

Matecumbe Historical Trust

Newsletter - April 2010



1935 Hurricane Survivors Reunion

The Matecumbe Historical Trust will host this month's lecture on **Tuesday, April 27th** at Island Community Church, (mm 83) at 6:30 PM

This year is the 75th anniversary of the September 2, 1935 Labor Day Hurricane.

Five of the survivors will come together to share their stories of life in the Keys in the early 30's, the Hurricane and the aftermath. This is a rare opportunity to listen to Joe Pinder, Alma Pinder Dalton, Laurette Pinder Russell, Norman Parker and Charles Pellicer speak in person about the Keys during the early years, the wonderful experiences of island living and the disaster of the 1935 hurricane that took over 500 lives. The Hurricane Monument was built in Islamorada and dedicated in November of 1937 to honor the locals and veterans who lost their lives. The audience will have an opportunity to ask questions.

This event is free and open to the public. For more information please call Irving or Jeane Eyster at 305-664-9504.

Papa Joe's

Since the destruction of Papa Joe's at the west end of Upper Matecumbe, the Trust has received many calls wanting to know more about its history. I interviewed several people who at times were involved with the Yacht Harbor or who knew the Fowlers, as Jeane and I did. Jeane, my wife, at one time was a realtor working with Susie Fowler. We have listened to many stories of the history of what is now called Papa Joe's. Ed Ball, one of the largest stockholders of FEC Railway, made frequent trips to Key West. When Mr. Ball was aboard, the train always stopped at the restaurant. Owning the railway, he could do this. He would go in and pick up a fish sandwich. It was waiting for him to take to the train and eat on the way.

This was inhabited by Indians over 2000 years ago. This island was discovered by Ponce de Leon on Sunday, May 26, 1513. He made port on Lower Matecumbe to take on water and fire wood for the long trek back to Puerto Rico. At the time, this island was called Achecumbe, and became Spanish. Then English and became part of the United States.

One third of Upper Matecumbe was homesteaded by the Parkers in the early 1900s. The eastern two thirds of the island was homesteaded by the Russells and the Pinders in the center. Charles and Isabelle Peacock purchased the west end from today's La Siesta to the west end of the island. They sold it to George and Eunice Merrick, developers of Coral Gables, and built the Caribee Colony Resort with cottages, cabins, restaurants, dance hall and a marina. It had two bands. One played Cuban music. They also had a restaurant where Papa Joes was. Merricks Caribee Colony was destroyed in the Labor Day hurricane, Sept. 2, 1935.

The following year, Everett and Susie Fowler started building a restaurant and marina on the deep water lagoon. They built nine cabins across the lagoon with an arched foot bridge to get to the cabins. This was known as Fowler's Caribee Resort. Electricity was furnished by a windmill. The resort was built by Bernard Russell, Ray Bushea and Ev Fowler. Ev as he was known, was one of the officials of the Miami Metropolitan Fishing Tournament and in 1937 he put on the Keys tournament, with the awards and banquet being held on the lower floor or basement as they called it.

Most places were not rebuilt after the hurricane, making Fowlers one of the few places where tourists could get a room, eat at the restaurant, drink from the bar, rent a boat, go deep sea fishing or swim from the sand beach across from the lagoon. Bait and supplies were also available.

Don Wollard, in the 40's was a fishing guide from the resort. The first air boat in the Keys was operated from here. He was the distributor of the Johnson outboard motor in the Keys.

Charlie Lazo also operated a back country charter from the Caribee docks. Charlie said Ted Williams small boat was docked next to his, along with many other famous guides and charter captains. Charlie could remember more about the food at Susie's than he could about fishing, especially the key lime pies.

Edney Parker ran a charter boat from the Fowlers Marina in the late 30's and early 40's. Charter was \$50 a day. Norm Parker said he could remember meeting Shirley Temple here when her family stopped here to eat. He said there were only two places on Upper Matecumbe with marinas – Fowlers and Whale Harbor. These were popular places for all boaters, diners and a place to visit and exchange gossip.

Joe Miller changed the name to Papa Joe's before selling to Frank Curtiss in 1982. Most everyone who came to Islamorada, even for a few days, ate at least one meal with Frank Curtiss.



Papa Joe's under construction
In 1937



Papa Joe's demolished



Papa Joe's earlier this year

Several artifacts have been donated to our future museum. One of these is a 100 year old piano which was used at the Toll Gate Inn years ago and was donated by Anna May Heald. Another is a Florida East coast railway marker donated by the Sandrey family who own the Chesapeake Resort. It was found in their yard. The concrete marker is 6"x 6" square and 21" long. The concrete marker had "FEC Railway molded in it. It was to mark the railway right of way. We have a metal spear from the 1700's donated by Sally Duncan who now lives in the Keys. Her son found the spear.

A few young ladies meeting twice a week are cataloging our artifacts for the Trust. Only a thousand or more to go. When we travel on the road, I am please and impressed with the number of people standing in front of our plaques reading and copying the verbiage or taking pictures of our history. Barbara and Cinnamon fill our brochures boxes on a regular basis.

Our vast collection is growing as we continue to collect items and entire collections from others who are looking for a place to display their treasures. If you have artifacts, photos or items you would like to share, please contact Irving or Jeane Eyster at 305-664-9504.