



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.

*Norberg heard to brag, he epitomized.
"Greatness has a soft voice."*



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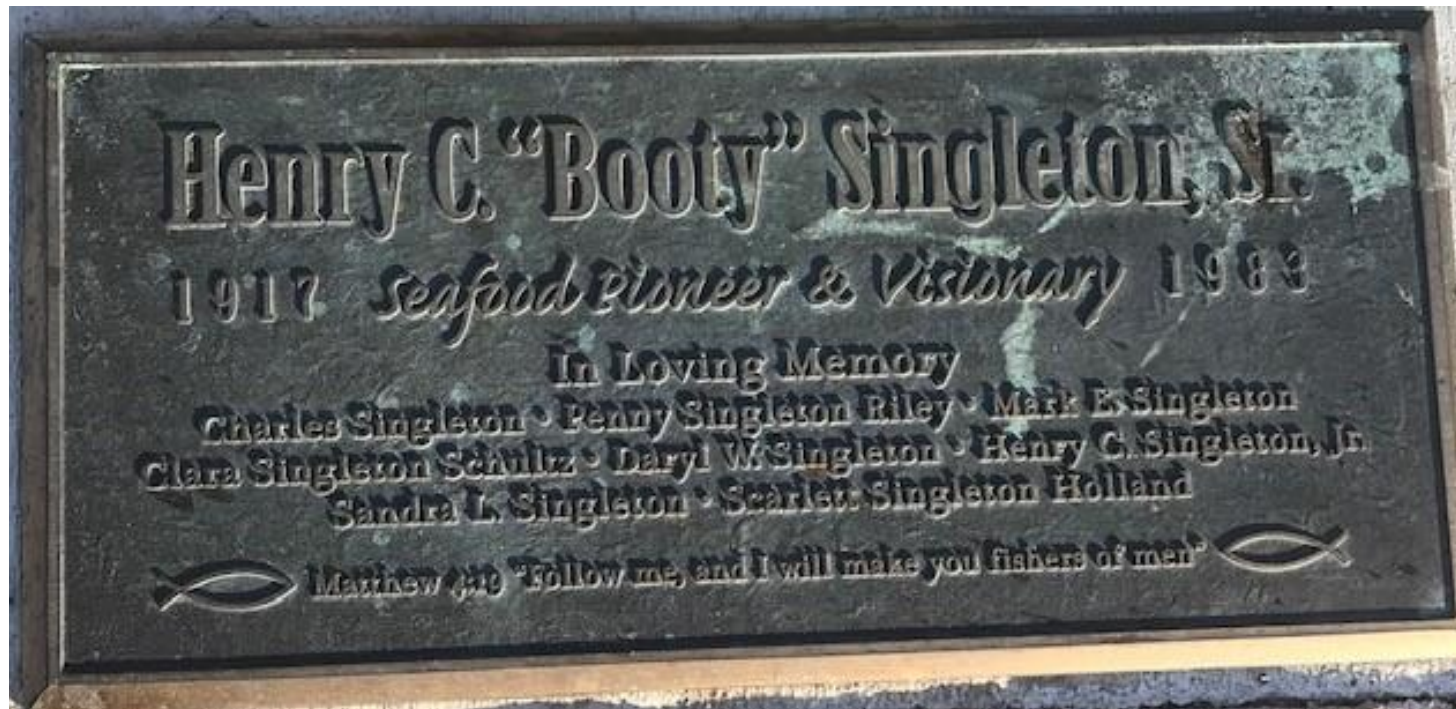


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Welcome to Key West's Historic Seaport!

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 busy rendezvous for fishermen, coastal shipping, and other maritime-related activities. That longstanding tradition resulted in an extensive and changing, which was popularly called "Key West" in November 1925. Key West today represents maritime occupation of the Seaport. Nevertheless, the original maritime activities of the Seaport today mostly given over to the current role of marine-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, European traders 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 primitive life ashore. 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 where 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 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), *p. 1* 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 by far the most important source of food and income for the early settlers. Its abundance, variety, and diversity of marine life in Key West's waters provided much of the food for the early settlers.

The first fishermen (and their families) 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 early fishermen (and their families) 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 early fishermen (and their families) 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.



The Sponge Fishery

The Seaport (shown in the map at the left) was the primary base for the sponge fishery. 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 (called "spongers") to go out into the water, and harvest the sponges. The sponges were then taken to the Seaport and sold to the sponge dealers.

The spongers (and Key West's) were in such demand, that dealers often had to use sailing vessels (called "spongers") (see photo at right) to support the daily catch in sponges to Key West. As local fishermen with a total of about 1,000 boats and spongers, were involved in sponging during the peak years of the late 19th century. But, local fishermen eventually became depleted. By 1900, the fishery of the Seaport shifted to Tampa, Florida, and the importance of Key West as a sponge harbor declined.



The Shrimp Fishery

The business of the Seaport had long been bustling with maritime activity (as evident in the photo above left). However, beginning in late 1940s, the pace of activity increased dramatically. That is when vast beds of Litopenaeus setiferus (pink 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 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 1965, 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 rigging in 1910.

1890

The schooner **WESTERN UNION** was constructed by Robert H. Loring, head of the Loring Brothers, and a team of local carpenters. They chose the schooner design for its speed and maneuverability, and its ability to carry a large cargo of mail and passengers. The schooner was built in Key West, Florida, and was the first schooner to be built in the United States.



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

1900
The **WESTERN UNION** was the first schooner to be built in Key West, Florida, and was the first schooner to be built in the United States.

1905-1910
The **WESTERN UNION** was the first schooner to be built in Key West, Florida, and was the first schooner to be built in the United States.

1910-1915
The **WESTERN UNION** was the first schooner to be built in Key West, Florida, and was the first schooner to be built in the United States.

The Captain's Quarters
The **WESTERN UNION** was the first schooner to be built in Key West, Florida, and was the first schooner to be built in the United States.



The Western Union schooner sailing on the water.



1915
The **WESTERN UNION** was the first schooner to be built in Key West, Florida, and was the first schooner to be built in the United States.



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

"Western Union"

1. Built in the year 1890 in Key West, Florida, the schooner was the first of its kind to be built in the United States.
2. The schooner was built by Robert H. Loring, head of the Loring Brothers, and a team of local carpenters.
3. The schooner was the first to be built in Key West, Florida, and was the first schooner to be built in the United States.
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The Western Union schooner sailing on the water.

SAIL into HISTORY.

Presented By
Historic Tours of America

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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 17th 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 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, 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 1749, 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 fishers generally fished out to nearby coral reefs to catch small fish called "snappers" (see photo below) for and other means of transportation were not yet widely available here in those days. Snappers (also known as "sea bolls") to the fish — were needed to keep the catch alive in when taken 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 docks elsewhere in the lower Keys, in order to utilize rising prices.



The Sponge Fishery

The Seaport also became a hub for the fishery for sponges. These were important articles of commerce with north and south markets beginning in the late 17th century. In the 18th century, sponge harvesting began in the Keys. Fishers returned out to small rising dunes (such as in photo below), and searched the surface for sponges. The sponges were then laboriously cleaned and tied together in bunches for transport to the sponge dealers for sale at market.

The sponges from Key West were in such demand, that fishers often had to sail to distant waters in "slooperships" (sloops for right) to support the single crews on sponges to grow. 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 boasted with maritime activity. That is when vast beds of Tortugas pick 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 best 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 made possible by the Florida Keys Historical Society, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. The Florida Keys Historical Society is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. The Florida Keys Historical Society is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. The Florida Keys Historical Society is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.