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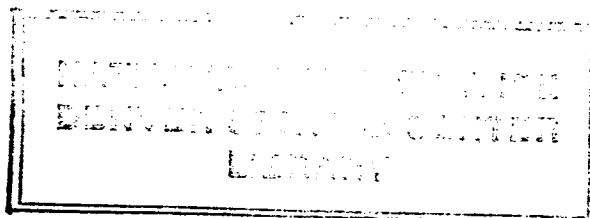
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SHIPWRECK STUDY -
THE DRY TORTUGAS

by

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WASHINGTON, D.C.
APRIL 15, 1971

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FOREWORD

This report has been prepared to satisfy the research needs as enumerated in RSP, FOJE-H-2, Shipwreck Study--Dry Tortugas. Such a study was needed to provide archeologists with general background information and data as to the location of the more treacherous reefs where most strandings occurred. In May and June 1971, archeologists led by George R. Fischer made an underwater archeological survey of the Dry Tortugas and pinpointed about 20 wrecks, dating from the seventeenth century until the 1960s. It is hoped that this study will now assist in identifying some of these wrecks.

Included in this study are brief surveys and accounts of 195 wrecks. Because of limited time and money, no search was made of Spanish archives or of British admiralty court records in the Bahamas, which would have provided much information on shipwrecks taking place in the area prior to the establishment of the District Court at Key West in 1828. After that date the record of shipwrecks where there were claims for salvage is complete. Not identified in this study for the American period are the few wrecks not libelled for salvage and those vessels assisted by ships in the government service prior to 1872. Most of these craft could be identified by a thorough examination of the records of the Corps of Engineers for construction of Fort Jefferson. The time involved in examining a Record Group of this scope and complexity prevented me from doing so in the two months programmed for the subject study.

A number of persons have assisted with preparation of this study. First and foremost, I wish to express my appreciation to George Fischer and Zorro Bradley and their colleagues of the Division of Archeology of the National Park Service, for their suggestions as to source material and for making this project possible. Mrs. Hope Holdcamper of the National Archives, Ross Holland of the Western Service Center, and Al Manucy formerly of the Southeast Regional Office went out of their way to suggest possible sources of information. Carlton Brown, James O. Hall, C. A. Rayden, and Dr. Edward Weldon of the Federal Records Center in East Point, Georgia, especially the latter, provided assistance above and beyond the call of duty in making available records of the U. S. District Court at Key West. At the University of Florida, the staff of P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History and Dr. E. A. Hammond made suggestions and provided invaluable source materials. Historian Luis Arana of Castillo de San Marcos NM and the staff of the New York Public Library came to my assistance on several occasions. A debt of gratitude is owed J. J. Mackowski and Miss Celia Lambert of "The Atlantic Companies" of 45 Wall Street, New York, N. Y., for permitting me to use the wonderful company archives.

My colleagues Frank Sarles and Barry Mackintosh read the manuscript in draft and made a number of suggestions which strengthened the end product. Mrs. Beatrice B. Libys spent hours at the typewriter turning my scrawl into a handsome document. In closing, I wish to pay special tribute to my friend Al Manucy, whose knowledge of Fort Jefferson and the Dry Tortugas is encyclopedic, who read my manuscript and made numerous suggestions as to sources and ways to improve and expand the study.

E. C. Bearss

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I. GEOGRAPHY AND HYDROGRAPHY OF THE TORTUGAS, 1513-1867

A. The First Visitors

1. Ponce de León Discovers the Dry Tortugas

The first Europeans to set foot on the Dry Tortugas belonged to the expedition commanded by Ponce de León in 1513. On Sunday, May 8, De León's expedition doubled Cape Kennedy and anchored near Abaióá, an Indian village. It then sailed southward, stopping briefly at Biscayne Bay on the 13th, and coasted along the keys, which De León named Los Mártires "because the high rocks looked at a distance like men who are suffering." The Spaniards then set a course toward the northeast until they struck the Florida Peninsula somewhere north of Cape Sable. They then skirted the gulf coast perhaps as far as Pensacola Bay.

Retracing his route on the 23d, De León coasted the peninsula until he reached the vicinity of Charlotte Harbor. Here the Spaniards stopped to take on water and wood and to careen one of their caravels. On Wednesday, June 15, the expedition sailed in search of "the eleven rocky islets" that had been passed to the west in May.

On Thursday and Friday the ships beat toward the west, and on Tuesday, the 21st, the lookouts sighted the islands. A landing was made, and De León named the islands Las Tortugas, because "in one short time in the night" the Spaniards took on one of the islets 160 turtles, and "might have taken more if they had wished." They also killed 14 seals and many pelicans. On Friday, the 24th, De León weighed anchor and ran to the southwest. The voyage back to their base was prolonged, and it was September 15, 1513, when De León and his men landed in Puerto Rico.¹

1. T. Frederick Davis, "Ponce de León's First Voyage and Discovery of Florida," The Florida Historical Society Quarterly, XIV, No. 1, 21; Woodbury Lowery, The Spanish Settlements Within the Present Limits of the United States 1513-1561 (New York, 1901), pp. 141-43.

2. The English Seadogs Land

During the next half-century many Spanish vessels cruising the Florida Straits passed the Dry Tortugas. Some undoubtedly were stranded or wrecked on the uncharted reefs and shoals. Some certainly dropped anchor while men were landed in small boats to collect eggs and fish.

The first English mariner to write of the Dry Tortugas was John Sparke, one of those who sailed with Sir John Hawkins in 1565. Hawkins' expedition had departed from Cape San Antonio, Cuba, in June 1565. On July 5 the ships anchored off the Tortugas

where the captaine went in with his pinnesse, and found such a number of birds, that in halfe an houre he laded her with them; and if they had beene ten boats more, they might have done the like. These Islands beare the name of Tortoises because of the number of them, which there do breed, whose nature is to live both in the water and upon land also, but breed onely upon the shore, in making a great pit wherein they lay eggs, to the number of three or foure hundred, and covering them with sand, they are hatched by the heat of the Sunne; and by this meanes commeth the great increase. Of these we tooke very great ones, which have both backe and belly all of bone, of the thickness of an inch: the fish [*sic*] where of are proved, eating much like veale; and finding a number of egges in them, tasted also of them, but they did not eat very sweetly.

After leaving the Dry Tortugas, Hawkins sailed northeast, following the keys and the coast of Florida as far as the mouth of the St. Johns. Here the ships anchored, while Hawkins visited Fort Caroline.²

2. Henry S. Burriage, editor, Early English and French Voyages, Chiefly from Hakluyt, 1534-1608 (New York, 1906), p. 115.

B. Florida under the British

1. Jefferys Describes the Tortugas

Florida was ceded to Great Britain by Spain in 1763, and for the next 20 years the Tortugas belonged to the British. To interest British capital and potential colonists in the newly acquired colony, T. Jefferys in 1763 published, in London, An Account of the First Discovery, and Natural History of Florida. In this book, Jefferys provided British commercial interests with a description of the hazards shipping would encounter in coasting the Florida Reef.

La Sonda, he wrote, is a large bank that extends from the west side of the Florida Peninsula into the Gulf of Mexico. On the southern extension of the bank are the Dry Tortugas, consisting of nine or ten islands. Adjacent to these islands is a good anchorage with a depth of from three to 20 fathoms.³

Navigation about the Tortugas and along the Florida Reef, Jefferys reported, was very dangerous, "not only because it is within the course of the tradewinds, but because the whole shore upon which the current for the most part sets" was low and flat. The water offshore was shallow, except for the channels, and shipwrecks were numerous. In passing through the Florida Straits, mariners were cautioned that because of the powerful current, subsequently named the Gulf Stream, they should make an allowance of about five points in the compass, and keep as close as possible to the Bahama side.⁴

2. Bernard Romans Cruises the Tortugas

Bernard Romans, a geographer, was sent to Florida by the British government. An experienced traveler and observer, Romans explored the colony and authored A Concise Natural History of East and West Florida, descriptive of what he saw and the region's resources.

3. T. Jefferys, An Account of the First Discovery, and Natural History of Florida ... (London, 1763), p. 18.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

In August of 1766, the vessel on which Romans was a passenger was becalmed near the Marquesas and drifted for three days. On the morning of the fourth day, soundings showed that the ship was in 30 fathoms, a dense fog having closed in. The water gradually shoaled to 20 fathoms.

The captain called to the men swinging the lead lines that if the water shoaled to 12 fathoms, they would anchor. Romans left the deck and returned to his cabin. He rushed out onto the deck as the vessel, which drew nine feet, struck and crossed a shoal. When he heaved a lead line overboard, he found 18 feet of water on sand. Nearby to the west, through the fog, he caught sight of a key.

The ship anchored, and a small boat was lowered and manned. Within a few minutes, the sailors in the boat found themselves surrounded by three "very low sand keys (full of prickly pears) on the west, and a reef every where else." About 9 o'clock the tide began to ebb, setting violently over the reefs to the southeast. At 10 a.m. the fog lifted, and Romans saw "bushy islands to the N & NNW about 4½ leagues off." When he took a reading on the sun, he found the latitude was 24° 25'.

Two days were spent looking for a passage through the reef, and on the morning of the third day, they "warp'd out to the east" and set sail for Matecumbe.⁵

3. Gauld's Survey

The British government, as befitted the world's greatest maritime power, in the early 1770s sent George Gauld to make a survey and prepare a chart of the Tortugas. Gauld's chart, published in 1773, provided mariners navigating these waters with a tool calculated to help them avoid the reefs and shoals in fair weather. Gauld also gave the keys the names by which most of them are now known.⁶

In the lower left-hand corner of his chart, Gauld provided notes to assist ship captains. They were cautioned that a thorough knowledge of the Tortugas "and that extensive Bank

5. Bernard Romans, A Concise Natural History of East and West Florida ... (New Orleans, 1961), pp. 256-57.

6. Gauld named the keys, North, Sandy, East, Bird, Middle, Rocky, Bush, Booby, Loggerhead-Turtle, and South-West Keys.

near the extremity of which they are situated" was essential for navigating both the Gulf of Mexico and the Florida Straits. The Tortugas, Gauld pointed out, formed an elbow between the Gulf and Straits, at a distance of 30 leagues from Cape Sable, 40 from the coast of Cuba, and 14 from Key West.

There were at this time ten islets or keys in the Tortugas, most of which were covered with low bushes. In good visibility, they could be seen at a distance of four leagues. South-West Key, which served as his base point, was located at 24° 32' 30" North Latitude and about 83° 45' West Longitude.

Although most sailors looked upon the Tortugas as "very dangerous" at night, Gauld believed that on occasions they would be "very useful and convenient." There were several good anchorages, particularly the "small but snug Harbour at Bush Key, which is entirely sheltered from the Sea by a large Reef of Rocks and a flat shoal." (This key was subsequently renamed Garden Key and the anchorage became known as Tortugas Harbor.) The bottom of the harbor was soft clay and mud, and even during a gale the water was smooth.

The only drinking water was found on North Key, but it was brackish. Nor was there any firewood, except the few bushes. It would be a mistake to cut these down, Gauld wrote, as they helped to identify the keys at a distance. Like the early explorers, Gauld found that the Tortugas abounded in sea birds, turtles, and fish.⁷

C. The United States Acquires Florida

1. Vignoles' Observations Upon the Florida Reef

In 1783 Spain recovered Florida from Great Britain, as a result of her participation in the American Revolutionary War. The Spanish crown retained possession until 1821, when in accordance with the Adams-Onís Treaty, Florida became a part of the United States.

7. "A Plan of the Tortugas and Part of the Florida Kays, Surveyed by George Gauld, M. A., 1773, for The Right Honorable The Board of Admiralty," Library of Congress.

The American public was as interested as their British cousins had been in the 1760s in learning about the geography, economy, and history of the peninsula. In 1823 Charles B. Vignoles published Observations Upon the Floridas. He informed his readers that the great Florida Reef commences at Cape Florida, on the east coast in Latitude 25° 23' North, and sweeps southwest to Bahia Honda, 25 miles south of Cape Sable, from where it sweeps westward until terminated by the Tortugas.

By 1821 captains of ships drawing 15 feet of water or less were in the habit of navigating a channel lying between the Florida Keys and the offshore banks. The rule for sailing within the reef and when skirting the Tortugas was to have a good man at the masthead on lookout. The clear blue water, during fair weather and the daytime, enabled him to see "all the heads and shoals a good way off."⁸

2. The American Coast Pilot's Advice to Mariners

The Dry Tortugas in the early 1820s were well known to mariners navigating the area. The American Coast Pilot, the bible for American ship captains, for 1822 warned that upon "the southern edge of the sounding," which ran off from the west coast of Florida, "there lie 10 keys or islands, called Tortugas," and they "announce the proximity of the Great Florida reef."

The American Coast Pilot cautioned that as the Tortugas were low and not covered with mangroves, they could not be seen at distances in excess of 12 miles. Sailors were warned not to approach nearer than two miles, as there were "some rocky spits," which, in places, extend two miles off shore.

In navigating Tortugas Bank to the west of the keys, a captain had reported, "I found not less than 9 [feet] on the coral rocks, and usually heave to in passing over it, for 15 or 30 minutes, to fish, in which time I get as many as I can dispose of principally groupers." Between Tortugas Bank and Loggerhead Key was a three-mile wide channel, with a depth of from 13 to 17 fathoms.

Eighteen miles to the east of East Key, the Great Florida Reef began, and between was a good channel of nine fathoms. Mariners were cautioned to be on the lookout for a coral shoal of 12-foot depth, which lay 11 miles from the Tortugas. On this

8. Charles B. Vignoles, Observations Upon the Floridas (New York, 1823), p. 115.

shoal Rebecca, out of New York City, had lost part of her cargo in 1820. In navigating this channel, captains were warned to keep East Key "in sight off deck," so as to pass at two or three leagues from it.⁹

The proximity of the Great Florida Reef was disclosed in the daylight by the whiteness of the water, so mariners would have ample warning. "But, if safe by day," The American Coast Pilot warned, this was not so at night or in foul weather. To avoid stranding at these times, the sailors must keep the lead lines going, by which means the captain could stand clear of the danger "at the distance of two miles from the shore."¹⁰

The editors of The American Coast Pilot revised their publication to keep abreast of the installation of aids to navigation and the latest information regarding location of reefs, shoals, and anchorages. Accordingly, the 1847 edition reported that there was a stationary light on Garden Key (this light had been lit on July 4, 1826), while a spar buoy, painted white, positioned in 15 to 18 feet of water, had been placed at the western edge of Rebecca Reef, 15 miles east of East Key.¹¹

The 1867 edition of the Coast Pilot reported that now there were two lights in the Dry Tortugas. One of these was a fixed light on Garden Key, while on Loggerhead Key there was a fixed light displayed from a 150-foot brick tower.¹²

Mariners were warned that the Tortugas were very dangerous, and "to a person unacquainted with them they undoubtedly are so, especially in the night-time." They

9. Edmund Blunt, The American Coast Pilot: Containing the Courses and Distances Between the Principal Harbours, Capes, and Headlands, on the Coasts of North and South America ... (New York, 1822), p. 286. The shoal on which Rebecca stranded was subsequently designated Rebecca Reef.

10. Ibid.

11. Edmund Blunt, The American Coast Pilot: Containing Directions for the Principal Harbors, Capes and Headlands on the Coasts of North and South America ... (New York, 1847), p. 242.

12. Edmund Blunt, The American Coast Pilot: Containing Directions for the Principal Harbors, Capes, and Headlands, on the Coasts of North and Part of South America ... (New York, 1867), p. 385.

extended east and west nine miles and north to south six miles and, although they were very low, they, being covered with bush, were visible on a clear day at a distance of 12 miles. Navigators were cautioned not to approach nearer than six miles, because of offshore rocky spits. To the west was Tortugas Bank, a coral reef intermixed with white patches of sand, on which soundings were irregular.

Sailing vessels bound from Gulf Coast ports for the Straits of Florida frequently encountered strong winds from the east. If this occurred, the captains could anchor in five or six fathoms, about one-fourth mile offshore, under the lee of Loggerhead Key. There were several other good anchorages nearby, particularly in "a small but snug harbor, near Garden Key, which was sheltered from the sea by a reef." This harbor, with its mud and clay bottom, was quite smooth, even during a storm. The phraseology employed by The American Coast Pilot in the 1867 edition demonstrates that, although almost 100 years had passed, mariners still relied on Gauld.¹³

3. Audubon Visits the Tortugas

In May 1832 the distinguished ornithologist John J. Audubon visited the Dry Tortugas aboard the U. S. Revenue Cutter Marion. Although primarily interested in the bird life, he observed the geography and marine life. Audubon reported that the Tortugas consisted of "five or six extremely low uninhabitable banks" formed of shelly sand, and are resorted to principally by "wreckers and turtlers." Between the keys were deep channels, which, "although extremely intricate, are well known" to wreckers, as well as to the commanders of the revenue cutters. He was told by the captain of Marion that a "great coral reef or wall lies about eight miles from these inhospitable isles, in the direction of the Gulf, and on it many an ignorant or careless navigator has suffered shipwreck."

The naturalist observed that the area adjacent to the keys was densely covered with coral, "sea-fans, and other productions of the deep, amid which crawl innumerable testaceous animals, while shoals of curious and beautiful fishes fill the limpid waters above them."¹⁴

13. Ibid., p. 389.

14. John J. Audubon, Ornithological Biography, or An Account of the Habits of the Birds of the United States of America ..., 4 vols. (Boston, 1827-38), II, p. 370.

When he returned from the Tortugas to Key West, Audubon brought with him many "specimens of terns," along with a number of "shells, conchs, corals, &c." From Key West, Audubon proceeded to Charleston aboard Marion.¹⁵

4. John Williams Describes the Tortugas

John Lee Williams, relying on information found in The American Coast Pilot, on Gauld's chart, and on the reports published by Congress in the 1830s, included a good description of the Dry Tortugas in his The Territory of Florida, published in New York City in 1837. He reported that the Tortugas, 11 in number, were situated on a coral reef.¹⁶ Of these keys, "a few of the largest were about three feet above the common tides." Seven of them were covered with "mangrove bushes and bastard lignum vitae." The only vegetation on the smaller islets was herbs and grass.

Southwest Key, one of the smallest, Williams correctly concluded was the most important, "because it ends the chain of Florida Keys." A reef extended for a distance of a quarter of a mile to the southwest of this key. To the northeast was Loggerhead Key, under the lee of which, one-fourth mile offshore, was a good anchorage. During the years following 1829 more ships were to strand on Southwest Reef than in the rest of the Tortugas combined.

The best anchorage, Williams agreed with his predecessors, was Tortugas Harbor. Here there was 18 feet of water close inshore. Three channels (Northwest, Southwest, and Southeast) gave access to the harbor, which was "capacious enough for a large fleet." The waters and keys abounded with fish and turtles, but the Tortugas afforded neither fresh water nor firewood. Williams' conclusion was that their only value was as an anchorage.¹⁷

15. The Register, May 16 and 23, 1832.

16. A chart prepared by Samuel M. Stewart in 1833 locates ten islets (North, Sand, East, Bird, Middle, Long, Bush, Booby, Turtle, and South West Keys), the same number as Gauld's chart of 1773. Turtle and Bush Keys are better known as Loggerhead and Garden Keys.

17. John Lee Williams, The Territory of Florida: or Sketches of the Topographical, Civil and Natural History of the Country, its Climate, and the Indian Tribes from the First Discovery to the Present Time, with introduction by Herbert J. Doherty, Jr. (Gainesville, 1962), pp. 39-40.

II. AIDS TO NAVIGATION

A. The Tortugas Lighthouse

1. Commander Perry's Recommendations

Following the acquisition of Florida in 1821, the United States took steps to lessen the hazards to vessels passing through the Florida Straits. In March of 1822 the U. S. Schooner Shark, Lt. Comdr. Matthew C. Perry, reached Key West. Commander Perry, after cruising the area, called the government's attention to the absence of lighthouses on the Florida Reef. Many vessels had been lost on this treacherous coast, he reported, and so common were shipwrecks that there were many vessels employed "solely [sic] for the purpose of rescuing [sic] property from destruction [sic], of which they received a very large Share as Salvage."¹

Perry reported that the Gulf Stream and winds of the region tested the skill of the most experienced navigators, and deprived as they were of the "common Beacons," they were exposed at all times "to the most eminent danger." The large number of vessels daily passing through the Florida Straits to and from "Gulf ports, Cuba, Jamaica, and the Spanish Main" made the construction of lighthouses "an act of justice and humanity" on the part of the United States.

Currently, he continued, vessels bound for the Gulf of Mexico were compelled to "make the Island of Cuba for the purpose of Shapeing [sic] a correct course to clear the dry Tortugas." By approaching the Cuban coast, vessels were exposed to the depredations of the "Picaroons" who infested the area. The construction of four lighthouses, one at each extreme of the Florida Reef, and two at intermediate points (Cape Florida, Key Largo, Sand Key, and Southwest Key in the Dry Tortugas) would, in Perry's opinion, reduce the hazards of coasting the Florida Keys and enable mariners to avoid the "picaroons."²

1. Perry to Secretary of the Navy, found in The Territorial Papers of the United States, The Territory of Florida, 1821-1824, compiled and edited by Clarence F. Carter (Washington, 1956), XXII, p. 387.

2. Ibid., p. 388.

2. Congress Acts

Congress reacted promptly, and on May 7, 1822, legislation was enacted providing that

as soon as the jurisdiction of such portions of land on the Dry Tortugas ... as the President of the United States shall select for the sites of light-houses shall be ceded to, and the property there of vested in the United States, it shall be the duty of the Secretary of the Treasury to provide, by contracts ... for building a light-house on such site, to be so lighted as to be distinguishable from other light-houses near the same.³

For this purpose in 1824 an appropriation of \$8,000 was made by Congress. Taking cognizance of Commander Perry's recommendations, Congress also provided funds for construction of lighthouses at Cape Florida and on Sambo Keys, a lightship at Carysfort Reef, and beacons and buoys between the Tortugas and the Florida Coast. When the sites were surveyed, Sambo Keys were passed over in favor of Key West.⁴

3. The Tortugas Light is Lit

The Boston contractor who had agreed to erect the three lighthouses was lost at sea with part of his materials in August 1824. Despite this setback, it was hoped that the lighthouses would be completed by June 1825. These expectations were dashed, and it was February 1826 before the lighthouses at Cape Florida and Key West were lighted. Work on the 70-foot conical brick tower of the Dry Tortugas Light, on Garden Key, was completed in late March, but its

3. Dry Tortugas Clipping File, Lighthouse Service, NA, RG 26.

4. Ibid.; Dorothy Dodd, "The Wrecking Business on the Florida Reefs, 1822-1860," Florida Historical Quarterly, XXII, No. 4, p. 182.

lighting was delayed by the non-arrival of the keeper-- John R. Flaherty.⁵

On April 27 William Pinkney, the Lighthouse Superintendent at Key West complained that "it would be of immense advantage to have the light in operation speedily, but it would be improper to entrust it to anyone except its keeper."⁶ It was mid-June before Flaherty reached Key West, and on the evening of July 4, 1826, the Tortugas Light was lit for the first time.⁷

A beacon and five buoys had been installed at dangerous points along the Keys, while the lightship took station at Carysfort Reef. In 1826 Congress made appropriations for another lighthouse on the Keys. The site selected was Sand Key, and it was lit April 15, 1827. Although these aids to navigation helped reduce hazards, they in no way put the wreckers out of business. With the increasing commercial importance of the Gulf Coast ports, the number of vessels passing through the Florida Straits increased year by year until the outbreak of the Civil War and the imposition of the blockade. Thus, while the hazards had been reduced, the ever-increasing number of vessels plying the shipping lanes resulted in more strandings than heretofore.⁸

4. Complaints About Its Location

In the mid-1830s the keeper of Tortugas Light was Capt. John Thompson, an able and thoughtful individual. By 1836 his experience enabled him to make recommendations to his superiors for its improvement. He had observed that

5. Dodd, "The Wrecking Business on the Florida Reef, 1822-1860," Florida Historical Quarterly, XXII, No. 4, pp. 182-83. The facilities on Garden Key cost more than planned, and to complete them Congress was compelled to appropriate another \$2,700. Dry Tortugas Clipping File, Lighthouse Service, NA, RG 26.

6. Pinkney to Pleasonton, March 19, 22, and April 27, 1826, Ltrs. Sent, Lighthouse Supt., Key West, 1825-1852, NA, RG 26. Stephen Pleasonton was the longtime Superintendent of the Lighthouse Board.

7. Ibid., May 11 and July 1, 1826, Ltrs. Sent, Lighthouse Supt., Key West, 1825-1852, NA, RG 26.

8. Dodd, "The Wrecking Business on the Florida Reef, 1822-1860," Florida Historical Quarterly, XXII, No. 4, p. 183.

to the northeast of Garden Key, the shoals extended to a distance of eight miles, while those to the southwest were distant about six miles. The latter were the more destructive to shipping. "In thick or squally weather, or even in bright moonlight," captains had complained that they could not judge accurately their distance from the light, no matter how well it was kept. To meet these complaints, he suggested that the government erect two more lighthouses in the Tortugas--one on the easternmost and the other on the westernmost keys.⁹

The editor of the Key West Inquirer, in endorsing Thompson's proposal, pointed out that the Tortugas were a hazard to the constantly increasing commerce to and from the Gulf of Mexico ports.¹⁰

Publishers of the popular American Coast Pilot, Edmund and G. W. Blunt of New York City, were critical of the United States Lighthouse Establishment. In a letter of November 30, 1837, to Secretary of the Treasury Levi Woodbury, the Blunts expressed themselves as satisfied that United States lighthouses, both as to management and equipment, were inferior to the British and French.

Among United States lights singled out for criticism by the Blunts was Tortugas Light. This light, they observed, from its position should be first class. But it had long been considered "by mariners as a very bad one." In their latest edition of the American Coast Pilot, the Blunts had commented on "the very bad manner in which this light is kept."

Lt. Thomas R. Gedney had also complained to Supt. Stephen Pleasonton about the Tortugas Light, but nothing had been done to correct the situation or to implement Captain Thompson's proposal.¹¹

9. Key West Inquirer, June 18, 1836.

10. Ibid.

11. "Report from Secretary of the Treasury, January 26, 1838," found in Public Documents Printed by Orders of the Senate of the United States, 25th Congress, 2d Session, Serial 315, Doc. 138, pp. 2, 4.

No steps were taken at this time to correct the situation. As commerce increased to and from the Gulf Coast ports in the early 1840s and more and more vessels stranded in the Dry Tortugas, Superintendent Pleasonton was bombarded with complaints. In the spring of 1845, he directed Adam Gordon, who had replaced Pinkney as Lighthouse Superintendent at Key West, to make a personal inspection of Tortugas Light and determine the reasons for the complaints that it was only visible at a short distance. Previous to the receipt of this message from Pleasonton, Gordon had dispatched Captain Day of the Revenue Steamer Legaré to make the semiannual examination of the light.

In accordance with his request, Capts. William H. Chase and George Dutton of the U. S. Corps of Engineers had also visited the Tortugas. On their return to Key West, the two army officers expressed the opinion that the tower was too low; that its height should be raised to 120 feet; and that it should be relocated on Loggerhead Key. The officers blamed the "hazy atmosphere," which was characteristic of the area, for the restricted visibility, because on clear nights the light could be seen at 20 miles.¹²

In the late 1840s the Lighthouse Board, taking cognizance of complaints about Tortugas Light, sent a Mr. Lewis to Garden Key. Lewis made some adjustments to the lamps, which improved the situation, but did not silence all complaints. Critics familiar with Garden Key pointed out that when the light bore northeast-by-east to east, much of its candle-power was lost because of the location of the iron door, and the want of more lamps and reflectors. Several captains, whose vessels had stranded when the light bore east-northeast, had stated that they believed their ships to be at least ten miles from the lighthouse, and therefore safe, when they grounded.¹³

In 1851, prodded by Congress, the Board undertook a thorough study of all United States lighthouses and other

12. Gordon to Pleasonton, July 10, 1845, Ltrs. Sent, Lighthouse Supt., Key West, 1825-1852, NA, RG 26. Captain Day had reported that the keeper's quarters leaked and should be reshingled, while the three officers united in pronouncing the station as "well and neatly kept."

13. Hunt's Merchants' Magazine, XXII (Jan. to June 1850), p. 340.

aids to navigation. A circular letter was prepared by the Board on May 29, 1851, and forwarded to the "commanders of mail-steamers, packet-ships, &c." The captains were asked to answer a number of questions, which would enable the Board "to make a detailed report and programme to guide legislation in extending and improving our present system of construction, illumination, inspection, and superintendence."¹⁴

Lt. David D. Porter, the commander of the U. S. mail-steamer Georgia, was well acquainted with the sea lanes between the Atlantic coast ports and New Orleans. The salty Porter replied with zest, because "our light-houses as at present arranged are so wretched, that any seafaring man must desire a change." He was confident that the Board "will have great satisfaction, at the close of their labors, in feeling that they have conferred the greatest benefit on commerce by making a complete revolution in the present disorganized system of light-houses."¹⁵

Porter, while he had caustic comments on most of the lights from Navesink to the Carysfort Lightship, had had no experience with the lights on the Florida Reef to the westward. This was because he habitually left the reef at Carysfort and steered for the Morro light on the coast of Cuba. The Spanish, he chided, "pay great attention to the subject of light-houses, and all of their lights are of the very first order." From Cuba he set a course to the northwest and the mouth of the Mississippi.¹⁶

Because of the importance of the commerce daily passing along the Florida Reef between the Tortugas and Carysfort, Porter recommended that a revolving light be placed on Carysfort Reef; a fixed light at New Matecumbe; a fixed red light at Sombrero Keys; a double light at Sambres; and a lightship at Boca Grande Bank, from where the "coast is clear up to Tortugas." The addition of these lights, Porter argued, would "light up the entire Florida reef, nearly as well as Long Island sound."¹⁷

14. "Report of the Officers Constituting the Light-House Board, Convened under Instructions from the Secretary of the Treasury . . .," February 6, 1852, found in House Executive Documents, 32d Congress, 1st Session (Washington, 1852), Serial 642, pp. 204-05.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 206-07.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 211.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 211-12.

Capt. Thomas S. Budd of the U. S. mail steamship Union usually made 11 voyages a year between New Orleans and New York. Unlike Porter, he skirted the Florida Reef for its entire distance. The lights displayed by the Carysfort lightship, he wrote, were miserable and did more harm than good, because they could not be seen outside the reef unless "the weather is very clear." The Key West and Sand Key lights, which had been rebuilt following the hurricane of 1846, needed improvement, while the Tortugas Light was "very poor," and he considered it "unsafe to run for it unless the weather is very clear."¹⁸

Capt. George Barker informed the Board that since 1840, he had been "engaged in the freighting business between the Gulf of Mexico and Europe, ... making two and three voyages yearly." He considered the passage of the Florida Straits as "very intricate and dangerous." On the outbound passage from New Orleans, the first point made was the Dry Tortugas, "on which is a fixed light, but not of sufficient brilliancy and power to be seen over ten miles in very clear weather." After passing the Tortugas, he shaped his course through the straits. As the Tortugas were "the extreme point of the Florida reef," he urged the Board to see that the light was of "first magnitude."¹⁹

B. The Loggerhead Light

1. Its Construction

The report prepared by the Lighthouse Board and forwarded to Congress helped speed construction of a second lighthouse in the Tortugas. In 1856 Congress appropriated \$35,000 for "re-building the light-house, on a proper site, at Dry Tortugas, and fitting it with first-order apparatus." Taking cognizance of the recommendation first made by Captain Thompson in 1836, the Lighthouse Board in 1857 had the new lighthouse built on Loggerhead Key.

When completed, the brick tower from which a fixed light was displayed was 152 feet in height. Nearby was the keeper's

18. Ibid., p. 214.

19. Ibid., p. 218. Alterations recently made to the Tortugas Light by Mr. Lewis had helped but more work was warranted, Captain Barker added.

quarters, a two-story dwelling. When the lighthouse was lighted in 1858, the light on Garden Key was made a fourth-order light for harbor purposes.²⁰

C. The Lighthouses and Hurricanes

1. The Hurricane of 1842

On September 4, 1842, a hurricane hammered the Dry Tortugas. Long Key was swept away, and the keeper's two small boats broke loose from their moorings and were "thrown up" on Garden Key. It was estimated that the cost of their repair would be \$50. The vane atop the lighthouse was broken and the frame for turning the smock pipe injured. A portion of Garden Key had been washed away by the surf, and at flood tide the water flowed within 20 feet of the tower.²¹

2. The Hurricane of 1844

The worst hurricane in "the remembrance of the oldest inhabitants" roared in on October 5, 1844, and raged for the next 12 hours. Damage to the Tortugas Lighthouse, however, was not as great as two years before. The glass in the tower and quarters was broken, but the keeper replaced it. All the inner burners had burnt out, and, having used all his spares, the keeper could only light 23 lamps. He was also out of outside burners, but he had fashioned new ones.²²

3. The Hurricanes of 1850 and 1852

In late August 1850 and two years later in September 1852, the Tortugas were visited by tropical storms. Although much damage was done to shipping in the Gulf of Mexico, Tortugas Light was unscathed.²³

20. Dry Tortugas Clipping File, Lighthouse Service, NA, RG 26.

21. Gordon to Pleasonton, Sept. 12, 1842, Ltrs. Sent, Lighthouse Supt., Key West, 1825-1852, NA, RG 26.

22. Ibid., Oct. 12, 1844, Ltrs. Sent, Lighthouse Supt., Key West, 1825-1852, NA, RG 26.

23. Douglas to Pleasonton, Aug. 23, 1850, and Sept. 2, 1852, Ltrs. Sent, Lighthouse Supt., Key West, 1825-1852, NA, RG 26. Samuel Douglas had replaced Adam Gordon as Lighthouse Superintendent at Key West.

4. The Hurricanes of 1873 and 1875

The hurricane of October 1873 seriously damaged the masonry tower of the Loggerhead Key Lighthouse. In 1875 Congress appropriated \$75,000 for repair of the masonry. Soon after repairs were effected, the hurricane of September 1875 injured the station.²⁴

D. The Construction of the Iron Lighthouse at Fort Jefferson

The hurricane of 1873 had also damaged the keeper's quarters and other buildings at the Garden Key Lighthouse. When they investigated the situation, officers of the Lighthouse Service recommended that the old tower be razed and a new lighthouse constructed on one of the Fort Jefferson bastions. But as the fort was the responsibility of the Corps of Engineers, War Department approval was needed. Secretary of War William W. Belknap, having been apprised of the situation, sanctioned on May 2, 1874, a request from the Secretary of the Treasury that the Lighthouse Board be permitted to build a "structure for the Garden Key Light House on one of the Towers of Fort Jefferson ... in place of the one on the parade ground, to be removed."²⁵

The War Department having given its permission, Congress in March 1875 appropriated \$5,000 for transferring the light "to a new tower on an adjacent bastion of Fort Jefferson." Before this project could be implemented, the hurricane of September 1875 punished the Dry Tortugas. The tower erected in 1825 was battered and the lantern rendered "almost useless." In February 1876 construction was started on a hexagonal tower of boiler-plate iron, and on April 5 the new light was lighted.²⁶

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24. Dry Tortugas Clipping File, Lighthouse Service, NA, RG 26.
25. Dry Tortugas Site File, Lighthouse Service, NA, RG 26.
26. Dry Tortugas Clipping File, Lighthouse Service, NA, RG 26.

III. THE DEFENSE AGENCIES TAKE AN INTEREST

A. Commodore Porter's Reconnaissance

Com. David Porter, who had been sent to suppress piracy in the Caribbean, reconnoitered the Dry Tortugas in late December 1824 and early January 1825. He was on the lookout for a site for a naval station. Unimpressed with what he saw, he notified the Secretary of the Navy that the Tortugas were unfit for any kind of naval establishment. He reported that they

consist of small sand Islands a little above the surface of the Ocean, on some of which is some low shrubbery, but all are liable to changes from gales of wind. Their insulated situation, and distance from the continent renders blockade easy; they have a good inner harbour for small craft and a tolerable outer one for ships of war; but they have no fresh water, and furnish scarcely land enough to place a fortification and it is doubtful if they have solidity enough to bear one.¹

B. The Tattnall Survey of 1829-30

1. Commodore Rodgers Has a Different Perspective

Com. John Rodgers and a team of engineers visited the Gulf Coast in May 1829. Their task was to examine the Pensacola Navy Yard and select a site for a Naval Hospital and other facilities, and to investigate the land purchased for a live oak reservation. On his return to Washington from Pensacola, Rodgers took passage aboard the sloop-of-war Erie. A stop of four days was made at Dry Tortugas to enable Rodgers to reconnoiter the anchorage.²

1. Territorial Papers of Florida, 1824-1828, vol. 23, pp. 161-62.

2. "Report of John Rodgers, July 3, 1829," found in Message from the President of the United States to the Two Houses of Congress at the Commencement of the 1st Session of the 21st Congress, December 8, 1829, Serial 192 (Washington, 1830), Senate Doc. 1, pp. 231-36; The Register, June 18, 1829. Commodore Rodgers stopped at Key West in the second week of June, where he told several people that he favored the establishment of a naval station in the area, as a base for the West India Squadron in its campaign against piracy. Rodgers sailed for Norfolk aboard Erie on the 11th.

The veteran naval officer was delighted with what he found. The Tortugas, he reported, consisted of 11 small keys and surrounding reefs and banks, over which the sea broke. Within were an outer and inner harbor-- the former which, besides affording a safe anchorage at all seasons, was large enough to enable all the navies of Europe to ride at anchor. Of more importance, the inner harbor combined a sufficient depth of water for ships-of-the line, with a narrow entrance of not more than 120 yards.

When he studied his charts, Rodgers found the geographic location ideal. If occupied and fortified, the Dry Tortugas would constitute the "advance post" for a defense of the Gulf Coast. These islands, he reported to Secretary of the Navy John Branch, were "directly in the track of all vessels passing to and fro, not only between ... [them] and the Mississippi, but between every part of West Florida, and our Eastern States." At the same time, no other site presented the "same facilities in communicating" with ports in Cuba and on the Mexican Gulf Coast. If the Dry Tortugas were fortified, he waxed enthusiastic, the commerce of La Habana and "even the homeward bound trade of Jamaica, would be subjected to its grasp."

But, he added, there were certain disadvantages, inasmuch as there was no fresh water or firewood of any consequence on the keys. Water, however, could be supplied by cisterns, while wood could be secured from Key West or on the east coast of Florida.³

2. Josiah Tattnall Surveys the Tortugas

Secretary of the Navy Branch, after reviewing Rodgers' report, determined to have a detailed survey made of the Dry Tortugas. This would be the first survey of the islands and adjacent waters since Gauld's survey of 1773. Lt. Josiah Tattnall, a veteran of the War of 1812, was placed in charge of the project.

3. "Report of John Rodgers, July 3, 1829," Serial 192, Senate Doc. 1, p. 236. Seven of the keys were covered with mangroves and shrubbery, while the other four had little vegetation. Fish, birds, and turtles were found in "greatest abundance."

Lieutenant Tattnall sailed from Washington for the Dry Tortugas aboard the sloop Florida in the first week of September 1829. The ship tied up at Savannah on the 16th. When informed of Tattnall's mission, the editor of the Savannah Republican informed his readers that the United States had ordered a survey to ascertain the usefulness of the Tortugas as a naval base. According to Commodore Rodgers, the anchorage was a good one, "capable of admitting the largest ships of the line," and was perfectly secure from heavy winds. The proximity of the keys to Cuba, 90 miles away, made them "a desirable resort" for Commodore Porter's squadron engaged in suppression of piracy in the Gulf of Mexico.⁴

Florida reached the Tortugas on October 3, after a longer passage than anticipated. Work was commenced immediately, with the men frequently standing in water up to their shoulders, under a blazing sun. Several officers and men, already weakened by exposure on the run down from Washington, were soon confined to sick bay with "intermittent fever." The work force was so reduced that Tattnall hailed a fishing boat and had it carry a message to La Habana. He requested that the United States Consul send him several seamen to help man his small craft.⁵

Tattnall was relieved to find the climate of the Tortugas conducive to good health, especially as Key West had been swept by yellow fever. Out of 150 inhabitants, 65 had died. Tattnall attributed the favorable health situation on the Tortugas to the absence of ponds and mud banks. His experiences satisfied him that they were "as healthy as the deck of a ship in the same latitude."⁶

When no replacements from Cuba were forthcoming, Tattnall on October 20 suspended the survey and made a run over to La Habana in the sloop. His mission was to ship four seamen

4. Niles' Register, Oct. 17, 1829.

5. Tattnall to Secretary of the Navy, Oct. 6, 1829, NA, Microcopy 148, Ltrs. Recd. by Secretary of the Navy from Officers below the Rank of Commander, 1802-1884.

6. Ibid., "Tattnall's February 28, 1830, Report," found in Message from the President of the United States to the Two Houses of Congress at the Commencement of the 2d Session of the 21st Congress, December 8, 1830, Serial 193 (Washington, 1831), pp. 3-4.

to fill vacant billets and to borrow a long boat from one of the United States cruisers operating off the north coast of Cuba.⁷ In reporting his arrival at La Habana, Lieutenant Tattnall notified his superiors that he had been greatly inconvenienced in making soundings with Florida's small boat, and a larger craft was needed. If all went well, he hoped to be back at Dry Tortugas early on the 21st, and to complete the survey of the two inner harbors before another week had passed.⁸

Tattnall was disappointed to find no United States men-of-war on the north Cuban coast and that seamen's wages were higher than he was authorized to pay. He therefore returned to the Dry Tortugas on the 22d. There Tattnall and Lieutenant Gedney disembarked with four men, with the goal of "continuing such parts of the survey as our reduced force was equal to." Lt. Henry M. Morris then proceeded with Florida for Pensacola to secure supplies, a long boat, and recruit seamen.

The weather on the 22d, as Florida made sail, was clear, with a "fine breeze from the east." When he reached Pensacola, Lieutenant Morris was unable to obtain a long boat or recruits. To get these he was compelled to travel to New Orleans. It was December 8 before he was back at Pensacola, and several more days passed before he had Florida ready to weigh anchor.⁹

Meanwhile, Lieutenant Tattnall had grown increasingly apprehensive as the weeks passed and Florida failed to return. He feared that she had foundered. Unwilling to brook any delay, Tattnall chartered a small sloop with a three-man crew for \$100 per month. With this craft he pushed the survey. By the time Florida returned from Pensacola in the fourth week of December, the project was practically completed.¹⁰

7. There were two vacant billets in Florida, and the signing on of four seamen would make his crew two overstrength and facilitate the survey.

8. Tattnall to Secretary of the Navy, Oct. 21, 1829, NA, Microcopy 148, Ltrs. Recd. by Secretary of the Navy from Officers below the Rank of Commander, 1802-1884.

9. Tattnall to Secretary of the Navy, Oct. 22 and Dec. 17, 1829, and Morris to Secretary of the Navy, Dec. 9, 1829, NA, Microcopy 148, Ltrs. Recd. by Secretary of the Navy from Officers Below the Rank of Commander, 1802-1884.

10. Tattnall to Secretary of the Navy, Dec. 17, 1829, NA, Microcopy 148, Ltrs. Recd. by Secretary of the Navy from Officers Below the Rank of Commander, 1802-1884.

The survey was quickly finished, and by the first week of January 1830 the equipment had been loaded and the surveyors started for Washington. Florida, on her return from southern waters, was compelled to dock at Gosport, when it was learned that the Potomac was obstructed with ice.¹¹ Lieutenant Tattnall had to complete his trip to the capital by stage, where on February 28 he submitted his report and charts of the survey to Secretary of the Navy Branch.

3. Tattnall's Report

Like Commodore Rodgers, Lieutenants Tattnall and Gedney were impressed with the possibilities of the Dry Tortugas as a fleet anchorage. The survey had shown that the large outer harbor had an average depth of eight fathoms, was clear of rock, and constituted a holding ground of first quality. There were three entrances from the sea, each with sufficient depth for the largest ships, from the southeast, southwest, and northwest. Tattnall considered the first two to be safest and easiest of access. Northwest Channel was more difficult, as it was intersected by shoals, and should only be attempted by large ships in emergency situations. Several hard blows had occurred while they were in the Dry Tortugas, but on no occasion were the seas so rough as to make it an unsafe anchorage.

The inner harbor (Tortugas Harbor) consisted of two basins, the largest of which was 1,200 yards by 770, and the smaller 600 yards by 400. The depth of the former was from 28 to 40 feet, and of the latter from 16 to 24 feet. Once again, the bottom was clear of rock. There were two entrances from the outer harbor, by a 35-foot channel into the large and a 23-foot channel into the small. The two basins were connected by a 23-foot channel, so that a vessel "may haul from one into the other without passing into the outer harbor."

11. Tattnall to Secretary of the Navy, Feb. 24, 1830, NA, Microcopy 148, Ltrs. Recd., Secretary of the Navy from Officers Below the Rank of Commander, 1802-1884.

Tortugas Harbor was so well protected by keys and flats that the water, even in the worst gales, was calm. Vessels had nothing to cope with but the force of the wind. A wrecker had told Tattnall that in the last hurricane, two fishing smacks were at anchor in the small basin. One of them rode out the blow, while the other was driven ashore. After the gale had abated, she was refloated. Moreover, the sailor, who had been on one of the craft, swore that although the storm "was of almost unprecedented violence, there was not sea enough to cause the vessel to pitch."¹²

4. The Secretary's Recommendations

Secretary Branch on March 25 forwarded Tattnall's report to President Andrew Jackson. In a covering letter, he pointed out that the Tattnall-Gedney survey "fully confirms the favorable anticipations" formed by Commodore Rodgers. In regard to its susceptibility for defense, a study would have to be undertaken by the Corps of Engineers. But, he added, it would be difficult to over-estimate its value as a naval rendezvous and depot, provided it could be made invulnerable to a bombardment and blockade by a superior naval force. In his opinion no other position afforded the same advantages for the protection of the Gulf Coast.¹³

Nothing further was done at this time, however, to establish a naval base at the Dry Tortugas. While the navy lost interest in the Tortugas and focused its attention on the base previously established at Pensacola, the War Department soon became interested in the area.

C. The Army and Fort Jefferson

In 1844 Congress directed the War Department to prepare plans and estimates for erecting Third System forts on the Dry Tortugas and at Key West. Preliminary surveys were made, and the Engineer

12. "Tattnall's Report of February 28, 1830," found in Message from the President of the United States to the Two Houses of Congress, Serial 193, p. 3.

13. Branch to Jackson, March 25, 1830, found *ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

Department estimated the cost of the desired fortifications at three million dollars. Construction was commenced on Fort Jefferson, as the work to be built on Garden Key was designated, in 1847. The project engineer was Lt. Horatio G. Wright. Soon after his arrival on Garden Key in December 1846, Wright had trouble with fishermen and wreckers, "many of whom he described as lawless and immoral characters who flouted his authority. A minor problem was the sale of liquor by the unwelcomed visitors to the men employed" on the fort. His major concern, however, was "with the establishment of a quarentine, since many fishing smacks" made frequent trips to La Habana and United States ports where there was yellow fever.¹⁴

Work on the fort continued for years. By 1860 Fort Jefferson was nearly one-half completed. A million and a quarter dollars had been spent. During the Civil War years, work continued but ceased in the years following the return of peace. The army kept a garrison at Fort Jefferson until January 1874, when it was withdrawn after the yellow fever epidemic of 1873.¹⁵

14. Albert C. Manucy, "Fort Jefferson History," Natl. Park Service, Castillo de San Marcos NM, 1942, pp. 2-3,30.

15. Ibid., p. 5.

IV. WRECKING ON THE FLORIDA REEF

A. The First Wreckers

1. The Calusa

Dr. Dorothy Dodd, in her masterful monograph, "The Wrecking Business on the Florida Reef, 1822-1860," has pointed out that the first Florida wreckers were the Calusa Indians. From the sixteenth century until the early seventeenth century, the Calusa during periods when there was war plundered stranded ships and butchered the survivors. Whenever their relations with the Spanish were amicable, sailors and passengers aboard wrecked or stranded vessels were well received by the Calusa. By the 1740s the power of the Calusa had been destroyed by Creek and other invaders from the north, and the few Indians remaining on the Keys were powerless. In 1763 these survivors, few of whom were Calusa, were removed from the area by the Spanish and taken to Cuba, where they were enslaved.¹

2. The Bahamans

Almost as soon as the last Calusa had been taken to Cuba and enslaved, Bahaman fishermen and turtlers arrived. These people supplemented their income from the sea by engaging in wrecking. Although they were regarded as pirates by the Spanish, the Bahamans engaged in a well organized, systematic, and legal business.² The usual custom in fitting out these small craft on a wrecking and turtling voyage (they were usually combined), Charles B. Vignoles wrote in 1823, was upon shares. Nassau merchants generally owned the vessels into which a few barrels of pork and biscuit were loaded, the crews being expected to subsist themselves by fishing and hunting.

1. Dorothy Dodd, "The Wrecking Business on the Florida Reef, 1822-1860," The Florida Historical Quarterly, XXII, 174; telephone conversation, John Griffin with Bearss, June 1, 1971. John Griffin, former chief of the Southeast Archeological Center at Ocmulgee, Ga., is an expert on Indian cultures of the southeast.

2. Ibid.; "A Plan of the Tortugas and Part of the Florida Kays, Surveyed by George Gauld."

When the wreckers returned to Nassau, the salvage was adjudicated in the British Admiralty Court. Government duties, admiralty fees, the "tithe to the resident governor," and a variety of other colonial charges absorbed about 35 per cent from the gross sale of the property salvaged and landed by the wreckers. A salvage of from 50 to 75 per cent was usually awarded by the court. The owner of the craft customarily received one-half of the net proceeds, while the remainder was apportioned among the captain and crew as agreed upon previous to the commencement of the voyage.³

The principal rendezvous for the Bahaman wreckers was Key Tavernier, because of its proximity to Carysfort Reef, the most hazardous point on the Florida Reef. A good anchorage and fresh water, the two other prerequisites for a wrecking station, were found at nearby Upper Matecumbe. Key Biscayne, to the north, and Key Vacas and Key West, to the southwest, were also frequented by the wreckers in the period 1763-1821.⁴

B. The Establishment of a Settlement at Key West

1. Simonton Makes a Purchase

In 1821 Florida became a part of the United States. Both territorial officials and speculators were aware that the salvage business offered opportunities for huge profits. On December 20, 1821, John W. Simonton, a New Jersey merchant with commercial interests in Cuba, purchased Juan P. Salas' claim to Key West or Cayo Hueso as it was then called for \$2,000. Simonton immediately sold three undivided one-fourths of the claim to four business associates, and the proprietors took possession of Key West on January 19, 1822.⁵

From La Habana, Cuba, two weeks before the purchase was consummated, Simonton had written Secretary of the Navy

3. Vignoles, Observations, p. 125.

4. Ibid., pp. 118, 125; Andrew Ellicott, Journal of Andrew Ellicott (Philadelphia, 1803), pp. 246, 255; Dodd, "The Wrecking Business on the Florida Reef, 1822-1860," Florida Historical Quarterly, XXII, No. 4, p. 175.

5. Jefferson B. Browne, Key West the Old and the New (St. Augustine, 1912), p. 199; House Report 189, 30th Congress, 1st Session, Serial No. 524, pp. 2, 8, 15, 22. Key West had been granted to Salas by the Spanish government on August 26, 1815.

Smith Thompson. He suggested that Key West be made a port of entry; championed its potential as a naval base; and pointed out that "it is the only eligible situation for a depot of wrecked property on the whole coast of Florida." To underscore this point, Simonton reminded Secretary Thompson that at present, "we are ... wholly dependent on the wreckers of New Providence for the protection of our property in case of shipwreck; and when that occurs, it is carried to New Providence." If Key West were declared a port of entry, Simonton and his partners were prepared to erect warehouses.⁶

2. Congress Declares Key West a Port of Entry

Prodded by Simonton, Congress acted. On May 7, 1822, Congress designated the Florida coast from Cape Sable to Charlotte Harbor as the collection district of Key West. The establishment of the port of entry for this region was left to President James Monroe. He acted promptly, and an executive order was issued designating Key West a port of entry.⁷

C. Initial Efforts to Control Wrecking on the Florida Reef

1. Congress is Urged to Act

Meanwhile, Simonton had continued his campaign to have Key West declared a Depot for Wrecked Property. In a memorial to Congress, dated January 31, 1822, he pointed out that Key West was within four miles of "the Florida Reef where so many vessels of all Nations are driven on shore and about half way between Cape Florida and the Dry Tortugas." Now, as heretofore, citizens of the United States were dependent on the Bahama wreckers, and whenever a wreck occurred the property salvage was taken to New Providence, "which affords a living to more than Five hundred persons, employs fifty or sixty vessels, produces a large Revenue to that Government and is of great pecuniary advantage to the Merchants of that place."⁸

6. House Report 189, 30th Congress, 1st Session, Serial No. 524, pp. 12-13.

7. U. S. Senate, Executive Journal, III, pp. 312-13.

8. Territorial Papers of Florida, 1821-1824, XXIII, p. 352.

W. G. D. Worthington, Acting Governor of Florida Territory, echoed Simonton's sentiments. On March 5 he called his government's attention to the British wreckers along the Florida Reef, who were "reaping advantages" which should belong "to United States citizens." He urged that Congress enact legislation to give "our Wreckers preference."⁹

Two weeks later, Worthington notified Secretary of State John Quincy Adams that between Cape Florida and the Dry Tortugas 37 to 40 wreckers of from 16 to 18 tons were operating. Their rendezvous was Key Tavernier. In addition, there were eight or nine American fishing smacks, under Spanish license, operating off Cape Sable. These craft fished for grouper, while the Bahamans took turtles. Worthington urged that wrecking, turtling, and fishing be "put on a footing to ensure a monopoly or first preference to our own citizens."¹⁰

2. The Legislative Council Acts

No less interested in Federal regulation of wrecking was the Territorial Legislative Council. In 1822 the Council, some members of which had been shipwrecked while in passage from St. Augustine to Pensacola to attend the first session, petitioned Congress "to provide some law upon the subject of wrecking at the Peninsula of Florida, which is now in the hands of foreigners ... and is frequently made the pretext for piracy and smuggling."¹¹ When Congress took no action, the Council in 1823 forwarded a memorial to President Monroe in which it asked that the "wrecking grounds" be closed to Bahaman vessels, a reduction in "the customary tariff" on "dutiabale wrecked goods, and provision of some machinery, less 'tedious and expensive,' than the process of an admiralty court, for the prompt determination and award of salvage."¹²

9. Ibid., p. 377.

10. Ibid., p. 282.

11. Dodd, "The Wrecking Business on the Florida Reef, 1822-1860," Florida Historical Quarterly, XXII, No. 4, pp. 177-78; House Document 53, 17th Congress, 2d Session, Serial 78, p. 7.

12. Dodd, "The Wrecking Business on the Florida Reef, 1822-1860," Florida Historical Quarterly, XXII, No. 4, p. 178; "Memorial, The Legislative Council of Florida to the President of the United States," n. d., MS in Florida State Library.

When no action was forthcoming, the Council passed a wrecking act of its own on July 4, 1823, providing that "salvors of wrecked property brought into the territory must immediately report it to the nearest justice of the peace or public notary. The official so notified was to assemble a five-man jury, which, after making an investigation of the wreck and salvage, was "to make a written award specifying the amount of salvage allowed and whether payable in kind or from proceeds of sale." The officer in charge was to see that the jury's award was effected, and was to forward "a certified copy to the clerk of the Superior Court of the district in which the property was landed." The clerk, if the owner were not present, was to take charge of the owner's part of the property or proceeds, and "to advertise it once a month for 12 months in a newspaper of the territory." After one year and a day, unclaimed property, except for ten per cent payable to the territory, belonged to the salvor. All costs were to be assessed against the property, along with a three per cent territorial tax.¹³

3. The Bahamans are Squeezed Out

As it lacked the authority, the Florida Legislative Council made no effort to enact laws regulating duties and embargoing American territorial waters to foreign wreckers. But the lure of profits by 1822 was already attracting United States seamen and capital. Bahaman wreckers threatened that armed force would have to be employed to get them off the Florida Reef, and the Americans countered with threats that the foreigners must go.¹⁴

With both parties braced for a fight, it is difficult "to accept" Governor William P. DuVal's qualified declaration that, "no violence was, it is believed, committed." To win their point, DuVal wrote, our citizens

13. Dodd, "The Wrecking Business on the Florida Reef, 1822-1860," Florida Historical Quarterly, XXII, No. 4, pp. 178-79; Florida Territory Acts, 1823, pp. 128-32.

14. Vignoles, Observations, pp. 126-27.

avoided all amicable association with the foreigners, refused to furnish provisions or aid them in any manner, threw every possible obstacle in their way, enforced vigorously the revenue laws of the United States, relating to foreign vessels in our waters ... and adopted many other expedients extremely vexatious to those against whom they operated.¹⁵

Congress on March 3, 1825, came to the aid of its citizens' interest, and enacted legislation declaring "subject to seizure and condemnation any vessel engaged in wrecking on the Florida coast which took property, salvaged within the jurisdiction of the United States, to a foreign port." Such property, in the future, would have to be landed at a regularly designated United States port of entry.¹⁶

In accordance with this act, wreckers operating on the Florida Reef had but two options--they could either land salvaged property at Key West, or make a long run up the east coast to St. Augustine. Key West, because of its position on the Florida Reef, became a boomtown.

4. Commander Perry at Key West

Lt. Comdr. Matthew C. Perry was sent with the schooner Shark by Secretary of Navy Thompson to make a reconnaissance of Key West, "its harbor, its extent, and dangers of navigation." If the island possessed, as reported, prerequisites for a port of rendezvous, Perry was "to take possession of it in the name of the United States."¹⁷

After touching at La Habana to take aboard John Warner, one of Simonton's partners, Shark proceeded to Key West, where she dropped anchor on March 20, 1822. Commander Perry

15. DuVal to E. Livingston, Oct. 7, 1837, found in Senate Report 242, 30th Congress, 1st Session, Serial 512, p. 94.

16. Dodd, "The Wrecking Business on the Florida Reef, 1822-1860," Florida Historical Quarterly, XXII, No. 4, pp. 179-180; 4th U. S. Statutes at Large, pp. 132-33.

17. Thompson to Perry, found in House Report No. 189, 30th Congress, 1st Session, Serial 524, pp. 14-15.

sent parties to explore the island, while he surveyed the harbor. The shore parties returned with reports that the island, which was seven miles east and west by two miles north and south, "abounded with wild animals, snakes, fowl, and fish." Turtles were found by the thousands, with large numbers being taken annually by Cubans and sold in the La Habana market. While the island had not been subject to cultivation, the soil appeared fertile and was believed capable of growing tropical crops. Another economic asset observed was the extensive salt ponds.

Commander Perry was impressed with the harbor, which he was told had "long been the resort of vessels in foul weather." There was an inexhaustible supply of wood and water was abundant. On March 25, in accordance with Secretary Thompson's orders, Perry formally took possession of the island in the name of the United States. The stars and stripes were raised and a 13-gun salute fired; after which "the company partook of a handsome entertainment, prepared for the occasion at which 13 toasts were drank."¹⁸

On the day previous to the flag raising, a Mr. Hemming had arrived from Mobile with a number of artisans and lumber. These people were turned to erecting a warehouse, 60 feet long, which Simonton and his partners hoped would "become the starting point of a great city."¹⁹ Other storehouses and buildings followed. A town was platted; preparations for the manufacture of salt made; and a number of sheep and hogs introduced.²⁰

5. Key West Booms

On February 1, 1823, Secretary of the Navy Thompson, following up on Perry's reconnaissance, ordered Commodore Porter, commanding the West Indies Station, to establish at

18. Perry to Thompson, March 28, 1822, found *ibid.*, pp. 15-17; Niles' Weekly Register, XXII, May 11, 1822, p. 176. Perry named the island Thompson's Island in honor of the Secretary of the Navy and the harbor Port Rodgers to honor of the President of the Navy Board.

19. Niles' Weekly Register, XXII, May 11, 1822, p. 176.

20. House Report, No. 189, 30th Congress, 1st Session, Serial 524, p. 2.

Key West "a depot, and to land the ordnance and marines to protect the stores and provisions." On April 23 Porter notified the Navy Department that "he had built storehouses" on Key West, "landed stores, collected together all the schooners of the squadron and stationed them at different points on the island of Cuba." For the next two years, Key West continued to be the operating base for the squadron employed in suppression of piracy in the West Indies.²¹

Gross duties paid on goods landed at Key West zoomed from \$389 in 1823 to \$14,108 in 1824.²² Because of its designation as a port of entry and its location on the Florida Reef, Key West enjoyed even more spectacular economic growth following the passage by Congress of the Act of March 3, 1825.

Federal revenue collected between August 1824 and March 1825 exceeded \$35,000, with an added \$5,000 due the territory under its wrecking laws. Simonton in 1826 reported that "from December, 1824, to December, 1825, \$293,353.00 of wrecked property" was sold at Key West.²³

The economic livelihood of Key West, except for the military, was dependent on wrecking. When the ship Pointe-a-Petre was wrecked on Carysfort Reef in February 1825, "The presiding magistrate was the judge who condemned--the auctioneer who sold--and the purchaser at the sale of some of the property."²⁴ Salvage awards sometimes ran from 75 to 93 per cent. The New York Mercantile Advertiser complained:

Special little is therefore left for the underwriters, and that little will not be easy for them to obtain from the holders of the property on that Island [Key West], as it is not known in whose hands it is deposited. No returns, (as required by the law) have been made to the Clerk's office of the Superior Court.²⁵

21. Ibid., pp. 2, 5.

22. Pensacola Gazette, June 10, 1826.

23. Dodd, "The Wrecking Business on the Florida Reef, 1822-1860," Florida Historical Quarterly, XXII, No. 4, p. 180.

24. Ibid., pp. 180-81; Pensacola Gazette, Aug. 20, 1825.

25. Pensacola Gazette, Dec. 3, 1825.

6. The Florida Wrecking Laws are Challenged

In 1825 the territorial law governing salvage was challenged in the courts. First the New York underwriters who had insured Pointe-a-Petre brought suit in the U. S. District Court for South Carolina to recover 365 bales of cotton, awarded as salvage to David Canter and shipped by him to Charleston. The District Court ruled that the court at Key West lacked jurisdiction because admiralty cases were the preserve of the Florida Superior Courts, and that the Legislative Council did not have power to confer such jurisdiction on an inferior court.²⁶ The Circuit Court reversed the District Court's decision in 1826, and it was appealed to the Supreme Court.²⁷ In 1828 the Supreme Court ruled the Florida law valid.

But by then the problem had been resolved by another case. Jacob Housman, who having fallen out with "the gentleman of many avocations at Key West" had established himself at Indian Key, landed merchandise salvage from the French brig Revenge at St. Augustine. Instead of libeling the property in the admiralty court, he instituted proceedings under the territorial law. The jury allowed him 95 per cent salvage. The French consul at Charleston chanced to be in St. Augustine and had the goods libeled in the Superior Court.²⁸

These challenges to the Florida wrecking law of 1823 aroused much interest in shipping and insurance circles, as "much complaint" had been voiced because of the excessive amount of salvage allowed to Florida wreckers. These interests believed the law to be unconstitutional, and at variance with the "practice of the British and United States admiralty courts," which never allowed more than 50 per cent for salvage.²⁹

26. Ibid., Aug. 20, 1825.

27. Dodd, "The Wrecking Business on the Florida Reefs, 1822-1860," Florida Historical Quarterly, XXII, No. 4, p. 181.

28. Ibid., pp. 181-82; Pensacola Gazette, Dec. 3 and 10, 1825.

29. Niles' Register, XXIX, Nov. 12, 1825, p. 163.

Judge Joseph L. Smith of the Superior Court for the District of East Florida, on October 25, 1825, found against Housman. Smith at the same time declared the territorial wrecking law invalid.³⁰ By its Act of February 1, 1826, Congress annulled the Florida act.³¹

These legal decisions, along with the construction of lighthouses and the commissioning of the Carysfort Reef lightship, had little or no effect on the value of wrecked property landed at Key West. Arbitration was now employed to settle claims. The percentage of salvage allowed by the arbitrators remained high and was considered excessive by the underwriters. Their only recourse was to bring suit whenever the salvor or purchaser of wrecked property made the mistake of coming within the jurisdiction of an admiralty court.³²

D. The U. S. Court for the Southern Judicial District of the Territory of Florida

1. Congress Acts

In 1826 Congress moved to correct this situation, and the Senate enacted a bill to establish an admiralty court at Key West. The House failed to act, because Territorial Delegate Joseph M. White "could not make up his mind whether or not it would be politic to have such a court."³³ Opposition to the creation of the court centered in St. Augustine, where it was hoped that the wreckers could be compelled to come to that city. Memorials supporting the projected court were forwarded to Washington from the Legislative Council and from wreckers.³⁴ Congress finally acted, and by the Act of May 23, 1828, established a "U. S. Court for the Southern Judicial District of the Territory of Florida," to be domiciled on the island of Key West.

30. Ibid., p. 197.

31. 4th U. S. Statutes at Large, 1938.

32. Dodd, "The Wrecking Business on the Florida Reef, 1822-1860," Florida Historical Quarterly, XXII, No. 4, p. 183.

33. Ibid., pp. 183-84.

34. Ibid., p. 184.

The court would have territorial jurisdiction south of a line drawn across Florida from Indian River on the Atlantic to Charlotte Harbor on the Gulf. Besides the usual admiralty jurisdiction vested in District Courts, the judge was given the means to control wrecking by "the provision that no vessel should be employed as a wrecker except under his authority, and that no person should be employed on a wrecking vessel who had made a collusive agreement with the master of a wrecked vessel." Dr. Dodd, in her excellent monograph on "The Wrecking Business," concludes that the "provision for the licensing of wreckers, which was an innovation never introduced in any other United States judicial district, seems to have been suggested by the more responsible element at Key West."³⁵ This provision was continued in the 1847 act establishing a District Court at Key West, with the further stipulation that a licensed vessel must be seaworthy and equipped to salvage shipwrecked property.³⁶

2. The Organization of the Court

James Webb, a resident of West Florida, was appointed by President John Quincy Adams on May 26, 1828, as the first judge of the District Court at Key West. He held this position for 11 years, until his resignation in 1839.³⁷ Webb was succeeded by William Marvin, a native of Herkimer County, New York. In 1835 President Andrew Jackson had appointed the 27-year-old Marvin United States District Attorney for the Southern District of Florida. Marvin remained on the bench until 1863, when he resigned because of ill health.³⁸

35. Ibid., p. 184.

36. Ibid., pp. 184-85.

37. Webb entered on duty September 18, 1828. Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, Vol. 2, pp. 1-3, Federal Records Center, Region 4, East Point, Georgia, RG 21. Hereinafter, the Federal Records Center, East Point, Georgia, will be referred to as EPRC.

38. William Marvin, "Autobiography of William Marvin," edited by Kevin E. Kearney, The Florida Historical Quarterly, XXXIV, No. 3, pp. 180, 198, 206, 214.

Webb and Marvin were strong willed-men and employed their statutory powers" to transfer wrecking into a well regulated business." Webb, an observer noted, was held "in awful reverence" by the wreckers. When asked why this was and how he controlled the wreckers, Judge Webb answered, "Oh, that is easily done. If they commit any offense against honor or justice, instantly I take from them their licenses."³⁹ Judge Marvin wrote in 1859, "embezzlement of wrecked goods; voluntarily running a vessel aground under the pretense of piloting her; colluding with the master of a vessel wrecked or in distress; or corrupting him by an unlawful present or promise," were cause for withholding or revoking a license. A less drastic control was the forfeiture of salvage, either in part or in whole.⁴⁰

3. Number of Wreckers vs Amount of Salvage

As Dr. Dodd has written, "Wrecking was a speculative business. The owners of wrecking vessels staked their capital on the chances of participating in the salvage of profitable wrecks; the crews wagered their time and lives." The U. S. Court, through its licensing power, attempted to regulate the number of wreckers on the Florida Reef. It sought to allow enough salvage to keep an adequate number operating and "yet not to attract more than were actually needed."⁴¹ The number of wreckers, however, increased out of all proportion to total salvage awarded by the court. In 1835 there were 20 licensed wreckers on the reef,⁴² 27 in 1841, and 57 in 1858, although salvage decreed by the court in 1858 was \$58,340 compared with \$87,240 in 1835.⁴³

In 1835 seven of the 20 wreckers were registered out of ports in New York, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania, while

39. Charles Nordhoff, "Wrecking on the Florida Keys," Harper's New Monthly Magazine, XVIII, 1859, p. 584.

40. William Marvin, Law of Wreck and Salvage (Boston, 1859), pp. 5, 226-27.

41. Dodd, "The Wrecking Business on the Florida Reef, 1822-1860," Florida Historical Quarterly, XXII, No. 4, pp. 185-86; Marvin, Wreck and Salvage, pp. 211-12.

42. Key West Inquirer, Dec. 26, 1835. See Appendix A for list of Key West wreckers in 1835.

43. Marvin, Wreck and Salvage, p. 5; Nordhoff, "Wrecking on the Florida Keys," Harper's New Monthly Magazine, XVIII, p. 186; Hunt's Merchants' Magazine, VI, p. 292; XVI, p. 54; XX, p. 247; XXII, p. 627.

the rest were registered at Key West, Indian Key, and Key Vacas. The vessels, sloops and schooners, were manned by "down Easters," Bahamans, and "a scattering of European seamen." They were fast sailers, ranging from 20 to 80 tons, with an average value of \$2,500, and manned by from eight to 25 hardy, fearless and skillful seamen. About one-half of them combined fishing and turtling for the Cuban market with wrecking.⁴⁴ It was the 1870s before the first steam tug entered the Key West wrecking business.

Skindivers, mostly black, were employed almost from the beginning, and in the summer of 1835, W. R. Hackley purchased and brought to the Florida Keys a diving bell. In commenting on this development, the editor of the Key West Enquirer observed, "We understand the bell is to go on the Florida Reef, and we have no doubt that the property saved will be immense."⁴⁵

One-half the total salvage allotted to a vessel went to the owner. In certain years this could result in a loss. In 1835 the total salvage awarded was \$87,240. The owners' share of the 20 licensed wreckers could have been only \$43,620, or an average of \$2,180 had each vessel shared in the proceeds. The annual expense of maintaining a wrecker was estimated at \$2,700. Hunt's Merchants' Magazine in 1847 reported that "the whole expense of keeping up this business cannot be short, in actual money paid out, of \$100,000."⁴⁶ The rest of the salvage was divided among the captains and crews of the wreckers, in accordance with a formula worked out by the court (see Appendix B).⁴⁷

E. Stories of Wrecked Treasure Ships and Warships

1. Holder's Article

An examination of the Spanish Archives and records

44. Marvin, Wreck and Salvage, p. 5; Key West Inquirer, Dec. 21, 1835.

45. Key West Enquirer, June 13, 1835.

46. Dodd, "The Wrecking Business on the Florida Reef, 1822-1860," Florida Historical Quarterly, XXII, No. 4, pp. 186-87.

47. Marvin, Wreck and Salvage, pp. 303-04.

of the Admiralty Court in the Bahamas has not been possible. Accordingly information regarding strandings and wrecks in the Dry Tortugas prior to 1829, when the United States Court was established there, are fragmentary. There are stories, which can not be verified, of Spanish treasure ships and European warships being wrecked on the Dry Tortugas. Scuba divers have recovered coral encrusted cannon, which probably date to before 1829.

The earliest documented stories of sunken treasure in the Tortugas date to 1868. In that year, J. B. Holder published an article, "The Dry Tortugas," in Harper's New Monthly Magazine. Holder, who had been stationed on the Tortugas for several years, informed his readers that if one's ship approaches the Tortugas from the south, they are first sighted to the starboard. "The pale, whitish blue of the sea reveals the coral bottom of the reef which you are just clearing to avoid the current of the Gulf Stream, whose deep blue waters are on the port side." On the western horizon can be seen the lighthouse on Loggerhead Key, a solitary tower. Soon the "lesser tower" of Tortugas Light and the bastions of Fort Jefferson appear.⁴⁸

When work commenced on Fort Jefferson in 1847, Holder wrote, there was living on Garden Key the lighthouse keeper. His home was a "Swiss-like" structure, with a broad veranda, before which stood two palms, "whose wonderfully large leaves gave grateful shade, and whose fruit furnished cool, delicious beverage and meat." By 1868 the cottage had been razed.⁴⁹ It had been the locale of one of Cooper's novels, Jack Tier.

Relics of the buccaneers had been found on the Dry Tortugas, Holder reported. These consisted of long guns of iron and brass, one of which was preserved and displayed at Fort Jefferson. He had been told that Spanish coins had been found on the keys, and that Captain Benner, the lighthouse keeper, had recovered "something over a thousand dollars of silver money at East Key."⁵⁰ It has been impossible to further document these stories of pirate cannon and a silver treasure trove.

48. J. B. Holder, "The Dry Tortugas," Harper's New Monthly Magazine, July 1868, p. 260; Manucy to Bearss, May 16, 1971.

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid.

V. VESSELS WRECKED IN THE DRY TORTUGAS, 1621-1824

Small Patache Foundered Off Dry Tortugas

"An unidentified small patache," en route from Veracruz to Spain, in 1621 was capsized by a huge wave, about three leagues off the Dry Tortugas, and sank. Thirty of those aboard were drowned, while the survivors reached one of the Tortugas. They built signal fires, which were sighted by a passing Spanish ship. The survivors, along with the mail bags, were rescued.¹

Nuestra Señora del Rosario Wrecked Dry Tortugas

On September 4, 1622, a convoy consisting of the Armada de Tierra Firme and the Tierra Firme Flota departed La Habana for Spain. Two days later, it was struck by a hurricane, and the ships scattered, nine being lost along the Florida Reef. One of these was the galleon Nuestra Señora del Rosario (Capt. Francisco Rodriguez Rico) of 600 tons. She was wrecked in the Dry Tortugas with about 500,000 pesos of silver bullion and specie. Salvors out of La Habana recovered the treasure and 20 cannon from the wreck.²

A Patache Wrecked Dry Tortugas

Another vessel from the convoy, a patache, was stranded near Nuestra Señora del Rosario. Everything of value aboard was salvaged.³

Relief Ship Wrecked Dry Tortugas

A relief ship sailed from New Spain for St. Augustine in November 1691. She was wrecked in the Dry Tortugas. The 2,000 reeles salvaged were sent to La Habana and used to purchase 500 fanegas of corn in Cuba to be shipped to Florida.⁴

Grenville Packet Wrecked Dry Tortugas

On February 27, 1765, the British ship Grenville Packet (Captain Curlett), bound from Falmouth, England, to Pensacola, was stranded and

1. Robert F. Marx, Shipwrecks in Florida Waters (Eau Gallie, 1969), p. 42.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Governor Diego de Quiroga y Losada to the Crown, Stetson Collection, Yonge Library, University of Florida.

wrecked on the Dry Tortugas. The crew with seven gallons of water and a few biscuits reached one of the keys. They were rescued by Spanish fishermen and taken to La Habana, from where they booked passage to Charleston, South Carolina.⁵

Santísima Concepción Foundered Dry Tortugas

The Spanish ship Santísima Concepción reportedly foundered near the Tortugas in 1775, with a valuable cargo.⁶

Maria Wrecked Dry Tortugas

In 1806 the ship Maria (Captain Rundle), en route from Jamaica to Halifax, Nova Scotia, was wrecked in the Tortugas.⁷

Sir John Sherbroke Wrecked Dry Tortugas

The ship Sir John Sherbroke (Captain Cowan), en route from Jamaica to the Port of New York with a general cargo and \$60,000 in specie, in 1816 stranded on the Tortugas. The ship went to pieces, and the crew, which was rescued, made off with the specie.⁸

Acasta Wrecked Dry Tortugas

The British merchantman Acasta (Captain Parkin), bound from Jamaica for Liverpool, was wrecked before December 5, 1818, in the Tortugas. Bahaman wreckers rescued the crew and salvaged most of the cargo.⁹

Ceres Wrecked Dry Tortugas

In 1824 the ship Ceres, outbound from New Orleans, was wrecked in the Dry Tortugas. The crew was rescued and taken to La Habana.¹⁰

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5. Marx, Shipwrecks in Florida Waters, p. 51.
 6. H. G. Schlensker, The Pirates and Treasures of the Southeast States, Orlando, 1951.
 7. Marx, Shipwrecks in Florida Waters, p. 58.
 8. Ibid., p. 61.
 9. Ibid., p. 63.
 10. Ibid., p. 66.

VI. VESSELS STRANDED AND WRECKED IN THE TORTUGAS, 1829-1840

Orono

Stranded

Southwest Reef

In the late spring of 1829 the brig Orono (Captain Foster) bound for Providence, Rhode Island, from a Gulf Coast port with a cargo of cotton bales, hams, lard, and general merchandise, stranded on Southwest Reef.

She was lightened and refloated by the wrecker Mary Ann, commanded by Capt. Joshua Appleby. Orono was brought into Key West for adjudication of claims. After reviewing the briefs filed by the salvors and Captain Foster, Judge James Webb decreed that the wreckers were entitled to one-sixth of the cargo and \$300 for their services.¹

Union

Stranded

North Key Reef

The brig Union sailed on March 29, 1830, from New Orleans for La Habana, Cuba, with a mixed cargo of hogs, lard, flour, tobacco, hoop poles, potatoes, and clothing.² On the night of April 1 the brig stranded on North Reef, near North Key, about six miles northeast of Tortugas Light.

At this time four wreckers were anchored in Tortugas Harbor. Soon after daybreak, the lookouts sighted the stranded vessel, and getting underway the vessels beat their way out of the harbor. Approaching the brig, Capt. John Burroughs of Mary Ann hailed Capt. Thomas Boss of Union, and inquired if he needed assistance. Boss shouted, "No!" But within an hour, his vessel having "dragged farther upon the reef," Boss called for the wreckers to come alongside. When they did, the wreckers found that Union was "lying on a bed of rocks in a very bad and dangerous situation with a shoal directly astern on which she must have dragged in a short time, as there was a strong north wind and rough sea."³

1. The Register, June 25, 1829.

2. Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, II, pp. 40-49, RG 21, EPRC. Aboard the vessel were 102 hogs, 1,040 kegs of lard, 155 barrels of flour, 10 hogsheads of tobacco, 5,175 hoop poles, 98 barrels of potatoes, and two tons of clothing.

3. Ibid. In addition to Mary Ann, the wreckers involved were Mystic (Capt. William Kemp), Morning Star (Capt. John Appleman), and Energy (Capt. Thomas Eldridge).

Boarding the bark, the wreckers began lightening her by taking her cargo and stowing it on their smacks. When they refloated Union, it was found that while aground she had lost her rudder, nearly all her false keel, and could not be navigated. The wreckers accordingly maneuvered their smacks astern of her and pushed her into Tortugas Harbor, through a narrow pass. After temporary repairs were effected, the wreckers took Union to Key West, where their claims for salvage were mediated in the court of Judge Webb.⁴

Dumfries

Wrecked

Southwest Reef

The American ship Dumfries, Captain Harvey, en route from Lisbon, Portugal, to New Orleans with a cargo of wine and salt, stranded on the night of April 1, 1831, on Southwest Reef. The vessel was lost, but 29 casks of wine, 500 sacks of salt, the sails and rigging--along with Captain Harvey, his crew, and passengers--were saved by Captain Hoxie of the wrecker Pizarro and landed at Key West.⁵

Exerton

Wrecked

Dry Tortugas

Before the month was over, the Dry Tortugas reefs claimed another victim. On the night of the 27th, the brig Exerton, Capt. John Thomas, stranded. Captain Hoxie of Pizarro was able to save the captain, his crew, her cargo of 428 bales of cotton, and the rigging. These were brought into Key West.⁶

William Tell

Stranded

Bird Key

More fortunate was the brig William Tell (Captain Riley), 11 days out of New York bound for New Orleans, with an assorted cargo of dry goods and cutlery. She was stranded in the third week of May 1831 on Bird Key, the lighthouse bearing north, northeast about two miles. She was sighted and assisted by Captain Hoxie of Pizarro. After being lightened, she was refloated and taken to Key West, where she dropped anchor on May 20.⁷

4. Ibid.

5. Key West Gazette, April 30, 1831. Dumfries was 29 days out of Lisbon at the time she stranded.

6. Ibid., May 4, 1831. Exerton was bound from New Orleans for Providence. Captain Thomas called Eden, Maine, his home.

7. Ibid., May 25, 1831.

Concord

Stranded

Dry Tortugas

Five months passed before there was another stranding in the Tortugas. The brig Concord (Capt. John McKowen) had sailed from New York City on September 5, 1831, for Mobile with a cargo of dry goods and groceries. She encountered strong gales on her run down the Atlantic coast, and by the time she reached the Straits of Florida, her sails were tattered and her rigging shredded.

On the night of October 2, in bad weather, she stranded. No wreckers were anchored in Tortugas Harbor, and Capt. Edward Glover, the lighthouse keeper, went to her assistance. Captain McKowen, as his ship was in danger of breaking up, accepted Glover's offer of help. After hiring Captain Clift of the sloop Spermacetti to assist him, part of the cargo and the crew were ferried to Key West.

Several weeks later, a storm cast the hulk adrift. When she was next seen Concord was drifting in the straits between Florida and Cuba. She was taken in tow by the wrecker Morning Star and brought into Key West. When recovered Concord was demasted, "with nothing but stumps standing, her decks in great confusion, and three feet of water in her holds."

Captain Glover libeled the goods saved from Concord for \$15,000. Judge Webb, when he heard the case, decreed him only \$750 and expenses, as he did not wish to encourage lighthouse keepers to engage in the wrecking business.⁸

Florence

Stranded

Southwest Reef

The ship Florence was only two months off the stocks when she sailed from Boston for New Orleans with a cargo of dry goods, furniture, etc. On the night of November 9, 1831, as she was beating her way along at eight knots she stranded on Southwest Reef. At the time she stuck, no light could be seen from her deck. A man was sent aloft and he was able to dimly see the Tortugas Light.

8. Ibid., Oct. 13, 19, 26, Nov. 2, and Dec 7, 1831. A collection of books belonging to a college in Alabama was salvaged from the vessel by Captain Clift. By his consent, they were not included in the valuation of the cargo and were forwarded to the owner. Key West Enquirer, April 25, 1835.

brig, Capt. A. Anderson hailed Captain Page and asked, "Do you need assistance?" Captain Page declined.

At 6 p.m. Captain Page, having failed to free his ship, had the flag hoisted with the union down. The wrecker then came alongside, and Captain Anderson took charge. Soundings showed the brig was ashore in eight feet of water, on a rocky bottom. As she drew 11 feet of water, Anderson sent a crew aboard and began lightening her. At high tide, on the morning of June 18, the wreckers having set cables and made sail pulled Constitution off the reef. She was taken into Key West.¹¹

Sea Flower

Stranded

Dry Tortugas

At 2 a.m., on November 7, 1834, the brig Sea Flower (Capt. Nathaniel Hartford), en route from Camden, Maine, to Apalachicola, Florida, with a cargo of lime stranded on the Tortugas, about four miles from the lighthouse. She was boarded at daybreak by seamen from the wreckers Hero and Orion. After 96 barrels of lime had been jettisoned, the brig floated free. Her seams had started, and to keep her afloat until she reached Key West, the pumps had to be manned.¹²

Galaxy

Wrecked

Dry Tortugas

On May 25, 1835, the schooner Galaxy (Captain Warren), outward bound from La Habana to Apalachicola with 863 bags of coffee, cigars, fruit, and molasses, sprang a leak in the Gulf of Mexico. To keep from foundering, Captain Warren ran his schooner aground on one of the Tortugas. The wreckers Caroline and Loreto, assisted by the lighthouse boat, saved the crew, 200 bags of coffee, the sails, and rigging, before the schooner went to pieces.¹³

William Turner

Stranded

Dry Tortugas

On the night of July 26, 1835, the schooner Wm Turner, en route from La Habana to New Orleans, stranded during a squall on the Tortugas. Assisted by the lighthouse keeper's boat, the captain was able to free his vessel and continue his voyage.¹⁴

11. Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, I, pp. 130-33, EPRC, RG 21.

12. Key West Enquirer, Nov. 15, 1834; Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, I, pp. 172-73, EPRC 21.

13. Key West Enquirer, June 6, 1835.

14. Ibid., Aug. 1, 1835.

Flora

Wrecked

Dry Tortugas

The bark Flora was wrecked in the Dry Tortugas in late May 1836.¹⁵

Eleanor

Stranded

Between Loggerhead and Sand Keys

The bark Eleanor, Capt. John Davison, sailed from New Orleans for Liverpool in the fourth week of May 1836. Aboard were 1,656 bales of cotton. On the night of May 29, she stranded between Loggerhead and Sand Keys. She was sighted at daybreak by Capt. George Eldridge of the wrecker Whale.

Getting under way, Whale beat her way out of Tortugas Harbor. Captain Eldridge, as he approached the stranded vessel, hailed Captain Davison and asked if he needed assistance.

"No!" Davison replied.

On the 31st Davison had a change of heart. Whale now came alongside Eleanor. Fifty bales of cotton were transferred to the wrecker. This lightened the bark, and she began to pound very hard on the bottom. The wreckers continued to lighten the craft. All told, 658 bales were taken off and landed by the wreckers on Loggerhead Key.

On June 2 lines and anchors were put out, and with the wreckers heaving on the windlass and capstan, the bark was refloated. Eleanor was then taken to Key West, where an inspection showed that her hull was sound, although some of the sheeting had been knocked off.¹⁶

Athenia

Stranded

Dry Tortugas

The brig Athenia left Philadelphia on August 17, 1836, bound for Mobile. On the evening of September 10, she "got ashore" on one of the Tortugas. She was hauled off by the wreckers and anchored in Tortugas Harbor. The captain then proceeded to Key West aboard one

15. The Sailor's Magazine and Naval Journal, VIII, p. 357.

16. Key West Inquirer, June 4, 1836; Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, I, pp. 333-34, EPRC, RG 21. Eleanor's home port was St. John, New Brunswick.

of the wreckers to adjust in Judge Webb's court the claims for services rendered. Judge Webb on the 15th ruled the wreckers were entitled to \$1,500.¹⁷

America

Wrecked

Loggerhead Reef

In the autumn of 1836, the ship America sailed from the Port of New York for Mobile. She had been chartered to take the place of the "regular packet in the well-known and popular packet line of Messrs. E. D. Hurlbut and Co." Her captain was Lemuel S. Akin of Massachusetts. Aboard the ship when she sailed were about 30 passengers, both male and female, most of whom were returning to their places of employment in the Deep South from a summer visit to their homes in the North.

One of the passengers--Charles Nordhoff--long recalled the passage southward by Great Abaco, through Providence Channel, and by Double-Headed Shot Keys. America then stood on her course, as she doubled Cape Florida and ran along "the line of Keys of Florida," those aboard "unconscious and unsuspecting of danger."

The weather on the evening of November 6 was tropical. Those aboard felt "the joyfulness of the approaching termination of our passage." The ship now hauled up for its northwest course, and with Tortugas Light to the west, the passengers retired, remarking, "No more land will be seen till we make Mobile Light."

About midnight America stranded, and the passengers turned out of their berths. Soundings were taken, the sails backed, as Captain Akin vainly sought to refloat his ship. As the tide ebbed the ship careened. Captain Akin, believing that the lighthouse keeper had purposely dimmed the light to lure his ship to destruction, exclaimed, "We are victims of the piratical wreckers!"

Day broke on the morning of the 7th "upon a seemingly hopeless wreck." The sea was smooth, but the ship was hard aground. There was at this time one wrecker at Tortugas Harbor--the sloop Loreto. Capt. Ben Sawyer sighted America stranded on Bird Key Shoal. As Loreto was grounded by the ebb tide, Captain Sawyer proceeded out to the ship in a small boat. Boarding America, he informed Captain Akin that he held a wrecker's license from the District Court at Key West.

17. Key West Inquirer, Sept. 17, 1836.

Captain Akin, suspecting treachery, rejected Sawyer's offer of assistance.

Passenger Nordhoff recalled:

I have a distinct impression of the man . . . , as he stood upon our deck by the starboard bulwarks, a stout, burly, red-faced, sun-burned sailor, whose only clothing consisted of a Guernsey shirt, pantaloons rolled up to his knees, and a slouched, weather-beaten hat, without stocking or shoes.¹⁸

In an effort to refloat his ship, Captain Akin had an anchor carried out astern, and at flood tide turned all hands to at the capstan. The sails had been trimmed, but unfortunately it was impossible to "fetch by" the reef. America was driven farther up onto the shoal.¹⁹

On the morning of the 8th, Captain Akin offered Captain Sawyer \$1,000, provided he could get America off the shoal. Sawyer refused, but promised to "use his best effort and if successful to leave the question of his compensation to the District Court." Akin said no, as he planned to proceed direct to Mobile, once his vessel was afloat.

Captain Akin, during the day, ran out a kedge from the stern of his ship, and had his crew jettison a large quantity of white lead, tobacco, and ironware. Unsuccessful efforts were then made to carryout the best bow anchor. All the while the ship continued to thump heavily.

Captain Sawyer, on the 9th, again tendered the assistance of his sloop and the lighthouse tender. This time Captain Akin was agreeable, and the sloops were ordered alongside. The wreckers were turned to lightening the ship of the heaviest part of her cargo--kegs of nails and ironware. These were lightered into the harbor and landed on Garden Key.

18. Charles Nordhoff, "Wrecking on the Florida Keys," Harper's New Monthly Magazine, XVIII, No. 105, April 1859, pp. 577-78; Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, II, pp. 436-38, EPRC, RG 21.

19. Nordhoff, "Wrecking on the Florida Keys," Harper's, XVIII, p. 579.

America drifted off the reef at the next flood tide, but she refused to respond to the helm, as the rudder was unhung. An attempt was then made to maneuver the ship with the sails. This was very difficult, and she was anchored in five fathoms of water, midway between Bird Key and Loggerhead Reef. During the night a gale blew in from the southeast, and America dragged her anchor and stranded at 1 a.m., on the 10th, on Loggerhead Reef. She bilged within ten hours.

Captain Sawyer now landed the passengers and their baggage on Garden Key. Next he began transshipping cargo to the same point. As the weather was boisterous and he feared the ship would disintegrate, Captain Sawyer sent the lighthouse tender to Key West for help. She was becalmed and compelled to return. On the 13th she again set sail and reached Key West the next day. As soon as word was out that America had stranded and bilged, a number of wreckers cleared Key West for the Tortugas.

Meanwhile the sloop Francisco had arrived, and her captain entered into a consort with Captain Sawyer, as did the captains of the wreckers which reached America on November 15.²⁰ Soon there were ten vessels and more than 100 men employed in salvaging America's cargo and landing it on Garden and Long Keys.²¹

Judge Webb of the U. S. District Court, when he heard the case, ruled that Captain Sawyer had been remiss in failing to forward immediately to Key West news that America had stranded. To penalize him for his error, Judge Webb reduced his percentage of the salvage from the customary 50 to 60 per cent to 35 per cent levied on the merchandise salvaged. This difference in percentage due Sawyer inured to the advantage of the underwriters.

Captain Akin was understandably relieved when the court made its decree, and the case was closed with the disbursement by the U. S. deputy marshal to each wrecker of his share of the salvage. The underwriters' portion was the residuum. As a prudent captain, Akin worked hard to make this latter portion as large as possible.²²

20. The wreckers joining the consortium on the 15th were: Charles Mallory, Morro Castle, Relief, Globe, Citizen, Whale, United States, and Brilliant.

21. Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, II, pp. 436-52, EPRC, RG 21.

22. Nordhoff, "Wrecking on the Florida Keys," Harper's, XVIII, pp. 585-86.

Tallahassee

Wrecked

Dry Tortugas

The ship Tallahassee, en route from Liverpool to New Orleans with a cargo of general merchandise, stranded in the Dry Tortugas in the winter of 1836-37. The ship bilged and was lost, along with her cargo, while the crew and passengers were rescued.²³

Billow

Wrecked

Dry Tortugas

The brig Billow, en route from Boston for New Orleans, was wrecked in the Dry Tortugas on the night of February 3, 1837. Although the captain and crew survived, the brig and her cargo were lost.²⁴

Cumberland

Stranded

Northwest Reef

At daybreak on April 10, 1837, there were three wreckers--Mt. Vernon, Urbania, and Alert--anchored in Tortugas Harbor. Sweeping the reefs with their glasses, the lookouts sighted a vessel in distress on Northwest Reef, six miles north, northwest of Tortugas Light. They weighed anchor immediately.

When Capt. Austin Packer of Mt. Vernon boarded the schooner at 6:30 a.m., he found she was Cumberland (Capt. Micah Pon), bound from New Orleans to Philadelphia, with a cargo of sugar, cotton, lard, and flax seed. Captain Pon explained that his vessel had grounded at 3 a.m., and was in seven feet of water. The wind was fresh from the northeast, and with a heavy swell the schooner was "thumping heavily."

Captain Pon refused the wreckers' offer of assistance. He had his crew carry out a kedge and shift cargo from aft to forward. But when his hawser parted, he called for help. Although Cumberland was leaking badly, the wreckers heaved her off the reef at 6 p.m., and took her into Tortugas Harbor. There temporary repairs were effected, and on the 17th Cumberland sailed for Key West.²⁵

23. The Sailor's Magazine and Naval Journal (New York), IX, p. 164.

24. Ibid., p. 294.

25. Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, I, pp. 469-70, EPRC, RG 21.

Isaac Franklin

Stranded

North Key Keef

Early in April 1837 the brig Isaac Franklin (Capt. William Smith) departed from New Orleans for the Port of New York, with 270 hogsheads of sugar. She stranded on North Key Keef at 3 a.m., on the 16th. Assisted by wreckers, she was refloated at 2 p.m.²⁶

Ella Hand

Stranded

Bird Key Shoal

The bark Ella Hand, en route from Philadelphia for New Orleans with an assorted cargo, stranded at 1 a.m., June 30, 1837, on Bird Key Shoal. She was boarded by the wreckers soon after daybreak. Capt. S. H. Pillsbury, although his ship was hard aground, at first refused assistance.

By 9 a.m., when he called for help, there was a fresh wind blowing from the east-northeast. The wreckers came alongside and commenced to lighten the bark. At 2 p.m. the wreckers heaved Ella Hand off the reef and she proceeded to Key West.²⁷

Bombay

Wrecked

Southwest Reef

On Saturday, March 10, 1838, the wreckers based in Tortugas Harbor saw a vessel in distress on Southwest Reef. The craft was found to be the American ship Bombay (Captain Humphreys), bound from New Orleans to Boston with cotton, provisions, and molasses. She was seen to be in "a very dangerous situation, in a bend ... in the reef, with the wind blowing fresh from the NNE, in 11½ feet of water, while she drew 14' 4" ..., and was thumping severely." Captain Humphreys refused the wreckers offer of assistance, expressing his determination to "use first his own best efforts."

At midnight the wind veered into the north, and the ship swung broadside to the reef and continued to thump. Captain Humphreys now called for help. But throughout Sunday the wind was so strong that the wreckers were unable to bring their sloops alongside. On Monday, the 12th, the winds moderated, and the wreckers began lightening Bombay. The sloops Globe and Index and schooner Whale were brought

26. Ibid., p. 474.

27. Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, II, pp. 21-8, EPRC, RG 21; Marvin, Wreck and Salvage, p. 156.

alongside, although the surf was still running high and the ship thumping. On the 13th the sloops Mt. Vernon and Frudence Ann were loaded.

The ship having been lightened, all her sails were made, and she was refloated, with her rudder unhung and pintles broken. Next the wreckers attempted to take her into the harbor. By 8 p.m. she had been navigated through Southwest Channel and a course shaped for Tortugas Light. She now grounded on an uncharted shoal and lay there until refloated at 11 p.m.

On Wednesday, the 14th, Bombay again got under way, but the tide and wind were against her, and she was anchored. To keep the ship from foundering, the pumps were kept going. During the day the sloops Francis Parke, Charles Mallory, and Francisco were brought alongside and loaded. At 1 p.m. Bombay again cast off and succeeded in entering Tortugas Harbor, where she was moored alongside the schooner Harrison. The sloops Evergreen and Morro Castle were loaded on the 15th.

The wreckers found the task of transshipping the cargo and working the pumps exhausting. They therefore hired 14 sailors from Bombay's complement. On the 15th Globe, Index, and Mt. Vernon proceeded to Key West to discharge the cargo salvaged. The other wreckers were compelled to remain with Bombay, as the pumps had to be kept going constantly.

By the 18th all cargo had been salvaged, and it having been determined that Bombay was no longer seaworthy, she was stripped. The "material" salvaged, along with the remainder of the cargo, was taken to Key West on the 24th. The hulk was left in Tortugas Harbor.²⁸

La Maria

Stranded

North Key Flats

On June 29, 1838, a ship with painted streaks was seen ashore in the Dry Tortugas. Either the vessel was relieved by the crew or refloated by wreckers and the claim for salvage settled by mutual agreement, because the U. S. District Court did not adjudicate this case.²⁹

28. Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, II, pp. 128-35.

29. The Sailor's Magazine and Naval Journal, X, p. 490.

Not so fortunate was the Genoese brig La Maria (Capt. Giobotta Russé). The brig, while en route from Genova to Veracruz with a cargo of paper, wine, and olive oil, stranded before daybreak on December 8, 1838, on the flats, one and one-half miles northwest of North Key.

The wreckers, observing that the vessel had set her colors with the union down, put out from Tortugas Harbor. Because of the language barrier, the wreckers and Captain Russé had difficulty communicating. Russé, at first, wished to make an agreement to pay the wreckers a fixed sum for their assistance, but this was rejected.

After Russé had given in, the wreckers made soundings and found that La Maria was aground in eight feet of water, "on a rocky and dangerous bottom, in a hole, deeper than the surrounding shoals, having just water sufficient to float her." At 1 p.m. the wreckers began lightening the brig. The cargo was broken out and placed aboard the sloops. By nightfall, when a strong north wind made up, five sloops had been loaded.

On the 9th the sea was too rough to transship any cargo, but it had moderated sufficiently on the 10th for the wreckers to bring the schooner Whale alongside. The wind picked up during the night, and on the 11th the brig could only be boarded with difficulty.

With reefed topsails, the wreckers endeavored to get La Maria off North Key Flats. In passing across the shoals, she struck, knocking off her rudder. By steering with the sails, the wreckers navigated the bark into Tortugas Harbor. There she was anchored, and temporary repairs made to the rudder. On the 14th the wreckers made sail and started for Key West, where they arrived on the 16th.³⁰

Black Hawk

Stranded

Bird Key Shoal

Five wreckers were riding at anchor in Tortugas Harbor on the morning of March 16, 1839. At 8 a.m. the lookouts sighted a vessel in distress on Bird Key Shoal. When they came within hailing distance, they found she was the brig Black Hawk (Capt. S. Armstrong) bound from New Orleans for the Port of New York, with 390 casks of molasses. In addition to the crew, there were aboard two fugitive slaves who had stowed away at New Orleans.

30. Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, II, pp. 194-209, EPRC, RG 21. As Veracruz was being blockaded by a French squadron, La Maria had been turned back, and was en route to La Habana when she stranded.

The brig was ashore on a coral reef in 11 feet of water. There was a heavy sea and she was thumping badly, with a Norther, "the worst kind of wind that blows around the Tortugas to make a heavy sea."

Captain Armstrong accepted with alacrity the wreckers' offer of assistance. The sloop Francis Parke was brought alongside, and as soon as she was loaded, followed in succession by George Eldridge and Whale. At 11 p.m. the wreckers ceased work to permit the weather to moderate. The winds had abated on the 17th, and kedges were carried out and positioned. At flood tide that evening, Black Hawk was pulled off Bird Key Shoal and taken to Key West the next day.³¹

Allbree

Stranded

Pulaski Shoal

On Sunday, April 3, 1839, there were three wreckers--George Eldridge, Whale, and Superior--anchored in Tortugas Harbor. At 3 p.m. they sighted a vessel in distress on the northeast flat of Pulaski Shoal.

When they reached the vessel, they found she was the ship Allbree (Capt. Isiah Knowles), en route from St. Joseph, Florida, for Boston with 1,060 bales of cotton. Captain Knowles informed the wreckers that his ship had been ashore about two hours; that she drew 12' 8"; and was lying in nine feet of water. She was "thumping heavily on a rocky bottom" and was listing to starboard.

As soon as they were assured that Knowles needed assistance, George Eldridge was hauled alongside. The bales of cotton stored on the starboard quarter of Allbree were sent aboard the wrecker. This caused the ship to careen onto her port bilge, thus enabling Whale and Superior to anchor in her lee.

After the ship had been lightened, she was refloated and taken into Tortugas Harbor. These temporary repairs were made, preparatory to sailing Allbree to Key West.³²

31. Ibid., pp. 239-40.

32. Ibid., pp. 221-31.

Exchange

Stranded

Southwest Reef

The schooner Exchange (Capt. Stephen Ellis) sailed from New Orleans for Boston in the first week of April 1839. She was heavily laden with flour, hides, and scrap iron. At 11 p.m. on the 12th, her helmsman having misjudged his distance from Tortugas Light, Exchange stranded on Southwest Reef.

She was sighted at sunrise on Saturday, the 13th, by wreckers, who immediately put out from Tortugas Harbor. When they reached Exchange at 7 a.m., she was "thumping heavily." In a vain effort to refloat his vessel, Captain Ellis had had his crew jettison the deck cargo--the scrap iron. He therefore accepted the wreckers' offer of assistance.

When they surveyed the vessel, the wreckers saw that she was abreast the reef, with only six feet of water around her. The bottom was rocky, the wind strong and from the NNW, with a heavy sea. The only way to relieve Exchange was to heave her off the shoal "the same way she went on." She would first have to be lightened. After this was done, Exchange was pulled off Southwest Reef and taken to Key West.³³

William Henry

Stranded

Southwest Reef

On the evening of Tuesday, May 28, 1839, the crew of a small boat from the wrecker Globe sighted a brig ashore on Southwest Reef. The crew returned to Tortugas Harbor and notified Capt. James R. Andrews. Recalling all hands, Andrews took Globe out of the harbor and reached the brig at 3 a.m.

Capt. Daniel Kurtz of the brig identified his vessel as William Henry, bound from New Orleans for Philadelphia with a cargo of sugar, tobacco, pork, bacon, and lard. She had stranded at 9 p.m.; was hard aground in 11 feet of water; with the wind fresh and from the north.

When crews of the wreckers Globe and Whale sought to bring their vessels alongside to lighten William Henry, they stranded. Because of the wind and surf, it was impossible for the wreckers to accomplish anything toward relieving the brig on the 29th. She continued to thump, and by nightfall the sea was sweeping her decks. The pumps, which were manned, were unable to expel the water as fast as it entered the hold. By daybreak, when the weather cleared, there was three feet of water in the hold.

The sea having moderated, the wreckers were able to lighten and refloat William Henry. She then proceeded to Key West.³⁴

33. Ibid., pp. 262-63.

34. Ibid., pp. 287-88.

VII. VESSELS STRANDED AND WRECKED IN THE TORTUGAS, 1842-1860

New York

Wrecked

Northwest Reef

In late April 1842 the schooner New York (Capt. B. F. Lane) sailed from Trinidad de Cuba for the Port of New York, with a cargo of molasses. On the night of May 3 the schooner grounded on Northwest Reef.

The next morning crews of the wreckers Euphrates and Whale, then anchored in Tortugas Harbor, sighted a ship with her sails set bearing northwest from Tortugas Light, distance about four miles. A strong wind prevented the wreckers from beating their way out Northwest Channel, so they took a long boat and proceeded out to the schooner.

Reaching the schooner at 7:30 p.m., the wreckers found her broadside to the reef, "her head westward, with her mainsail, foresail, and topsail full."

With New York thumping heavily against the reef, Captain Lane called for help. Capt. L. Brightman of Whale returned to Tortugas Harbor in the long boat to bring out the wreckers' sloops, while Capt. James Packer and four men boarded the schooner and assisted the crew in trimming her sail, "so as to wear around her bow to bring her lee stem to the sea."

By 10 p.m., on the 4th, the surf was breaking over New York's amidships; the rudder had been smashed; and parts of the keel were seen to float to the surface. It was daybreak on the 5th when Euphrates, Whale, and Globe arrived, and the wreckers began lightening the schooner. She was refloated and started for Tortugas Harbor. Night came on before they reached the anchorage, and the wreckers anchored the schooner.

The next morning, the 6th, they took New York into Tortugas Harbor. When a diver examined her hull, he found it so badly chafed as to make the schooner unseaworthy. It was agreed that the vessel was too badly damaged to be taken to Key West, and the wreckers removed the cargo and stripped New York of her rigging, sails, and chains, while the crew manned the pumps in waist-deep water. After the cargo had been salvaged, Captain Lane pulled his men off the pumps, and his vessel's hulk disappeared below the surface.¹

1. Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, III (1841-1846), pp. 57-61, EPRC, RG 21.

Horace

Stranded

Pulaski Shoal

On the afternoon of May 19, 1842, 16 days after New York had gone ashore, the crews of the sloops Euphrates and Mary Washington, from Tortugas Harbor, sighted a brig aground on Pulaski Shoal. The wreckers, favored by a fair wind and sea, made the seven-mile run out to the brig in 90 minutes.

When they came aboard, they found she was the brig Horace (Capt. Andrew Scott), bound from the Port of New York to New Orleans with paving stone and miscellaneous cargo. Captain Scott told the wreckers that his vessel had gone ashore at 2 p.m. At the moment, the wind was from the NNE. Captain Scott had taken advanged of this condition to set all his sails in an effort to force Horace over the reef into deep water. The wreckers told Scott that this was a mistake and would result in the loss of this ship.

Captain Scott now asked for help. The wreckers furled the sails to keep Horace from being "worked farther onto the shoal." Next they lightened the craft by throwing several tons of paving stone overboard. By 11 p.m. they had refloated the brig, and had her in the false channel in three fathoms. On the 21st Horace was taken into deep water, and 48 hours later found her anchored in Key West Harbor.²

Rudolph Groning

Condemned and Stripped

Tortugas Harbor

Although a hurricane swept the area on September 3 and 4, 1842, no ships were wrecked in the Dry Tortugas. The first victim in 1843 was the brig Rudolph Groning (Captain Sheffield) out of the Port of New York for Apalachicola, Florida, with a cargo of general merchandise. At 2 a.m., on June 7, the brig grounded on Southwest Reef.

At daylight the wreckers, from Tortugas Harbor, sighted a brig ashore with sails set and the wind from the northwest. They reached Rudolph Groning at 6 a.m. and saw that Captain Sheffield, in attempting to force his vessel over the reef, had driven her into seven feet of water. Sheffield refused their offer of assistance. The crew then carried out a kedge. When they hove on the kedge and the vessel did not budge, Captain Sheffield at 10 a.m. called for help. On boarding, the wreckers found the rudder unshipped and broken. A consort of five wreckers (the sloops George Eldridge, Globe, Robert Bruce, Huron, and Energy) was organized and the cargo transferred.

2. Ibid., pp. 64-66.

By the 8th the cargo had been removed, but the breakers had driven the vessel higher onto the reef. The ballast was now thrown overboard, and on the 10th Rudolph Groning was heaved off Southwest Reef. The bark was taken into Tortugas Harbor the next day. Her hull had been so badly damaged that she was condemned, stripped, and abandoned.³

Rebecca

Wrecked

Dry Tortugas

In the second week of August 1843, the British schooner Rebecca (Captain Sawyer), en route from Honduras to New Orleans, was wrecked in the Dry Tortugas. Although part of the cargo was salvaged, the vessel was lost.⁴

Pilgrim

Wrecked

Garden (Bush) Key Reef

The American brig Pilgrim (Capt. W. J. Philbrook) had sailed from New Orleans for the Port of New York in early November 1843. She carried a valuable cargo of lard, whiskey, molasses, and lead. On the 17th Captain Philbrook put into Tortugas Harbor and his vessel stranded on Garden (Bush) Key Reef.

Pilgrim was sighted and boarded at 7 p.m. by the wreckers haunting Tortugas Harbor. They found the brig "on a rocky bottom, on a lee shore, with the wind blowing fresh from the east," and a heavy sea. Their initial offer of assistance was refused by Captain Philbrook.

But on the 18th Captain Philbrook had a change of heart, as his ship had been driven into shallower water and had started to leak. Already there was three feet of water in the hold. The wreckers' efforts to lighten Pilgrim were slowed by a surging surf which made it difficult to get their small boats alongside the stricken craft.

At midnight on the 18th Pilgrim bilged. The wreckers then turned to getting the cargo out of the hold and up onto the deck. By December 1 the bark had been stripped and abandoned and the cargo transshipped to Key West.⁵

Charlotte

Stranded

Dry Tortugas

Six vessels were wrecked or stranded in the Dry Tortugas in 1844. The first of these was the schooner Charlotte (Captain Best), en route

3. Ibid., pp. 160-62.

4. The Sailor's Magazine and Naval Journal, XVI, p. 63.

5. Ibid., p. 158; Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, III (1841-1846), pp. 186-87, EPRC, RG 21. Wreckers consorting to salvage the cargo of Pilgrim were: George

all the buildings and wharves were damaged by the tropical storm. The ship Atlantic was wrecked on Carysfort Reef, and the U. S. Revenue Cutter Vigilant dragged her anchor. There was no damage to shipping off the Dry Tortugas, however.⁹

About five weeks after the hurricane, the crew of the wrecker Mary Jane, anchored in Tortugas Harbor, on the evening of November 17 sighted a distress signal displayed by a vessel aground on Southwest Reef. When the wreckers reached and boarded the ship at 1 a.m., they found her to be the American bark Highlander (Captain Mabery), en route from Providence, Rhode Island, for New Orleans with a cargo of general merchandise.

The bark was stranded on a "dangerous and rocky reef with her rudder unhung and the rudder pintles gone." She was in nine feet of water, and the wind and breakers were causing the hull to thump "very heavily."

After the captain had asked for their assistance, the wreckers began bringing the cargo up out of the hold and storing it on deck, to prevent it from being damaged by salt water. At 5 p.m. on the 18th, they heaved Highlander off the reef, and, after warping her to a safe and proper distance, they anchored her for the night. On the 19th she was taken into Tortugas Harbor. After temporary repairs were made, the wreckers, on the 23d, started with the bark to Key West, where they arrived the next day.

When Captain Mabery and the wreckers were unable to agree on the amount due for salvage and expenses, a hearing was held before Judge Marvin.¹⁰

Lime Rock

Stranded

East Key

On November 20, 1844, the brig Lime Rock (Captain Ould), en route from Key West to New Orleans, sprang a leak off the Tortugas. To prevent his vessel from foundering, Captain Ould at 7 a.m., on the 21st, ran her aground on the ocean side of East Key. The seams were caulked and the bark refloated.¹¹

9. Niles' National Register, LXVI (Oct. 26, 1844), p. 67.

10. Reports of Committees, 1st Session 30th Congress, I, Rpt. 242, pp. 98-99; Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, III, pp. 205-06, EPRC, RG 21.

11. Report of Committees, 1st Session 30th Congress, I, Rpt. 242, pp. 98-99.

Zotoff

Wrecked

Southwest Reef

The ship Zotoff (Capt. John Murphy) sailed from New Orleans for Boston in the second week of December 1844, with a valuable cargo of cotton, flour, lead, sugar, molasses, and hides. On the night of the 14th she stranded on Southwest Reef.

At daylight she was sighted by two wreckers from Tortugas Harbor. When the sloops Star and Morro Castle reached Zotoff, they found her "on a rocky, and the most dangerous reef around the Tortugas, with the wind from the north, northwest, and a heavy surf." Captain Murphy called for assistance, but the ship was leaking badly. By 11 o'clock there was three feet of water in the hold and the pumps were manned. But the water continued to inch upward, and by 12:30 p.m. it had reached a depth of six feet.

Meanwhile the winds had increased in violence, and the wreckers were compelled to return to their sloops. The next morning the wind moderated. The wreckers returned, but about noon a squall swept in from the west, southwest, causing Zotoff to careen offshore. The masts were cut away, and soon after daybreak the wrecker Mary Jane came alongside and took off those remaining aboard. Within the hour the ship began to disintegrate. On the 18th wreckers from Mary Jane again approached the wreck and saved the crew's clothing.¹²

Oneco

Stranded

Northwest Reef

On March 26, 1845, wreckers in Tortugas Harbor sighted a brig ashore on Northwest Reef. When they boarded her at 8 a.m., they found her to be Oneco (Captain Smith), en route from New Orleans for the Port of New York, with 340 hogsheads of sugar, 32 puncheons of rum, and 32 barrels of molasses.

Captain Smith, on asking for assistance, explained to the wreckers that his brig had been ashore for more than four hours. She was headed northeast, her rudder was unhung, and her bottom was being pounded against the reef.

Oneco was lightened and refloated on the 28th, and taken into Tortugas Harbor. There temporary repairs were made, and on April 3 she was sailed to Key West, where she was libeled by the wreckers.¹³

12. Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, III, pp. 214-16, EPRC, RG 21.

13. Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, III, pp. 228-30, EPRC, RG 21.

J. T. Bertine

Stranded

Dry Tortugas

The schooner J. T. Bertine (Captain Brown), en route from St. Marks, Florida, for the Port of New York, stranded in the Dry Tortugas in April. She was easily refloated, and, having suffered no damage, continued on through the Straits of Florida.¹⁴

Globe

Stranded

Southwest Reef

At flood tide on the afternoon of May 18, 1845, the bark Globe (Capt. George Braziers) stranded on Southwest Reef. She was bound from the Port of New York for Apalachicola in ballast.

Wreckers, seeing a vessel in distress, put out from Tortugas Harbor in their sloops. When they boarded Globe, they found her to be on a rocky and dangerous reef. Their assistance requested by Captain Braziers, they went to work. Globe was refloated and taken to Key West. There she was condemned by Judge Marvin, and sold by the United States deputy marshal to pay the cost of salvage. Her new owner had her repaired, and she soon returned to the coastal trade.¹⁵

Victor

Stranded

Dry Tortugas

The British brig Victor, en route from Jamaica to Norfolk, Virginia, stranded in the Dry Tortugas in November 1845. She was refloated by her crew without assistance from the wreckers.¹⁶

B. D'Mar

Stranded

Dry Tortugas

In November 1845 the schooner B. D'Mar, bound from New York City to a Texas port, stranded in the Dry Tortugas. The owners of B. D'Mar were almost as fortunate as those of Victor. The captain of the schooner prevailed on one of the wreckers to assist him for \$200. After being relieved, the schooner, having suffered no damage, continued on to Texas.¹⁷

14. Reports of Committees, 1st Session 30th Congress, I, Rpt. 242, pp. 100-01.

15. Ibid.; Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, III, pp. 254-55, EPRC, RG 21.

16. Reports of Committees, 1st Session 30th Congress, I, Rpt. 242, pp. 100-01.

17. Ibid.

Moxy

Stranded

Southwest Reef

The American brig Moxy (Captain Grant), with a cargo of staves, sailed from New Orleans in late February for New Haven, Connecticut. She stranded on the night of March 3, 1846, on Southwest Reef.

She was sighted on the morning of the 4th by the wreckers, who immediately put out from Tortugas Harbor. Wreckers boarded Moxy at 7 a.m., and found that she was on the northwest section of the shoals, and that the wind was from the NNW. At the invitation of Captain Grant, the wreckers came to his assistance.

The brig was lightened and refloated. She then proceeded to Key West, where she arrived on Monday. The claims for salvage and expenses due the wreckers were adjudicated by the United States District Court. After paying \$528 in salvage and \$1,100 in expenses, Moxy was released and continued her voyage.¹⁸

Southport

Stranded

Pulaski Shoal

On the night of March 4, 1846, within less than 24 hours after Moxy had gone ashore, a vessel stranded on Pulaski Shoal. She was discovered by the wreckers at daybreak, and, on boarding her at 8 a.m., they found her to be the ship Southport.

Captain Griffith told the wreckers that his ship had been bound from Charleston to Apalachicola, Florida, with 20 tierces of rice, 226 bales of hay, and ballast. She had gone ashore at 9:30 p.m. and he needed assistance.

Southport lay broadside to Pulaski Shoal, on a hard and rocky reef, with the wind fresh out of the northeast. In a futile effort to refloat their ship, the crew had already thrown overboard 13 tons of ballast stone. With the ship grinding against the reef, there was danger she would bilge. Kedges were placed by the wreckers and additional ballast disposed of. On the 8th Southport was refloated and sailed to Key West.

Judge Marvin, after listening to testimony, awarded the wreckers \$3,500 in salvage and \$4,000 for expenses.¹⁹

18. Ibid., pp. 102-03; Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, III, pp. 311-12, EPRC, RG 21.

19. Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, Vol. III, pp. 306-08, EPRC, RG 21.

The Hurricane of October 11-12, 1846

Five months after the United States declared war on Mexico, a terrible hurricane visited death and destruction on the Florida Keys. The eye of the storm passed over Key West.

One of the ships anchored at Key West at this time was the U. S. Revenue Cutter Morris. She was en route to join the fleet operating off the east coast of Mexico. When the barometer plummeted on the morning of October 11, Capt. Green Walden had his ship anchored with fore and aft chains. By 5 a.m., with the wind and waves becoming stronger by the minute, Captain Walden had the foresail, and fore-and topsail yards lowered, and backed the bits with the deck tack. Throughout the morning Morris "labored very heavy," with her broadside to the wind.

By 2 p.m. the gale had become a hurricane. The winds and mountainous waves knocked Morris "down nearly on her beam ends." Although the pumps were manned and bailing resorted to, Captain Walden was unable to keep the sea out of the wardrooms and berth deck. To keep his ship from foundering, Walden had the mainmast cut away and two of the cannon thrown overboard.

At 4 p.m. the starboard chain parted and the cutter commenced dragging, which direction Walden knew not, as it was impossible to get a compass reading. He called to cut away the foremast. While a team of brawny sailors turned to, a powerful wave crashed down, smashing the port small boat, and sweeping the deck of everything moveable.

Morris at 5 p.m. grounded, and as she struck the port chain parted. The schooner, although lashed by wind and waves, did not break up. At daybreak on the 12th, Captain Walden was able to get his bearing: his ship had stranded on a shoal, three miles from Key West and one and one-half miles from the main channel. Nearby he saw a ship ashore on her beam ends, three brigs and three schooners ashore dismasted, one vessel sunk, and four turned turtle. All told 25 merchant vessels had been driven aground on the Florida Keys or sunk in the harbor of Key West by the hurricane. In addition, nine vessels were demasted and had to be towed into Key West for repairs. The storm for the time being compelled the wreckers to shut down operations, as most of their vessels were lost or suffered heavy damage. Strange as it seems, the hurricane of October 11-12, 1846, claimed no victims in the waters off the Dry Tortugas.²⁰

20. Walden to Secretary of the Treasury, Oct. 14, 1846, Ltrs. from Officers of Revenue Cutters, NA, RG 26; Reports of Committees, 1st Session 30th Congress, I, Rept. 242, pp. 102-05. Morris was refloated in November 1846, and, after being repaired, put to sea.

Ashore the damage caused by wind and water was even more staggering. The lighthouses at Key West and Sand Key crumbled and washed away, "not a vestige of anything like a building or foundation" remaining. Sixteen people, including the keeper and his family, who had taken refuge in the Key West station lost their lives, while six were drowned when the Sand Key tower collapsed. The foundations of the fort currently under construction at Key West were destroyed, and estimates of damage to public property placed the figure at \$300,000. In the town scarcely half a dozen buildings had roofs, and when the wind and tide were at their height, water to a depth of two feet had swept across much of the island.²¹

John Howell

Burned

At Sea

On August 1, 1847, the ship Pharsalia, en route from Liverpool to New Orleans, sighted a vessel afire. She rescued the crew which had abandoned the schooner. When they boarded Pharsalia, the sailors identified their vessel as the schooner John Howell out of the Port of New York and bound for the Dry Tortugas with a load of building materials (bricks) for the fort under construction there.²²

Persia

Stranded

Southwest Reef

The wreckers were soon back in business following the terrible hurricane. On the evening of November 8, 1847, from their station in Tortugas Harbor, the wreckers saw from the direction of Southwest Reef, a light that they presumed to be displayed by a vessel in distress. They cast off at once.

When they boarded the vessel, they found she was the brig Persia, Capt. W. S. Robbins. His ship had been bound from Manzanillo, Cuba, to Boston with a cargo of mahogany, cedar, tobacco, and honey when she had stranded on Southwest Reef. She had been making 6 knots before a fresh wind.

Captain Robbins asked for assistance. The wreckers succeeded in lightening and refloating Persia. She then made for Key West to effect repairs and have the claims for salvage and expenses adjudicated.²³

21. Walden to Secretary of the Treasury, Oct. 14, 1846, Ltrs. from Officers of Revenue Cutters, NA RG 26; Niles' National Register, LXXI (Oct. 31, 1846), p. 144; Journals of Revenue Cutters, Schooner Morris, 1846, NA, RG 26.

22. The Sailor's Magazine and Naval Journal, XX, p. 86.

23. Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, IV, pp. 71-2, EPRC, RG 21.

Canton

Wrecked

East Key

The ship Canton (Capt. J. B. Silsby) left New Orleans in late October 1848 for Liverpool. Aboard were 556 bales of cotton for British textile mills, and 3,290 barrels of flour. On the evening of November 2, the ship struck East Key Reef and bilged.

At this time there were no wreckers in Tortugas Harbor, and the first vessel to come to Canton's assistance was the U. S. schooner Activa, stationed at Dry Tortugas as a dispatch vessel. On the 3d Activa had returned to the Tortugas from Key West. After her cargo had been put ashore, the captain, **having secured permission from** the project engineer at Fort Jefferson, proceeded to the assistance of the stranded ship. Captain Silsby asked Capt. Francis Wattington of Activa to help save his cargo. Canton's crew at first refused to help, insisting that they be landed immediately. Captain Wattington, as he had only a few seamen, promised to compensate the crew of Canton if they helped his men. They agreed, provided he would land them at Garden Key.

By sundown the flour from the lower hold and a number of bales of cotton had been placed aboard Activa. Captain Wattington now told Canton's crew to get their gear and board his schooner. All did except four men who agreed to remain with the ship. Captain Silsby, being very sick, accompanied his crew. When he returned to Garden Key, Captain Wattington left seven of his sailors, in addition to the four volunteers, aboard the wreck.

Activa, after landing the survivors and salvaged cargo, returned to the wreck. Another load was taken aboard and landed, and while loading a third on the 5th, a heavy swell set in from the northwest. This endangered his vessel, so Captain Wattington put into Tortugas Harbor. As his men were exhausted by the hard work, Wattington permitted them to rest on the 6th.

23
Meanwhile Wattington had sent John Thompson and his slave, John, who had assisted in the salvage on the 3d, to Key West in a small sloop for assistance. On Tuesday, the 7th, several wreckers, having been notified by Thompson, arrived. Captain Wattington declined to consort with them, but asked them to begin saving cargo and materials. They were agreeable, and 150 bales of cotton which had been broken out were distributed aboard Savannah, Andrew Gray, Jane Eliza, Champlin, Convoy, Marion, Morro Castle, Lavinia, Sherwood, and Champlin and Lafayette. The captain and crew of Savannah then assisted the men of Activa to strip the wreck.

When the claims for salvage were brought before Judge Marvin, he limited the amount Captain Wattington and the crew of Activa were to receive. This was based on the precedent established in the wreck of Concord, when assistance was rendered by a vessel in public service.²⁴

Fidelia

Stranded

Southwest Reef

There were three wreckers (Henry W. Myers, Wm. Niles, and Jane Eliza) anchored in Tortugas Harbor on Friday, January 12, 1849. As soon as it was light, the lookouts sighted a vessel flying the distress signal on Southwest Reef.

When they boarded the craft at 7 a.m., they found she was the brig Fidelia (Capt. P. Kendrick) bound from New Orleans for Georgetown, District of Columbia, with a cargo of sugar, molasses, and lard. She had stranded during the night on a rocky, dangerous reef. With a strong wind out of the northeast and a heavy swell, the bark was pounding and grinding against the rocks. Captain Kendrick asked the wreckers for assistance, but the surf was too strong to chance bringing their sloops alongside.

About 1 a.m., on the 13th, the wind veered to the ESE, and Fidelia's bow was forced around to the west. She now began to ship water, and the pumps were manned. The wreckers were now able to bring their vessels abreast the brig, and the deck cargo was transferred. She was refloated, and taken into Tortugas Harbor, where she was anchored under the lee of Garden Kay. To prevent her from foundering, the pumps were kept going at a rate of 800 strokes per hour.

On the 16th Fidelia reached Key West, where she was repaired, and Judge Marvin held a hearing and made his award.²⁵

William Hitchcock

Wrecked

Near Garden Key

On January 20, 1849, several wreckers, having learned that a vessel was ashore near Garden Key, sailed from Key West for the Tortugas. They reached Tortugas Harbor the next day and found the ship William Hitchcock "lying on her starboard bilge." There was several feet of water in her hold.

24. Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, IV, pp. 191-97, EPRC RG 21. To assist with the salvage, Captain Wattington had secured the services of 17 of the construction gang at Fort Jefferson.

25. Ibid., pp. 227-29.

Mora

Stranded

Southwest Reef

The bark Mora (Captain Spall), en route from St. Marks for the Port of New York with a cargo of lumber, stranded on Southwest Reef at 3 a.m. on November 23, 1850. She was sighted at daybreak by the wreckers. When they approached within hailing distance, Captain Spall refused to permit them to board his vessel.

The crew jettisoned the deck cargo, and when their efforts to refloat Mora failed, Captain Spall called for the wreckers. On the 25th they heaved the bark off the reef and took her into Tortugas Harbor. From there she proceeded to Key West. There she was libeled, and, after a hearing before Judge Marvin in which claims for salvage were adjudicated, she was permitted to put to sea.³⁵

Niobe

Stranded

Dry Tortugas

On December 22, 1850, the ship Niobe (Captain Thomas), bound from Boston for New Orleans with a cargo of general merchandise, stranded in the Dry Tortugas. She was refloated by wreckers.

Captain Thomas and the wreckers having agreed on \$5,000 as the value of the service rendered, the ship was allowed to continue on to New Orleans without making a detour to Key West.³⁶

Sylphide

Wrecked

Southwest Reef

The sea was rough on the night of December 29, 1850, when the Swedish brig Sylphide (Capt. C. J. Valle), en route from New Orleans to Trieste, Austria, with a cargo of cotton bales, stranded on Southwest Reef. She was sighted and boarded by wreckers from Tortugas Harbor in the morning. As they approached, they had seen that the crew had cut away the mainmast, and Sylphide had bilged. She was resting on her starboard beam, with that rail under water.

Captain Valle and the crew, along with their personal gear, were rescued by the wreckers. In addition, they salvaged 329 bales of cotton, the rigging, sails, and navigation instruments.³⁷

35. Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, IV, pp. 467-68, EPRC, RG 21; "Report of the Officers Constituting the Light-House Board," found in House Executive Documents, Serial 624, Doc. 55, p. 492.

36. "Report of the Officers Constituting the Light-House Board," found in House Executive Documents, Serial 624, Doc. 55, p. 492.

37. Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, IV, pp. 477-78, EPRC, RG 21.

Franklin

Stranded

North Key Flat

On February 4, 1852, the bark Franklin, bound from Apalachicola, Florida, for the Port of New York with 803 bales of cotton, stranded on North Key Flat, seven and one-half miles from Tortugas Light. She was refloated by wreckers and taken to Key West, where she arrived on the evening of the 8th.³⁸

George Thomas

Stranded

Middle Key Reef

At daybreak on December 30, 1852, the wreckers anchored in Tortugas Harbor sighted a bark stranded on Middle Key Reef, five miles away, Weighting anchor, they soon came alongside and found the vessel in distress to be the bark George Thomas, bound from St. Marks, Florida, for the Port of New York with 680 bales of cotton, 30 boxes of leaf tobacco, 12 tons of scrap iron, and wool. The captain called that his vessel had struck on the windward side of the reef at midnight. She was resting with her starboard bilge on a rocky bottom.

The wreckers, after lightening the bark, refloated her at the first flood tide, on the last day of the year. George Thomas was then sailed to Key West.³⁹

Harriet and Martha

Wrecked

Dry Tortugas

On January 13, 1854, the bark Harriet and Martha stranded and bilged in the Dry Tortugas. Although the bark was lost, the wrecking schooner Wm. Chestnut was able to salvage the cargo and materials--sails, rigging, anchors, and chains.⁴⁰

Joseph H. Flanner

Stranded

Bird Key Shoal

Capt. John Lowe of the wrecking schooner Lizzy Wall on Thursday night, January 26, 1854, had anchored his vessel alongside the wreck of Harriet and Martha. Having purchased the wreck, Lowe had turned his crew to and divers had been sent down and were salvaging cargo from the hold.

38. Ibid., pp. 553-55.

39. Ibid., pp. 611-12.

40. The Sailor's Magazine and Naval Journal, XXVI, p. 244.

About 9 p.m. Captain Lowe sighted a vessel displaying the distress signal ashore on Bird Key Shoal. He called up his divers and set sail to her relief. When he boarded the vessel, he found she was the schooner Joseph H. Flanner of 240 tons. Captain Vanguilder of the schooner told the wreckers that his ship was en route from Baltimore to New Orleans, with an assorted cargo valued at \$65,000. Captain Vanguilder having declined his offer of assistance, Lowe returned to Tortugas Harbor with his vessel.

At 6 a.m. on the 27th, Captain Vanguilder had a change of heart and sent for the wreckers. Captain Lowe's craft, assisted by the wrecker Chestnut, refloated Joseph H. Flanner during the day and escorted her to Key West. After Captain Vanguilder was assessed \$6,615 for salvage by the Admiralty Court, he had his crew hoist anchor and the voyage to New Orleans was resumed.⁴¹

Amesbury

Stranded

Loggerhead Key Reef

The brig Amesbury sailed from Attakapas, Louisiana, on April 1, 1854, bound for the Port of New York with 251 hogsheads of sugar and 255 barrels of molasses. On the evening of the 20th, she was beating her way by the Dry Tortugas. Captain Gould, who was on deck, had the Tortugas Light in view. As he judged the light to be ten miles away, he was shocked when his brig struck "on the reef on the back part of Loggerhead Key."

Captain Gould tried to back his ship off but failed. Next he lightened ship by having his crew stove in the heads of 170 barrels of molasses that had been stored on deck. When his vessel remained hard aground, Captain Gould had a distress signal hoisted. It was sighted by Capt. John Williams of the wrecker Wm. Chestnut, currently based at Garden Key. The wrecker stood out of the harbor to assist Captain Gould.

On the 21st Williams and his wreckers removed 68 hogsheads of sugar and 38 barrels of molasses from Amesbury. Anchors and spring lines were run out, and the bark refloated at 10 p.m. She then proceeded to Key West, where she dropped anchor on April 23. Judge Marvin of the Admiralty Court, after reviewing the case, awarded the wreckers \$3,740 as salvage. After the claim was paid and the damage repaired, Amesbury continued on to New York City.⁴²

41. Records of the United States District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, V (1853-1857), pp. 178-79, EPRC, RG 21; Archives of the Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., 45 Wall Street, New York City, New York, V, p. 85. The wrecker Lizzy Wall displaced 88 tons and had an 11-man crew.

42. Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, V (1853-1857), EPRC, p 219, RG 21; Archives of Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., VI, pp. 69, 74, 75. The home port of Amesbury was Gardiner, Maine.

Tartar

Wrecked

East Key Reef

The brig Tartar had sailed from Charleston, South Carolina, for New Orleans in the last week of 1854, with a cargo of rice, dyewood, and peas. On the night of January 3, 1855, the brig stranded on East Key Reef.

In the morning she was sighted by Capt. Richard Roberts of the wrecker Vinyard, then lying at anchor in Tortugas Harbor. When his vessel came alongside Tartar, Captain Roberts saw that the brig was hard aground. A powerful surf baffled Captain Roberts and the crew of Vinyard, who were soon reinforced by the wreckers Florida, Frome, Champion, and Guger.

On the 5th Tartar was broadside to the reef, and the crew was taken off. The next day she bilged, and the cargo salvaged by the wreckers was landed on Long Key. Before abandoning the hulk, the wreckers removed the rigging, sails, anchors, and chains. These, along with 33 casks of rice, 100 boxes of lemons, 25 packages of dyewood, and 380 bags of peas, were taken to Key West.⁴³

Pilgrim

Stranded

Southwest Reef

The weather around the Dry Tortugas on the evening of September 4, 1855, was thick, with intermittent squalls, and "a high sea running." As chance willed it, the bark Pilgrim, bound from the Port of New York for Mobile with a cargo of general merchandise, was beating her way northwestward. Unable to get a bearing on Tortugas Light, she stranded on Southwest Reef. Captain Andros ordered a light signaling a vessel in distress hoisted.

The light was seen by the crews of two wreckers (Globe and Plume) lying at anchor in the shelter of Tortugas Harbor. Because of the heavy sea, the sloops could not beat their way out of the anchorage, and their crews headed for the vessel in distress in a long boat. They found Pilgrim broadside to the reef and being battered by a violent east wind. On the 5th the wind and sea moderated, and Globe and Plume were able to get underway. Men were sent aboard the bark, in accordance with Captain Andros' request, and she was lightened.

43. Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, V, (1853-1857), pp. 317-18, EPRC, RG 21; Archives of Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., VIII, pp. 161, 204. The value of the cargo lost, including 200 tierces of rice, was estimated at \$20,000.

On the morning of September 7, Pilgrim was refloated. She then proceeded to Key West. As her hull had been badly battered, it was feared that she might not be seaworthy. When divers examined the bottom, they reported it "much cut up" by the coral heads. But when a thorough investigation showed no leaks, Judge Marvin allowed her to continue on to Mobile on September 19, after Captain Andros had posted bonds to cover the \$9,257 claim for salvage and \$10,000 for expenses allowed the wreckers by the District Court.⁴⁴

Western Empire

Stranded

North Key Shoal

On the morning of November 8, 1855, the ship Western Empire, (Captain Winsor), en route from Liverpool to New Orleans, stranded on North Key Shoal. Captain Winsor accepted assistance from the wreckers William Pinkney and Plume. His ship was refloated on the 9th, and for this service, Captain Winsor gave the wreckers 60-day drafts on the owner--Phineas, Sprague and Co., of Boston--for \$7,000.⁴⁵

James Guthrie

Stranded

Northeast Shoal

There was a thick haze on the afternoon of March 28, 1856, as the American ship James Guthrie approached the Dry Tortugas. She had sailed from Mobile the previous week for a Spanish port, with a cargo of masts, spars, and ship timbers. She was logging seven knots when she stranded on Northeast Shoal. Seeing that his ship was hard aground in 17 feet of water and being pounded by a powerful surf, Captain Chase had the distress signal hoisted.

Capt. Winthrop Sawyer of the wrecking sloop Flying Arrow saw the ship go ashore. Putting out from Tortugas Harbor, he conned a course toward the craft in distress. Flying Arrow was anchored close under the starboard quarter of James Guthrie, in the breakers.

44. Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, V (1853-1857), pp. 380-82, EPRC, RG 21; Archives of Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., X, pp. 120, 124, 129, 133, 149. At first, it was feared that Pilgrim would have to be unloaded and pulled out of the water on the marine railway to effect repairs to the hull. The cargo removed to lighten the bark was stored in Asa F. Tift's warehouse. Asa and Nelson Tift, in 1861, contracted with the Confederate government to build at New Orleans the ill-starred ironclad Mississippi.

45. Key of the Gulf, Nov. 24, 1855.

The next morning, March 29, Captain Chase having asked for assistance, the wreckers carried out two of the ship's heaviest anchors and 175 fathoms of chain. These were positioned, and the sea having calmed on the 31st, the wreckers began lightening James Guthrie. She had taken a heavy pounding and was now leaking badly. Although the pumps were manned, there was soon five feet of water in the hold. After five masts and 30 spars were taken off, James Guthrie was heaved off the reef on April 2.

Taking cognizance of the leaks, the wreckers determined to take the ship into Tortugas Harbor. There was a close call as a squall buffeted the ship, but she finally reached a safe anchorage in the lee of Garden Key. Captain Chase then booked passage for Key West to secure the services of a tug to tow his ship there for repairs. He contracted with the master of the government tug Corwin. As the masts and spars could not be reloaded, they were sold to the United States, when Corwin towed the battered ship to Key West. There she was repaired, and Judge Marvin ruled that \$5,128 was reasonable compensation for the salvage service: \$3,500 was allotted to Flying Arrow and \$1,628 to Corwin.⁴⁶

Lady Arbella

Stranded

Bird Key Shoal

The ship Lady Arbella, Capt. John Merrill master, sailed from Bordeaux, France, on August 29, 1856. She was en route for New Orleans, with a valuable cargo of wines, cordials, brandies, and china. Ten weeks later found her entering the Gulf of Mexico. At 4 p.m. Captain Merrill sighted Tortugas Lighthouse, several miles to the west. Moments later, his ship struck and grounded on the eastern fringe of Bird Key Shoal.

There were two wrecking sloops, Plume and Globe, anchored in Tortugas Harbor. The lookouts saw Lady Arbella aground, and at 6 p.m. they got underway. The wind at this time was from the northeast, and as the sloops neared the ship, they encountered a "heavy swell." When hailed by Capts. John Parke of Plume and William Greene of Globe, Captain Merrill declined to accept their offers of assistance.

46. Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, V (1853-1857), pp. 526-529, EPRC, KG 21; Archives of Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., XII, pp. 95, 142. Eight men employed on the construction of Fort Jefferson assisted the crew of Flying Arrow in freeing James Guthrie from the reef. The point where the ship stranded was seven miles northeast of Tortugas Light.

On the morning of the 9th, Captain Merrill found that the seams of his ship had been started by the pounding against the rocky bottom. With his vessel leaking badly, he invited the wreckers to come aboard, help man the pumps, and lighten Lady Arbella. One hundred tons of cargo were removed, and the vessel winched off the reef. She was taken, leaking badly, to Key West, where she anchored on November 13.⁴⁷

Isaac Carver

Stranded

Tortugas Harbor

The brig Isaac Carver, Captain Partridge, as she was entering Tortugas Harbor on November 12, 1856, grounded on a shoal. She was hauled off by the crew of the sloop Dolphin. Judge Marvin ruled that the sailors were entitled to \$600 for their assistance.⁴⁸

Philiah

Stranded

Flapjack Shoals

A number of vessels came to grief in the Dry Tortugas in 1857. The first to do so was the American bark Philiah. Capt. William Spofford, a sea dog from Rockland, Maine, had sailed from New Orleans on April 25, aboard his vessel with 728 bales of cotton and 400 hogsheads of tobacco. His destination was the Swedish port of Goteborg. Philiah stranded on Flapjack Shoals at 2 a.m. on Wednesday, May 6.

She was boarded soon after daybreak by wreckers from the sloops Belle of the Cape, Bride, Plume, and Globe, which had been anchored in Tortugas Harbor. Captain Spofford at first rejected their offers of assistance.

During the next 24 hours his efforts to free Philiah failed and she took a fearful pounding from the surf. She began to leak badly, her rudder brace was torn away, and she careened to port. Spofford called for help. Soundings made by the wreckers showed that at high tide there was 9 feet of water aft and 10 feet of water forward. As Philiah drew 14 feet, it meant that she would have to be lightened, and the four feet of water pumped out of her hold.

47. Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, V (1853-1857), pp. 643-44, EPRC, RG 21; Archives of Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., XIII, p. 274.

48. Archives of Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., XIII, p. 274.

While additional men were ordered to the pumps, the rest of the wreckers turned to lightening Philiah. After 24 hours' hard work, the bark was refloated at first flood tide on May 8 and sailed to Key West. An examination by divers showed that Philiah's hull had been badly strained and chafed and her keel was gone. She therefore was compelled to lay to at Key West for weeks, while the underwriters made arrangements for repairs and settled claims for salvage.⁴⁹

Pacific

Wrecked

East Key Reef

The bark Pacific, Capt. Charles F. Gardner, en route from the Port of New York for Mobile with a cargo of general merchandise, stranded on East Key Reef. It was 11 p.m. on July 24, 1857, when she came ashore. Shortly after daybreak, the sloops Globe and Elisha Beckwith put out from Tortugas Harbor to her assistance.

Coming alongside, they saw that Pacific was on a rocky irregular bottom, about four and one-half miles east of Tortugas Light, "which bore from her west by south half south." The wind was fresh out of the east, and Captain Gardner had turned his sailors to lightening ship. When they boarded the bark, the wreckers found the deck littered with boxes, chests, barrels, and bales. The pumps were manned, but the water continued to inch higher in the hold.

By 2 a.m. on the 25th, the water inside Pacific was level with the surf, and the pumps were deserted. With the wind getting stronger and waves sweeping over the vessel, fore and aft, she was abandoned. The wreckers, however, were able to save and bring to Key West for adjudication much of the cargo, along with her sails, rigging, anchors, and chains.

Judge Marvin, on investigating the wreck, found that the property saved was valued at \$29,776.76. He ruled that the wreckers were

49. Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, V (1853-1857), pp. 685-88, EPRC, RG 21; Archives of Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., XV, pp. 221, 226. The captains or the wreckers were: Michael McNamara of Belle of the Cape, Lemuel Parke of Bride, Stephen Gillet of Plume, and Peter Stout of Globe.

entitled to \$10,416.61. As soon as this claim was settled by the underwriters, the cargo was sent aboard the steamer General Rusk for transshipment to New Orleans.⁵⁰

Arlington

Stranded

Southwest Reef

Before daybreak on August 2, 1857, the 248-ton schooner Arlington, Capt. William Munch, went ashore at spring tide on Southwest Reef. The vessel, which was bound from the Port of New York for Mobile with a cargo of general merchandise, was logging six knots when she stranded.

Capt. John Parke of the sloop Elisha Beckwith went to the assistance of Arlington as soon as it was light. He found the schooner resting on her larboard bilge, on a coral reef, with the "wind and sea heavy from the southeast." Arlington's bottom was pounding against the coral with great violence.

Captain Munch called for assistance, and it was apparent to Captain Parke that there was no time to spare. While he put his crew to work lightening the schooner, he sent to Tortugas Harbor for help. The United States schooner Tortugas, with a number of men employed on the fort, and the boat Truxton put out.

On the morning of August 5, Arlington was refloated, and, leaking badly, escorted to Key West. A survey of her hull showed that it had sustained "considerable injury," and the schooner would have to undergo temporary repairs before resuming her voyage to Mobile.

Judge Marvin, when he heard the case, found that the underwriters valued Arlington and her cargo at \$110,000. Before releasing the schooner, he awarded the wreckers \$4,710 in salvage and \$637.40 for expenses.⁵¹

50. Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, VI (1857-1862), pp. 1-7, EPRC, RG 21; Archives of the Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., XVI, p. 59. Philip Fontane captained Globe on this mission and John Parke Elisha Beckwith. The damaged cargo, in accordance with procedures, was sold by the U. S. marshal at Key West.

51. Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, VI (1857-1862), pp. 12-13, EPRC, RG 21; Archives of Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., XVI, pp. 50, 59; The Sailors' Magazine and Naval Journal, XXXVIII, pp. 232-34; Hunt's Merchants' Magazine, XXXVIII (July to Dec. 1857), pp. 232-34.

Cassandra

Stranded

Dry Tortugas

The schooner Cassandra, L. V. Merrill master, bound from Franklin, Louisiana, for Plymouth stranded on the Dry Tortugas in October 1857. Captain Merrill and his crew refloated their schooner without assistance from the wreckers.⁵²

E. Remington

Stranded

North Key Reef

Capt. William Jones left St. Marks, Florida, on November 8, 1857, with his vessel--the brig E. Remington. The brig was bound for the Port of New York, with 1,006 bales of cotton and other merchandise. Within 24 hours of her sailing, all the crew except the first mate and cook were stricken with a virus.

It was impossible to turn back, and the bark continued southward "under a heavy press of sail." The weather on the morning of the 11th was hazy, and, as she was running before a strong wind, she went ashore on North Key Reef.

A distress signal was run up. At 11 a.m. the sloops Globe, Plume, and L. Burrows, and the schooner Truxton, having stood out from Tortugas Harbor, reached E. Remington. The bark, with most of her crew sick, was in a bad way. She was being pounded by the breakers, and already her rudder had been smashed. Captain Jones called for the wreckers to come aboard. After 116 bales of cotton were removed, the bark was refloated on the 12th and taken to Key West.

Although E. Remington had taken a fearful pounding, her seams had held and she did not leak. After a new rudder was secured, and Judge Marvin had awarded \$6,200 in salvage and \$1,260 in expenses, the bark, her captain and crew having recovered, was allowed to proceed.⁵³

Sarah

Stranded

Dry Tortugas

The ship Sarah, Captain Judkins, en route to Fort Jefferson with supplies, went ashore in Tortugas Harbor in November 1857. She was refloated at an expense of \$500 to the underwriters.⁵⁴

52. Hunt's Merchants' Magazine, XXXVIII (July to Dec. 1857), pp. 232-34.

53. Ibid.; Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, VI (1857-1862), pp. 23-9, EPRC, RG 21; Archives of Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., Vol. XVI, p. 265.

54. Hunt's Merchants' Magazine, XXXVIII (July to Dec. 1857), pp. 232-34.

A. H. Manchester

Stranded

Dry Tortugas

A third vessel encountered trouble in the Dry Tortugas during the month. She was the schooner A. H. Manchester, bound from Matagorda Bay, Texas, to the Port of New York. The schooner grounded, but the captain was able to get her refloated for \$100.⁵⁵

West Wind

Stranded

Entrance to Tortugas Harbor

The bark West Wind, Captain Saunders, en route to the Dry Tortugas with construction materials for Fort Jefferson, grounded in December 1857 at the entrance to Tortugas Harbor. She was lightened and refloated by the government schooner Tortugas.⁵⁶

A. P. Howe

Stranded

Tortugas Harbor

December 1857 was an embarrassing month for captains of vessels transporting brick and other building materials for Fort Jefferson. The schooner A. P. Howe, Captain Tilbery, reached Tortugas Harbor with a cargo of brick from Pensacola. She grounded but was relieved by a government transport at no cost to the underwriters.⁵⁷

Flommefect

Demasted

Off Dry Tortugas

The schooner Flommefect, en route from Pensacola to Dry Tortugas with a cargo of brick, encountered a storm. Flommefect was demasted in December 1857, but Captain String and his crew rode out the gale and saved their vessel and her cargo.⁵⁸

R. H. Gamble

Stranded

East Key Shoal

On March 5, 1858, the bark R. H. Gamble (Captain Powell), bound from the Port of New York for St. Marks with a cargo of general merchandise, grounded on East Key Shoal. She was refloated, without assistance, at the first flood tide and continued on to St. Marks. In getting off the reef, she lost two of her anchors.⁵⁹

55. Ibid.

56. Ibid.

57. Ibid.

58. Ibid.

59. Key of the Gulf, March 6, 1858.

S. B. James

Stranded

North Key Shoal

The schooner S. B. James, Captain Clark, had sailed from the Port of New York for Mobile, with a cargo of general merchandise valued at \$20,000. She grounded on North Key Shoal on the night of April 17, 1858. Captain Clark relieved his vessel without having to call on the wreckers and sailed on to Mobile.⁶⁰

Isaac H. Davis

Stranded

Bird Key Shoal

On August 9, 1858, the bark Isaac H. Davis out of Philadelphia, bound for New Orleans, with a valuable cargo grounded on Bird Key Shoal. She "beat over the reef," getting clear without help.⁶¹

Martha Gilchrist

Wrecked

North Key Shoal

Not so fortunate was the brig Martha Gilchrist. The brig commanded by Capt. Edward Rawley sailed from Pensacola in mid-December 1858, with 180,000-brick consigned to the engineer in charge of construction at Fort Jefferson. Two days after she sailed, she sprang a leak and the pumps were manned.

By Sunday afternoon, the 19th, Martha Gilchrist, although there was four feet of water in her hold, approached Northwest Channel. Here she hove to and, while awaiting the arrival of a pilot from Garden Key, drifted onto North Key Shoal. With her heavy cargo, she bilged almost immediately.

Wreckers anchored in Tortugas Harbor saw that she was in distress and weighed anchor. When the wreckers--the sloop Elisha Beckwith and schooner Hermitage--reached Martha Gilchrist, they found her abandoned by her crew and resting on the bottom, with her sails "partly loose and flying." The wreckers removed the sails and rigging, which they brought into Key West along with Captain Rowley and his crew.⁶²

60. Hunt's Merchants' Magazine, XLI (July to Dec. 1859), p. 354.

61. Ibid.

62. Captain Rawley had been accompanied on his last voyage aboard Martha Gilchrist by his wife and three children. The part of North Key Reef on which the bark stranded was northeast by north of the Tortugas Light.

The wreckers realized very little from Martha Gilchrist. The sails, rigging, anchors, and chains were sold by R. L. Hicks on order from Judge Marvin. The money realized, \$816.26, was awarded to the captains and crews of Elisha Beckworth and Hermitage.⁶³

Governor Brown

Stranded

Dry Tortugas

In the first week of 1859, the brig Governor Brown, Captain Axworthy, sailed from the Port of New York for Tortugas Harbor. Like West Wind and A. P. Howe, she stranded after reaching her destination. She was refloated on January 21 by Tortugas, and, after discharging her cargo of brick, left the area.⁶⁴

Silas Holmes

Stranded

East Key Shoal

The ship Silas Holmes (Captain Griffin), en route from the Port of New York to New Orleans with a cargo of general merchandise, stranded on the morning of December 2, 1859, on East Key Shoal. She was lightened and refloated by wreckers, who were paid \$4,000 for their services.

She then proceeded into Tortugas Harbor, where the cargo was reloaded. As she was leaving the harbor for New Orleans, Silas Holmes stranded in Northwest Channel. She was refloated. Silas Holmes, however, had sailed under an ill omen, because within 30 hours she encountered a squall and foundered, drowning all but six of her passengers and crew.⁶⁵

Delphos

Stranded

Southwest Key Shoal

The bark Delphos, Capt. J. W. Gill, left Boston on March 28, 1860, for New Orleans with a cargo of paving stones, furniture, and gurnsey cloth, valued at \$85,000. She grounded on the evening of April 18 on the southwest point of Southwest Key Shoal.

Delphos was sighted the next morning by wreckers, who put out from Tortugas Harbor. They found the bark stranded in 13 feet of water on a rocky bottom. Her keel was being pounded against the shoal.

63. Ibid.; Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, VI (1857-1862), pp. 230-231, EPRC, RG 21; Archives of Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., XIX, pp. 173-175.

64. Hunt's Merchants' Magazine, XLI (July to Dec. 1859), p. 352.

65. Key of the Gulf, Dec. 10, 1859.

Captain Gill having called for help, the wreckers began to lighten Delphos, she having a draft of 16 feet. They were assisted by workmen from Fort Jefferson.

On the 20th anchors were carried out and set, and the bark freed and taken into Tortugas Harbor. On the 21st Captain Gill took passage for Key West to consult with the agent of his underwriters. There he made arrangements to have the salvage claim adjudicated, and returned to Garden Key with a steam pump.

After the hold was pumped out, Delphos was sailed to Key West to have her seams recaulked and her keelson replaced. She then resumed her interrupted voyage.⁶⁶

Cerro Gordo

Wrecked

Southwest Reef

The ship Cerro Gordo (George York master) departed New Orleans for Queenstown, Ireland, on October 7, 1860. Aboard were 1,870 bales of cotton. At 4 p.m. on the 13th, the watch sighted Loggerhead Light, its bearing ESE at a distance estimated at 18 miles. The wind being from the NNE, Captain York, planning to pass to the east of the Dry Tortugas, ordered "haul up mainsail and haul on the wind to the eastward."

By 7 p.m. darkness had closed in. The weather was hazy and thick, and the lookout lost sight of the light. An hour later, the watch called that there were breakers off the port bow, distance about three-quarters of a mile. Captain York bellowed for the helm to be put "hard up," while the yards were squared and the spanker sheet released. Cerro Gordo, however, failed to respond, and she continued "to come to the windward," striking on the southwest point of Southwest Reef. There she remained throughout the night.

Capt. Thomas Franklin of the sloop Elisha Beckwith, from Tortugas Harbor, sighted the ship the next morning, Saturday, October 13. He took his vessel out and offered to assist Captain York to refloat Cerro Gordo. York refused. While the wrecker returned to the anchorage, York had his crew run out an anchor, with which they hoped to heave their ship off the reef. To complicate their efforts, a gale from the NNW now roared in, bringing heavy seas. On the night of the 14th Cerro Gordo bilged.

66. Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, VI (1857-1862), pp. 489-93, EPRC, RG 21; Archives of Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., XXIII, p. 150.

Captain York now signaled for help. Elisha Beckwith and Grover King responded. When they arrived, the wreckers found the hulk on the gulf side of the reef, heading southeast, and the surf breaking over her. The wrecker turned to saving cargo. Six other sloops soon arrived and were admitted as consorts. The wreckers, before abandoning the hulk, were able to save 648 bales of cotton, along with the rigging, anchors, and sails. These were taken to Key West.⁶⁷

Trinidad

Derelict

16 Miles Southeast of Ft. Jeffers

On Monday afternoon, September 24, 1860, Capt. John Wilson left Fort Jefferson aboard his vessel--the United States Schooner Tortugas--with the mail for Key West. At 10 p.m., about 16 miles southeast of the Dry Tortugas, the watch sighted a **demasted hulk drifting in the Gulf Stream**. Captain Wilson had a small boat lowered, and, boarding the hulk, found her to be the Spanish schooner Trinidad. Her masts, rigging, chains, and anchors were gone; her hatches uncovered; and her holds filled with water.

Securing a six-inch hawser from Tortugas, Wilson took the schooner in tow and returned to Fort Jefferson, where he arrived about daybreak on the 25th. When Trinidad's holds were examined, they were found to contain casks of wines and boxes of preserves. After the holds were pumped out, the hatches were closed.

In the weeks between September 25 and October 21, Captain Wilson employed Tortugas to shuttle Trinidad's cargo to Key West, where it was delivered to the United States deputy marshal. Wilson in November towed the hulk to Key West, and filed a claim for salvage.⁶⁸

67. Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, Vol. VI (1857-1862), pp. 529-35, EPRC, RG 21; Archives of Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., XXIV, pp. 213, 257.

68. Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, VI (1857-1862), pp. 568-73, EPRC, RG 21. Trinidad displaced about 80 tons, and the sale of her cargo netted \$1,909.11.

VIII. VESSELS IN DISTRESS IN THE DRY TORTUGAS, 1861-1900

Pike

Stranded

North Key Flats

Although Louisiana had seceded from the United States on January 26, 1861, and the Civil War was about to engulf the country, commercial ties between the states of the Deep South and northern ports continued until after President Abraham Lincoln's declaration of a blockade in late April.

The schooner Pike departed New Orleans at the end of January, bound for Boston with a cargo of molasses and cotton. On the night of February 4, the 337-ton schooner stranded on North Key Flats.

She was sighted from Tortugas Harbor soon after daybreak by the sloops Usquepang, Rattler, and Grover King. When they reached the schooner, they saw Capt. Samuel Crawford and his crew lightening ship by stoving in casks of molasses stored on deck and jettisoning the contents. When called on for assistance by Captain Crawford, the wreckers found that Pike had been driven far up onto the shoal, and that the breakers were rolling heavily. Their efforts to refloat her, however, were successful, and she was taken to Key West.¹

L. R. Mallory

Stranded

Middle Key Shoals

Fort Jefferson was one of the three forts in the South that the United States did not abandon. As such, it became an important base for the fleet blockading the Gulf Coast of the Confederacy. A large garrison was posted there, and provided troops in the closing months of the war for raids on the Florida coast.²

One of the vessels chartered by the United States to transport soldiers to Fort Jefferson was L. R. Mallory. Departing from the Port of New York, the steamer reached the Dry Tortugas on Sunday morning, March 9, 1862. As she was entering Tortugas Harbor, she stranded on Middle Key Shoals.

1. Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, Vol. VI (1857-1862), pp. 625-27, EPRC, RG 21.

2. Edwin C. Bearss, "Federal Expedition Against Saint Marks Ends at Natural Bridge," The Florida Historical Quarterly, XIV (April 1967), pp. 369-90.

Four wreckers--Grover King, Wanderer, Cambridge, and Archelous--put out from Tortugas Harbor, reaching the ship at 9 a.m. The captain asked the wreckers to take off the troops and their gear and land them at Fort Jefferson. One hundred soldiers boarded Wanderer, 130 Grover King, and 50 each Cambridge and Archelous. The wreckers then returned and heaved L. R. Mallory off the shoal.

When they brought the case before Judge Marvin, who had remained loyal to the United States, he awarded the wreckers expenses for landing the troops and refloating the ship.³

Atlanta

Wrecked

Flapjack Shoal

Key West, like Fort Jefferson and the Dry Tortugas, was held throughout the Civil War by the Union. Judge Marvin and most of the court functionaries remained loyal, and the United States District Court for the Southern District of Florida remained open. With an ever-tightening blockade of the Confederacy, the court's docket reflected this situation. There were few claims for salvage as most of the wreckers entered the Union navy, while a few sought employment on blockade runners. Most of the court's business was the adjudication of prizes--ships captured by blockaders of the United States Navy and brought into Key West. In the period March 1862 until April 1865, the District Court heard no case involving salvage of a vessel stranded or wrecked in the Dry Tortugas. Vessels going ashore there in this period were relieved by government ships, and the expenses involved and salvage secured were too small to warrant a claim.⁴

It was April 6, 1865, three days before Gen. Robert E. Lee surrendered his Army of Northern Virginia at Appomattox Court House, before another stranding occurred in the Dry Tortugas serious enough to involve an appearance in the District Court. The brig Atlanta (Capt. Jonathan Dow) of 400 tons had sailed from Philadelphia on March 15, with a cargo of coal for New Orleans. Thirteen days later, near the Great Isaacs in the Bahamas, she fell in with the ship Conqueror, ashore and bilged. Conqueror, Capt. Charles Boutelle, had been en route to Pensacola from the Port of New York when she struck a rock near North Breakers.

3. Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, Vol. VI (1857-1862) pp. 752-57, EPRC, RG 21.

4. Diary of Harrison B. Herrick of Granby, Oswego County, New York, files Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation, NPS.

Captain Dow came to the assistance of Conqueror. The captain and crew, along with the rigging and sails, were taken aboard Atlanta, and on April 1 she resumed her passage through the Straits of Florida.

About 3 p.m. on April 4, as the brig was passing to the east of the Dry Tortugas, she stranded on Flapjack Shoal, to the northwest of East Key. Soundings showed that Atlanta was hard aground in 13 1/3 feet of water. When no assistance was forthcoming, Captain Boutelle volunteered to take a small boat and several sailors and row to Fort Jefferson.

It was late Thursday afternoon, the 6th, when Boutelle reached Garden Key. As there were no wreckers in port, he boarded the United States mail schooner moored at the Fort Jefferson wharf. Boutelle told Capt. David Ellis of the misfortune encountered by Atlanta and of the loss of Conqueror. The next morning, the 7th, Captain Ellis cast off in Tortugas. When they reached the brig, they found that she had bilged. The wreck was full of water, heading southeast, with a fresh wind out of the east and a heavy sea.

After rescuing Captain Dow and the crews of Atlanta and Conqueror, the brig was stripped of her sails, rigging, and anchors. On the 8th Tortugas, taking in tow two of Atlanta's boats, started for Key West, where she docked and landed the survivors and salvaged materials on the 10th.⁵

Mattey E. Tabor

Stranded

Pulaski Shoal

Although a hurricane pounded the Florida Keys in late October 1865, the Dry Tortugas were well west of the eye, and no vessels came to grief in that area. For the next three and one-half years, the wreckers, although the United States was again at peace, found little business in the Dry Tortugas. The few vessels stranding during these years were either relieved by government vessels or the expense and salvage were too slight to warrant an appearance in the United States District Court at Key West.

5. Ibid.; Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, Vol. VII (1862-1865), pp. 664-69, EPRC, RG 21; Archives of Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co.; Vol. XL, p. 158.

On March 17, 1869, there were three sloops--Restless, Grover King, and F. O. Bwoke--anchored in Tortugas Harbor. Soon after daybreak, the lookouts sighted a vessel flying a distress signal on Pulaski Shoal. When they reached the vessel, the wreckers found that she was the schooner Mattey Tabor, bound from the Port of New York to New Orleans, with a cargo of guano and coffee. Capt. L. P. Cook asked the wreckers for assistance, explaining that his ship had stranded during the night, and that efforts of his crew to get the vessel off had been futile.

The wreckers saw that Mattey Tabor was "hard and fast ashore ... upon the reef of sharp rocks, surrounded by other reefs and shoals." She was broadside to Pulaski Reef, heading NNW, with the wind "pressing her ashore." To lighten the schooner, the wreckers took off and stowed aboard their craft 120 bags of coffee and 71 sacks of guano. On the 18th at flood tide, Mattey Tabor was heaved off the reef and taken to Key West.

An investigation showed that the schooner had suffered very little damage. The District Court, after learning that the value of the cargo had been appraised at \$73,563, awarded the wreckers nine per cent as their share, in addition to \$7,219.40 for expenses. These charges having been paid, Mattey Tabor sailed for New Orleans on March 25.⁶

Angie Amsbury

Stranded

North Key Shoals

A second vessel stranded on the Dry Tortugas before the end of March 1869. On the night of the 28th, the schooner Angie Amsbury, en route from Boston to Mobile with ice, grounded on North Key Shoals. She was sighted the next morning by the crew of Isaac Washington.

It was 11 a.m. when the wrecker reached the schooner. Capt G. W. Rogers and his crew were lightening ship, and he declined an offer of assistance. By mid-afternoon 25 tons of ice had been brought up on deck and thrown overboard. A squall now blew up, and Captain Rogers, despairing of saving his vessel, at 5 p.m. called on Capt. Francis A. Brooks of Isaac Washington for help. Anchors were taken out and set by the wreckers, and at 11 p.m. they refloated Angie Amsbury.

6. Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, VIII (1865-1870), pp. 515-21, EPRC, RG 21; Archives of Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., LXI, pp. 30, 36.

The schooner and the wrecker then sailed to Key West. On April 1 the case was heard in Admiralty Court, and the parties having agreed that the vessel and cargo were worth \$23,000, the judge awarded the captain and crew of Isaac Washington six per cent salvage, after deducting \$100 for court costs.⁷

Maria Ferguson

Wrecked

Southwest Key Reef

The British brig Maria Ferguson was a proud ship, a little more than one year old, when she sailed from Mobile for Liverpool in the second week of January 1870. Aboard, besides Captain Gormley and the crew, were 850 bales of cotton. On the night of the 18th, the Britisher "stranded near Loggerhead Lighthouse on the southwest spit." Many mariners considered this the most dangerous area in the Dry Tortugas, because of the "huge boulders and heads of brain coral" lying just below the surface.

Because of the presence of these hazards, the vessel's bottom was stove in as the surf pounded against her hull. The first craft to reach the stricken bark was the smack Fulton, but she was too small to salvage much cargo. Captain Gormley accordingly took passage aboard her to Fort Jefferson. There he succeeded in obtaining the assistance of the government schooner Matchless. She was able to remove 156 bales of cotton from the bilged bark. Five wreckers--Chieftain, Champion, Invincible, Liberty, and Nonpareil--arrived on the 22d and joined the consortium. Before the wreckers left the hulk, they had salvaged most of the cargo, along with Maria Ferguson's sails, rigging, chains, and anchors.⁸

Somers and M. D. Scull

Shipping Water

Tortugas Harbor

The schooner Somers and M. D. Scull was en route from Indianola, Texas, for the Port of New York in May 1872. She sprang a leak, so Capt. L. S. Steelman put into Tortugas Harbor on the 13th. The only other vessel in the anchorage at this time was the pilot boat Invincible.

7. Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, VIII (1865-1870), pp. 528-33, EPRC, RG 21; Archives of Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., Vol. LXI, p. 91.

8. Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, X (1870-1874), pp. 439-40, EPRC, RG 21; Archives of Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., LXXIV, pp. 73, 94, 139, 150.

Captain Steelman boarded Invincible and told Capt. Graham Lester that unless he secured a steam pump his vessel would founder. In reply to Steelman's request, Lester agreed to take him to Key West. They reached Key West on the morning of the 14th, and by 4 p.m. a steam pump and several tons of coal had been placed aboard Invincible.

The pilot boat was back at Tortugas Harbor the next morning. Assisted by a working party from Fort Jefferson, the crew transferred the pump and coal to Somers and M. D. Scull. While the pump was started and the bilges pumped, 18 bales of cotton and a large number of hides that had been unloaded from the schooner and stored on the Fort Jefferson wharf were sent aboard Invincible. The two vessels sailed for Key West on the 17th, reaching there the next morning. While the claim for salvage were being adjusted, the hides were landed and dried on Boca Grandes and the schooner's hull caulked.⁹

Sonora

Wrecked

Pulaski Shoal

On Sunday morning, December 22, 1872, the wrecker Mary E. Hoxie of 31 tons (Capt. W. S. Chesebro) sighted a vessel aground on Pulaski Shoal, with the United States flag flapping from the mizzenmast with the union down. On boarding the vessel, which had bilged, Chesebro was hailed by Capt. T. B. Glover of Bath, Maine.

Glover explained that his ship, the schooner Sonora, had been bound from Apalachicola to Cardenas, Cuba, when she had stranded the previous evening. Her cargo was yellow pine, he continued. The wind was fresh out of the NNE, and with breakers sweeping the decks of Sonora, it was impossible at this time to do more than rescue the master and crew. After they were taken aboard, Mary E. Hoxie anchored in lee of East Key and rode out the storm.

The wind had died and the sea was calm on the 23d, so the wreckers returned to Pulaski Shoal and removed the sails and rigging from the hulk. These were taken to Key West and sold by court order for salvage.¹⁰

9. Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, X (1870-1874), pp. 243-46, EPRC, RG 21; Archives of Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., LXXXVIII, pp. 237, 277.

10. Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, X (1870-1874), pp. 370-75, EPRC, RG 21; Records of Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., Vol. XCV, pp. 37, 39, 201.

West Darby

Stranded

East Key Reef

The British ship West Darby of 914 tons sailed from Mobile for Liverpool on January 2, 1873, with 2,240 bales of cotton. On the night of the 4th she grounded on East Key Reef, as Capt. Thomas Uran conned a course east of the Dry Tortugas.

She was sighted the next morning by several wreckers from Tortugas Harbor. At 7 a.m. West Darby was boarded by Capts. Fernando Pass of the sloop Chief, Calvin Parke of Relief, and Isaac Worthington of In Time. The ship at this hour was stranded on the reef, heading southwest, with a moderate east wind. As soundings showed that she was ashore in 13 feet of water, Captain Uran, knowing that his ship drew 17 feet, requested assistance of the wreckers. No time was lost, and the crews were turned to lightening ship.

Captain Uran on the 7th reached Key West aboard In Time, with 50 bales of cotton. Meanwhile other wreckers had arrived at the site of the stranding. By Wednesday, the 8th, 400 cotton bales had been removed from West Darby. She had been lightened considerably, and while the United States Revenue Cutter Northerner towed her head into the wind, the wreckers crowded on sail, and West Darby was forced off the reef. She then proceeded to Key West.

An investigation by a diver demonstrated that her bottom was in good condition, except for the false keel. But before the cotton could be reloaded and salvage and expenses adjudicated, a fire was discovered aboard West Darby on January 17. The deck was cut, water pumped into the hold, and the blaze extinguished. About 50 bales of cotton were found to have been damaged. When a charred stick was found thrust into a bale of cotton under a ventilator, it was decided that the fire was caused by an arsonist.¹¹

Stephen S. Lee

Derelict

20 Miles West of Tortugas

The American schooner S. S. Lee of 183 tons had sailed from Cedar Keys, Florida, in the second week of November 1874, bound for New York City with a cargo of yellow pine and cedar. She encountered a terrible gale on the 15th, west of the Dry Tortugas. She was thrown

11. Records of the U. S. District Court of Key West, Admiralty Records, X (1870-1874), pp. 287-88, EPRC, RG 21; Archives of the Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., XCV, pp. 207, 226, 249, 272, 276. West Darby had been launched in Liverpool in 1865. Other wreckers assisting in refloating the ship were Restless (Capt. Russell Latham), Science (Capt. Sylvester Perez), and Invincible (Capt. Graham Lester).

on her beam, and to right his vessel, Capt. Charles H. Praetorus had his crew cut away the masts. She now became a derelict at the mercy of winds and sea.

On the 20th the ship, leaking badly, was abandoned by Captain Praetorus and his six sailors. They were taken aboard the bark Minerva, 20 miles west of the Dry Tortugas, and taken to Key West.

Within 24 hours, the derelict, the weather having moderated, was sighted six miles west of Sand Key and taken in tow by the wreckers Mary, Junietta, and Apace. The hull, "full of water and masts cut away," was towed into Key West on the 24th.¹²

William M. Jones

Wrecked

Pulaski Shoal

The wreckers found the next 26 months off the Dry Tortugas a bore. Although a hurricane pounded the area on September 12-14, 1875, there were no strandings or wrecks on the Tortugas reefs, though two vessels--the brig Sparkling Water and the schooner St. Marys--foundered to the west and northwest. It was the first month of 1877 before another vessel came ashore in the area.

On January 24 the American three-masted schooner William M. Jones of 374.81 tons stranded on Pulaski Shoal. She was bound from New Orleans for New York City with 1,246 barrels of molasses, 87 hogsheads of sugar, and 670 bags of rice.

Capt. John M. Buckley of the fishing smack Rio saw that the vessel was in difficulty. Weighing anchor, Rio put out from Tortugas Harbor. She reached William M. Jones at 4:30 p.m., and found the seven-man crew jettisoning cargo. The three-master was stranded on the outer part of the shoal, heading southeast by south, with a wind fresh out of the north. Capt. J. Davis told Captain Buckley that his ship had been ashore since 2:30 p.m., and blamed atmospheric conditions for his difficulties, as the afternoon haze made a distance of five miles appear as ten.

12. Wreck Reports for Key West, Dec. 31, 1873-Jan. 4, 1882, I, p. 17, National Archives, RG 26: Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, X (1870-1874), pp. 651-57, RG 21; Archives of the Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., CVII, pp. 190, 207. Stephen S. Lee had reached Cedar Keys from Galveston, Texas, on October 2, 1874. Mary was a pilot boat, while Junietta and Apace were fishermen.

During the night, the wind increased and William M. Jones bilged. Captain Buckley now turned his people to saving provisions and furnishings. But by 2 p.m. they had to stop, as huge waves began to break over the wreck. All hands were compelled to go aboard Rio, and she beat her way back into Tortugas Harbor, where Captain Davis and his sailors were landed at Fort Jefferson.

The winds had died and the sea had calmed by January 30. On that day Rio returned to the wreck and salvaged the rigging, sails, and chains. During the next week a number of fishing craft, which doubled as wreckers, converged on the hulk and successfully salvaged and carried to Key West part of William M. Jones' cargo.¹³

Henry J. May

Wrecked

Southwest Reef

Within three weeks the Tortugas had claimed another victim. On February 12, 1875, the three-masted schooner Henry J. May of 392.25 tons stranded on Southwest Reef. She had sailed from Brashear City, Louisiana, the previous week for New York City, with 473 hogsheads of sugar and 327 barrels of molasses. It was 4:30 a.m. when the vessel grounded in bad weather. Henry J. May bilged immediately. As the deck was above water, Capt. Elmer E. Blackman and his six sailors remained with the hulk.

At daybreak the crew of the fishing schooner Wallace Blackford, from Tortugas Harbor, sighted a vessel in distress on the reef six miles away. When the fishermen reached the wreck, Captain Blackman told them that his vessel had stranded at 4:30 a.m. She lay on "a hard and rocky bottom, headed southwest," with the sea breaking over her. The lighthouse on Loggerhead Key bore to the northeast.

13. Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, XI (1875-1880), pp. 297-315, RG 21; Wreck Reports for Key West, Dec. 31, 1873-Jan. 4, 1882, I, p. 44, NA, RG 26; Archives of Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., CXX, pp. 250, 328. William M. Jones had been built at Port Jefferson, New York, in 1871, and was owned by John R. Mather, Jacob Wilse, and others of Brooklyn. Other fishing smacks engaged in salvaging the cargo were: Velocipede (Capt. Henry Rogers), Gildersleve (Capt. Moses Fish), Mazeppa (Capt. William Russell), Comstock (Capt. Jed Allen), Alaska (Capt. Alberto Vitzelio), and Ocean Queen (Capt. Calvin Parke).

When the bark was two days out of Aspinwall, several of the crew were felled with "Chagres fever." The fever spread. Captain Hanson and two of the sailors died and were buried at sea. Soon only one man, the mate, was up and about.

On the morning of September 14, the keeper of the Loggerhead Light and his assistant sighted a vessel bearing to the west at a distance of 12 miles. The craft was under "short sails and her colors were set on the mizzenmast with the union down." Manning their small boat, they overtook the bark at sundown. When they boarded the vessel, they found her to be Caribou. Assisted by the lighthouse personnel, 1st Mate Fielder made sail and took the bark into Tortugas Harbor. There he landed the lighthouse people, and, taking aboard a pilot and five men from a pilot boat, proceeded to Key West with the plague ship. The 2d mate and five sailors were sent ashore on the 23d and hospitalized in the United States Marine Hospital.

The men from the pilot boat filed a claim for \$2,500 for their services, while the lighthouse keepers asked for \$800. The underwriters refused to pay these claims, whereupon the claimants libelled the bark. As the judge was on leave of absence, the clerk, after taking the testimony, bonded the craft. The sick having recovered, Caribou sailed for Bull River, South Carolina, to load a cargo of phosphate for Baltimore.¹⁷

Tolomeo

Burned

Southwest Reef

Six months later, in late February 1881, the Italian bark Tolomeo (Captain Ivancich) sailed from Galveston for Bremen, Germany, with 1,655 bales of cotton. On March 2 the vessel caught fire, and to save his crew Captain Ivancich beached Tolomeo on Southwest Reef.

The wrecker Mazeppa had left Key West on Wednesday, the 2d, for Tortugas Harbor. At 6 p.m. the crew sighted a vessel afire, with

Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, XI (1875-1880), pp. 616-21, EPRC, RG 21; Wreck Reports for Key West, Dec. 31, 1873-Jan. 4, 1882, I, p. 90. Aurora's cargo, most of which was lost, included 17,377 feet of sawed lumber and 32,000 feet of timber.

17. Archives of Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., CXLI, p. 177; Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, XII (1880-1881), pp. 37-38, EPRC, RG 21.

On September 7 the schooner Nonpareil left Key West to cruise the Tortugas and see if any vessels had been driven ashore in the storm. At 1 p.m. the lookouts sighted two vessels flying the distress signal. She made for the nearest, which was anchored about five miles southwest of Loggerhead Light. When the wreckers boarded the vessel, they found Captain Hunt and the cook (the only men aboard) sitting on the poop for safety, the hold of Wm. S. Farwell having filled with water.

Captain Hunt accepted Capt. Courtland Williams' offer of assistance, and the captain's chest, and the ship's chronometer, compass, binnacle lamp, flags, and other navigation materials were taken aboard Nonpareil. The schooner Arietas, Capt. Gideon W. Lowe, now reached the scene. As the hour was late and the sea high, Captain Williams took Captain Hunt and the cook aboard Nonpareil, and the two wreckers sailed into Tortugas Harbor. There Captains Williams and Lowe entered into consort to take Wm. S. Farwell into a safe harbor where temporary repairs could be effected.²⁰

On the morning of September 8, the two wreckers left Tortugas Harbor and proceeded to the schooner. The crews were turned to clearing lumber from around Wm. S. Farwell's windlass and throwing it overboard to lighten her, and get her rail above water. After this was done, the anchor was weighed and a hawser ran from the schooner to Arietas. While Arietas prepared to take the hulk in tow, the wreckers hoisted the schooner's mainsail and jibs, and Captain Williams adjusted Farwell's rudder.

The schooner during the day was towed 11 miles, and nightfall found the wreckers anchored off North Key. That night the wind gathered force, and at 2 a.m. Nonpareil lost her windlass, the bar striking and injuring one of the crew.

There was a heavy sea on the morning of the 9th, and with the barometer still falling, Captain Williams, assured by Captains Hunt and Lowe that no further assistance was needed, took his vessel and returned to Key West.

20. Captain Lowe had sailed from Key West for the Tortugas on the morning of September 7 aboard Arietas. About 4 p.m. he had sighted the wreck of Louisa A. Courtney stripped and abandoned, and immediately thereafter he was contacted by Captain Williams of Nonpareil.

Following the departure of Nonpareil, Captain Lowe set his colors for assistance, as he needed more men to man the two vessels for which he was responsible. The schooner Madgie soon hove to, but her captain called that he too was shorthanded. After securing Farwell with another 90 fathoms of chain, Captain Lowe ran his vessel into Tortugas Harbor in search of help. Because of gales he was unable to return to the schooner until Monday, the 11th. When he did, he found that Farwell's deckload had been washed overboard.

There was no wind on the 12th, so Captain Lowe sought to get Farwell into Tortugas Harbor by warping. After warping about one-half mile, Arietas was hailed by the steamer Cora.²¹ At this time, Farwell was full of water and listing so far to starboard that her starboard rail was under water.

A line was sent aboard Farwell from Cora, and the schooner towed into Tortugas Harbor. There her rudder was temporarily fixed with chains. On the 14th Cora towed Wm. S. Farwell to Key West, where she was anchored near the Quarantine Buoy.

Libels against the vessel were filed by the captains of the three wreckers, and it was observed in shipping circles that Captain Hunt in late September was "working hard to keep her from being robbed by the Philistines." Judge James W. Locke of the District Court on December 4, 1882, ruled that the captains and crews of the wreckers were entitled to \$1,000 in salvage to be divided as follows: Arietas \$472.02, Cora \$410.55, and Nonpareil \$117.43.

There was a happy ending to the stranding and salvage of Wm. S. Farwell, however. The bark Stidacona, bound from Pensacola to Cardiff, Wales, picked up the mate and three sailors that had started for help. They had been two nights and three days in an open boat on the Gulf of Mexico.²²

21. Cora (Capt. W. Weatherford), a licensed wrecker, had left Key West on the 12th. At Tortugas Harbor she was boarded by Captain Hunt, who explained to Captain Weatherford that he needed Cora's assistance. The next morning, the 13th, she got under way and encountered Arietas and Farwell at the mouth of Northwest Channel, four miles from Garden Key. Cora was the first steam-powered wrecker to operate in the Tortugas.

22. Archives of Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., CL, p. 331; Wreck Reports for Key West, Jan. 25. 1882-Feb. 1897, II, p. 10; Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, XII (1880-1881), pp. 221-37, EPRC, RG 21.

Louisa A. Courtney

Stranded

Southwest Reef

The second vessel stranded on Southwest Reef in the tropical storm of the first week of September 1882 was Louisa A. Courtney. At 4:30 p.m. on the 6th, she grounded on Southwest Reef. She was bound from Pascagoula, Mississippi, for Boston with a cargo of lumber. Prior to going ashore, she had been shipping water badly.

Capt. Ira B. Atkins, his five-man crew, and three passengers were saved by wreckers, who stripped his ship of her sails, rigging, chains, and anchors.

Subsequently, Louisa A. Courtney was refloated and brought to Key West. There she and her cargo were delivered to Asa Tift. He had purchased the vessel from the underwriters as she lay on the reef.²³

Dolcoath

Stranded

North Key Spit

The British iron-hulled steamer Dolcoath of 1,171 tons, en route from New Orleans to Antwerp, Belgium, with a cargo of cotton and grain, stranded on North Key Spit at 6:35 p.m., March 31, 1883. She came ashore in clear weather and calm seas.

She was sighted on April 1 by Capt. Robert H. Sawyer of the licensed wrecker Rover Brothers. He boarded the steamer at 7 a.m. and found that she was ashore in 19 feet of water aft and 16 feet of water forward. The wind at this hour was fresh and from the southeast. Capt. John I. Jago said he needed help to refloat his ship, as he had already jettisoned 250 tons of grain to no avail.

Captain Sawyer sent to Key West for reinforcements. The wreckers Jerry Angel, E. P. Church, Alaska, and Cuba soon arrived. After much of the cargo had been sent aboard the five wreckers, Dolcoath was refloated. She sailed to Key West, where her underwriters paid \$12,000 in claims for salvage. She was then released, and continued on to Antwerp on April 17.²⁴

23. Archives of Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., CL, p. 311; Wreck Reports for Key West, Jan. 25, 1882-Feb. 1897, II, p. 9. Louisa A. Courtney, a wooden schooner, displaced 122.13 tons and had been built 19 years before.

24. Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, XII (1880-1881) pp. 295-301, EPRC, RG 21; Wreck Reports for Key West, Jan. 25, 1882-Feb. 1897, II, p. 18; Archives of Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., CLII, p. 300. Dolcoath had been built in Cardiff, Wales, and was on her maiden trans-Atlantic run.

Lalia

Stranded

Southwest Reef

On May 17, 1883, at 4 a.m., the British bark Lalia (Capt. John C. Rogers) of 390 tons grounded in moderate seas on Southwest Reef. She was bound from Pensacola for Great Yarmouth, England, with a cargo of lumber and cedar.

She was sighted at daybreak by several wreckers anchored in Tortugas Harbor. To refloat the bark, the wreckers jettisoned her deck cargo. As they were taking her into Key West to have their claims adjudicated, Lalia stranded on Crawfish Bar. She was hauled off on the 21st by the steam tug Cora.

When a diver examined her bottom at Key West, he found it badly chafed and most of the sheathing gone. The underwriters decided the cost of effecting repairs to the 16-year-old bark would not be economical. She was accordingly sold by the United States deputy marshal to satisfy claims for salvage. Lalia was purchased by Captain Myers, who after making temporary repairs, sailed her for St. John, New Brunswick, on June 23.²⁵

Alvah

Stranded

Flapjack Reef

The British steamer Alvah of 1,511 tons, bound from New Orleans for Le Havre with 4,800 bales of cotton and grain, approached Flapjack Reef at 2:30 p.m., March 29, 1884. The sea was calm, but an inaccurate chart took the iron steamer into dangerous water. There was a scraping and the proud ship grounded.

Capt. William Stephen had the engines reversed in an unsuccessful effort to free his ship. He was compelled to call on licensed wreckers for assistance. The steamer was lightened, spring lines run out, and she was refloated.

Alvah then got up a head of steam and headed for Key West. On April 4 she departed Key West for France, her underwriters having deposited \$13,000 in a New York City bank to cover salvage and court costs.²⁶

25. Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, XII (1880-1881), pp. 316-19, EPRC, RG 21; Wreck Reports for Key West, Jan. 25, 1882-Feb. 1897, II, p. 22; Archives of Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., CLIII, p. 73.

26. Archives of Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., CLVI, p. 11; Wreck Reports for Key West, Jan. 25, 1882-Feb. 1897, II, p. 26, NA, RG 26.

Gutenberg

Wrecked

Bird Key Shoal

There was a pea-soup-like-fog and a heavy sea at 4 a.m., December 15, 1885, as the German bark Gutenberg, bound from New Orleans for Bremen, approached the Dry Tortugas. Aboard the 654-ton, 23-year-old wooden craft was a valuable cargo--2,005 bales of cotton, 2,700 bags of cotton seed meal, and 4,200 staves. Too late the lookouts heard the roar of the surf, and the bark stranded on Bird Key Shoal.

Gutenberg was boarded at 6:30 a.m. by Captain Russell of the wrecking schooner Emma L. Lowe. Capt. C. Averdam asked for assistance. The bark at this hour lay on the middle of the shoal, heading northwest, with her rudder gone. There was 13 feet of water in her hold, and she was pounding heavily. She soon broke up, but the wreckers salvaged and took to Key West about 1,000 bales of cotton.

After the District Court had apportioned the salvage, the cotton was released and sent aboard the steamer Bremen for shipment to Germany.²⁷

Cetewayo

Stranded

Bird Key Shoal

Four days before the end of 1885, Bird Key Shoal claimed another vessel. A powerful gale bearing out of the north, northwest, buffeted the British schooner Cetewayo of 141 tons, en route from Port William, Nova Scotia, to La Habana. The vessel began to take water, and Capt. Willoughby Covert turned his six-man crew to at the pumps and conned a course for Tortugas Harbor. The sailors soon tired, and the schooner stranded and bilged on Bird Key Shoal.

Captain Covert and his crew reached Garden Key in a small boat, and wreckers salvaged 1,305 barrels of potatoes from the hulk. In mid-February 1886, Capt. B. W. Johnson of the wrecker Irene reconnoitered Cetewayo. Employing a steam pump, he and his men refloated the schooner and brought her into Key West.²⁸

27. Archives of Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., CLXIV, pp. 75, 81, 281; Wreck Reports for Key West, Jan. 25, 1882-Feb. 1897, II, p. 34, NA, RG 26; Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, XII (1880-1885), pp. 579-83, EPRC, RG 21. When Gutenberg broke up, her stern grounded about one mile from the remainder of the wreck.

28. Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, XII (1880-1885), pp. 264-65, EPRC, RG 21; Archives of Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., CLXIV, pp. 148-49, 163; Wreck Reports for Key West, Jan. 25, 1882-Feb. 1897, II, p. 35, NA, RG 26. A wooden vessel, Cetewayo had been laid down in 1879.

Ada A. Kennedy

Stranded

Southwest Reef

The American schooner Ada A. Kennedy of 601 tons sailed from Pensacola on April 18, 1886, bound for Wilmington, Delaware, with a cargo of pine lumber. At 7 a.m., April 21, she stranded on Southwest Reef. When the wreckers arrived, they found her resting on the northwest side of the reef, heading SSW, with a strong wind out of the NNE.

Capt. Peter Kennedy called for assistance. The schooner was lightened and refloated on April 22. She was taken to Key West on the 23d, where claims for salvage were adjudicated in the United States District Court.²⁹

Arietas

Foundered

West of Dry Tortugas

The small wooden schooner Arietas of 88.52 tons left Key West on April 29, 1886, en route to Apalachicola, Florida. Her manifest showed that the 28-year-old vessel was in ballast. This was the last ever heard of Arietas and Capt. John H. A. Roberts and his five-man crew. The schooner foundered west of the Tortugas drowning those aboard.³⁰

Charles R. Campbell

Abandoned

Northwest of Tortugas

There were 50-mile-per-hour gales in the eastern Gulf of Mexico on October 11, 1886. One of the vessels buffeted by the storm was the three-masted American schooner Charles R. Campbell.

She had sailed from Ship Island, Mississippi, on the 10th, bound for Aspinwall, Colombia, with a cargo of lumber. Pounded by the storm, Charles R. Campbell lost her masts. With the ship leaking badly and the pumps failing, Capt. Oliver McFarland at Latitude 28.34 North and Longitude 88.29 West hailed the steamer Willesden out of London. The captain, eight-man crew, and two passengers were taken aboard the steamer, and the schooner abandoned.³¹

29. Records of the United States District Court at Key West, XII (1880-1885), pp. 628-29, EPRC, RG 21; Wreck Reports for Key West, Jan. 25, 1882-Feb. 1897, II, p. 27, NA, RG 26. Ada A. Kennedy had been launched at Rockland, Maine, in 1881.

30. Wreck Reports for Key West, Jan. 25, 1882-Feb. 1897, II, p. 41, NA, RG 26.

31. Ibid., p. 42. Charles R. Campbell had been built at Pensacola in 1883.

Sebulon

Wrecked

Southwest Reef

The Norwegian bark Sebulon of 327.29 tons had sailed from a Central American port on November 17, 1887, bound for Queensland, Ireland, with a cargo of mahogany and cedar. The night was pitch dark and a fog enveloped the area, as Sebulon at 3:30 a.m. on the 30th approached Loggerhead Light. Moments after the roar of the surf was heard, the three-year-old Norwegian stranded on Southwest Reef. Capt. Ole Jensen and his nine-man crew abandoned ship as she bilged.

At Garden Key, Captain Jensen made arrangements with Capt. Daniel Campbell of the wrecker Meteor to begin salvage. Campbell and his people found that the bark had started to break up, and, after stripping her of sails, rigging, anchors, and chains, they proceeded to Key West.

On December 13 the wreck was visited by the steam tug Cora. Capt. Adolphus Russell and his sailors found that Sebulon had been dismantled, and everything in the shape of ropes, winches, and capstan bars removed. Some of the cargo, however, was salvaged, placed on a barge, and towed into Tortugas Harbor.³²

Sabino

Stranded

Pulaski Shoal

Another Norwegian vessel, the wooden bark Sabino of 1,225 tons, was luckier than Sebulon. She had sailed from Pensacola on January 19, 1888, with a cargo of grain and lumber to be unloaded at Buenos Aires. The weather at 6:30 a.m. on the 27th was hazy with a strong wind out of the northeast. Sabino stranded on Pulaski Shoal.

At daybreak the crews of the wreckers Emma Lowe, Irene, and Cuba (anchored in Tortugas Harbor) sighted a ship in distress on Pulaski Shoal. She was boarded at 10 a.m., and Capt. Hendrick Borgerson told the wreckers that he needed assistance. The bark was aground on the north point of the reef, with her bow pointed southeast. Sabino was lightened by the wreckers, and on the 30th she was heaved off the reef.³³

32. Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, Vol. XIII (1886-1890), pp. 331-34, EPRC, RG 21; Wreck Reports for Key West, Jan. 25, 1882-Feb. 1897, II, p. 52, NA, RG 26. Sebulon's home port was Grensted, Norway.

33. Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, XIII (1886-1890), pp. 321-22, EPRC, RG 21; Wreck Reports for Key West, Jan. 25, 1882-Feb. 1897, II, p. 55, NA, RG 26. Sabino had been launched in 1863 at Tonsberg, Norway.

Governor

Stranded

East Key Reef

The British bark Governor (Captain Edmonds) had sailed from Navassa on December 4, 1888. She was bound for Plymouth, England, with a cargo of phosphate. Gales were encountered in mid-December, as the bark beat her way across the Gulf of Mexico. The vessel was battered and began to ship water. To compound Captain Edmonds' difficulties, his vessel grounded at 3 p.m., December 18, on East Key Reef.

Fortunately for the Britisher, two wreckers--the smacks Pelican and Cuba--were fishing nearby. They reached Governor within an hour after she had come ashore. They found the brig lying on the northeast side of the reef, her bow heading WSW, and the winds fresh out of the northwest. Captain Edmonds called for help.

The bark was lightened and refloated on the 21st. She was then taken to Key West, where the claims for salvage were adjudicated in the United States District Court.³⁴

Joseph Baker

Wrecked

North Key Flat

The American bark Joseph Baker of 379 tons had sailed from New Orleans for Baltimore, in early January 1891, with a cargo of molasses and rice. As she approached the Dry Tortugas, a wind out of the northwest began to build up. The sea was rough and the night dark. At 6 a.m. on the 13th she stranded on North Key Flat. Capt. Albert C. Eaton and his seven-man crew were rescued, but the ship and cargo were lost.³⁵

Mabel

Stranded

Pulaski Shoal

On September 14, 1891, the British bark Mabel of 619 tons, bound from Punta Gorda to London with 780 tons of phosphate rock, stranded on Palaski Shoal. News that there was a vessel in distress in the Tortugas reached Key West at 2 p.m.

34. Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, XIII (1886-1890), pp. 533-69, EPRC, RG 21.

35. Wreck Reports for Key West, Jan. 25, 1882-Feb. 1897, II, p. 78, NA, RG 26. Joseph Baker had been launched at Bangor, Maine, in 1873.

Capt. Thomas C. Pent left immediately aboard the steam tug Cora. He reached Pulaski Shoal at midnight. Upon Capt. Evan Davis' request, Captain Pent had his crew begin lightening Mabel. Anchors were then set, and the powerful tug pulled the bark off the reef.³⁶

Shannon

Wrecked

Pulaski Shoal

The next ship to strand on Pulaski Shoal was not so fortunate. On March 6, 1892, the American brig Shannon of 374 tons sailed from Mobile en route to Mantanzas, Cuba, with a cargo of lumber. On the night of March 11, the weather was hazy and visibility limited. Before the watch could raise the alarm, the vessel had stranded. The brig bilged almost immediately, and Capt. George M. Peck and his seven-man crew were fortunate to escape with their lives.

Captain Peck secured passage in Tortugas Harbor to Key West for the survivors. There he made arrangements with Capt. John H. Saunders of the wrecker Hollyhock to salvage the materials from the brig, and as much of her cargo as had not been waterlogged.

Hollyhock got under way on March 14 and reached the wreck the next day. In the days since Shannon had been abandoned, she had started to disintegrate, and the wreckers found little to salvage.³⁷

Arcadia

Wrecked

North Key Flat

Two ships were wrecked on the Dry Tortugas in 1893, while two others (the schooner Benjamin Hale and the brig Autilla) required assistance. On April 10 the British brig Arcadia of 241 tons had sailed from Apalachicola for Sagua la Grande, Cuba, with 280 tons of lumber.

On the 18th the brig found herself in a squall off the Dry Tortugas. With visibility limited, several of the crew were turned to with lead lines. This measure proved inadequate as Arcadia stranded on North Key Flats. Capt. Thomas M. Vickery and his seven sailors abandoned the ship before she bilged.

36. Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, XIV (1891-1895), pp. 112-14, EPRC, RG 21; Wreck Reports for Key West, Jan. 25, 1882-Feb. 1897, II, p. 80. Mabel had been built at Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, in 1878.

37. Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, XIV (1891-1895), pp. 235-36, EPRC, RG 21; Wreck Reports for Key West, Jan. 25, 1882-Feb. 1897, II, p. 86. Shannon had been launched at Bangor, Maine, in 1867.

When O. C. Williams reached Autilla, the crew found her "high and dry" on the reef and flying the quarantine flag. Regulations prevented anyone from boarding the ship. A line was sent aboard, anchors carried out and set, and the bark refloated on the 10th. She was then towed to the Fort Jefferson Quarantine Station, where the captain died during the day. After Autilla had been fumigated, she was allowed to proceed to Key West, where she was libeled by Captain Johnson.⁴⁰

Carmalita Composite

Wrecked

Bird Key Shoal

The 537-ton British bark Carmalita Composite was bound, in ballast, from La Guaira, Venezuela, for Charlotte Harbor. A fresh wind was blowing out of the northeast and the weather was clear as Capt. Thomas Austin mistook Loggerhead Light for Tortugas Light. Before he realized his error, his ship on October 16, 1893, had stranded on Bird Key Shoal.

Captain Austin had his sailors run out an anchor with 80 fathoms of steel hawser. His efforts to winch his vessel off the shoal failed, so he sent to Key West for wreckers. Before they arrived, however, a storm roared in, and it was the 22d before the wreckers reached Carmalita Composite. In the meantime she had bilged and was abandoned. Captain Austin and his seamen, along with their personal gear, having been taken off by Pocahontas, were landed at Fort Jefferson.⁴¹

John R. Stanhope

Stranded

Pulaski Shoal

On April 6, 1894, the American bark John R. Stanhope of 391.16 tons sailed from Mobile for Santo Domingo City, with 400 tons of lumber. Aboard were Capt. Joshua B. Norton, his wife, and the eight-man crew. The bark on the evening of Friday the 13th was off the Dry Tortugas.

It was a hazy night, and, although the vessel was within six miles of Garden Key, no light was visible. The helmsman having lost his bearings, the bark stranded on Pulaski Shoal. Captain Norton drove his crew hard. The deck cargo was jettisoned, and on the 19th John R. Stanhope floated free and made for Key West.⁴²

40. Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, XIV (1891-1895), pp. 506-08, EPRC, RG 21.

41. Ibid., pp. 542-43; Wreck Reports for Key West, Jan. 25, 1882-Feb. 1897, II, p. 103, NA, RG 26. Carmalita Composite had been launched at Falmouth in 1865.

42. Wreck Reports for Key West, Jan. 25, 1882-Feb. 1897, II, p. 114. John R. Stanhope was 17 years old, having been laid down in Rockland, Maine, in 1877.

R. Bowers

Stranded

Southwest Reef

The American schooner R. Bowers of 413.97 tons sailed from Apalachicola on April 10, 1895, bound for Boston with a cargo of yellow pine lumber.

At 1:30 a.m. on the 13th, there was a heavy sea. Because of the haze, the lookout lost his bearings, and the schooner hauled to and stranded on Southwest Reef. She was refloated and, after stopping at Key West, continued on to Boston.⁴³

Walter D. Wallett

Wrecked

Southwest Reef

The British ship Walter D. Wallett of 1,416 tons sailed from Mobile in the second week of 1895 for Belfast, Ireland. She was heavily loaded with lumber. On the night of the 13th, the helmsman was conning a course to the southwest of Loggerhead Light. He misjudged his distance from the light, and the ship grounded at 10 p.m.

It was several days before the Key West wreckers arrived. When they did, it was too late to save Walter D. Wallett from bilging. They were successful, however, in their efforts to salvage the ship's sails and rigging, along with part of the cargo.⁴⁴

Harry B. Ritter

Stranded

Southwest Reef

On June 1, 1895, the American schooner Harry B. Ritter of 611.50 tons, out of the Port of New York bound for Charlotte Harbor with 500 tons of railroad iron, came to grief on Southwest Reef. It was 2:30 a.m., with a strong breeze and high surf, when she struck.

A government schooner and tug came to Ritter's assistance. Efforts to refloat the heavily laden vessel failed, and, after removing the rigging and sails, they landed the survivors at Key West. Capt. Isaac Peterson, after reporting the loss of his vessel to the Marine Revenue Service and blaming a compass failure for the disaster, wired his underwriters. They, in turn, contacted the wreckers.

43. Ibid., p. 124. R. Bowers had been laid down at Boston in 1880.

44. Ibid., p. 128. Walter D. Wallett had been launched at Liverpool in 1876.

Ranmoor called at Key West, on the 24th, to permit Captain Jones and his insurance agent to settle with the wreckers. After the lightered cargo had been reloaded, she sailed for Harburg on the 27th.³

Vidette

Stranded

Southwest Reef

The schooner Vidette (Captain Kemp), bound from Apalachicola for Gardiner, Maine, with a cargo of timber, grounded on Southwest Reef, on June 9, 1902. She was assisted by wreckers from the tug Admiral Dewey. Part of her deck load was discharged, and Vidette was refloated on the 10th. She reached Key West the next day towed by the tug.

Captain Kemp and his insurance agent were unable to reach an agreement with the wreckers. Vidette was accordingly libeled and condemned as unseaworthy, not worth repairing. The United States District Court decreed the salvors 23 per cent of the net proceeds of the vessel and \$950 salvage on the cargo. When this was not paid in the stipulated ten days, the schooner and her cargo were advertised for sale.

The U. S. deputy marshal sold Vidette and her cargo on August 2. N. B. Broward of Jacksonville secured both for \$5,375.⁴

Alice E. Clark

Stranded

Southwest Reef

The American schooner Alice E. Clark (Captain McDonald) departed Punta Gorda, Florida, in the second week of December 1904 for Baltimore. She carried a valuable cargo of phosphate rock. The schooner in passing to the southwest of Loggerhead Key grounded on Southwest Reef.

Although Captain McDonald and his crew jettisoned 100 tons of phosphate rock, they were unable to refloat Alice E. Clark. McDonald then accepted assistance from the wrecking tug G. W. Childs. The tug got her off the reef on December 14, and towed her into Key West Harbor with a damaged rudder.

3. New York Maritime Register, July 24 and 31, 1901; Archives of Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., CCXIX, p. 19.

4. Archives of Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., CCXXII, p. 23; New York Maritime Register, June 18, July 9 and 30, Aug. 6 and 13, 1902.

there was a strong wind from the north, northwest; the sea was breaking over the schooner's stern; and she was pounding against the reef. Captain Fountain told Sawyer that he had telegraphed for a tug to get his vessel off.

When no tug had arrived by 10 a.m. on April 2 Fountain accepted Sawyer's offer of assistance. To refloat Fannie Prescott it was necessary to lighten her of her deck load. On the 5th after 115,00 feet of timber had been unloaded, she was refloated.¹¹

Nannie C. Bohlin

Wrecked

Garden Key

The schooner Nannie C. Bohlin (Capt. N. A. Borden) sailed from Tampa for Bahia Honda in the third week of October 1909. The 130-ton schooner was loaded with lumber. Although a terrible hurricane had hammered Key West the previous week, a new front had moved into the Gulf, bringing a gale out of the northeast. Buffeted by winds and sea, the schooner became waterlogged. Captain Borden took his ship into Tortugas Harbor, and to keep her from foundering beached her on Garden Key.

When notified that a vessel was in distress, the tug Resolute proceeded to her assistance. Efforts to refloat Nannie C. Bohlin were unsuccessful, and she and her cargo were listed as a total loss.¹²

Florida

Foundered

Dry Tortugas

The 8-ton schooner Florida foundered in the Dry Tortugas on November 29, 1910. The little fishing schooner, which had been built in 1881, had a crew of nine men.¹³

Mary Eliza

Stranded

Garden Key

On December 5, 1911, the 13-ton fishing schooner Mary Eliza stranded on Garden Key. Efforts to refloat the craft failed, and she

11. Records of the U. S. District Court at Key West, Admiralty Records, XVIII, pp. 306-16, EPRC, RG 21; Archives of Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., CCXL, p. 55.

12. Archives of Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., CCXLV, p. 309; Forty-Second Annual List of Merchant Vessels of the United States ... 1910 (Washington, 1910), p. 406.

13. Forty-Third Annual List of Merchant Vessels of the United States with Official and Signal Letters ... (Washington, 1911), p. 410.

was stripped and abandoned.¹⁴

Pendleton Brothers

Wrecked

Southwest Reef

The big three-masted schooner Pendleton Brothers (Captain Bunker) departed Gulfport, Mississippi, for Wilmington, Delaware, on March 10, 1913, heavily laden with lumber. She stranded the night of the 17th on Southwest Reef. She bilged, and the captain and crew were rescued by the Revenue Cutter Miami and landed at Key West on the 22d. Except for the rigging, spars, chains, and anchors, which were salvaged, Pendleton Brothers and her cargo were written off by the underwriters as a total loss.¹⁵

Celia

Stranded

Garden Key

The 412-ton schooner Celia (Capt. H. P. Boston) stranded on Garden Key on January 8, 1914. She was refloated on the next flood tide, and, as she had suffered no damage, finished discharging her cargo and continued on to her next port of call.¹⁶

Elizabeth T. Doyle

Shipping Water

20 Miles SW of Tortugas

On September 13, 1915, the 781-ton schooner Elizabeth T. Doyle encountered hurricane force gales, 20 miles southwest of the Dry Tortugas. Her deck load of lumber shifted as the crew battled the elements. For a while it looked as if she might founder. But she rode out the storm.

The captain, on learning that the ship's chronometer had failed and that his vessel was shipping water, determined to make for Key West. After repairs were made and the deck cargo reloaded and secured, Elizabeth T. Doyle continued on to St. Paul de Luanda, Portugese West Africa.¹⁷

14. Forty-Fourth Annual List of Merchant Vessels of the United States ... (Washington, 1912), p. 417.

15. Archives of Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., CCLVIII, p. 2; Forty-Fifth Annual List of Merchant Vessels of the United States ... (Washington, 1913), p. 423.

16. Casualty Reports, 1913-1939, U. S. Coast Guard, NA, Microcopy T925, Entry 1136.

17. Archives of Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., CCLXL, p. 330; Casualty Reports, 1913-1939, U. S. Coast Guard, NA, Microcopy T925, Entry 225. Elizabeth T. Doyle had loaded her cargo of lumber out of Gulfport, Mississippi.

Santurce

Stranded

Flapjack Shoal

On August 9, 1915, the steamship Santurce 1,886 tons, en route from New Orleans to San Juan, Puerto Rico, with a cargo of lumber, stranded on Flapjack Shoal as she attempted to pass to the east of the Dry Tortugas. The captain and his 26-man crew refloated their ship on Thursday morning, the 12th.

Santurce put into Key West on the 13th to have divers check her hull for damage. They reported her shipshape, except for some minor repairs required to her machinery.¹⁸

M. A. Achorn

Demasted

Near the Tortugas

On October 16, 1916, the 308-ton schooner M. A. Achorn, en route from Pensacola for La Habana with a cargo of lumber, was caught in a gale north of the Dry Tortugas. She was demasted and lost her deck cargo, but she remained afloat.

After the winds had died and the seas calmed, the captain had his crew jury-rig M. A. Achorn. The schooner then returned to her home port--Mobile--for repairs.¹⁹

Cumberland County

Stranded

Southwest Reef

The 448-ton bark Cumberland County sailed from Gulfport, Mississippi, in late January 1917 for Fort-de-France, Martinique. She was loaded with lumber. On February 3 her captain misjudged his distance from Loggerhead Light, and Cumberland County grounded on Southwest Reef.

It was at first feared that the ship would be lost. But after jettisoning most of the cargo, the bark was refloated and towed to Key West by the Coast Guard Cutter Tampa.²⁰

18. Archives of Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., CCLXL, pp. 203, 207, 307; Casualty Reports, 1913-1939, U. S. Coast Guard, NA, Microcopy T925, Entry 93. When she reached her home port of New York City, it cost \$6,700 to repair Santurce's machinery.

19. Archives of Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., CCLXX, p. 205; Casualty Reports, 1913-1939, U. S. Coast Guard, NA, Microcopy T925, Entry 958.

20. Archives of Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., CCLXXI, p. 333; Casualty Reports, 1913-1939, U. S. Coast Guard, NA, Microcopy T925, Entry 694. The Marine Revenue Service and the U. S. Life-Saving Service were merged in January 1915 and redesignated the United States Coast Guard.

Maria Louisa Wrecked 1 3/4 Miles South of Bird Key Harbor

The United States again went to war in April 1917. Although German U-boats crossed the Atlantic to war on shipping in 1918, they restricted their activities to the Atlantic seaboard north of Cape Hatteras, North Carolina. No enemy submarines penetrated the Straits of Florida to attack shipping in the Gulf of Mexico. Captains, however, still had to worry about their age-old foes--hazards to navigation and storms.

In the same month that Congress declared war on Germany, the Greek schooner Maria Louisa sailed from Pensacola for a Mediterranean port with a cargo of lumber. On April 27 she stranded in the Dry Tortugas, one and three-fourths miles south of Bird Key Harbor. The 436-ton ship soon bilged, and, along with her cargo, was lost.²¹

Brazos Wrecked Northwest Reef

The 226-ton schooner Brazos sailed from Port Tampa for Matanzas, Cuba, on November 1, 1917, with a cargo of phosphate rock. Buffeted by gales, she stranded on Northwest Reef on the 3d. She was carried over the reef by the surf and capsized. The captain and crew, fortunate to be alive, reached Garden Key.

Brazos, along with her cargo, was listed as a total loss by Armour Fertilizer Corp., the owners. The schooner was valued at \$30,000 and the cargo at \$10,000.²²

Sequin Wind and Waves West of Tortugas

The Armistice was signed on November 11, 1918, and World War I was over. Within the next ten weeks, a ship encountered difficulties west of the Tortugas.

21. Archives of Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., CCLXXII, p. 159; Casualty Reports, 1913-1939, U. S. Coast Guard, NA, Microcopy T925.

22. Archives of Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., CCLXXIV, p. 92; Casualty Reports, 1913-1939, U. S. Coast Guard, NA, Microcopy T925, Entry 347.

In the period January 16-18, 1919, the 405-ton schooner Sequin battled a storm. She was bound from St. Andrews, Florida, for Macoris, Santo Domingo. Her deck load of pitch pine lumber was swept overboard, and she made for Key West, her rigging shredded, and with her pumps hammering.²³

Fred W. Weller

Stranded

Dry Tortugas

A hurricane roared across the eastern Gulf of Mexico in the second week of September 1919. The 10,626 ton tanker Fred W. Weller was driven aground in the Dry Tortugas on the 9th. She was refloated on the 11th and limped into her home port of Key West the next day. One of her crew had lost his life, while the cost of repairing the tanker was estimated at \$190,000.²⁴

Lake Winona

Stranded

Pulaski Shoal

The 2,308-ton steamer Lake Winona, en route from New Orleans for San Juan, Puerto Rico, with a cargo of general merchandise, was also driven aground in the Dry Tortugas by the September 1919 hurricane. She was abandoned on the 10th by captain and crew. They returned and took possession of her on the 11th.

An examination showed that Lake Winona had nine feet of water in her port holds and four feet in those on the starboard beam. These had to be pumped out and 600 tons of damaged cargo jettisoned before the ship was refloated on September 22. Emergency repairs were necessary, and it was October 1 before she was towed into Key West, with her bottom badly damaged. The cost of repairing the steamer was estimated at \$150,000 and the loss of cargo at \$200,000.²⁵

Ligonier

Wind and Wave Damage

20 Miles SE of Tortugas

A second tanker, Ligonier of 3,737 tons, was caught in the September 1919 hurricane, 20 miles southeast of the Dry Tortugas.

23. Archives of Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., CCLXXXIV, p. 203; Casualty Reports, 1913-1939, U. S. Coast Guard, NA, Microcopy T925, Entry 533.

24. Archives of Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., CCLXXXI, p. 131; Casualty Reports, 1913-1939, U. S. Coast Guard, NA, Microcopy T925, Entry 111. To refloat the tanker, the captain had lightened her by discharging crude oil into the ocean.

25. Archives of Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., CCLXXXI, pp. 131, 132, 171, 179; Casualty Reports, 1913-1939, U. S. Coast Guard, NA, Microcopy T925; Entry 483.

She was en route for Savannah from Port Arthur, Texas, with the steel oil barge Monongahela in tow. The tow line parted, and the crew of Ligonier watched horrified as the barge disappeared among the mountainous waves.

They did not have long to reflect on the fate of the barge and its 15 crewmen, as their ship was in danger of foundering. She, however, rode out the blow, and put into Tampa, on the 13th, with her machinery disabled, lifeboats, ventilators, and wireless smashed.

The barge and her crew rode out the hurricane. On the 14th Monongahela was sighted by the tug Senator Bailey and towed into Key West the next day.²⁶

Paulsboro

Stranded

Pulaski Shoal

The tanker Paulsboro of 6,966 tons stranded in a dense fog, in the first week of April 1920, on Pulaski Shoal. She was refloated on the 7th, and the next day she was towed into Key West by a navy tug.

In getting off the reef, the tanker had wrecked her high pressure cylinder and damaged her cylinder head, piston, and rings. The bill for repairs was \$108,000.²⁷

The Coast Guard Casualty Reports for the period immediately after World War I are interesting. They show that steamships had replaced sailing ships as commerce carriers, and that the lumber trade of the Gulf Coast ports of Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida had slumped. Most of the vessels now passing the Dry Tortugas were tankers bound to and from the Texas coast.

C. W. Wells

Fire

SSW of the Tortugas

The 372-ton schooner C. W. Wells out of Gulfport, Mississippi, with a cargo of lumber caught fire May 21, 1921, 35 miles SSW of the Dry Tortugas. Fortunately the sea was calm, and the captain and six-man crew were able to abandon the craft. C. W. Wells and her cargo were listed by the U. S. Coast Guard as a total loss.²⁸

26. Archives of Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., CCLXXXI, p. 155; Casualty Reports, 1913-1939, U. S. Coast Guard, NA, Microcopy T925, Entry 238.

27. Archives of Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., CCLXXXIV, p. 203; Casualty Reports, 1913-1939, U. S. Coast Guard, NA, Microcopy T925, Entry 1287.

28. Casualty Reports, 1913-1939, U. S. Coast Guard, NA, Microcopy T925, Entry 717.

Agnes Bell

Foundered

Between Tortugas and Egmont Key

The hurricane of October 25, 1921, caught the little 29-ton fishing schooner Agnes Bell somewhere between the Dry Tortugas and Egmont Key. The fisherman, which operated out of Tampa, foundered. No trace of the schooner or the seven men aboard was found after the storm passed.²⁹

Caldwell H. Colt

Wrecked

Southwest Reef

On February 16, 1922, the 64-ton fishing schooner Caldwell H. Colt, out of Pensacola, was off the Dry Tortugas. The captain misjudged the distance to Loggerhead Light, and his vessel stranded on Southwest Reef. Pounded by the breakers, she soon bilged and was abandoned by her crew. Seven of the nine aboard were drowned.³⁰

Elizabeth Freeman

Stranded

Pulaski Shoal

The big four-masted schooner Elizabeth Freeman of 1,665 tons sailed from Tampa for Baltimore on November 16, 1924. She was loaded with phosphate rock. There was a pea-soup-like fog on the morning of the 17th, and the schooner stranded on Pulaski Shoal.

Word that a vessel was in distress reached Key West on the 19th, and the wrecking tug Warbler got under way. The schooner was relieved by Warbler and proceeded to Key West for repairs. While ashore, her bottom had been damaged, and she was shipping 18 inches of water per hour. Temporary repairs having been made, Elizabeth Freeman left Key West for Baltimore on December 1, towed by the tug Willett.³¹

Emily Spears

Stranded

Tortugas Harbor

On February 28, 1925, the gasoline-powered schooner Emily Spears (44 tons) out of Key West put into Tortugas Harbor. As she did so, she stranded on a rock at the entrance to the channel. Although badly

29. Ibid., Entry 416. Among the men lost and presumed drowned were: Fred Ryan, Clarence Eskridge, William Lemark, James Blanchard, William McKibben, and two others.

30. Ibid., Entry 658. The men drowned were J. Clark, W. McGinnis, Miller O'Brien, Wm. Mudge, Francis Lubrath, Andrew Gallon, and Joseph Muse.

31. Archives of Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., CCC, p. 237; Casualty Reports, 1913-1939, U. S. Coast Guard, NA, Microcopy T925, Entry 361.

damaged, the fisherman was refloated and taken to her home port.³²

Etta Mildred Demasted Seven Miles South of Tortugas

On April 7, 1925, the gasoline-powered schooner Etta Mildred, out of Tampa, was fishing seven miles south of the Dry Tortugas. Caught in a squall, she was demasted. The captain used his radio to send for help. The U. S. Coast Guard Cutter Sawkee answered the call, and found and relieved the schooner.³³

Fannie and Fay Foundered 50 Miles Northwest of Tortugas

There were still a few schooners involved in the lumber trade between the Gulf Coast ports and the Atlantic seaboard in the mid 1920s. One of these was Fannie and Fay of 233 tons.

In the fourth week of June 1925 she sailed from Tampa for Boston. Aboard was lumber valued at \$9,000, consigned to Massachusetts builders. A storm was encountered northwest of the Dry Tortugas. The winds shredded the rigging, while the waves caused the seams to start. The captain, fearing the worst, radioed for assistance. He and his four sailors were taken off their waterlogged vessel, which had made her last voyage, by the steamer Eksjo.³⁴

Birkenhead Collision Off Loggerhead Key

February 1927 found three vessels encountering difficulties in the waters around the Dry Tortugas. The first of these was the 6,960-ton tanker Birkenhead, en route from Texas City for Paulsboro, New Jersey. Unknown to the captain, as his ship approached the Dry Tortugas, the U. S. Submarine S21 was making practice dives in the area. The crew of the tanker were startled on the 3d when the submarine, as she surfaced, collided with their ship. Both vessels suffered some

32. Casualty Reports, 1913-1939, U. S. Coast Guard, NA, Microcopy T925, Entry 1088. The value of the schooner was \$7,000, and damages totaled \$3,500.

33. Archives of Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., CCCI, p. 287; Casualty Reports, 1913-1939, U. S. Coast Guard, NA, Microcopy T925, Entry 973.

34. Archives of Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., Vol. CCCII, p. 144; Casualty Reports, 1913-1939, U. S. Coast Guard, NA, Microcopy T925, Entry 997.

damage but were able to proceed--Birkenhead to Paulsboro and S21 back to her base at Key West.³⁵

Orleans

Stranded

Southwest Reef

The first vessel in February 1927 to require assistance was the schooner Orleans, en route in ballast from La Habana to St. Joseph, Florida. On the night of the 5th she stranded on Southwest Reef. Orleans was refloated on the 7th and, having lost her rudder while ashore, was taken into Tortugas Harbor. After temporary repairs were effected, she proceeded to Key West.³⁶

Geneva Kathleen

Storm Damage

Ten Miles South of Tortugas

In the second week of February 1927, the 583-ton schooner Geneva Kathleen left Orange, Texas, with a cargo of lumber for Cárdenas, Cuba. A wild gale was encountered on the 18th, near the Tortugas. The schooner lost her sails and sprang a leak. To make matters worse, the cargo shifted. The captain was compelled to radio for help. The Spanish steamer Artzamendi responded, and, taking the schooner in tow, took her into Key West on the 21st.³⁷

Harrison T. Beacham

Storm Damage

North of Tortugas

The schooner Harrison T. Beacham, out of Mobile with a cargo of lumber, encountered fierce gales north of the Dry Tortugas in the third week of November 1927. She rode out the storm, although the crew was compelled to jettison the deck cargo. The schooner put into Key West on the 23d in a waterlogged condition.³⁸

Hagood

Stranded

North Key Flat

On February 21, 1928, the tanker Hagood, en route from Orange, Texas, to Boston with thousands of gallons of crude oil stranded in foul weather on North Key Flat. Initial efforts by the captain

35. Archives of Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., CCCVII, p. 20, 145; Casualty Reports, 1913-1939, U. S. Coast Guard, NA, Microcopy T925, Entry 638.

36. Archives of Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., CCCVII, p. 15; Casualty Reports, 1913-1939, U. S. Coast Guard, NA, Microcopy T925, Entry 1000.

37. Archives of Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., Vol. CCCVIII, p. 56; Casualty Reports, 1913-1939, U. S. Coast Guard, NA, Microcopy T925, Entry 836.

38. Archives of Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., CCCIX, p. 92; Casualty Reports, 1913-1939, U. S. Coast Guard, NA, Microcopy T925, Entry 447.

and crew to refloat the ship failed, and a call for assistance was radioed to Key West.

The wrecking tug Warbler put to sea. But before she reached the Dry Tortugas, the crew had backed Hagood off the reef. When the tanker reached Key West, an examination by divers showed that she had suffered damaged estimated at \$20,000 to her hull while ashore.³⁹

Lake Fairport

Stranded

Pulaski Shoal

The 2,606-ton steamer Lake Fairport encountered a thick fog north of the Tortugas on September 30, 1930. Unable to get his bearings, the helmsman stranded the ship on Pulaski Shoal. She was refloated at flood tide, and, having suffered no damage, continued on her way.⁴⁰

W. J. Colle

Abandoned 50 Miles Southeast of Tortugas

On December 22, 1930, the 450-ton schooner W. J. Colle, out of Gulfport, Mississippi, loaded with \$14,000 worth of lumber, was 50 miles southeast of the Dry Tortugas. For several days she had been buffeted by heavy seas and strong gales. W. J. Colle sprang a leak and when the pumps failed, she was abandoned. The captain and crew escaped in a small boat.

The schooner, however, did not sink. Kept afloat by her cargo, she was sighted and recovered by wreckers in the second week of January 1931.⁴¹

Endicott

Stranded

Southwest Reef

The 6,319-ton steamer Endicott stranded on Southwest Reef on the night of February 3, 1932. She was relieved the next day, and proceeded on to her next port of call, having suffered no damage.⁴²

39. Archives of Atlantic Mutual Insurance Co., CCCX, p. 78; Casualty Reports, 1913-1939, U. S. Coast Guard, NA, Microcopy T925, Entry 689.

40. Casualty Reports, 1913-1939, U. S. Coast Guard, NA, Microcopy T925, Entry 316.

41. Ibid., Entry 235.

42. Ibid., Entry 397.

American Eagle

Stranded

Pulaski Shoal

On January 17, 1936, the steamship American Eagle of 4,371 tons stranded on Pulaski Shoal. She was bound from Tampa for the Port of New York with \$43,130 in phosphate rock. Efforts to refloat the ship were successful.

When the captain filed his report of the stranding with the U. S. Coast Guard, as required by law, he listed the damage to his ship in the accident as \$3,775. He blamed the stranding on an error in navigation caused by a mistake in the U. S. Coast and Geodetic Survey Chart of the area.⁴³

E. J. Bullock

Foundered

Southwest of the Tortugas

The 6,630-ton steamship E. J. Bullock foundered southwest of the Dry Tortugas in a storm on December 2, 1938. In the sinking of the ship, three lives were lost.⁴⁴

Sea Cloud

Foundered

North of Tortugas Harbor

German submarines, following the entry of the United States into World War II, crossed the Atlantic in large numbers. The first wave of U-boats attacked and sent to the bottom large numbers of ships off the Atlantic seaboard. Next they navigated the Straits of Florida to sink ships in the Gulf of Mexico. Although thousands of tons of shipping were sunk in the Gulf, none went down off the Dry Tortugas.

During a 14-year period, from 1938 until 1952, no ship was lost in the Tortugas. This hiatus was broken on December 3, 1952, when Sea Cloud, a 14-ton diesel-powered shrimper, foundered north of Fort Jefferson.⁴⁵

Big Apple

Foundered

Pulaski Shoal

On September 29, 1954, the 22-ton fishing trawler Big Apple foundered northeast of Pulaski Shoal.⁴⁶

43. Ibid., Entry 833.

44. Merchant Vessels of the United States in 1939, Year Ended June 30, 1939 (Washington, 1939), p. 533.

45. Merchant Vessels of the United States 1953-1954 (Washington, 1954), p. 750.

46. Merchant Vessels of the United States 1955 (Washington, 1955), p. 737.

Miss Priscilla

Collision

Dry Tortugas

On May 4, 1955, the 10-ton trawler Miss Priscilla was sunk in a collision with the motor vessel Big Lady in the Dry Tortugas.⁴⁷

Dayco

Foundered

Dry Tortugas

The 42-ton fishing trawler Dayco, built in 1950, foundered off the Dry Tortugas in November 1957.⁴⁸

Flying Ace

Foundered

Dry Tortugas

On August 18, 1958, the trawler Flying Ace of 30 tons, laid down in 1939, foundered off the Dry Tortugas.⁴⁹

47. Ibid., p. 739.

48. Merchant Vessels of the United States 1959 (Washington, 1959), p. 801.

49. Merchant Vessels of the United States 1960 (Washington, 1960), p. 824.

APPENDICES

59),

60),

APPENDIX A

In 1835 there were 20 licensed wreckers operating out of Key West. They were:

<u>VESSEL</u>	<u>RIG</u>	<u>WHERE REGISTERED</u>	<u>CAPTAIN</u>
<u>Hyder Ali</u>	schooner	Huntington, Conn.	J. Gould
<u>Actor</u>	sloop	Brookhaven, N. Y.	J. B. Smith
<u>Whale</u>	schooner	Mystic, Conn.	G. Eldridge
<u>Hester Ann</u>	schooner	Key West	J. H. Geiger
<u>Mystic</u>	sloop	Mystic, Conn.	E. Eldridge
<u>John Denison</u>	schooner	Indian Key	D. Cold
<u>Splendid</u>	schooner	Key West	G. Alderslade
<u>Florida</u>	schooner	Key West	A. Anderson
<u>Sarah Isabelle</u>	sloop	Indian Key	T. Eldridge
<u>Amelia</u>	schooner	Key Vacas	J. Bethell
<u>Brilliant</u>	sloop	Groton, Conn.	J. Egan
<u>Orion</u>	schooner	Key West	S. Sanderson
<u>Thistle</u>	sloop	Indian Key	H. Brown
<u>Standard</u>	sloop	Huntington, Conn.	J. Pierce
<u>Caroline</u>	schooner	Key West	J. Wood
<u>Single Sailor</u>	schooner	Key West	R. Roberts
<u>Edward Thompson</u>	schooner	Philadelphia	S. Young
<u>Fair American</u>	schooner	Jordon Key	J. Shurtieff
<u>Olive Branch</u>	schooner	Key West	W. Greene
<u>Blacksmith</u>	schooner	Key West	S. Coombs

APPENDIX B

RULES OF THE DISTRICT COURT

OF THE

UNITED STATES, FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT
OF FLORIDA, FROM MARVIN, LAW OF WRECK & SALVAGE.

IN ADMIRALTY.

1.

In addition to what is required to be stated by the 23d Supreme Court rule, the libel shall aver the amount of the debt, damages, or salvage, for which the action is brought. The amount, with the addition of \$250 in a suit *in rem* and \$100 in a suit *in personam*, shall be indorsed by the clerk on the mesne process, so as to enable the marshal under the Act of the 3d of March, 1847, or the court or commissioner to take, and the defendant or claimant to give, the bail or stipulation required by law or the rules of court. In cases of salvage, the libel shall also state the value, or estimated value of the property saved, the names of the principal salvors, and that the suit is instituted in their behalf and in behalf of all other persons interested or associated with them. It shall also have annexed to it a list of the names of all the salvors, and of all other persons entitled to share in the salvage, and also any agreement of consortium existing among them; so as to enable the court to divide the salvage according to the rights or interests of the parties.

2.

When a libellant, claimant, or respondent resides out of the district, the libel, claim, or answer may be sworn to by his proctor, or agent, or attorney in fact. If his personal answer under oath to averments or interrogatories is demanded, and it shall appear to the court, that the

RULES OF THE DISTRICT COURT.

ends of justice require such answer, a *commission* or *dedimus potestatem* may issue to take the same.

3.

Appraisers may be appointed by the court, or, in case of the sickness or absence of the judge, by the clerk. All appraisements shall be made according to the cash value of the property, and, if there be different kinds of goods, the separate value of each shall be specified. The appraisalment shall be filed in the clerk's office, without unnecessary delay. Before executing their trust the appraisers shall be sworn before the clerk to its faithful and honest discharge. They shall be allowed ten dollars a day, each, for the time necessarily employed in making the appraisalment.

4.

In cases of seizure or other suits *in rem* which seek the forfeiture or possession of the property, or a recovery to the full amount of its value, the stipulation to be given by the claimant, on delivery, before the court or commissioner, shall be for its value. In suits for salvage, seaman's wages, or other suits, which seek to recover a sum less or greater than the value, the stipulation shall be for double the sum demanded by the libel or libels; or for the value, as the claimant may prefer. Upon the proper stipulation being filed and the sureties approved, the clerk shall enter and issue an order to the marshal commanding him to restore the property to the claimant.

5.

In any salvage cause, upon petition, stating facts and circumstances, showing, that the master of any vessel has voluntarily cast her away, or has fraudulently abandoned her, or has been guilty of any other gross or barratrous misconduct in relation thereto; or has fraudulently colluded with the salvors; or has accepted or agreed to accept any part of the salvage; or any thing in lieu thereof; or any unlawful present from any salvor; or that he employs, as his agent or consignee, any person entitled to a share of the salvage, knowing him to be so entitled; or stands in any other relation to the property incompatible with the proper and independent discharge of his duty to protect the interests of the owner; in every such case, the court will, upon the hearing and proof of such petition, appoint and admit the resident

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agent of underwriters, the proper consul, or some other suitable person, to intervene in the cause, as *amicus curie* for the protection of the interests of absent owners, by himself or by his proctor, without stipulation for costs, and to answer and defend the libel, and to object to any item of costs or charges; and generally to do whatever may be necessary to protect the rights and interests of such owners. The court will allow a reasonable fee to the proctor so employed to be included in the costs of suit.

6.

In suits *in rem* for salvage, persons having demands for wharfage, storage, commissions, or other charges upon the property, may intervene for their interests; but, if, preferring to settle with the master of the vessel out of court, they omit to intervene, the court may order the master to produce before it an account of all such charges as have been settled or contracted by him, to enable it to determine the true value of the property on which salvage ought to be allowed; and upon the production of such accounts, the court may determine their just and true amounts. All bills of costs or charges to be allowed or paid under any order or decree of the court, shall specify fully the items and be supported by the proper vouchers. Labor bills must state the number of days' labor charged, and, when required by the court or commissioner, the names of the laborers. Wharfage, storage, commissions, and other charges shall be allowed according to the established rates, unless a less rate has been agreed upon, or unless a part of such charges has been agreed to be returned. When the accounts have been referred to a commissioner to report upon, he may, on his own motion, and shall, on the motion of a party interested, examine the parties or witnesses under oath, touching such accounts, and touching any supposed agreement or secret understanding for the return of any portion of the amounts charged to the master, or any other allowance to be made him, and report the result to the court. All bills overcharged, with intent to enable the master to make money for his own use or to enable the owners to defraud the underwriters, by furnishing him or them with false vouchers, shall be disallowed.

7.

In salvage causes there shall be allowed the master's agent or con-

RULES OF THE DISTRICT COURT.

signee, in compensation for his services, as a charge upon the property, a commission of five per cent. upon the moneys disbursed by him in payment of bills for wharfage, storage, labor, and other necessary expenses. Whenever a bond is required by any of the revenue laws to be given on the transportation or re-shipment of goods by the claimant, a commission of one per cent. upon the estimated duties or condition of the bond shall be allowed for giving such bond. A commission may be allowed, according to the discretion of the court, for giving an admiralty stipulation on the redelivery of the property arrested. But no commission shall be allowed upon the salvage, nor costs of suit, nor duties, nor upon the value of the property for reshipping it.

8.

There shall be allowed the libellant's proctor, for his services in salvage causes, three per cent. upon the salvage, to be deducted therefrom and paid by the clerk, and the statutory fee of twenty dollars to be charged to the property. In the absence of any agreement for any less sum, there shall be allowed the respondent's proctor, to be taxed as a charge upon the property, the same compensation and one quarter additional; *provided*, however, that if there should be any forfeiture of salvage, or diminution of the amount, on account of any misconduct of the salvors set up in the answer, his fee shall not be thereby diminished, but he shall receive the same compensation as if there had been no such forfeiture or diminution; *provided*, also, that when the salvage and expenses shall exceed fifty per cent. of the value, his fee shall be three per cent. upon the residue.

9.

Salvors having a common interest arising from associated service, or from consortship, shall unite in one libel. The majority of the masters, or, if a majority cannot agree, then the principal or master wrecker, shall appoint the proctor. The proctor for the principal salvors shall be entitled to the statutory fee of twenty dollars to be allowed as costs. Only one such fee shall be allowed.

10.

Salvages shall be divided between the vessels according to their tonnage — the vessels drawing one half — and between the men according

APPENDIX.

to their numbers, that is, "ton for ton and men according to tonnage." In vessels of over thirty tons burden, the master shall be entitled to three shares, the mate to two, the cook to one and a quarter, and the men each to one. In vessels under thirty tons burden and over twelve, the master shall draw two shares, the men each one. In vessels under twelve tons, the master and crew shall share alike. Boys under eighteen years of age shall draw half shares — except, in any of these cases the parties have otherwise agreed, or the court shall otherwise order. Divers shall share according to their merits, as the parties have agreed, or as the court may order.

11.

After deducting from the salvage the salvors' proctor's fee, the fee for dividing it, and any other charges allowed thereon, the clerk, or commissioner to whom it may be referred, shall divide the salvage among the salvors according to the foregoing rule, or other special direction of the court, and make report of such division. If no objection is made to the report within twenty-four hours after it is filed, a final decree shall be entered confirming the report and adjudging to each salvor his particular share. The clerk shall pay each salvor his proper share according to the decree. No order or transfer or assignment of shares shall be available, except where the salvor has left the coast, or the court shall otherwise order.

12.

In making sales under the decree or order of the court, the marshal or his deputies shall cry the goods, or he shall employ as crier some person not engaged in the business of buying and selling. Whenever the order gives him authority to sell only damaged or perishable goods, he shall be careful to sell no other. He shall see that the bidders have a fair opportunity of inspecting the goods. He may employ watchers, when necessary, to keep them from being stolen. He shall carefully note down and report the marks, numbers, weight, with the kind or description of goods sold. He may employ persons to assist him when necessary in arranging the goods for sale. He shall not permit the salvors, the master, or his consignee, or any other person, to interfere with the fair and impartial discharge of his duties. He shall not sell the goods at a price greatly below their value, without the special order

RULES OF THE DISTRICT COURT.

of the court; but when, from the want of bidders or of competition, they are likely to sell very much below their fair value, he shall adjourn the sale and report to the court. He shall file an account of the sales, with a bill of his charges or disbursements thereon, and shall pay the gross amount into the registry of the court.

13.

It shall be the duty of all licensed wreckers, finding, picking up, or saving property found derelict at sea, or as wreck upon the coast, to bring the same into some port of the United States, to preserve the marks and packages, as near as may be, in their original state, and to take other proper measures to secure to the owner his interest therein. If the value of the property saved exceeds one hundred dollars, and is brought into this district, the salvor shall proceed by regular suit to recover his salvage. If the value is less than one hundred dollars, he may report the property to the marshal, who shall sell the same at public auction; and upon his account of sales being filed the court will decree the salvage. The proceeds of the sales of all derelict property, after deducting the salvage and expenses, shall remain in the registry of the court a year and a day, unless sooner claimed by the owner; if not claimed within that period, they may be paid, on the order of the court, to the salvor or finder.

14.

On petition, setting forth the facts, the court will appoint surveyors to examine and report, under oath, the condition of any vessel wrecked or in distress, and such proceedings may thereupon be had as are customary in admiralty. Each surveyor is allowed five dollars for every survey and report.

15.

When an appeal shall be made from the decree of this court, either party may serve on the adverse party a statement of the testimony on the trial, excepting such evidence as was in writing, which shall be properly referred to therein. The party on whom the same shall be served shall, in four days after such service, propose amendments thereto; otherwise the statement shall be deemed acquiesced in. The statement if amended, shall, with the amendments, unless they are acquiesced in, be submitted to the judge for settlement; and when settled,

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shall be engrossed by the clerk, and with the written evidence, shall be deemed the proofs on which the decree was made.

COMMON LAW, EQUITY, AND ADMIRALTY.

16.

After the cause is at issue, commissions to take testimony may be taken out in vacation as well as in term, jointly by both parties or severally by either party, upon interrogatories filed by the party taking out the same, in the clerk's office, ten days' notice thereof being given to the adverse party to file cross-interrogatories before the issuing of the commission; and, if no cross-interrogatories are filed at the expiration of the time, the commission may issue *ex parte*. In all cases the commissioner or commissioners shall be named by the court or judge. If the parties shall so agree the testimony may be taken upon oral interrogatories by the parties or their agents without filing any written interrogatories; or, commissions may be issued, executed, and returned, according to the laws of the State.

17.

The "*Rules of practice for the courts of equity of the United States, promulgated by the Supreme Court of the United States,*" 2d of March, 1842, and published in the first volume of Howard's Reports, constitute the rules of practice in equity causes in this court.

18.

The rules of practice, forms of pleading, and modes of proceeding in common law cases in this court, shall be the same as now prevail in the State courts, so far as they may be applicable and not inconsistent with the laws and constitution of the United States. 16 Peters, 89.

19.

Previous to any term of the court at which a grand or petit jury may be ordered to be summoned, the marshal shall procure from the county clerk a copy of the latest corrected list of jurors which shall have been made and filed according to law, and shall deliver the same to the clerk of this court. The clerk shall write the names of each of the persons in said list on separate slips of paper, which shall be rolled

RULES OF THE DISTRICT COURT.

up and put in a box, from which, in the presence of the marshal and of any two or more citizens of the county who may choose to be present, and who shall be notified by the marshal, he shall draw a petit jury of twenty-four and no more. If however a grand jury shall have been specially ordered by the judge, the clerk shall draw out forty-seven names, or such other number as may have been specially designated by order of the judge, and thereupon shall issue a venire to the marshal to summon the persons whose names are thus drawn to serve as jurors at the next term of the court. From those who appear and answer to their names when called, the grand and petit juries shall be drawn in the same manner as in the State courts.

20.

The clerk of this court, the judge of the Circuit Court of the State for the southern circuit, the officer in charge or command of Fort Jefferson at the Tortugas, whether said officers are in office or command at the time of making this order, or shall be subsequently appointed or elected thereto, shall be, whilst holding such offices or commands, *ex officio*, commissioners of this court, and each of said officers, whilst in office, is hereby appointed a commissioner to take affidavits in civil causes depending in courts of the United States, and to execute all the powers and to perform all the duties authorized or enjoined by the Act of Congress, entitled "An Act in addition to the act entitled 'An Act to establish the judicial courts of the United States,'" approved March 2, 1793; and by the Act of Congress entitled "An Act for the more convenient taking of affidavits and bail in civil causes depending in the courts of the United States," approved February 20, 1812; and by the Act of Congress entitled "An Act in addition to the Act entitled 'An Act for the more convenient taking of affidavits and bail in civil causes depending in the courts of the United States,'" approved March 1, 1817; and by the Act of Congress entitled "An Act further supplementary to an Act entitled 'An Act to establish the judicial courts of the United States,' passed 24th September, 1789," approved August 23, 1842; and by the Act entitled "An Act to amend and supplementary to the Act entitled 'An Act respecting fugitives from justice and persons escaping from the service of their masters,' approved February 12, 1793," approved September 18, 1850; or by any other Act of Congress passed

APPENDIX.

or hereafter to be passed having relation to such commissioners, and their duties and powers.

21.

Ordered, That the foregoing rules take effect, as the rules of the District Court for the Southern District of Florida, from and after the first Monday of May, 1858.

YEAR

1621
1622
1691
1765
1775
1806
1816
1818
1824
1829
1830
1831
1832
1834
1835
1836
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1850
1852
1854
1855
1856
1857
1858
1859

SUB TOTAL

APPENDIX C

Vessels Which Stranded in the Dry Tortugas, 1621-1958

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>STRANDED BUT ESCAPED</u>	<u>LOST AT</u>	<u>LOST NEAR</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
1621			1	1
1622		2		2
1691		1		1
1765		1		1
1775			1	1
1806		1		1
1816		1		1
1818		1		1
1824		1		1
1829	1			1
1830	1			1
1831	3	2		5
1832			1	1
1834	2			2
1835	1	1		2
1836	2	3		5
1837	3	1		4
1838	2	1		3
1839	5			5
1840		1	1	2
1842	1	2		3
1843		2		2
1844	3	3		6
1845	5			5
1846	2			2
1847	1	1	1	3
1849	6	1		7
1850	4	1	1	6
1852	2			2
1854	2	1		3
1855	2	1		3
1856	3			3
1857	9	1		10
1858	3	1		4
1859	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>
SUB TOTAL	64	31	7	102

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>STRANDED BUT ESCAPED</u>	<u>LOST AT</u>	<u>LOST NEAR</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
1860	2	1		3
1861	1			1
1862	1			1
1865		1		1
1869	2			2
1870		1		1
1872	1	1		2
1873	1			1
1874	1			1
1875		2		2
1877		1		1
1879		1		1
1880	1			1
1881		1		1
1882	2	1		3
1883	2			2
1884	1			1
1885	1	1		2
1886	1		2	3
1887		1		1
1888	2			2
1891	1	1		2
1892		1		1
1893	2	2		4
1894	1			1
1895	2	2		4
1897	1			1
1898	1	1		2
1900	1	1		2
1901	1			1
1902	1			1
1904	2			2
1905		1		1
1906	1		1	2
1907		1		1
1908	1			1
1909		1		1
1910		1		1
1911		1		1
1913		1		1
SUB TOTAL	34	26	3	63

YEAR

1914
1915
1916
1917
1919
1920
1921
1922
1924
1925
1927
1928
1930
1932
1936
1938
1952
1954
1955
1957
1958

SUB TOT.

GRAND TO

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>STRANDED BUT ESCAPED</u>	<u>LOST AT</u>	<u>LOST NEAR</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
1914	1			1
1915	2			2
1916	1			1
1917	1	2		3
1919	3			3
1920	1	1		2
1921			1	1
1922		1		1
1924	1			1
1925	2		1	3
1927	1			1
1928	2			2
1930	1			1
1932	1			1
1936	1			1
1938			1	1
1952		1		1
1954			1	1
1955		1		1
1957			1	1
1958			1	1
<hr/>				
SUB TOTAL	18	6	6	30
GRAND TOTAL	116	63	16	195

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PLATE I

"A Plan of the Tortugas and Part of the Florida Keys, Surveyed by George Gauld, M.A., 1773, for The Right Honorable, The Board of Admiralty, London, 1773," courtesy Library of Congress. Only the section of Gauld's chart showing the Dry Tortugas is shown.

2

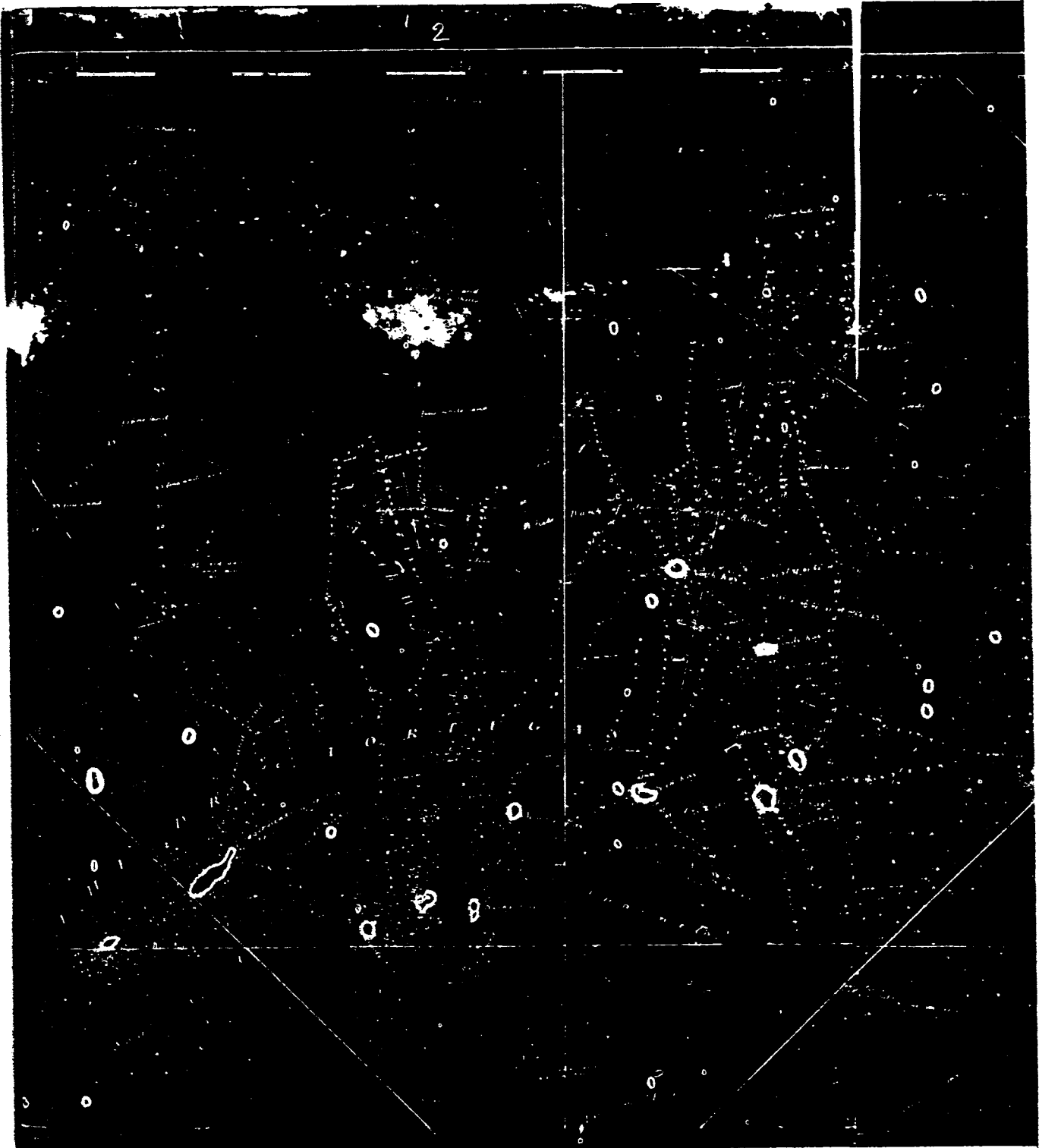


PLATE I

PLATE II

"Chart of the Dry Tortugas and Part of the Florida Reef, Shewing [sic] the Channels to Key West Harbour & the Adjacent Islands, compiled from the Surveys of George Gauld Esq.," with additions by I. W. P. Lewis, Civil Engineer, Boston, 1838, courtesy Library of Congress.

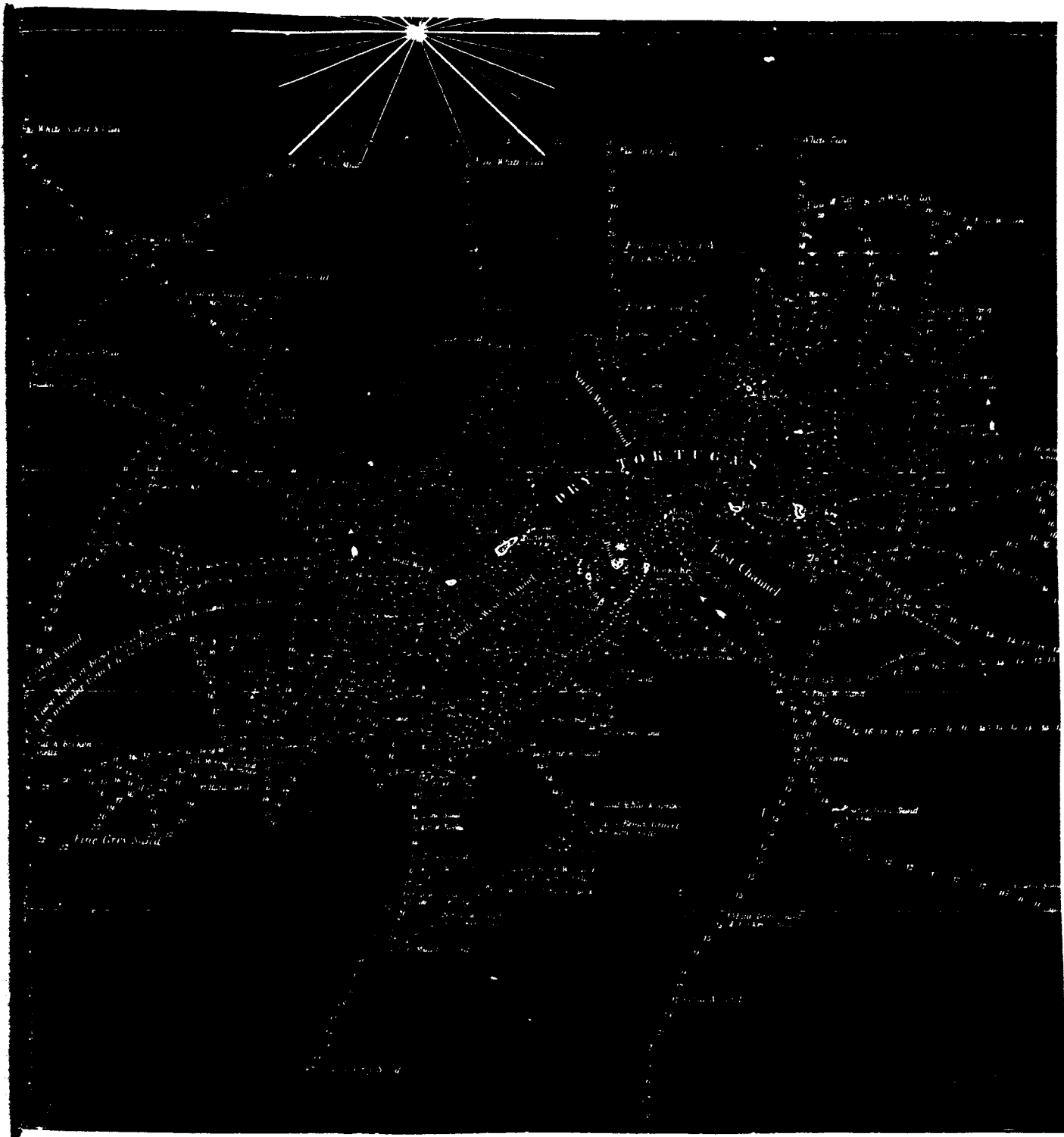
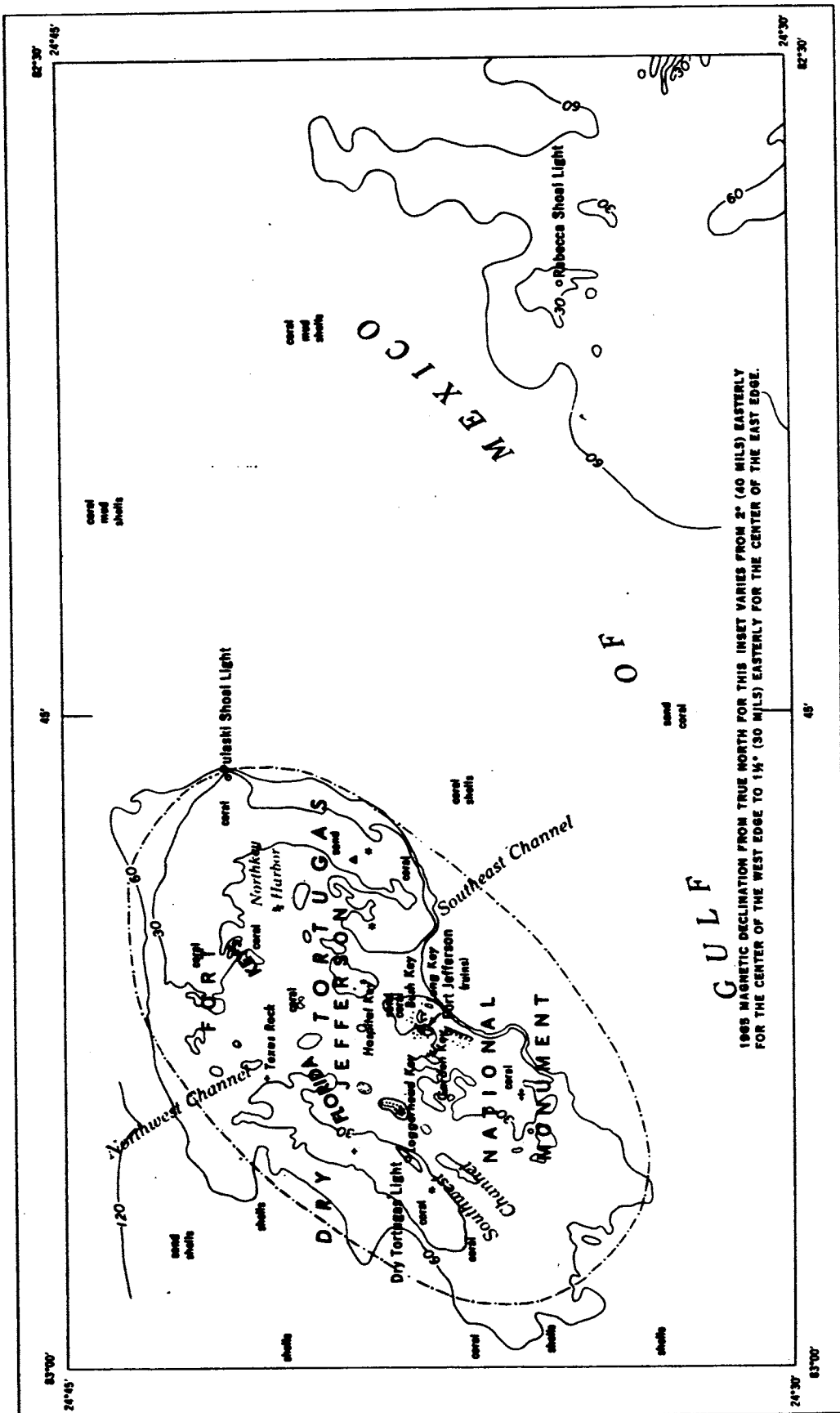


PLATE II

PLATE III

United States Geological Survey Map of the Dry Tortugas, 1965.



1965 MAGNETIC DECLINATION FROM TRUE NORTH FOR THIS INSET VARIES FROM 2° (40 MILS) EASTERLY FOR THE CENTER OF THE WEST EDGE TO 1½° (30 MILS) EASTERLY FOR THE CENTER OF THE EAST EDGE.