

Florida Keys History Center Series of Occasional Papers In Monroe County, Florida Historical Research



“To explore, preserve, promote, and make accessible the history of Monroe County, Florida.”

No.1

The Diary of Henry A. Patterson, Recording a Visit to Key West, Florida in 1843

Friday evening I spent at home writing.
On the afternoon of that day Mr W^m A Seymour stated
to me that Mr Philip J Fontaine of Key West, (son in
law to Uncle Alexander Patterson) was in debt to the firm
about 2000 dollars, which they wished to have secured in
some way, & therefore proposed that I should go out there
by the first opportunity, & endeavour to bring about such a
result. This morning I went to Burling Slip & found the
Brig Emeline was expected to sail for that place on the
5th January; & after duly weighing the subject in my own
mind, this afternoon I told Mr Seymour I was ready to go
at any time, as he wished.

An Excerpt from the Diary of Henry A. Patterson. New York Historical Society.

Transcribed and Annotated
By Corey Malcom, PhD
Lead Historian
Florida Keys History Center
July 2023

Abstract

A section of a diary kept by New York City business clerk Henry A. Patterson during an 1843 voyage to Key West, Florida is a detailed record of four months he spent at the remote island community. The town was dominated by wrecking, a business in which people salvaged ships and cargos wrecked on the Florida Reef in return for compensation. The residents of Key West prospered from the business, and according to the diary had quite comfortable lives. Patterson also explored and described the rather unspoiled natural environment of the Keys. This annotated and illustrated transcript makes Henry Patterson's diary - a significant part of the early-nineteenth-century Florida record - readily accessible.

Introduction

On December 30, 1842, a 23-year-old New York City hardware clerk named Henry A. Patterson was told by his employer that a client in Key West, Florida had gone into debt to the firm, and the matter needed to be resolved. Because Patterson had an uncle who lived in Key West (and who also happened to be the father-in-law of the debtor) he was asked to travel there to resolve the situation. Patterson quickly found a schooner sailing to Key West, and within two weeks was on his way to the far-flung island. Fortunately for us, Henry Patterson was an avid diarist, and he kept a detailed account of his journey and of his four-month stay at the small island community in the Florida Keys.¹

Henry Patterson was born on September 26, 1819, in New York City, but as a boy he grew up in Morris County, New Jersey; likely at Succasunna. He returned to New York City in 1837 and began a career in the hardware business with the W.N. Seymour Company. Patterson was employed as an administrative clerk for Seymour when he traveled to Key West.

The following transcript of Patterson's diary covers a period that ranges from the last day of December 1842 to early May of 1843. It starts in New York City, describing snippets of his life in lower Manhattan and the preparations for his Florida voyage. Once Patterson is aboard ship and island bound, he details the journey, describing life at sea as his ship sails southward from New York, past the Carolinas, through The Bahamas, and then to Key West.

At Key West, Patterson, offers seldom documented accounts of aspects of Key West life from the early nineteenth century, including details about travel, commerce, nature, and social life. Patterson depicts an island community that was remote but not isolated, with a steady stream of ships both coming and going, carrying people, goods, and mail. The regular maritime connections brought a noticeable cosmopolitan aspect to an otherwise out-of-the-way community.

In 1843, the Florida Keys economy was dominated by wrecking - the salvage of wrecked ships. The Florida Reef runs off the southern shores of the Florida Keys, and it has long been a "ship trap," a place where ships inadvertently sailed onto its submerged shallows and became stranded or sank. Wreckers made their living from the misfortune of these ships by freeing them from the reef or recovering their cargos and saving crew and passengers. For their salvage efforts, the wreckers were compensated, generally with a portion of the cargo or a percentage of its sale price. A court at Key West oversaw the process and determined the rewards. Warehouses and auction houses were on the island to store and sell the rescued goods.

Though the maritime aspects of wrecking must have been dangerous and demanding, the business appears to have produced relatively easy wealth for many islanders. From Patterson's writings, his social circle of merchants, captains, lawyers, landowners, politicians, and their families - all of them tied to wrecking in one way or another - appears to have had a comfortable, leisurely lifestyle. In Henry Patterson's Key West, both men and women spent considerable time calling on friends, playing games, enjoying music, having parties, and taking tea.

¹ Henry A. Patterson kept diaries between 1836-1849, mostly documenting his life in New York City. The four volumes were donated by his daughter, Ann Cuyler Patterson, to the New York Historical Society in 1950. NYHS (1950). *Annual Report and List of Members*, p. 64.

At the other end of the spectrum, Patterson gives fleeting glimpses into the lives of the enslaved. They are generally shown in barely noticeable supporting roles, identified at best by first name, but ultimately, they are revealed as people who would go to great lengths to escape their situation. There was also a steady government presence at Key West, with Navy and Coast Survey vessels calling regularly, their crews becoming a part of the island's social fabric, if only temporarily. Of course, since early nineteenth century medicine was crude, disease and death loomed large for everyone, no matter their age or social status, and Patterson takes us through the journey from life to death for more than one person.

Henry Patterson and his friends also spent much time exploring the environs of Key West, and their outdoor adventures give us a good sense of the physical spaces of the island, then a place of largely untamed wildland and broad beaches best traversed by horseback. His journeys also took in other Keys - Boca Chica, Big Pine, and Sand Key - and they are described as even wilder, with some serving as home to a few hardy pioneers willing to tough out the barest of existences. Wildlife in the Keys was more diverse and widespread than we see today, but for Patterson, animals seemingly existed to be shot or hooked, though the presence of at least two professional naturalists amongst his friends indicates there was at least some curiosity about the ecological world.



Figure 1. The roll of microfilm at the Florida Keys History Center containing Henry Patterson's diary.

The Florida Keys History Center holds a microfilmed excerpt of Patterson's diaries that was created in 1966 by the New York Historical Society for Betty M. Bruce, then the Historian for the Monroe County Library at Key West (Fig. 1). The film is badly underexposed, though, and quite difficult to read. Considering the microfilm reading technology of the time, Bruce probably found the film illegible and never worked with it. At some point, a substantial length of the film was torn, making much of Patterson's writing even more illegible. Still, Florida Keys Historian John Viele was able to use a portion of the diary for an essay on early settlers of Big Pine Key.²

This writer came across the long-dormant roll labelled "Key West Newspapers and Patterson Diary" in the Florida Keys History Center's microfilm collection, saw upon cursory examination that the contents looked significant, and decided to try to decipher it. To overcome the film's deficiencies and damage,

² See: Viele, John (2017). *Tales of Yesterday's Florida Keys*, Pineapple Press, Sarasota.

the microfilm was first scanned, and the page images were saved as digital files. The images from the torn sections of film were reassembled via photo editing software. Once all the pages were complete, they were then digitally brightened and contrasted to make the writing legible.

The resulting transcript, published here, retains all of Patterson's original spelling and punctuation. The only change to his writing is that ships' names have been italicized. Patterson's page headings of year, month, location, and page number have been retained, but it should be noted that his entries were not always made daily. Instead, he often summarized what had happened over the previous few days under one heading. The original diary is not illustrated, so relevant images from elsewhere have been incorporated to give Patterson's words better context. Footnotes have been added to offer explanations of events, details about ships, and clarifications of antiquated terms. Where possible, information is provided about people mentioned by Patterson, though any profiles only reflect who the people were in 1843; their life stories are not told.

The multi-level effort of technological salvage, transcription, and historical research has been a worthy project resulting in a vivid, detailed account of what life was like in the Florida Keys a mere 20 years after they had first been settled. Though Henry Patterson's diary covers only four months of 1843, his words greatly broaden our understanding of the young, early days of Florida's southernmost island communities.

The Henry A. Patterson Diary, December 31, 1842 – May 6, 1843:

1841 December. New York. 192

Saturday, thirty-first Wednesday morning at seven o'clock I commenced my usual routine of duty. The evening Robert Bruce spent at our house. Thursday evening at about eleven o'clock I went out,

1841 December. New York. 193

well muffled against a violent storm of snow & hail which was then raging & witnessed the conflagration of some half dozen fine stores containing near 300,000 dollars worth of merchandise. The scene might have been a very fine one if witnessed from a comfortable situation, but standing with my feet in water & my body in the storm, I soon found the attractions inferior to those of my own snug room in Henry street, so I quickly transported myself thither. The fire was on Water & Fletcher streets & Maiden Lane.³

Friday evening I spent at home writing. On the afternoon of that day Mr. Wm N. Seymour stated to me that Mr. Philip J. Fontaine of Key West,⁴ (son in law to Uncle Alexander Patterson)⁵ was in debt to the firm about 2000 dollars, which they wished to have secured in some way, & there fore proposed that I should go out there by the first opportunity, & endeavoured to bring about such a result. This morning I went to Burling Slip & found the Brig *Emeline* was expected to sail for that place on the 5th January (Fig. X); & after duly weighing the subject in my own mind, this afternoon I told Mr. Seymour I was ready to go at any time, as he wished.

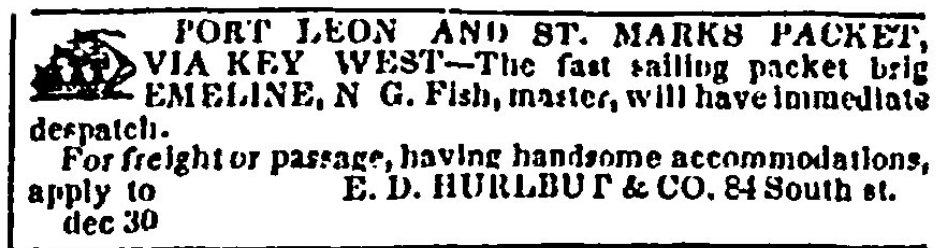


Figure 2 Advertisement for the Packet Brig *Emeline*, sailing to Port Leon, St. Marks, and Key West, Florida. New York *Commercial Advertiser*, January 4, 1843, page 3.

³ The New York *Herald* of December 30, 1842, reported: "The fire last evening at 11 o'clock. Was at the North and South West corners of Maiden lane and Water street. The upper story of A.B. Marvin's store, on the South West corner, and Phillips' fur store, on the North West corner, were much injured. The latter was entirely destroyed, and the front prostrated in the street."

⁴ Felipe "Philip" Juan Fontane (b.1809) was a native of Spanish colonial St. Augustine, Florida. He married Mary Jane Patterson in 1834. Fontane ran Key West's leading grocery and ship chandlery in partnership with George E. Weaver See: Browne, Jefferson B. (1912) *Key West: The Old and the New*, The Record Co., St. Augustine, p.12.

⁵Alexander Henry Patterson (b.1791) was a native of Stonington, Connecticut and a veteran of the War of 1812. He had come to Key West in 1824, on a government survey ship that was assessing locations for lighthouses. In 1830, he was chosen to represent Monroe County in the Florida Territorial Legislature. Patterson was also a businessman, and he owned a store at the foot of Whitehead Street. See: Bruce, Betty (1976). *Key West Mayors, 1828-1971*. On file at Florida Keys History Center, Monroe County Public Library.

Weather has been tolerably pleasant except Thursday, the snow fell on that day to the depth of several inches making tolerably good sleighing & very bad walking.

1842

January. New York.

194

Saturday, seventh I heard Mr. Bellows preach a New York sermon last Sunday morning. It was an exhortation to his hearers to improve themselves in virtue & seek religion & piety; & make the present anniversary an era of reform in their lives; & as such I was pleased with & instructed by it. Spent the afternoon writing; tea'd & spent part of the evening at Grand Father's & then walked home with Caroline Howe whom I found there, & finished the evening at her Father's house.

Monday Jan 2 as usual was a holiday. Closing the store at ten & a half o'clock, I immediately began making calls alone - made five, & at the fifth (Samuel Brainerd's) met Turner & Edgar by appointment, & we went thence together the rest of the day in a sleigh with driver & two horses, & by six o'clock had completed about forty calls. At seven & a half o'clock I called for Aaron Barnes at his boarding place, but found him not at home; thence I walked to Mr. Wenman's where I found beside the usual club of Platts, Cranes &c; Miss Anna Eliza Wilson from Goshen. We passed the evening as usual with spirited amusements, & all rode down in sleighs, reaching home before two o'clock Tuesday AM.

From getting less fatigued than usual on such occasions, & from the unexpected pleasure of meeting Miss Wilson, the enjoyment of the day was very much enhanced, & I shall look back on the commencement of the present year as the happiest in my life thus far.

1842

January. New York.

195

Thursday evening I again met a large part of the same company, with the addition of Mary Aletta, at Mrs. Howe's, where I also took tea. The evening passed much in the same manner as Monday evening, except that there was less dancing & music, & we broke up by eleven o'clock. I enjoyed it very much, but did not feel in spirits quite so buoyant as on the former occasion. Miss Wilson was again one of our number. Tuesday evening after closing the store, I went to Samuel Brainerd's & waited on Mary Aletta, & Miss Martha Brainerd to our house. The latter remained until Wednesday PM. Wednesday morning at seven o'clock I went to the Oliver street Baptist Church⁶ to see a Miss Hoyt married to a Mr. Fox, but from the ceremony being performed before the time appointed I was just in time to see the happy couple ride off. From the thermometer being down to plus 13, I imagine their ardour was somewhat cooled, & I am quite sure Mine was. Mary was there with a female acquaintance & I met them coming out. Miss Martha Haley took tea & spent Wednesday evening here, & I waited on her home & spent a few minutes there. An old school English Baptist named Mr. Pavey also took tea with us that evening.

⁶ At 3 Henry Street. Today rebuilt as Mariner's Temple, the oldest Baptist congregation in Manhattan See: <https://www.mtbc1795.org/>.

Wednesday January 4 I concluded to undertake the trip to Key West; Thursday I engaged my package on board the *Emeline*, N.G. Fish, Master;⁷ bound to St. Marks, with military stores to Tampa Bay⁸, & hoped to sail to day, but the weather is very foggy & wind Southerly and

1842

January. New York.

196

Easterly; hence our Captain decided on remaining in port until Monday.

The weather the first of the week was cold & slippery walking; Monday there was occasional snow squalls, which frightened us but did no material damage; the sleighing until yesterday was excellent; the two last days have been warm, damp, foggy, & very muddy & wet, unpleasant walking.

Saturday, fourteenth Last Sunday AM Mary & I went to the First Baptist Church & heard Mr. Cone preach his unusual sermon to the young. The house was crowded so that although we got there before the service commenced, I was obliged to sit on a bench in the aisle; & after all the sermon was not a good one, nothing in it either new or instructing to me. Returning via Broadway, we found the walking very muddy & got well splashed.

After dinner Sanford Whaler came in & spent part of the afternoon with me. He had just returned from the North East Coast of South America, whence he came as second mate of the Schooner *Foam*. Tea'd at Grand Father's, called in the evening at Doctor Halsey's, & bade them adieu & then went to the store with G.H. Hedenberg & got a trunk, in which, with one of my own I packed my things for my voyage.

Monday morning January 9 it looked pleasant, & I sent my baggage on board the brig, then went down myself, & found as the weather was not very favourable, & there would be some difficulty in getting the vessel out of dock, that we would not get off until the next day. After dinner I met

1842

January. New York.

197

Turner by appointment at the rooms of Mr. Chilton in Broadway, & by him had two miniature likenesses of myself taken by the daguerreotype process.⁹ The first one is perfect, the second has some defects in the plate, but the likeness is exact in either. I had to sit perfectly still, looking into a kind of box which was placed before me, some eight or ten feet distant, with no other

⁷ Nathan G. Fish of Mystic, Connecticut. The brig was named after his wife, Emeline F. (Miner) Fish.

⁸ The US Army's Fort Brooke was at Tampa Bay. It had been the command center during the Second Seminole War (1835-1842). Covington, James W. (1996) Some Observations Concerning the History of Fort Brook and Tampa, *Sunland Tribune*: Vol. 22, Article 6.

⁹ Patterson was almost certainly photographed by Dr. James R. Chilton, one of the first proponents of the Daguerreotype process in the US. An early photo historian wrote in 1896, "In the year 1840-41, a short time after Daguerre had invented the process of taking pictures bearing his name...John Plumbe, Jr., William H. Butler, S. Draper, **James R. Chilton**, and Samuel F. B. Morse, the inventor of telegraphy, opened a place at 7 Bowery to experiment in taking pictures by the Daguerre process. They used only a side light. It occurred to John Plumbe, Jr., that a skylight would bring about better results, and he leased the upper floors of 251 Broadway, corner of Murray street...and opened Plumbe's National Gallery...taking 400-500 pictures a day at from \$3 to \$8 each." Excerpt from Wilmot M. Chapman, "Our First Photographers." New York Sun, February 4, 1896, p.6. See: Gary W. Ewer, ed., *The Daguerreotype: an Archive of Source Texts, Graphics, and Ephemera*, EWERARCHIVE N8960003 <http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org>

light on my face than that which came through a window near me (Fig. 3). The first one Turner intends keeping for himself, the second is to be sent by the first opportunity to Succasunny.¹⁰ After concluding that business I called at Mr. Howe's & left with Sarah an invitation for Caroline to take tea at our house, with which she complied. I also called a few minutes at Grand Father's.



Figure 3. Posing for a Duguerreotype Photograph.
O.H. Willard c.1855, Séance de pose chez un photographe Daguerreotype. Musée d'Orsay.

In the evening, beside Miss Howe, we had Miss Reeves & Miss Morgan, Turner, Edgar, Aaron Barnes, & Sanford Wheeler come in and take a parting glass with me. They all left about ten o'clock, & I went to bed hoping to start Tuesday, but on that morning Uncle Andrew & I went down & found the weather was still too foggy & stormy to admit of going to sea, so we went on board the ship *Ashburton*, & after examining her returned to Chatham Square. This ship is a new Liverpool packet of 1200 tons burthen, & in all her arrangements, & the beauty & skill of her construction exceeds all that have preceeded her. She is in the same dock as the *Emeline*, & like her is weather bound. In the evening Mary & I went to Grand Father's to tea, found Caroline Howe there, & in the evening the Slatts, Newmans, Miss Wilson, two Miss Mumfords,

1842

January. New York.

198

Mr. & Mrs. A.P. Crane, & Samuel Brainerd came in & we spent a very social evening until near midnight, with music, cards, conversation, refreshments, &c.

¹⁰ Succasunna, New Jersey, an unincorporated town in Roxbury Township, Morris County.

Mr. Morgan's son Charles, No. 30 Henry street, was very sick Tuesday with Small Pox. It is quite prevalent in the city.

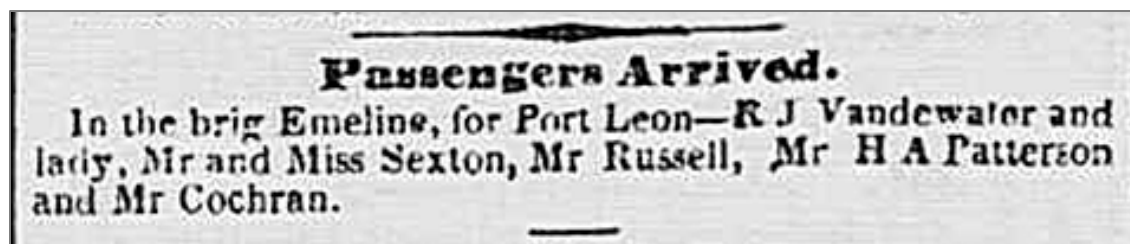


Figure 4. List of passengers onboard the brig *Emeline*, including "Mr. H A Patterson."
New-York *Daily Tribune*, January 12, 1843, p.3.

Wednesday Jan 11 forenoon, after bidding my friends adieu & receiving the assurance of their best wishes for a pleasant voyage & speedy return, I repaired on board the *Emeline* accompanied by Uncle Andrew, A.P. Crane, Turner & Edgar, who came to see me off. At eleven & a half o'clock we cast off our moorings & made sail, running down the Bay with a gentle Northerly wind, we were soon within the influence of the Oceanic swell, & when I turned in at seven o'clock, the Nevisink [Neversink] Highland light was far away astern of us, the white shores of Jersey in the West, with the surf breaking with the sound of distant thunder on the beach, & to the South and East the broad Ocean heaving from the effects of the late Easterly winds, & studded with numerous sails, all having been wind bound like ourselves, & now starting on their various voyages. The weather was as fine as I ever saw, clear, warm for the season, & nearly calm. The *Ashburton* was towed out at the same time with us; & just off Sandy Hook, the steamer being cast loose, rounded too under her bows, & cheers being exchanged between the two vessels, the ship proceeded on her way alone.

It was a gallant sight to see her as she went down the Bay shaking loose her topsails one by one, but when her companion

1843

January. At Sea.

199

left her, & with every inch of canvas set from her royals to the courses, she went she went on her trackless way alone, then she looked one of the proudest monuments of the architectural skill of our country; the noblest business of genius over inert matter; adapting all the laws which govern it, to forward its own purposes & administer to the wants of the human family.

All of Thursday we had a gentle Northerly wind, cold & foggy, & a long, sluggish, sickening swell, which made me in company with the rest of our passengers, quite sea sick all day. I ate nothing but a ship cracker, & threw up what little was in my stomach before, feeling not much sick except my head, which was dizzy, aching, & every way uncomfortable. The day was spent moping about decks & in my berth at intervals. Friday we had a fine breeze from the North & West, with a short, jumping sea, which, from being more congenial to my feelings, or my feelings having accustomed themselves to the motion, enabled me to pass the day with comparative comfort. Still, I had no appetite for food, & ate but little. The other passengers were all very sick, & I had the deck pretty much to myself. In the evening the wind blew clear & fresh

from the North West, clearing off the fog which had before continually enveloped us, & pushing us on our course (due South) with encouraging rapidity. I stay'd on deck until eight o'clock, enjoying the scene, which words are inadequate to justly describe. Our vessel, under a press of sail plunging & tearing through the head sea, which she threw barrels full over the forward part of her decks - the salt spray flying fore & aft - the bright moonlight - & the sea breaking feathery white all

1843

January. At Sea.

200

around us caused an exhilaration of spirits particularly grateful after the depression of the preceding day.

To day I arose early & found we were crossing the Gulf Stream, water at 72 of Fahrenheit & the air about 30 degrees lower; the North Wester still blowing fresh, sea running high & irregular; vessel making about nine miles an hour & shipping water forward continually, of which myself & a fellow passenger received some copious doses, without material injury, however; the weather cloudy, cold, & uncomfortable, which is made worse by the wet and slippery state of the decks. My head is nearly well again, & my appetite is returning, so that I hope the worst is past. The other passengers are some of them improving, & occasionally show themselves about decks, but I still have them nearly all to myself. Went to bed at eight o'clock, after crossing the Gulf stream & having a day of most rapid sailing spent in very good spirits.

Sunday, fifteenth Arose early this morning & found the wind very moderate & the sea much smoother than yesterday, the air warm and balmy like Spring; so that after breakfast the passengers with but one exception came out of their nests to air themselves. The wind continued very moderate but fair, until near night, when it fell calm, & we lay rolling about at the mercy of the waves, the sails flapping idly against the masts.

In the course of the afternoon I went into the fore top & had a splendid view of the ocean, a sail just visible in the West, & our own craft, with her crew & passengers spread beneath me; & just at supper time I saw two large fish some fifteen or twenty feet long, just under our quarter, called cow fish; they are "very like a whale," but smaller; blowing in the same

1843

January. At Sea.

201

way when they came to the surface.¹¹

Our vessel is a brigantine of 250 tons, built at Mystic, Connecticut. Her cabin is spacious for a vessel of her size; containing four state rooms, with two berths in each, & eight open berths, one of which I occupy. The promenade on top of her cabin is inferior to the *Adrien*, being more limited, & rolling very much when there is much sea. Her captain, mate (Mr. Stark), second mate (Mr. Cray), & boy are all from Mystic, & all thorough Yankees. She carries four men before the mast, & one cook & a steward, all black, and all very musical. Their song as they hoisted the top sail at New York, with the chorus "fare ye well forever," was truly beautiful; their melodious voices ringing clear in the still air, & the words so appropriate to the occasion,

¹¹ Based on Patterson's description of their size, these were likely pilot whales (*Globicephala* sp.).

touched my feelings with sadness but not unpleasantly. We breakfast about eight o'clock, dine at half past twelve & sup at six. Our fare is very good, similar to that which would be found at a good country inn; but except to day I have not enjoyed it much, & our table has never yet been filled.

Our cabin is to me unpleasant, being kept closed, & quite warm with the stove, & filled with sundry smells, such as are to be found nowhere except at sea, among which, that proceeding from the stomachs of several sea sick passengers figures most conspicuous. However I avoid these much of the time by remaining on deck.

We have six passengers beside myself. I sit at the foot of the table & first on my right is Mr. Russell, a young bachelor I believe from Cooperstown, Otsego Co. NY: a quiet unpretending gentleman, disposed to be sociable, but at first very sick, now

1843

January. At Sea.

202

improving & spending much of his time on deck. Next to him is Mr. Sexton, from Chenango Co. NY, also a bachelor to appearance & consumptive; wrapped in a cloak & cap all the time, afraid of every breath of pure fresh air, but seemingly afraid of nothing in the way of provisions, loading himself with the most indigestible substances, washed down with gallons of fluids: tea, coffee, & water; & in consequence he is the most woe begone, unhappy, disconsolate looking being I have lately met with. Like Mr. Russell he is in search of health, & like him also he suffered much from sea sickness.

Opposite him is his sister, a most thorough specimen of the old maid. She spent the first four days in her berth, continually calling the stewards for various mixtures in the shape of victuals, which she persisted in putting down her throat, apparently with only the laudable purpose of complimenting the steward's skill in concocting these mixtures; for she invariably proceeded summarily to eject them from the premises: a process which the most obtuse penetration could readily perceive causes her unspeakable disgust. Whether the steward considered the compliment an adequate reward for his trouble in preparing & cleaning up, is a problem in which I find myself incapable of solving. Her ignorance of everything connected with seamanship is profound: when the vessel rolls, she cries out "oh my, how the boat rocks!" & when a sailor layed out on the topgallant yard, she called our attention to "the man climbing that beam."

On my left are Mr. & Mrs. Vandewater, residents of the City, going to Port Leon,¹² & thence through the Atlantic Cities back again to New York. They are very genteel persons,

¹² Port Leon, Florida was a coastal community south of Tallahassee, at the mouth of the St. Marks River. It was established in 1837 as a commercial port with the primary purpose of shipping cotton from Florida and Georgia. In 1843, it had a population of 200, with a hotel, taverns, stores, and warehouses. On September 13, 1843, Port Leon was destroyed by the storm surge of a hurricane. See: St. Marks Refuge Association, Inc. (2015). Port Leon, <https://www.fws.gov/sites/default/files/documents/history-port-leon-st-marks-nwr.pdf>.

accustomed to good living; & pleasant & sociable in their manners; but luxurious, accustomed to have every want gratified, & not much given to the practice of self denial. She is delicate in appearance & was not very sick; but he, with his stomach deranged by high living, was very much distressed, retching & vomiting most violently. Yet in spite of all this, he persisted in eating largely, & of the most deleterious articles.

Last is Mr. Cochran, also a consumptive invalid in search of a more genial climate: he has lately come from England, & keeps his room constantly, so that I can form no opinion of him. We have vessels in sight nearly all of the time, & with looking at them, watching the waves, hauling on the ropes, reading, writing, walking, conversing, eating & sleeping, the time passes off not very heavily.

I was on deck until ten o'clock, when I retired, having spent a very pleasant day.

Monday, sixteenth This has been the most beautiful January day I ever saw; clear, warm, & the air soft like a northern summer, with a light breeze which gently stirred the surface of the sea, & enabled us to carry every sail we have got, from the royal sail down. It is beyond the power of man to convey an idea of the magnificence of the sunset; such brilliancy of colours on the clouds, such gorgeous tints of every hue as shot across the heavens as the sun sank below the Western waves; while the ocean slept calm as a river; & far in the West lay a fine ship, with every spar & sail distinctly marked

against the sky as she rose & fell on the long swelling sea: & then, as that scene faded from view, another, scarce inferior appeared in the East, where the full moon, just making her appearance, & lighting the waves with her placid beams, left me in doubt which most to admire: that brilliant & overpowering by the very blaze of its beauty; or this, so gentle, so calm, & so peaceful; the utmost perfection of serenity. To a temperament like mine, preferring the beautiful displayed in vast extent, as Nature alone can display it, either of them was an adequate reward for all the hours of sea sickness.

About nine o'clock in the evening we drew near & passed this ship, within a quarter of a mile; & with all her canvas drawing & studding sails set allow & aloft, she made a fine appearance. Those accustomed to seeing ships only lying at the docks cannot conceive of their appearance at sea, under full sail, their onward motion, their swaying to & fro, & their eager pressing forward on their course; making them appear a thing instinct - with life & intellect, all are wanting.

Since we left New York, we have seen numbers of flying fish skimming the surface of the water, & making a very pretty appearance, with their transparent wings fluttering in the air. Porpoises also amuse us, swimming about the vessel & leaping out of the waves.

Our passengers have all been out to day except Mr. Cochran, & we had a not very interesting game of Whist,¹³ in which I got beat. I retired at ten o'clock, loth to leave the pleasant air for the close cabin.

1843

January. At Sea.

205

Tuesday, seventeenth Came on deck at six o'clock AM, & found we were in the North East Trade winds, which blew so fresh as to carry away our lower & topmast studding sail booms just at daylight, & got up such a high, irregular sea as to make all the passengers except myself sick again. I am troubled only with pain & heat in my head from looking out & being exposed to the sun & wind so much; & also with hunger, which fortunately I have the means of appeasing at short intervals. The weather continues comfortably warm, so that we can be on deck all of the time, & need no overcoats, or scarce any coats at all. Occasionally, rain squalls, like Summer pass over us. I went into the fore tops again this afternoon & had a fine swinging from the pitching & rolling of the vessel, & an extensive view of old ocean. The sea is higher to day than at any time previous, throwing the salt spray over her decks fore & aft. Retired at ten o'clock very tired & overcome with excitement. Now that my sea sickness is past, I am highly amused to see the tricks performed by things animate & inanimate, in consequence of the motion of the vessel. Clothes, which on turning in, I arrange carefully by my head to have them handy, will in the night take a flight to leeward, & in the morning be spread over the floor, with the stool on which they were lay's standing feet upward on top of them - sedate looking armchairs which seem pictures of composure & serenity will mysteriously set to & chasseur about the floor & balancez mayhap with a lady passenger, finish by throwing a somerset

1843

January. At Sea.

206

on the stove - great coats skate about the floor as though the spirit of their owners animated them - soups, seemingly anxious to be eaten, jump unbidden toward the sick but expectant stomachs of the guests; & by the way pretty generally jump out again - while on deck affairs are better - a man who is laboriously promenading on the starboard side, will without the slightest notice find himself precipitated (perhaps on all fours, or on his seat) to larboard; &, as if to add insult to injury, have a barrel of salt water dashed after him - & the pig even goes grunting about soliloquizing on the mutability of affairs, brutish as well as human. These are some of the bright tints to set off against the many disagreeable things which are unavoidable at sea; lack of room for exercise, deranged health, absence from home & its comforts; isolation from all the rest of the world, & scores of others, of which a person always on land never dreams. I have the reputation of being the best sailor among the passengers, & certainly I think I enjoy myself best.

Wednesday, eighteenth On turning out at six o'clock this morning I found a heavy sea on still, & wind as yesterday. North East, & quite fresh. The light on the island of Abaco had just been seen, & after straining my eyes an hour, I perceived the land & light house on it. Altering our course from nearly South to West we ran through what is known as "hole in the

¹³ "A card game played between two pairs of players in which each side tries to win more cards than the other." See: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/whist>.

wall;"¹⁴ & soon losing sight of Abaco had a close view of Stirrup Keys & Berry Islands. These islands are all of them a part of the Bahamas & belong to Britain. They are barren, sandy looking hills, with the surf

1843

January. At Sea.

207

flying many feet high on their uninteresting looking shores; & a few houses, & one small vessel, denoting that the hand of civilization has touched their features, are there

After dinner the Captain & Mr. Russell caught a boneta¹⁵ & three Spanish mackerel; each about two feet in length, of which we partook at supper.

About three o'clock we commenced crossing the Great Bahama Bank, & shall probably be about eleven hours in accomplishing it, as it is near one hundred miles over. The water in the channel across this Bank is about three fathoms deep, with white sand bottom, which when the sea is calm is quite dazzling; but to day, owing to the breeze, it is not so: however in the evening it made it less dark than otherwise, & when the moon rose it was almost like daylight.

Since passing the Bahama islands, the water is comparatively calm; & on the Bank it is like River navigation; so smooth notwithstanding the breeze, that one can scarce divest oneself of the idea that we are sailing in some inland water; & yet no land has been seen since passing the Berry islands. This makes sailors of all our passengers again; & being enabled to come out & walk about the decks, they are once more quite delighted with sea going.

We had another glorious sunset & beautiful evening, which I enjoyed to the full, promenading the deck until after ten o'clock; & then when I turned in, I was pleased to find, instead of the usual close & stifling cabin; one with all the doors open & the night air circulating freely through it. The sun shone so warm through the day, as to induce us to seek the shady places.

1843

January. At Sea.

208

Thursday, nineteenth When I came on deck at the usual hour this morning, we were once more crossing the Gulf stream, with the usual accompaniment of a short irregular sea; not high, but sufficient to give our brig a rolling & jumping motion, which again slightly disturbed the digestive organs of some of our company. The sun rose beautiful & clear from the water; the first time since starting: the North East Trades still push us gallantly on our way; & the weather is still like a Northern summer: open doors, & lounging on deck divested of superfluous clothing being the order of the day. About breakfast time, I went into the fore top & had a view of the Double Headed Shot Keys; & afterward we passed quite near them.¹⁶ They are simply black, threatening looking rocks rising from the water, scattered irregularly about for several miles with the waves of the ocean breaking in mighty volumes over them, dashing the white foam high in air, a warning beacon to mariners to avoid their dangerous vicinity. There is also a

¹⁴ The entrance to an east-west passage through the Bahama Islands between the southern end of Great Abaco Island, marked by a lighthouse, and Eleuthera.

¹⁵ Atlantic bonito, a member of the mackerel family.

¹⁶ A group of uninhabited islets along the northern edge of the Cay Sal Bank, between the Florida Keys and Cuba.

light house on one of them which was dimly visible about ten o'clock far away on our larboard beam.

On days such as this I love to stand for hours on the fore castle & watch the tiny rainbows formed by the spray under the vessel's bow, as momentarily they appear, & disappear, & again reappear, ever varying in colour, form, & size: & I love to listen to the deep sullen voice of the ocean, as it speaks unceasingly of its own reposing power, resembling in its tones no other sounds. Truly 'tis not strange that the Ancients should have imagined a God of the sea, when they heard him always addressing them with "the sound of many waters."

I have also been much entertained in observing the character of our Captain; a more thorough specimen of a New York Salt, I never met.

1843

January. At Sea.

209

Always calm, collected, & self confident, he is ready to handle any subject, political, religious, philosophical, or medicinal; haranguing much in favor of total abstinence from alcoholic drinks, & allowing none on board among the ship's company; although he has the common inconsistency of using tobacco freely. He is withal strictly moral, gentlemanly in his deportment, unobtrusive in advancing his opinions, which he is always able to support with plausible reasons; nowise unbearing, either toward his passengers or crew, treating them always kindly; & never using, or allowing others to use profane language. What a rebuke this is to those who hold the opinion that sailors can be controlled by no other.

In the afternoon we saw two vessels many miles off, bound to the north. About five o'clock a squall of wind & rain appeared to windward, which induced us to take in studding sails, clew up gaff topsail, & furl the royal, in a hurry; but it passed harmlessly by. A half hour afterward Mr. Crary announced from the royal yard, "Land ho"! in the North; & at seven o'clock "light ho" was cried out from aloft. Ascending the main rigging I soon discovered the Key Wests light. Gradually shortening sail, & hauling close on a wind, we rapidly approached Key West; & at ten & quarter o'clock let go the anchor in the harbour; at my journey's end for the present. Took a rapid view of the town by moonlight, & thought it did not look very inviting; but will reverse my opinion until I am better acquainted; & to prepare myself for making that acquaintance, will now turn in & endeavour to sleep, spite of the various noises attending coming to an anchor.

[Note: Pages 210 and 211 are a somewhat despondent love letter that is written in a different hand than Patterson's and signed by a Lilia Dickerson. The letter does not relate to Henry Patterson or his story, so the pages are not included in this transcript.]



Figure 5. The entrance to Key West Harbor, from the diary of Jacob Schoener, 1842, Florida Keys History Center Collection.

1843

Key West. E Fa.¹⁷

212

Friday, twentieth The first sounds which greeted my ears this morning as I went on deck were the songs of the sailors running round the capstan of the Brig *Metamora*, as they hauled her to the dock. Rising cheerily on the fresh morning air, their exhilarating notes seemed enough to shake despondency from the hearts of the most depressed. This vessel left New York on the first day of January & reached this place about two hours before we did. Although the *Emeline* is a very fast sailer, beating almost every thing with which we came in competition, yet this astonishing difference in the voyages of the two vessels, must be attributed principally to their different fortune in being favored with favourable winds. Mr. Russell's brother, a resident of this place, came on board last evening & took him a shore; & reporting my arrival to Alexander Patterson; about seven o'clock I had the satisfaction to see my cousin come clambering over the side.¹⁸ I immediately went on shore with him, & walking up to his house, soon found myself taking breakfast with himself & wife; again firmly seated on terra firma; where the tables & their contents are not addicted to locomotion.

After breakfast we called a few minutes at Mr. Fontane's (nearly opposite) where I saw himself & family; then went down town to the place of business & spent the forenoon; Alexander engaged selling provisions (on commission) for Mr. Vandewater; & myself alternately on board the vessel, in the stores, & walking the street; getting my business in train, making new acquaintances, chatting, & reading.

Mr. & Miss Sexton also stop at this place; probably he will never live to leave it, being in my opinion in a hopeless condition.

¹⁷ Patterson's abbreviation for East Florida.

¹⁸ Alexander Seymour Patterson (b.1819) was the son of Alexander H. Patterson and Priscilla Crawford Patterson (d.1832). In 1840, he married Emeline Blunt (b.1821). Alexander S. Patterson was the same age as his cousin Henry Patterson. See <https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/familytree/person/tree/14350911/person/94108282/facts>.

Bidding the rest of my fellow passengers adieu, I came up to dinner & the *Emeline* weighed & stood up for Tampa Bay. Having a most violent head ache, I layed down after dinner & slept two hours; when I got up not much improved, I found Mrs. Fontane here; & a Mrs. Clark¹⁹ with her little boy also came in & we all tea'd & spent the evening together. I also called with Alexander on his Father's family; found Aunt Sarah & her children at home, but Uncle Alexander has lately gone to Tallahassee, having been elected a member of the legislature. His wife is in delicate health; still much as she was while visiting at the North.

A.S. Patterson is engaged in no business, except attending to his Father's auction & commission business. Mrs. Fontane has kindly accommodated me with a comfortable & airy room, whither I had my baggage taken. My reception in this place was all I could wish; hospitable, affectionate, & warm; equalling the high reputation which the South already enjoys, for cordiality & unaffected kindness of feeling & manner.

The place & the public appearance of its inhabitants are not such as are pleasing to my Northern taste. The town which is scattered, irregular & not well built, the buildings being mostly of wood & low; with streets rough & ill conditioned; it is situated on the North West extremity of the island, which is about eight miles long by two broad; low, barren, & mostly uncultivated, with a stunted growth of brushwood covering nearly the whole of it. The appearance of the cocoa nut, lime, & other tropical trees, with birds of various kinds, among which the pelican is most conspicuous, are all striking to a stranger like myself. The climate is similar to June in

New Jersey, the North East trades prevailing with great regularity: & where sufficient soil can be found together, garden vegetables can be produced the year round. However the principal food of the inhabitants is turtle, fish, & such articles as are brought from abroad. A few sheep, goats, & black cattle are kept by the more wealthy inhabitants. The main dependence of the place is on wrecks, several of which with invaluable cargoes of wine, copper coin, &c, have lately been brought in by the wreckers. The houses of Uncle Alexander & Mr. Fontane being built to order, are among the best on the island.²⁰ The former has a very good garden attached, & in all its appointments looks like Northern thrift & careful management; the latter is not so old, & scarcely completed in its exterior arrangements, but gives promise of equalling its predecessor (Fig. 7). The views from the upper parts of it are commanding; embracing the town; the light house; the harbour, with its shoals & islands; & far away in the distance on one hand the Gulf stream with its troubled surface, & the Gulf of Mexico on the other, calmly reposing, except during very violent winds.

¹⁹ Born Petronilla Deloria Geraldo; in 1833, she had married Lt. George W. Clarke of the United States Revenue Cutter Service (fn. 35).

²⁰ Alexander Patterson's house was located at today's 522 Caroline Street, though the home no longer stands.

A.S. Patterson's house is small, a large proportion of it being his own handiwork, & yet unfinished; & to me it appears strange in being unprovided with all those contrivances for keeping out the cold, which porter so largely into Northern architecture.

We sleep with mosquito bars over our beds,²¹ although the little tormentors are not numerous this season.

I waited on Mrs. Fontane & Mrs. Clark home, & at ten o'clock retired; tired & quite unwell with my head ache.

1843

January. Key West.

215

The public appearance of the majority of the inhabitants of this place is such as I anticipated from the nature of the place; its warm, enervating climate, its slavery²², the precarious nature of its dependence (wrecking) & its being the resort of invalids; many of whom come here & entering into business, form a considerable portion of the population.²³ Hence there is an apathy; a spirit of procrastination; a want of foresight, prudence, & energy; an indifference to all except present enjoyment; a spirit of discontent, without the spirit to remedy the evils of which they complain; & a disposition to hang around the corners & public places, to avoid such employments as require steady & persevering application, & to trust all to a fortunate turning of the wheel of fortune; pervade & shed their blighting taste & sense of propriety, to which I lay claim.

There is a custom house in this place; several good schools, one or two good boarding houses, with prices enormously high; no taverns; one or two low grog shops; numerous stores; an Episcopal church which at present is unoccupied, & chapels for the Baptists & Methodists, both of which sects have preaching weekly, together. The Temperance cause seems also in a very flourishing condition. The mail comes here once a month by sea from Charleston, & returns as often, leaving there the first & here the fifteenth. It also goes to, & comes from Havana the same number of times. That place is about sixty miles from here, South, & can be reached in one night, but as a visit there would be attended with an expense of near fifty dollars, I fear I shall not see it.

²¹ A cone made of fine netting that hung from above the bed, enclosing sleepers and preventing mosquitos from accessing them.

²² In 1840, Key West had a population of 688 people, 96 of whom were enslaved. By 1842, those numbers would have been slightly larger. See: Browne, J.B. (1912) *Key West: The Old and the New*, The Record Co., St. Augustine, p.173.

²³ Starting in the 1830s, Key West, because of its mild climate, was considered a resort for invalids, particularly those with tuberculosis. In 1839, a writer noted that Key West was hosting a dozen such people See: "Key West, Feb. 8," *New York Spectator*, February 28, 1839, p.4.



Figure 6. The Business Part of Key West, June 1838. A Sketch by Wm. A. Whitehead. When Patterson mentions going “down town,” this is the location he was referring to.



Figure 7. Key West, June 1838. A sketch by Wm. A. Whitehead. This view looks south, down Whitehead Street. The Alexander Patterson and Philip Fontane homes are at center left. The lighthouse is to the right, at the southwestern tip of the island. Images from: Maloney, W. C. (1876). *A Sketch of the History of Key West*, Advertiser Printing House, Newark.

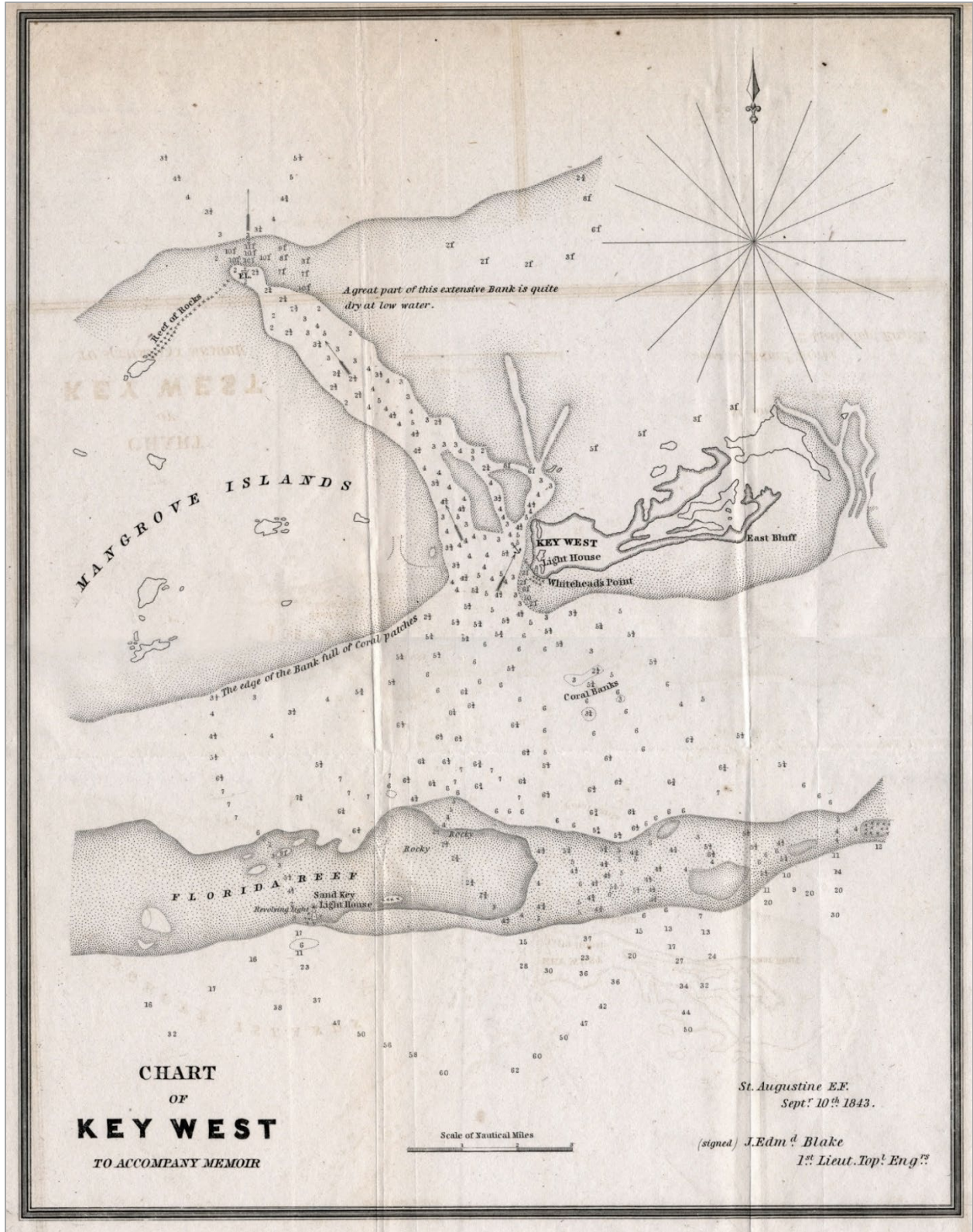


Figure 8. Chart of Key West, 1843 by J. Edmund Blake, 1st Lieutenant Topographical Engineers. This chart shows the layout of Key West and its harbor in relationship to the Northwest Passage, Sand Key, and the Florida Reef.

Saturday, twenty first I arose this morning at seven o'clock, quite rid of my head ache; breakfasted at Mr. Fontane's, & after chatting awhile with Emma Patterson, walked down town where I met Alexander, & returning with him to his house, spent the rest of the forenoon writing. After dinner I spent an hour with Mr. & Mrs. Hackley²⁴ at their house. She was formerly Matilda Folker; sister to Aunt Sarah; was at our house in Henry street with Uncle Alexander's family in 1840, & has been married over a year. She has improved in appearance since we last met, having grown taller; & her figure being more fully developed. Afterward Alexander & I called on Mrs. Williams, a former wife of Uncle Alexander, from whom he was divorced.²⁵ She is older than I expected, very talkative, & has the reputation among those who know her best, of being very kind & affectionate; & conducting in every respect with perfect propriety. We then walked about the village, made one or two short calls on gentlemen; & returned to tea. Spent the evening in conversation until nine & a half o'clock; then went to Mr. Fontane's intending to go immediately to bed, but unexpectedly found myself seated with Mr. Fontane, Mr. McCray (District Attorney),²⁶ & Captain Watlington²⁷ playing Whist. Soon our party was joined by Mrs. Fontane, Mrs. Clark, & Mr. Weaver (Fontane's partner;)²⁸ & about eleven o'clock we sat down to a substantial supper. This occupied an hour, during which the joke, story, & laugh went round with great spirit; then the company began to disperse, & at a half hour after midnight I put myself in bed. I cannot refrain from again recording the warm & generous hospitality with which I meet wherever I go, & the free, easy

²⁴ William Beverly Randolph Hackley (b.1806) was an attorney and native of Virginia. After being admitted to the Florida bar in 1827, he moved to Key West in 1828 to begin his practice. In 1841, he married sixteen-year-old Charleston, SC native Matilda Rhoda Agnes Clark Folker, who had likely first come to the island to visit her sister. Wm. Hackley is best remembered for having kept extensive diaries of their time on the island. See: Hambright, Tom (2009). William Beverly Randolph Hackley, *Florida Keys Sea Heritage Journal* 20(2): pp.1-5.

²⁵ Eliza Williams. Williams and Alexander Patterson had formally divorced in 1839. It was a drawn out and bitter split: She was first compelled to separate because of his "cruel and inhuman treatment," including "chastisement," confining her in the house with no outside contact, violent and abusive language, and from having to submit to "his inhuman behavior and ungovernable temper." In addition, for "the gratification of his evil passions," he brought into the house "a young female of the age of seventeen with whom the said Alexander lived in criminal connection... And, furthermore, Alexander compelled her to give him a bill of sale for a negro slave, her private property, of the value of \$300." Eliza testified that Alexander earned three dollars a day as an officer of the Custom House, and, with other employment, he earned between three and four thousand dollars a year. They agreed to a separation whereby Alexander would pay for Eliza's passage to Rhode Island and pay her \$10 per month for support. Eliza returned to Key West in 1836 to live with her father, and upon her return she found that, unbeknownst to her, Alexander had been granted a divorce and remarried. She then filed for a divorce on her terms to recoup her property and be granted support. On April 1, 1839, that divorce was granted by the Legislative Council of the Territory of Florida with a favorable vote of 15 to 8. See: Divorce Petition of Eliza Patterson, 1839. State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory. <https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/347968>.

²⁶ George W. Macrae. He had been appointed US District Attorney at Key West on August 24, 1842.

²⁷ Francis Benjamin Watlington (b.1804) was a native of Danish St. Croix. He married Emeline Johnson in 1828, and they moved to Key West soon after, occupying a house that still stands in Key West at 322 Duval Street, now known as the "Oldest House." At the time of Patterson's visit, Captain Watlington was a wrecker, Key West Harbor Warden, and an auctioneer of goods salvaged from wrecked ships. See: Reutling, Karl (2018) Francis B. Watlington, The Man We Thought We Knew. *Old Island Restoration Foundation Oldest House Newsletter*, March 2018, p.2.

²⁸ Aside from his mercantile enterprise, George E. Weaver was one of Key West's first city councilmen and a founding member of St. Paul's Episcopal Church.

& unaffected good feeling & hilarity which characterize the social intercourse of the Southrons.

The weather is perfectly delightful, clear, warm, & breezy.

Sunday, twenty second This forenoon Alexander & I took a walk on the beach, then went to the Baptist Chapel, & heard a sermon from Mr. Lewis,²⁹ & a short exhortation from Mr. Mills. The former gentleman was a sailor, & grossly immoral; but has lately become a professed Christian, & taken up preaching. Of his elocution, his language, his views of religion, or of anything, except his sincerity, & full conviction of the truth & importance of the doctrines he inculcates; I cannot say a word in praise. The whole discourse was a jumbled mess of unintelligible words; unconnected, disjointed sentences; quotation, misplaced & distorted; ideas old & hacknied; & a roaring monotonous sound of voice, conveying no impressions, but serving to distract my thoughts from every other subject. Mr. Mills spoke very little & in a little better style. The singing was shocking; with the exception of a few female voices. The house is a simple enclosure of weather boards & shingles, small, unceiled, & unglazed; but quite suitable for this climate. The seats are moveable & bear a great resemblance to those found in the Quaker meeting houses. The congregation consisted principally of the humbler classes: two thirds females & some young men who behaved very ill; & quite a large proportion of the whole were natives or descendants of the Bahamas; called here Conchs.³⁰

Dined at Mr. Fontane's, & then with Alexander took a

walk a mile or two to the Light House,³¹ to the top of which we went, & had a view of the interior arrangements & the surrounding scenery (Figs. 5, 7, 9). The lantern is said to be ninety feet above the level of the sea; & truly it is a dizzy height to look abroad; under your feet the surf rolling in on the white beach with an angry sound; at your back the island with its town sunk in verdure; & its evergreen, uncultivated surface; & in front the Gulf stream, far as the eye can reach two white specks dimly visible, which experience tells are stately vessels, & nearer by, a Brigantine, standing boldly up for the Light House; & still nearer in the shallow water, a wrecking schooner making all speed for an unfortunate vessel which grounded last night on some of the islands near here. Returning through the woods, I engaged myself until tea time writing a letter home; a Mr. George Abbott took that meal with us & spent the evening; & at ten o'clock I retired. Weather continues the same. The brig *Sampson* stopped here two hours this forenoon on her way from Port Leon to New York, but I did not know of it until I saw her a

²⁹ Charles C. Lewis. He had been ordained on December 30, 1842, as the first Baptist minister on Key West. Browne, J.B. (1912) *Key West the Old and the New*, The Record Company, St. Augustine, p.43.

³⁰ A term applied to white, Anglo Bahamians and their descendants due to the abundance of the queen conch, a thick-shelled marine mollusk, in Bahamian and Florida Keys waters, and which was an integral part of the islanders' diets.

³¹ The first Key West lighthouse that stood on the southwestern point of the island known as Whitehead's Point. It was first lit on March 10, 1826, and its fixed light could be seen for 15-20 miles. See: "Notice to Mariners," Boston *Marine Telegraphic*, March 11, 1826, p.2.

mile off, on her way North. The Brig *J.D. Noyes*³² also arrived last night from New York in six days. I have seen no letters from her.



Figure 9. Untitled view looking south from the town of Key West towards the light house. From the diary of Jacob Schoener, 1842. Florida Keys History Center.

Monday, twenty third I spent an hour or two down town this forenoon; then took a long walk on the North side of the island, following the road about two miles until I came to the end of it, & tore my pantaloons in the brush; returning to Mr. Fontane's I was introduced to Captain Nones³³ of the Revenue Cutter *Jefferson*³⁴ & Lieutenant

1843

January. Key West.

219

Clark of the Revenue Boat *Water Witch*³⁵; both of which vessels arrived this morning from Tortugas³⁶; dinner followed, & from that until tea time, I spent reading aloud to Mrs. Clark and Mrs. Fontane from Graham's Magazine, a Venetian story; insipid, stale & quite uninteresting, &

³² The Brig *J.D. Noyes*, 95 feet long and 186 tons, was built in 1839 at Groton, Connecticut. Simeon W. Ashby was part owner and Master. See: Survey of Federal Archives in Louisiana (1942). Ship Registers and Enrollments of New Orleans, Louisiana: 1841-1850, Louisiana State University, p.140.

³³ Henry B. Nones of Philadelphia; part of a large Jewish family, prominent in the US Navy. See: Markens, Isaac (1888). *The Hebrews in America*, Published by Author, New York, p.135.

³⁴ *Jefferson* was a brigantine built at Baltimore and launched January 1, 1839. It was 84' 6" long and mounted four 12-pound carronades and had been used for service against the Seminole people of Florida. On April 19, 1843, *Jefferson* was ordered to New York from Key West to be sold.

See: <https://www.history.uscg.mil/Browse-by-Topic/Assets/Water/All/Article/2492682/jefferson-1839/>

³⁵ Little is known about this vessel other than in 1842 it was additionally described as a "Revenue Schooner" See: Charleston *Courier*, 1842-09-26 p.2. In November of 1842, Lt. George Clarke was put in was in command of the Revenue Cutter *Nautilus* and based at Key West. See: *Army and Navy Chronicle and Scientific Repository* (1843), Vol. II, No.8, p.318.

³⁶ The Dry Tortugas – A group of islands approximately 65 miles west of Key West.

uninstructive.³⁷ After the tea I called a short time at Alexander's, found Emma had been indisposed all day; & finished the evening playing Whist at the Fontanes.

Weather continues still unchanged.

Tuesday, twenty fourth Breakfasted at Mr. Fontane's; took a walk down town, met Alexander, & finished the forenoon assisting him in putting a roof on the back house. At four o'clock PM, we got two saddle horses & took a ride to the Salt Works about three miles hence, returning by the Light House road, we reached home a little after five o'clock: called on Mrs. Williams, whose son Thomas is very sick with measles; tea'd; & finished the evening at Mr. Fontanes playing Whist.

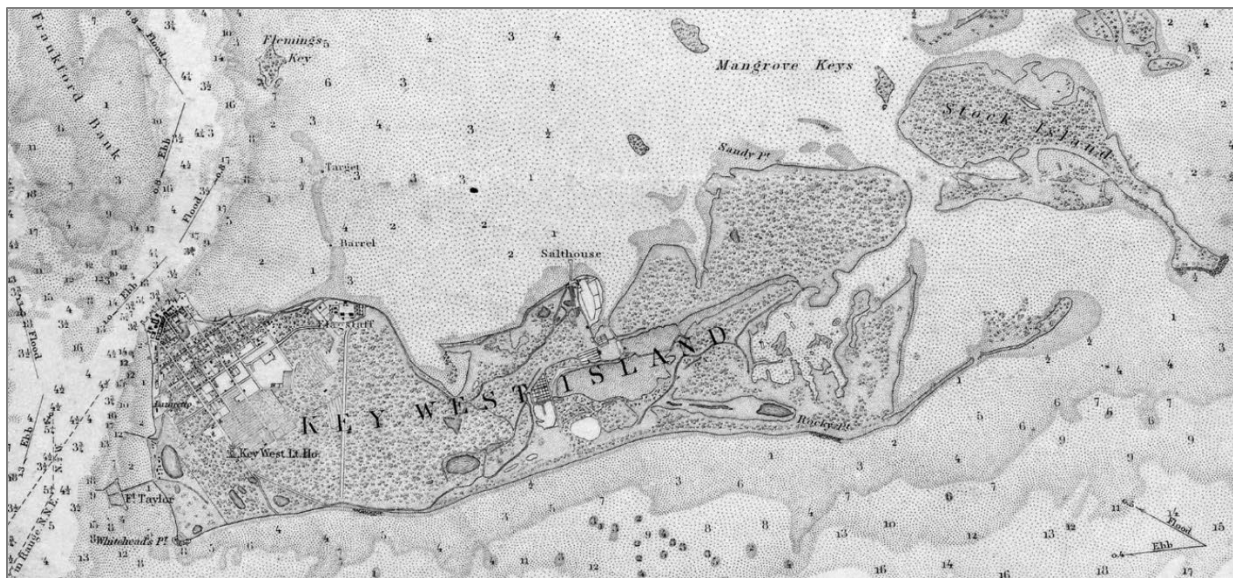


Figure 10. The "Salthouse" and other elements of the Key West saltworks are seen at the center of the island, along the north shore. Detail from Key West Harbor and Its Approaches, 1855, by US Coast Survey under the direction of A.D. Bache. Florida Keys History Center Collection.

Our ride was a pleasant one; the roads are mostly very bad; stony, narrow, & choked with brushwood; & sometimes leading on the soft sand of the beach; totally unfit for carriages, & nearly so for horses; but our nags were very spirited, requiring all of our attention for their management; & very easy riding animals. The salt works are extremely simple: the water is pumped from the sea by wind power; flows into vats; & the salt is formed by evaporation, caused by solar heat.³⁸ We were joined in our ride just before reaching home by Henry D'Lespine (Mr. Fontane's nephew)³⁹ who had followed us through our

³⁷ "A Few Hours in Venice" by George B. Cheever, *Graham's Magazine*, February 1843, Vol.XXII, No.2, pp.111-113.

³⁸ From the earliest days of Key West's settlement, it was hoped the manufacture of salt would be a viable business there, as the island's natural, shallow salt ponds seemingly lent themselves to its success. But rain or hurricanes could quickly destroy a crop of salt, and the island proved a difficult place to consistently produce profitable quantities. The salt works was abandoned in 1876.

³⁹ Henry Delespine was from a St. Augustine family. His sister Charlotte had married Hiram C. Benner of Key West.

whole route. A lot of very fine wrecked oranges were sold in the market to day at the rate of one shilling per hundred. Alexander got some at second hand & we had a great feast on them at tea time.⁴⁰

Weather was a little cooler this morning but soon got warm as ever again. The wind is Westerly.

Wednesday, twenty fifth Alexander & I went out before breakfast, & he shot three Robins, a bird which it is said has never before visited this island; & which I discovered yesterday in large flocks. After breakfast I went out again & shot one robin & a dove. Finished the forenoon writing.

In the afternoon I took a walk down town & purchased a pair of jumpers; & at seven o'clock went to a party given by Mrs. Fontane, principally on my account, to introduce me to the society of the place. The company soon assembled the number of fifty to a hundred gentlemen & ladies; among whom figured Captain Nones, & his Lieutenants Cost & Brushwood in full uniform; Mr. Pinckney, Belgian Vice Consul⁴¹; Mr. Wall, British Vice Consul,⁴² Mr. Gordon, Collector;⁴³ & numerous others of both sexes, the elite of the town. The ladies are not remarkable for their beauty, rather the reverse; the dancing (in which I joined) was the same as in New York & very spirited; & in other respects the whole affair was conducted in the same manner as a similar assemblage in the North; the same attentive devotion on the part of the males; the same gracious modesty on the part of the females; & the same appearance of intense enjoyment on the party of both. The dancing was almost incessant; the music accordion, fife, triangle, & tambourine, assisted occasionally by two drums; all

but the first instrument belonging to the Cutter & loaned for the occasion. All was going on in the happiest manner; & I was getting acquainted with the company very fast until near midnight, when we gentlemen partook of a substantial supper of cold meat & bread; & the ladies were served with cake & lemonade: (it was a temperance party,) which operation was nearly finished, when we were startled by the cry of fire! in the street. This was at first supposed to be the burning of a tar barrel for a joke; but on looking out of the upper windows, I saw a deep red light in the direction of the wharves, which convinced me that the alarm was real. Hastily drawing on my boots, I waited on Miss Howard & Miss Whitehead,⁴⁴ home, then ran to the scene of action. Here I found a large building known as Brown's warehouse enveloped in

⁴⁰ The oranges were from the wrecked brig *Frances Ashby*, "from Havana, with a cargo of Coffee and Fruit, [which] went ashore on the American Shoal. She was got off by wreckers, and taken to Key West, after being abandoned by her captain and crew." See: "Shipping News," *Charleston Courier*, February 13, 1843, p.2

⁴¹ Dr. Theodore A. Pinckney was from Ontario County New York and had married Sybil Marvin, sister of Judge William Marvin. The Pinckneys moved to Key West in the late 1830s, and with the judge's help he became Inspector of Customs and Surgeon in the Marine Hospital. He was appointed Belgian Vice-Consul by President Tyler in August of 1842. See: Kearney, Kevin E. (1958) *Autobiography of William Marvin, Florida Historical Quarterly* (36)3:179-222.; *Baltimore Sun*, August 11, 1842, p.1.

⁴² William H. Wall, an Englishman, had arrived at Key West by shipwreck in the 1820s. Soon after, he opened a long-running store and in 1831, established the island's first cigar factory. See: J.B. Browne, op.cit., p.125

⁴³ Adam Gordon, Collector of Customs, former mayor, and an attorney. See: J.B. Browne, op.cit., pp.210 & 223.

⁴⁴ Miss Howard and Miss Whitehead are both unidentified.

flames, & the whole town threatened with similar fate from the heat & flying sparks. Only one engine is on the island, on this I worked until we found it was useless from being out of repair. It was then dragged into the water to save it, & abandoned. At Alexander's request, I returned to the house & found all well there; changed my coat for a roundabout, & again ran to the fire. Several other buildings constituting the entire block were now on fire, & the great object was to prevent its spread. This seemed almost hopeless; the scene was terrific; the raging elements & the confusion & panic of the people exceeding all I ever witnessed; some were giving orders & endeavouring to carry out their own plans; others were idle from indifference or despair; others were undoing what the first had done: but fortunately the

1843

January. Key West.

222

Cutter's people & the crews of some other vessels in the harbour came to the rescue, & by their coolness & their daring, their untiring exertions, & their combined efforts; about four o'clock the flames were arrested after a loss of property to the amount of about ten thousand dollars; on which there was no insurance. Several bags of powder were exploded in one building for the purpose of blowing it up, & thus arresting the fire, but as the doors & windows were all open, it did not succeed. Another range of buildings called Green's⁴⁵ warehouse was in imminent danger; it contained near 200,000 dollars in wrecked goods & it was evident that if it caught fire, the whole town, being close & built of wood, would be consumed. Here then was a desperate struggle & here I was stationed, begrimed with cinders & dust, nearly suffocated with smoke & heat, & drenched with water, we first tore down a low building which intervened between the fire & the warehouse, carried away as much as possible, & plied the remainder with water until the fire was exhausted. On another point the danger was nearly as great, & the exertions were equally great & equally successful. Fontane & Weaver's loss is near a thousand dollars. The origin of the fire is unknown.⁴⁶ I got to bed before five o'clock, &

Thursday, twenty sixth Got up at eight o'clock. After breakfast I visited the scene of disaster & found not a mass of smoking ruins, but a heap of white ashes, the sad remains of that which yesterday was enough to make Mr. Brown think himself a man in fortunate circumstances. The blow is a very severe one to his family, as well as to the other sufferers of more

⁴⁵ The warehouse of Pardon C. Greene, one of Key West's first residents. Greene had died in 1838.

⁴⁶ A writer for the Charleston *Southern Patriot*, in a report dated February 13, 1843, p.2, offered additional details about the fire: "On the morning of 26th January last, about 1 o'clock, our citizens were aroused by the cry of fire which proved to be in the wooden ware house belonging to our estimable fellow citizen F.A. Brown, Esq., which with its contents, [with the exception of Mr. B. books and a part of his papers] was destroyed, it extended to the adjoining building occupied by the U.S. District Attorney, U.S. Marshall, Clerk of the Supreme Court, and Post Master as their offices, which was also destroyed. Most of the articles in those offices were removed. There was also another store destroyed owned by Mr. Brown, and four stores belonging to the estate of P.C. Green were burned to the ground. Here we were able by the greatest exertions to stop the flames of the devouring element, which threatened the destruction of the large and very valuable ware house owned by the estate of P.C. Green, which had it taken fire, nothing could have saved the principal part of the city from destruction. As we were fortunate enough to stop it as we did, I suppose there was not but about \$10,000 loss sustained, the principal part of which falls on Mr. F.A. Brown. As our city is mostly built of wood, it is a wonder to me that the whole place was not destroyed. Nothing but the greatest exertions on the part of citizens and strangers, together with the crew of the Revenue Cutter Jefferson, under the command of that gentlemanly Officer Henry B. Nones, who is ever foremost in any set of justice and humanity, saved this place from utter destruction and ruin."

more humble station. Mr. Sexton was under the necessity of moving his effects, & aggravated his disease by over exertion. I spent an hour or two putting Fontane & Weaver's hardware in order; sauntered about town, & dined at Mr. Fontane's. After dinner called with Mary Jane⁴⁷ at Alexander's, & found that at noon, Emma was delivered of a man child & is doing very well. Mary & I visited the "burnt district", made a call on Mrs. Geraldo (Mrs. Clark's mother),⁴⁸ tea'd at home, called again at Alexander's; & at eight o'clock all the family (myself included) went to bed.

The Barque *Albany*, a late wreck, came into the harbour to day; also the United States war steamer *Poinsett*.⁴⁹ I have felt somewhat sore to day, from violent muscular exertions at the fire, but otherwise my health has not suffered.

Friday, twenty seventh I went out gunning this forenoon in the neighborhood of Gordon's garden, & shot six robins, a snipe, & a dove, on which, in company with Alexander I dined. Finished the forenoon writing. In the afternoon I called an hour on Mrs. Hackley, then looked in on my friends down town; took tea at Mr. Fontane's where I met Mr. Joseph Lespin,⁵⁰ late from St. Augustine, in the *Poinsett*; spent an hour after tea at Alexander's & completed the day's employment with two games of Whist; in which I was thoroughly defeated. Emma is getting along very comfortably, & the child is a fine healthy looking boy.

The *Jefferson* and *Water Witch* left here to day for Tortugas, & in consequence we lose the company of Mr. Clark at Mr. Fontane's.

Saturday, twenty eighth I took a walk down town this morning; thence nearly to the Salt Works & back again; getting myself in a violent heat by the operation, as the day was a very warm one. After spending three hours writing & reading I dined at Mr. Fontane's; then with Mary Jane made a call at the house of Mr. Dukes⁵¹ (situated near the Barracks) on his daughter Mrs. Druscilla Phillips,⁵² who was married last Sunday. Found the bride a very pretty looking woman; & the mother is also rather good looking, & entertained us very agreeably - after partaking of some wedding cake, we called a few minutes at the house of Mrs. Johnson, where we found her sister Miss Howard, beside a room full of company; thence we went to Mrs. Geraldo's & made a short call & returned to Alexander's to tea. After tea we spent over an hour at Mrs. Geraldo's, where we found some six or eight persons assembled playing a very silly &

⁴⁷ Mary Jane Fontane, wife of Philip and daughter of Alexander H. Patterson.

⁴⁸ Magdelina Geraldo, wife of Antonio Geraldo.

⁴⁹ A 250-ton US Navy sidewheel steamer that was stationed primarily at Tampa from 1840-42, for service in the 2nd Seminole War. After that, it was engaged in coast survey efforts. See:

www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhrc/research/histories/ship-histories/danfs/p/poinsett-i.html

⁵⁰ Joseph Delespine, brother of Henry and nephew of Philip Fontane.

⁵¹ Reason Duke had arrived with his family at Key West in 1836, after the Seminole War forced them from their home on the Miami River. He was a wrecking captain and founding member of the Key West Baptist Church See: Browne, op.cit.; Stout, Wesley (1967). "Beachcomber," Fort Lauderdale News, November 29, p.12.

⁵² Druscilla Gardner Duke, who had married Franklin D. Phillips on January 22, 1843.

tiresome game called Loto;⁵³ in which each one staked a "Picayune": but in which from disapproving of it as barefaced gambling, I did not join. When we returned to Mr. Fontane's, we formed two tables & played Whist until midnight. I played with Mr. Weaver against Mr. Fontane & Mr. M'Cray, & beat them four games in five. Captain Watlington, the two Mr. D'Lespins, & Mary Jane were at the other table.

Sunday, twenty ninth After breakfast at Mr. Fonatne's, I went per invitation to Mr. Hackley's & waited on Mrs. Hackley, & her sister Miss Eliza Folker to meeting. Heard a sermon, & the accompaniments similar to that last Sunday; returned to dinner with the ladies; after dinner, took a walk with Alexander to the South Beach; tea'd with him, & spent the remainder of

1843 January. Key West. 225

the evening at Mr. Fontane's, reading the Journal of Commerce of 17th inst; brought by the Brig *Almeida*. The *Jefferson* has returned. Alexander's son is named Alexander Henry.

Monday, thirtieth I met Mr. Russell down town before breakfast this morning, & made arrangements to go with him in a sail boat to some of the neighbouring islands, & shoot water fowl, of which large flocks were flying about. Accordingly after getting a late breakfast at Mr. Fontane's, I went with him in a good sail boat loaned to us by Captain Pfister,⁵⁴ to the Mangrove Key, round which we sailed without seeing any game except a few flying about at a great distance; then sailed about the harbour with like success; amusing ourselves chasing some innocent porpoises, at which from their quick amusements we could not get a shot; got aground on a shoal in the harbour, but soon shoved off again, & returned to the dock where we found Alexander & Mr. Russell's brother waiting for us; & although our sail had been a pleasant one with a good breeze & a rough sea, we gladly exchanged it for the pleasures of the dining table.

After dinner I spent an hour or two reading & writing, then took a walk to the South Beach, & on the way shot two robins & a mocking bird; returning to Mr. Fontane's to tea I spent the evening learning Mr. Weaver & Captain Watlington to play Chess; & was glad to find them apt scholars.

Tuesday, thirty-first Before breakfast this morning I took a walk down town; after that meal, Alexander & I cleaned a green turtle, which he had taken from the crall,⁵⁵ for dinner; then borrowed a horse & cart from Uncle Alexander's place, & driving it into the woods near the Light House, cut a load

1843 February. Key West. 226

of fire wood, which we took to the house. I blistered my hands, & got myself in a profuse perspiration before the job was completed; the latter we remedied by bathing ourselves in the

⁵³ A game of matching randomly drawn tokens to numbered cards, in which the winner receives a pool of money. It is commonly known as Keno in the United States. See: Dick, W.B. (1868) *The Modern Pocket Hoyle: Containing All the Games of Skill and Chance as Played in this Country at the Present Time*, Dick & Fitzgerald, New York, p.222.

⁵⁴ William H. Von Pfister.

⁵⁵ Kraal or "crawl" – a shallow water, pen-like enclosure designed to hold sea turtles after they had been captured.

surf on the South Beach, the former must be left to the healing touch of time. Our swim did not amount to much, except in as much as it cooled & refreshed us; because of the various things on the bottom; the shells, the crabs, the weed, &c., we were afraid to go out. After dinner I spent two hours reading & writing; then with Alexander called at Mrs. Williams, where we found a collection of company, & at several other places down town: returning to Mr. Fontane's to tea, I found assembled some eight or ten persons beside the family, consisting principally of the family of Fielding A. Brown;⁵⁶ after tea we had conversation & music until nine o'clock, at which time the company departed; spent an hour at Whist; & retired at ten o'clock. The *Poinsett*, the *Albany*, & the *Almeida* have all sailed. The weather since I have been here has been very regular; the Trade winds blowing most of the time; the sun shining hot in the middle of the day; & the thermometer in the shade ranging up to plus 76; but about bed time to night, the wind came out from the North, bringing the first rain I have seen here, in copious showers, & cold.

Wednesday, first When I came out this morning I found the wind blowing violently from the North; the dust flying in the streets so as to nearly blind a person; the harbour with its waters lashed to fury; & a great many of the inhabitants engaged in making the shipping secure. The weather is

1843

Key West. February.

227

quite cool, so as to require thick clothing, & fires in some of the dwellings. I spent the day with Alexander preparing the frame of a kitchen he is about to build in the rear of his dwelling. My employment was principally boring out the mortices. Just before tea we made a short call on Mrs. Williams; the evening I spent at Mr. Fontane's, reading, & seeing the gentlemen play Whist, until after nine o'clock; then gave Mrs. Clark a lesson in Chess, & retired to bed at ten & a half o'clock: glad to find a place where I could keep comfortably warm.

Thursday, second Spent the day as yesterday, helping Alexander with his kitchen; & spent the evening at Mr. Fontane's playing Whist & Chess.

Miss Eliza Folker also took tea, & spent the evening there; Mr. Clark returned from his cruise; & the steamer *Poinsett* put back into this harbour, on account of the violence of the wind. The weather continues cloudy & cold; but less wind than yesterday.

Friday, third The Brig *Statira* arrived from Port Leon, & sailed at noon for New York. I spent the forenoon preparing letters to send by her; but from being misinformed with regard to the time of her sailing, went down a little late, & found she was under weigh; but will be able to send them to morrow by the packet Brig *Howell*, Captain Morris, which is on the way here from Havana; & sails hence to Charleston. Spent the afternoon working on the kitchen, tea'd at Mr. Fontane's; & after tea went with Mr. & Mrs. Clark, & Mr. & Mrs. Fontane to the house of Mr. Wall (British Vice Consul,) but finding no one

1843

February. Key West.

228

⁵⁶ Fielding A. Browne was one of Key West's first residents and a principal merchant. He had served on the town council and was elected mayor in 1833 and 1836. He was uncle to Joseph Beverly Browne (fn.91). See: Bruce, Betty (1976). Key West Mayors, 1828-1971. On file at Florida Keys History Center, Monroe County Public Library.

at home we went into Mr. Hackley's, & although the gentleman, being unwell, had retired to bed, we found Mrs. Hackley & Miss Folker at home, & spent an hour with them; principally occupied in listening to some very inspired music on the guitar & vocals; by Mrs. Clark & Mrs. Hackley. After sitting until we gentlemen were nearly asleep, we came home; sat an hour by the fire; ate another supper at ten o'clock, & retired. The weather is getting warm again

Saturday, fourth I spent the most of the day working on the kitchen, & after dinner we had the satisfaction of raising the frame. In the afternoon Alexander & I called on Aunt Sarah - Miss Howard took tea with us - Mr. Abbott called in a few minutes - at eight o'clock I waited on Miss Howard home; & finished the evening playing Whist until near midnight at Mr. Fontane's.

Sunday, fifth After breakfast Alexander & I took a walk to English's garden,⁵⁷ thence through the woods to the Barracks; & from there home, stopping at the wharves on our way. At the Barracks we had a fine view of the whole island & the surrounding Keys extending far away into the Gulf of Mexico on one hand & the Atlantic on the other; where were three large vessels in sight (Fig. 11). The Barracks are now unoccupied & unfinished - were layed out & partly constructed of wood, in the best manner, & quite extensive; but they have been neglected since the announcement of the Seminole war; & are fast going to ruin.⁵⁸ Still the Cupola on them stands one of the most conspicuous & elevated spots on the island. We called at two houses on our way, & killed a water Mocasín snake, & saw a Black snake;



Figure 11. "View from the Cupola," from the diary of Jacob Schoener, 1842. This sketch was likely made from the same barracks vantage point described by Henry Patterson. Florida Keys History Center.

⁵⁷ Likely a reference to William English, a former resident of Indian Key and owner of a plantation along the Miami River. See: Albritton, L. and Wilkinson, J. (2018). *Hidden History of the Florida Keys*, The History Press, Charleston, pp.32-36.

⁵⁸ Construction on the barracks had started over ten years earlier but never finished. A writer in 1838 lamented from his view atop the cupola, "I looked round to see what our Government had done here, by which its estimation of the place could be inferred. But the unfinished and deserted barracks under my feet, and a few buildings around them, alone proclaimed the feeble impression which this commanding position had made on the minds of our statesmen." See: "Key West," *Daily National Intelligencer*, January 15, 1838, p.2.

both harmless. In the afternoon we took another short walk to the South Beach; & in the evening I spent an hour with Mary at Mrs. Williams.

Monday, sixth Spent the day carpentering. After tea went with Mr. Fontane & M'Cray, & played four games of ten pins, in three of which Mr. Fontane & I were beaten. My playing was very bad, from my ignorance of the game.

Saturday, eleventh The last five days have been spent working with Alexander on the kitchen through the day; & the evenings principally at Mr. Fontane's playing Whist & Backgammon. This evening we finished enclosing the kitchen. My work has been sawing & planing boards; weatherboarding; & shingling; & I have gone to bed every night quite fatigued. The weather continues warm & pleasant; last night there was a heavy shower with thunder & lightning. The mail boat came here Wednesday from Charleston & sailed the same day for Havana. I received letters from Suckasunny; dated 20th January. Thursday I sent letters to the North by the Schooner *Niaad* [*Naiad*]. The Government steamers *Poinsett* & *Cincinnati* have both been here & gone again.

Saturday, eighteenth I went with Alexander on the South Beach last Sunday forenoon, & picked up some shells to take home. Finished the forenoon writing letters to send to New York by the Schooner *Mary Hammond*, which vessel arrived from Port Leon that afternoon, bringing letters & papers from Uncle Alexander, & sailed Monday for Charleston. After seeing this schooner let go her anchor I tea'd & spent the evening at Mrs.

Williams, where were Mr. & Mrs. Fontane, Mr. Weaver, Lieutenant Brushwood⁵⁹ of the *Jefferson*, which arrived about seven o'clock PM; & other gentlemen & ladies. Mr. Brushwood came away with us, & slept in my room on a bed prepared for him on the floor.

Monday forenoon Mr. Sexton died about five o'clock of consumption, & the same afternoon Alexander & I attended his funeral. He was buried on the South Beach in the presence of his sister, some few friends from the North, & a few of the residents of this place, & as we committed his body to the keeping of the sands of this little island, to which he had come in the vain hope of finding a renovator to his exhausted constitution; with the sands of that ocean, so many miles of which rolled between him & his distant home & friends, for his funeral dirge: it seemed to me one of the most sad & impressive scenes I had ever witnessed, & the conviction was more forcibly impressed upon my mind, of the impolicy of persons in his situation, leaving their homes with all its comforts & loved associations, to breathe their last in a strange land in the presence of unknown & careless spectators.

⁵⁹ John G. Brushwood, a native of Virginia. A colleague from an earlier time wrote of him, "He was an unjust man in many respects, and had once been kicked out of the service for cheating the men beneath him of their salary" See: Davis, George (1887). *Recollections of a Sea Wanderer's Life*, A.A. Kellogg, New York, p.307.



Figure 12. The headstone of “Mr. Sexton” in North Norwich Cemetery, Chenango County, New York. It reads: “Died at Key West, Florida, Feb. 13, 1843. Walter K. Sexton, Aged 37 years. His remains are interred at that place.” See: <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/121025831/walter-k.-sexton>

The evening I spent at Mr. Fontane’s dancing until near midnight, then waited on Miss Harriet Howard to her home. Our party consisted of about twenty five gentlemen & ladies, including some of the officers of the *Jefferson*, our music violin by Mr. Littlewood, professor of music⁶⁰ & dancing for the town; & a flute by a member of the Cutter’s band; & having a company just sufficiently numerous, all of whom were on good

1843

February. Key West.

231

spirits apparently; good music, & a good manager; & breaking up at an hour so early that we did not feel surfeited with the amusement; & having no eating or drinking to do; the whole affair deserves to be recorded as pleasant. Well managed; & every way worthy of a pleasing remembrance.

Monday forenoon & all of Tuesday we worked hard on the kitchen. Wednesday forenoon I went pr invitation with Mr. Hackley to the Mangrove Key, in a row boat, with a black man as rower & pilot.; to take fish, water fowl, or any such game as might present; but after sailing around & through the island; & spending an hour or two sitting on an old wreck, watching our idle fish lines, & broiling in the sun; we came home as empty handed as when we started. I

⁶⁰ C. Littlewood had only just arrived at Key West at the beginning of 1843, and in immigration records was listed as a “music master.” See: “List of Passengers Arriving in the District of Key West from Foreign Port During the 1st Quarter 1843,” National Archives Microfilm Publications No.575, Roll4.

finished the day, & Thursday & Friday carpentering. The latter day we moved the appropriate furniture into the kitchen, & commenced using it, as it is nearly completed. It is 16 feet long, 13 feet wide; one story high; with two doors & three windows; situated some ten or fifteen feet from the dwelling, with which it is connected by a platform; & in every way well constructed. Total cost of material about thirty dollars. Thursday I had letters from my brothers by the Brig *N.G. Bourne*; with dates to 30 ult.; & yesterday sent out a paper to Suckasunny by the mail boat.

This forenoon Alexander & I intended going in a boat for water fowl; but could not get a boat to suit us; so we deferred it until Monday, & about noon started with Mr. Littlewood in company for a hunt on this island. We all separated when we started; & Mr. Littlewood

1843

February. Key West.

232

remained along the rest of the day; but Alexander & I met near the Barracks; & ransacking the woods & ponds, & getting in mud & water near knee deep, we finally found ourselves at the Salt Works; just in time to sit down to the table on Mr. Pitcher (the superintendent)⁶¹ & eat a most welcome & substantial dinner. After this we went still further up the island to some salt water ponds, where we found large flocks of snipe & gulls, the pursuit of which occupied us two hours, & caused us again to get separated. Crossing to the South Beach; I was making my way home, shooting occasionally as I went; & had nearly reached it when Alexander over took me: & we went on together. We bagged a dozen birds of various sizes & qualities. Killed & dressed a roasting pig for to morrow's dinner - tea'd - & after tea I spent until ten & a half o'clock learning Captain Watlington to play Chess at his house (Fig. 13); then retired, quite tired enough to enjoy a night's sleep.

The weather was very pleasant & warm until Wednesday PM; then a shower came up, which blew off with a "Norther" less violent than the last; & since then it has been cold, damp, raw, & disagreeable; with considerable rain.

Sunday, nineteenth Miss Harriet Howard dined & spent part of the day with us. Captain Wm. Pfister also spent part of the afternoon here, made some calls, & engaged a boat, &c. for tomorrow. The evening I spent reading. Very warm all day, & a heavy shower in the evening.

⁶¹ William A. Pitcher. He had come to Key West in the 1830s for his health. He was soon married to Minta Mohnsann, one of four German sisters who supposedly arrived at the island by shipwreck in what has become known the "Wreck of the German Brides." See: Forgarty, Ollie Z. (1972). *They Called it Fogartyville*, Theo Gaus' Sons, Brooklyn, p.72.



Figure 13. The Watlington residence at 322 Duval Street, Key West, ca. 1865. The home partly shown at the left of the photograph, is where Captain Francis Watlington and Henry Patterson played chess on February 19, 1843. Florida Keys History Center Collection.

1843

February. Key West.

233

Monday, twentieth On springing from bed this morning & finding the weather pleasant, with a fine Southerly breeze; I immediately commenced preparations for a day's sport. Alexander had procured a good sail boat of Mess. Harvey & Dexter,⁶² & a Whitehall rowboat of Captain Studly of the wrecked Brig *Isaac Mead* of New York, now lying at the wharf;⁶³ & after getting breakfast, providing ammunition; cleaning & putting in proper order the shooting apparatus; laying in an ample supply of cold meat & bread, & being joined by Mr. John Russell, similarly equipped; we got under weigh about nine o'clock, & sailed some five or six miles to the Mule Keys: islands formed of Mangrove bushes, in the Western part of the harbour. These keys are frequented by great quantities of wild fowl: pelicans, gulls, cranes, cormorant; man-of-war hawks, &c., &c.; & we are anticipated finding ample employment for our guns; particularly in shooting cormorant, which are the best birds to eat; being very like the black duck of the North; but after spending some five hours in sailing & rowing about the different keys, we had in our boat but four cormorant, & a pelican, killed by Alexander; one poke⁶⁴ killed sitting in a tree by myself; one gull killed flying by Mr. Russell, & four young, unfledged cranes taken from

⁶² Samuel Harvey and Edmund Dexter, Wardens of the Port.

⁶³ "The brig Issac Mead of New York, Studly, master, from Marseilles in France, for New Orleans, with a cargo of wine, went ashore on what is known here as the American Shoals about thirty miles to the windward of this place. She was assisted by wreckers and near one half of her cargo taken out before she was got off. She arrived here on Friday evening and being as is supposed badly injured is now discharging the balance of her cargo and will have to heave out and repair before she can proceed on her voyage." See: "From Our Correspondent, Key West, Jan.3, 1843," *The Southern Patriot*, January 9, 1843, p.2.

⁶⁴ Green heron.

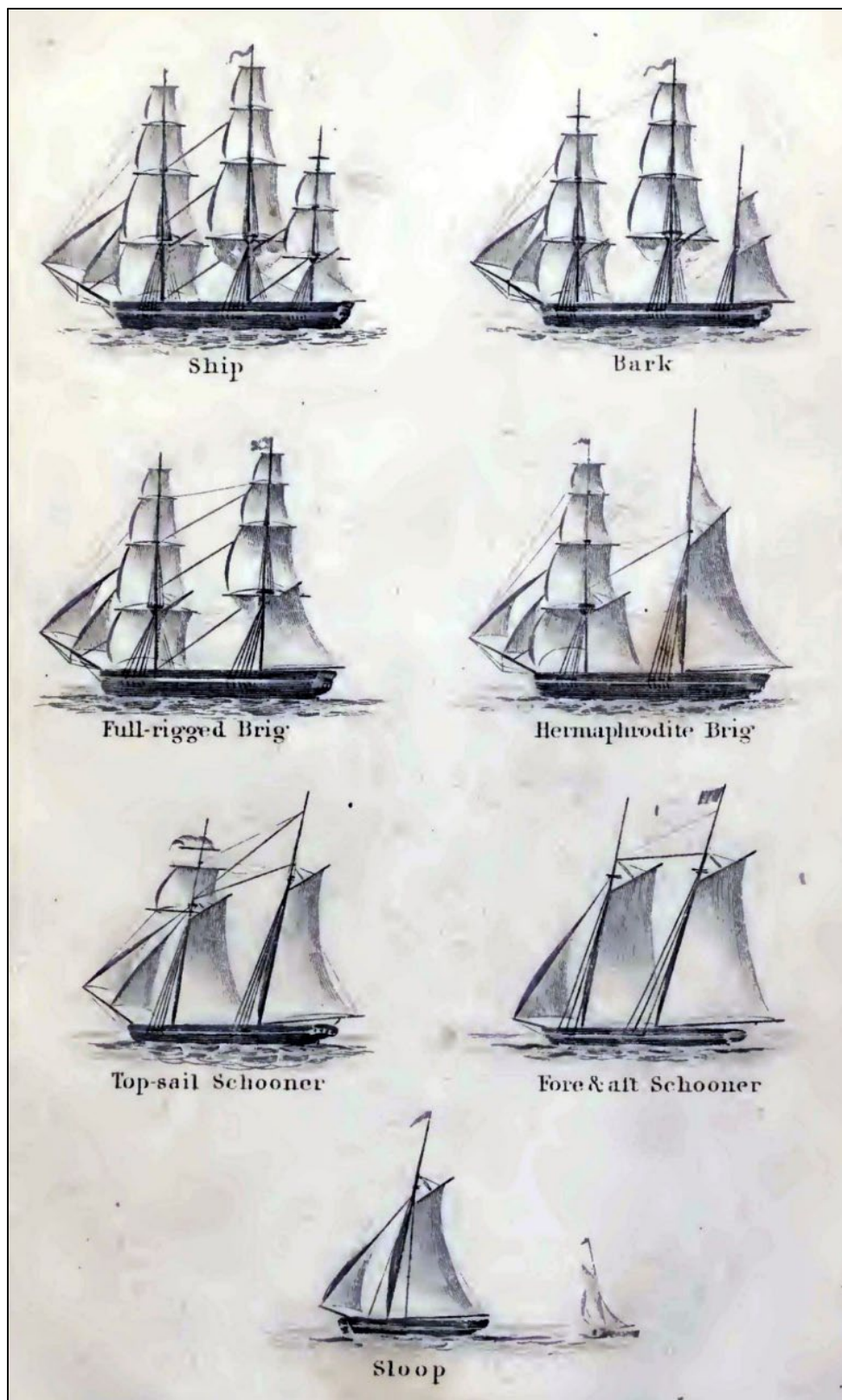


Figure 14. Sailing Ship Types. From Richard Henry Dana, Jr. (1851) *The Seaman's Friend*, plate 4. These craft are typical of the sailing vessels noted by Henry Patterson.

the nests on the Mangrove bush by Mr. Russell & myself. Of these the cormorant & cranes are alone good eating. Still I enjoyed the day very much. The immense numbers of pelicans hovering about the islands, darkening the air with their unwieldy bodies – the graceful & high sailing hawks – the snow white gulls, covering large trees

1843

February. Key West.

234

as with a profusion of white flowers – the quick, hurried flight of the ill shaped cormorant - & the slow & measured motions of the long legged, long necked, awkward cranes, as they winged their way at a cautious distance from us; all were novel to me; & amply repaid me for the disappointment of not shooting as much as I expected.

From some cause the cormorant are scarce compared with the accounts of former times; & although we fired a great many times; it was generally at such long distances that it was without the hope of affecting anything. The scramble over the bushes after the crane nests; & the grotesque motions of the birds, as they tried either to escape by running, or to defend themselves with their bills, afforded me a great deal of amusement. When we were crossing the channel on our way home, the sea was so high that our row boat was continually jamming the other with her bow; so I got into the former, & steered it clear with an oar the rest of the way up. After tea I went to an auction sale with Alexander, but found only a room filled with a mixed assemblage of men & boys; fumes of liquor, segars, perspiration, &c.; and a sale of old merchandise, so I immediately returned to Mr. Fontane's & finished the evening playing cards with Messrs. Macrae, Weaver, Fontane, & Watlington until eleven o'clock; then partook of an oyster supper; & retired at midnight. Mr. Weaver has been sick with the gout yesterday & today. Weather was clear, warm, & pleasant until six o'clock; after that it was showery & cool. The changes are more sudden in this latitude than I supposed; almost equalling New York.

1843

February. Key West.

235

Thursday, twenty third Last Tuesday forenoon I spent cleaning our guns, & writing. While engaged at this latter business, Mrs. Doctor Blodgett⁶⁵ called here a short time. In the afternoon I spent an hour at Mr. Hackley's, where I again met Mrs. Blodgett, & Mrs. & Miss Doubleday.⁶⁶

Wednesday morning I attended an auction sale by Filor & Patterson, then took my gun, & again went to the salt ponds where we were Saturday, & shot thirteen sand snipe; one poke, & one plover; thinking this was glory enough for one day, I wended my way homeward, reaching there at four & a half o'clock. In the course of my rambles I went several miles above the Salt Works; the crossed to the South Beach, & selecting a shady seat under a gnarled tree; drew my

⁶⁵ Julia Smith Blodgett (b.1814), a native of Hadley Massachusetts, had married Dr. John Loomis Blodgett (b.1809) of Amherst in 1834. Doctor Blodgett was a physician and botanist, and in 1836, he went to Liberia as a surgeon for the American Colonization Society. On his return in 1838, the couple moved to Key West, where they were devoted to his botanical research. Julia was a skilled artist and painted many of the specimens they collected. See: "The Late Mrs. Julia A. Howe," *Springfield Republican*, April 6, 1904, p.14.

⁶⁶ Perhaps the family of English Etymologist Edward Doubleday who was living in Key West at the time. See: Doubleday, Edward (1843). "Edward Doubleday letter in which he informs his correspondent of his intent to remain in Key West another year," Dated April 17, Broadus R. Littlejohn, Jr. Manuscript and Ephemera Collection. 187. <https://digitalcommons.wofford.edu/littlejohnmss/187>

cold bread & meat from my pocket & took a hunter's dinner; with no sound near me but the roar of the waves as they rolled themselves, impatient of restraint, at my feet, & no signs of humanity in sight, save a small wrecking sloop coasting along the shore of the island: & dimly visible outside the reef, two ships standing North. Thus, in silent & solitary contemplation of Nature's beauties, that I find a pleasure far surpassing all that's derived from the gaieties of life. In the evening, as if to present the two in the most striking contrast, I attended a subscription ball, given under the management of Mr. Littlewood at Mrs. Mallory's rooms,⁶⁷ & with dancing, eating, drinking, flirting, conversing, &c., &c., the time passed until two o'clock before I got to bed. There were present

1843

February. Key West.

236

just enough ladies to form three cotillions, & many more gentlemen, hence we found it very difficult to obtain partners; & although I met with very good success, dancing as often as I wished; yet toward the last of it, some of the ladies left the rooms; & I formed a cotillion of gentlemen only, & we enjoyed ourselves as well as when we had partners of the fair sex: however before we quit, some of our party got a little intoxicated, rude, & boisterous, & some dissatisfaction was created among the more orderly sets, from our noise interfering with the sound of the music; & detracting from pleasures of their amusement. I afterward learned that there was considerable ill feeling existing among different members of the assembly, arising from the difficulty of procuring partners on the part of the gentlemen; & the confusion consequent on engagements being formed many cotillions in advance; but I avoided all difficulties of that nature; & studiously abstaining from the indulgence of any angry feeling; went to bed in good humour with myself & every one else.

This morning I again went fishing with Mr. Hackley & his black man Peter in the boat we had before, rigged out with a lug sail. Running first to the bank in the harbour, we caught some very large horse conchs, & saw a number of dead sharks collected around a dead horse. There were specimens of several different varieties, some of them near twelve feet long. They had been killed there & their livers extracted for the oil.⁶⁸ Thence we sculled along to Man of War channel, near Mangrove Key, anchored & commenced fishing; & by one o'clock had a fine lot,

1843

February. Key West.

237

consisting of some fifty or sixty grouper; yellow tails, & grunts. Of these, I caught about a dozen; the first salt water fish I ever took. We beat back against a head wind; & I reached Mr. Fontane's in time for dinner. After dinner I played Chess with Watlington; & in the evening attended a sale by Filor & Patterson.

⁶⁷ Ellen Mallory, one of Key West's earliest female settlers, arrived in December 1823, as matron of the military hospital. See: Hammond, E. Ashby (1967). "Notes on the Medical History of Key West, 1822-1832," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 46(2):93-110. W. C. Maloney wrote in 1876, "Her husband died shortly after their arrival; she kept for many years the only comfortable boarding house on the island, located first on the north side of Fitzpatrick Street and subsequently, after the [island's] proprietors had expressed their appreciation of her character and usefulness, by a donation of a lot of ground, on her own premises, on the south side of Duval street near Front." See: Maloney, Walter C. (1876). *A Sketch of the History of Key West*, Advertiser Printing House, Newark, p.61.

⁶⁸ Shark liver oil has been used for centuries in folk medicine. The dead horse was apparently used as shark bait.

Weather is clear, warm, & very pleasant.

Saturday, twenty fifth Alexander & I intended going to Sand Key (an island with a light house on it some nine miles South from here) yesterday (Fig. 16), but the wind has been strong from the South both yesterday & to-day, & the boat could not go. I spent the day sauntering about town, reading & writing; tea'd & spent the evening at Mr. Fontane's playing cards with Macrae, Watlington, & Fontane.

This morning Alexander & I got our shooting tackle ready; borrowed a boat of a Mr. Roberts; & sailed seven miles to an island called Boca Chica, expecting to find water fowl; probably raccoons, & possibly deer; but after spending an hour tramping through the water, mud & bushes, getting miserably bitten by innumerable mosquitoes; & finding no signs of game save occasionally a deer track, we got under weigh at five o'clock, & beat up home again in four hours; thoroughly drenched with salt water, tired, & hungry. The game had all been driven from the island by two men who had been there shortly before us with dogs. Our boat was very small, not over ten or twelve feet long; with a deck nearly covering her, having only space

1843

February. Key West.

238

sufficient for our legs, & the necessary implements of gunning; a centre board, and a large sprit sail, & from the wind being pretty fresh, & the water being rough; we were continually exposed to the waves that flew over her in buckets full; & had to manage her very carefully to prevent a capsise. Yet notwithstanding these drawbacks, & our ill success in shooting, I enjoyed the day much; the excitement & exhilaration of spirits as we danced over the waters; & the scene of slight danger. On our return we saw a flock of flamingoes, some twenty or thirty in number; & endeavoured to get within shot of them as they stood in the water; but they took to flight too soon for us. The most awkward birds I ever before saw, are perfect specimens of grace & elegance compared with the appearance of these as they flew past us, their long necks stuck straight out before, & their equally long legs trailing behind. But their red & black plumage is said to excel in beauty all the feathered tribe.⁶⁹

The wrecking sloop *Globe*, & some fishing smacks arrived last evening from Tortugas, bringing some sugar & molasses, part of the cargo of the Brig *Ivanhoe* lately wrecked near that place.⁷⁰

The South winds which have prevailed during the last two days have made the weather very warm, but not unpleasant; there being all times a good breeze.

Sunday, twenty sixth I wrote a letter home this forenoon; dined at Mr. Fontane's; in the afternoon took a walk with Alexander & Emma; & spent the evening with them. The weather is still clear, warm & pleasant.

⁶⁹ In recent times, there has been some debate as to whether Flamingos are native to Florida. Patterson's observation of this flock at Boca Chica reinforces the case that indeed they are. See: Whitfield, S. M.; Frezza, P.; Ridgley, F. N., et al. (2018). "Status and trends of American Flamingos (*Phoenicopterus ruber*) in Florida, USA," *The Condor: Ornithological Applications*, 120:291–304.

⁷⁰ According to *The Southern Patriot*, March 25, 1843, p.3, "The brig *Ivanhoe*, from N. Orleans, for Philadelphia, was totally lost, a small portion of cargo saved."

Tuesday, twenty eighth Yesterday I intended going in the *Water Witch*, by invitation from Lieutenant Clark, on a short cruise to the North West Bar to paint the buoys; but after getting on board with Alexander in company we concluded not to go, on account of the wind & sea being so high that it would be impossible to work any after getting there. I spent the forenoon sauntering about down town; saw the *Jefferson* come in, & anchor – in the afternoon helped Alexander at some carpenter work; also in cleaning a goat of his, which had just been so badly injured by a blow from a sheep that its life had been despaired, & he cut its throat to render the carcass fit for market – in the evening I called with Alexander at Mr. Stephen Mallory's⁷¹ & challenged him to a game of Chess, which he accepted; & in a few moves check mated me; a second game we played, & he made a stale mate; but on recalling his move, & continuing the game, he again check mated me. He is much the best player I ever met. In the afternoon I also spent an hour or two teaching the game to Watlington. This morning at nine o'clock I went out in a little fishing boat belonging to Mr. Howe, (an attaché of the Custom House,)⁷² with a Mr. James Smith of Goshen, NY, & spent the day fishing in the channel; near the Key West light; taking as near as I can guess some eight or ten dozen fish, similar to those I caught with Mr. Hackley. Until near twelve o'clock we took the fish very fast; once I hooked two at a haul; from that time until three o'clock the tide was running out so strong that the fish would not bite, & we passed the time dining, &

conversing, principally on the subject of our Orange County friends.⁷³ The two hours following, we were again successful in catching the fish quite rapidly; we then hove up the anchor & I navigated the boat in; well pleased with my day's sport, even after deducing the inconvenience of a very warm sun shiny day, without any breeze, which caused the weather to be quite oppressive to those exposed to it. Our bait was dead clams. This boat & others of the same kind go out in this way daily, & sell their fish from their wells the following morning. Mr. Smith I found to be quite intelligent, & well informed; having seen much of the world in his roving. He is about my age. The packet brig *Howell* arrived last night from Charleston; & sailed to day for Havana, passing near us as we lay at anchor in the afternoon, but not making much headway in consequence of the calm.

At eight & a half o'clock this evening I went pr invitation to a large party given by Dr. Pinckney & Lady – found some sixty ladies & gentlemen packed into a very small house – danced, &c., &c., until two o'clock, then came home & went to bed, minus my hat which had been lost in the confusion. We had Mr. Littlewood as manager, assisted in his music by the Cutter's band – the whole society of the island as assembled, & seemed determined to enjoy the festivities to the utmost – all were in high spirits – jokes were cracked, blunders perpetrated – flirtation & rivalry

⁷¹ Stephen R. Mallory, son of Ellen Mallory, had come to Key West as a boy. In 1843, he was a leading attorney on the island.

⁷² Charles Howe, previously a resident of Duck Key, and then Indian Key, moved to Key West in 1842. See: "Charles Howe of Indian Key," by Jerry Wilkinson <http://www.keyshistory.org/IK-charles-howe.html>. In 1843, Howe became involved in the Salt Business at Key West See: W.C. Maloney: op.cit. p.23.

⁷³ Orange County, New York.

carried on – Champagne & Madeira drank by those who liked stimulants - & lemonade & water by the total-abstinence people – sandwiches & cake eaten by all - & a dire confusion of tongues

1843

March. Key West.

241

rendering the whole scene a perfect Babel. The display of female beauty was equal to any I ever met in an assembly of the kind; the dark eyes & hair of the Castilian predominating but owing to the custom prevalent among the women of this place of marrying very young, they were nearly all accompanied by husbands. There was a great deal of Waltzing; & the dancing notwithstanding the crowd was very spirited, especially after the wine had circulated freely.

Wednesday, first When on my way down town before breakfast this morning, my hat was handed to me by Mr. Hackley's black boy, who had found it in the street this morning. The brig *Metamora* arrived to day from Apalachicola, & sailed in the afternoon for New York. The Schooner *Alabama* also arrived from New York; sailed the 11th ult; & brought materials & men for repairing the *Isaac Mead*. I spent the forenoon waiting for Mr. Clark to go out to the Buoys, but he again disappointed me by postponing it until to morrow, having some business at the Custom House. I spent the afternoon helping Alexander do some carpenter work about the kitchen, & went to bed early, feeling very stupid from last night's dissipation.

Thursday, second I went on board the *Water Witch* with Mr. Clark, & before eight o'clock we were under weigh for the North West Bar. Running alongside the *Jefferson*, we obtained four men from her crew, & some oars & tackle; then with wind, tide, & sweeps alternately, we reached the outer Buoy (about ten miles from here) at eleven & a half o'clock. Making fast to it, we scrubbed

1843

March. Key West.

242

& painted it & pumped the water out; all of which occupied an hour & a half; we then cast off & made sail for Key West. At first it was quite calm & we drifted down with the tide; but soon a breeze sprang up nearly dead ahead; & we beat down to Green's Wharf by four o'clock; stopping at the Light Ship,⁷⁴ & at the Cutter on our way to deliver tools & men which we had borrowed. The day was excessively warm; but little air stirring except as we were returning; & much of the time I was obliged to be exposed to the sun which shone with unclouded brilliancy: the consequence was a degree of suffering on my part which nearly counterbalanced the pleasure of the excursion; & a violent & unpleasant sensation of heat in my head during the rest of the day. I breakfasted & dined on board on salt boiled beef, ship bread, butter, potatoes, molasses, & water. In the afternoon & evening I played Chess with Watlington. The Schooner *Alabama* sailed to day for Mobile, & I sent a letter for Suckasunny by her.

Saturday, fourth I spent yesterday forenoon planning boards for shelving to the Kitchen; in the afternoon called at Mr. Hackley's, tea'd, & spent the evening. Mr. Macrae also tea'd there, & Messrs. Hicks & Allen spent evening with us. This forenoon I spent at the Salt

⁷⁴ The lightship *Key West* had been put in place at the outer end of the Northwest Channel passage in 1838, with a crew of three. It had a fixed, white light at its masthead that could be seen for 12 miles. See: Taylor, Thomas W. (1995). *Florida's Territorial Lighthouses, 1821-1845*, Burgman Printing, Daytona Beach, pp.264-267.

ponds shooting snipe; killed eighteen; five of them on the wing at three shots; got my feet covered with mud & wet; returned by the South Beach, & reached home at two o'clock excessively fatigued. Called at Mr. Hackley's again in the afternoon; tea'd at Mr. Fontane's - after tea called at Mr. Joseph Brown's⁷⁵ to play Chess, but on knocking at the door

1843

March. Key West.

243

& announcing my name, he informed me that they had all gone to bed to avoid the mosquitoes, which are very numerous; & as it was only eight & a quarter o'clock, I came round & finished the evening playing with Watlington.

The Steamers *Colonel Harney* & *Wm. Gaston*, have both touched here within a few days. The weather increases in warmth very fast, thermometer reaching plus 80 every day. News arrived from New Orleans by the *Wm. Gaston* to day, that Mr. F.A. Brown's property which was destroyed by fire on the night of 25th Jan'y was fully insured, the policy covering \$10,000.

Margaret Cummins, a young woman who lives in Alexander's family, was taken with a fit this forenoon, while no one was in the house but Emma. She commenced throwing cold water on her head, & by her cries attracted the attention of the neighbours, who came to her assistance. The doctor said it was something similar to apoplexy, and bled her; which caused immediate relief.⁷⁶

Monday, sixth Yesterday forenoon I waited on Miss Folker to meeting; heard Mr. Lewis preach a sermon; like all of his productions, unconnected, & pointless; serving rather to mystify than explain his text - dined at Mr. Fontane's; had a merchant tailor from New York named Benson there to dinner - after dinner I tried to get a horse to ride to the Salt Ponds in company with Messrs. Benson & Fontane, but did not succeed - I then took a walk with Alexander, tea'd, & spent the evening in conversation: first however taking a short walk down town with Mrs. Fontane.

1843

March. Key West.

244

Before dinner I played a game of Chess at Mr. Fontane's store, with Mr. Benson, & was defeated.

This forenoon Alexander & I spent in the woods near the Light House, cutting a load of fire wood, which he afterward got hauled in. The exercise was very severe, & the weather was very warm, consequently we got ourselves excessively heated & fatigued.

After dinner I saw the *Jefferson* sail for Havana; wrote a letter to Turner, to send by Mr. Benson, who sailed at Ten & a half o'clock this evening in the Packet Brig *Howell* - called at Aunt Sarah's, where I found her youngest daughter Theodora dangerously sick with whooping

⁷⁵ Joseph Beverly Browne, nephew of Fielding A. Browne. According to his son and Key West historian Jefferson Beale Brown, "In 1830, when [F.A. Browne's] nephew, Mr. Joseph Beverly Browne, was graduated from William and Mary College, he sent for him to come to Key West and go in business with him." See: J.B. Browne, Op.cit: p164.

⁷⁶ Bloodletting was based on the idea that illness was caused by an imbalance of "humors" - blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile - in the body. Removing an amount of blood from a patient was thought to restore proper balance. See: Greenstone, Gerry (2010). "The History of Bloodletting," *British Columbia Medical Journal*, 52(1): 12-14.

cough – tea’d – took a walk down town – spent two hours reading & writing; saw the *Howell* sail, & went to bed. The *Jefferson* took as passengers a number of gentlemen from this place; & I was to have been invited; but owing to some mal-arrangements on the part of those engaged in the business, I did not hear of it until just as she was getting under weigh, Captain Nones came to see me, & apologized for the occurrence. On reflection however, I rejoice that I did not go; the expense into which I would have been hurried, would have been inconvenient; & probably from the character of the passengers I would have fallen into bad company. The children in Mr. Fontane’s family & Uncle Alexander’s also, are afflicted with measles & whooping cough among them. The weather continues very warm, & musquitoes very plenty. During several evenings past, a comet has been visible in the West; it is visible soon after

1843

March. Key West.

245

sunset, & sets about eight o’clock. It extends transversely across the Heavens; reaching over I judge 25 degrees, & exceeds by far anything I ever before saw in brilliancy & extent. It seems to be from all accounts an unexpected visitor to this portion of creation; & excites the fears of the ignorant, & the wonder of all (Fig. 15).⁷⁷



Figure 15. The Great March Comet of 1843. *Illustrated London Times*, 25 March 1843, p.211.

A patrol was organized the first of this month, to guard this town in the night. Mr. Fontane is Captain; & has four men out each night. It includes all the able bodied citizens of the place. Alexander is out to night.

⁷⁷ The Great March Comet of 1843, considered the most spectacular comet of the 19th century, was first observed in early February, and it was last seen on April 19. It passed closest to earth and reached its peak brilliance on March 6 – the date of Patterson’s entry. See: Cottam, S. and Orchiston, W. (2015). *Eclipses, Transits, and Comets of the Nineteenth Century*, Springer, New York, pp.17-23. The *Philadelphia Public Ledger* of March 17, p.2, noted, “The Comet, or Zodiacal Light, or whatever the phenomenon nightly observed may be, has been seen as far south as Key West, in the vicinity of Florida’s Reef. It occasions much speculation, and as it remains so long in view, we shall no doubt have a full description of its real character, from some of the astronomers of the day.”

Wednesday, eight Yesterday forenoon I took a walk down town with Alexander – made preparations for a hunt to-morrow – called at Mrs. Williams & drank some Claret & water – then called at Mr. Hackley’s & ate some raw oysters, washed down with Port wine – in this we were joined by Henry D’Lespin; & in company with him I stopped to dinner. Passing the time until four o’clock, conversing, eating green cocoa nuts, discussing the prospect for the evening’s party, &c., &c.; I then took a walk on the North Beach – stopped at the Wharf & saw the Brig *Deborah* of Charleston come in; having sprung a leak on her voyage⁷⁸ – tea’d at Mrs. Williams – & at eight & a half o’clock went to a Ball given by the married ladies of Key West at Mrs. Mallory’s rooms; to which I received an invitation signed by the six lady managers of whom Mrs. Fontane is one. This Ball was similar to the one given at the same place on the 22 ult; with the exception that on this occasion an elegant & substantial supper; including meats, confectionary, wines, &c., &c; was served

1843

March. Key West.

246

about midnight. I waited on a Mrs. Jones, a stranger lady arrived that day in a Schooner from Charleston, to the supper table; but just as I had succeeded in helping her & the other members of the assembly about me to such of the fare as they desired; & was about commencing an attack on my own account, I perceived Mrs. Jones attempting to make her egress from the room; which she accomplished just as I reached her, & seated herself on a chair in the piazza; just ready to faint away from the heat & foul air of the crowded room, & her own debility, consequent on a fit of sea sickness. I got a glass of water which partially restored her; & her husband coming to her assistance, she was removed to a private apartment where she entirely recovered. In consequence of this affair, & feeling a little dispirited myself, & being persuaded that I would feel better without it, I refrained from tasting anything, & left the party for bed at a little after one o’clock. This party also differed from the former one in the number of ladies present being greater; & the difficulty in procuring partners being less. But on the whole, either from some cause contained within myself, or from some outward cause I did not feel at all buoyed during the evening. Perhaps this was owing to the arrival of the Mail Boat *Hayne* from Charleston; which took place about ten o’clock; & was first announced to me as I was standing on the sidewalk, by a bright & startling flash, followed by the booming of her gun; & which probably directed my thoughts into the Channel of Home, & all its associations. She brought me one letter from W.N. Seymour & Co.

1843

March. Key West.

247

The Barque *Everton* also came in during the evening, having been on the reef; & just as she was preparing to discharge her cargo into the wreckers alongside, she slid off, & was brought in to day. The Brigs *Samson* & *Republic* arrived from New York; the former bringing me letters & papers to the 21st Feb’y. At eight o’clock this morning Alexander & I started in a large sail boat belonging to Mr. Davis,⁷⁹ with Mr. Hackley’s batteau in tow, for some Mangrove Keys some

⁷⁸ “On the evening of the 7th the brig *Deborah*, Luther Handey master, of Mattapoisetts, Mass., from New Orleans for Baltimore, arrived here with a cargo of Sugar, Molasses, Rum and Lard, in a leaky condition. She has been discharged and hove out, and will be repaired and reloaded and ready for sea in the course of eight or ten days.” See: “From Our Correspondent,” Key West, March 17. *Southern Patriot*, March 27, 1843, p.2.

⁷⁹ Daniel Davis (b.1813), a Key West businessman.

eight miles up the Harbour, intending if possible to kill a lot of cormorant, which we were informed were very plenty there; but after spending the day sailing around & between them, walking over them; & broiling ourselves in the sun; we had but one cormorant, one young crane, & four pelican's eggs; the former shot by Alexander on the wing; the two latter taken from the nests by myself, after a hard scramble over the bushes & up the trees. Alexander also shot a Curlew which we could not afterward find; & during a few hours, we fished in a creek; I hooked a large snapper, & Alexander a shark, some five feet long; but both escaped. Rather disgusted with our day's sport, we beat down the Harbour again, reaching home at dark; & spent the evening reading. I also played Chess with Watlington. The weather continues clear, pleasant, but very warm; as we sat in our boat to day, fishing in the creeks which intersect the Mangrove Keys; with all the breeze kept from us by the thick bushes; & nothing to look upon but the stagnant water, the black trunks of the mangroves, or the burning sky overhead; it was almost suffocating; & my skin where it was exposed, is tanned equal to any negro driver.

1843

March. Key West.

248

Saturday, eleventh I spent last Thursday principally writing & reading, & making preparations for a trip to Sand Key the next day.

Yesterday morning at ten o'clock I started in a sail boat with Courtlandt Williams⁸⁰; & Stephen Gillet (an attaché of the Sand Key Light House) in another boat in company, for Sand Key. On getting under weigh I found there was quite a spirit of rivalry between my companions as to the speed of their respective boats, but as the breeze was fresh, the heavy boat of Stephen soon got ahead of us, and Courtlandt having been on patrol the night before, he lay'd down in the boat, & left her in my charge. Soon the wind died nearly away & I gained on my competition; then it fell calm, & we got out our sweeps & commenced pulling;⁸¹ the sun shone on me with intense power, & I was drenched with perspiration in a few minutes; but persisted in it; & when, after the lapse of an hour, Courtlandt & the breeze sprang up simultaneously. Stephen was more than a mile astern of us. The wind was dead ahead, but I beat up to the Key by three o'clock, & Stephen reached there an hour later. Found Captain Appleby (Mrs. Williams Father)⁸² & his Cook, Mr. Arkins; spent the afternoon picking up shells on the beach - touring with Courtlandt for fish, of which we caught two Baracouta,⁸³ & a Spanish Mackerell; examining the Light, &c., &c; & at seven & a half o'clock lay'd down for the night on a settee. This Key, the Southernmost of the United States, situated ten miles South from Key West, & just on the Florida Reef, of where it is a part; is a mere sand bank, of one or two acres in extent; a deposit

⁸⁰ Courtland Parker Stephen Williams (b.1825) was the son of Eliza Williams (the former, divorced wife of Alexander Patterson) and the grandson of Capt. Joshua Appleby (fn. 82).

See: <https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/family-tree/person/tree/163833514/person/362132429771/facts>

⁸¹ A style or rowing in which each person has one oar.

⁸² Joshua Appleby (b.1770) had come to the Keys in 1822, when he established a wrecking settlement called Port Monroe on Knight's Key with partner John Fiveash. In 1824, Appleby and another partner established a store at Indian Key, the first settlement on that island. Because he was involved in schemes to illegally import foreign goods, Appleby spent much time mired in legal proceedings, and his business ventures withered. By 1830, he was in Key West working as a wrecker, and in 1837, he was appointed lightkeeper at Sand Key Lighthouse. See: Viele, John (1996). *The Florida Keys: A History of the Pioneers*, Pineapple Press, Sarasota, pp.25-31.

⁸³ Barracuda

of marine substances: shells, coral, &c; & being just on the edge of the Gulf Stream, exposed to the unceasing action of the wind & waves; is constantly undergoing changes of form & material; every sea as it rolls in brings a fresh deposit of matter, & every returning wave carries away some portion of the former island. In the great gale of September last the whole island was nearly destroyed; the dwelling was undermined & carried away, & the people were obliged to seek refuge in the Light House, which fortunately is founded on a rock.⁸⁴ The present dwellings are but temporary, limited & the whole of their arrangements show the want of a female housekeeper. The Light House is nearly the same in every respect as the one at Key West; but the light is a revolving one, having two light & two dark sides, & makes about thirty revolutions an hour. It is moved by a weight attached to machinery. The Key is utterly barren of every vegetable substance; & the inhabitants (three in number) are entirely dependent on Key West for provisions & water, except the little of the latter they catch in the cistern & the fish they take in the adjoining waters. The comet showed with great brilliancy in the evening. During my stay; about a dozen square rigged vessels passed in sight; those bound to the Westward running so close that we could distinguish the people on their decks; those bound North keeping far out, in the force of the current. To day while out fishing, the Brig *J.D. Noyes* from Port Leon to New York hove to very near Sand Key, within a mile of us; & put a passenger on board the Pilot Boat, which came down to her from Key West. This proved to be Judge Marvin, whose

arrival afforded much satisfaction to myself & others who are waiting his decision on some wrecked property. He has been attending the session of the Territorial Legislature at Tallahassee.⁸⁵

I arose before sunrise this morning – bathed on the beach – breakfasted - & with my yesterday's companions went out fishing in the small sail boat: & by twelve o'clock we had taken a well full of fish; mostly grouper & yellow tails; some grouper; & one mackerel weighing some five pounds taken by myself. This was the best fishing I ever enjoyed; they bit the bait as fast as we could offer it to them, & frequently we would haul in two at once. Returning to dinner we caught another Baracouta by towing, & at two o'clock Courtlandt & I started on our return;

⁸⁴ A person who went through the storm while at Sand Key wrote, "On the 4th instant a gale of wind came on, the sea rose and began to wash away the island. The kitchen, store house and other outhouses washed away before the night... But about ten o'clock at night, the sea began to beat and break against the side of the house. It was soon undermined, the walls gave way, and the sea poured in, filling the lower rooms at each surge.... We all succeeded in escaping though the back door and getting into the tower... About 12 o'clock at night, the walls of the house having been undermined on all sides, the roof fell in." See: "Correspondence Commercial Advertiser. Key West, September 6, 1842." *New York Spectator*, October 1, 1841, p.1.

⁸⁵ William Marvin (b. 1808), a native of New York State, moved to Key West in 1835, when he was appointed US District Attorney for the Southern District of Florida by President Andrew Jackson. He was soon elected to represent Monroe County at the Florida Territorial Council. In March of 1839, he was appointed Judge of the US District Court, where he oversaw the many admiralty cases at the island. See: Kearney, Kevin E. (1958) Autobiography of William Marvin, *Florida Historical Quarterly* (36)3:179-222.



Figure 16. Sand Key Light, ca. 1835 by William A. Whitehead. The lighthouse, keeper's quarters, and Island itself, were all destroyed by the great hurricane of 1846. Florida Keys History Center Collection.

reaching Key West at five o'clock. I navigated the boat the most of the way. We stopped about an hour at the Dry Rocks, & caught three very large Baracouta, weighing some fifteen or twenty pounds, & measuring from two to three feet in length. These Dry Rocks are also part of the Florida Reef - they are partly coral & show their heads just above water, extending about a quarter mile. Out side of them is the Gulf Stream: & as the wind was quite fresh to day, the sea was high, & the waves broke over the rocks in heavy breakers; white as milk and threatening destruction to every craft that should fall among them. But our boat worked admirably; & as we ran her up & down, outside & in, tacking, luffing, filling away, & occasionally dropping everything & forgetting everything in the high excitement of hauling in & securing the fish, which operation required the combined power of both of us; I thought it the finest sport I had ever experienced. Our line was

1843

March. Key West.

251

about ten fathoms long, a quarter of an inch thick; hooks stout in proportion, with a ganging of copper wire to prevent the fish from biting it off with their powerful teeth; but yet we hooked one in so strong & heavy that he parted the line above the ganging & escaped with the hook. The bait we used in all our fishing was a small fish, called Sardinia; taken on the beach at Sand Key, with a cast net. When we left these rocks, my companion again lay'd down, & left me in charge of the boat.

The children in Mr. Fontane's & Uncle's families are improving; except Theodora; she is gradually failing.

I spent the evening walking with Alexander, & playing cards at Mr. Fontane's. The weather continues very warm; but not unpleasant to me. I clothe myself in the thinnest manner consistent with decency: & I sleep with open windows and no clothes over me.

From letters received by Judge Marvin from Uncle Alexander, we are led to expect him within a fortnight.

Tuesday, fourteenth I wrote up my journal last Sunday forenoon - called on Aunt Sarah - dined at Alexander's - in the afternoon took a long walk up the island - in the evening called at Mrs. Williams with Alexander & Emma - found Mary Jane, & some other visitors there - & came home to bed at ten o'clock. The weather was clear, very warm, & pleasant: but Monday morning when I rose it was raining violently, which continued until noon; it then cleared off with a Norther, which still continues with considerable violence; & sufficiently cold to call out thick clothing. I spent Monday forenoon

1843

March. Key West.

252

writing letters - after dinner Alexander & I went into the woods near the Barracks, & cut two crabwood sticks, which he intends making into canes; these, with a great deal of labour we carried home. Afterward in chasing a stray lamb about the woods, I accidentally wounded my knee by running against the thorns of a prickly pear; & to day I am quite lame in consequence thereof. I spent the evening learning Alex to play Chess.

This morning I took a walk on the South Beach, called at Mr. Hackley's; & finished the day with Alexander raising the kitchen a foot or two by means of jack screws. Spent the evening at Mr. Fontane's, where I found Miss Howard, Mrs. Randolph, & Miss Brown. I waited on the two latter to their home.

The Brigantine *Calais Packet* arrived yesterday from New York; brought us no letters or papers. Two Barques have been ashore near here within three days; one got off & went on her way, the other bilged & is a total loss, except such parts of her as the wreckers succeeded in saving. She was in ballast. The sick children are improving.

Thursday, sixteenth I spent yesterday forenoon writing letters for the mail; the afternoon I helped Alexander do some carpenter work; tea'd at Mr. Fontane's; & spent the evening with Alexander at Mr. Adam Gordon's house. Mr. Gordon (the Collector of the Port)⁸⁶ & Miss Sexton, (who has taken up her residence there) were with us; & the evening passed in conversation. The weather was warm & showery.

To day we had a heavy Southerly wind in the morning; about

⁸⁶ Adam Gordon (b.1793) came to Key West in 1834, when he was appointed US Attorney for the Southern District of Florida. He served as mayor of the island community from 1835-36 and was appointed Collector of Customs in 1838. See: Bruce, Betty (1976). *Key West Mayors, 1828-1971*. On file at Florida Keys History Center, Monroe County Public Library.

eight o'clock it shifted to the West, with violent rains; at noon it cleared off with a "Norther" which continues heavy & cold; but the evening is pleasant, notwithstanding, clear, & moonlight surpassing any I ever saw at the North.

The morning I spent writing letters; after dinner sauntered about town with Alexander; called at the Post Office, & taking a walk on the South Beach. Here we saw the *Jefferson* off Boca Chica Point, beating up for this harbour, which she reached at nine o'clock PM, about twelve hours from Matanzas. In the evening we started to hear a temperance lecture by Captain Watlington, but it was postponed. Afterward, at nine o'clock, I mounted guard as Captain of the patrol, in Alexander's stead; & with two companions Messrs. Davis & Comacco, patrolled the town until one o'clock; then I called Alexander up, & turned in. We ought to have had another man, but one of those who were ordered out (Mr. Brown) refused to serve. My companions were asleep in the Guard house a large part of the time, & left me to look out alone; this did not displease me however; & I walked the streets, reflecting on the singularity of my position. Three months since, the wildest imagination would scarcely have conceived anything more improbable, than that on this evening I should be figuring in the streets of Key West, Captain of the City Patrol. The appointment of Captain is made each evening by Mr. Fontane, the Captain of the Company.

Saturday, eighteenth The weather continues Northerly; warm sunshine in the middle of the day; but the mornings & evenings cool; & the air raw & searching. Yesterday morning I spent partly on the Wharf looking at the fruit, game cocks, & other curiosities from Cuba, as they were brought ashore from the Cutter; partly taking a walk to the Barracks to buy some Crab wood canes; & the rest of it reading & writing. In the afternoon I helped Alexander build a Hog pen; & spent the evening with him & Emma making molasses candy.

This forenoon I spent down town: taking a long walk from the Salt Ponds; reading & writing. In the afternoon helped Alexander put up some shelves, & made some calls about town. I spent the evening very pleasantly with Mary Jane at the house of Mr. F.A. Brown. Found the family at home, beside some other visitors. The Mail Boat arrived last evening from Havana, & sailed this noon for Charleston. The *Jefferson* also sailed for the same place this morning at sunrise, taking in her as passengers, Mr. John Russell & Mr. Littlewood.

Tuesday, twenty first The weather continues unchanged, cool & raw: the moonlight evenings are past, & the comet shows with increased brilliancy.

Sunday forenoon Alexander & I took a walk to the South Beach, thence to the wharf, where we found the Brigs *Billow* & *Statira*, just arrived fifteen days from New York. The former brought some articles for Alexander, which I ordered by letter, but to my grievous disappointment neither of them brought me any

letters or papers. They sailed in company this morning for Port Leon. Dined at Mr. Fontane's; & spent the afternoon with Alexander reading, writing, & walking; & in the evening we called with Emma at Doctor Blodgett's house, & spent an hour, found the Doctor & his Lady & Mr. Lull there.

Yesterday forenoon Alexander & I attended the sitting of the Admiralty Court, Judge Marvin presiding; & heard the evidence, & summing up of the counsel on the case of the *Isaac Mead*. The Court is held in the Court House; on the road to the Light House – the evidence was short & conclusive – the speech of Mr. Gordon for the wreckers was short & not good; he hesitates & expresses himself with difficulty, seeming not to have his argument well arranged, & consequently making much repetition. But with Mr. Mallory, the counsel for the Brig, I was much pleased. He speaks fluently, & with ease; has his argument well arranged; expresses his ideas in well chosen language, & without repetition; & confirmed me in the opinion which I previously entertained, that he is one of the most finished gentlemen on the island. The Judge deferred giving an opinion at present. He presides of course with dignity; & wears a very indifferent & confident air.

After dinner Emma, Alexander, & I spent an hour at Uncle Alexander's. His child continues dangerously ill. Mary Jane was also taken suddenly ill yesterday morning, with a fainting fit. She is still confined to

her bed, seriously sick. Her disease is called Erysipelas.⁸⁷ Just before tea Alexander & I spent an hour wading about on the flats near the Barracks, gathering crabs, sponges, & shells; & this afternoon I spent an hour in the same way with Doctor Blodgett. We collected a large quantity of each. The shells are principally the eyestone species. In the evening I spent an hour at Mr. Mallory's. Found no one at home but Mr. Merano, Mrs. Mallory's brother.⁸⁸

After breakfast this morning I jumped on board the *Water Witch*; & went out with Mr. Clark to the Buoy, just at the Southern entrance of this Harbour. This we pumped, cleaned, & painted; & returned to the wharf at one o'clock, after a very pleasant sail. But I was grieved to find that from being absent, I had missed an excellent opportunity for going to a wrecker's station, about a hundred miles hence, North East, above Indian Key, in a small sail boat with Alexander, to notify some witnesses to appear on the approaching trial of the Brig *Frances Ashby*. As Alexander was unable to find me, he gave it up, & two other men went instead.

⁸⁷ Erysipelas (aka St. Anthony's Fire) is a bacterial infection involving the dermis layer of the skin, but it may also extend to the superficial cutaneous lymphatics. Symptoms often occur suddenly. Affected individuals may develop a fever, shivering, chills, fatigue, headaches, vomiting, and be generally unwell. See: Youstina, M.; Shaukat, N.M. (2022). "Erysipelas" <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK532247/>.

⁸⁸ Fernando J. Moreno (b.1824), a native of Pensacola, was the half-brother of Stephen Mallory's wife, Angela Moreno Mallory (b. 1815). See: <https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/family-tree/person/tree/23823780/person/2063022604/facts>

Owing to the sickness in Mr. Fontane's family, I took his place as patrol to night. Mounted on a horse of Mr. Wall, & accompanied by Captain John Giger (of the firm Tift & Giger)⁸⁹ also mounted: I patrolled the streets of the town from half past ten o'clock; until four o'clock in the morning at which time I went to bed. Part of the time we were sitting in the Guard

1843

March. Key West.

257

House, or at the steps of Mr. Giger's house,⁹⁰ but generally were mounted & walking our horses about the town. I felt less fatigue than on my former patrol.

The night was partly cloudy, with a pleasant Southerly wind.

The Brig *Ann Eliza* arrived from Mobile Monday morning & sailed immediately for New York, taking a letter from me to my brothers.

I have a slight cough & sore throat; arising from unpleasant weather, & exposure.

There is a great deal of sickness about this place, especially among the children.

End of Volume Fifth.

1843

March. Key West.

1

Thursday, twenty thirds The weather has been cold, rainy, & very unpleasant during the last two days. Yesterday forenoon I arose about nine o'clock - read & wrote until dinner time - after dinner spent two hours with Alexander lathing the passage way in his dwelling over head, which job requiring a stooping posture from the work men, was sufficiently unpleasant.

Afterward we took a walk down town; saw some of the citizens play a game of ten pins; tea'd - & very soon after tea I went to bed.

To day I played Chess with Watlington in the morning - took a walk on the South Beach - dined & spent two hours at Mr. Hackley's - called at Uncle's house, where I found his child improving - took another walk down town, & on the North Beach; tea'd at Alexander's, & spent the evening at the house of Mr. Joseph B. Brown,⁹¹ playing Chess with him. The first game I beat him, & the second he beat me. I think we are about equally matched. Afterward I stopped in at the "Lonja"⁹² & saw a game of Billiards played, for a stake of half a sovereign. Here I was

⁸⁹ Captain John Geiger (b.1807) had been in Key West since 1823, when he arrived as a harbor pilot for Commodore David Porter's anti-piracy squadron. He also captained wrecking vessels and was "a sort of commodore among his compeers," according to Jefferson B. Browne, op.cit. pp.12; 179-180. The Tift family had a mercantile business and a warehouse for the storage and sale of salvaged goods See: *Key West Gazette*, December 13, 1845, p.3.

⁹⁰ Geiger lived at what is now 205 Whitehead Street in Key West. The building that currently stands there, popularly known as the "Audubon House," was built sometime after 1846.

⁹¹ Joseph Beverly Browne was a prominent Key West businessman and politician. He had arrived at the island from his native Virginia in 1830. He was a member of the St. Joseph convention that, in 1838, wrote the first Florida constitution. He also served as U.S. Marshall, Clerk of the U.S. Court, member of the Florida legislature, postmaster and Mayor of Key West. See: Hambright, Tom (n.d). "This Day in Keys History, December 25." On file at Florida Keys History Center.

⁹² *Lonja* is the Spanish word for auction, market, or exchange, but in this case it appears to be the name of a billiard hall or saloon, perhaps linked with an auction house.

very much amused at the efforts made by the players to discompose their antagonists, by taunting & ridicule.

Mary Jane is improving is now able to go about the house. The Government Steamer *Charleston* arrived yesterday from Tampa Bay, & sailed this morning for Charleston & Augustine. Mr. Joseph D'Lespin took passage in her for the latter place. My cough still harasses me at times.

1843

March. Key West.

2

Saturday, twenty fifth Yesterday forenoon I spent an hour at the Court House listening to the trial of the case of the *Herald*, Hancock Master, from Vera Cruz bound to Swanzey, & wrecked on the Florida Reef some time in December last.⁹³ She sent in a large part of her cargo, principally copper coin, to this place by the wreckers, was got off the Reef, & in attempting to reach this place went down, carrying the balance of her cargo with her. The trial was not an interesting one, & I came away before it was finished. Messrs. Gordon & Mallory were engaged as counsel, one by the wreckers, the other by the Brig. The decision is not yet given.

After dinner, at four & a half o'clock, Alexander & I attended the funeral of Maria Brown, youngest daughter of F.A. Brown, aged three years; who died that morning after a short & severe illness, being a complication of diseases, whooping cough among others. We accompanied the body to the South Beach, where it was interred in a vault. Returning with Watlington & others through the woods, we got lost, & had an unpleasant walk through the bushes & tangled under wood. The evening I spent at Mr. Mallory's, where I was introduced to his wife, a very pretty, & sprightly woman of Spanish descent; also to a gentleman & lady from Cuba, whose names I forgot, & who spoke no English.

The forenoon I spent at the Court House, listening to the trial of the case of the Brig *Frances Ashby*, Randall Master, from Matanzas bound to New York; & wrecked on the Florida Reef about the 20th January. She had a cargo of oranges (see page 220, Vol 5th), honey, grass,

1843

March. Key West.

3

tobacco, coffee, &c; & being in a leaky condition was run on to the reef to prevent her sinking. Her cargo was mostly taken out by the wreckers, & after being shipped, she was abandoned, but afterward was got off & brought into this port, where she was refitted & is now taking in her cargo again. During these operations it was discovered that holes had been bored in her bottom, & afterward plugged up, & from all the evidence which has yet transpired it appears that there was some great villainy practiced somewhere, either by the Master or some of the wreckers; & the prevailing opinion, & one well sustained by facts, is that the whole business, the springing a leak, the running ashore, & the abandonment of the Brig, was a concerted &

⁹³ "On the 26th ult, the British brig Herald, Hancock, master, ran ashore at Elliot's Key, near Cape Florida. She was from Vera Cruz, bound to Swansea, England, laden with copper, coin, and jalap. Most of the cargo has been saved and brought to this place, the vessel was lost." See: "Correspondence Commercial Advertiser. Key West, Jan.2, 1842 [sic]," *New York Commercial Advertiser*, January 12, 1843, p.2.

previously arranged plan, between Randall, & Captain Packer⁹⁴ of the wrecking sloop *George Eldridge*, who was the first to board her.⁹⁵

Mr. Macrae is counsel for the Brig. This is his first case in this place, & he is determined to spare no efforts to make his client's cause a good one; & to increase his own reputation. But I cannot admire his conduct. He is disposed to do too much – asks questions over & over again; & those which have but a slight bearing on the case – is very absent minded, often forgetting or not noticing what passes - & shows a disposition to make long & useless speeches, & convert mole hills into mountains.

Mr. Gordon is counsel for Captain Packer, & Mr. Mallory for the other wreckers. The witnesses are numerous, the evidence contradictory, the lawyers acute & anxious to elicit all the evidence they can in their own favour, at the same

1843

March. Key West.

4

time sparing us events to set aside that which is unfavourable to their clients - & the whole trial promises to be an interesting one; & the struggle between the parties concerned long & obstinate.

In the afternoon I took a walk up the South Beach, intending to cross thence to the North Beach; but was overtaken by darkness, & getting bewildered in roads unknown to me, was obliged to retrace my steps, & return the way I came, reaching home at seven o'clock. Spent the evening playing Chess with Watlington.

The weather yesterday was clear & cool, with a fresh Northerly wind; to day is warmer, & partly cloudy.

Monday, twenty seventh The last two days have been again clear & warm, with pleasant Southerly winds. Yesterday forenoon I spent writing & walking about the island. In the afternoon I called a few minutes at Uncle's house; then with Emma & Alexander at Mrs. Johnson's, sister of Miss Howard. The evening I spent at Fontane's.

This forenoon I played two games of Chess with Watlington, then attended Court a short time, & found the case going on as Saturday; took a walk on the South Beach – after dinner played two more games of Chess with the same antagonist – took another long walk to the South Beach, & thence by the North Beach & Barracks home - & finished the day at the house of Mr. Joseph B. Browne, playing Chess with him. We each beat one game. The sick ones among my friends are about stationary; a little improvement in some, in others the reverse.

⁹⁴ Josephus F. Packer (b.1822), native of Mystic, Connecticut and a wrecking captain, auctioneer, and commission merchant. See: <https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/family-tree/person/tree/22817421/person/1307043163/facts>.

⁹⁵ When the vessel first arrived at Key West, a correspondent wrote, "The brig Frances Ashby has been hove out and six auger holes found in her bottom on one side, and one on the other side. No one, however, knows how they came there, but the captain will have to bear the blame till he proves who did it, as he was on board until after it was done." See: "From Key West," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 2, 1843, p.2.

Tuesday, twenty eighth Doctor Blodgett & Lady commenced boarding here to day, having broken up housekeeping preparatory to going North.

I attended Court a short time this morning & found from the evidence of Mr. Ward, a passenger, and of the mate of the *Frances Ashby*, that the case assumes a different aspect, appearing more favourable to Captains Randall & Packer, & proportionally unfavourable to the other persons concerned in the wrecking of the vessel.

Returning to dinner I saw the Barque - from Apalachicola bound to New York, freighted with cotton, which having got ashore at the Tortugas islands, commenced discharging cargo into a fishing smack which came to her assistance; but in a few minutes she slid off; the cotton was replaced; the smack piloted her to this place, & she is now awaiting the arbitrement of the salvage due the smack previous to going on her voyage.

After dinner I played three games of ten pins with Alexander, & two other men, & was badly beaten - then took a long walk about the island; called at Uncle's house; tea'd at Mr. Fontane's; after tea called with Mary Jane on Mrs. Smith (wife of the Post Master,) who is very sick; then went to bed. Weather was warm & pleasant in the forenoon, but at one o'clock a violent thunder shower arose; & since then the wind is fresh & cool from the North.

Wednesday, twenty ninth I spent this forenoon principally reading & studying algebra, a copy of which I accidentally found in the house, & having a slight recollection of it from

my studies at school; hope I will be able to get along with it without assistance, & reap profit & pleasant occupation from it. I spent an hour at Court before dinner & found the case going on as yesterday.

In the afternoon I read, studied algebra, visited the ten pin alley, but did not play; took a long walk toward the Salt Ponds, tea'd with Alexander, spent an hour with him at Hackley's, & retired before ten o'clock. Captain Forrest of the Brig *Opelousas*, lately wrecked & bilged on the Florida Reef, is staying at Mr. Fontane's. The weather is clear, cool, but pleasant.

Friday, thirty first The weather during the last two days has been clear, & warm again, with fine fresh Easterly winds. I spent the forenoon of yesterday reading, writing, studying Algebra, taking a walk toward the salt ponds, & making a short call at Uncle's house, where I found the children improving, except the youngest son Edwin; he is dangerously sick with whooping cough.

After dinner I saw a brig from Maine, loaded with ice, & a brigantine, name & where from & where bound, unknown, come into the harbour through the ship channel. The former went on out the North West passage to day; the latter did not stop at all; she commenced shortening sail, & we supposed was coming to an anchor, but the wind being fair & fresh, she took in a pilot, &

stood on for the Bay of Mexico.⁹⁶ I spent an hour on my bed reading Shakespeare, spent another one seeing some men roll ten pins, & yet another taking a walk with Alexander toward the Salt Ponds, & home again. After tea I beat

1843

March. Key West.

7

Mr. Brown at two games of Chess. This morning at eight & a half o'clock I started in Mr. Howe's fishing boat, to have a day's sport on the reef. I had two negroes with me, & went out in company with three other fish boats, all starting nearly together, with the wind on our larboard bow, & plenty of it; consequently a race ensued. But unfortunately our boat being a dull sailor, & too light for the head sea which we had to stem, we fell astern & to leeward a mile or two. We reached thee rocky bottoms near Sand Key before noon; spent the time until two & a half o'clock catching fish, mostly large grouper, porgees, hog fish, &c; we then weighed & navigated the boat back to Key West, reaching there about five o'clock, & stopping at an old wreck on the way to catch crawfish, of which we succeeded in capturing three. I did not enjoy the day much; eating a hurried breakfast I did not feel so well as I would otherwise; the sun shone hot; the sea was quite high, causing the boat to roll very much; & worse than all I caught the fish very slow; true they were generally large, weighing several pounds, but the intervals were too long: I caught altogether but about fifteen or twenty. My companions had not much different success. In the evening I beat Watlington two games of Chess, giving him the odds of the Queen.

The counsel in the case of the *Frances Ashby* summed up their evidence to day, & the Judge gave his decision. Captain Packer receives pilotage for piloting the Brig on the mud bank; & all the wreckers concerned in her receive pay pr day for their labour. No salvage is given to anyone.

1843

March. Key West.

8

The boring of the vessel's bottom is not fixed upon anyone, least of all on Captain packer.

The salvage awarded on the *Isaac Mead* & her cargo is \$4100, being about thirty three pr cent. Both these decisions cause great dissatisfaction among those interested in the wreckers.

During my stay here I have read four books which I brought out with me, "Jack Hinton" by Lever;⁹⁷ "Handy Andy" by Lever; "The Old World & the New" by Orville Dewey, pastor of the (Unitarian) Church of the Messiah, Broadway, New York; & "Incidents of Travel in Greece, Turkey, Russia, & Poland," by Stevens. The first two are tales of Irish life: Jack Hinton like Charles O'Malley (they are by the same author) has running through it a tone of rich & deep feeling which I admire very much. And the descriptions in it of various scenes, whether of nature's beauties, of the splendours of war, or of the brilliancy of the gay assemblies of the noblest blood in Europe, are all of them excellent, bringing them before the reader in the most graphic & striking manner. Of Handy Andy I cannot say so much in praise; although as a display of Irish wit, for which it is intended, it is very good. Mr. Dewey's work is a mixture of many beauties, & many faults. His reflections on various subjects, political, religious, & moral, partaking of the liberal & practical character of the Unitarian faith, are an ornament sufficient to

⁹⁶ Gulf of Mexico, accessible via the Northwest Channel passage.

⁹⁷ Charles Lever, Irish novelist. See: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Charles-James-Lever>.

recommend any book. His descriptive powers are limited, being of an unconnected & rambling character, delighting in flowing imagery, but wanting in plain matter fact.

1843

April. Key West.

9

Mr. Steven's book is for light reading very good; containing many pleasing incidents, & well told & amusing stories; & some useful information with regard to the countries through which he travelled; but I look upon it as a very superficial work, ranking with such good works of fiction as contain some truth, so embellished with extraneous matter as to render them attractive, & induce those to read who read only for pastime, & without something palatable would not read at all.

Saturday, first The weather is very warm to day, wind from the South, & but little of it.

The Brig *Deborah* sailed to day for Baltimore, having been thoroughly repaired. Spent the forenoon as usual writing & studying Algebra, & taking walks for exercise. After dinner I studied an hour, went down town & play'd two games of ten pins, in which I was victorious - took a ride on a cart with a baulky horse, with Alexander & another man (the carman) in company, as far as the Quarters & back - after tea called with Captain Watlington at Mr. Mallory's, but finding only Mr. Merano & an immense swarm of mosquitoes at home, we went thence to the Lonja, & saw a game of Billiards play'd - soon after we started for home, & had to run at the top of our speed to avoid a heavy shower which just then came up - from that time (nine o'clock) until after eleven o'clock I spent playing Cards with Messrs. Macrae, Fontane & Clark; excepting a few minutes which I occupied in waiting on Miss Howard from her sister's to Uncle's house, where she was to sit up all night with the sick.

1843

March. Key West.

10

Mary Jane also sat up all night. Edwin is getting gradually worse; his life is almost despaired of. The others are improving. Doctor Blodgett is absent, on an excursion up the Reef, in search of curiosities.

Sunday, second I spent the forenoon first playing Chess with Watlington, then writing, & finally in taking a very warm walk toward the Salt Ponds. After dining at Mr. Fontane's, I spent two hours in the house, took another walk around by both the South & North Beach; tea'd with Alexander, & with him spent an hour at Uncle's house; & retired to bed before ten o'clock. Edwin continues to fail gradually. The weather continues very warm, & mosquitoes very plenty & troublesome.

Monday, third I went down town this morning intending to go out with Lieutenant Clark to the buoy on the triangle shoals, but about ten o'clock, as we were about starting, word came that Edwin was dying: Mr. Fontane & I immediately went to the house, & found him apparently in the last stage of his disease - we then went to the Court House & heard the decision in the case of the Herald; also heard another case of trifling importance brought up - I then returned to Uncle's house (eleven & a half o'clock) & found Edwin was just dead. He was two years & about three months old, & previous to his last illness was never seriously sick. This is a grievous affliction to the family, more specially owing to the absence of his Father, with

who he was a particular favourite. Aunt Sarah is quite overcome with grief, fatigue, & anxiety, having slept none during three days; & looking

1843

April. Key West.

11

all the time for weeks past, with anxious expectations for the arrival of her husband. She has been unable to sit up at all to day, & part of the time is delirious. I think however that time & quietness will restore her. We buried Edwin Adolphus in Mr. Fontane's lot, at six o'clock PM.

About noon the United States Steamer *Colonel Harvey* arrived here from Tampa Bay, bringing troops to be stationed on this island. They will take up their quarters at the Barracks, & doubtless add to the life & business of the town by their presence.

In the case of the *Herald*, the salvage decreed is one third of the property saved, the expenses of the suit to be paid from this. The net proceeds to the wreckers will be about \$22,000.

While I was taking supper at Alexander's house, Mrs. Williams, Mrs. & Miss Doubleday, & Messrs. Lull, & Wm. Russell came in & spent half an hour; we then walked to Mr. Doubleday's & spent another half hour; thence Wm. Russell & I went to Mr. Mallory's & stayed until after nine o'clock, at which time we were obliged to decamp to avoid the horrible torments of the mosquitoes. Found Mr. & Mrs. Mallory at home, also Mr. Merano; & while there Judge Marvin came in & I was introduced. Afterward I spent a half hour at the Lonja & got to be a little after ten o'clock.

The weather is exceptionally warm, with Southerly winds.

Tuesday, fourth While dressing this morning, word was sent to me to the effect that Uncle Alexander had arrived last evening at eleven o'clock, in the Brig *Susquehanna*, eight days from Port Leon: & in going down town before

1843

April. Key West.

12

breakfast I met him & Edwin Folker.⁹⁸ They breakfasted at Alexander's & afterward we went on board the Brig to get their things on shore. On the wharf was a very stirring scene - the *Susquehanna* discharging the baggage belonging to her passengers of whom there is some half dozen; among other things a pony & a dog belonging to Uncle - & the *Harvey* filled with soldiers, all hot & dirty; getting their things ashore, & sending them up to the Barracks in a heavy wagon drawn by five mules - & the citizens mingling among all the parties, lending assistance, or looking on & commenting on occurrences as they passed before them. Uncle found his house like a hospital; wife still confined to her bed with her illness; youngest daughter still very sick, & the other children quite unwell, except Fielding. But he meets his troubles manfully; his health is good, & I think with no additional affliction he will soon recover his spirits.

Edwin Folker is the same person that was at our house in Henry street in October 1840.

⁹⁸ Likely the brother or nephew of Sarah Folker Patterson.

Before dinner & before supper I went to the South Beach to shoot a pelican for the sake of the pouch; but found them so wild that I could not get near enough to kill them. In the evening I called at Mr. J.B. Brown's, Mr. Doubleday's, and at the gate of Mrs. Johnson's house, where I found Miss Howard, Miss Doubleday, & Mr. Russell; & had a chat with them. Mr. & Mrs. Clark have discontinued boarding at Mr. Fontane's. Matilda Hackley has the measles.

The comet has nearly or quite disappeared.

Weather continues very warm, wind Southerly & but little of it; & mosquitoes thick enough to find one full employment in brushing.

1843

April. Key West.

13

Wednesday, fifth I spent this afternoon writing, playing Chess with Watlington, calling at Uncle's, & attending an auction sale by the Marshal, J.B. Brown, of a part of the cargo of the Herald, sufficient to pay duties & expenses. The afternoon I spent at Algebra, playing Chess, & hunting Pelican on the South Beach, of which I got none.

In the evening I spent near two hours with Emma, Mrs. Blodgett, Miss Howard, & Alexander at Mr. Doubleday's. Found the family at home, & Messrs. Lull & Russell also called while we were there. Miss Howard & George Abbott tea'd here. I bade adieu to day to Messrs. Russell, Pfister, & Abbott, as they will start early tomorrow morning in the Barque *Everton* for New York. The *Susquehanna* has also sailed for New York. Weather is very warm & clear.

Thursday, sixth Play'd two games of Chess with Watlington, then went on the South Beach to shoot Pelicans; after considerable labour in getting through the woods so as to be under cover & in gunshot of a flock which was fishing near the shore; I fired & killed two - thinking they would soon be thrown in by the action of the waves, I proceeded leisurely to reload my gun, & wait for them; but in a few minutes was disappointed to find they were receding from the land by the action of the wind which was off shore, & to my great chagrin they did not come within reach at all. One of them soon disappeared entirely; the other alternately approached & went from me, & I waited, walking up & down the Beach, near two hours; then came home to dinner. In the afternoon I took a walk some three miles up the beach, in hopes to find one or both of them, but

1843

April. Key West.

14

was unsuccessful. The evening I spent at Mr. Fontane's & went to bed early, very tired, having walked some fifteen miles in my pursuit of Pelicans.

Weather was warm with a Southerly & Westerly wind in the morning; in the afternoon the wind hauled round to the North, with light showers, & it is since cool, & blustering.

Friday, seventh Spent the forenoon reading, writing, studying Algebra, & rolling ten pins. Of these I beat three in four games. Spent the afternoon reading, & playing Chess with Watlington, tea'd with him, & spent the evening until near nine o'clock playing another game. Since yesterday noon I have been unwell: my stomach is disordered, & diarrhoea consequent on it. This is the effect of eating my dinner yesterday when I was excessively heated, & taking a

great deal of cold water with it. My cough has resolved itself into a confirmed whooping cough; very light, but troublesome. I had this disease when I was some five years old. The weather is cloudy & cool, with a heavy Northerly wind.

Saturday, eighth The Mail Boat arrived this morning eight days from Charleston, but brought me nothing. I suppose my friends do not write to me, supposing I am on my way home, as I anticipated getting back to New York by the first of March. The Brigantine *George Henry* also arrived from St. Thomas, & the *Frances Ashby* sailed for New York. Doctor Blodgett returned this afternoon.

I spent the forenoon reading, writing, studying Algebra, & taking a walk with Alexander out by the Barracks, where the soldiers are fitting up accommodations for themselves; & back again by the South Beach. In the afternoon I played Chess with Watlington,

1843

April. Key West.

15

called with Alexander at Uncle's & at Mr. Hackley's - took another walk toward the Barracks - & the evening I spent at Mr. Mallory's with Watlington, playing Chess. I have been quite unwell all day with a disordered stomach. Weather is clear, cool, & pleasant.

Monday, tenth Captain Forrest sailed in the *Frances Ashby* on Saturday. Yesterday forenoon I spent at usual at Algebra, writing, & walking. After dinner I called at Uncle's, he sent to Mr. F.A. Brown's & got a horse for me, & mounting his own pony, we set out for a ride. Going first to the South Beach we saw a brigantine beating to the harbour; thence we rode along the beach & through the woods to the Salt Ponds, & by the Barracks home again. My horse was a very large one, & not very easy, yet I enjoyed the ride very well. Uncle's pony is a very spirited & very good looking animal, but quite small; has not yet got his growth. Learning that the vessel just arrived was the *Emeline*, eleven days from New York, we walked down to hear the news, but after waiting a half hour, & seeing no one from her we returned to get tea; however my impatience was so great that I immediately went back, & found her boat had come ashore with Captain Fish, & a short & hasty letter for me, from Turner, dated 29th ult, announcing only that all were well, & Mother was in New York. This however was sufficient to give me great pleasure. I took tea & spent the evening at Uncle's. The *Emeline* went past here on her last voyage from Port Leon to new York about the first day of march; did not stop, nor come into this harbour on

1843

April. Key West.

16

account of adverse winds.

After breakfast this morning I called at Uncle's; & while there was introduced to Mr. Rogers a merchant of Tallahassee, Mr. Monroe a merchant of Quincy, Fla. & Doctor Solten, a young physician going to Madison Corner, Florida; all passengers in the *Emeline*; all young men, & all as I afterward found lively, gentlemanly, & pleasant companions, for one day at least. They started for a walk about the island, & Uncle & I went down town. Here we met Captain Fish & Mr. Stark; with the latter I went on board the Brig, & with him & Mr. Crary spent an hour or two: then came ashore, but finding the Captain & his passengers were just going on board, I

accepted their invitation to return & dine, which I did, & also spent the afternoon, tea'd, & came ashore in the evening with the passengers, excepting Mr. Monroe, Messrs. Stark & Crary. As soon as we were ashore we walked up to a boat house near the Custom House, & with the exception of Mr. Rogers, bathed. The water was warm, the bottom fine sand, & all of us in high spirits, consequently we enjoyed it highly. Afterward I called at Alexander's house with Messrs. Rogers & Pollen, & presented them each with a cane, also one for Mr. Monroe; & very soon after I parted with them with real regret, & came back to my own room. The whole day's proceedings gave me pleasure equal to any I have experienced since my sojourn here. The *Emeline* seems to me almost like home - the familiar faces of her exemplary Captain, & good humour'd Mates are like old friends - & the agreeable society of her passengers, will ever cause me to look back on this as a

1843

April. Key West.

17

day of unusual enjoyment. It was proposed in the afternoon that we should bathe over the side of the vessel, but the sight of a large shark swimming leisurely about her, with a particularly voracious appearance, soon caused us to banish that idea. The weather is clear & pleasant, with cool Westerly winds.

Tuesday, eleventh When I arose this morning I saw the *Emeline* under sail, going out the North West channel. During the forenoon the Brig *Metamora* passed through the harbour. She left New York six hours before the *Emeline*. Two schooners also arrived, one from Augustine, & one some twenty days from New York. The Brig *George Henry*, & the schooner *Mary Clark* are loading for New York with Captain Hancock's portion of the wrecked copper coin. I spent the day as usual writing, sauntering about town, & taking walks; the evening I spent playing Cards & Chefs with Messrs. Fontane & Watlington. The weather is the same as yesterday, except that the wind is Easterly.

In one of my walks on the North Beach, I overtook some boys who had just killed a small Saw Fish, which I purchased of them. They are of the Shark species & grow very large, & are very ferocious when attacked. This one is 20 inches long beside the saw, which measures 7 ½ inches.

Wednesday, twelvth While I was on board the *George Henry* yesterday, talking with her Captain, one of the seamen came up & requested some medicine, & leave to quit work, as he was sick; & to day it is reported that he has the small pox, which disease was on board the vessel some

1843

April. Key West.

18

weeks since, but which the Captain thinks was completely eradicated by smoking, cleansing, & ventilating. However as the Doctor was not certain that this was not a case of Small Pox, it was deemed prudent to hasten her lading as fast as possible, & then haul her into the stream; which was done.

The schooner *Harriet*, Hand Master, from Philadelphia bound to Mobile, went ashore on the Dry Rocks west of Sand Key last night; was boarded this morning by several vessels belonging

to Tift & Giger; sent in her cargo consisting of assorted merchandise by them & will be got off & brought in here in a few hours.

I spent the day walking, reading, writing, & playing Chess & Ten Pins. Watlington beat me one game at the former playing even for the first time.

The *Isaac Mead*, having been repaired & taken in her cargo, is hauled into the stream, & will sail for New Orleans tomorrow. Weather continues as yesterday.

Thursday, thirteenth The weather is very warm to day, & I am quite unwell. After breakfast I beat Watlington twice at Chess; was then taken with a feeling of excessive languor: to shake this off I took a long walk about the island & got myself into a profuse perspiration, but it only changed my illness to a pain in the back of my head, & a general soreness in all my muscles. After a light dinner I sat & layed about the room two hours, then spent two more down town; went to Uncle's & had my hair cut by him, & took a very light supper; & at eight & a half o'clock went to bed; feeling bruised, sore, stiff necked, depressed, & feverish. The *George Henry* sailed this evening.

1843

April. Key West.

19

Sunday, sixteenth I arose last Friday morning considerably refreshed by my nights rest, although I was feverish & restless all night. Spent the forenoon writing, reading, rolling ten pins, & doing nothing a large portion of the time. After dinner I dozed & read until five o'clock; I then learned from Alexander that he was about starting for Big Pine Key, twenty five miles from here up the reef, with Doctor Blodgett, Mr. Maloney, & Mr. Daniel Davis, in a boat belonging to the latter, the same that we had on the eighth of March; & he invited me to accompany them, which after a little consideration I concluded to do. Doctor Blodgett, being a Botanist was in search of plants; Mr. Maloney was formerly a resident at Pine Key, & still has a house standing vacant, & a garden there, & wishes to see in what condition they are, and also bring away some of the products of the latter. Mr. Davis, Alexander, & myself were in pursuit of pleasure; they took each a gun in hopes to kill some deer, which are found on all the Keys above this; I went empty handed in search of novelty, information, or employment. After laying

the requisite stores, provisions, water, and spare clothing, we got under weigh at seven & a half o'clock. The moon was shining beautifully, the wind fair, & the weather delightful, & we sailed pleasantly along, keeping the beach in sight & passing the time alternately telling stories, laughing, joking, & dozing until near midnight when we were near Loggerhead, here we found two wrecking schooners at anchor & were hailed by one of them; shortly after we lost sight of the land, in consequence of a deep bay making up just above Loggerhead, & after sailing over four

1843

April. Key West.

20

miles we fell in with the point of New Found Harbour Key.⁹⁹ Hauling close on a wind we crossed the harbour, then beat up a channel about a mile wide, but very shallow, between Pine

⁹⁹ The Newfound Harbor Keys - composed of Cook's, Hopkins, and Munson Keys - front the Atlantic Ocean south of Ramrod, Little Torch, and Big Pine Keys.

Key & Ram Rod Key, four miles to Mr. Maloney's wharf. By this time the sun was up. We ran the boat aground within a few feet of the wharf then each one took such things as he could carry, jumped overboard, & waded ashore. Proceeding to Mr. Maloney's house we first made preparations for breakfast, of which we partook after calling at the house of Mr. Williams, one of the settlers on the island, where we were entertained by his wife, all of us sitting in the best room, enveloped in a thick suffocating smoke, proceeding from a vessel sitting on the floor with a few burning brands in it, which are placed there to smoke out mosquitoes. The immense swarms of these insects on this island, & their intense voracity exceed all my former conceptions. It is impossible to live a minute with the smallest degree of comfort, except by continually brushing one's self; & even the labourers about the place, men who lived there for years are obliged to employ one hand in brushing while they toil with their other.

The scene of our breakfast was ludicrous in the extreme. First building a fire of light wood, each one got a slice of ham, & sticking it on a splinter held it in the flame until it was cooked to his satisfaction, we then sat down, some in the windows, some on the floor, others on condemned casks; & whenever we could get an opportunity between the roars of laughter at our own appearance - more like cannibals than civilized beings - & the witticisms consequent thereon, we would alternately gnaw on our ham as it hung on the splinters, or chew the bread which

1843

April. Key West.

21

we brought with us.

After finishing this meal, we visited Mr. Williams' & other gardens, called at the house of Mr. Hopper, & then each one started in pursuit of his own object: Mr. Maloney for potatoes & other vegetables, Doctor Blodgett for specimens of plants (Fig. 17), & Mr. Davis, Alexander, & I started for an excursion partly to shoot deer, & partly to see the nature of the island. We walked through pine barrens, palmetto trees, hammocks, mud, & over rock & brakes, until we were heartily tired, with out seeing game of any kind, then returned to the house, where we waited for the other two, & then commenced preparing dinner. We got a dressed chicken of Mrs. Hopper, put with it pork, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, onions, & ship crackers, & cooking the whole together soon sat down to a savory stew. This was served up in the same style as our morning repast; each one sitting on the floor & helping himself with fork, knife, or spoon, as he could procure it.

After dinner we again separated: we three walked again about the island, amusing ourselves firing the grass & dry palmetto leaves, which burnt for a short season with great fury & a loud crackling - at five o'clock, after taking the opinions of the company, we concluded to start again for Key West; & in an hour were under weigh. Doctor Blodgett & Mr. Maloney, having mosquito bars with them, & feeling a dislike to spending a second night in an open boat, were desirous to remain & sleep at the house, but we three being not so provided & foreseeing the unfeasibility of sleeping exposed to their attacks, gave our voices in favour of an immediate departure & prevailed.



Figure 17. Maidenberry (*Crossopetalum rhacoma*) collected at Big Pine Key by Dr. John L. Blodgett.

Collection of Harvard University Herbaria & Libraries:

https://kiki.huh.harvard.edu/databases/specimen_search.php?mode=details&id=214300

We were taken to our boat in a canoe belonging to Mr. Williams:

1843

April. Key West.

22

Having very light winds we did not reach New Found Harbour Key until nine o'clock; here Messrs. Maloney & Davis went to sleep & put Alexander & myself in charge of the boat, the former telling us to keep the boat as she was then heading to reach Loggerhead. The wind was now quite fresh & we pushed along an hour, gradually hauling more to the Westward we kept on near an hour more without seeing land; Davis then got up & from the course we had been steering we concluded we were near the Reef; accordingly we hauled close on a wind about North West, & about midnight again saw land, far below Loggerhead. Mr. Davis accused Maloney of intentionally misleading us to avoid stopping at Sugar Loaf (just below Loggerhead) as we intended to, & I think myself his conduct gave rise to just suspicions, although he expressly denied it. From here we kept slowly on, with light winds, the beach in sight nearly all the time; relieving each other at the helm to allow time for sleep & at six o'clock found ourselves once more ashore at Key West. Although nearly sick from the violent purging

aroused by the spring water which I drank at Pine Key in large quantities, & completely exhausted for want of sleep, having slept scarce fifteen minutes at a time since Thursday night, & that little on a plank, oars, or spare spars, with a coil of rope for a pillow, yet I felt well pleased with the excursion, having received many new ideas with regard to the nature of the islands up the Reef; the kind of life led by the inhabitants, & the pleasures & discomforts of boat navigation.

These islands are all of them low, all covered with vegetation at least to high water mark; all abounding in mosquitoes and game;

1843

April. Key West.

23

all of them surrounded by rocks or shoals.

Pine Key unlike any others is covered principally with a growth of pitch pine trees, intermixed with the palmetto trees. At frequent intervals there are hammocks of brushwood, very thick & difficult of access – the soil in a few places is good & productive, but generally rocky, dry, & barren, with frequent holes in which is found fresh water, & in some of them frogs & small fish. Rattle snakes also infest it, but we saw none. There are five families on the island living within a circuit of three miles, & subsisting by gunning, fishing, & raising fruit & vegetables for the Key West Market. Their gardens are unenclosed, & except Mr. Williams' are rough, all cultivated & overgrown with rank weeds & even large brushwood. Mr. Williams' garden is in tolerable order, considering the circumstances; & he has some fine patches of bananas, corn, potatoes, melons, &c. The dwellings are rude structures of logs, sticks, & palmetto leaves; (except Mr. Maloney's, which is weatherboard & framed, but thatched with leaves: roads, there are none, simply tracks from point to point: & of domestic animals there are none but dogs, goats, & one mule, which latter is so wild as to be of no use, & destroys a great deal in the gardens. The inhabitants are weatherbeaten, browned by the smoke & sunshine in which they constantly live; sallow from the climate; ignorant & uncultivated from their situation; their every feature disfigured by the excessive use of tobacco, alcohol, coffee, tea, or other noxious articles; & the aspect of everything about them desolate, & uncomfortable in the extreme. For any one to sojourn there a short time in hopes of some high reward would be surprising, but when it is

1843

April. Key West.

24

chosen for a residence with no inducement held out beyond a bare subsistence, it seems scarce credible. This Key is one of the largest on this coast, being about fourteen miles in length and three in breadth. There are some few people living in some other part from that which we visited. The access to the settlement which we visited, & I expect to all other parts, is difficult & admits only very small vessels. Our boat although drawing less than two feet of water was aground in the deepest of the channels at low water. With the sail I was much pleased. There is something in boat sailing which gives me very agreeable excitement, although so drawing on my return as to be not able to keep my eyes open all of the time, yet it was a real pleasure to me so long as we had wind sufficient to give us motion. Of a calm I have a great dread.

After washing, drying, & breakfasting, Alexander & I spent over two hours at Mr. Gordon's with great satisfaction to ourselves, Mr. & Mrs. Gordon, Doctor Davis, Miss Sexton, & Mr. Page

- Mrs. Gordon's father - were present. After dinner I slept two hours, took a short walk with Captain Watlington; tea'd and spent two hours at Uncle's, & went to bed at nine o'clock. The *Mary Clark* sailed for New York this morning, taking Captain Hancock as passenger, & the Mail Boat arrives from Havana this evening; will sail hence for Charleston to-morrow. Fontane & Weaver have hired a young man named Allen as clerk in their store & he eats at Mr. Fontane's house.

Weather is clear, very warm, & pleasant. The nights are moonlit & consequently very beautiful.

1843 April. Key West. 25

Monday, seventeenth I spent the day readding, writing, playing Chess, & walking about town. In the evening I spent an hour at Mr. Doubleday's where I found several young people assembled. A Mar Amory, Texian Consul at Boston, & a passenger from Havana to Charleston in the Mail Boat, breakfasted at Alexander's this morning. He was formerly an acquaintance of Alexander's in Texas during his residence there. The weather is clear, breezy, but very warm.

Wednesday, nineteenth The last two days have been spent as usual, sauntering about town, playing Chess with Watlington, reading, writing, &c.

Yesterday morning the Brig *J.D. Noyes* arrived in nine days from New York. In the afternoon of that day, Ellen, oldest daughter of Stephen R. Mallory, aged about three years, died of cholera morbus, after an illness of but little over twelve hours. This morning at ten o'clock I attended the funeral. The body was interred in the yard of the house.

This afternoon Edwin Folker, Alexander & I went bathing on the South Beach. We found a fine sand bank a little way from shore, covered with water to the depth of three or four feet, & enjoyed the frolic very much. In the evening I attended an auction sale of the stock of a store in the town, by Filor & Patterson. Mrs. Gordon & Miss Sexton called here yesterday, & Mrs. Joseph B. Brown called this afternoon.

The schooner *Chas. M. Thompson* of Philadelphia arrived here a few days since from Augustine, & is now

1843 April. Key West. 26

preparing to take the wrecker's portion of the cargo of the *Herald* to New York. She will probably get away within a week. I expect Mr. Fontane will ship his portion by her, & pay at least a part of his debt to W.N. Seymour & Co. from the proceeds; so that I hope soon to be on my way home. I feel extremely impatient by the delay, & look forward to the time when I shall be at liberty to quit Key West. Not but the place & its inhabitants are agreeable, but the want of employment & the extreme monotony of the life I am leading is very irksome. Weather continues clear, warm, & pleasant, with a very little rain to day.

Friday, twenty first Yesterday afternoon I called at Mr. Hackley's, but finding no one except Mr. Hackley at home. I called again in the evening & spent near two hours playing Whist with Mrs. Hackley, Edwin & Liza Folker. In the afternoon there was quite a row about town,

caused by a number of wreckers taking forcible possession of Mr. Mills (see fol 217 Vol.5th) & parading him about, shouting, & ringing a bell before him. After working their pleasure on him, he was put on board a small schooner which sailed immediately for Pensacola. He is an Englishman by birth, but has a family residing in Mystic, Ct. This outrage was committed on the ground of some immoral & lewd conduct on the part of Mr. Mills, but there are serious doubts in my mind of his guilt, & at all events there can be nothing urged in extenuation of such a violent proceeding, enacted in defiance of law, justice, & good order.

The Government Steamer *Cincinnati* arrived last evening

1843

April. Key West.

27

from Tampa, & sailed this morning for Charleston, via Augustine.

After dinner to day I went to Mr. Doubleday's, where I found Doctor Blodgett & Lady, waiting to go on board the schooner *Clara*, bound to New York. Several other gentlemen came there, & about four o'clock we went to the wharf & saw them embark. This leaves Alexander's family quite small again. Margaret Cummins intended going with them, but was unable to get ready.

The evening I spent at J.B. Brown's playing Chess & seeing Messrs. Brown & Macrae play.

The weather continues clear & pleasant, with fine breezes from the North East.

Sunday, twenty third Yesterday morning a fine schooner called the *Robert Mills* arrived from New York, having left the same day with the *J.D. Noyes*. Some of the people of this place who are desirous of taking passage to the North are making efforts to get passengers & freight sufficient to induce the Captain to return to New York immediately, but their success is very doubtful. The Packet Brig *Howell* also arrived last night from Charleston, & immediately sailed for Havana. In the afternoon Alexander & I took a walk to the South Beach, intending to bathe, but from the sea rolling in so heavy, the water was become too dirty, & we returned dry.

This morning when I went down town I found a great excitement, caused by some four or five negroes running away last night in company with a Sandwich Islander¹⁰⁰

1843

April. Key West.

28

called George Kanaka, a hand on board a pilot boat belonging to George Alderslade,¹⁰¹ in which vessel they went away, having stolen it from its moorings in the harbour. As near as can be ascertained they got under weigh about one or two o'clock this morning. The boat was provisioned for three weeks, & is one of the fastest sailers on this coast. They have probably steered for Nassau.¹⁰² Mr. Alderslade, & eight others started in the Smack *Energy* as soon as it was discovered, about six o'clock this morning, in pursuit; & about ten o'clock the wrecking sloop *Key West* was sent out under Revenue colours in command of Lieutenant Clark.

¹⁰⁰ An antiquated term for a Native of the Hawaiian Islands.

¹⁰¹ An English sea captain nicknamed "Captain Jack." He was heavysset, of medium height, and illiterate, but regarded as "the best yellow fever nurse on Key West," according to W.C. Maloney (1876) op.cit., pp.175-176.

¹⁰² Slavery ended in all British colonies in 1833. After that, enslaved people in the United States would sometimes make the relatively short ocean crossing to The Bahamas to find freedom.

I have walked so much to day that my feet are very sore. In the afternoon I visited the Salt Works with Edwin Folker. The weather is clear & pleasant, with fresh breezes.

Monday, twenty fourth This morning I sent some things on board the *C.M. Thompson*, & I have spent the day making preparations for going home by the first opportunity. Mr. Fontane & myself have got our business so nearly adjusted that I can leave at any time with an hour's notice. He gave me a draft on New York for twelve hundred dollars; the balance of his account to be paid within three months.

The weather is clear & very pleasant.

Tuesday, twenty fifth This afternoon Alexander & I bathed at the South Beach; I tea'd at Uncle's, where I found Mr. & Mrs. Hackley & Eliza Folker; shortly after tea I accompanied them home, & finished the evening there: Mr. Hopkins & Edwin Folker were also there spending the evening. The *C.M. Thompson* sailed this morning. Weather is still clear, warm, & pleasant, with fine Northerly winds.

1843

April. Key West.

29

Thursday, twenty seventh Yesterday afternoon I played four games of ten pins; bathed at the South Beach with Edwin Folker & Alexander; tea'd & spent the evening at Mr. Hackley's. Doctor Pinckney & some other gentlemen in the place have chartered the *Robert Mills*, Captain Darling, to sail for New York next Monday. Some twenty gentlemen & ladies (myself included) have engaged berths, & she is making the most rapid preparation for the voyage; taking out ballast to make up the amount of freight required, twenty five hundred bushels of salt.

This morning the Government steamer Harney arrived from Tampa, & will immediately return. The *Key West* & *Energy* arrived to day from their pursuit of the negroes. The former has been cruising up the Reef, & saw or heard nothing of them. The *Energy* went toward Cuba; got sight of the boat, & even so near as a mile or two; chased them many hours; carried away her topmast, & finally the boat eluded them in the darkness of night.

This evening I spent at Mr. F.A. Brown's. Uncle Alexander & Edwin Folker were there, & the evening passed off rather dull; conversation flagged & there was great want of animation in the family.

Weather has been exceptionally warm for two days past.

Friday, twenty eighth The wrecking Schooner *Sally Ann* started this afternoon with Mr. Alderslade & several other men on board to search the Bahama Islands & a part of Cuba for the stolen Pilot Boat.¹⁰³ About four o'clock Alexander & I started out on horse back to have a ride for

¹⁰³ The *Massachusetts Spy* of June 7, 1843, p.3, reported, "By letters of recent date from Nassau, received via Baltimore, we learn that six or eight slaves had stolen a fine pilot boat sloop from Key West, and made good their escape to New Providence, or some one of the neighbouring islands. They were pursued up to Nassau by the owners, but neither they nor the vessel could be found. The latter may be recovered, but the negroes, on reaching a British colony, are at once free, as has been seen in several instances."

pleasure. He was mounted on Mr. Porter's horse, & I had one belonging to Mr. Filor; a broken down express horse from the Florida war but still animated, & fleet, when stimulated by the presence of another horse. He is an easy saddle horse when allowed to go his own gait, which is either a very fast trot or gallop, but when reined in he goes very uncertain, changing frequently from gallop to a trot, & vice versa. We rode first to the salt works; thence to the South Beach which we found so fine & hard that we could not resist the temptation to run our horses over it; after enjoying that amusement sufficiently we returned home quite warm & fatigued, but much pleased with our excursion. I spent the evening at Uncle's & Mr. Hackley's. Mary Jane is preparing to go with us in the *Robert Mills* with her two children. Weather continues very warm, but to day there is a fine Northerly wind.

Sunday, thirtieth . . . The Brig *Billow* arrived to day from Port Leon. This afternoon Uncle Alexander & I took a ride about the island some five miles. I was mounted on Mr. Filor's horse & he on a black horse of his, which having been puking up his own living until within a few days past, is quite poor and shabby in appearance, yet he made him go as fast as I wished to ride, & the ride was quite a pleasant one, although not equal to the one of Friday. The weather yesterday was very pleasant, with a fine breeze, but to day it is very warm with a light Southerly wind.

Saturday, sixth . . . Last Monday forenoon I spent preparing for sea, & making calls on my friends, bidding them all adieu; at one o'clock I dined with Alexander & Emma, then went on board the *Robert Mills*,¹⁰⁴ completed my business with Mr. Fontane, & at one & a half o'clock our fasts were cast off & we were under weigh once more for New York, having an assemblage of a large part of the population of Key West to witness our departure. Our company of passengers is a large one, but the schooner has good accommodations for all of us & even a number more. It consists of the following persons: Dr. Pinckney, Lady, & two children & servant; (Margaret Cummings;) Mr. Doubleday, Lady, & two children; Mrs. Fontane & two children; Messrs Lull, Browne, Hopkins, Goldsmith; Misses Robinson, Sexton, Rachel -- & Russell, & one man in the steerage. Our ship's company consists of the Captain, Mate, (Mr. Lawless) steward, cabin boy, & four men before the mast; all white. Our vessel is about 135 tons burthen, carries a great deal of sail, a centre board, & is a very fast sailer, beating everything with which we come on fair competition. She is also an excellent sea boat, riding the sea very easily, & shipping very little water & is very light and strong. Our captain is a remarkably pleasant man, a good seaman, very confident in himself & vessel, & always ready with expedients to meet any emergency. Our table is good considering the circumstances, but coming from a southern port has no fresh provisions, save green turtle, which we carry alive.

END

¹⁰⁴ The schooner *Robert Mills* was built in Middletown, Connecticut in 1839 by Joseph J. Hendley. He sailed the vessel between Galveston and New York until 1845. See: Whittemore, Henry (1888) *History of Middlesex County, Connecticut*, J.B. Beers and Co., New York, pp.166-167.

Epilogue

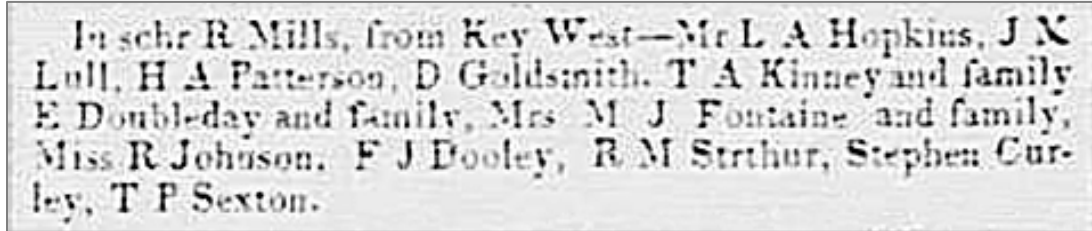


Figure 18. An announcement of the passengers arrived at New York City on board the schooner *Robert Mills* on May 15, 1843, including “H A Patterson.” See: “Passengers Arrived,” *New York Daily Tribune* May 15, 1843, p.3.

The schooner *Robert Mills* reached New York City on May 15, and Henry Patterson made it home safely (Fig.18). Patterson went on to have a long, prosperous life. He married Eleanor “Ella” Simons Wright in July of 1844, and they had eight children. In 1848, he, along with his brothers Edgar and William, started the Patterson Brothers hardware business, an enterprise that would last for 111 years. Henry A. Patterson died in 1897, at the age of 78, remembered “as one of the ‘old fashioned’ businessmen who have been the corner stones on which many modern business establishments have been built.”¹⁰⁵

The Key West that Patterson wrote about was largely ruined in powerful hurricanes that struck in both 1844 and 1846. Virtually all the structures the visited, inhabited, and described were destroyed, including the lighthouses. Only the Watlington house, where many games of chess were played, survives from that time. Wrecking was at its peak in the 1840s, but by the later part of the century, with the construction of additional lighthouses, sailing along the reef became safer, and fewer ships wrecked. Despite setbacks and changes, Key West thrived and grew. Cigar making and sponging became leading industries. At the dawn of the twentieth century, a railroad connected Key West to the mainland, and then a highway. The military presence increased, then faded. Eventually, tourism came to be the leading economic engine for all the Florida Keys.

Fortunately for us today, Henry Patterson’s dedicated, detailed documentation of his journey gives us an important insight into life in Key West and the Florida Keys just as the communities were taking shape.

¹⁰⁵ See: “Death of Henry A. Patterson,” *New York Tribune*, February 11, 1897, p.10.