



THE CITY OF KEY WEST

Post Office Box 1409 Key West, FL 33041-1409 (305) 809-3700

TO: Key West Bight Management Board

FROM: Doug Bradshaw, Director Port and Marine Services

DATE: November 6, 2019

SUBJECT: Historic Marker and Information Boards

The Key West Bight Management Board has requested staff to look at the bronze plaques as well as the information boards within the Bight and develop a strategy for restoring, refreshing, or replacing.

There are three (3) bronze plaques within the Bight. Two are identical. Staff was able to clean and polish the plaques in-house (see attached Photos). Staff contacted the company that does the statue garden at Mallory, but it was not financially feasible to come to Key West for only three (3) plaques and he did not have the statue garden scheduled anytime in the near future.

Staff is still tracking down the original creator of the information boards. It appears that both the Maritime Society and HTA utilized the same company, possibly Olympus Group, to produce the prints. I have contacted them and they are currently searching to see if they have a work order. Additionally I have spoken with Bill Verge and he is attempting to find any paperwork or artwork that they may have in their files. The three (3) boards are in decent shape and still readable especially the Western Union one. Once we determine how we can get them reproduced we will move forward with replacement.

Key to the Caribbean – Average yearly temperature 77° F.

MEMORANDUM



NORBERG THOMPSON
1884 - 1951

HE LOVED HIS ISLAND CITY AND SERVED AS ITS MAYOR.
HE DEVOTED HIS LIFE TO AIDING AND PROVIDING
EMPLOYMENT FOR ITS PEOPLE FOR OVER 50 YEARS.
MOST OF HIS ACCOMPLISHMENTS WERE LOCATED
ALONG THIS HARBOR.

THEY INCLUDED SPONGING, FISHING, SHRIMPING,
ICE MAKING, A CIGAR BOX FACTORY, GOURMET
TURTLE SOUP, PINEAPPLE AND GUAVA CANNING,
BARGE AND TRUCK LINES, ETC.

*Never heard to brag, he epitomized
"Greatness has a soft voice."*



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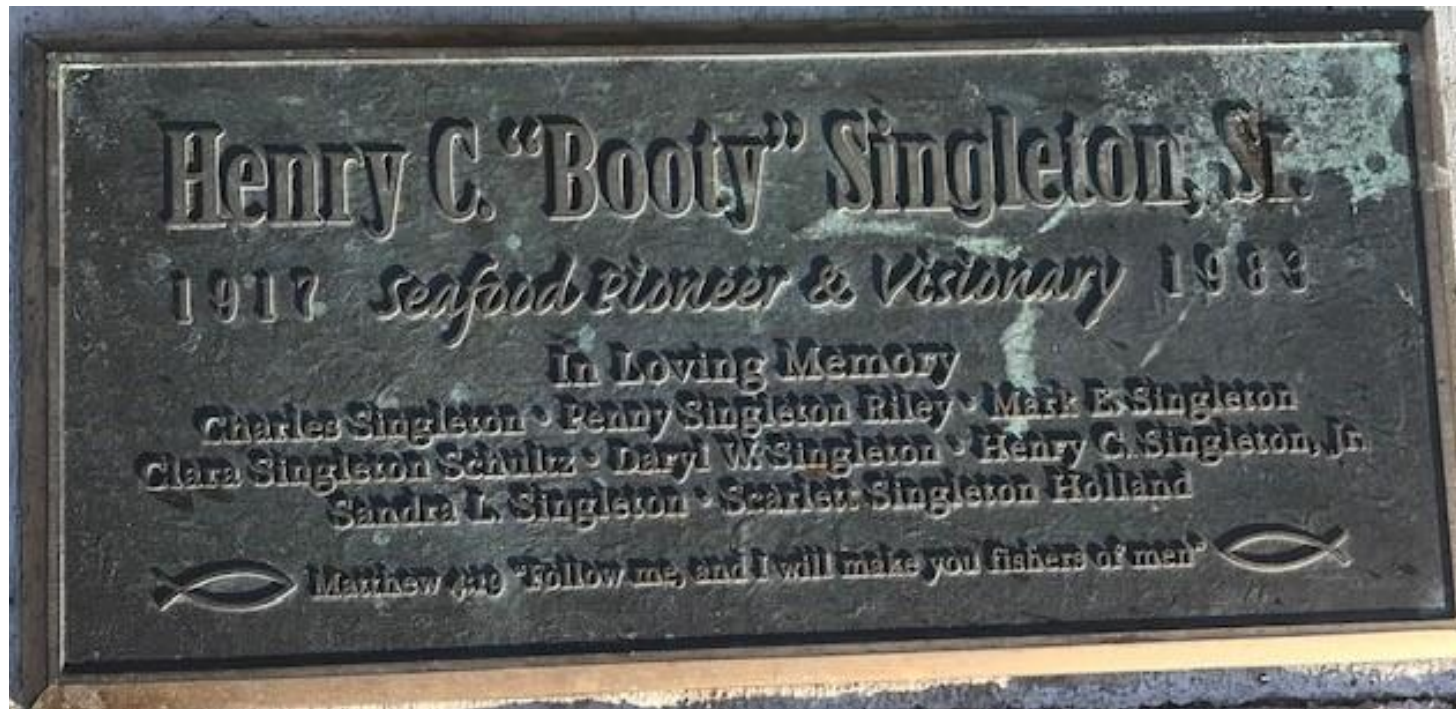


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Welcome to Key West's Historic Seaport!

What's so Special about the Seaport?

For almost two hundred years, the Seaport (shown in the map at right as the shoreline just below the orange point) has been a focal point for much of the economic and cultural life on the island. The Seaport (shown also as the "lower harbor" or as "Key West Light") formerly served as a base for maritime trade in fish, shell, and other marine products. That long-standing tradition resulted in an extensive and changing, which was popularly called "Key West". In November 1922, Key West voters approved municipal incorporation of the Seaport. Nevertheless, the original maritime activities of the Seaport have mostly given way to the current role of maritime-related businesses. But visitors can still get a glimpse into the past by looking at the "seaport historical markers", such as this one, that are posted along the Seaport waterfront.



How did the Seaport get started?



As shown in the chart at the left (sections of which date from the 17th century), Key West has long afforded mariners a handy, large, deepwater natural harbor. Moreover, just west of the island, a broad channel leads north to the Gulf of Mexico. Thus, by the late 17th century, mariners found that the uninhabited island of Key West (which was also known by the Spanish name, "Cabo Hatter") was a useful stopping point during coastal navigation. It had a safe anchorage, and there was plenty of drinkable water as provided by the spring. Also, there was a great abundance and diversity of marine life in Key's waters. The early fishermen, and the first settlers of the island, soon came to rely on such water as their primary source of food. As part of the economic base of the town, which it first became established in the 17th century, this tradition continued on into the present day.

What were the Principal Activities and Industries of the Seaport in days past?

Although there were a variety of maritime trades and businesses once active at the Seaport, four stand out as being especially important. These were the fisheries for sea turtles, fishing to supply local (and distant, markets), the sponge fishery, and the shrimp fishery. A brief summary of each follows. On other interpretive markers along this harborwalk, additional information will be provided.

The Sea Turtle Fishery

Perhaps the first, and longest lasting, of all Seaport industries was the fishery for sea turtles. One species, the green turtle, *Chelonia mydas*, was the most desirable for human consumption. It was relatively easy to capture, grew to a substantial size (up to 300 pounds or more), and, and it was valued for its butterfat, could be kept alive either in shallow water aquatic pens ("crazals") or, especially when being shipped some distance, turned upside down on its back.

As the previous chart indicates (see the top center position), it is to hold the turtles had long been extant at what later came to be known as Key West Light. The photo below shows several green turtles on display at Lowe's dock, which once occupied much of the SW corner of the light. Many turtles held there, and at other locales along the Seaport, were processed into soups (see label above) and shipped to the nation's better restaurants. Over the years, turtle harvests slowly dwindled as the result of overfishing. Thus, by late 1971, protective laws ended the industry.

Fishing for local (and distant) Markets

When the first permanent settlement arrived at Key West in 1793, fishing was the primary means of subsistence food and economic activity for the early settlers. Its abundance, variety, and diversity of marine life in Key West Light provided much of the food for the early settlers.

The first fishermen (and their children) used to make their catch in small sailing vessels called "sloopers" (see photo). Because of the small size of these vessels, they were not widely available for the commercial fishery. However, the small size of the boats, and the fact that they were not widely available for the commercial fishery, meant that the catch was in what came to be called the "Key West Market Fishery". That fishery was made up of small boats, and the catch was mostly sold to the local market, and the catch was mostly sold to the local market, and the catch was mostly sold to the local market.



The Sponge Fishery

The Seaport (shown in the map at the left) was the base for the fishery for sponges. These were important articles of commerce until artificial sponges became available after WWII. In the 19th century, sponge harvesting began in the Seaport. Fishermen would use small boats (shown in the photo below), and searched the waters for sponges. The sponges were then taken to the Seaport and sold to the local market, and the catch was mostly sold to the local market.

The sponges (shown in the photo below) were of such demand, that fishermen often had to use small boats (shown in the photo below) to support the fishery. The small boats were used to support the fishery, and the catch was mostly sold to the local market, and the catch was mostly sold to the local market.



The Shrimp Fishery

The waters of the Seaport had long been used with maritime activity (as shown in the photo above left). However, beginning in late 1940s, the pace of activity increased dramatically. That is when the first of the shrimp fishery was discovered in Gulf waters off Key West. Word of the rich find soon leaked out, and scores of shrimp trawlers converged on Key West. So much shrimp was caught, and so much money earned, that the event was termed "the Pink Gold Rush".

The photo, above center, shows some of the fleet. Much of the Seaport waterfront was enlarged or improved to accommodate the fishery and the handling of the catch. The shrimp fishery remained highly profitable until the advent of the 1960's. After that, catch rates declined. By 1960, the last shrimp dealers were gone from the Seaport, and a unique, very special, era in Key West history came to a close.

Key West Maritime Historical Society of the Florida Keys, Inc.

"WESTERN UNION" Key West's Flagship Schooner



The Western Union schooner's mast structure in 1910.

1890

The schooner **WESTERN UNION** was constructed by Robert D. Lantry, head of the Lantry family, and a crew of local sailors and fishermen. They were building a schooner to carry mail and passengers from Key West to Havana, Cuba, and other ports in the Caribbean Sea. The schooner was built in the Lantry family's shipyard in Key West, Florida.



The Western Union schooner docked at the pier in Key West, Florida.

The **WESTERN UNION** was built of oak, pine, and mahogany. It was 100 feet long, 30 feet wide, and had a draft of 10 feet. The schooner was built in the Lantry family's shipyard in Key West, Florida.

1895-1910

The **WESTERN UNION** was built of oak, pine, and mahogany. It was 100 feet long, 30 feet wide, and had a draft of 10 feet. The schooner was built in the Lantry family's shipyard in Key West, Florida.

1910-1915

The **WESTERN UNION** was built of oak, pine, and mahogany. It was 100 feet long, 30 feet wide, and had a draft of 10 feet. The schooner was built in the Lantry family's shipyard in Key West, Florida.

The Capitan's Death

The **WESTERN UNION** was built of oak, pine, and mahogany. It was 100 feet long, 30 feet wide, and had a draft of 10 feet. The schooner was built in the Lantry family's shipyard in Key West, Florida.

1915

The **WESTERN UNION** was built of oak, pine, and mahogany. It was 100 feet long, 30 feet wide, and had a draft of 10 feet. The schooner was built in the Lantry family's shipyard in Key West, Florida.



Two men standing on the deck of the Western Union schooner.

"Western Union"

1. Built in the year 1890 by the Lantry family, the schooner was built in the Lantry family's shipyard in Key West, Florida.
2. The schooner was built of oak, pine, and mahogany. It was 100 feet long, 30 feet wide, and had a draft of 10 feet.
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The Western Union schooner sailing on the water.

SAIL into HISTORY

Presented By
Historic Tours of America

Welcome to Key West's Historic Seaport!

What's so Special about the Seaport?

For almost two hundred years, the Seaport has been a focal point for much of the economy and culture of the island. The Seaport (known also as the "main harbor" or to "Key West Light") primarily served as a base for vessels used in fisheries, coastal shipping, and other maritime trades. That longstanding tradition resulted in an ambiance and character, which was uniquely "old Key West". In November 1990, Key West voters approved municipal acquisition of the Seaport. Nowadays, the original maritime activities of the Seaport have mostly given way to the current maritime activities of the Seaport. But visitors can still get a glimpse into the past by looking at the "wayside historical markers", such as this one, that are placed along the Seaport's waterfront.



How did the Seaport get started?



As shown in the chart at the left (periods of which date from the 17th to Key West has long afforded mariners a handy large, deepwater natural harbor. Moreover, just west of the island, a broad channel leads north to the Gulf of Mexico. Thus, by the late 17th or early 18th century, the uninhabited island of Key West (which was also known by the Spanish name, "Cayo Hueso") was a useful stopping point for passing maritime navigation. It had a safe anchorage, and there were stocks of drinkable water at primitive wells. Also, there was a great abundance and diversity of marine life in Key West waters. The early mariners, and the first settlers of the island, soon came to rely on such resources for subsistence, and as part of the economic base of the town when it first became established in the 18th century. That tradition continued on into the present day.

What were the Principal Activities and Industries of the Seaport in days past?

Although there were a variety of maritime trades and businesses once active at the Seaport, four stand out as being especially important. These were the fisheries for sea turtles, fishing to supply local (and distant, markets), the sponge fishery, and the shrimp fishery. A short summary of each follows. On other interpretive markers along this harborwalk, additional information will be provided.

The Sea Turtle Fishery

Perhaps the first, and longest lasting, of all Seaport industries was the fishery for sea turtles. One especially green turtle, *Chelonia mydas*, was the most desirable for human consumption. It was relatively easy to capture, grew to a substantial size (up to 300 pounds or more), and, until it was needed for butchering, could be kept alive either in shallow water aquatic pens ("crawls") or, especially when being shipped some distance, turned upside down on its back.

As the previous chart indicates (see the top center position), pens to hold the turtles had long been extant at what later came to be known as Key West Light. The photo below shows several green turtles on display at Looe's dock, which once occupied much of the SW corner of the light. Many turtles held there, and at other locales along the Seaport, were processed into soups (see label above) and shipped to the nation's better restaurants. Over the years, turtle harvests slowly dwindled as the result of overfishing. Thus, by late 1970s, protective laws ended the industry.

Fishing for local Market Markets

When the first permanent inhabitants arrived at Key West in 1763, fishing soon became an important means to provide food and economic activity for the early settlers. It is likely that because the shallow waters of Key West Light provided a safe anchorage, many of the fishers were based there.

The early fishery generally consisted of small boats with small crews (often called "schooners") that fished for and other species of fish. These boats were available here in 18th century. Although these "schooners" were used to keep the catch alive in what came to be called the "Key West Market Fishery", that fishery eventually disappeared and modernized to supply much of America's seafood, not by the late 19th century, the boats had mostly moved to other harbors in the lower Keys, in order to allow rising prices.



The Sponge Fishery

The Seaport also became a hub for the fishery for sponges. These were important articles of commerce with both local and distant markets beginning in the 18th century. In the 18th century, sponge harvesting began in the Keys. Fishers returned out to small floating ditches (such as in photo below), and watched the sponges for signs. The sponges were then manually cleaned and sent together to buyers for transport to the sponge dealers for sale at market.

The sponges from Key West were in such demand, that buyers often had to sail sailboats to "sponge" (sponge for right) to support the single crews on sponge grounds further up the Florida west coast. At least one vessel, with a total of about 10 men (fishers and shoreward helpers), were involved in sponging during the peak years of the late 18th century. But, local grounds eventually became depleted. By 1900, the center of the fishery shifted to Tarpon Springs, and the importance of Key West as a sponging base waned.



The Shrimp Fishery

The waters of the Seaport had long teemed with maritime species (see photo above left). However, beginning in late 1840s, the price of shrimp increased dramatically. That is when vast beds of *Portunus* (a species of shrimp) were discovered in Gulf waters off Key West. Word of the rich find soon leaked out, and scores of shrimp trawlers converged on Key West. So much shrimp were caught, and so much money earned, that the event was termed "the Pink Gold Rush".

The photo, above center, shows some of the fleet. Much of the Seaport waterfront was enlarged or improved to accommodate the fishery and the handling of the catch. The shrimp fishery remained highly profitable until the advent of the 19th century. After that, catch rates declined. By 1910, the last shrimp dealers were gone from the Seaport, and a unique, very special, era in Key West history came to a close.



Key West Maritime Historical Society
at the Florida Keys, Inc.

This marker and information are a courtesy of the Key West Maritime Historical Society. For more information, contact the Key West Maritime Historical Society, 1000 Duval Street, Key West, FL 34290. Phone: (305) 291-1234. Website: www.keywestmaritime.org