, the 1950s and the 1960s saw dramatic changes both inside and outside the home, many of which were documented and digested through this exciting new medium known as television.—SFH

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*Steven Davidson is the director of the Louis Wolfson II Florida Moving Image Archive and is actively involved in the field of film and video archives on a national level. Davidson is the co-editor of The Administration of Television Newsfilm and Videotape Collections: A Curatorial Manual. Davidson is the curator of Changing Styles/Changing Dials.*







# The SPANISH WHALE AMBERGRIS TRADE

with Florida's Ais & Tequesta Indians

by Robert I. Davidsson

The productive coastal waters off Florida's eastern shore have been a habitat for several species of great whales since before recorded history. Pods of sperm, right and pilot whales—as well as dolphins and manatees—were present when the first native American tribes entered the Florida peninsula prior to 10,000 B.C.

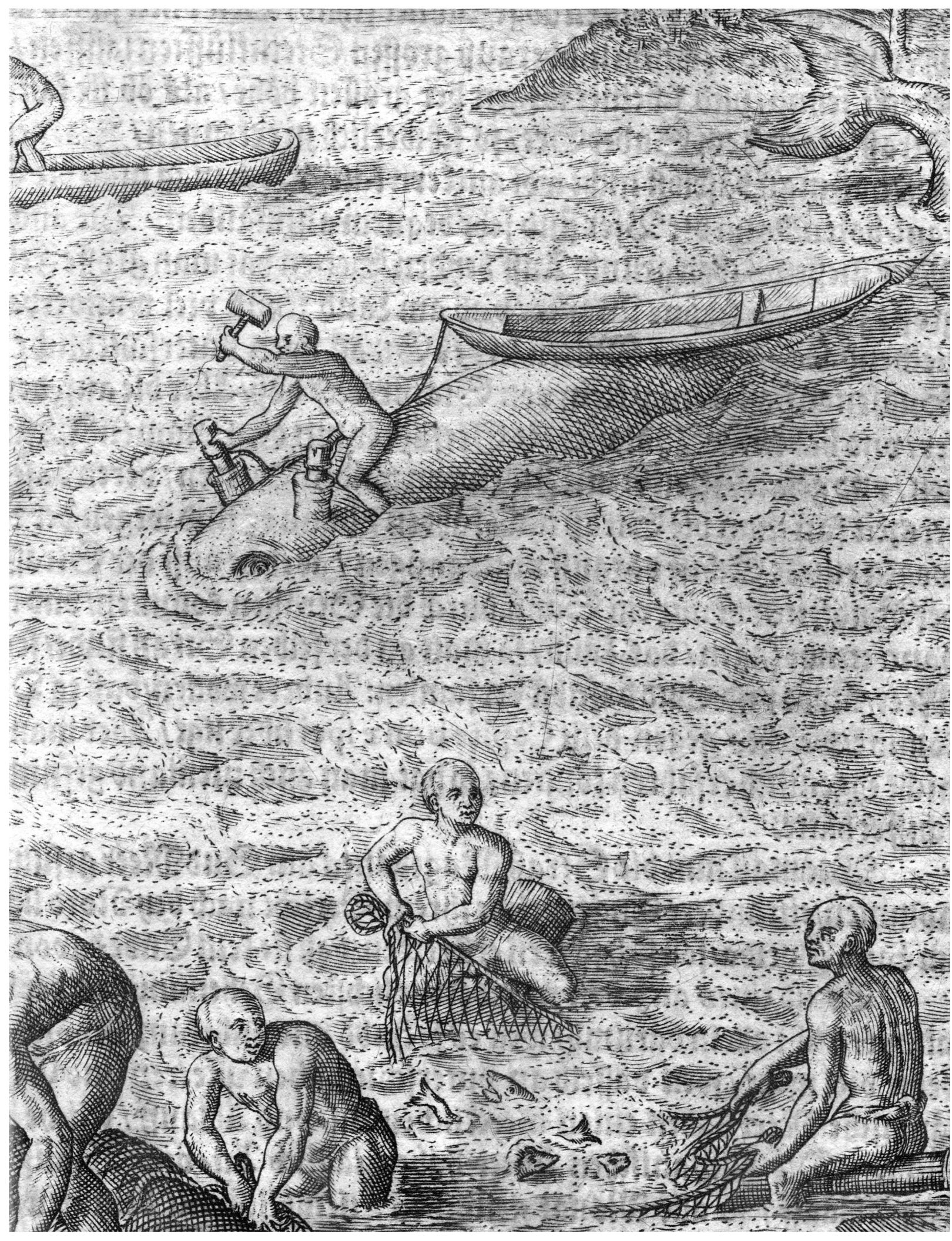
Every winter the northern Atlantic right whales (*eubalaena glacialis*) make their epic 1,400-mile migration from Canada's maritime provinces to the warmer Gulf Stream-fed waters off the coast of Florida. Here the pregnant females of the pods give birth to calves in a predetermined birthing area extending offshore of Jacksonville and south to Vero Beach.

Baleen whales were not the only maritime mammals sighted in coastal waters by Florida's first inhabitants. Slow-moving manatees and toothed cetaceans—pilot whales, bottlenose dolphins and both pygmy and great sperm whales—roamed the ocean in search of schooling fish and squid.

"Whale Fishing by Florida Indians" Frankfurt. Theodore de Bry, 1655.  
HASF 1992-098-1.









To the Ais, Jeaga and Tekesta Indians, the native tribes of southeastern Florida, the great whales were a rare but welcomed food source, a delicacy awarded to maritime hunters with the courage to navigate their dugout canoes through dangerous currents and frequent storms found along what is now Florida's Treasure and Gold coasts.

"The Indians go into the sea, no matter how dangerous it may be, to kill whales—the larger the better," wrote a Spanish observer in the 1590s. "One Indian, alone, strong and fearless is able to kill the whale."

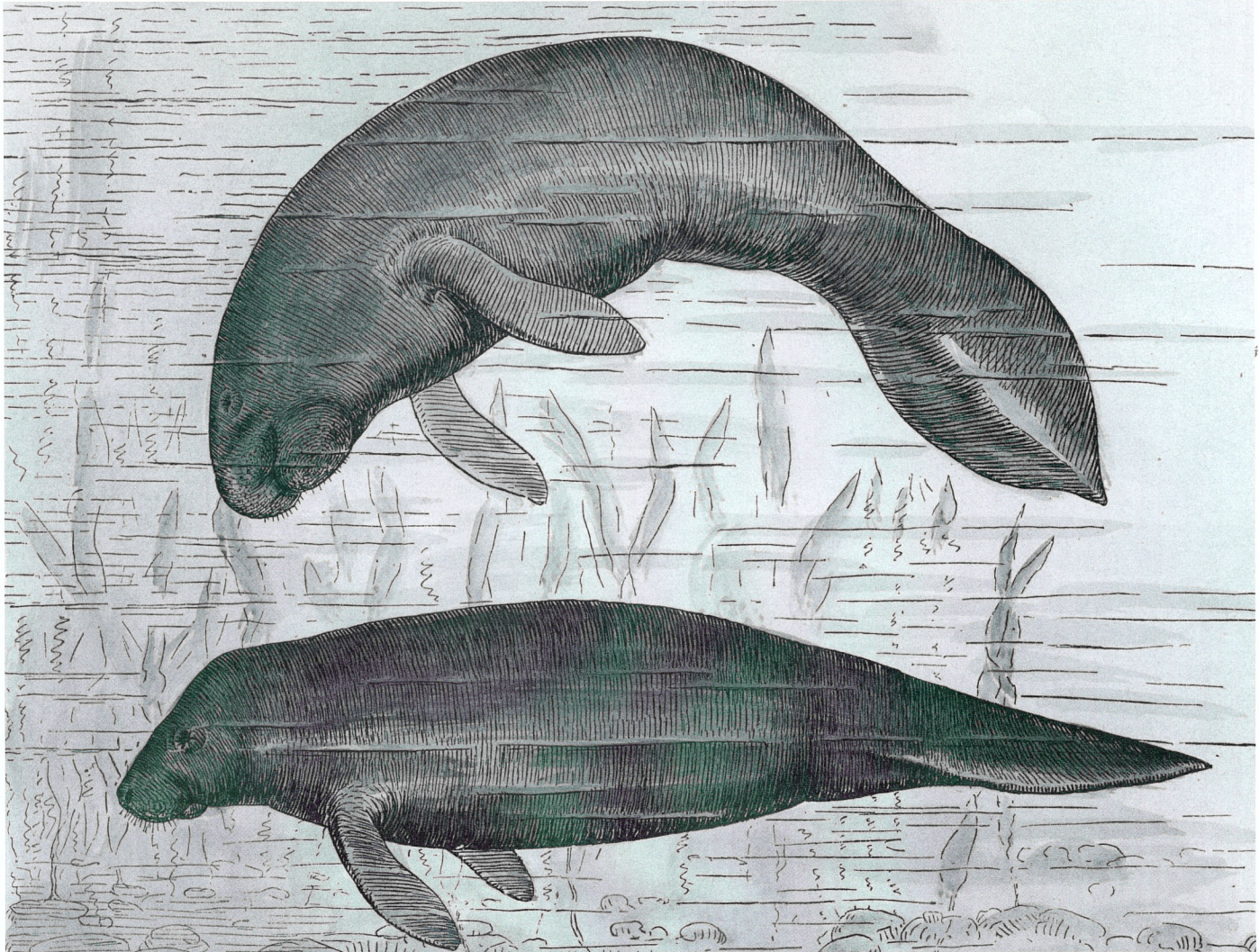
"Upon seeing the whale completely helpless, the waiting crowd on the beach go after the whale in their canoes and tie the whale fast to poles and their canoes. The canoes then move towards the beach towing the whale."

Ironically, when Europeans from Spain established their first permanent settlement at St. Augustine in 1565, it was not meat, blubber or whale oil that was valued most by its settlers, but a secreted waste byproduct of sperm whales—ambergris. To obtain this waxy aromatic substance found in abundance along

the beaches of Florida's east coast, Spanish merchants, soldiers and even governors would risk their fortunes and lives in trading ventures with the often hostile tribes to the south.

In 1696, Jonathan Dickinson, a Quaker merchant from Jamaica, while a shipwrecked captive at the main village of the Ais Indians near modern Vero Beach, observed, "An Indian of this town some time before the Spaniards came, having a considerable quantity of ambergris, boasted that when he went for (St.) Augustine with that, he could purchase of the Spaniards a looking-glass, an ax, a knife or two, and three or four 'mannocoes' (which is about five or six pounds) of tobacco. The quantity of ambergris might be about five pounds in weight."

Ambergris was used as a spice in eastern Asia and as a scent fixative in Europe. It is a secretion of the intestines of sperm whales (*Physeter catodon* L.) resulting from the irritation caused by the beaks of its chief food, squid. Most free ambergris lumps that wash up on Florida beaches are small, but one large mass weighed in at 418 kg (922 lbs.).



Manatees swimming. Sketch by Henry W. Elliot from "Transactions Zoological Society of London." HASF 2002-207.



The main ingredient of ambergris is ambrein, a cholesterol derivative, which becomes a grayish, waxy substance with a somewhat sweet scent when exposed to sunlight. It was used as the primary fixative for perfumes by Europeans during the colonial period and was highly prized by royalty and the upper classes of society.

Today, trade in ambergris, also called “whale droppings,” has been banned worldwide by International Whaling Commission treaties and the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972, which makes it illegal to hunt whales or import marketable whale products. Chemists have isolated and reproduced active aromatic ingredients similar to ambrein from plants such as rockrose and bee-balm, making the use of whale ambergris nonessential.

During the colonial period, the coast of Florida and the Bahamas was an important source of ambergris. Fray Alonso Gregorio de Escobedo, a Franciscan father at the *Nombre de Dios Florida* mission, provided ethnographic descriptions of the ambergris trade and whale hunting by the southeast Florida Indians in his epic poem entitled “La Florida,” completed in 1609.

Father Escobedo arrived in Florida late in 1587 and served the Franciscan mission for about 10 years. His personal written observations and documented second-hand accounts of early Indian life in the Spanish colony were archived in the *Biblioteca Nacional* in Madrid.

In his descriptive vignettes, Father Escobedo wrote, “The flat and sandy coast seems to be the favorite haunt of the whale. Her excrement becomes ambergris. We know that the most talented gentleman brushes his nose with ambergris as does the elegant madame of the court, and both are proud to smell and to carry the scent of ambergris before the king and nobles.”

The Florida cleric observed, “The Indian knows that the reward for one who finds such ambergris is great and hence he looks about for the whales so that he can gather large quantities of the material. When a ship approaches, he exchanges the ambergris with the Castilian who, in turn, give him glass beads. He delights in receiving these articles for he can then dress himself in a fashion he thinks attractive.”

The Spanish jealously guarded this valuable resource from French and English intruders. The garrison of St. Augustine was often used as marines aboard locally-built “presidio boats”

that patrolled the coastline in search of shipwrecked vessels or foreign interlopers. Trading with unsubdued Ais or Tequesta Indians was not without risk to Spanish merchants and seamen.

In “La Florida,” Father Escobedo reported, “The odor of ambergris is so fragrant that it is popular among the Spanish and as a result, is just as valuable as pearls, gold or silver. The small canoes surround the ship on both sides; hoping anxiously that she will strike a reef or shallow waters. If that takes place, the Indians will be able to kill the faithful soldiers. They know they cannot perform such a deed in open warfare and pretend to be humble.”

After decades of shipwreck massacres, skirmishes and open warfare with Florida’s southeastern tribes, a

peace agreement was reached on September 2, 1605, between Governor Pedro Ybarro (1603-09) and *El Capitan Grande*, the main cacique of the Ais Indians, together with 20 other coastal Indian representatives attending the St. Augustine ceremony. The Indians would assist shipwreck survivors of vessels flying the Spanish flag, report activities of foreign ships and allow Spanish rescue parties to enter their territory. In return, the coastal Indians could visit St. Augustine for trade without fear of attack or enslavement.

Governor Ybarro immediately dispatched an expedition led by a talented soldier-surveyor named Alvaro

Mexia to explore the southern coast. The expedition sailed down the Halifax River and Mosquito Lagoon to the Bakers Haulover (called Potopotoyo in the Ais dialect). The villages of the Surruque division of the Ais tribe, known as the notorious “Cape Indians” of Cape Canaveral, were visited in peace. His journey was recorded in a document entitled “The Derrotero from St. Augustine to Ais, 1605”.

Proceeding south from the haulover portage to Indian River Bay (Bay of the Ais) and the Indian River (Rio d’Ais), the Mexia expedition visited the heavily populated Ais village complex of Ulumay on Merritt Island and the villages of Savochequeya and Pentoaya near Eau Gallie, before reaching its final destination, the main “Village of Ais,” located on the ocean barrier island in Indian River County. Mexia’s journey opened the path for future explorers and merchant-adventurers.

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If the Mexia expedition had continued further south, as did two shipwreck rescue patrols sent by Governor Juan de Salinas in 1622, they would have discovered two tributary tribes of the Ais, the Guacata (also called the Santaluces by the Spanish) at their main village located north of the St. Lucie Inlet, and the Jeaga Indians of southern Martin and northern Palm Beach counties. South of the Jeaga village of "Hobe" at the Jupiter Inlet was the powerful Tequesta tribe, whose influence extended from the Lake Worth Lagoon south to Biscayne Bay during the 17th century.

Franciscan missionaries had mixed feelings concerning the Spanish ambergris trade with the pagan Ais and Tequesta. The two tribes had resisted their efforts to convert them to Christianity and join their expansive mission system in Florida. The ambergris trade fostered profiteering and greed, two corrupting tenets outside the teachings of the Franciscans.

In his 1700 "Memorial to the King of Spain," describing the natural wealth of Florida, Father Alonso de Leturiondo admitted, "Similarly, on the coasts that look to the south, the best amber, that one could desire, is found."

The lure of sudden wealth from the ambergris trade impacted both native Americans and European settlers, even resulting in a royal investigation of one Spanish governor in the 1650s. Ambergris provided the subsistent level hunter-gatherer coastal tribes of southeastern Florida with a valuable commodity to obtain European manufactured goods through trade instead of warfare or from an occasional shipwreck.

"They (the Indians) board the vessels even before orders are given to cast anchor and the captain, pilot and crew buy the ambergris from the pagans at a high price," Father Escobedo lamented in his vignettes. "What the Indian received in trade at the frigate is not as valuable as the ambergris he exchanges. Ambergris is very valuable and there are no pearls, emeralds, gold or silver to equal its value."

In his narrative, Father Escobedo describes unfair trade practices by Spanish colonists and warns of dire consequences. He records, "The Indian leaves one object and receives another worth one-hundredth its value, but he goes away happy and careful that no one steals what he has received."

From the point of view of native Ais and Tequesta Indians, the foolish settlers and seamen were trading valuable metal knives, axes and fishing hooks for mere lumps of smelly whale droppings that covered their beaches. Both Spanish

and Indian trading partners were generally content with the results of these exchanges.

Spanish officials and soldiers were caught profiteering from the ambergris trade during the administration of Governor Diego de Rebolledo (1655-59). Between the years 1574 and 1715, the annual income of a Florida governor was set at 2,000 ducats by the Council of the Indies. The salary consisted of a 1,000-ducat annual subsidy from Spain, and 1,000 ducats from the "fruits of the land," profits made in the colony. "Whale amber" was included in this category.

The governor controlled the annual "situado" or royal subsidy received from Spain to support the colony's garrison, civil service and public works projects. It was the alleged misuse of public funds and property by government officials and the garrison in the ambergris trade that caused a scandal in St. Augustine,

and a formal investigation by the Council of the Indies.

In a letter to King Philip dated November 20, 1655, the governor's regime was accused by the Franciscans of "using up all the iron implements in the city for trade." His critics specifically charged him with using 500 tons of iron purchased from New Spain with treasury funds to barter "whale amber" from Ais and Tequesta over a period of six months. The shipment of ambergris sold by the St. Augustine officials was valued at \$40,000.

The complaint was forwarded to the Council of the Indies, which conducted a two-year investigation

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into the alleged “evil conduct” by the governor of Florida. The council’s opinion was decreed and returned to King Philip on June 15, 1657, and today provides interesting insight into how the corrupting influence of the ambergris tradewith public officials jeopardized the safety of the royal colony.

The Council of the Indies opinion states: “Around July 1654 some Indians arrived at the presidio whose residence was on the seashore close to the Bahamas Channel and that they brought a quantity of amber. They presented some of this to the governor and exchanged all that they could for goods. The Indians left and he sent a troop of soldiers in pursuit of them in two oar-powered vessels with (more) goods that he had sought so that they might bring back all the amber they could. And similarly he sent three troops, one going the other coming, whose work lasted six months.”

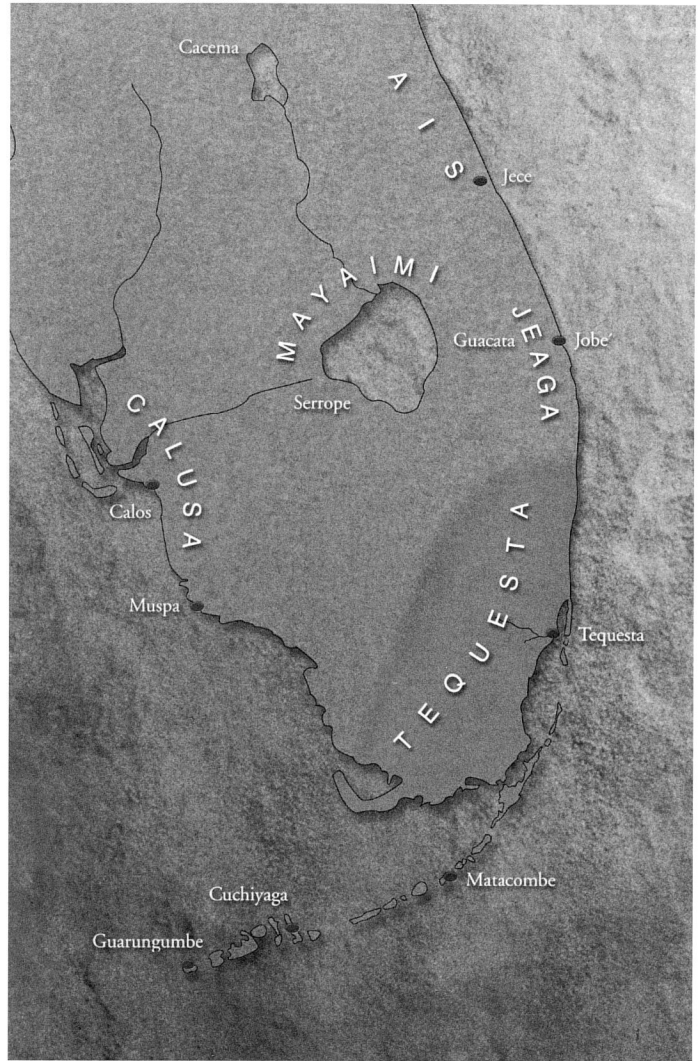
The Council report recorded that in order to obtain the ambergris, St. Augustine officials melted down an anchor, cannons and their carriages, and even the barrels of muskets and harquebuses. They also neglected to repair the fort with materials imported from Mexico.

The Council of the Indies report concluded, “And by means of these efforts, he (the governor) collected an arroba and a half of amber, which at 25 pesos per ounce as for which some of it has been sold in Havana amounts to 15,000 pesos that he traded for the iron tools and other goods, in the greater part taken out of royal warehouses. The amber it seems, should belong to the royal treasury of your majesty, supposing that the goods are of the character alluded to and the infantrymen and other persons who handled these deals are in your majesty’s pay.”

The whale ambergris trade between St. Augustine and the tribes of southeastern Florida ended abruptly in 1702 with the outbreak of the War of Spanish Succession (Queen Anne’s War in America) between Spain and the British in South Carolina. Captain Thomas Nairn, the Royal Indian Agent for the Carolina Assembly, led a mixed force of Yamasee Indians and English militia in a series of slave raids targeting the Mayaca, Ais, Tequesta and Calusa tribes of southern Florida. By 1711, the coastal tribal remnants had either fled to the “Indios de la Costa” mission established near St. Augustine in 1703, or were seeking evacuation to Cuba from their hideouts in the Florida Keys.

Ambergris remained uncollected along the nearly uninhabited shorelines of Southeast Florida for the remainder of the first Spanish colonial period, which ended in 1763. In his “Concise Natural History of East and West Florida,” English surveyor-historian Bernard Romans noted in his 1769-70 survey that the entire “Palmar d’Ais” (the chain of barrier islands between Cape Canaveral and Port St. Lucie that runs parallel to the Indian River) was deserted with the exception of a few fishermen from St. Augustine.

While Florida’s whale ambergris trade has passed onto the pages of history, rich images of a bygone era live on in the words and chronicles of its early settlers and explorers. A vignette in



Historic contact tribes of Southern Florida. HASE.

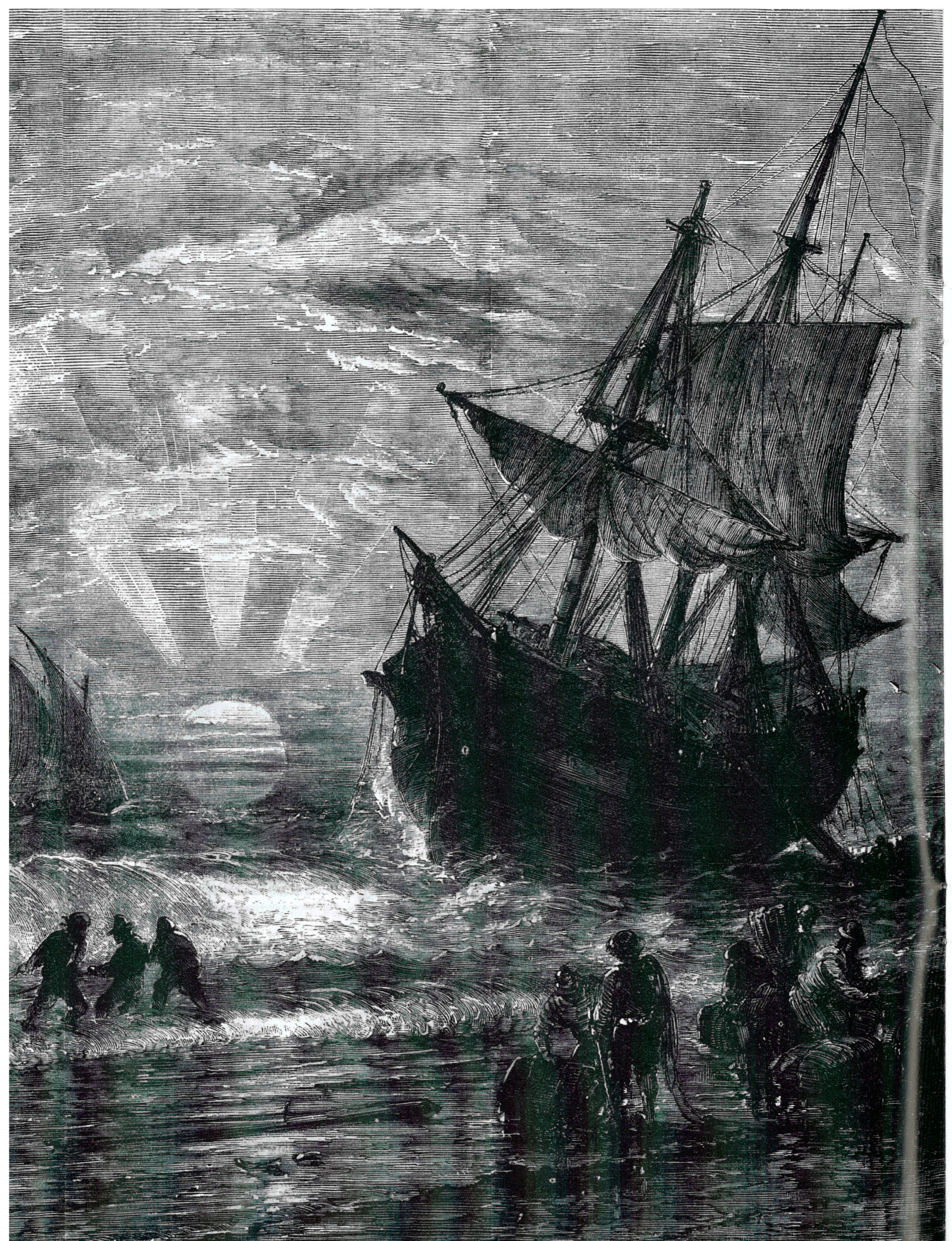
“La Florida,” describing the importance of whales to the ancient Indians of Florida’s southern shore, provides a fitting conclusion to this report.

In this cultural sketch, Father Escobedo observes, “His ancestors learned the science of catching the whale, and the traditional procedure is well-known among them. They know that once the whale is hit on the ears it is doomed to death. In this way, they kill, and by the seaside, they share the flesh which is considered by all to be an excellent luxury for it provides strength and life.”—*SFH*

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# History of WRECKING

by Jerry Wilkinson

WRECKING; SPONGING; FARMING; fishing; turtling; and cigar, salt and charcoal making were early Florida Keys industries. Wrecking in this use means “salvaging.” Of the above, wrecking and farming significantly shaped the early settling of the Upper Keys. Ships and their crews became known as “wreckers.”

The end of wrecking overlapped with the beginning of farming, and most of the products from both wrecking and farming were taken to Key West for disposition. In Key West, cigar manufacturing replaced the wrecking economy. Sponging, turtling and mackerel fishing also flourished for awhile; however, they were almost completely controlled by Havana at first, then by Key West and finally by Key West and Miami.

Wrecking was the industry that dominated the Florida Keys from the first wrecked Spanish ships to about 1890. Most of the shipwrecks were in the Tortugas and Middle/Upper Keys’ areas. Wrecking included, but seldom mentioned, the wrecking of slave ships such as the Spanish ship *Guerrero* in 1827. Human cargoes turned out not to be very lucrative in the Keys.

From the beginning of commerce with the New World, ships crashed onto the reefs of the Florida Keys. Some were simply grounded high and dry while others had their hulls ripped open, and were sinking or sunk.

Many factors were involved. The early square-rigged merchant ships were often overloaded, very difficult to control and did not sail into the wind very well. What charts there were did not indicate the dangers that lay beneath the water’s surface. Precise navigation equipment and accurate charts were still centuries away. Little was known of weather conditions in this part of the world. There were no lighthouses and little communication existed when bad weather threatened.

The word “wrecking” in this use refers to the salvaging or the saving of crews, ships and/or cargoes—hopefully, in that order. Of course, some kind of reward or payment was expected and this became the function of the wrecking court to adjudicate. When Florida became a territory in 1821, there were no U.S. statutes, only the “Common Laws at Sea” and a Bahamian Admiralty Court. From its inception, wide differences of opinion and almost constant controversy on the pros and cons, ethics and nature of wrecking existed.

The Florida indigenous Indians were the first salvagers or wreckers. For example, they were employed to assist the Spanish in saving what they could from the 1622 Spanish Fleet wreck in the Marquesas. The *Atocha* and the *Margarita* are the better known ships



Above—Ship in distress. HASF 82-88-7.

Opposite page—“Cotton Ship Wrecked on the Bahama Banks.” *Harper’s Weekly*, December 21, 1872. HASF 2002-403-6.



of the fleet. About eight years of salvaging of the treasure of the two ships by the Spanish was partially done with hired Indians.

Meanwhile, Dutch mariners frequently harassed the Spanish salvagers. With little doubt, the native Indians profited one way or another by diving for sunken goods. Quite possibly the Bahamians were the ones who developed wrecking into an industry. Once it was organized, the adjudication of salvage claims was done at Nassau or Havana, or mutually between the parties involved.

Maritime records abound with events where complete ships, cargos, passengers and crews were saved. Most expect that the entire gambit from heroism to outright piracy existed. Tales of moving navigation lights to placing false lights exist. The *Georgia Gazette* of October 7, 1790, ended an article of two English ships, one saved and one lost, as follows: "...The wreckers [Bahamians]

wrecks here that Captain Ben Baker started growing pineapples on Plantation Key and Key Largo, and quite possibly launched the pineapple industry. One wrecking report actually stated that Captain Baker spotted a wreck while sitting on his front porch on Key Largo. Almost all wreckers had to have supporting work in between wrecking. Most were also spongers, turtlers, fishermen or anything that placed them in a good position when a wreck occurred.

On May 7, 1822, Key West was declared an official port of entry. The following year, Commodore David Porter with his West Indies Anti-Piracy Squadron was sent to clear the waters of pirates so U.S. shipping could proceed in peace and safety. During this process Commodore Porter wrote to the Secretary of the Navy of the dilemma of the lack of written legal statutes to enforce.

The federal legislature took no immediate action. The legislative council of the Territory of Florida passed its own wrecking act on July 4, 1823. It contained 14 sections, and section one mandated that salvagers of wrecked property brought into the territory must report it to the nearest justice of the peace or notary public. Section two gave the officer the duty to gather a jury of five. Section three gave the composition of the jury as two members nominated by the salvagers, two by the owners and one by the justice or notary. Other sections established court costs, advertisement, required a certified copy to be sent to the clerk of the Superior Court, etc. As there was not a Superior Court in Key West until 1828, early records are difficult to locate. Section 14 covered the making or holding false lights, devices or anything "with the intent to mislead, bewilder or decoy the mariners of any vessel on the high seas, whereby such vessel may be cast ashore, or get aground...If convicted, ...be deemed guilty of felony, and shall suffer death."

The act gave far too much power to minor offices as a notary. Section two allowed the officer to appoint representatives for the owners if none were present. Key West only had a population of a few hundred. Ships and entire cargos were sold. Therefore, wrecking got off to a bad start in the Keys.

The June 10, 1826, *Pensacola Gazette* reported that gross duties paid on goods landed in Key West increased from \$389 in 1823 to \$14,108 in 1824, and this was only the beginning.

In these early territorial times, as well as later, settlement could be resolved by agreement or arbitration. A court was only required in cases of disagreement. In some cases the ship's owner did not agree with the ship's master and neither agreed with the salvager, in which case a court was usually necessary. In maritime law, the word "master" referred to the person in charge of a civilian vessel and "captain" was used for a military vessel. In some cases there was the fourth party, the insurer, who had to represent his interests. Appeals of decisions could and did last for years.

A 1990 court case involved the sinking and salvaging of the USS *Central America*, which had sunk off of South Carolina in the 1850s. It was transporting gold from California to Washington, D.C. and the gold was salvaged. The insurance company recovered part of its losses by court action.



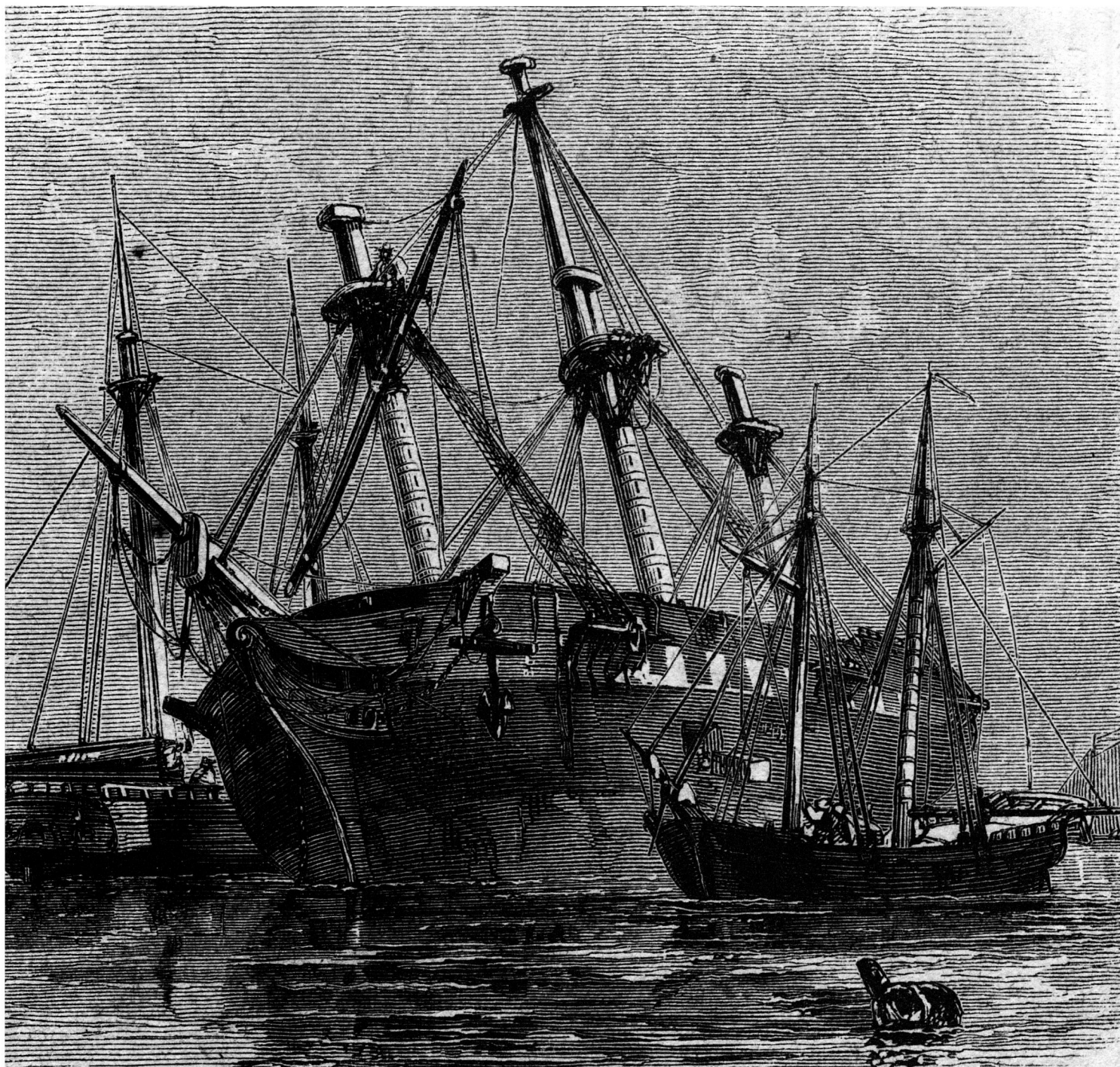
THE RAFT.

"The Raft" from "Wrecking on the Florida Keys" in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*. No. CVIL-April, 1859, Vol. XVIII. Page 585. HASF 975.941, Nor.

generally set the ships on fire after they have done with them, that they may not serve as a beacon to guide other ships clear of those dangerous shoals." This editorializing by the writer implies that the wreckers did not want markers showing other ships where the dangerous reefs were. The same arguments can be made that wreckers moved navigation lights to cause groundings. Most likely when any ship's captain saw any light it would immediately know it was far too close and steer away to seaward. A better argument would be that the dishonest wreckers extinguished the lights. There is no primary documentation to substantiate these allegations.

Shipwrecks occurred everywhere in the Florida Straits. In the Upper Keys, Carysfort Reef was an especially dangerous reef and the waters around Tavernier Key was a favorite anchorage location while waiting for wrecks on the offshore reefs to happen. In early times, the name Carysfort was frequently used generically to include all the reefs in the general area. It was while waiting for





“Wreckers at Work” from “Wrecking on the Florida Keys” in *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*. No. CVIL-April, 1859, Vol. XVIII. Page 582. HASF 975.941, Nor.

To prevent the spoils of shipwrecks within U.S. jurisdiction from being carried to foreign ports for adjudication, Congress passed the Federal Wrecking Act on March 3, 1825. It mandated that all property shipwrecked in these seas had to be brought to a U.S. port of entry. Businessman John Simonton reported in 1826 that “...from December, 1824, to December, 1825, \$293,353.00 of wrecked property...” was sold in Key West.

In 1828, the U.S. established a Superior Court in Key West with maritime and admiralty jurisdiction and James Webb was appointed as its judge. Judge William Marvin replaced him in 1839 and wrote the book on wrecking laws. Judge Marvin made considerable improvements on the then adversarial system against the ship’s owners. The only other courts were at St. Augustine and Pensacola, so almost all of the Florida Keys wrecking



property was taken to Key West. The wrecking act was further tightened in 1847.

The first Superior Court case tried in the Key West court was that of the ship *Nanna*, which had run aground on Carysfort Reef and was able to be pulled off once lightened of 456 bales of cotton. The un-grounding was accomplished by three wreckers who happened to be near. This was often the case when a ship ran aground at low tide, if her hull was not split open and quick-acting assistance was near. The wreckers would secure their anchors in deeper water, lighten the ship's cargo and as the tide rose, pull the stricken ship off of the reef using their capstans. There were a lot of "ifs" in doing this, such as if the weather permitted. What if the wreckers were not immediately available, the ships ran aground at other than low tide, the weather was fierce, and the cargo did not lend itself to be easily off-loaded rather than throwing it overboard. In the *Nanna's* case, the salvaged cotton was valued at \$60,000, of which the wreckers were awarded \$10,000.

There were many wreckers operating during the wrecking heyday. Some of the better-known were Jacob Housman, Ben Baker, Brandish "Hog" Johnson, John Geiger, "Bull" Weatherford and John Lowe.

Jacob Housman of Indian Key was involved in salvage court with a French ship, the *Vigilant*, which had run aground near present-day Marathon. He was found guilty of consorting with the ship's master to cheat the ship's owner. Evidently Housman and the ship's master split the reward. In this case there were \$32,000 in coins aboard.

The courts employed 13 rules of wrecking which are quite involved. These were legal rules and defined all parties, dealt with collusion, licensing, discrimination, bribery, price fixing, using a disaster to make a profit, wharfage, providing the ship's master with a copy of rules, rights of the master wrecker, etc.

The wrecking ship and its master had to be licensed; its owner's name only had to be recorded. The ones who really got rich were the ship owners and warehouse owners. William Curry, John Lowe and Asa Tift of Key West are good examples.

Consortiums existed when various ships worked together. There were basically two types of consortiums, one more or less permanent and another that applied only to a specific shipwreck and was null and void after that specific salvage.

Wreckers also rewarded agents, such as fishermen, who reported a shipwreck to them. Being the first to arrive at the wreck site meant being capable of being the "wrecking master," who could, but not necessarily did, receive a larger reward. This designate also was able to choose other wreckers that he wanted to assist in the project. The ship's master could choose whomever he wished to be the master wrecker or none; however, in any circumstance other than a simple low tide grounding, he usually needed assistance as soon as the first wrecker arrived on the scene.

Ideally, only sufficient cargo should be removed to float the ship free at the next high tide. Often this required the assistance of other wreckers, who would divide a reduced number of shares of the first, or master-wrecker. There is a case where a beer-laden ship was salvaged and considerable cargo was consumed in the

process. The court decreed no additional fees. In another case, the wreckers consumed considerable food from the wrecked ship and the judge deducted this from the award.

The wrecking industry began to wind down with the erection of effective lighthouses. Cape Florida, Sand Key and Dry Tortugas had lighthouses since the 1820s. Many of the wrecks, though, were occurring in the Upper Keys. The Carysfort lighthouse was lit in 1852. Possibly before, at the same time or later were a series of fixed iron day beacons along the outer edge of the reef. According to an 1855 dated U. S. Coast Survey chart each beacon had an alphabet letter from A through P and "Erected by Lieut. James Totten U. S. Army." The letter "A" was at Eastern Sambo off of Key West and the last was "Beacon P" off of Fowey Rocks south of Cape Florida. The total height of the beacon assembly was about 45 feet depending on the water depth. Each beacon had a five-foot square lettered vane that rotated with the wind direction and a 3 foot wide and five foot high cylinder of hoop iron on top. Some remains can still be found.

The Sombrero Reef lighthouse off of Marathon was put into operation in 1858. Slowly navigation was improved with the addition of lighthouses at Alligator (1873), Fowey (1878), American Shoal (1880) and Rebecca Shoal (1886). The advent of the steam powered steamship—steerable regardless of wind conditions—doomed wrecking as an industry. As a time reference, steam-powered ships were fairly common by the end of the Civil War.

The grounding of the steamship *Alicia* of Bilbao on Ajax Reef off Miami while en route to Havana is usually acknowledged as the end of the wrecking industry. The year was 1905 and wreckers came from many parts to assist. Captain "Hog" Johnson was the master wrecker. With much of the cargo removed, the ship was floated only to be sunk again the next day in a severe wind squall.

For further information, all of the records of each shipwreck are in the downtown branch of the Miami-Dade Public Library and the May Hill Russell Public Library in Key West. They are known as admiralty records, but are officially titled The Federal Court, Southern District of Florida, Setting in Admiralty.

The Wrecking License Bureau of the court closed in 1921. The last known licensed wrecker, Captain Chet Alexander, passed away in 1984—the final curtain.

The book and movie, "*Reap the Wild Wind*," starring John Wayne, Ray Milland and Paulette Goddard set in 1840 dramatized the life of the Key West wrecking industry. Check your local library.—*SFH*

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*Jerry Wilkinson, a fourth generation Floridian, has collected and summarized Keys history for various newspapers and magazines in the Florida Keys and has served as president of the Historical Preservation Society of the Upper Keys (HPSUK). In 1997 he undertook the publication of a 16-page Upper Keys history, "History Talk of the Upper Keys."*

"The Wrecker" from "Wrecking on the Florida Keys" in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*. No. CVIL-April, 1859, Vol. XVIII. Page 577. HASF 975.941, Nor.





# The African Cemetery on Higgs Beach Key West, Florida

*by Gail Swanson*

**D**aniel Davis closed the last grave. With that, there were 295 Africans buried in 80 days on the shore of Key West. Davis, a local carpenter, had contracted with the U.S. Marshal to make coffins for, and bury, those who died from a group of 1,432 Africans brought to the island during the summer of 1860. These people had been carried as human cargo aboard American-owned slave ships captured by the U.S. Navy. Davis was paid \$5.50 for every corpse he put into the sand; each one a victim of the most terrible, cruel business ever conceived—the African slave trade.

The next year Army engineer E. B. Hunt described the cemetery in a letter: “beside numerous human waifs left stranded on this ocean outpost, some 200 to 300 poor victims of the African slave trade, sleep their last sleep in a long and most desolate row of sand graves.” That same year James C. Clapp, a Key West resident, drew a very detailed map of Key West, with the notation at a point of land now named Higgs Beach: “African Cemetery.”

This is the tragic story of the people buried at Key West, in a cemetery that was unmarked for 141 years; of commerce in human beings on the west coast of Africa; of drama upon the high seas off Cuba between the slavers and the U. S. Navy; and the cares of the village of Key West on the very eve of the Civil War.

The orders from U.S. Secretary of the Navy Isaac Toucey to the commanders of four newly-purchased steamships, then at New York, Philadelphia and Norfolk, came in September 1859. They were to proceed to the coast of Cuba and patrol “the immediate object in view being the suppression of the slave trade between that island and Africa, so far as carried on by citizens or under the flag of the United States.” A second net, it was, to capture the American slavers that had escaped U.S. Navy ships that were stationed off the African coast.

The horrendous trade in human beings from the African continent to the Western Hemisphere was finally coming to an end, after hundreds of years, and after millions had died in passage in the horror of the holds of the slave ships. In 1808, importation of enslaved Africans to the U.S. was banned, and in 1820, importation to Spanish colonies was banned by Spain; but the trade to Cuba, a colony, continued, as Cuban officials and the planters were in collusion. There was little enforcement of Spain's law, for Cuba needed the forced labor for her sugar plantations. In the four-year period of 1856-1860, over 90,000 enslaved Africans were imported into Cuba.

The price of a human being in Cuba in 1860 was \$1,000. The price of a human being in Africa was \$10 to \$34. "No wonder," someone wrote anonymously from Key West in 1860, "that Boston, New York, and Philadelphia have so much interest in the business."

"Humanity was outraged and the American flag was prostituted on a shameful scale," historian Warren S. Howard has written, on the continued slave trade from Africa to Cuba in American-owned vessels flying our national flag. The U.S. Navy had patrolled the African coast for American slavers since 1839—but in 20 years had captured only two ships. That changed in 1859, when the headquarters for the African squadron was moved from Cape Verde Islands to a more effectual area, Angola; the number of ships was increased, and the four steamships were placed to patrol the coast of Cuba. In 1860, the Navy captured seven slavers, rescuing some 4,300 Africans. Three of those slave ships were captured off Cuba.

On December 16, 1859, the Amesbury, Massachusetts-built clipper *Wildfire* left New York for the Congo River, where, on March 21, 1860, 608 African people, the majority 12-16 years old, were loaded, probably chained together, into the ship's hold. They may have been from tribes deep in the interior of Africa, shipped down the Congo and penned like animals for weeks while their sale was organized. A crew member later told M. H. Stacey in Key West that "when they were in the river there were many vessels awaiting [human] cargoes." One of those other

vessels may have been the *William*, owned and captained by Thomas W. Williams, a Baltimore resident. That ship had left Havana for Africa November 19, 1859. Her cargo, loaded at the Congo River, consisted of 664 human beings.

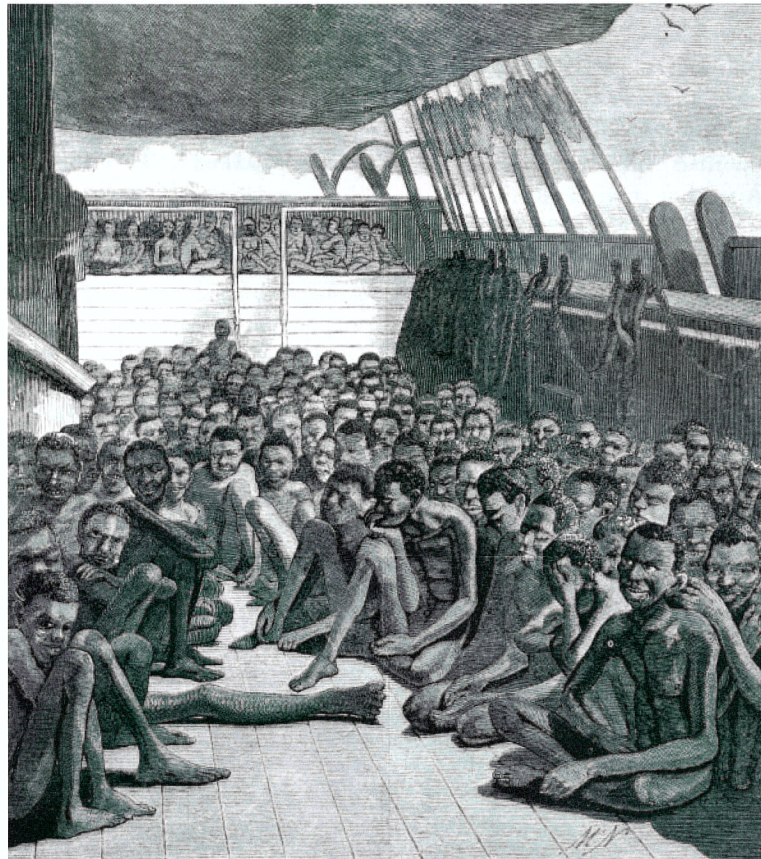
Elsewhere in Africa, at Wydah (present-day Benin) an infamous slaving port, an unknown number of Africans, purchased from Glele, the King of Dahomey, were forced into the hold of the *Bogota*, a ship owned by parties in New York.

The *Wildfire* had been at sea for 35 days when, upon approaching Cuba, the USS *Mohawk*, Lt. T. Augustus Craven commanding, sighted her. From the *Boston Post*, May 15, 1860:

She did not look the slaver, but from force of habit, with a spice of curiosity, Lt. Craven ordered Lt. Carpenter to board. As the boat approached the vessel, it was observed no rope was thrown out, and it was evident the visit was not agreeable. The lieutenant, unassisted, boarded the vessel, and was no sooner on her bulwarks than he waved his sword, and the men in the boat raised a shout, a signal that she was a slaver and a prize. The moment that the slaves, who had just been driven below, caught sight of the officer's uniform, (the hatches were covered with gratings only) they sang and clapped their hands with joy. They instinctively knew that their deliverers were at hand.

On the *Mohawk's* way to Key West, the slaver in tow, according again to the *Boston Post*, the slaver's captain, who first had laughed at the capture, became alarmed:

and offered one of the officers \$100,000 if he would cause him to be safely ashore...he went to Capt. Craven and begged that he might be landed on one of the [unsettled] Keys...his frenzy knew no bounds, and he declared he would jump overboard...the prisoners were placed in irons...Every man and officers were armed with pistol and cutlass. The Spanish captain, finding he could no longer deceive himself that he was in danger of punishment, tried every means to avert it; he offered one of the officers \$200,000 to be allowed to go free with his cargo.



Slave deck of the bark "Wildfire" brought into Key West. April 30, 1860. Courtesy of the Florida State Archives.



Key West was never intended to be a depot for recaptured Africans, but Lt. Craven refused to make the Africans endure travel any further than necessary for their deliverance from the hold, termed by him in a letter to the Secretary of the Navy, "a crowded and filthy pen." Eighty-eight people had died there before the capture; 13 more before reaching Key West. In a letter to Secretary Touchey he described what he saw on the *Wildfire*:

The negroes are packed below in as dense a mass as it is possible for human beings to be crowded; the space allotted them being in general about 4' high...are obliged to attend the calls of nature in this place—tubs being provided for the purpose—and here they pass their days, their nights, amidst the most horribly offensive odors...under the scorching heat of the tropical sun, without room enough for sleep; with scarcely space to die in; with daily allowance of food and water barely sufficient to keep them alive.

The warship and slaver arrived at Key West on April 30, 1860, with Craven delivering the Africans to the custody of the U.S. Marshal there, a surprised Fernando J. Moreno. Moreno acted with all haste in getting quarters called "barracoons" and a hospital built for the Africans after being denied the use of Ft. Taylor, then being completed. He had 507 people to take care of, people who had absolutely no idea in the world where they were. Key West was then a town of about 3,000 people, and had been settled for 39 years.

Many of the Africans arrived sick or blind from diseases brought on by the conditions that they had endured in the ship's hold; blind from ophthalmia, ill from lung disease, typhoid fever and dysentery. M. H. Stacy, stationed on the USS *Crusader*, then at Key West, visited the slave ship while the people were still aboard and wrote:

It was a horrible sight to see the poor creatures, in all stages of emaciation...A glance on the slave deck was enough to fill the mind with indescribable horror at what the poor creatures must have suffered in passage...34 are ashore at present sick and will probably die. I noticed one little black boy lying on deck perfectly naked, and apparently too unwell to move hand nor foot. He only cast imploring glances about too expressive to be misunderstood...It was altogether horrible beyond description.

Jefferson B. Browne related the scene at the first death and burial in his 1912 history of Key West. Browne's father had probably been the source of his information; he had rented two of his slaves to Marshal Moreno to nurse the sick Africans:

The first burial was of a child six weeks old, whose young mother was barely in her teens. Her devotion to her offspring made her an object of much sympathy to the visitors to the camp, and upon the death of the child, our people provided a handsome coffin to bury it in. The interment took place some distance from the barracoon, and the Africans were allowed to

be present at the services, where they performed their native ceremony. Weird chants were sung, mingled with loud wails of grief and mournful moanings from a hundred throats, until the coffin was lowered into the grave, when at once the chanting stopped and perfect silence reigned, and the Africans marched back to the barracoon without a sound.

On May 9 the USS *Wyandotte*, Lt. Fabius Stanley commanding, began a 4-hour chase of the *William*, then approaching Cuba with her cargo, who were also mostly children. Already 118 Africans had died on the passage, and another six were murdered that day by the crew upon the approach of the warship. When the *Wyandotte* overtook the slaver, Lt. Stanley

used a ruse and asked the ship's nationality—in Spanish.

"American," was the reply, the slaver's crew believing they had been overtaken by a Spanish ship and would not be boarded if American. On the contrary, and the *William* was brought into Key West May 13, after even more people died, and the survivors, another 513 Africans, were delivered to Fernando J. Moreno who then had over 1,000 people to care for.

Moreno's descendants, of the Bruce family, still live in Key West, still have paperwork of his trials, of his payment to doctors and nurses, receipts for purchases of medicine, payments for housing construction, food, of providing guards to protect the Africans. From all accounts the Africans were well-treated at Key West by Moreno, by the commanders of the warships and by the citizens who voluntarily brought clothing, especially for the naked women, one of whom gave birth to a son while at Key West. The entire town, it can be gleaned from the Moreno receipts, was involved in the goods and services provided to care for and to protect the Africans.

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On May 23 USS *Crusader*, Lt. John N. Maffitt commanding, captured the ship loaded at Wydah, the *Bogota*, upon her approach to Cuba, and brought her into Key West on May 26, with 420 Africans aboard. It was the third rescue, a third delivery to Moreno, for a total of 1,432 people.

The monetary value of the Africans, if sold as slaves in Cuba or the United States, was well-realized by the Key Westers. Moreno wrote to the Secretary of the Interior, Jacob Thompson, on May 28, "I have consumed all the lumber on the island in the construction...the supply of water is getting very low, and the military force on this island entirely too small to resist such a large force, in the event of any attack." On June 15, Moreno hired the use of a horse, "to be used in case of alarm, or attack on said depot." And, writing Secretary Thompson on July 25, he told of the near-realization of his fears:

I will take this opportunity to inform the Department that a party of adventurers from the States of So. Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Louisiana, visited this island during the last month with the view of relieving me of some of the Africans. That this was their object I have the strongest assurances. A number of our most worthy citizens were consulted on the subject of rescuing them from me; and offers of money were made to my military guard not to use their arms in case of an attack upon the depot.

There was no cooperation with the scheme, at all, and the southerners left, but Moreno's concerns remained. "How far I would have been justified in the use of arms in defense of the law, I am at a loss to say...I desire to receive special instructions on this point to guide me for the future."

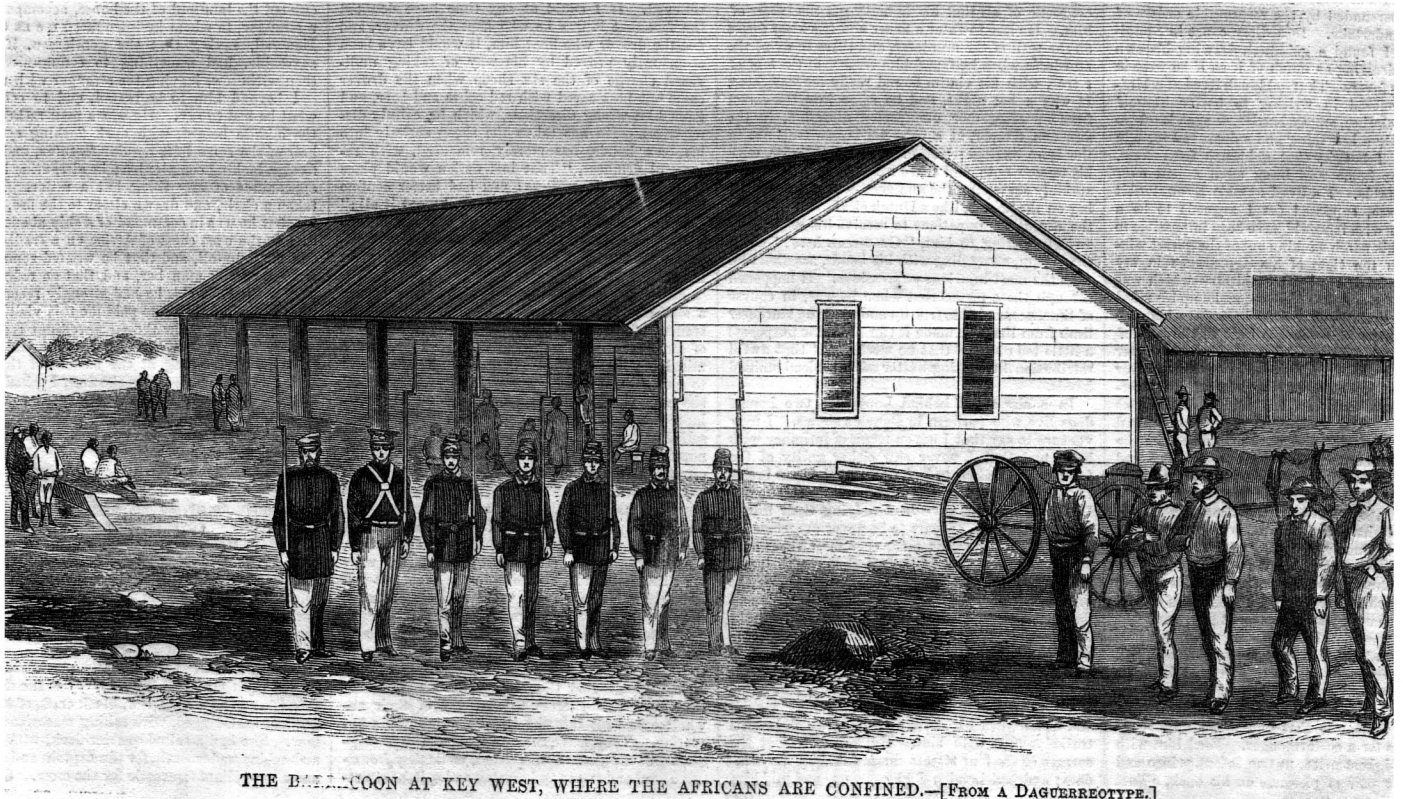
The situation of over 1,400 Africans at Key West became the subject of Congressional debate. Some southern congressmen wanted them to stay in the U.S., where slavery, although not the trans-Atlantic slave trade, was still legal. But the U.S. government contracted with the American Colonization Society to return the people in Key West to West Africa, to the nation established for freed slaves, Liberia.

Due to the winds of that summer, the ships chartered by the American Colonization Society, based in Washington, did not immediately arrive at Key West, and deaths among the Africans from the diseases brought on by the conditions of their confinements in the ships' holds continued unabated. The deaths recorded were: people from the *Wildfire*, 96; the *William*, 171; and the *Bogota*, 28. Buried at Key West were a total of 295 Africans from the slave ships.

The chartered ships *Castillian*, *South Shore* and *Star of the Union* finally arrived, and the Africans boarded as free people, rescued people, but still sick and weak people. The number of deaths on the voyage to Liberia: another 255 people.

After their residence of 80 days on the island, a Key Wester wrote, after their departure:

The solitude of the trackless ocean, or untrodden prints of our broad domain, are not more complete than the late residence of these negroes. The buildings stand, but the loud and dinning sound of voices—the chanting and singing and dancing, and even the fierce expressions of anger are all gone—the weary sentinel—the relief guards—the smoke—giving note of



THE BARRACON AT KEY WEST, WHERE THE AFRICANS ARE CONFINED.—[FROM A DAGUERRETYPE.]

The barracoon at Key West where the African slaves were confined, June 1860. *Harper's Weekly*, July 14, 1866. HASF 1999-325.



busy preparations of food—the corn mill, and even the stocks are all deserted, and silence reigns throughout.

The burial ground of those who died was forgotten shortly after 1861 and the outbreak of the Civil War. A brick battery, West Martello Tower, was built in 1863 on the cemetery, over the objections of Army engineer Hunt in Key West. In the heat of war preparations, his objection had been overridden in Washington.

Jefferson B. Browne wrote briefly of the Africans in 1912, and of the “disinterment of human bones on the southeast side of the island, where excavations were being made for public improvements...[was of the] remains...of the Africans who were brought to Key West.”

The focus of the “public improvements” Browne wrote of was no doubt the construction of West Martello Tower. There is little doubt the remains of many of the Africans were moved at that time. An elderly Key Wester, Armando Sosa, recalled of hearing workmen on a pipe project in the 1940s finding many human remains about two blocks from the tower.

The Civil War, in which Key West remained Union-held, ended slavery in the United States, and the results of the war also indirectly ended all of the slave trade to Cuba later in the decade. It is ironic that a cemetery of people who died from slavery was built upon with a fortification in the war to end slavery.

Today a public beach and its facilities are at the cemetery, together with the remains of the Civil War battery, now occupied by the Key West Garden Club, and few know of the tragedy this place represents.

### Epilogues

The loss of the lives of African people tragically continued on the coast of Liberia. On September 6, two boats swamped in the surf while attempting to land the Africans from one of the ships from Key West. Ten people drowned.

The captains of the three slave ships were all set free by the courts of Key West that found “no [true] bill” for the case of one captain, “indicted but found not guilty” for another, and “acquitted” the third. But paradoxically their ships were all adjudicated as participating in the slave trade and sold by the court at Key West. By September of 1860, the *William*, in another port and under a new owner, was outfitted for another voyage as a slave ship.

Verifiable news of the Emancipation Proclamation arrived at Key West on January 24, 1863. Five days later Key West African-Americans celebrated—in the barracoon; liberated people celebrating at a structure that had been built for other liberated people. Soldier John Jacob Hornbeck wrote in his diary January 29, 1863 that the black people of Key West congregated...

...for a parade today in honor of their freedom. They marched up to the Col's Head Quarters and gave him 3 cheers. They marched through most of the streets. There were a few stones thrown at them in passing through Conktown. At 3 p.m. they had a dinner at the barracoon on the beach, and had dancing. It created great excitement in the city...

Lt. Craven, the captain of USS *Mohawk*, the man whose crew wouldn't take an enormous bribe and whose humanity was so evident in the report of the conditions the Africans had endured, lost his life fighting for the Union in 1864 in the battle of Mobile Bay.

The land where West Martello Tower was built had been purchased by the U.S. from the widow of an early Key West settler who then lived in Boston. But the title was never examined, funds never paid, the deed never recorded. In 1878 it was sold for taxes and the keeper of Ft. Taylor, George Phillips, reported to his superior that the new owner, Mr. Watson, was removing sand from the

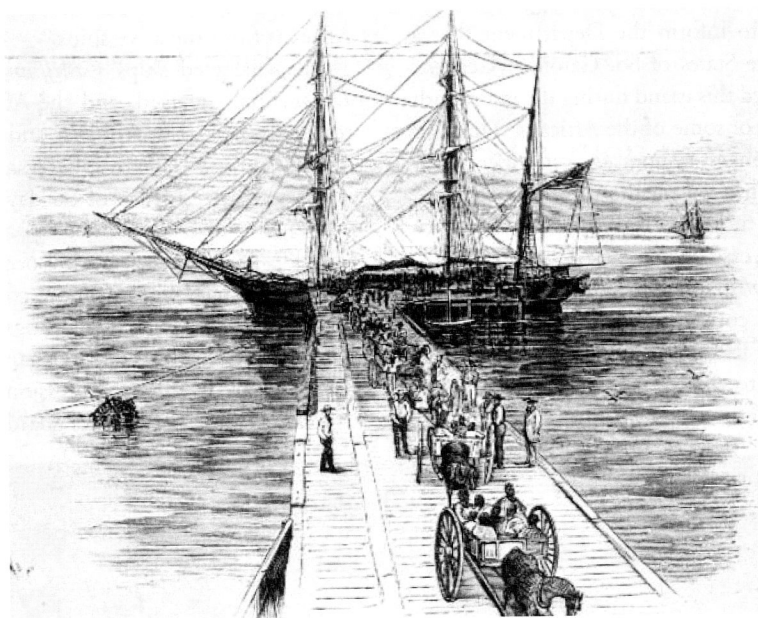
base of the tower. The year was 1880, the 20-year-old burial ground then completely forgotten.

### Author's Note

My documenting this event which began in 1992 and my efforts to bring it to the attention of the public that began in 1997 led to the marking of the burial ground with a State of Florida Historical Marker in 2001. In 2002 the Mel Fisher Maritime Heritage Society of Key West, an organization much interested in the slave trade due to their excavation of the wreck of the slave ship *Henrietta Marie* hired Dr. Lawrence B. Conyers to conduct a non-disturbing ground-penetrating radar survey of the site. Dr. Conyers discovered an area adjacent to the tower that contained at least nine undisturbed burials.—SFH

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*Gail Swanson was a Florida Keys resident for 22 years. She is author of "Documentation of the Indians of the Florida Keys & Miami 1513-1765" (Infinity Publishing, 2003).*

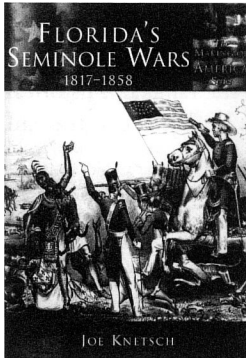


Drawing of a landing of a cargo of slaves. The slaves were on the *William* but were captured by the USS *Wyandotte*. Courtesy of the Florida State Archives.



## FLORIDA'S SEMINOLE WAR, 1817-1858

by Joe Knetsch, Arcadia Publishing, Charleston, SC. 160 pages, \$24.99



reviewed by Stuart McIver

Floridians today may be dismayed by our high crime rate and terrible traffic accidents, but consider this. In the 19th century, Florida was the scene of the longest, bloodiest and costliest Indian warfare in our history—three wars with the Seminoles stretching from 1817 to 1858, four decades characterized as either outright war or

uneasy periods of peace between the battles.

A substantial part of the longest, the Second Seminole War (1835-1842), was fought in South Florida and nearly all of the Third Seminole War occurred south of the Lake Okeechobee area. These were difficult days in Florida, particularly for the Indians whose Florida population declined from roughly 5,000 to about 100, partly because of the three wars and partly due to the United States policy of Indian removal to lands farther west.

Author and historian Joe Knetsch has covered all three of these wars, combining them into a compact, readable and well-illustrated account of Florida's bloodiest period. One of Florida's most relentless researchers, Dr. Knetsch has provided readers with a rich selection of illustrations, always a feature of Arcadia Publishing's *The Making of America Series*. These images include sketches, paintings, maps, battle plans and even a few early photographs.

In this book a colorful collection of players parade across the Florida scene—two presidents, Andrew Jackson and Zachary Taylor; Generals Winfield Scott, William Jenkins Worth, Thomas Jesup and Duncan L. Clinch; and such major Indian leaders as Osceola, Micanopy Coacoochee, Alligator, Billy Bowlegs and Abiaca, better known as the invincible Sam Jones.

The first war, an attempt by the young republic to wrest west Florida from Spain, occurred mostly in northwest Florida. The second started on December 28, 1835, and gave to a vast county

in the southern part of the Territory of Florida a name that it held for many years—Dade County.

Unaware of the depth of the anger fueled by the policy of Indian removal, Brevet Major Francis L. Dade was leading a command of 108 men from the Tampa Bay area toward Fort King, near today's Ocala. Along the way a band of Indians, led by Jumper, Alligator and Micanopy, ambushed the Americans. Only three of Dade's soldiers survived the surprise attack. Dade, killed in the first volley, has been remembered in the naming of Florida's most populous county, though he now has to share his name in the present-day designation of Miami-Dade County.

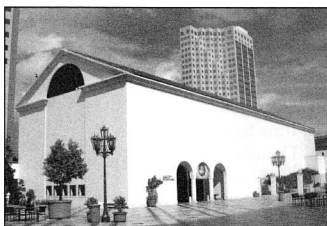
Eight days after the Dade ambush, the family of William Cooley was murdered on the banks of the New River in today's Fort Lauderdale. The second war was under way, and seven more years would elapse until it ground to an indecisive end. More than 1,500 American soldiers were killed in the seven-year war and most of the Indians who still lived in Florida found their refuge in the Everglades and the Big Cypress Swamp until the third war broke out in 1855.

"Few wars in United States history have been so contrived as the Third Seminole War," writes Dr. Knetsch. Its purpose was simply an attempt to remove the last few remnants of the Seminole Nation. Under the leadership of an ancient and stubborn medicine man called Sam Jones, the Indians survived. South Floridians can see proof of their durability by driving west on the Tamiami Trail or north on State Road 7 in Hollywood where a brand-new Seminole hotel and casino has just now arisen.

By tying these three wars together author Knetsch has given us a concise picture of a major influence on the overall history of an always-changing Florida.—*SFH*

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*Stuart McIver is a former editor of South Florida History magazine. His latest book is Death In The Everglades, the story of the murder of Audubon warden Guy Bradley.*



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We wish to especially thank the following individuals who joined the Historical Museum for the first time or reinstated their past membership. This is not a complete list of all our members; it is merely recognition of those who chose to join the ranks of Historical Museum supporters from November 11, 2003 until July 20, 2004. A complete list of our membership appears in *Tequesta* at the end of each year.

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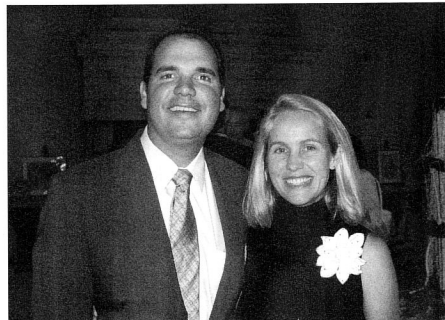
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# HISTORIC TOURS with DR. GEORGE

For almost two decades, Dr. Paul George, historian for the Historical Museum of Southern Florida, has toured his way to local, national and international acclaim with his continuing series of historic tours. As a South Florida native, author and Miami-Dade professor, Dr. George has gained fame for his uncanny ability to recall the most impressive details about the people and places that make South Florida so unique.

## 2004-2005 TOUR SCHEDULE

Sat	Nov 27	10 am	Magical Miami River Family Boat Tour
Sun	Jan 16	1 pm	Postwar Miami Home Architecture Coach Tour
Sat	Jan 22	2 pm	South Florida History Challenge
Sat	Jan 29	10 am	Coral Gables Bike Tour
Sun	Jan 30	1 pm	Downtown/Miami River Walking Tour
Sat	Feb 5	10 am	Stiltsville & Key Biscayne Boat Tour
Sun	Feb 6	1 pm	Mystery & Mayhem Coach Tour
Sun	Feb 20	10 am	The "Other" Hollywood Walking Tour
Sat	Feb 26	10 am	Islands of the Bay Boat Tour
Sat	Mar 12	10 am	Miami River Boat Tour
Sat	Mar 12	1:30 pm	Many Faces of Miami Coach Tour
Fri	Mar 18	6 pm	Coral Gables Twilight Walking Tour
Sat	Apr 2	10 am	Ocean Drive Art Deco Walking Tour
Sun	Apr 3	10 am	Stiltsville and Key Biscayne Boat Tour
Sat	Apr 16	6 pm	Secrets of Coconut Grove: Twilight Walking Tour
Sun	Apr 17	5 pm	Moon Over Miami River Boat Tour
Sat	May 7	10 am	Mother's Day Stiltsville and Key Biscayne Boat Tour
Sat	May 21	10 am	Miami River Boat Tour
Sat	Jun 4	10 am	Visions of the Caribbean Coach Tour
Sat	Jun 18	10 am	Father's Day Stiltsville & Key Biscayne Boat Tour

## INFORMATION AND RESERVATIONS

For information and reservations for Historic Tours with Dr. George, call 305.375.1621, Monday through Friday, 10 am to 4:30 pm. For additional information, visit [www.historical-museum.org](http://www.historical-museum.org)

### Boat and Coach Tours

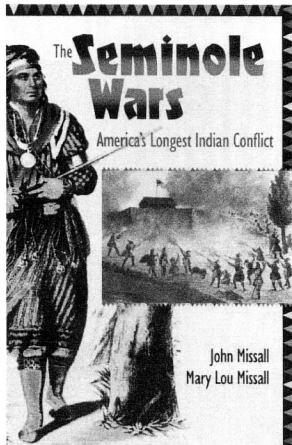
HMSF Members\* \$34, Non-Members \$39. Advance reservations and non-refundable payment required. All coach tours leave from the Historical Museum, 101 West Flagler Street.

### Walking and Bike Tours

HMSF Members\* \$15, Non-members \$20. **No reservations required except for Nov. 13 Walking Tour.**

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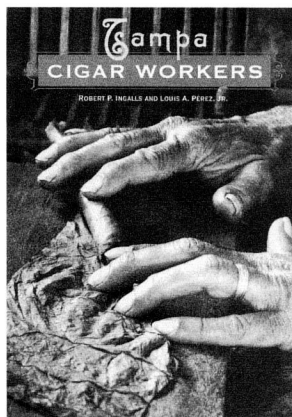
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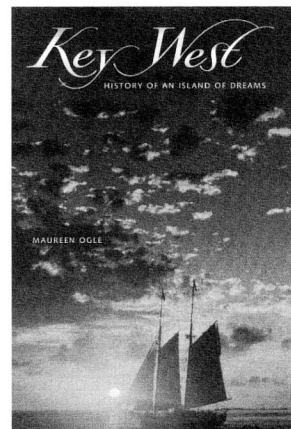
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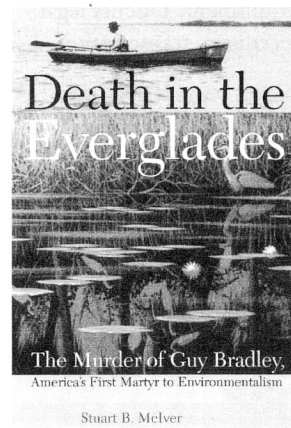
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Have you ever heard somebody tell a story and wish you had recorded it for others to hear? Do you want to preserve your friends' and relatives' life histories and capture their memories for future generations to enjoy? At the Historical Museum, you can learn about oral history and how to do it on your own.

Dr. Gregory Bush, oral historian and Director of the Institute for Public History at the University of Miami will lead this three-part seminar. Cost for the series: HMSF Members \$30, Non-Members \$35. Advance payment and registration required.

- Saturday  
**JAN 15**  
10-noon
- What is Oral History?**  
Learn what oral history is and how it is used as a method of preserving and understanding the past. Explore different types of oral history and discover why they are important.
- Saturday  
**JAN 22**  
10-noon
- Oral History 101**  
Learn how to prepare questions, select informants, conduct an interview, and choose the best equipment. Discuss legal issues, ethical procedures, transcription and editing.
- Saturday  
**JAN 29**  
10-noon
- Sample Oral History**  
Dr. Bush will conduct a sample oral history interview for the class to observe.

### GENEALOGY SEMINAR: WHO AM I?

Are you among the millions who enjoy asking questions about your ancestry, prowling cemeteries, and combing libraries and archives for answers? If you have the desire to learn about your past, this three-part genealogy series at the Historical Museum is for you!

Patti Martin of the Genealogical Society of Greater Miami will offer an in-depth introduction to the basic methods, tools, and sources for getting started on your family history research. Cost for the series: HMSF Members \$30, Non-Members \$35. Advance payment and registration required.

- Saturday  
**APR 2**  
10-noon
- Getting Started**  
Learn how to begin, where to look for information and how to use library resources (books, files, microfilm, CD-ROM and computers). Explore types of documentation methods and how to use them.
- Saturday  
**APR 9**  
10-noon
- Surfing the Net**  
Learn about advanced Internet techniques and useful websites for acquiring information on the World Wide Web.
- Saturday  
**APR 16**  
10-noon
- Sharing History**  
Bring your family documents and old photographs and share your history. Program will include group discussion and a question and answer session.

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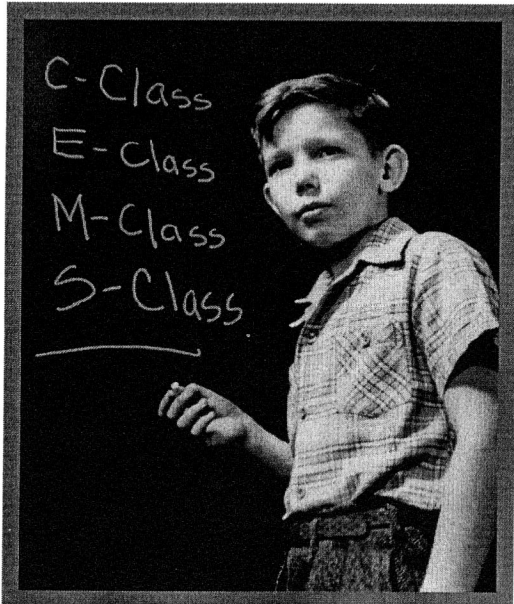
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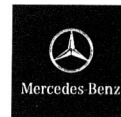
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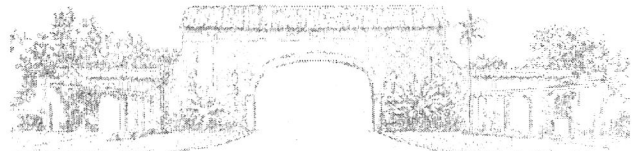
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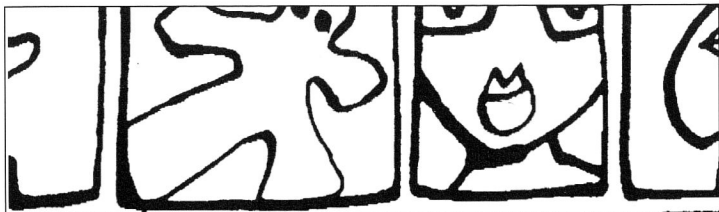
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# Historical Museum of Southern Florida

## The Florida Home Modern Living



An exhibition  
on display  
through 01.23.05

1945-1965

Guest curated by  
Jean-François Lejeune  
& Allan Shulman



Experience the residential architecture & family life of the post-war boom!



**HISTORICAL MUSEUM  
OF SOUTHERN FLORIDA**

101 West Flagler Street Downtown Miami  
305.375.1492 [www.historical-museum.org](http://www.historical-museum.org)

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