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**Miami, Florida**

**LINKS ACROSS THE GULFSTREAM:  
THE FLORIDA /BAHAMAS ZONE, 1780-1900**

**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**in**

**HISTORY**

**by**

**Astrid Melzner Whidden**

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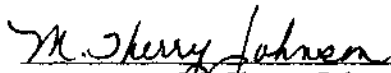
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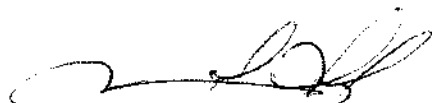
  
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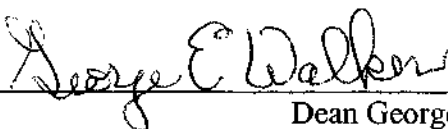
  
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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to Randy, my parents, friends and Golden Retrievers. Without all of their contributions over the years, this work would not have been completed. Thank you all!

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank the members of my committee for all of their support during this project. My major professor, Dr. Sherry Johnson, was particularly helpful in shaping this work to reflect the major thrust of all of my research. Dr. N. Cook provided new insight into my topic based on the wider Atlantic world. Dr. Carol Damian understood the nuances of the architecture I used as a major source of proof for my work.

I also could not have attained this degree without the support of the Mellon Foundation. The Doctoral Fellowship provided by this institution helped me to accomplish this goal. The administrators of my fellowship at the Latin American and Caribbean Center at Florida International University always provided me with the resources which proved necessary to continue.

**ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION**  
**LINKS ACROSS THE GULSTREAM:**  
**THE FLORIDA/BAHAMAS ZONE, 1780-1900**

by

**Astrid Melzner Whidden**

**Florida International University, 2007**

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The links created between Florida and the Bahamas from 1780 to 1900 constituted a major influence in the evolution of a unique society. This dissertation adds to the understanding of this topic by using primary sources and architecture to follow the odyssey of the people who shaped this region. Building on the historiography which examined each area separately, this work focused on the ties forged in the interactions between Florida and the Bahamas

Following the immigrants who shaped Florida and the Bahamas, this work examines cultural holdovers which influenced this region during times of demographic flux. Aesthetic preferences stood out as one way that people maintained connections to their past. The use of architecture as a lens to view this process provides a concrete example of this phenomenon.

The societies of Florida and the Bahamas remained intertwined during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Forced migrations shaped the trajectory of the evolution of a distinctive culture in these areas bordered by the Gulfstream. This

dissertation proves that the links forged between these societies reinforced the patterns which endured throughout the maturation of this area.



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## Chapter One

### Introduction

The Circum Caribbean nexus created by contact between Floridians and Bahamians garnered attention from scholars as the setting for a multinational clash set within the fluid world fostered by the geographical setting of many islands set within a vast sea. Scholarly inquiry into this region and the forces which caused the initial exchanges under scrutiny in this study of these two areas primarily focused on the period when the revolutionary trends of the late eighteenth century caused a large influx of American Loyalists into the Florida peninsula.<sup>1</sup> Eventually, some of the American Loyalists and their slaves moved to the Bahamas and influenced its development. The narrative of their incursion into the Bahamas remains important in a wider context as they dispersed from the archipelago back into the American territory of Florida. For this analysis, the value of their architectural aesthetic formulated in the Anglo American

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<sup>1</sup>The initial research on the Florida/Bahamas connection which concerns this study began with the discussions based on the experiences of the American Loyalists in East Florida. The seminal studies by Charles Loch Mowat, *East Florida as a British Province* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1943), and Wilbur Henry Siebert, *Loyalists in East Florida, 1774 to 1785; The Most Important Documents Pertaining Thereto, Edited with an Accompanying Narrative*, Vol. I & II, (Boston: Gregg Press, 1972), both documented their arrival to East Florida. J. Leitch Wright, Jr.'s *Florida in the American Revolution* (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1975), fits Florida into the events of revolutionary North America. Thelma Peterson Peters, "Loyalists in the Plantation Period" (Ph.D. diss., University of Florida, 1960). Gail Saunders, *Bahamian Loyalists and Their Slaves* (London: Macmillan Education LTD, 1983) and Michael Craton, *A History of the Bahamas* (Canada: San Salvador Press, 1962) all enriched the understanding of the travails of the Loyalists in the Bahamas. Sandra Riley *Homeward Bound: A History of the Bahama Islands to 1850 with a Definitive Study of Abaco in the American Loyalist Plantation Period* (Miami: Island Research, 1983) contributed to the knowledge concerning the Loyalists in the Northern Bahamas and their decision to return to Florida. All of these authors enriched the historiography on the Loyalists and the work of this group dominates the topic for this area.

experience, which changed the built world of the Bahamas, proved an important lens through which to view the historical processes which occurred after their arrival to the islands.

This work addresses the idea that the societal patterns and architectural motifs which matured in the Florida/Bahamas zone continues to be an important element in the understanding of this region. While the scholarly scrutiny of the two areas remains an important topic, the dominant focus of many of the earlier works examined each region as a discrete entity. The contact which continued between the two regions drew other scholars to examine the nature of the Bahamians who came to Florida. Some focused on their contributions as immigrants, especially in labor related issues, to the growth of Florida.<sup>2</sup> Some other works also suggest that linkages between the two areas have been present throughout the development of this unique geographical setting.<sup>3</sup> The Loyalists' slaves and the free black communities of the Bahamas also received acknowledgement as

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<sup>2</sup> Walter Maloney's *A Sketch of the History of Key West* (Newark, N.J.: Advertiser Printing House, 1876) documents the early days of the inception of Key West as an important city. *Key West: The Old and the New* (St. Augustine: The Record Company, 1912) is an invaluable source as Jefferson Browne built on Maloney's work. John Viele published a series of books on the Keys beginning with *The Florida Keys: A History of the Pioneers* (Sarasota, Florida: Pineapple Press, 1996). Maureen Ogle's *Key West: History of an Island of Dreams* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003) is the latest addition to the narratives on the city's development. Howard Johnson, *The Bahamas from Slavery to Servitude, 1783-1933* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), examines the movement of Black Bahamian Laborers to the Keys, and then Miami, and contends that the deplorable labor conditions in the Bahamas caused the migration to Florida.

<sup>3</sup> William Keegan, *The People who Discovered Columbus: The Prehistory of the Bahamas* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1992), looks at the Amerindians and posits the existence of Pre-Columbian contact between Florida and the Bahamas; Rosalyn Howard, *Black Seminoles in the Bahamas* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), examines the Seminoles who migrated to the Bahamas in the nineteenth century.



an important factor in the growth of the Florida/Bahamas zone.<sup>4</sup> Because Florida and the Bahamas deviated from established patterns found on the American continent and in the wider Caribbean world due to their isolation from important economic and political centers, the confluence of many groups fostered a mind set in their inhabitants which allowed a syncretism of cultural and societal practices.

The second portion of this study looks at the visual expression of the syncretism which occurred: it survives in the architecture of the region. The use of architecture as a source for examining the experiences of the groups involved in the development of an enduring material cultural exchange goes beyond merely dissecting visual motifs: it reveals linkages maintained by the immigrants. The study of architecture in the Florida/Bahamas zone has a rich tradition as each region was examined by well known scholars. The acknowledgement of a distinct St. Augustine style in East Florida began in the 1960s and continues to draw attention as nuances in building methods continue to be

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<sup>4</sup> On East Florida, during the colonial period, Jane Landers edited an important work, *Colonial Plantations and Economy in Florida* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), which concentrated on plantation slavery. In Key West, Sharon Wells, *Forgotten Legacy: Blacks in Nineteenth Century Key West* (Key West: Historic Florida Keys Preservation Board, 1982), worked on the history of the black community while Larry Rivers, *Slavery in Florida: Territorial Days to Emancipation* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), gives an overview of slavery in Florida during the territorial period up to emancipation. Gail Saunders, *Slavery in the Bahamas, 1648-1838* (Nassau: The Nassau Guardian, 1985), was the scholar to concentrate on slavery in the Bahamas; Michael Craton, *Empire, Enslavement and Freedom in the Caribbean* (Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 1997), has worked with her and independently to enlarge the scope of this inquiry in the Bahamas. Roseanne Adderley contributes to this discussion when she looks at liberated Africans in the Bahamas, in her text *New Negroes from Africa: Culture and Community Among Liberated Africans* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2006), and their links to the wider Atlantic world.

revealed.<sup>5</sup> With the Loyalist's arrival to the city, their heritage based on the Georgian style, dominant on the Southeastern coast of the American colonies, added to the St. Augustine style and was included in the transference of aesthetics to the Bahamas.<sup>6</sup> The Georgian style dominated much of the British Caribbean's building programs.<sup>7</sup> Its

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<sup>5</sup> Albert Manucy's works, *The Houses of St. Augustin, 1565-1821* (St. Augustine: St. Augustine Historical Society, 1962); *Sixteenth century St. Augustine: The People and Their Homes* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997), led the way in making St. Augustine's architecture an important component in understanding the variety found within the city's structures. Jean Parker Waterbury published two in-depth exposes, *The Gonzalez-Alvarez Oldest House: The Place and its People* (St. Augustine: St. Augustine Historical Society, 1984); *The Treasurer's House* (St. Augustine: St. Augustine Historical Society, 1994), on individual structures. Elsbeth K. Gordon's recent study, *Florida's Colonial Architectural Heritage* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), is more inclusive of all the contributions made to the city's aesthetic environs.

<sup>6</sup> The historiography on the Georgian Style has a vast background. John Summerson's work, *Georgian London* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1946), looks at its beginnings in England and is followed by the work of James Stevens Curl, *Georgian Architecture* (London: David & Charles, 1993). Hugh Morrison's *Early American Architecture: From the First Colonial Settlements to the National Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952) contributed to the focus on the style as it gained currency in colonial America. The many studies on South Carolina, where the Georgian stylistic tradition was very strong, gained currency under the leadership of authors such as Albert Simons and Samuel Lapham, *The Early Architecture of Charleston* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1970).

<sup>7</sup> David Buisseret's enormous work *Historic Architecture of the Caribbean* (London: Heinemann, 1980) on the entire Caribbean's architecture dominates the historiography on the topic. Edward Crain, *Historic Architecture in the Caribbean Islands* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994), continued in this vein but added the social and political factors which contributed to the development of building patterns. Pamela Gosner divided the Caribbean into two separate studies of the Georgian style, *Caribbean Georgian: The Great and Small Houses of the West Indies* (Washington D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1982), and then the Baroque style, *Caribbean Baroque: Historic Architecture of the Spanish Antilles* (Colorado: Passeggiata Press, 1996), in the region. Robert Douglas, *Island Heritage: Architecture of the Bahamas* (Nassau: Darkstream Publication, 1992), condenses the area into a smaller study done with illustrations; while Newell Lewis, *Architecture of the Caribbean and its Amerindian Origins in Trinidad* (New York: American Institute of Architects, 1983), included Amerindian contributions to the architecture of one island. Andrew Gravette, *Architectural Heritage of the*

primary position in the architecture of the Bahamas thus fits the patterns developed in the colonies. Unfortunately, publications on Bahamian architecture remain scarce and concentrate mostly on the structures of the dominant elites and public buildings.

The evolution of Nassau into a Georgian town occurred with the arrival of the Loyalists who followed an ambitious building agenda. Under their guidance, the major public buildings, such as the government compound, the jail and two churches were completed. Town houses constructed on the single and double house plan found in Charleston, South Carolina gave the city a cosmopolitan façade. The knowledge of materials gained in the American colonies as well as East Florida facilitated a rapid restructuring of the island's built world. The influx of a large slave population into Nassau as well as the Out Islands<sup>8</sup> constructed an environment which attempted to duplicate the old material terrain of the American South.<sup>9</sup> The scarcity of the material available on the history of this architecture mirrors the struggling efforts to preserve the

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*Caribbean: An A-Z of Historic Buildings* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2000), who looked at the entire Caribbean, published a work done for the amateur architectural buff.

<sup>8</sup> The term Out Islands in this period refers to all of the islands of the Bahamas except the island of New Providence which contained the capital of Nassau. Later, after Freeport, Grand Bahama was developed, Freeport was also included as separate from the Out Islands. Today the Ministry of Tourism has promoted the use of the term Family Islands to replace the Out Island moniker, but Bahamians still use Out Island.

<sup>9</sup> Slave architecture in the South is well documented by John Vlach in his *Back of the Big House* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993). The studies by Henry Glassie, *Vernacular Architecture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), on architecture and folk material are invaluable when attempting to trace patterns in slave architecture.

remnants of buildings.<sup>10</sup> The preservation of historic properties in the Bahamas began in the 1980s and continues under the auspices of the Antiquities, Monuments and Museum Corporation of the Bahamas begun in 1999. In her latest book on architecture, Gail Saunders, along with Linda M. Huber, hoped that the “unnecessary and unwarranted demolitions” of old buildings would cease.<sup>11</sup> These conditions continue to make the efforts of scholars in Bahamian architectural history difficult.

While the Bahamas struggles to preserve and document its architecture, the city of Key West continues to maintain a strong preservation ethos.<sup>12</sup> The early architecture of the city remains one of the hallmarks of Key West’s material realm. With the intense scrutiny of the structures in the town, surprisingly the available in-depth published material remains sparse. Articles in newspapers and magazines about Key West’s

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<sup>10</sup>Gail Saunders’ and Donald Cartwright’s *Historic Nassau* (London: Macmillan Education, 1979) represents the first scholarly compilation on Nassau’s architecture. There were government tracks prior to this as well as magazine articles in publications such as *Country Life* but the work by Saunders and Cartwright defined the topic. G. Seighbert Russell, *Nassau’s Historic Buildings*, published the next text on Nassau’s buildings with help from the Bahamas National Trust in 1980 (a non-governmental body). Two works deal with individual structures: Henry Villard’s text on the Royal Victoria Hotel and Iris Finlayson’s history of St. Matthew’s Church. Beginning with his book in 1987, Steve Dodge published his *The Compleat Guide to Nassau* (Illinois: White Sound Press, 1987) and then *A Guide and History of Hope Town* (Illinois: White Sound Press, 1990). Robert Douglas illustrated some of the architecture in Nassau and the Out Islands in his *Island Heritage* of 1992. Gail Saunders and Linda M. Huber collaborated for another overview of Nassau’s architecture in 2001.

<sup>11</sup>Gail Saunders and Linda M. Huber, *Nassau’s Historic Landmarks* (London: Macmillan Education, 2001), viii.

<sup>12</sup>I worked for Research Atlantica, a Boca Raton based company in Key West in 1996 documenting each structure in old Key West for an Historic Sites Evaluation. Historic American Building Surveys are maintained by the State of Florida. Extensive files on individual houses are kept in the Monroe County Public Library in Key West.

architecture appeared frequently in the last quarter of the twentieth century as the popularity of the town as a tourist destination increased. As far as the more significant work written on architecture in the city, it has been the topic for at least two graduate level manuscripts and three published works.<sup>13</sup> The Bahamians also developed distinct material enclaves in other portions of the State, but no published sources document their architecture in those areas.<sup>14</sup> The inclusion of the history and architecture of the immigrants who made multiple transferences in the Florida/Bahamas zone into this historiography would explain the unique characteristics, societal and architectural, forged in coastal settings of the region.

Thus the two areas under consideration in this work, Florida and the Bahamas, have been examined by historians as well as architectural historians. This work is different because it links the regions together and proves through architecture that the contact which began as soon as the peninsula and islands had permanent residents continued to shape the evolution of the two societies. Although their positions as buffer

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<sup>13</sup>Thom Vance Smith, "19<sup>th</sup> Century American Architecture and the Houses of Key West," (Master's Thesis, University of Florida, 1979); William Carl Shiver, "The Historic Architecture of Key West: The Triumph of Vernacular Form in a Nineteenth Century Florida Town, (Ph.D. diss., Florida State University, 1987); James R. Warnke, *Balustrades and Gingerbreads: Key West's Handcrafted Homes and Buildings* (Miami: Banyon Books, 1978); Sharon Wells and Lawson Little, *Wooden Houses of Key West* (Key West: Historic Florida Keys Preservation Board, 1991); Alex Caemmerer, *The Houses of Key West* (Sarasota, Florida: Pineapple Press, 1992).

<sup>14</sup>Black Bahamians developed communities in Miami while working there and Bahamians also developed a community in Riviera Beach, Florida called Conchtown. I had family members living in Riviera Beach into the 1980s. Arlington Knowles, related distantly to my mother's family, came from Long Island to the area to work in the 1940s. Until he was eighty years old, he mended fishing nets for the local fishermen. He built his own house which was unfortunately demolished for the expansion of the Port of Palm Beach.

zones between opposing forces made for a precarious existence at times, Floridians and Bahamians developed solid interregional ties. The proximity of the neighbors, the southern boundaries of Florida were approximately 200 miles from capital city of the Bahamas, made dealings between them inevitable. This also facilitated movement between the two terrains. Migration constituted the Caribbean experience from the earliest pre-Columbian movements of the Amerindians. The restlessness of the population, driven by the search for economic gain, characterizes the region up to the present. The distinctiveness of the Florida/Bahamas zone lies in the continued back and forth flow of the people.<sup>15</sup>

The first part of this study reinforces much of the historiography on Florida and the Bahamas. It details the odyssey which begun in St. Augustine and ended in the Florida Keys. The irony of the immigration experience for many of the people who chose to embark on this journey could be found in the nature of their conservatism. Their unwillingness to accept the outcome of the American Revolution led to them arriving in East Florida as refugee. The intractability of their stance eventually forced many to bend in order to survive. When Britain lost East Florida the Loyalists who went to the

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<sup>15</sup>Even today the intersection of the population is continuous. Bahamians come to Florida to shop and seek medical help. A hotel in West Palm Beach, located across the street from the Palm Beach Mall, is nicknamed the Abaco Inn. The majority of tourists in the Bahamas originate from America with many of them leaving from Florida. Boaters travel from Florida to the Bahamas as the closeness (from West Palm Beach to West End in Grand Bahama is fifty miles) lures them and many make day trips to the islands. I have been over to the islands by boat to go diving and eat some Bahamian food.

Bahamas derisively called the locals Conchs;<sup>16</sup> ironically the ones who ultimately adopted the Conch lifestyle prospered.

The conservatism of the Loyalists included their adherence to the ideals set forth by the metropolises of Great Britain. Their expressions of loyalty included a continuance of the role of colonizers in a strange land. They arrived to the Bahamas with the mindset that they had a superior understanding of what made a successful colony; after all the American colonies prospered in the colonial period. This precept rested on the undeniable results of the massive agricultural system which nurtured the thriving economy of areas such as Charleston and its surrounding countryside. The large monoculture of plantations in the southern colonies served as a model which the migrants carried with them. Included with this faction of the migrants, were their slaves and less well to do refugees. Thus, a socio economic split within the Loyalist population existed which would lead to a unforeseen outcome: for the most part, those from the lower classes as well as the freed men and women<sup>17</sup> managed to endure in the Bahamas and the upper class members departed after the failure of cotton plantations in the region.

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<sup>16</sup>The name Conch refers to the diet of the old inhabitants of the Bahamas who were there when the Loyalists arrived. The Loyalists used this as a pejorative nickname for the natives who had learned to live off of the mollusks which were so plentiful in the shallow waters around the Bahamas. Bahamians today still see the conch as a major source of food and have many recipes to cook the tough meat. By the time the Loyalists' descendents moved to Key West, they ironically carried the moniker with them and proudly used it to identify themselves as separate from the Americans in the city. Today in Key West anyone who is born in the city calls themselves a Conch, although if they are not of Bahamian descent this would be incorrect according to the origins of the name. In the Bahamas, the name has totally died out except for a section of the population who are called Conchy Joes. This term means a native born white Bahamian who is from an old Bahamian family. I am considered a Conchy Joe.

<sup>17</sup> Slaves were emancipated in the British colonies in 1834.

The inhabitants of the northern islands mainly came from the poorer members of the Loyalist immigrants. They had to wrest their existence from an environment which offered little in the way of traditional agricultural production. Instead, they turned to the sea as a main source of revenue. Fishing, boat building, and wrecking produced satisfactory returns for the people of the cays. Wrecking attracted Bahamians as a lucrative industry long before the Loyalists arrived to the archipelago. Situated among many treacherous reefs, the shallow sea of the Bahamas guaranteed mishaps by old shipping vessels; in addition, poor, if any, charts confused captains unfamiliar with the waters. At times shipping, thus foundered ships, declined in the area due to outside events such as wars and when this occurred the salvors ventured into other shipping lanes to reap profits from distressed ships. The Spanish had noted the Bahamian wreckers' presence in the waters off of Florida and did little to curtail their encroachment into those shipping lanes, but the acquisition of the Florida territory by the United States in 1821 forced the salvors to reconsider the location of their home ports. The enforcement of the Congressional Act<sup>18</sup> whereby wrecks had to be carried into the ports of Florida when wrecked in her coastal waters compelled many of the Bahamian wreckers to move to Florida; specifically Key West.

The Bahamians who watched the unfolding of events in Florida anticipated the acquisition of the peninsula from the Spanish by the Americans. These savvy men displayed an understanding of the links which bound the two borderlands and allowed

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<sup>18</sup>Congress, Senate, Mr. Johnston calling for an Inquiry into the Law of the Territorial Government of Florida, relating to Wrecks, 19<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., *Register of Debates in Congress* pt. 1 (28 & 29 December 1825): 25-26.



them to capitalize on the changes foreseen by the more astute. The wreckers of the northern Bahamas made swift decisions to pull up stakes and move to Key West as they again reacted to circumstances beyond their control. Their decisions helped to make the small key "the city of the wreckers."<sup>19</sup>

Wrecking flourished in Key West as well as other industries which drew more Bahamians to its shores. Increasingly after 1850, Black Bahamians ventured into Key West as the abusive labor practices instituted after the end of slavery hindered their prosperity. The black population of the Bahamas had come out of slavery under distinct circumstances. Slavery in the Bahamas existed as soon as the first settlers came to the islands with slaves although no documentation exists which gives the absolute numbers and demographic make up of these first inhabitants.<sup>20</sup> Slaves reached the colony from a variety of sources but the greatest influx of them occurred when the Loyalists arrived with their slaves in the 1780s. They were a heterogeneous group of people who more often than not had been born into the Americas' system of slavery. As put forth by Howard Johnson, the slaves in the Bahamas had developed a type of protopeasantry accommodation to the system of slavery in the years before emancipation.<sup>21</sup> As the outward migration of Loyalists from the Bahamas began, many of the slaves remained behind on the remote Out Islands of the southern Bahamas. There they continued

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<sup>19</sup>Kenneth Scott, "The City of Wreckers: Two Letters of 1838," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 25 (October 1946): 193.

<sup>20</sup>Gail Saunders, *Slavery in the Bahamas, 1648-1838* (Nassau: The Nassau Guardian, 1985), i.

<sup>21</sup>Johnson, *The Bahamas from Slavery to Servitude*, 47.

subsistence farming practices and learned how to work within the remnants of the slave system in the Bahamas. They learned how to deal with dependency and independency issues two decades prior to the 1834 freeing of slaves.<sup>22</sup> The black population, whether free or slave, achieved personal freedom while still working within boundaries imposed by the dominant white oligarchy.

Thus, the Black Bahamians arriving in Key West came with a vastly different background in the formation of their own society. They constituted an important portion of Key West's growing population although they consciously remained outside of the American Blacks' experiences in Key West. They found that the native Blacks of Key West felt antipathy toward them as a result of their willingness to labor for lower wages.<sup>23</sup> They also experienced the racism of the whites of Key West who looked for avenues to dissuade them from remaining in the city; officials eagerly deported them back to the Bahamas. The tribulations inherent in the immigrants' circumstances compounded with racial tensions did not deter them from creating a viable atmosphere in which they flourished. They continued to identify with their Bahamian roots. The visits to the Bahamas of members of the black community with ties to the islands were newsworthy events as they emphasized the different nature of their past histories. In the *New York Age*, notices of visits of black citizens to Nassau continued to appear into the

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<sup>22</sup>Michael Craton, "The Ambivalencies of Independency: The Transition out of Slavery in the Bahamas, c.1800-1850," in *West Indies Accounts: Essays on the History of the British Caribbean and the Atlantic Economy*, ed. Roderick A. McDonald (Jamaica: The Press University of the West Indies, 1996), 284.

<sup>23</sup>Jerrell H. Shofner, "Militant Florida Negro Laborers, *The Journal of Southern History* (August 1973): 407.

twentieth century: Miss Bloneva Terry visited Nassau for one year<sup>24</sup> while Mrs. Susan Martin's and her children's return from Nassau received attention.<sup>25</sup> Black Bahamians hung on to their roots with determination and this made them stand out. The reporter L.W.Livingston could not help but comment about them and the diverse racial mixture of Key West when he related that:

The Conchs are white and would-be white Bahamians. There are white Cubans and colored Cubans. The Conchs and colored Bahamians show many cockney traits, express love and admiration for John Bull and the queen and publish in many other ways that they are "Hinglish, you know."<sup>26</sup>

They helped to maintain the links created in the Florida/Bahamas zone due to the fluid movement of the people who crossed the Gulfstream with seeming impunity.

The first portion of this study thus follows the links established in the region beginning in the eighteenth century. The second half of my work proves the strong continuity found by looking at architecture. The photographs in this section provide the reader with a new source by which to evaluate the diversity and consistency which characterized this odyssey.<sup>27</sup>

When the British acquired Florida in 1763, they arrived to colony which had few amenities in comparison to larger cities in the American colonies, such as Charleston. The new arrivals attempted to recreate their former lives and impose their Anglo

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<sup>24</sup> *New York Age* (Key West), 1 August 1912.

<sup>25</sup> *New York Age* (Key West), 6 June 1912.

<sup>26</sup> *New York Age* (Key West), 3 November 1888.

<sup>27</sup> These photos were all taken by me over a period of fifteen years. Many of the structures from the Out Islands have never been seen by architectural historians and they shed new light on the entire experience of the immigrants.

aesthetics on the new colony, but the task proved a rigorous challenge to many of them. Using Charleston as an inception point for the urban architecture which the Loyalists relied on as a starting point for the development of their own material preferences, the style which they so clearly copied came out of the Georgian period in British architecture. Based on the Renaissance architecture of Palladio, the Georgian style demonstrated a restrained taste in the evolution of British architecture. The style itself flourished in England in the eighteenth century. It continued to be popular in the colonies of Great Britain long after it fell from favor in the metropolis due to the proliferation of architectural pattern books which promoted the Georgian ethos.<sup>28</sup> Based on principals of symmetrical balance and using such adornments as quoining, dentil-molding on the cornice, engaged pilasters around the centered doorway and dormers the Georgian style represented power, wealth and an appreciation of classical antiquity.<sup>29</sup>

In St. Augustine, the Loyalists observed traditional Spanish building techniques, such as cantilevered balconies, and they adopted some of the solutions found in the St. Augustine style to climatic conditions. The syncretism of these two styles, along with the building technologies of Africans and Amerindians, allowed the Florida/Bahamas zone to develop its own architecture. The borderlands of vast empires encouraged ad hoc solutions to building problems posed by frontier territories. The Loyalist refugees still believed in the ideologies of the dominant elite displayed in Georgian architecture, but they had to distort this aesthetic to serve them in their migrations. When they arrived in

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<sup>28</sup> John Summerson, *Georgian London*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: Pimlico, 1991), 49-50.

<sup>29</sup> James Stevens Curl, *Georgian Architecture* (United Kingdom: David & Charles, 1993; reprint, United Kingdom: David & Charles, 2002), 18.

the Bahamas, they quickly imposed their taste on the town of Nassau; Nassau became a smaller version of Charleston. The Loyalists incorporated the St. Augustine style in balconies and used exterior staircases.<sup>30</sup> Some developed plantations on other islands with slave labor which was also used to build most of the structures associated with these complexes. The legacy of these aesthetic preferences made the imposition of the Loyalists' taste an important part of the Bahamian story. The intervening years between the arrival of the Loyalists and then the beginnings of migration back to Florida allowed mutations in the original Loyalists' influences to develop.

As the Loyalists adapted to the Conch lifestyle in the Northern Bahamas, they developed their own vernacular architecture. The Loyalists included merchants, artisans and the yeoman farmers who found an inhospitable region where water and arable land proved a scarce commodity. The builders of this group of settlers relied on wood construction as they also became experts in ship building. Perhaps some of the back woodsmen adjusted to the use of wood in a marine environment as they had a tradition of wood construction in areas such as North Carolina. The unusual rooflines in Hope Town, Abaco resemble the rooflines of some structures in North Carolina and this leads me to the conclusion that the people of the backcountry of the southern coastline were more influential in developing the aesthetic found in wood then originally thought.<sup>31</sup> This

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<sup>30</sup>Exterior staircases and second story galleries were found in St. Augustine during the evolution of the St. Augustine style.

<sup>31</sup>State Library of North Carolina, "Historic Halifax," available from <http://statelibrary.dcr.state.nc.us/nc/ncsites/Halifax2.htm#Constitution>; Internet; accessed 6 August 2006. The unusual roofline, sometimes called a cranked roofline, was seen and documented by me at the Constitution-Burgess House in Halifax, North Carolina. The structure has been dated to 1808 due to its first deed. Architectural historians have

roofline and other features of structures on the Abaco Cays and Eleuthera have been considered a product of the New England influence on the area.<sup>32</sup> This linkage must be questioned as this type of roof line and other construction features, such as the art of gingerbread, existed in the southern colonies of America. The style of homes in the Abacos and North Eleuthera reflects the accommodations made by the settlers to the conditions they found. The aesthetic considerations of the structure reflected the Anglo American experience of the Loyalists.

The slaves and then freed people also developed an architectural style which today characterizes many structures on the old plantation islands of the Bahamas. The manifestation of their self reliance remains in the vernacular structures found on the Out Islands. The form of the slaves' houses arrived with them to the Bahamas from the American colonies. The pyramid house and the hall and parlor style structure had their antecedents for the Bahamian slaves in the plantations of the American South. These vernacular interpretations of African forms and the Georgian motifs of the masters survived the vicissitudes of the Out Island experience; whereas, the Great Houses of the plantocracy moldered away in the thick bush of such places as Crooked Island and Cat Island. These legacies in building were carried with the Bahamians as they journeyed back to Key West.

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reconsidered this date due to the Georgian features of the house. It was more likely built during the last twenty years of the eighteenth century.

<sup>32</sup>Pamela Gosner, *Caribbean Georgian: The Great and Small Houses of the West Indies* (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1982), 96; Steve Dodge and Vernon Malone, *A Guide and History of Hope Town* (Illionois: White Sound Press, 1990), 1; Andrew Gravette, *Architectural Heritage of the Caribbean: An A-Z of Historic Buildings* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2000), 97.

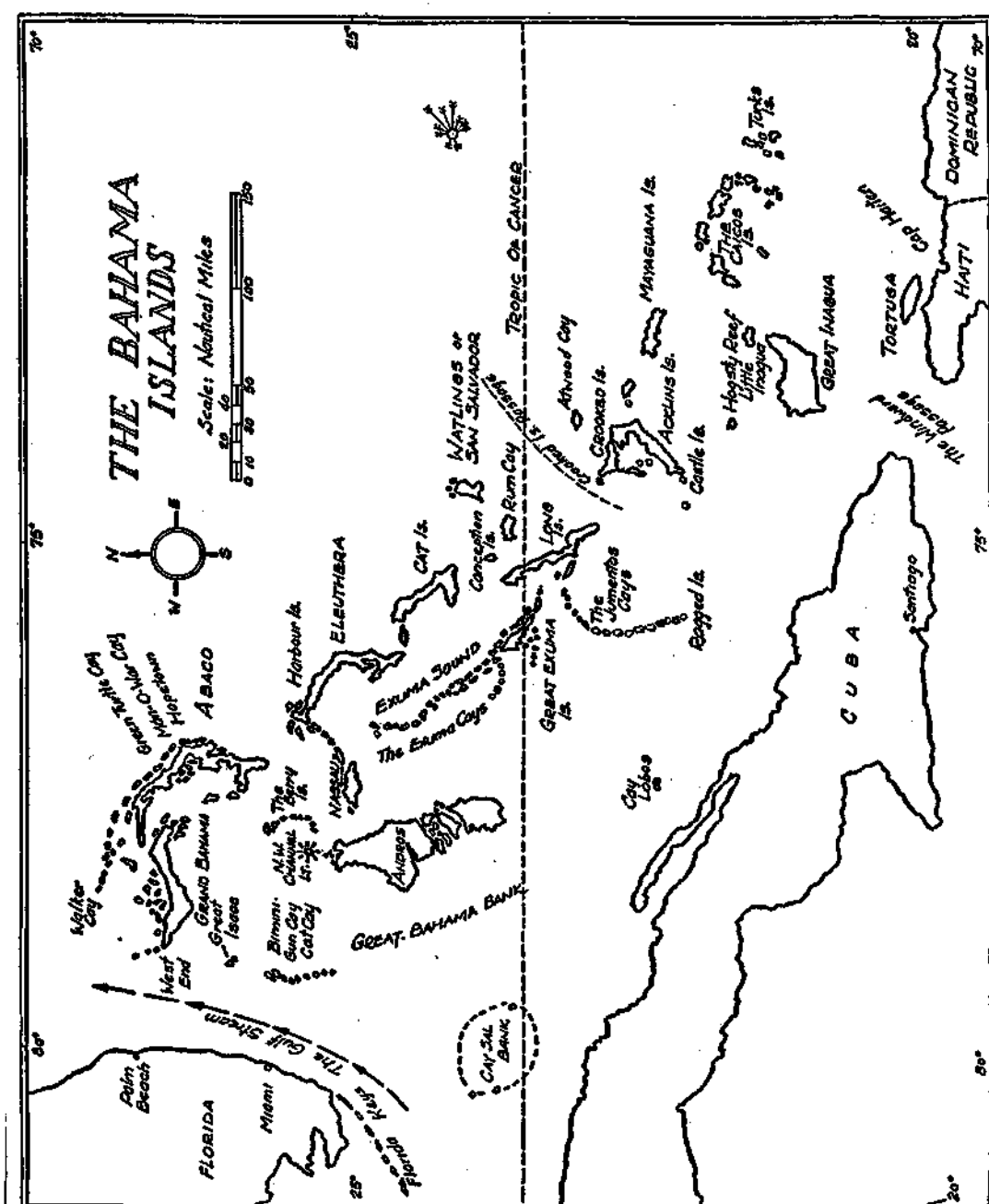
When the first Bahamians entered Key West they brought with them the knowledge of wood construction and a firm aesthetic grounded in their island experience. The structures they built today draw visitors who become entranced with the island atmosphere exemplified in the Conch architecture of the small key. Yet, the genesis of its architectural development, though credited to the Bahamians, remains a phenomenon looked at as a somewhat quaint manifestation of the island lifestyle. The buildings' status as a tourist draw obfuscates the syncretic nature of the Key West experience found in the material manifestations of the city's early architectural mode. Based on the Anglo American experience in the South, enriched by contact with a Spanish understanding of balconies, and then maturing in the isolation of the northern Bahamian Out Islands, the builders of Key West had a vast architectural language to draw on when they arrived in the city. Include later influences from the Cubans immigrating to Key West, Bahamian Blacks arriving from Nassau and then an introduction of the American aesthetics of the nineteenth century, and the examination of Key West's built milieu becomes problematic if trying to find one single trajectory in the aesthetic growth of the city. Thus, an inherent multiplicity in taste explains some of the more quirky structures produced by the city's builders. The basic Conch house evolved continuously in the nineteenth century to eventually include a vast non-discursive record of all the elements found in the structures on the island; the continual contact between Florida and the Bahamas in the nineteenth century allowed the constant renourishment of the linkages which created this atmosphere.

The Florida/Bahamas connection begun in the late eighteenth hundreds represents a continuing strand in the historical process which explains the unique features of these two

isolated regions. Their seclusion from the developments of the wider colonial world, caused by the colonies' seeming inability to contribute to the wealth of the imperial agendas of the metropolises, hindered them in their growth but also allowed them to formulate unique solutions to the problems they faced. The lack of attention to the idea of progress as a goal for the regions from the centers of power created an atmosphere of autonomy for various portions of the population. The acknowledgement of this symbiotic relationship occurred in the scholarship on the two regions, but the studies continued to refine discrete moments of influences. This bifurcation in the historiography allowed an understanding of Florida and the Bahamas to develop which continued to stress the differences between the two territories. The use of architecture as a tool to emphasize the similarities between the two allows an understanding to develop whereby the nexus created becomes clearer and more complex than expected. The utilization of architecture as a primary source for following the evolution of societal identities and the examination of its aesthetic meanings, maintained by the people of Florida and the Bahamas, provide a viable tool for understanding the events which transpired in the years between 1782 and 1861.



**PART ONE**  
**Forging the Links**



**Fig. 2.1 Map of the Bahamas**

## Chapter Two

### The Odyssey Begins: The Arrivals of the Immigrants into Florida

The beginning of the Circum Caribbean as a separate entity as opposed to the dominant sphere of the larger Caribbean bears researching insofar as its identity has been difficult to pinpoint. In modern scholarship, this region now encompasses a vast territory reaching down into the South American coastline; it is composed of areas that border the Caribbean Sea. But at the very beginnings of the Europeans' incursions into the New World, the secondary empire emerged. The story of the Circum Caribbean commenced with the settlement of Florida by the Spanish, but within the context of the development of a distinct Circum Caribbean society and cultural setting more than one group of people was involved. The idea that colonists bring with them ingrained ideas concerning the trajectory which their new societies would embark upon receives its fair share of acknowledgement,<sup>1</sup> but the New World experience mutated their ideas concerning the foundation and thus eventual maturation of their new surroundings. The meeting of many different peoples allowed the materialization of a society based on their new circumstances. The reality of available resources and the tenacity of colonists attempting to retain past societal patterns often necessitated adaptations which dictated new standards and the widening of the spheres of influence on which to draw for further solutions to problems.

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony Padgen, *Lords of all the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France, c. 1500-c.1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); Patricia Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession In Europe's Conquest of the New World, 1492-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). These texts explore some of the ways in which colonists retained their traditions and old links to Europe.

The Spanish settled in the Circum Caribbean long before the British arrived on the scene. They established the first colonies in Florida and the marks of their endeavors survive in the coastal town of St. Augustine in the northern half of the peninsula. The Spanish experience in colony building in the region began with the incorporation of some of the adaptations of the autochthonous elements already in existence in the region. The indigenous peoples of Florida had survived based on a complex social system<sup>2</sup> and the judicious cultivation of crops such as maize, beans, and squashes.<sup>3</sup> The arrival of the Europeans to the Florida peninsula set up the initial bifurcation of the society which evolved. The Amerindians challenged the Europeans for access to resources and the colonists soon learned the foes they encountered mandated adaptations to the variety of situations which arose as the Spanish gained a foothold in the region. For example, they soon realized they essentially only had control over a small amount of territory which bordered the coastline in East Florida<sup>4</sup>. They had to build forts in order to protect

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<sup>2</sup> Jerald T. Milanich, "Original Inhabitants," In *The New History of Florida*, ed. Michael Gannon (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), 6. The most in depth historical work on the Amerindians of Florida can be found in Milanich's works *Florida Indians and the Invasions from Europe* (1995); *Florida's Indians from Ancient Times to the Present* (1998).

<sup>3</sup> Paul E. Hoffman, *Florida's Frontiers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 12.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 203-204.

themselves from the native inhabitants as well as from invaders from the sea,<sup>5</sup> but they also learned useful survival skills such as maize production from the Amerindians.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, the Natives who survived the incursions by the Spanish inevitably gave way to the powerful forces at work under the auspices of the leadership of a new king.<sup>7</sup> Using Christianity, along with the subtle inclusion of European goods and Hispanic cultural beliefs, the Spanish influenced Amerindians toward a fundamental change in their way of life.<sup>8</sup> By the 1570s, accommodations between Spanish leaders and Amerindian caciques allowed an uneasy association between the two factions.<sup>9</sup> In 1595, a Spanish traveler to the region informed readers in his account concerning his adventures how a village cacique in Florida spoke “the Castilian language very well and was a Christian.”<sup>10</sup> The Amerindians learned to accommodate the new invaders. They had to

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<sup>5</sup> Jeannette Thurber Connor, ed., *Pedro Menéndez de Avilés, Memorial by Gonzalo Solís de Merás* (Deland, Florida: The Florida Historical Society, 1923; facsimile reproduction, Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1964), 184.

<sup>6</sup> Eugene Lyon, “Settlement and Survival,” In *The New History of Florida*, ed. Michael Gannon (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), 55.

<sup>7</sup> John H. Hann, *Indians of Central and South Florida, 1513-1763* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 164. The leadership of the Amerindians usually existed in the person of a cacique, a chief or head chief, but the position of king did exist in the Calusa people’s complex political system. Through an intricate tributary system established by the Calusa, the natives on the southeast coast were aware of this exalted position and the idea of a new Spanish king seemed a part of the evolution of relationships with outsiders.

<sup>8</sup> Jerald T. Milanich, *Florida Indians and the Invasion from Europe* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1995), 198-199.

<sup>9</sup> Hoffman, 65.

<sup>10</sup> Fray Andrés de San Miguel, *An Early Florida Adventure Story* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), 60.

concede to some hispanization and in many instances helped the intruders to survive the unfamiliar environs of the Florida peninsula. For example, the Indians under Spanish influence helped transport the shipwrecked survivor Jonathon Dickinson in 1696 northward toward British territory: as he was a British subject desiring to return to Philadelphia. Dickenson's account of the hospitality of the natives on the trip shows the adaptability required for the new allies. At one stop Dickinson recounts how the Indians had a dance in their traditional style. As guests, Dickinson relates how he and the accompanying members of his party received "plenty of cassena drink and such victuals as the Indians had provided for us, some bringing corn boiled, another peas, some one thing, some another, of all which we made a good supper and slept till morning."<sup>11</sup> The new society beginning to emerge in the Circum Caribbean showed the flexibility necessary for future gains in the growth of the area.

The complexity of the emerging society in the early colonial period also included the arrival of two more groups of people to the arena under examination. The Spanish brought African slaves and free Africans with them into Florida with their earliest expeditions.<sup>12</sup> They impacted the development of the colony as many were recognized as skilled artisans<sup>13</sup> and contributed to the overall survival of the region as a viable new

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<sup>11</sup> Evangeline Walker Andrews and Charles McLean, eds., *Jonathon Dickinson's Journal or, God's Protecting Providence, Being the Narrative of a Journey from Port Royal in Jamaica to Philadelphia between August 23, 1696 and April 1, 1697* (Stuart, Florida: Valentine Books, 1975), 66.

<sup>12</sup> Larry Eugene Rivers, *Slavery in Florida: Territorial Days to Emancipation* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), 2-3.

<sup>13</sup> Elsbeth K. Gordon, *Florida's Architectural Heritage* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), 8.

Spanish territory. Meanwhile, the British had gained a foothold on a lower portion of the North American continent by 1670 and this incursion challenged Spanish sovereignty on the entire Atlantic seaboard.<sup>14</sup> In addition, the British had expanded their empire into the nearby islands of the Bahamas in 1648<sup>15</sup> and this wedged the Spanish colony of East Florida directly between the new British settlement enterprises.

The Spanish and eventually the British were the dominant groups in the early colonies of the Circum Caribbean, but the Africans also played a major part in the evolution of the region. Unlike the European adventurers who willingly came to the New World, most of the arriving Africans comprised the unwilling component of this experience. Many of them arrived as forced, chattel labor which meant that they would play a major role in the physical tasks associated with the building of the new colony. The amount of influence they had on the New World has not been underestimated as historians have looked at the demographics of all of the Americas and the far reaching implications of slavery on the development of social patterns in the area. Florida's

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<sup>14</sup> J. Leitch Wright, *Anglo-Spanish Rivalry in North America* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1971), 49-51. The British had already established Virginia, New England and Maryland at this point but the arrival of a group of settlers from Barbados to the Carolinas caused more concern for the Spanish. They established Charleston and seriously encroached on the northern limits of the Spanish territory. The initial exploratory expedition of Captain Hilton, from Barbados, into the region in 1663 was actually greeted by a group of Indians who carried a letter from a Spanish officer to the Captain explaining they had captured some shipwrecked Englishmen and were holding them captive at Santa Elena (in southern Carolina).

<sup>15</sup> Michael Craton and Gail Saunders, *A History of the Bahamian People*, vol. 1, *From Aboriginal Times to the End of Slavery* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 77.

experience included a black population beginning as early as 1580.<sup>16</sup> Although a free black community existed, the majority of blacks in Spanish St. Augustine by 1763 were slaves.<sup>17</sup> The slaves, along with Indians and convicts, worked on the major fortifications in the town until the major fort, Castillo de San Marcos, was completed.<sup>18</sup> They became an integral part of the community as many of them worked as domestic slaves in St. Augustine after the completion of the large building projects.<sup>19</sup> The latitude found in the Spanish system of slavery allowed manumission of slaves and a potential for upward mobility existed not found in the colonies of the Anglo Americas.<sup>20</sup> A later acknowledgement of the humane treatment of Spanish slaves by an American testifies to the leniency of the system in the Spanish periods.<sup>21</sup> Dr. William Simmons mentioned the “humane code of laws” which the Spanish had enacted. The acknowledgement by the Spanish that slaves had a moral personality which required protection under a defined code allowed both master and slave to concede the possibility for upward mobility for

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<sup>16</sup> Kathleen Deagan, *Spanish St. Augustine: The Archaeology of a Colonial Creole Community* (New York: Academic Press, 1983), 32.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Elsbeth Gordon, *Florida's Colonial Architectural Heritage* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002). The basic footprint of the fort took between 1672 and 1695 to complete. At that point it was defensible and additional work would continue on it for the next hundred years.

<sup>19</sup> Deagan, 32.

<sup>20</sup> Rivers, 4.

<sup>21</sup> William Hayne Simmons, *Notices of East Florida* (Charleston: Printed for the Author, 1822; facsimile reproduction, Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1973), 42. Simmons is most remembered as one of the men who helped to select Florida's capital in Tallahassee.



some enslaved people.<sup>22</sup> Under this benign system, in comparison to other slave laws established in the New World, the blacks in Spanish St. Augustine flourished.

The demographic composition of St. Augustine appeared diverse as the colony matured in the eighteenth century. Along with the Amerindians, Spanish and Africans other non-Hispanic Europeans arrived to Florida during its growing years under Spanish rule. A small number of Swiss immigrants arrived in the mid-1740s; by 1761 a few Germans and then several hundred Canary Islanders also made up a portion of the city's inhabitants.<sup>23</sup> The multinational character of the town pre-dated the arrival of another group of immigrants into the arena. Although most of the Spanish left St. Augustine with the cession of Florida by the Spanish to the British at the end of the Seven Years' War, the establishment for interactions among the variety of the people in Florida remained as an integral part of the Florida odyssey. The next arrivals to the scene found themselves in the unique position to capitalize on lessons learned by the Spanish colonists concerning survival in the harsh geographical and climatic circumstances found on the peninsula as well as the their own experiences in the Anglo world of the southern American colonies.

The intersection of the Spanish, Amerindians, English and Africans, insofar as how it affects this study of a particular place in the Circum Caribbean world, begins in the city of St. Augustine in the year 1763. At this point, the British received the territory

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<sup>22</sup> Jane Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 7.

<sup>23</sup> Deagan, 31.

of Florida in exchange for Havana at the end of the Seven Years' War.<sup>24</sup> When the British arrived on the scene in St. Augustine, they found a town whose citizens prepared for leave taking, though a few Spanish remained to take care of the sale of property, with half the garrison and the Governor still in residence. This meant that there would be few accommodations for the British troops and any civilians arriving on the scene.<sup>25</sup> The British engaged on a program of improvement, insofar as it represented an Anglo adaptation of the infrastructure found in St. Augustine. Although the British acquisition of Florida lasted for a mere twenty years, their impetus for starting plantations changed the face of the landscape. Under their auspices, Florida became a plantation region which fit into the idea that the New World produced for the Old World. Following models developed in the West Indies and on the eastern seaboard of colonial America, the British sought to successfully introduce agricultural modes of production so that Florida might produce its own wealth rather than depending on other regions of the Empire to support its growth. The first British governor of East Florida, James Grant, successfully recruited planters from the other British colonies to invest in Florida and begin plantations. Grant had influential friends in the southern colonies and he hoped to capitalize on their knowledge of New World agricultural systems.<sup>26</sup> With the initial investments of

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<sup>24</sup> Charles Loch Mowat, *East Florida as a British Province, 1763-1784* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1943; reprint, Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1964), 5-7 (page citations are to the reprint edition). For a full accounting of the treaty which leads to the cession of Florida and the British takeover Mowat's work has been considered the original authority on this subject.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>26</sup> Daniel L. Schafer, "... not so gay a Town in America as this . . .," in *The Oldest City: St. Augustine Saga of Survival*, ed. Jean Parker Waterbury (Florida: St. Augustine

knowledgeable agriculturalists, the hinterlands of Florida proceeded to attract other investors. For example, the enterprise of Dr. Turnbull to bring “heat-inured Mediterraneans” to carve out a plantation in the underdeveloped territory came to fruition under the British.<sup>27</sup> This burgeoning population further influenced the growth of St. Augustine.

The advent of new agricultural enterprises and the promise of Florida as an untapped source for large plantations began with promising investments from the British and saw the creation of large plantations such as those built by Richard Oswald, Andrew Turnbull and John Moultrie. Although most of the historical analysis of the British period has concurred that those twenty years appeared to produce little evidence of any grand agricultural achievements, new research suggests that “successful plantations were established before the destabilizing events of the American Revolution intervened.”<sup>28</sup> The rebellion of the thirteen British colonies to the north of Florida saw the arrival of the largest influx of immigrants to St. Augustine. Known as Loyalists, they chose to remain under British rule rather than align themselves with the patriots who sought freedom from the administrative yoke of the British Empire. They impacted the historical trajectory of

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Historical Society, 1983), 95. Grant managed to interest John and James Moultrie in East Florida. They were considered the most influential and successful planters in South Carolina at this time.

<sup>27</sup> Patricia C. Griffin, *Mullet on the Beach: The Minorcans of Florida, 1768-1788* (Jacksonville: University of North Florida Press, 1991), 3-4.

<sup>28</sup> Jane G. Landers, ed., *Colonial Plantations and Economy in Florida* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), 12. Daniel Schafer’s chapter on Oswald’s plantation in East Florida argues that Charles Loch Mowat, David Hancock and Bernard Bailyn all failed to take into account the advances made even though political turmoil truncated the efforts of the planters of the period.

the evolving Circum Caribbean under study as they brought set ideas with them concerning government, economic systems for gain, and cultural mores which had already gone through a mutation in colonial America.

The material on this new period in the history of East Florida and the main city of St. Augustine revolves around the story of the Loyalist refugees. They began to arrive in East Florida after they perceived that the patriots would prevail in the contest between the British and the protesting colonials in the American Revolution. The losing Tories would be forced to choose between staying in the new Republic, under patriot rule, or evacuation to some other portion of the British Empire. For some, this proved no choice at all as the state of affairs for them in the emerging republic proved so bleak they felt driven out of their former homes. In South Carolina, the bushwhacking warfare practiced by the end of the War by the Patriot and Loyalists' militias proved so savage that the countryside resembled a scorched land where it seemed as if no living thing could prosper.<sup>29</sup> The virulence of the war in South Carolina made it appear as if a civil war had ensued and the presence of the British occupying forces from 1780 to 1782 increased the feelings of hatred between the Whigs and Tories.<sup>30</sup> The move out of the two lower states of Georgia and South Carolina by many of Loyalists hardly seemed surprising as the

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<sup>29</sup> Gary B. Nash, *The Unknown American Revolution: The Unruly Birth of Democracy and the Struggle to Create America* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2005), 392-393.

<sup>30</sup> Mary Beth Norton, "What an Alarming Crisis is This: Southern Women and the American Revolution," in *The Southern Experience in the American Revolution*, ed. Jeffrey J. Crow and Larry E. Tise (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 215.

animosity between the two factions reached heights, especially in South Carolina, not experienced anywhere else during the Revolutionary period in America.<sup>31</sup>

The ramifications of leaving America for the majority of the fleeing refugees meant giving up many of their worldly possessions to travel to unknown destinations and begin anew.<sup>32</sup> One of the fleeing refugee's accounts gives an idea as to how destitute some found themselves. Louisa Wells wrote in her journal on June 27 of 1778:

To what necessity we were reduced for want of British manufactures. With much difficulty and trouble I obtained 3/8 yard of black serge; I purchased a pair of clumsy shoe-heels of a Jew; and in an obscure lane found a negro shoe-maker who said he could "make for ladies." I deny that he could fit them. My shoes had no binding, were lined with French sail-duck, and the heels were covered with leather. On stepping out of the boat to go up the ship-side, one of my dear-bought shoes slipped off. I exclaimed "then I must go barefooted to Europe."<sup>33</sup>

Even though the circumstances of people like Miss Well were dire, many of Britain's supporters in the southern colonies chose to leave as could be seen by reports of large numbers exiting areas such as Georgia and South Carolina. For example, in April of 1782 Charleston's newspaper the *Royal Gazette* mentioned that many Loyalists had left Georgia.<sup>34</sup> The amount of refugees flooding into East Florida, a close move for many of

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<sup>31</sup> Nash, 393.

<sup>32</sup>Robert Stansbury Lambert, *South Carolina Loyalists in the American Revolution* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1987), 234.

<sup>33</sup> Louisa Susannah Wells, "Journal of a Voyage from Charleston, South Carolina to London Undertaken During the American Revolution by a Daughter of an Eminent American Loyalist in the Year 1778 and Written from Memory Only in 1779," Copied in 1904 for the New York Historical Society, (transcript), p. 1, Special Collections, Charleston Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina. Ms. Wells chose to go to England when she departed Charleston.

<sup>34</sup>*The Royal Gazette* (Charleston), Vol. IV NO. CCC, 30 April 1782.

the Loyalists from the southern regions, proved an impossible burden on the area. By May of 1783, the population of East Florida reached 17,375 and 13,375 of this number were Loyalists and their slaves.<sup>35</sup> The new immigrants came in such large numbers that the British landowners already in the province began to resent them as the Loyalists received land grants of acreage already owned by absentee proprietors who had not developed their properties.<sup>36</sup> Still many of the refugees remained confident that East Florida promised a better life and they invested in St. Augustine property and the surrounding land as soon as they arrived. It was reported that the more prosperous cleared plantations and extended the settled region around St. Augustine outward up to one hundred miles.<sup>37</sup> In 1784, one traveler through East Florida noted that an extensive Loyalist refugee village had sprung up at the mouth of the St. John's River.<sup>38</sup> He also noted that in St. Augustine "stand the hastily built cabins of these poor fugitives, walled and thatched with palmetto leaves."<sup>39</sup> The Loyalists with fewer resources utilized whatever means available to them for survival as they chose to align themselves with Great Britain.

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<sup>35</sup> Wilbur Henry Siebert, *Loyalists in East Florida, 1774-1785; the Most Important Documents Pertaining Thereto, Edited with an Accompanying Narrative*, vol. 1 (Boston: Gregg Press, 1972), 131.

<sup>36</sup> J. Leitch Wright, Jr., *Florida in the American Revolution* (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1975), 103.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>38</sup> Johann Schöpfung, *Travels in the Confederation, 1783-1784* (Philadelphia: William J. Campbell, 1911; reprint, New York: Burt Franklin, 1968), 226 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

The Loyalists travails began in the American colonies where by 1782 it became obvious they would have to make major decisions about staying or leaving the emergent new country. Many who came to East Florida did so confident that the British rule there would last for a long time as seen by the aforementioned plantations that they started and thus invested in a future in the province. Unfortunately, for the immigrants, the Treaty of Paris in 1783 gave East Florida back to Spain. The eighth article of the treaty allowed English subjects eighteen months in which to collect debts, sell property and leave the country. This time frame though came too quickly for many of the loyal subjects and the British governor of East Florida, Patrick Tonyn, had to extend this period until the first of March in 1785.<sup>40</sup> The Loyalists now faced another move and this time it involved going further a field. Many went to Canada, the Caribbean Islands, England and the focus of this study: the Bahamas. The scholarly scrutiny of these people has formulated some ideas concerning who they were as related to their socio-economic backgrounds. The bulk of the research done on them suggests many of them had above average incomes; they included merchants, professionals and government officials.<sup>41</sup> In addition, new

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<sup>40</sup> Wilbur H. Siebert, "The Legacy of the American Revolution to the British West Indies and the Bahamas," *The Ohio State Bulletin* 17 (Columbus: Ohio State University, 1913), 20.

<sup>41</sup> Claude Halstead van Tyne, *The Loyalists in the American Revolution* (New York: Macmillan, 1902; reprint, Honolulu, Hawaii: University Press of the Pacific, 2004), 275. Much of the research done on the Loyalists occurred either in the early 1900s or in the 1960s and 1970s, although later monographs do exist. Van Tyne's text remains one of the preeminent works done on the composition and actions of the adherents to Britain. Wallace Brown, Wilbur Henry Siebert, Thelma Peters, and Robert Calhoun are just a few of the researchers who have studied this group of people. Some of the new historiography on this topic also explores the experiences of Black Loyalists. This includes work by John W. Pulis and Mary Louise Clifford.

research suggests that many of them occupied more modest positions in society and did not have the economic means to recover from the devastating circumstances predicated by the misfortune of being on the losing side in the conflict.<sup>42</sup> What the various factions in the Loyalist population appeared to have in common was their seeming inability to adjust to the change which the American Revolution forecast.

A closer look at some of the people impacted by first the American Revolution and then the return of Florida to Spain gives a more fully defined picture of some of the characteristics of the Loyalist immigrants. For example, Roger Kelsall arrived in East Florida with a background as an Indian Trader involved with a patriot partner named James Spalding. Spalding and Kelsall had trading posts on the St. John's River which William Bartram took note of during his time in East Florida in the year 1773.<sup>43</sup> The partnership, which began in 1766, lasted until the American Revolution; at some point the stores became part of the Panton and Forbes trading empire in Florida.<sup>44</sup> Roger Kelsall came from a family which had originally immigrated to America and settled somewhere in the southern portion of the colonies.<sup>45</sup> His father, John Kelsall, had his will

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<sup>42</sup> Nash., 239.

<sup>43</sup> Francis Harper, ed. *Travels of William Bartram* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958), 62.

<sup>44</sup> William S. Coker and Thomas D. Watson, *Indian Traders of the Southeastern Spanish Borderlands: Panton, Leslie & Company and John Forbes & Company, 1783-1847* (Pensacola: University of West Florida, 1986), 33.

<sup>45</sup> Eleanor Kelsall, "The Kelsall Family. Recollections of Eleanor Kelsall, daughter of John Kelsall" August 1, 1851, Liverpool, England." Webber Collection, Charleston Historical Society, South Carolina. Eleanor's recollections state that the John Kelsall settled in Prince Williams's Parish, Granville County, South Carolina at an estate called Great Ropers. This author has been unable to find any vestiges of this estate.



processed in South Carolina in 1765 and left Roger and his brother William as executors of his estate.<sup>46</sup> Roger, twenty-seven years old at that time, became partners with Spalding the next year. At some point Roger Kelsall married Barbara Mackay, the daughter of Captain James Mackay a friend of George Washington. She reportedly had red hair and was a sweet tempered woman.<sup>47</sup> Barbara and Roger Kelsall settled in Sunbury, Georgia in 1763. At this seaport, Roger built a house for his bride and also had a store in this location with Spalding.<sup>48</sup>

Thus, Roger Kelsall fit into the paradigm constructed for what constituted a loyal subject of above average economic standing during the American Revolution. He had a profitable business, the Kelsall-Spalding trading enterprise had been characterized as the Sears Roebuck of the colonial period; by 1774 the partners owned five Indian Trading posts in Florida and Georgia.<sup>49</sup> He served as a Colonel of the Loyal Sunbury Regiment Militia and took part in the defense of Savannah by the British during the Revolutionary

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<sup>46</sup> Caroline T. Moore, *Abstracts of the Wills of South Carolina, 1760-1784* (Columbia: R. L. Brysen, 1969), 177.

<sup>47</sup> Kelsall, "The Kelsall Family." Mackay came to Georgia with Oglethorpe during the settling of that region. He was a highlander and possibly came from the area of Strathy in Scotland where the name Mackay can be found in local history. This would account for the name given to the Mackay family plantation. It was and still is called Strathy Hall. Today it lies within the boundaries of Fort McAllister State Park in Georgia south of Savannah.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Lydia Austin Parrish, "Records of Some Southern Loyalists: Being a Collection of Manuscripts About Some Eighty Families, Most of Whom Immigrated to the Bahamas During and After the American Revolution," p. 379, Sorted, Indexed and Bound by Maxfield Parrish, Jr., 1953.

War.<sup>50</sup> His father had immigrated to South Carolina fairly recently on the eve of the Revolution and his family ties in England reinforced his allegiance to the British crown. The idea that non-creoles in America as well as those of Scots origin remained loyal gains validity when looking at the composition of the Loyalists' backgrounds. Most of them still had ties in the British Isles which remained strong.<sup>51</sup> The Kelsall's, other than John and his children, remained in England and continue to this day to be a large family around Fareham.<sup>52</sup> The Mackay's, whose progeny Barbara married Roger Kelsall, had come directly from Scotland. Even after leaving Georgia, Roger Kelsall amassed quite a fortune in land during his stay in East Florida and he claimed a loss of one thousand acres after his departure from the province.<sup>53</sup> Roger Kelsall, like many Loyalists, lost most of his wealth after the defeat of the British by the Americans.

Just as the Kelsall family story relates a tale based on above average success in the southern colonies, others arriving to St. Augustine also had shared in the prosperity of the American colonies prior to the American Revolution. The Wells family from South Carolina enjoyed an upper class position in Charleston's cosmopolitan atmosphere.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Wallace Brown, *The King's Friends: The Composition and Motives of the American Loyalist Claimants* (Providence, Rhode Island: Brown University Press, 1965), 217.

<sup>52</sup> A member of the Kelsall family maintains a large website which traces the relatives which are still living and has an extensive genealogical record on it.

<sup>53</sup> Wilbur H. Sieburt, *Loyalists in East Florida, 1774 to 1785: The Most Important Documents Pertaining Thereto, Edited with an Accompanying Narrative* Vol. II (Florida: Florida State Historical Society, 1929), 278-279.

Robert Wells and his wife Mary immigrated to South Carolina from Scotland in 1758.<sup>54</sup> Robert Wells began a successful publishing establishment in Charleston in that year.<sup>55</sup> He eventually began a newspaper which he called the *South Carolina & American General Gazette*.<sup>56</sup> Robert's son John joined him in the enterprise in 1775 when his father left America and returned to England due to his unwillingness, along with others of his acquaintance, to witness "the political struggles then beginning in North America."<sup>57</sup> Robert Wells' avowed loyalism made his remaining days in Charleston an uncomfortable experience. He left his business to his son John and set his daughter Louisa to watch his property "as long as one stone stood upon another."<sup>58</sup> The Wells' obtained quite a bit of property in Charleston: they owned Edgefield in the ninety-sixth district;<sup>59</sup> a lot on King Street (140' x 53') with a house; a lot on Tradd Street (35 'x 86') with a house; a lot on

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<sup>54</sup>Douglas C. McMurtrie, "The Beginning of Printing in Florida," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 23 (Oct. 1944): 63.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Siebert, *Loyalists in East Florida*, vol. I, 134. There is some confusion as to the original name of the Wells' newspaper. McMurtrie identifies it as the *South Carolina Weekly Gazette* in his article while both Siebert and then Mabel Webber in a letter to McMurtrie in 1932 use the name I have mentioned. I have chosen to identify it as the later since two sources reiterate the *South Carolina & American General Gazette* title.

<sup>57</sup> Wells, 16.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>59</sup> Mabel L. Webber, Charleston, to Mr. H.E. Kimmel, DuQuoin, Illinois, 20 July 1933, results of family genealogical search, Webber Collection, Charleston Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

Rope Alley 24' x 60') with a two story wooden house.<sup>60</sup> Because Robert Wells' prosperity appeared incontrovertible before the beginning of the Revolution, he had loaned money to people; by 1775 he scrambled to have some of those loans repaid in order to repay his own creditors.<sup>61</sup> Sometime in late 1777 or early 1778, his daughter witnessed most of the family's property burn to the ground with only a large house remaining of the approximately four recently owned. She reacted by selling the wreckage out of the fire and any other property, such as slaves, remaining to the family in an attempt to rescue some of the family fortune. She hoped to take the proceeds and purchase barrels of indigo which the Wells' family patriarch hoped to sell for five thousand pounds sterling in London.<sup>62</sup> Imagine her dismay when she discovered that a mandate forbade her to take any of the indigo out of the country.<sup>63</sup> Louisa's resourcefulness eventually allowed her to recoup some of the losses as she was allowed "to take three casks. The size was not limited; we therefore turned out the contents of five into three rum-puncheons."<sup>64</sup> Robert Wells never fully recovered economically from the blow to his once large fortune and his daughter later remembered in an addition to her journal how his misfortune attributed to his stroke at age sixty-three and his death at age

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<sup>60</sup> "Account Book of the Commissioners of Forfeited Estates, 1782-1783," listed under John and Robert Wells, 16 June 1783, Charleston Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

<sup>61</sup> *South Carolina & American General Gazette* (Charleston), 28 April- 5 May, 1775.

<sup>62</sup> Wells, 14.

<sup>63</sup> Van Tyne, 275. The patriots in America had begun early in the War to pass legislation which inhibited the sale of Loyalist property.

<sup>64</sup> Wells, 15.

sixty-six in 1794.<sup>65</sup> His loyalty to the ideals of the British Empire appeared to serve as the impetus for his decline.

While Robert Wells made his way back to England, his sons, especially John, attempted to continue to enjoy the richness of the New World, both in Charleston and later in the seemingly economically challenged Circum Caribbean arena. John Wells continued to publish his father's paper. The paper's name changed to *The Royal Gazette* sometime before March of 1781. This perhaps happened under the guidance of John Wells although he had patriot leanings before changing his allegiance back to Britain by 1781. The intricacies of the evolving Revolutionary state, which at times divided families, affected the Wells' relationship just as had so many others. John Wells appeared to have remained friends with important patriots such as Henry Laurens. He received correspondences from Laurens as the War progressed and published accounts, per Laurens' request, concerning the patriot army's defeats and victories.<sup>66</sup> John Wells, at some point, reevaluated his decision and reportedly following the advice of his brother left Charleston in 1781 to reconcile with his father in England.<sup>67</sup> William Wells had refused to sign the papers of allegiance to the rebel cause in 1775 and at that point left Charleston to further his education.<sup>68</sup> The younger son William finished his education as

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Henry Laurens to John Wells, 31 May 1778, *Letters of Delegates to Congress* (February 1, 1778-May 31, 1778), vol. 9, p. 789.

<sup>67</sup> McMurtrie, 64.

<sup>68</sup> Wells, 18. This citation refers to extracts from Charles Wells memoirs included with the original document by Louisa Wells.

a Doctor of Medicine in Edinburgh, Scotland by 1780.<sup>69</sup> He arrived in Charleston to take over the publication of the family newspaper from his brother John in 1781 and continued to do all of the major editing until the evacuation of Charleston in 1782.<sup>70</sup> In December of that year William, along with many other refugees, evacuated to East Florida when it became obvious that the British had lost the city and the War.

William Wells arrived in East Florida to find the chaos which characterized the wholesale movement of a large number of displaced peoples. Unlike many of the more destitute of the refugees who brought nothing with them from their old lives, William managed to dismantle the printing press of the family paper and reassemble it in St. Augustine. The publication which Wells produced, *The East-Florida Gazette*, brought printing to Florida for the first time.<sup>71</sup> Although William Wells never considered himself a printer, he managed to maintain the family business until his brother John returned from England in the spring of 1784.<sup>72</sup> Under the press established, in addition to the weekly newspaper, two books also saw publication in the province.<sup>73</sup> William Wells remained determinedly British in his views even when returning to Charleston in 1783 to conclude some family business. His arrest for his loyalist sentiments rallied some friends in

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<sup>69</sup>Wells, 16.

<sup>70</sup> Mabel Webber to C. McMurtrie, 15 November 1932, Webber Collection, Charleston Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

<sup>71</sup> Wells, 16.

<sup>72</sup> McMurtrie, 65.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 65-67. The books published under the names of John Wells' printing establishment were *The Case of the Inhabitants of East-Florida* and Samuel Gale's *Essay II. On the Nature and Principals of Publick Credit*.

Charleston as well as the support of the Chief Justice of the Bahamas, Mr. Wylie, who Governor Tonyn of Florida sent to negotiate his release.<sup>74</sup> William Wells' short sojourn as a Loyalist in America remained an important part of the East Florida milieu created by the British. He returned to England in 1784 while his brother continued to pursue the odyssey evolving in the Florida/Bahamas zone.

Less fortunate Loyalists also arrived in East Florida to establish themselves in the years before the territory returned to Spain. A ship's carpenter George Tallock managed to construct a small wooden house on St. John's Bluff.<sup>75</sup> The tailor John Buckley opened a shop in East Florida and extended credit to his customers in order to continue practicing his trade.<sup>76</sup> Robert Cunningham hoped to begin a plantation but in reality he owned a small log house on a small piece of land close to St. Mary's and knew nothing of planting.<sup>77</sup> James Scotland's house carpentry skills, he particularly boasted of his ability to add chimneys and piazzas to structures, stood him in good stead in the city of St. Augustine; after his arrival there in 1775, he managed to acquire three houses.<sup>78</sup> Thus, the diversity of the arriving group supports that only their strong beliefs in the superiority of their positions under Great Britain bound them together. On the eve of their imminent departure from East Florida, they had forged a shared identity as the refugees from the

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<sup>74</sup> Wells., 18. Extract from William Wells' memoirs.

<sup>75</sup> Siebert, *Loyalists in East Florida*, vol. II, 34.

<sup>76</sup> Parrish, 197.

<sup>77</sup> Siebert, *Loyalists in East Florida*, vol. II, 8.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

horrid rebellion in America. They took this new outlook with them as they began the next segment of their odyssey.

The Loyalists' departure from St. Augustine proved traumatizing to many of those ill-fated people. Having gone through one major dislocation, they faced decisions which seemed even harder to bear for most of them. Now they would depart from the continent which had proved so promising to many. They left behind those who did not have the resources to leave America and decided to go to unknown territories. The British attempted to make provisions for a total transference of their loyal subjects and offered land grants to those willing to go to the Bahamas. The situation in East Florida for the Loyalists appeared inhospitable and rumors that the "Indians are every day killing ten or twelve of the English because they are turning over the province to the Spanish" which reached as far as the Bahamas by 1783 probably hastened the departure of many.<sup>79</sup> The choice to leave also hinged on the issue of the Loyalists who stayed having to convert to Catholicism. The issue of religion presented a stumbling block to many who may have desired to stay in the region.<sup>80</sup> Reports on the Bahamas as an alternative to staying in East Florida appeared promising as the British had reports from army agents sent out to inspect the feasibility of the Loyalists reorganizing in the islands and starting up agricultural projects. For example, John Wilson, an army engineer stationed in St. Augustine, reported on Exuma Island. He stated, "I believe the soil upon this Island, is

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<sup>79</sup>Antonio Claraco y Sanz, New Providence, to Luis de Unzaga, Cuba, 19 May 1783, Lockey Papers, Special Collections, University of Florida, Florida.

<sup>80</sup>Bernardo del Campo, London, to Conde de Floridablanca, 9 August 1783, Lockey Papers, Special Collections, University of Florida, Florida.



equally fertile if not more so than any of the Bahamas.”<sup>81</sup> Hope for a continuation of the lifestyle which had foundered due to the cataclysmic circumstances fostered by warfare drove many of the Loyalists to make the move to the little known region of the Bahamian archipelago.

The movements of the Loyalists formed a new demographic make up in East Florida and then the Bahamas. The upheaval of relocating produced a population which learned that the rhetoric of the governing powers, which promised a better future in new lands, belied the reality of the moving to lands which produced few successes in reproducing their old lifestyles. Undoubtedly people like Roger Kelsall embarked on their journey with apprehensions. They hoped to recreate experiences established in the evolution of the American colonies and also those from their many lands of origin. The enslaved people who made the trip across the Gulf Stream would play a vital role in this reorganization. For many of the immigrants, the stop in St. Augustine allowed a new flexibility to develop in their ability to adapt to diverse elements: both social and environmental. The trials found in their unfolding saga in the following decades proved impossible for many of the Loyalists to surmount. But those who willingly inculcated the lessons learned during their travails, arrived in the Bahamas with strong foundations which helped to shape their futures.

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<sup>81</sup> Letter from John Wilson to Brigadier General McArthur, Commanding Officer at St. Augustine and the Bahama Islands, 28 February 1784, CO 23/24. ff. 74-75.

## Chapter Three

### Leap Across the Gulf Stream

The deadline for the departure of the Loyalists from East Florida came with a rapidity which some seemed ill prepared to deal with, according to some of the accounts of those last days of departure. The islands of the Bahamas appeared as a promising destination although the uncertainty of this move made this a leap filled with trepidation. Taking with them skills for survival shaped in a fashion which none of them could have predicted, the last of the immigrants left the shores of the American continent in November of 1785.<sup>1</sup> The land which they ventured to at first appeared to resemble the territories of the southern American colonies at least insofar as the climate and some geographical features which had the semi-tropical atmosphere from which they had departed. The eventual reality set in as this promised destination proved a hard taskmaster to the loyal colonists.

Leaving the mainland of America stressed the émigrés as they departed aboard hastily arranged transport ships for the Bahamas. Descriptions of the departure leave the reader with a sense of the chaos which ensued as this mass evacuation took place. Many of the Loyalists actually left from St. Mary's, Georgia due to the dangerous nature of the bar in St. Augustine.<sup>2</sup> St. Mary's had been a southern port with a better harbor than St.

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Loch Mowat, *East Florida as a British Province: 1763-1784* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1943; facsimile reproduction, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1964), 147 (page citations are to the reprint edition). This date was chosen by this author as being the final departure recorded due to the correspondence of the last British governor which declared his leaving the province.

<sup>2</sup> Thelma Peterson Peters, "Loyalists and the Plantation Period in the Bahamas Islands" (Ph. D. diss., University of Florida, 1960), 36.

Augustine's for some time. This had been reported many years earlier by William Bartram who traveled through the area between 1765 and 1766. He noted in his journal that St. Mary's was the "finest harbour in this new colony."<sup>3</sup> Some of the Loyalists attempted to transport their entire material possessions with them as they left St. Augustine. For example, Peter Edwards dissembled his three room house in order to transport it to the Bahamas. His travails proved insurmountable as part of his house rotted in St. Augustine while awaiting transport, a portion of it was lost as he carried it to St. Mary's and the final insult occurred when another part of it fell overboard while being unloaded in Nassau.<sup>4</sup> John Wood, who attempted to have his name removed from the Act of Confiscation by the patriots in America, decided to leave East Florida along with his brother-in-law Lewis Johnston, Jr. after the denial of his petition. He took along with him forty-two slaves, twelve bales of Indian corn, and three house frames.<sup>5</sup> When Johann Schöpf, a traveler after the American Revolution who had been in the forces fighting against the Americans, boarded a transport ship on March 24<sup>th</sup> of 1784 bound for Nassau.

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<sup>3</sup>Francis Harper, ed., *The Travels of William Bartram, Naturalist's Edition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958), 43.

<sup>4</sup> Peters, 38.

<sup>5</sup> Lydia Austin Parrish, "Records of Some Southern Loyalists; Being a Collection of Manuscripts About Some Eighty Families, Most of Whom Immigrated to the Bahamas During and After the American Revolution," p. 470, Sorted Indexed and Bound by Maxfield Parrish, Jr., 1953.

He described the following chaotic scene:

Our small vessel was crammed with people and cattle, luggage and household furniture. Our two seamen were Negroes; and we carried a parcel of black women and children being sent to Providence to market.<sup>6</sup>

The impact of this move had far reaching implications for all of those involved. The Loyalists lost everything with little remuneration for property left behind. John Wood, the intrepid immigrant who moved house frames with him, left behind his house and property in St. Augustine which had been valued at four hundred pounds; he sold it to a Spaniard for fifty-four pounds.<sup>7</sup> The slaves, who were the Loyalists' biggest source of wealth at this time, embarked for a new place which they had little knowledge of except probably information which they gleaned from their masters. How many of them lost families and friends cannot be estimated as little data remains from their saga. The tumultuous end of life in East Florida precipitated circumstances which tested the endurance of all of those involved.

The arrival of the refugees caused great trepidation among the officials of New Providence. The Bahamas may appear as a veritable paradise to many visitors who arrive on the island's shores, but these casual observations miss the implications of the poor soil of the region and its inability to support a large influx of people. A traveler's poetic description of the "singular union of light and shade, is long remembered by one, on

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<sup>6</sup> Johann David Schöpf, *Travels in the Confederation, 1783-84* (Philadelphia: William J. Campbell, 1911; reprint; New York: B. Franklin, 1968), 248 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

<sup>7</sup> Peters, 37.

whom it burst with all the charms of novelty”<sup>8</sup> failed to include the damage wrought by unrelenting sunshine and little rain on the production of a viable agricultural system. Travelers enchanted with the beautiful scenes offered by the Bahamian landscape justifiably do not concern themselves with the realities of living on a limestone rock formation.

The influx of a large number of refugees into a colony which had few resources proved a daunting challenge to the officials on the scene. Governor Tonyn<sup>9</sup> pleaded with Governor Maxwell of the Bahamas for supplies for the incoming refugees.<sup>10</sup> In June of 1784, Maxwell panicked when an important supply ship the *David* sank which would have helped to allay the plight of the refugees. In a letter written to Lord Sydney in London, he complained what little had been saved off the wreck would not help the Loyalist refugees. In the same correspondence, he grumbled that Tonyn informed him that “five Thousand People would upon the Evacuation come to Providence and that he expected some assistance in Provisions besides.”<sup>11</sup> The scramble to accommodate this sudden population increase escalated as the refugees themselves protested bitterly over the situation they found upon their arrival to this promised paradise.

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<sup>8</sup> Richard Kent, ed., *Letters from the Bahama Islands Written in 1823-4* (London: John Culmer, 1948), 6.

<sup>9</sup> Patrick Tonyn was the last royal Governor of East Florida. He was a military man who though largely disliked in the colony appeared to be aware of the desperate situation facing the Loyalists.

<sup>10</sup> Governor Tonyn to Governor Maxwell, 10 May 1784, Archives of the Bahamas, CO 23/25 f. 145.

<sup>11</sup> Governor Maxwell to Lord Sydney, 20 June 1784, Archives of the Bahamas, CO 23/25 f. 136.

The intrepid traveler Johann Schöpf<sup>12</sup> arrived in Nassau on April 6<sup>th</sup> of 1784. Shortly after his arrival, he witnessed the wreck of the *David*, which had so distressed Governor Maxwell, at the entrance of the harbor and reported that it sunk immediately.<sup>13</sup> His further observations told a woeful tale of what awaited the hopeful colonists. Not only had a major supply ship sunk, but there appeared a paucity of housing. The few houses in the town were of “wood, all lightly built and of simple construction, according to the need of the climate here . . .”<sup>14</sup> He managed to find housing with a refugee employed as a carpenter, but many did not have his luck. He noted that “many were waiting for permission to return to Georgia and South Carolina.”<sup>15</sup> Discontent among the Loyalists grew as their situation became unbearable in the hot climate of the inhospitable summer season.

The Loyalists who had enjoyed some influence in the American colonies contacted British officials to explain their desperate circumstances. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of August, Lord Sydney pleaded with Governor Maxwell to have some compassion for their plight. He argued that they understandably should “feel the difference between their former and present situation and their temper and disposition should be soured from that unpleasant change.”<sup>16</sup> The temper of the people who chose to accept the largess of the British

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<sup>12</sup>Schöpf, 32.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 260.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 262.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 264.

<sup>16</sup> Lord Sydney to Governor Maxwell, 6 August 1784, Archives of the Bahamas, CO 23/25 ff 155-156.

government in ceding them land was stretched to the limits in these unfavorable conditions. Some of them never attempted to recreate their old lives, but the few who accepted the challenge posed by their altered circumstances proved that they had developed skills necessary to begin this new adventure. The borderlands of East Florida had hardened enough of them so they perceived the possibilities of this new land.

The Loyalist population who arrived in the Bahamas for the most part appeared prosperous. New research points out that a portion of them also represented a lower socio-economic class.<sup>17</sup> Those who had some wealth left after their departure from the mainland carried it with them in the form of slaves. They could actually attain loans on the basis of number of slaves owned.<sup>18</sup> This population of refugees did not let the dire circumstances they found themselves in deter them from forever changing the fabric of Bahamian society. The ambitious Loyalists increased the population of the Bahamas from an estimated four to five thousand people, mostly free people, with an influx of five to seven thousand white settlers and their slaves.<sup>19</sup> The demographic make-up of the islands changed forever. The Loyalists who remained in the Bahamas would immediately set out on a program which in retrospect appears as a gentrification of the wild town of Nassau and the surrounding Out Islands. Wreckers and pirates would give way to merchants and planters.

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<sup>17</sup> Gary B. Nash, *The Unknown American Revolution: The Unruly Birth of Democracy and the Struggle to Create America* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2005), 239. The fleeing Loyalists in the South also came from groups such as the North Carolina Regulators and backcountry farmers from South Carolina.

<sup>18</sup> Peters, 53.

<sup>19</sup> Gail Saunders, *Bahamian Loyalists and Their Slaves* (London: Macmillan Education LTD, 1983; reprint, London: Macmillan Education LTD, 1990), 2-6.

Nassau had the reputation of harboring pirates and disreputable types held over from the time before the arrival of a royal governor in 1718. The Loyalists found the inhabitants of the town mostly indifferent to the plight of the refugees. For the most part, the colonists of the British Caribbean lacked identification with the North American's struggles for freedom. British West Indians never disputed the supremacy of British rule and thus did not relate to the complexity of the issue of independence. They failed to establish a strong Creole identity separate from the idea that they were first and foremost British. This sentiment in the Bahamas was only strengthened by the fear of foreign invasions; especially from nearby Cuba.<sup>20</sup> On more than one occasion the fears of the Bahamians proved correct as Cuban forces and privateers attacked small settlements on the Out Islands.<sup>21</sup> For example, Bahamians had to deal with the predations of notorious captains working out of Cuba like Augustine Blanco who reportedly murdered women and children on Cat Island and then took a few men prisoners in order to gain their unwilling help in continued raids.<sup>22</sup>

With this mind-set, the old inhabitants warily greeted the refugees. The Loyalists' contemptuous reaction to the insulated Bahamians centered on their own feelings of superiority; this put the islanders on the defensive. Derisively called Conchs by the new arrivals, the native Bahamian population's economic interests in the war probably

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<sup>20</sup> Andrew Jack O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 31.

<sup>21</sup> The persistent and acrimonious interactions between the Bahamas and Cuba continued unabated during the 1700s: no matter if the two European powers were experiencing a time of peace or war.

<sup>22</sup> Letter from Governor Phenney to the Commission of Trade and Plantations, 20 March 1723, CO 23/1, Part III, f.34, Archives of the Bahamas.



agitated the hard feelings between the two groups. The Loyalists quickly found out that the Conchs only concern over the Revolution's outcome focused on maintaining economic activities with the North American coastal region up to the Carolinas.<sup>23</sup> The citizens of Nassau profited from privateering during the War and the cession of this income impacted them far more than the outcome of the conflict.<sup>24</sup> The bifurcation of Bahamian society had begun before the arrival of the Loyalists; their arrival increased the tension found between the Conchs and the government. A triangulated social and economic structure developed in the Bahamas whereby the old residents, the new settlers and the royal officials competed for power. This impacted the development of its society, government and also the creation of a new Bahamian identity.

The challenges to the arriving Loyalists remained immense. They scrambled to continue to live in a fashion which approximated their former lives. Land grants issued by the Government in England included forty acres to heads of families and additional twenty acres given to each additional member of the family including slaves.<sup>25</sup> The more prosperous of the refugees would take these grants on the Out Islands, but for the most part the working class remained in Nassau. For example, a "Barber and Hair Dresser," lately arrived from East Florida, advertised in the local paper that he would begin business and hoped that the ladies and gentlemen of the town would patronize his

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<sup>23</sup>James Lewis, *The Final Campaign of the American Revolution: Rise and Fall of the Spanish Bahamas* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1991), 26.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>25</sup>*Bahama Gazette* (New Providence), 10-17 September 1785. The announcement of the land grants had been made by the King In September of 1784. This further notice delayed the payment of quit rents from two to ten years.

services.<sup>26</sup> In 1785, Panton, Leslie and Company advertised the opening of a store on the corner of Union Street and the Bay.<sup>27</sup> The trading house employed Thomas Forbes as a representative in New Providence and he oversaw a brisk business in the town. The Company engaged in such matters as importing lumber<sup>28</sup> and selling slaves.<sup>29</sup> A burgeoning prosperity emerged in these years as the Loyalists and the Conchs benefited from the aspirations of the refugees. A promising cotton crop by 1785, due to good rainfall, increased the optimism of planters.<sup>30</sup>

The incipient promise of the reinvention of the formerly dormant economic milieu of the Bahamas gained strength under the urging of the Loyalists. The Board of American Loyalists, formed in 1784 in Nassau, included many of the prominent refugees from East Florida.<sup>31</sup> In a handbill dispersed by the members they called for their “steady and united exertions to preserve and maintain those rights and liberties for which they left their homes and possessions.”<sup>32</sup> The Loyalists actively pursued their own interests and

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<sup>26</sup>*Bahama Gazette* (New Providence) 2-9 April 1785.

<sup>27</sup>*Bahama Gazette* (New Providence) 16-23 July 1785.

<sup>28</sup>Panton, Leslie, and Company Papers, Reel 4, CO 23/29, 30 September 1788. This is a list of ships entering into Nassau. One of the ships listed was the *Polly* which transported ten tons of logwood into the town.

<sup>29</sup>*Bahama Gazette* (New Providence) 28-25 March 1786. The sale of forty to fifty valuable slaves, born in Carolina or Florida, to be sold at auction was advertised by Josiah Tattnall and Thomas Forbes.

<sup>30</sup>*Bahama Gazette* (New Providence) 23-30 April 1785.

<sup>31</sup>Thelma Peters, “American Loyalists in the Bahama Islands: Who They Were,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 20 (January 1962): 230.

<sup>32</sup>Handbill dated 29 July 1784, CO 23/25, Archives of the Bahamas.

managed to impact the political machinations of the time. They helped to oust two governors: Maxwell and Dunmore. By 1789, many had gained places in government, and a committee of eight men chosen from the House of Assembly commissioned a new Public Building for the government; four of the members of the committee had come from East Florida.<sup>33</sup> Men like John Wells, the publisher of the *East Florida Gazette*, advocated change in the old government which antagonized the native Conchs who resisted change. He began publishing the only newspaper in the Bahamas, the *Bahama Gazette*, which succeeded in linking the archipelago to the rest of the world via a broad coverage of international events.<sup>34</sup> Thus, the refugees in Nassau began to represent the interests of the upper echelon of the arriving Loyalists. The dispersal of the group throughout the islands continued up until the collapse of the plantation system in the late 1700s. The less prosperous Loyalists had little voice in the evolving society of the capital, but they represented the portion of the population who failed to engage in the dream of the formerly powerful landowners and settled for the most part in the northern Bahamas. This split impacted the later solutions of the Loyalists and their descendants to the impending failure of the Bahamian economy.

Few of the Out Islands were inhabited by the time of the arrival of the Loyalists. The engineer John Wilson from St Augustine who went to the Bahamas in 1783 reported that only seven islands of the chain had occupants: New Providence, Eleuthera, Harbour

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<sup>33</sup>Wilbur Henry Siebert, *Loyalists in East Florida, 1774 to 1775; The Most Important Documents Pertaining Thereto, Edited with an Accompanying Narrative*, vol. I (Gregg Press, 1972), 195.

<sup>34</sup>Peters, "American Loyalists in the Bahama Islands," 239.

Island, Cat Island, Exuma, Long Island and Turks Island.<sup>35</sup> He estimated the total inhabitants at four thousand by 1782. Many of the more prosperous Loyalists who spread out from Nassau went to build cotton plantations<sup>36</sup> and the larger plantation islands became those in the southern part of the Bahamas chain. Consisting of over seven hundred islands and cays,<sup>37</sup> the potential for development and profit seemed limitless. The Loyalists eagerly began building and clearing acres for cultivation. In retrospect it almost seems impossible that they accomplished so much. For example, Crooked Island had no people dwelling on it prior to the arrival of the refugee planters. Fifteen years after the arrival of the last Loyalist, forty plantations and three thousand acres in cotton existed.<sup>38</sup> The Abacos,<sup>39</sup> which form a part of the northern portion of the Bahama chain, which today draw the most visitors of all the Out Islands, also had no inhabitants prior to the Loyalists' arrival. But by 1784, when Schöpf arrived in the Bahamas, he noted that two Loyalist settlements existed in the Abacos: Carleton and Marsh's Harbour.<sup>40</sup> In the Abacos, the ideas of successful farming endeavors soon died as the land proved too rocky

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<sup>35</sup>Siebert, 184.

<sup>36</sup> Most of the planters were familiar with this crop from their experiences in the American colonies.

<sup>37</sup> A cay is considered a small island or reef of sand or coral. The origins of the word probably lie in the Spanish *cayo*. This word is pronounced like key in the Bahamas.

<sup>38</sup> Wilbur H. Siebert, "The Legacy of the American Revolution to the British West Indies and the Bahamas," *The Ohio State Bulletin* XVII (1913): 27.

<sup>39</sup> See map on pg. 20.

<sup>40</sup>Schöpf, 259.

for good crop production. Most of the refugees who remained there adopted the ways of the Conchs and began to fish and practice wrecking.<sup>41</sup>

As noted earlier, two distinct trajectories in the development of the Out Islands began to occur after the influx of the Loyalists. In the northern islands of the chain, such as Abaco and New Providence, the population eventually pinned their hopes of economic prosperity on the sea and trading. In the southern Bahamas, a plantation economy seemed feasible in the early years after the Loyalists' arrival. The diversity of the populations which evolved in these two spheres reflected very different ways of life. A larger black population in the southern islands, due to the Loyalists' slaves, also impacted the development of the southern Bahamas, while the settlers of the northern islands had few slaves.<sup>42</sup> The demographic make-up as well as the economic standings of the two groups split the region as it matured under Loyalist influence.

Beginning in the smaller area of the Abacos which acquired the earliest settlers, the Loyalists found a group of small islets which only contained six hundred forty-nine square miles and virtually all of this land rested on a limestone and coral base. Because of the poor soil quality, the early settlers very quickly realized that farming would not produce the prosperity they had hoped for when they left America. The land that the Loyalists cleared for planting by 1789, some two thousand acres, lay deserted by the

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<sup>41</sup>Peters, 54; Steve Dodge, *Abaco: The History of an Out island and Its Cays* (Florida: Tropic Isle Publications, 1983), 23.

<sup>42</sup>Saunders, 12. In 1788, the number of slaves in Abaco only reached 198.

early 1800s.<sup>43</sup> The original Loyalist settlers of the Abacos consisted of refugees who came from New York starting in 1783;<sup>44</sup> later, an equal number of refugees joined them from East Florida.<sup>45</sup> The new Abaconians had to adapt to the circumstances they found. Many of them began to follow the lifestyles of the native Conchs. They began to fish, build boats, and wreck. Boat building proved quite lucrative and Abaco boats became well known as early as the 1780s.<sup>46</sup> Today, the Abaco boat builders on Man-o-War Cay still produce some of the finest open fishing boats in the world. This skill in wood working allowed the shipwrights to develop a high level of expertise as carpenter-joiners. By the 1850s, Abaco eventually reached the status as the most important boat building center in the Bahamas; its shipwrights produced almost half of the boats constructed in the archipelago in the nineteenth century.<sup>47</sup>

One of the renowned persons in Abaco's history, Wyannie Malone, a widow from South Carolina, came to the area in the Loyalist period.<sup>48</sup> Malone came with her four children to Hope Town, Abaco and established a dynasty which still remains prominent

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<sup>43</sup>John Melish, *A Description of East and West Florida and the Bahama Islands; With an Account of the Most Important Places in the United States, Bordering upon Florida and the Gulf of Mexico* (Philadelphia: T. and G. Palmer, 1813), 5.

<sup>44</sup>Dodge, *Abaco*, 18.

<sup>45</sup>Siebert, *Loyalists in East Florida*, 149. The Loyalists from New York amounted to 1458 persons; the Loyalists from East Florida amounted to 1500 persons.

<sup>46</sup>Dodge, *Abaco*, 36. Many of the ships built in the Bahamas in the 1780s came from the Abacos. For example, the *Huaibras* was a 21 ton sloop, the *Fair Abaconian* was a 74 ton sloop, and the *Ulysses* was a 119 ton schooner.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, 29.

in Hope Town's society. She represents the Loyalists who remained on the small cays due to their inability to make one more move as the future in the Bahamas appeared desolate to many by the 1800s. The only real access to world markets that the Abaconians found existed in the business of wrecking. Wrecking had a strong tradition in the islands which bordered the treacherous reefs of the shallow sea. When ships bound from ports such as Boston traveled to points south of Florida in the Americas, they usually traveled on a course just east of Abaco. This made the shipping lane close to the dangerous reef of the cays one of the principal shipping lanes in the world.<sup>49</sup> If the immigrants had no access to that industry, which Wyannie Malone probably did not, they remained in the isolated world of the northern Bahamas and adjusted to the Conch lifestyle. Many of the Loyalists who remained eventually married seafarers from Harbour Island, Eleuthera, situated south of the Abacos. The Harbour Islanders had been established in the Bahamas for approximately one hundred years before the arrival of the Loyalists.<sup>50</sup> Thus, the Loyalists who remained became Conchs. The irony of the situation must be noted as many of the immigrants from the North American mainland had derisively looked down upon the native Conchs after their arrival. The Loyalists of the northern Bahamas had to embrace any means necessary for survival even if it meant becoming the new Conchs.

The southern Out Islands or plantation islands received the majority of the immigrants wishing to continue the business of growing a money crop for market. Based

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 58.

<sup>50</sup> Sandra Riley, *Homeward Bound: A History of the Bahama Islands to 1850 with a Definitive Study of Abaco in the American Loyalist Plantation Period* (St. Petersburg, Florida: Byron Kenedy and Co., 1983; reprint, Miami: Island Research, 1985), 193 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

on their experiences in America, they hoped to establish a new West Indian plantation complex. The plantation model established by Philip Curtin fit some aspects of the situation the refugees found themselves in: they had a forced labor pool, large monocrop plantations were their major goal, owners obtained legal jurisdiction on their plantations and the surrounding area, and the products produced would be shipped to the governing country of the colony.<sup>51</sup> The evaluation by the new Bahamian planters of the sandy, rocky, salty soil and scarce precipitation determined that cotton met the criteria as a successful crop for their new plantations. Sea Island cotton, with its softer and longer fiber had less seeds and thus proved easier to harvest. It also commanded higher prices on the world market than the short, staple variety of cotton because of its luxuriant softness; by 1788, the Loyalists had 16,322 acres under cultivation and reportedly by 1793 one estimate proposed that acres planted doubled from the 1788 period. The production of cotton for sale also increased when Joseph Eve, a Loyalist refugee from South Carolina, invented a wind-powered cotton gin in 1793. His invention probably accounted for the rise in cotton exports from the Bahamas from 219 tons in 1787 to a peak of 610 tons in 1810.<sup>52</sup>

The hope to establish large plantations died on the islands by 1815. Soil exhaustion and then the opening of the American South to the British textile industry

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<sup>51</sup> Philip D. Curtin, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 73-85.

<sup>52</sup> Michael Craton and Gail Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, Volume One, From Aboriginal Times to the End of Slavery* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1992), 192-197.



effectively ended the dream.<sup>53</sup> The Loyalists who attempted this large move included people like Andrew Deveaux Jr. and his father Andrew Deveaux Sr. Possibly the most famous of the Loyalists to arrive in the Bahamas, his family chose Cat Island as the place to build his plantation. Andrew Deveaux survives in history as the great liberator of the Bahamas from the Spanish who had captured Nassau during the American Revolution.<sup>54</sup> Deveaux's family had lost all of their land in South Carolina and moved all of their slaves and livestock to southern Cat Island.<sup>55</sup> Their neighbors on the island included Oswell and Joseph Eve, the inventor of the Bahamian cotton gin.

Another family of Loyalist exiles, the Armbristers, came to the Bahamas with the arrival of the brothers John and James who reached the islands in the 1780s. John went to Cat Island and first started planting cotton. John married the widow Rachel Thompson in March of 1790<sup>56</sup> and began the Armbrister line of the family which still lives on Cat Island. The Armbristers prospered on this island as their ancestors survive there today and own one of the finest resorts in the southern Bahamas. In an informal discussion with one of the Armbristers,<sup>57</sup> she explained that the family first worked the land for cotton, then coconuts, then pineapples and finally sisal. The sisal production of the plantation was the most profitable and at one time the Armbrister's corporation, Bahamas Inaugural Sisal Plantation, LTD, sold shares on the London stock market. The other brother James

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 170. Deveaux's deeds have been retold in many books written on the Bahamas.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 171.

<sup>56</sup>Parrish, 92.

<sup>57</sup>Field notes taken on Cat Island in June of 1997.

stayed in Nassau and worked as the Registrar of Slaves.<sup>58</sup> His son Robert Armbrister went to Florida and became involved with Alexander Arbuthnot and in 1817 both received death sentences from Andrew Jackson who in a hasty military court convicted them of sympathizing with the Indians. Arbuthnot died by hanging and Armbrister died in front of a firing squad.<sup>59</sup> The descendants of the Armbristers thrived on Cat Island. W.E. Armbrister, possibly the most prosperous of the early Armbrister's and the son of John,<sup>60</sup> built a small gauge railroad here to transport sisal to his small factory,<sup>61</sup> where the fibers of the plant were extracted. The great plantation endeavors of the Out Islands failed but the stories of the families who attempted these feats survive in the memories of the people who descended from them as well as their slaves. Traveling further south down

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<sup>58</sup>Riley, 206; Craton and Saunders, 269.

<sup>59</sup>Riley, 206; Charlton W. Tebeau, *A History of Florida* (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1971; reprint, Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1991), 112-114; *Narrative of a Voyage to the Spanish Main in the Ship "Two Friends," The Occupation of Amelia Island, by McGregor, &c.-Sketches of the Province of East Florida; and Anecdotes Illustrative of the Habits and Manners of the Seminole Indians: With an Appendix Containing a Detail of the Seminole War and the Execution of Arbuthnot and Armbrister* (London: Printed for John Miller, Burlington Arcade, Picadilly, 1819; facsimile reproduction, Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1978), 315-326.

<sup>60</sup>W. E. Armbrister, "A Short History of the Bahamas of Recent Date (c. 1890), Copy Made from Original in Possession of Sandra Riley, Special Collections, Historical Museum of South Florida, Miami, Florida. This document by W. E. Armbrister was hand written and in it he relates: "My early days were passed at San Salvador until about ten years of age. I can just remember my father who had a man to follow him when walking around as he was (unreadable) to fits of apoplexy. My father died in 1828?" Cat Island was also called San Salvador as the debate over Columbus's first landing also includes this island as one of the possible spots.

<sup>61</sup>I found what appeared to be an old rail bed in the spot where the local lore told by natives posits that it would be: near the settlement called The Village. The creek the railroad bed passed over is still called Armbrister Creek. The termination point was close to the water and the sisal was probably shipped overseas from this point.

the chain of the Bahamas, the recollections by the locals of the Loyalists' impact proved less important to the remaining population.

On Exuma, west of Cat Island, the Kelsall family seemed to finally end their travels. They received land grants in the name of Roger Kelsall and his son John. The Kelsalls represented the landed elite on the island and appeared set to prosper on Exuma. Unfortunately, they too discovered that the soil in the Bahamas could not produce the quantities of cotton necessary to maintain a rich lifestyle. At first the elder Kelsall, Roger, lived alone on the island while his son and daughter attended school in England.<sup>62</sup> By the time that John and his sister Anne joined their father in Exuma, he had another child with his slave housekeeper Nelly whom they named Portia.<sup>63</sup> The failure of the land left Roger embittered and he looked back on his life in America with regret. As he told his daughter Anne before his death, "if Spalding had been what he ought to have been, you and I would have been richer than we are."<sup>64</sup> In 1788, Roger Kelsall died in England a broken man at the age of fifty.<sup>65</sup> John Kelsall remained on Exuma even though his wife abandoned him and returned to England to live with her mother.<sup>66</sup> John Kelsall tried hard

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<sup>62</sup> Craton and Saunders, 233.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Eleanor Kelsall, "The Kelsall Family, Recollections of Eleanor Kelsall, daughter of John Kelsall, August 1, 1851, Liverpool, England." Webber Collection, Charleston Historical Society, South Carolina. In Chapter Two, the facts about Roger Kelsall and his partnership with Spalding as an Indian Trader is related by this author.

<sup>65</sup> Kelsall Pedigree Chart, Special Collections, Monroe County Public Library, Key West, Florida.

<sup>66</sup> Kelsall, "The Kelsall Family."

to succeed as a planter on Exuma and at one point he even became the salt commissioner for the island, but the task proved too hard on him. John Kelsall died in 1803 at the age of thirty six from a fever.<sup>67</sup> His resting place at St. Matthew's church in Nassau lies close to Thomas Forbes and John Wells.<sup>68</sup> The tales of the Out Island Loyalists who attempted to become planters continued for the most part to follow this downward spiral.

Further south of Exuma and Cat Island, one the largest plantation islands lies close to one of the most important passages in the Bahamas: the Crooked Island passage. It seemed an ideal spot to establish large plantations as it allowed the close passage of ships. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Crooked Island had forty plantations on it one time and about 3000 acres in cotton cultivation. The estates of the planters attained good returns even after a chenille bug infestation ruined the cotton crops in 1788. Planters in the Bahamas continued to grow the crop until 1810, but they could not overcome the fundamental problem: the soil in the Bahamas could not sustain large, agricultural endeavors.<sup>69</sup> The years of prosperity saw some of the Loyalists like William Moss of Crooked Island accumulate quite a bit of property. On his death, he had seven acres east of the harbor in Nassau with two single story frame buildings, 312 acres, known as the Farm which included an octagonal garden house and a two story dwelling with piazzas. On Crooked Island, at his Prospect Hill estate, he had acquired a two story wooden frame building which included a stone built kitchen, cellar and piazzas, in addition to a barn,

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Parrish, 354.

<sup>69</sup> Craton and Saunders, 197.

four office houses, and a boat house.<sup>70</sup> Another Moss family member, Henry, purchased the Great Hope Plantation on Crooked Island in 1818. By this time, the preeminent planters of the Loyalist period had for the most part departed from the region. Moss purchased the plantation, which had already been developed, in 1818. Today little survives of the Moss family's dream of creating a new plantocracy in the Southern Bahamas. Although, the ambitions of the Mosses continue to fascinate the historians of the region due to the notoriety gained by Henry and his wife as to how cruelly they treated their slaves.<sup>71</sup> The Crooked Island planter Alexander Collie encapsulated the feeling of defeat felt by many of the planters by 1804. He related how he had been on Crooked Island "ten years to my sorrow" and had sunk "a great deal of money, I fear never to rise again and much precious time" into his own estate.<sup>72</sup>

Crooked Island and then the small cay to the southwest of it, Long Cay, formerly known as Fortune Island, thrived in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. When the plantations of Crooked Island failed, many of the Loyalists who had few resources left looked to deserted Fortune Island as an alternative way to earn money by raking salt. With forty slaves, one planter could rake 35,000 bushels of salt in one in a season.<sup>73</sup> Salt raking in the southeastern Bahamas had proved possible in the islands of

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<sup>70</sup>Peters, 154.

<sup>71</sup> Craton and Saunders, 302. Both Henry and his wife were convicted of "gross cruelty" to their slaves in 1826.

<sup>72</sup> Parrish, 47.

<sup>73</sup>Paul Albury, *The Story of the Bahamas* (London: Macmillan Education, LTD, 1975; reprint, London: Macmillan Education, 1981), 197.

Inagua and the Turks Islands. The main settlement of Albert Town, on Fortune Island, began to flourish with the arrival of wreckers to the Crooked Island group. The Bahamas eastern wrecking fleet's headquarters prospered on this island which lay close to a shipping channel, the Crooked Island passage, where hundred of ships passed by on their way to or from Cuba and Jamaica. The reefs in the area helped to make this truly a fortunate location for wrecking.<sup>74</sup>

Visitors who stopped at Fortune Island, which had become a provisioning stop and at a later date a coaling station, tell of the boisterous atmosphere of the island. James Curtis, a United States naval lieutenant, sailed aboard the U.S. Schooner *Porpoise* in 1821. The object of the cruise was to "break up the gangs of Pirates along the coast of Cuba" and to protect the American merchant vessels.<sup>75</sup> He kept a detailed log while at sea and while in the vicinity of Crooked Island and Fortune Island Curtis noted that: "Fortune Island is thickly settled, there are two windmills for ginning cotton of which quantities are produced, the South side is rocky, but near salt pond, is a sandy beach."<sup>76</sup> Curtis also put ashore in Crooked Island where he found a good spot to collect water and reprovision the ship. He sent the mate ashore who returned after four hours with all the water casks full. He reported to Lieutenant Curtis that he found "a spring there cut out of the solid

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 201.

<sup>75</sup> James Freeman Curtis, Curtis-Stevenson Family Papers, 1775-1920, MS. N-288, Box 12, Vol. 2, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. Sea Log Entry 23 August 1822.

rock as the inscription said by Blackbeard.”<sup>77</sup> The Lieutenant also met the post master<sup>78</sup> on Crooked Island and noted a number of families on it. He received information from a couple of slaves that Fortune Island produced “much coarse salt.”<sup>79</sup> The mention of a two cotton gin leads to the conclusion that cotton’s production still impacted the Crooked Island region.

The later recollections of L.D. Powles, Circuit and Stipendiary Magistrate to the Bahamas in 1886, reveal the vibrant society found on Fortune Island. On April 21, 1887 Powles left Nassau for his second circuit of the Out Islands on an Abaco schooner named the *Albury and Malone*.<sup>80</sup> Powles arrival at Fortune Island in May of 1887 was announced by the firing of the single canon on the boat; the captain and crew came from Fortune Island. It seemed odd after reading the account of the island’s prosperity that by the year 2000 it boasted only fifteen inhabitants.<sup>81</sup> Powles though related that the island’s

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid. Sea Log Entry 24 August 1822. Crooked Island has a famous artesian well that the locals call French Wells.

<sup>78</sup> Albury, 201. Crooked Island had the first post office in the Bahamas. The monthly packet from Jamaica to England stopped here to transport mail which then would be taken to Nassau.

<sup>79</sup> Curtis, Sea Log Entry 24 August 1822.

<sup>80</sup> L.D. Powles, *The Land of the Pink Pearl: Recollections of Life in the Bahamas* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Limited, 1888; reprint, Nassau: Media Publishing LTD, 1996), 104 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

<sup>81</sup> I visited Crooked Island and Fortune Island in August of 2000. Because there is no way to get to Fortune Island, now called Long Cay, I had to catch a ride on a boat and could only spend an afternoon there. Much of the information I received about the island was given to me by one of the few residents remaining in the community.

population "is rapidly increasing."<sup>82</sup> He considered the small island the most prosperous in the Bahamas. The island's prosperity rested on its close proximity to the Crooked Island passage. A "number of steamers trading between New York, Cuba, Hayti, the West Indies, and the Spanish Main call here for labourers, whom they take with them to load and unload cargo at the different ports at which they stop" then the laborers would be returned to the island to await new jobs.<sup>83</sup> Powles raved about the different atmosphere on the island due to the influx of world news. The people seemed to him to have an "air of freshness" not found in the rest of the Bahamas where the people seemed to be waiting to be awakened.<sup>84</sup>

The milieu of Fortune Island with its apparent cosmopolitan atmosphere due to its contact with the outside world<sup>85</sup> and the influence of the multi-national character of the transient population had as its expression the flourishing settlement of Albert Town. The town must have been a wild stop over with its many seamen waiting for their next berths. Powles describes a party he attended where the dance the Marengo (sic) from Cuba was danced as well as Irish jigs and the quadrille.<sup>86</sup> But the residents were a devout group

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<sup>82</sup>Powles, 129.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. Powles raved about the number of newspapers available on the Island. American news was only 4 days old and European news was up to date. He predicted that if the island could throw off the yoke of Nassau's influence, it would become more important a center especially since it was already doing some direct trade with the United States.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 150.



who attended church on a regular basis.<sup>87</sup> The large church structure still standing on Fortune Island attests to this observation by Powles. When asked, the locals who remain on the island boast that it could seat 3000 people: half the population of the island at its peak.<sup>88</sup> While walking through Long Cay in 2000, this author noticed ruins all around along with the remnants of carefully laid out streets. As the island's importance faded, due in part to its losing the business from shipping after the finishing of the Panama Canal, the promise of it outstripping Nassau as the center of the Bahamas also faded.

The largest portion of the refugees that came to the islands though were enslaved blacks the Loyalists brought with them. The interruption of their lives could not be calculated as their histories remain unwritten due to the execrable conditions imposed upon them during this time of upheaval. Due to the fact that slaves had remained the Loyalists' main source of wealth, when the immigrants needed cash the slaves suffered. Notices of slaves for sale and runaway slaves became more common in the newspapers of the periods. For example, in the *Bahama Gazette* during March of 1786 appeared the following: "To Be Sold at Public Vendue Monday May 1, 1786, 40-50 valuable slave families, mostly born in Carolina or Florida. Apply to Josiah Tattnall or Thomas Forbes."<sup>89</sup> John Morris, a departing Loyalist, announced the sale of ninety prime slaves in 1786 that included carpenters, coopers, wheelwrights, and field slaves. He gave his

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>88</sup> These figures come from local lore. The exact population of the island at its fullest capacity could not be determined by me.

<sup>89</sup> *Bahama Gazette* (New Providence) 18-25 March 1786.

departure date as February 28<sup>th</sup>, 1787.<sup>90</sup> The four house slaves of Charles Price, Esq., the announcement also noted that he was late of Georgia, went on sale in 1785.<sup>91</sup> The same edition of the paper which gave the notice of the sale of Price's slaves also reported the missing slaves Jack, Jenny, Miley and Mary who had ran from their owner at the time of the evacuation of Charleston and had been seen in Nassau.<sup>92</sup> The adaptation process which the American born slaves endured enabled them to make the most of the life they found in the Bahamas. They reacted to terrible circumstances with such actions as running away, but they eventually benefited from their unwilling dislocation as emancipation came to the British colonies almost thirty years before the United States.

By the time Emancipation arrived to the Bahamas in 1834, many of the plantation owners had simply forsaken their properties and left the slaves on their own. Many of the slaves and then later freedmen on the Out Islands simply co-opted abandoned property or squatted on empty crown land. This allowed them to quickly adapt to freedom as they had adjusted to an attitude of benign neglect from the planters during the last years of the slave system. The failure of cotton production had allowed a proto-peasant black population to evolve in the Bahamas.<sup>93</sup> By 1830, 65 percent of Bahamian slaves,

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<sup>90</sup>*Bahama Gazette* (New Providence) 21-28 January 1786.

<sup>91</sup>*Bahama Gazette* (New Providence) 30 July-6 August, 1785.

<sup>92</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup>Howard Johnson, "The Emergence of a Peasantry in the Bahamas during Slavery," *Slavery and Abolition* 10 (1989), 173.

registered with the government, engaged in other agriculture.<sup>94</sup> This infers that they predominantly raised foodstuffs such as cassava, corn, pineapples and plantain. About 10 percent of them raked salt, while another 10 percent fished and built boats.<sup>95</sup> The experience of the

Bahamian slaves did not mirror that of the rest of the West Indies. This makes this fringe society different in the development of a regional identity with the rest of the Caribbean. Similarities exist, but their manifestation lays deeper than mere surface mutations of the slaves' daily experiences.

Many of the islands of the Bahamas mutated under the direction of the Loyalists' ambitions. They helped to develop a new Bahamian identity, they changed the demographics of the colony, they impacted the government, but the one change they failed to impose on the surrounding cays was the enrichment of the soil to support a plantation economy. The descendants of the hardiest of them and the descendants of the slaves who came with them embraced the Bahamian way of life in order to overcome the adversities of the environment. The northern islands would produce great mariners who would venture back into American waters to profit from the wrecks found on the reefs of the Florida Keys. The southern islanders would eke out a living from the hard rocky soil, but more impressively, the slaves and then the freed people after 1834 found a unique autonomy in the Out Island experience. Some of the descendents of these freedmen branched out onto the nearby islets of the Florida Keys. They reinvented themselves in

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<sup>94</sup>B.W. Higman, *Slave Populations of the British Caribbean, 1807-1834* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 71-72.

<sup>95</sup>*Ibid.*

this move back to the country which had ejected them as mere appendages to their Loyalist masters. They came back with a history of being free and changed the black Key Westers' perception of the social role of a black person. Neither one of these two groups had easy lives, but their struggles and the solutions they forged outlasted the goals of the elites. The irony of Bahamian experience of the Loyalists was that the newcomers, who so despised the lowly Conchs, had to become Conchs in order to survive. As their odyssey continued to unfold, many traveled back across the Gulfstream seeking economic opportunities in the land which had ejected them.

## Chapter Four

### Economic Opportunities and Contacts

The contacts among the peoples of Florida and the Bahamas continued unabated throughout the Colonial period into the time after the acquisition of Florida by the United States. People maintained links with each other across the Gulfstream which included business concerns and eventually family ties. For examples, one family maintained a lawyer in Nassau even after moving to South Florida.<sup>1</sup> The movement of people between the regions represents an unexpected fluidity in migratory patterns in the tumultuous period of the coalescing of the modern boundaries of these two frontier areas. The opportunity for financial gain and a promised future stability drove the unrest found in demographic fluctuations of the Florida/Bahamas zone. To many of those who relocated, the foremost economic draw remained activities which surrounded maritime industries; fishing, sponging and wrecking being the primary occupations. This was especially true of the Bahamians, both from the old Conch populations and the Loyalists, living in the northern portion of the Bahamas. The failure of plantations in the southern Bahamas had not affected them as they had adjusted to the seafaring lifestyle necessitated by the poor soil found in areas such as Abaco. They eagerly pursued fishing and wrecking as lucrative ways of increasing their prosperity.

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<sup>1</sup> John Egan, Cape Florida, to James Hollywood, Nassau, 26 July 1807, Gardiner Baker Family Papers, Kislac Foundation, Miami, Florida. Egan acted as a representative for the settler Gardiner Baker, who came from Nassau to Florida in 1804, he maintained a correspondence with Baker's lawyer in Nassau.

The series of wars which affected the Caribbean region also facilitated the increasing interchange between the inhabitants who actively cultivated regional contacts. Even the simplest acts of necessity, such as the refitting and provisioning of ships, allowed for patterns to develop which influenced the mariners and islanders.<sup>2</sup> The naval actions in the Caribbean zone helped to give "birth to a numerous race of able mariners" that had a vested interest of continued contact in the region even at times when it became prohibited due to disputes between governments.<sup>3</sup> The idea that these associations allowed economic gains to the individuals involved could not be disputed as many of the colonies and buffer zone territories prospered despite the strict trade regulations of the colonial period. The disillusionment of the settlers with strictures imposed on them regarding the acquirement of goods bore fruition in an active subversion of the appropriate channels in which to trade. The populous saw the opportunities to foil the authorities as often necessary to their survival. This mind-set allowed enterprises to develop which encouraged a multiplicity in the type and numbers of networks between the various island groups.

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<sup>2</sup> J. H. Parry, P. M. Sherlock and A.P. Maingot, *A Short History of the West Indies*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., (London: Macmillan Education LTD., 1987), 95. For example, the interchange between the naval shipyards of Port Royal, Jamaica and English Harbor, Antigua allowed for a similar speech pattern to develop between the native peoples of those two cities which reflected the speech patterns of the seafarers using the dockyards.

<sup>3</sup> "Reflections On the True Interest of Great Britain with Respect to the Caribbee Islands: as well as the Old Settlements as the Neutral Islands, and the Conquests. In which the Importance of Martinique is particularly considered. By a Planter at Barbados, 1762," p. 1, Francis Russell Hart Collection, Manuscript Number N-189, Folder 40, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

The people of the buffer zone created between Florida and the Bahamas became masters of the sea. The merchant seamen and fishermen learned to make quick decisions on the open waters as they struggled to eke a living from the ocean. Life aboard ships for most sailors created a unique atmosphere which facilitated them to think as individuals as critical situations developed, yet at the same time it taught them to obey stringent rules or risk often harsh disciplinary measures. The dichotomy inherent in this acculturation to the insular communities aboard ships led many sailors on paths which at times crossed the boundaries of the laws which bound landlocked societies. The decision of many of the men to take to the seafaring life lay in their desires to see new places, meet new people and, foremost, they hoped to better their economic status.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the shipboard community encouraged adventurous individuals strong enough to survive the hardships of the enclosed world constructed aboard ships; in the Caribbean zone that world included physical as well as mental trials. The ships were often undersupplied with food and fresh water which had to be obtained at regular intervals in a geographic region which had many dry, desert islands. Sailing ships could also suffer delays in reaching land due to lack of wind or conversely too much wind. No one appeared immune to the deprivations inherent in shipboard life and the tales of passengers reinforce the sailors' experiences. One shipboard traveler reported on the lack of decent provisions when he

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<sup>4</sup> B.R. Burg, *Sodomy and the Pirate Tradition: English Sea Rovers in the Seventeenth Century Caribbean* (New York: New York University Press, 1983), 141.

complained that “marine people-the captain and his satellites-are bound to provide me; and all they have provided is yams, salt pork, biscuit, and bad coffee.”<sup>5</sup>

The capricious nature of captains who retained absolute power over their crews could also exacerbate the dismal lot of the sailor.<sup>6</sup> Life aboard a sailing vessel proved difficult to many as they learned to adjust to the mentality of mariners. The monotony of shipboard life wore on the nerves of the sailors and quarrels often broke out among them. One sailor attributed this to fact that “we had been too long from port. We were getting tired of one another, and were in an irritable state, both forward and aft.”<sup>7</sup> In addition, the dangerous and unpredictable nature of the climate hardened the seamen of the era. Hurricanes in the tropics could easily cause the demise of a ship and her crew; a thunderstorm at sea struck fear into sailors due to their vulnerable position in the open waters. Many feared being struck by lightening and a description of a storm at sea gives credence to their fears. Recounting his impression of thunder while in a thunderstorm off Cuba, Richard Dana wrote: “Peal after peal rattled over our heads, with a sound which seemed actually to stop the breath in a body.”<sup>8</sup> Under all of these circumstances, seafarers quickly learned to grasp at opportunities which allowed them to prosper.

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<sup>5</sup>Anthony Trollope, *The West Indies and the Spanish Main* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1860; reprint, New York: Carroll and Graf Publishers, 1999). 5.

<sup>6</sup>Dorothy Deneen Volo and James M. Volo, *Daily Life in the Age of Sail* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2002), 95. The captains were considered the master aboard all ships. They made all the important decisions regarding navigation and discipline.

<sup>7</sup>Richard Henry Dana, *Two Years Before the Mast* (1840; reprint, New York: International Collectors Library, 1949), 49.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 330.



Thus, many opportunities found through maritime occupations drew the more adventurous in the time before steam vessels evolved. One of the more lucrative ventures offered as an alternative to becoming a common sailor was wrecking.<sup>9</sup> Wrecking also came to be linked to the Caribbean region's history of piracy. The historiography on the pirates' lifestyle began soon after the advent of the pirates incursions into the region. John Esquemeling wrote *The Buccaneers of America* in 1627 and it became a very popular text in the nineteenth century. Esquemeling's book typified the types of accounts which sprang up about the freebooting lifestyle. They focused on the daring and brutal escapades of the most infamous characters engaged in the pillaging of ships. But, the after effects of this existence on the sailors who embraced the pirate life was harder to document as many of them simply disappeared into the vast networks of commercial and local shipping. Wrecking did draw many of those left over from the buccaneering days; its lure lay in the huge profits which could be garnered from the salvaging of floundered ships.<sup>10</sup> The transition from pirating or privateering to wrecking seemed natural as it appeared that during off times pirate and privateer crews often engaged in salvaging stranded hulks found on the reefs. The characterization of the salvors as heirs to the freebooting tradition does not appear too farfetched given these antecedents found in the

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<sup>9</sup>Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 124. The wages of the average seaman began falling in the eighteenth century. The attraction of wrecking lay in the sharing of the profits by the crew from the cargo which was sold after it was salvaged.

<sup>10</sup>Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), 163. The pirates' system of sharing the booty from captured ships resembled the wreckers' practice of sharing profits.

history of wrecking.<sup>11</sup> Wreckers lived with this spurious reputation left over from this legacy although for the most part they engaged in the business with licenses issued by their governments.<sup>12</sup> The salvors trade eventually effected migratory patterns, societal developments in the Bahamas/Florida zone and eventually led to wrecking being one of the most highly regulated and prosperous industries of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries.

The salvors, whether authorized or unauthorized, oftentimes still pushed the boundaries of what the governments considered legal. They crossed over borders into the waters of other governments. They defied authorities who attempted to prosecute them as many of the cases concerning territorial incursions prove. When they could not escape foreign justice, they relied on their governments to help them escape persecution. The coasts of Florida and the Bahama Islands saw many of these types of disputes as demonstrated in the earlier records of the colonial period. The treacherous reefs off both territories caused many wrecks and many problems which resulted from the fight to salvage wrecked ships for their profitable cargoes. The capture of one English ship which engaged in the salvage of a wreck off the Florida coast demonstrated the machinations which occurred between the governments of the period. In 1718, a British naval vessel

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<sup>11</sup>James M. Wright, "The Wrecking System of the Bahama Islands," *Political Science Quarterly* 30 (December 1915): 619.

<sup>12</sup> United States Admiralty Court Records. The wrecks and their cargoes were split up by the courts in ports like Key West and Nassau. The wreckers who wrecked in the Florida Keys had to have licenses issued by the Admiralty Court in Key West. Information on the issuance of licenses can be found in the United States Admiralty Court Records, Monroe County Public Library, Special Collections, Key West, Florida.

arrived in Havana, Cuba to obtain the freedom of a crew which had been taken from a British wrecking vessel off the Florida Keys. The captured crew was being used to build "the Castle" and reportedly received barbarous treatment.<sup>13</sup> The captured wrecking vessel and crew remained in Havana until the Governor of Jamaica sent Captain Dennis to parlay for the crews release with the promise of the release of Spaniards being held in Jamaica. The accusations against the English prisoners included piracy and the illegal incursion by them into Spanish territory. The English representative disputed the claims of piracy, but it was his stance on the Spanish claim to Florida which showed how the regional geographical limits imposed by the two governments appeared very fluid in the mind set of the early diplomats. The reply Dennis gave to the assertion of Florida's coastal waters being Spanish included the following refutation:

"as to their being upon the King of Spain's Land, 'tis certain that the King of Spain ascribes to himself the Title of being absolute Lord of all the Indies, but 'tis certain he is not such, Witness the many Settlements all the Kings of Europe have; and besides Florida is an unsettled Place, where none but barbarous Indians Live, and their being at Work upon the Wrecks is not a thing contrary to Law, for that the Laws of Nations allows of free Liberty to all Men to Work upon any Wreck after they have been cast away Twelve Months and a Day"<sup>14</sup>

The location of Florida made it an important area in the consideration of wrecking as a crucial means of contact among the people of the region. Florida's attempted settlement by Europeans began to occur as early as 1562 when the French arrived there to establish a

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<sup>13</sup> Pamela Gosner, *Caribbean Baroque: Historic Architecture of the Spanish Antilles* (Colorado: Passeggiata Press, 1996), 75. The Castle which Captain Dennis referred to was probably El Morro in Havana. The first plans for it were drawn by 1614. It was added to at regular intervals up until the nineteenth century.

<sup>14</sup> *The Whole Proceedings of Captain Dennis's Expedition to the Governor of the Havanna: Being a Memorial, or Journal of What Occurrences Happen'd during his Stay There* (Kingston, Jamaica: Printed by R. Baldwin, 1718.)

colony. It would be the Spanish though who established a permanent city and made the most decisive claim to the peninsula.<sup>15</sup>

The coastal waters of Florida harbored the avenue used by the Spanish to send treasure ships back to Spain. The Florida Straits, which border the coast of Florida, lead into the Gulfstream which hugs the coast of North America north and eventually ends up in the Arctic. It is a river within the Atlantic Ocean which had been described as "the mightiest river in the world, its current more rapid than that of the Mississippi or the Amazon, its volume more than a thousand times greater."<sup>16</sup> This northwardly moving stream facilitated the travel of the old sailing vessels carrying the wealth of the New World to the Old World. Its importance as a conduit for the continual interaction among the various island communities and the peninsula of Florida was perceived very early on in the history of the exploration and contact period of the Americas. Its discoverer may have been the Spanish navigator Anton de Alaminos who in 1513 journeyed with Ponce de León from the Caribbean northward to an area close to the modern day city of St. Augustine in Florida.<sup>17</sup> In any case, by the mid 1500s the knowledge of the manner in

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<sup>15</sup> Charlton W. Tebeau, *A History of Florida* (Miami: University of Miami Press, 1971; reprint, Miami: University of Miami Press, 1991). 29-34.

<sup>16</sup> J. Linton Rigg, *Bahama Islands* (Princeton, New Jersey: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1949), 12.

<sup>17</sup> Robert Chamberlain, "Discovery of the Bahamas Channel," *Tequesta* 8 (1948): 109. It was when Alaminos sailed in 1519 through the Bahamas Channel from south to north to the Gulfstream, past Bermuda, and then onto the Azores to finally arrive in San Lucar Barrameda in Spain that this route was acknowledged as the best route for getting back to Europe.

which the Gulfstream assisted ships' travels had been well documented;<sup>18</sup> the use of the Gulfstream, the Old Bahama Channel and the Florida Straits by vessels continues into the twenty-first century. These shipping channels helped to propel the sailing ships of the colonial period, but at the same time contained some of the most treacherous shoals found in the region.<sup>19</sup>

The Old Bahama Channel runs between Cuba and the Great Bahama Bank, with a north west current, it parallels the Cuban coast up to the Cay Sal Banks and then spills into the Florida Straits which eventually join the Gulfstream. The route provided deep water access for the old sailing ships, but the prevailing winds, which blow in a westerly direction, pushed the vessels into an area of reefs covered by shallow waters which surrounded the Florida Keys.<sup>20</sup> The waters had been considered as "dangerous, as the currents baffle all calculation" and certain spots such as Carysfort Reef in the upper Keys received the reputation as an extremely treacherous part of the coast.<sup>21</sup> The unusually

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<sup>18</sup>Samuel Eliot Morrison, *Admiral of the Ocean Sea: A Life of Christopher Columbus*, vol. 2 (New York: Time Incorporated, 1942), 489.

<sup>19</sup>Carla Rahn Phillips, *Six Galleons for the King of Spain: Imperial Defense in the Early Seventeenth Century* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1986), 13. As early as the seventeenth century, Spanish sailors understood the unsafe nature of these waters as they pressed to get through the Old Bahama Channel before the month of August when hurricane season was at its peak.

<sup>20</sup>Paul Albury, *The Story of the Bahamas* (London: Macmillan Education Limited, 1975), 2-3.

<sup>21</sup>James Grant Forbes, *Sketches Historical and Topographical, of the Floridas; More Particularly of East Florida* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1964, facsimile reproduction of the 1821 edition), 107; John Lee Williams, *The Territory of Florida: or Sketches of the Topography, Civil and Natural History, of the Country, the Climate, and the Indian Tribes, from the First Discovery to the Present Time* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1962, facsimile reproduction of the 1827 edition), 35.

shallow water combined with inaccurate charts challenged the most adept captains.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, the waters of the region facilitated shipping while at the same time they attracted a multitude of seamen who operated salvage ventures in the hope of garnering profits from the unfortunate circumstances of others. This created multinational connections in the area as shipping increased dramatically between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. The route's importance to the colonial powers' shipping endeavors countered the relative isolation of the majority of the land mass which made up the peninsula of Florida and the cays of the Bahamas.

The contest which played out over possession and wrecking rights in these coastal waters began soon after the European incursions into La Florida and the Bahamas. The Spanish actively salvaged their own wrecks in the Florida Keys as the hulks contained important treasure cargos which fed the Spanish economy.<sup>23</sup> The arrival of foreigners into the territorial waters of Spain caused Spanish officials great concern as they knew this resource drew others' attention. The Spanish governor of East Florida corresponded with Spanish administrators to complain that reports of Bahamians in the keys from 1785 confirmed their wrecking activities in the region.<sup>24</sup> In 1788, the Spanish also received

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 111. The inaccuracy of the early charts of the region was notorious. In 1800, an early surveyor in Florida noted that English charts seemed the most precise, but even they were full of errors and helped to increase the accidents which happened in these waters.

<sup>23</sup> John Viele, *The Florida Keys* vol. 3 (Sarasota, Florida: Pineapple Press, 2001), 5.

<sup>24</sup> Governor Zéspedes, East Florida, to Ministers and Consuls, Spain, 27 March 1786, East Florida Papers, Reel 17, 55A, University of Florida, Smathers Library East, Florida History Collection, Gainesville, Florida.

information that Bahamian settlers from New Providence also existed in the Keys.<sup>25</sup> In an earlier guide done by the British surveyor William Gerard De Brahm, he noted that although the Keys had no inhabitants they were “constantly visited by the English from New Providence, and Spaniards from Cuba, for the sake of wrecks, Madeira wood, tortoise, shrimps, fish, and birds.”<sup>26</sup> Both the Bahamians and Cubans perceived that the Florida Keys existed as a resource available to them when needed. Some of the wreckers began to establish bases for their operations on the small keys located in the Florida Straits; thus, they developed secondary harbors from which to conduct their business. The nature of the salvors received the description of “unsettled” and “improvident in their habits” but as later demonstrated by famous wreckers such as Jacob Housman they shrewdly capitalized on the location of isolated keys as base camps close to the more treacherous reefs.<sup>27</sup>

The most aggressive of the wreckers in the Florida/Bahamas environs arrived in the area prior to the eighteenth century. They were later joined by the Loyalist immigrants who moved to islands in the Bahamas such as New Providence and the

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<sup>25</sup>Governor Zéspedes, East Florida, to Ministers and Consuls, Spain, 11 October 1788, East Florida Papers, Reel 17, 55A, University of Florida, Smathers Library East, Florida History Collection, Gainesville, Florida.

<sup>26</sup>William Gerard De Brahm, *The Atlantic Pilot* (London: Printed for the Author by T. Spilsbury, 1772; facsimile reproduction, Gainesville: The University Presses of Florida, 1974), 11.

<sup>27</sup>Wright, 629; Dorothy Dodd, “Jacob Housman of Indian Key,” *Tequesta* 8 (1948): 5-7. In 1825, Housman developed Indian Key because of its ideal location halfway between Key West and Cape Florida. On it he built a grand home, a hotel, a hospital, a couple of warehouses and constructed a number of small houses for his crew. Today the remains of these structures as well as others can still be seen.

Abacos.<sup>28</sup> Many Bahamians from other places in the Bahamas practiced wrecking, but the seamen from the above two mentioned locales, because of their numbers, made the biggest impact on the perception of the salvors' characters. They were negatively seen as a class who avidly pursued this occupation because it "seemed to be a way of getting a living without having to create goods for the purpose."<sup>29</sup> The wreckers worked the shoals of the many reefs which at any given time could present an impossible navigational hazard to the captains of the era.

An example of the experiences of wrecked seamen and their interactions with the salvors shows the complexity of the system and its fundamental necessity in this sector of the ocean. Olaudah Equiano, a Black English seaman who arrived in the West Indies during the Seven Years' War, gave an account of being wrecked off of Abaco in 1767. The ship he sailed on ran aground on some rocks located five or six miles from a desolate cay. After determining they could not free their vessel, Equiano and his ship mates lowered their small dinghy and begun to transfer the cargo of twenty slaves and crew to the cay. The captain and Equiano, along with five other crew members, then set out in the dinghy to attempt to make their way to New Providence, approximately one hundred nautical miles away, in order to affect a rescue of the survivors. On their journey, they encountered a wrecking vessel and crew who had already taken aboard crew members from a wrecked whaling schooner two days prior to this meeting. An agreement between

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<sup>28</sup> Because of the failure of agriculture in the northern Bahamas, already mentioned earlier in this chapter, many of the wreckers came from the Abacos and Nassau. They ventured into the Florida Keys due to the proximity of the Northern Bahamas to that location.

<sup>29</sup>Wright, 620.



the captain of Equiano's ship and the salvors was reached whereby they would take the survivors to New Providence and receive "all things belonging to the vessel" which had been wrecked.<sup>30</sup> This arrangement, also made with the whaler's captain, shows how the wreckers made their money. They saved the crew, but profited from the sale of the items remaining onboard the ship as well as parts of the ship itself which could include commodities such as copper from the hull's sheathing.<sup>31</sup>

While the salvors brought income into the Bahamas, this pursuit did not gain wholesale approval from the officials due to their own desires to increase the value of the colony within the scope of the British colonial system. Wrecking seemed a precarious venture at best and it kept too many inhabitants from seeking gainful, permanent employment. Government officials in Nassau complained to the Foreign Office in London that the people involved in salvage enterprises tended to ignore the development of the Bahamas in order to pursue the occupation. In one correspondence from Woodes Rogers (the Governor of the Bahamas from 1718-1721 and then again from 1729-1732), he criticized the practice because the trading vessels in the colony in 1731 which were to go out to the other cays to bring back produce to Nassau instead engage in,

"an ill Custom too Long followed and which is hard to break them of, the people spend too much time on Fishing and waiting among the Islands for Ambergreese and Wrecks and they sometimes find Drifts of Wreck'd Vessels which they get

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<sup>30</sup>Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African* (New York, 1791; reprint, New York: Bedford Books, 1995), 127-134.

<sup>31</sup>Steve Dodge and Vernon Malone, *A Guide and History of Hope Town* (Decatur, Illinois: White Sound Press, 1990), 40. An example of the large amounts of items salvaged, such as copper, could be found in the Abaco export records from 1834. In that year, 1034 pounds of copper were exported from this tiny island community.

Old Iron and other things which do not answer so well for the Publick Good as if they lent their Thoughts and Labour towards Improving the Production of the Colony & raising Provisions.<sup>32</sup>

The responses to such grievances remained negligible as the colonial system throughout the height of the wrecking era did not rely on the Bahamas for economic gain. Instead, the Lord Commissioners for Trade and Plantations practiced a type of benign neglect of the region which only gained attention when its geographic position could be advantageously exploited in times of war.<sup>33</sup>

The disinterest the metropolises exhibited towards the less important areas of the Florida/Bahamas zone furthered the ideology which became peculiar to its inhabitants. They at times suffered such severe deprivations that subverting legal venues and rejecting the dominant views concerning hard work as an important standard for survival established itself as normative. In a letter to the Lords of Trade in England, Governor Fitzwilliam described the abject state of the Bahamas in 1738. In apprehension of threatening incursions from the Spanish on nearby islands, the inhabitants of some of the Bahama Islands had not gone out to rake salt: a major source of revenue for the colony. The other English colonies from which they usually purchased supplies realized they had

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<sup>32</sup> Answers to Query from the Right Honorable Lord Commissioners for Trade and Plantations, Received from Captain Rogers Letter of 14 October 1731, CO 23/3, f. 19, Archives of the Bahamas, Nassau, Bahamas.

<sup>33</sup> "Report to the King about the Purchase of the Bahama Islands," Treasury Chambers, Whitehall, 10 May 1734, Signed by R. Walpole, Geo. Oxendon, Wm. Clayton, CO 23/3, f. 91, Archives of the Bahamas, Nassau, Bahamas. The Bahamas was ideally suited for privateering ventures in times of war due to its proximity to the main shipping lanes, the Old Bahama Channel and the Gulfstream, which were used by the ships of the all nations in the Caribbean. This is noted again and again in official correspondences, but was especially persuasive when the Crown considered reasons for buying the colony from the Lord Proprietors for 1000 pounds in 1734.

no hard currency and refused to ship provisions to the beleaguered colony. Indeed, as Fitzwilliam described it, "there are very many among us, who have not eat either Bread or Meat these two months,- their sole Subsistence being Crabs they pick up along the shore, Fish when it is calm Weather to take them, wild Plums and whatever else they can find to pick off the Trees."<sup>34</sup> Thus, by ignoring the plight of the islanders, the colonial powers created a breeding ground for the subversion of their authority. The unprofitable frontier outposts, like the Bahamas, of the European empires were considered mere buffer regions between colonial territories and not important to the broader scheme of imperial ambitions.

Thus, wrecking helped to bring to fruition some of the worst fears of the European powers: it allowed a system of communication to develop which pivoted upon independent networks. It soon proved a very lucrative business although its antecedents received furious denunciations from the governments of the powers involved. Its regulation would later become highly structured as the governmental agents in the Bahamas and Florida realized the lucrative nature of this enterprise which thrived on the bad luck of the mariners of the era. The history of the legalization and control of wrecking in the Florida straits and Bahamian waters began in the Bahamas which followed laws established by the courts of England. The territory of Florida, acquired by the United States in 1821, addressed the issue of the adjudication of the proceeds from

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<sup>34</sup> "Letter from Mr. Fitzwilliam, Governor of the Bahama Islands, dated on 28<sup>th</sup> October 1737, transmitting publick Papers, he complains of a great Scarcity of Provsions there, and gives Account of Cat Island and its Value to encourage new Settlers," CO 23/4, f.33, Archives of the Bahamas, Nassau, Bahamas.

salving in 1827 with the establishment of a territorial court in Key West with admiralty jurisdiction.<sup>35</sup>

In England, salving rights and issues related to the disbursement of profits had been established by the Admiralty Courts prior to the settlement of the Bahamas. Its complexity as a regulated commercial enterprise in the outer boundaries of the Empire soon proved to benefit the local people involved who thrived on the inherent tensions found between ships' owners, wrecking captains, local courts, merchants, and insurance companies. The system benefited the entire community as most of the rewards from the endeavor remained in the hands of the people who created the system and most often practiced the trade. The Bahamians reaped the benefits from wrecking for most of their history and as one official correspondent stated in 1719 the enterprise "contributed very much toward their improvement."<sup>36</sup> The system operated on cooperation among the salvors who established formal rules for the industry's procedures on the open seas.

The first objective of the salvors rested on the ability of the various ships and crews involved to find and reach foundered vessels. Most often the salvors' luck in finding a wreck relied on the vicissitudes which characterized most of their existence. The ships engaged in the business would leave port in hope of finding a prize to salvage. They would often time these hunting trips after inclement weather affected the area, but even calm days could result in the running aground of a vessel whose captain lacked

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<sup>35</sup>Jefferson B. Browne, *Key West: the Old and the New* (St. Augustine: The Record Company, 1912; facsimile reproduction, Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1973), 64.

<sup>36</sup>Letter from Secretary Craggs dated 21 January 1719, concerning New Providence and the Carolinas, CO 23/1, ff. 97-100, Archives of the Bahamas, Nassau, Bahamas.

knowledge of local waters. The changeable quality of life on the open seas made the wreckers aggressive opportunists who created their own fortunes. The first master of salving ship who reached a distressed vessel earned the right to become wreck-master.<sup>37</sup> The protocol fed the fierce competition among wreckers as the wreck-master received an additional portion of the proceeds from the sale of wrecked goods.<sup>38</sup> The multiplicity of the arrangements made between wreckers also facilitated the increased complexity of the system as the ships' captains made consortship agreements with each other whereby crews of ships in consort shared in the profits of wrecks even though they might not be present for the actual work.<sup>39</sup> In addition, verbal contracts between the salvors and captains of wrecked ships often complicated matters as the stressful circumstances under which they were made caused later disputes after the start of the adjudication process.

In Florida, the salvors' practices had caused many problems for the Spanish as they had little control over the industry in areas like the Florida Keys. Distance from the administrative center, as well as insufficient means of enforcement for controlling foreign interest in the region, created a power vacuum which salving captains took wholesale advantage of from the earliest beginnings of wrecking. The officials and the wreckers of the Bahamas took an avid interest in all salvage operations occurring in Florida waters. In one instance, the Spanish salvors worked on a wreck off the Florida coast on which the British officials in New Providence speculated might remain an immense amount of

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<sup>37</sup>Wright, 621.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 627. The additional amount could be from 5 to 20 pound sterling as established by the law in 1848.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 621. These types of agreements were made in order to guarantee more regular returns for the wreckers.

bullion. The British sent a ship and its crew to watch the Spanish at work and they learned that although the salvors had recovered much of the cargo, one ship possibly remained missing with three million pieces of eight on board. The reports from the British informants included their evaluation of the others' efforts to retrieve the missing vessel. They asserted that "it seem'd very indifferent to them, whither they found her or not, and therefore were resolved to return to the Havanna from whence they came."<sup>40</sup> When a British warship, the HMS Looe, went aground off the lower Florida Keys the British in New Providence immediately began to worry that the Spanish in Havana would gain intelligence about the wreck and salvage the guns.<sup>41</sup> The information network in the region had become highly advanced and this worked for and against both sides of this contest that fought for the profits gained from the mishaps caused by the treacherous shoals.

These challenges as to the extent of ownership and wrecking rights in territorial waters were also legally addressed by the American government which eventually gained Florida in the Adam-Onis treaty in 1821 when Spain ceded Florida to the United States.<sup>42</sup> The issue of wrecking had been a concern in other areas in the U.S. prior to the acquisition of Florida. The banks of Cape Hatteras, North Carolina received their share of wrecks and demands for regulation of the occupation concerned the American legislative

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<sup>40</sup>Letter from Mr. Fitzwilliam, Governor of the Bahamas to the Board of Trade, dated at New Providence the 10<sup>th</sup> of February 1743, CO 23/3, f. 110, Archives of the Bahamas, Nassau, Bahamas.

<sup>41</sup>Letter from Governor Tinker to the Lord Commissioners of Trade, dated 20<sup>th</sup> of February 1743, CO 23/5, f. 17, Archives of the Bahamas, Nassau, Bahamas.

<sup>42</sup>Tebeau, 118.

bodies from as early as 1793.<sup>43</sup> After 1821, American interest in controlling wrecking intensified as its importance to the economy of Florida became more apparent. The city of Key West held preeminence as the wrecking capital of the new territory.<sup>44</sup> By 1850, the majority of the income of the city came from wrecking. A report from 1849 showed a valuation of 1,305,000 dollars for property and goods wrecked in the area with 127,870 dollars of salvage profits resulting from wrecking.<sup>45</sup> The industry made Key West, a geographically small island of only four miles long by one mile wide, the "largest town in Florida."<sup>46</sup> The United States immediately set out to control this valuable resource which it acquired after its cession by Spain in 1821.

One of the earliest problems addressed by the legislative body of the U.S. appeared in a Bill in 1824 which asserted a severe punishment for any wrecked goods, taken within the jurisdiction of the United States, to be carried to and sold at any foreign port.<sup>47</sup> The issue addressed appeared to concern the Bahamian and Cuban wreckers who practiced their occupation in the region, but then took salvaged goods to Nassau or

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<sup>43</sup>U.S. Congress, *An Act to Extend the Terms of Credit for Teas Imported in the Ship Argonaut; and to Permit the Export of Goods Saved Out of the Wreck of the Snow Frelove*, Third Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1793, Ac. 253Y. In this act, the legislative assembly decided to let the goods from the *Frelove*, wrecked off of Cape Hatteras, to be exported by the owner.

<sup>44</sup>Tebeau, 131. Florida remained a U.S. territory until March 3, 1845 when it was admitted to the Union as a state.

<sup>45</sup>"Commercial Cities and Towns of the United States: Key West, Florida," *Hunt's Merchant Magazine and Commercial Review* 26 (Jan.-June 1852): 56.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>47</sup>House, *A Bill Concerning Wrecks on the Coast of Florida*, 18<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1824, H.R. 176, 1.

Havana for their sale. The debates about wrecking in the territory continued as insurance companies, which had a vested interest in the salvage world due to the insurance claims from the owners of wrecked vessels, asked for tighter restrictions on the industry. This led to new legislation on the licensing of wrecking vessels which gained Congressional approval as the lucrative nature of the venture became more apparent.<sup>48</sup> The sales of wrecked goods also concerned the authorities who in 1838 passed a Bill demanding the notification of such sales be printed in local newspapers as well as the in the closest newspapers to any person connected with the wrecked ship. The sales of salvage items could not begin short of sixty days after the initial publication of the information concerning the auction of such goods.<sup>49</sup>

The American settlers of Key West saw the Bahamians as fierce rivals in the lucrative wrecking trade. A typical Bahamian wrecker owned a small ship manned by five to seven men but there were also large Bahamian wreckers like the *Galvanic* which worked large areas in the Keys. The money earned by the wreckers by 1821 was so important to the Bahamas that fifty to sixty vessels and five hundred seamen practiced the trade. Wrecking supported a large portion of the economy and earned the British quite a bit of revenue.<sup>50</sup> Meanwhile, Key Westers experienced the raising of the American flag

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<sup>48</sup>Congress, Senate, Mr. Johnston of Louisiana calling for an inquiry into the law of the Territorial Government of Florida, relating to wrecks, 19<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., *Gales & Seaton's Register of Debates in Congress* (28, 29 Dec. 1825), vol. 2, part 1, 25-26.

<sup>49</sup>Congress, Senate, *A Bill to Regulate the Sales of Wrecked Property within the Collection District of Key West, In Florida*, 25<sup>th</sup> Cong., see., S. 390, 5 July, 1838. In this Bill, one of the main concerns was that the notification of sale would not reach all the people who held an interest in the cargo; this included owners, consignees, and insurers.

<sup>50</sup>Dodd, "Wrecking Business," 175.



by the U.S. Naval representative Lieutenant M.C. Perry on the seventh of February in 1822. Soon after, people from other states made their way to Key West and established themselves on the small key. Simonton, the original developer of Key West, had the city surveyed and mapped in 1829 by Mr. William Whitehead, one of the earliest inhabitants.<sup>51</sup> The city began to grow, very slowly, and the new residents sought to push the Bahamians back to their islands. After the passage of the law forbidding foreigners from taking wrecked goods out of the territory, the establishment of a Naval Depot in Key West effectively slowed Bahamian incursions into Florida waters. Bahamians who lived by wrecking had to either abide by the law or stop wrecking in those waters.<sup>52</sup>

By the 1830s, many of the Bahamian wreckers soon made the choice to move to the Florida Keys. This exodus seriously affected the Bahamian economy. The motivation behind their immigration appeared totally dependant on the goal of bettering themselves through improved economic opportunities. But, the idea has been proposed that many Bahamians left the Bahamas for America before 1833 because of the imminent emancipation of slaves in the West Indies. Supposedly, they wanted to take their slaves with them and start new plantations. Considering that most of the islanders who went to Key West in the 1830s were from Abaco, this does not apply to that migration because by 1805 Abaco was no longer considered a plantation island.<sup>53</sup> Racism may have affected

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<sup>51</sup>Browne, *Key West*, 8.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 11; Dodd, "Wrecking Business," 6.

<sup>53</sup> By 1805 there were only fifteen slaves living on Great Abaco. Sandra Riley, *Homeward Bound: A History of the Bahama Islands to 1850 with a Definitive Study of Abaco in the American Loyalist Plantation Period*, (Miami, Florida: Island Research, 1983), 192.

the white islanders' decision more emphatically, because after emancipation all freedmen gained civil and religious equality. Many Abaconians refused to accept the new laws and their racial prejudice possibly helped them to make the decision to move to the segregated town of Key West. This does not mean that no Bahamian slaves were transported to Key West, but not many were, so most Black Bahamians came with later migrations due to labor problems in the Bahamas.<sup>54</sup>

All of these factors helped to make the decision to move to Key West easier for the Bahamians who chose to leave their old homes. By 1830, the population of Key West had risen to 517 and of these 97 were listed as aliens in the 1830 census, the races of the people were listed as: 368 whites, 83 free Negro, and 66 slaves.<sup>55</sup> The 97 aliens, origins of birth were not listed on this census, more than likely were Bahamian or Cuban. After this date, the names of families began to appear in Key West which were distinctly Bahamian. For example, the Lowes, Roberts, Bartlums, Russells and Currys had all settled in Green Turtle Key, Abaco in the late 1700s.<sup>56</sup> These surnames still appear in both Green Turtle and Key West. Some of the streets in Key West bear the names of the families because they often came in family groups from the Bahamas and settled on the same lots or adjoining lots. This pattern tended to make large portions of one area the enclave of one family; hence street names like Curry Lane appear in the city.<sup>57</sup> This

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 229-230.

<sup>55</sup> United States Census Office, *5<sup>th</sup> Census of the United States*, (Washington D.C.: United States Census Office, 1830).

<sup>56</sup> Riley, 275. These names appear on the slave register of 1834 for the Abaco chain.

<sup>57</sup> Stan Windhorn and Wright Langley, *Yesterday's Key West* (Miami, Florida: E.A. Seemann Publishing, Inc., 1973), 13-14. The lots of Key West were 46' x 90" as laid out

immigration of Bahamians to Key West continued until the 1920s when a shift of their migrational flow occurred and many went further north in Florida to work in other labor hungry enterprises.

The Bahamian wreckers who chose to move to Key West helped to make it one of the richest cities in America by 1840. According to the early reports of the industry, between December of 1824 and December of 1825 \$293,253.00 of wrecked property was sold in Key West; of that revenue \$35,000 stayed in Key West while the Territory collected \$5,000 under its wrecking laws.<sup>58</sup> The city was in wrecking heaven. The Key West army post surgeon, Dr. Benjamin Stroebel from Charleston, wrote a series of articles about his stay on the city from 1829 to 1832 which described the frenzy new wrecks created in the city:

One day I was very busily employed indoors for several hours, and took no cognizance of passing events. On going however into the street, I at once discovered an unusual excitement in our little town; the world appeared to be turned upside down....I enquired of several what was the matter?.... At length one man came running along, almost breathless. I seized him by the collar, and demanded of him for God's sake what is the matter? You all appear to be mad! Let me go, sir! Let me go! A wreck! A wreck!<sup>59</sup>

The city's occupants knew the importance of wrecks and most of them engaged in the business or profited from it. The Conchs actively pursued this business and no one realized the benefits more than a man like John Lowe, Jr.

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by Whitehead. The clustering of sometimes up to three homes on one lot is one reason why Key West's houses tend to be very close together.

<sup>58</sup> Dodd., "Wrecking Business," 180.

<sup>59</sup> E. A. Hammond, ed., "Wreckers and Wrecking on the Florida Reef. 1829-1832," *Florida Historical Quarterly* XLI (January 1963): 251-252.

John Lowe, Jr.'s family came from the Abacos some time around the 1830's, his birth was reported as 1833 and he claimed to be the oldest native-born citizen in Key West in 1915.<sup>60</sup> His father's occupation as a wrecker influenced John Jr. to take up the same profession. In 1863, the Register of Wrecking Licenses listed him registering one vessel, the schooner *Rebecca*, between July and November. By 1891, John Lowe, Jr. had seven vessels engaged in wrecking between May and August.<sup>61</sup> The prosperity gained from the wrecking business by people like John Lowe Jr. profoundly changed Key West. Men and women from the Bahamas transferred many elements of island lifestyle to the growing city. The flow of immigrants and travelers back and forth across the Gulf Stream allowed the Conchs with Loyalist backgrounds to return to America.

The industry which drew the Bahamian wreckers to Florida continued to garner attention from the public as it seemed the old buccaneering stigma associated with it titillated the imagination of many. The reality of the dangerous nature of the profession and the concern shown for human life by many of the wreckers allowed the mitigation of this reputation as more of its realities were exposed in the nineteenth century. For example, in 1852 *Hunt's Merchant Magazine and Commercial Review* published an article concerning the rescue of victims off a foundered ship. The shipwrecked brig laden with sugar bound from Havana to Europe had only one small life boat to share between the entire crew and five passengers. In an attempt to make their way to Key West, they

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<sup>60</sup>*Key West Citizen* (Key West) December 1915, Centennial Edition.

<sup>61</sup>Register of Licenses Granted to Vessels, Owners and Masters to be Employed in the Business of Wrecking on the Coast of Florida, by the Judge of States District Court for the Southern District of Florida, 1863 and 1891.

used the life boat along with a raft fashioned by the survivors. The small boat headed to Key West towing the raft but inclement weather made it impossible to keep the raft in tow and still make headway toward safety. The survivors decided to set the raft adrift and the life boat's occupants made their way to port where the circumstances of the remaining survivors on the raft were reported to a local wrecker. The salvage captain set out to look for the raft and after two days of searching recovered the make shift craft and its passengers. The wrecker then proceeded to the wreck where he found none of the perishable cargo survived. For his heroism, the wrecking captain received all the profits gained from the ship's salvage, although the meager amount of items he recovered did not compensate him for his efforts. He could only take the rigging, sails, chains and other ship's gear off of the vessel: these valued at a little over three hundred dollars.<sup>62</sup> Stories such as these made the wreckers heroes within the sphere of their personal world. Called pirates by some and "men of generous sentiments, and kindly feelings, who risk much and work hard for what they get" by others they lived with both of these reputations.<sup>63</sup> This dichotomy in the perception of the industry persisted during the entire time of its practice; oftentimes, survivors saw the wreckers as heroes while the insurance underwriters and ships' owners railed against the enormous profits gained from the distressed vessels.

Some of its earliest citizens arrived in Key West as survivors of wrecked ships. That the wreckers pursued economic gains from salvage operations represented only part

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 584.

<sup>63</sup> "Commercial Cities and Towns of the United States," *Hunt's Merchant Magazine and Commercial Review* 26 (Jan-June 1852): 55.

of the equation which made up the sum of the occupation. The saving of lives held preeminence for most of the sailors who came upon foundered ships. The tales which survivors relayed denied the reputation of quasi pirates which often characterized the salvors. The life led by these intrepid seamen was characterized by perilous journeys into a hostile environment which continually challenged their abilities as sailors, but the wrecking lifestyle also encouraged a boisterous attitude towards the enjoyment of the pleasures found on land. This attitude for seamen began from the moment the first men embarked on long sea voyages and the wreckers upheld this estimable tradition which carried a no holds barred attitude toward free time. One sailor justified this attitude in his question, "When sailors have been shut up within the prison walls of a ship for months, and sometimes for years, can any wonder that they crave society, and are a little extravagant, as soon as they touch their mother earth?"<sup>64</sup> Days spent in ports such as Key West allowed the seamen to enjoy "the cheap but potent liquor" for which the city was famous.<sup>65</sup> The wreckers who managed to accumulate the capital necessary to buy their own ships may have enjoyed the pleasures of Key West, but many also became some of the most upstanding citizens of the small island community. Even a member of the clergy engaged in the venture and avidly competed with the local seamen to arrive at the wrecks

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<sup>64</sup>Ben-Ezra Stiles Ely, *"There She Blows" A Narrative of a Whaling Voyage, in the Indian and South Atlantic Oceans* (Philadelphia: James K. Simon, 1849; reprint, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1971), 85.

<sup>65</sup> Ben Sloane, Unpublished Memoirs, Historical Museum of Southern Florida, Miami, Florida. Sloane was in Key West in 1849 aboard a whaling vessel and he described the wild life he found in Key West.

first and gain the title of wrecking master.<sup>66</sup> The occupation lured men from all sectors of the community. Its pursuit crossed socio-economic boundaries which fostered an egalitarian atmosphere in eighteenth and early nineteenth century Key West.

The wrecking business started the influx of settlers from the Bahamas but this migration continued on unabated into the next century. The reason this migration pattern remained so strong had to do with the continuing decline in the Bahamian economy. The exportation of pineapples from the Bahamas never reached the peaks predicted and the shipbuilding industry suffered from the declining population which reduced demands for new vessels. Another industry which seemed very promising for the Bahamas, sponging, suffered because the laborers became dissatisfied with the manner of payment for their work. Instead of receiving cash, the spongers received payment in shares. In order to survive until the next voyage, spongers had to take credit from owners of the vessels they worked on: a type of debt peonage.<sup>67</sup> These owners usually came from the merchant class and gave credit in the form of goods. When Bahamian sponge workers, many who

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<sup>66</sup>Browne, 165-166. One story which exists in the history of wrecking in Key West claims that while preaching a sermon, Brother Eagan, a Methodist minister, happened to see a brig go aground due to his advantageous position at the pulpit. Wishing to be the first to arrive at the wreck, he left the pulpit and continued preaching as he walked down the aisle to the front door. When he reached the door, he cried out "Wreck Ashore" and ran out of the meeting building to arrive at the wreck first. He became wreck master due to his head start over the other wreckers present at the service that day.

<sup>67</sup> Howard Johnson, *The Bahamas From Slavery to Servitude: 1783-1933* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), 108-109.

were Black Bahamians, heard that the industry paid cash in Key West, they took their labor and their knowledge of the industry with them to new homes.<sup>68</sup>

Sponging in Key West developed due to Bahamian entrepreneurs who found markets for the product. In 1848, William Kemp, most likely from Nassau, came into Key West with a boatload of sponges on his schooner *Mohawk*. Mr. Kemp hoped to establish sponging in the town because sponges were so plentiful in the waters off the cays. Initially he found no buyers for the sponges, but not willing to concede defeat he took his cargo north to New York. There he found a market for the sponges and this market continued to grow, even though Bahamians lost control of it later in the century when Greek helmet divers took over the industry. Sponges were used in all sectors of the economy but the most important buyer was the medical industry. Natural sponges had no lint and therefore did not leave byproducts which could infect wounds. By the Civil War era, Key West supplied 90 percent of all sponges to the United States and in 1895, 1400 men and 300 boats were engaged in sponging.<sup>69</sup>

Spongers usually went out in their boats for a period of eight to twelve weeks and after they filled their vessels returned home. Then the owners of the boats collected the sponges and took them to auctions. The largest buyers of sponges appeared to be A.J. Arapian, John Lowe, Jr., J. Fogarty and W. H. Taylor. These men then shipped the sponges to other markets outside of Key West. The largest sponging boat owners though were dominantly Conchs. The list of them reads like a roster of Abaconian residents:

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<sup>68</sup> Howard Johnson, "Bahamian Labor Migration to Florida in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century," *International Migration Review* 22: 88.

<sup>69</sup> *Key West Citizen*, December 1915, Centennial Issue.



John Lowe, Jr., S.S. Lowe, B.W. Albury, H.C. Albury, B.W. Kemp, W. Curry, A.J. Arapian, and F. Wells. The only name which did not appear as a common surname in Abaco was A. J. Arapin. The Bahamians also set new standards for the industry when they decided to help push for Florida's prohibiting sponge diving. This law, Chapter 3,913, appeared in Florida on March 8, 1889. It prohibited diving because the spongers saw what the Greeks had done to floor of the ocean after they began helmet diving. This technology allowed the helmeted diver to walk on the bottom of the ocean floor wearing lead lined boots. This destroyed the sponges the divers walked over. This move by the Key Westers may be seen as a concern for the environment but in context it probably was motivated by economic forces. The Greeks and Key West spongers had fierce battles over sponging grounds found off the islands. By 1889, the Greeks dominated the industry and the sponges had become scarce. The Key West Conchs hoped to benefit from the law to harvest any sponges still remaining.<sup>70</sup> Unfortunately, by 1897 the sponges which had abounded in the waters around the Keys no longer could grow quickly enough to keep up with the demand for them. The industry received a fatal blow in 1917 when a devastating blight wiped out all the sponges in the lower Keys.<sup>71</sup> But the remnants of the prosperity Conchs gained while harvesting sponges survived in the minds of the residents into the modern period.

The Florida/Bahamas sector of the Circum Caribbean developed its own peculiar characteristics due to the qualities of the people hardened by the benign neglect practiced

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<sup>70</sup>*Florida Times-Union*, Jacksonville, NO. 748, May 3, 1890.

<sup>71</sup>John Viele, *The Florida Keys: A History of the Pioneers* (Sarasota, Florida: Pineapple Press, 1996), 109-118.

by the colonial powers. This allowed a type of entrepreneurial spirit to emerge which thrived on adversarial conditions such as the catastrophic weather patterns which caused such devastation to shipping. The lure of the riches from the ocean's waters drew the seamen to cross international boundaries. The mariners who comprised a large portion of the population in the region pursued economic opportunities, such as wrecking and sponging, and they constructed links between the Bahamas and Florida. The position of the Bahamas and the Florida Keys made them more important than was realized in the colonial period as their proximity to vital shipping lanes also allowed the salvage of ships and saving of lives to occur. While two governments initially controlled the treacherous shipping lanes, the United States' entry into the realm allowed the growth of the occupation and eventually led to the city of Key West becoming one of the richest cities in Florida. The intrepid seamen represented some of the last great opportunists left over from the early Caribbean experience. Seeking the riches offered by the marine environment, whether by fishing, sponging or wrecking, they created a new society founded on a combination of Conch, Loyalist, and American ideals.

## Chapter Five

### The Impact of Black Bahamians on Key West

The demographic characteristic of Key West's earliest settlers, after the takeover of Florida by the United States in 1821, included a diverse population arriving from surrounding islands as well as people coming to the area from other states in America. Most of the people who chose to migrate to the Florida Keys, found at the southern tip of the archipelago which branched off from the Florida peninsula, pursued economic gain in the sparsely settled region. Although the area offered little in the form of agricultural enterprises, many of the new immigrants who made the choice to relocate arrived with the hope of reaping profits from maritime activities. The lure of the potential for increased earnings attracted all sectors of the socio-economic rungs of the feeder regions which made up the source from which new arrivals journeyed. The Bahamian islands which lay so close to Key West proved one of the major fountainheads from which this demographic movement sprang. A portion of the incoming Bahamians included a Black population which had already survived the rigors of living on small cays surrounded by water. The Black Bahamians managed to develop a thriving community in Key West which maintained strong ties to the Bahamas and developed an identity based on their unique Bahamian background.<sup>1</sup> Along with the other immigrants to the area, they made the city atypical in comparison to the rest of Florida.

Ignoring the multiplicity found in the racial make-up of Key West's society, the various narratives on the city's history tended to concentrate on the dominant

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<sup>1</sup> The Black Bahamians in Key West developed an area of the city which is still called Bahama Village today. It still contains the largest concentration of African Americans in the old town of Key West.

personalities who shaped the historical trajectory of the tiny island community. The Black experience in Key West has been documented in some texts although an in-depth analysis of how this minority affected the overall development of the Keys still remains necessary.<sup>2</sup> The inclusion of foreign born residents in the black community of the city, who consisted of both Black Bahamians and Black Cubans, makes the analysis of historical trends even more difficult for this sector of the community. Key West's diverse experiences insofar as it developed with a multi national as well as multi-racially composed population made its different from the rest of Florida. This chapter will concentrate on examining the affects that the Black Bahamians had on the island's interactions between various factions and the results of their incorporation into the social milieu which unfolded during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

To understand the impact of Black Bahamians on Key West, the demographic composition of Monroe County<sup>3</sup> in comparison to the rest of Florida illustrates how this relatively small group changed the island. Some of the earliest data available on the demographics of the island group indicates that the original population in territorial days

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<sup>2</sup> Sharon Wells, *Forgotten Legacy: Blacks in Nineteenth Century Key West* (Key West: Historic Florida Keys Preservation Board, 1982). Wells' work gives a brief overview of the Black experience in Key West. Larry E. Rivers and Cantor Brown Jr. published an article "African Americans in South Florida: A Home and a Haven for Reconstruction Era Leaders," *Tequesta* LVI (1996) which focused on the elite Blacks who led the African American community in Monroe County.

<sup>3</sup> Key West was a part of Monroe County from the earliest days of the assumption of the governing of the territory of Florida by the United States in 1821. It still remains part of that county.

included both free blacks and slaves.<sup>4</sup> The exact origins of these early inhabitants, with a total number of 517, were not recorded, although ninety-seven were foreign born.<sup>5</sup> By 1850, Monroe County had more than quintupled its population with 2,645 inhabitants. Thirty percent of the population during that period was black with less than half of that percentage being free blacks.<sup>6</sup> The low percentage of Blacks in Monroe County contrasted with the racial population ratios found in the rest of Florida.<sup>7</sup> Comparisons with other counties showed how this made Key West's blacks' experience distinct from the northern portion of the State. For example, in 1850 Jefferson County's white population reached 2,775, while the slave and free colored population totaled 4,943; of all the blacks in Jefferson County, only five were noted as free colored. Thus it could be seen that Jefferson County, and much of the rest of North Florida, appeared more like other agricultural regions of the South in demographic composition where often the blacks outnumbered the whites. Additional differences seen in Monroe County's population included a proportionally higher ratio of free blacks within the aggregate

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<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce Bureau of U.S. Census. *Fifth Census of the U.S., 1830*. This census listed sixty-six slaves and eighty-eight free blacks in Monroe County.

<sup>5</sup> Maureen Ogle, *Key West: History of an Island of Dreams* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 21.

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce Bureau of U.S. Census. *Census of 1850*. This census indicated that 431 slaves and 126 free colored resided in Monroe County. For Key West, 1824 whites were listed while the free colored population numbered 118. The exact number of slaves in Key West remains unknown because under this category the census takers recorded "cannot be defined."

<sup>7</sup> Charlton W. Tebeau, *A History of Florida* (Miami: University Press of Miami, 1971), 138-139. Most Floridians in this period engaged in agriculture; this helps to explain the low black population in the Florida Keys which had little agriculture due to the scarcity of land and poor soil quality.

black population;<sup>8</sup> other unique demographic features of the Florida Keys furthered the diversity in the maturing society of Key West.

The level of education achieved by the Blacks of Key West also showed the distinctions established in the formation of their position as contributors to the city's growth. Monroe County had twenty free black children attending school in the antebellum census of 1850. This represented the majority of the free black children between the ages of five and fifteen, who totaled thirty-eight, as compared to Escambia County which had one hundred and three free black children in that age range out of which only thirty-three of them attended school.<sup>9</sup> Illiteracy rates for free black adults were also slightly lower in Monroe County in comparison to Escambia County. The 1850 census considered illiteracy rates for adults only, without qualifying at which age adulthood began, but looking at the target population between the ages of twenty and one hundred, the percentage of adults who could not read in Monroe County totaled 58 percent while the same age group in Escambia County had an illiteracy rate of 68 percent.<sup>10</sup> The discrepancies between the black population in Monroe County and that of

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<sup>8</sup> *Seventh Census of the United States: 1850* (Washington: Robert Armstrong Public Printer, 1853), 398. For example, in Jefferson County free blacks made up less than one percent of the black population, while in Escambia County the free black community made up twenty-one percent of the black population. In Monroe County the free blacks comprised twenty-three percent of all the blacks counted. This number may not seem much larger than that of Escambia County's, but in a total population of only 557 blacks in Monroe County, in comparison to Escambia's 1707 blacks, their presence would have been felt more strongly, also the small land mass of Key West probably made their presence more obvious.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, Table IX, 406.

the rest of Florida could be calculated by looking at this type of statistical data. The interactions among the various racial components in the Key West proved more difficult to trace as little written material remains from the black sector of the city.<sup>11</sup> The impact of social mores and governmental policies on the Black Bahamians arriving to their new home was the reality which they had to combat daily in order to thrive.

Many of the white citizens of Key West considered themselves part of the ideological region known as the "South." This became obvious as the specter of Civil War threatened the United States as the nineteenth century progressed. Many Floridians subscribed to the belief that the lifestyles they pursued, based on slavery and a plantation economy, provided the only avenue for their prosperity.<sup>12</sup> A local amateur historian of the island city stated that "the influence of the cultured Southern men who located in Key West in the early days fostered the spirit of resisting Federal usurpation."<sup>13</sup> The southern aristocrats of the city, such as Stephen R. Mallory who later became the Secretary of the Navy for the Confederacy, followed many of the patterns established in the rest of the South in their treatment of blacks. In the charter of the town, the dominant white elites included ordinances to check what they considered improper behavior for Key West's blacks; during the period before the Civil War this practice prevailed in the entire South.

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<sup>11</sup>I used the data for Monroe County to discuss the black population of Key West in this section because most of the black population in the County resided in the city. For example, out of the 126 free blacks living in Monroe County, 118 of them lived in Key West. This represented approximately 94 percent of this group.

<sup>12</sup>Larry Eugene Rivers, *Slavery in Florida: Territorial Days to Emancipation* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), 145. The owning of slaves was linked to social standing in the antebellum period.

<sup>13</sup>Jefferson Browne, *Key West the Old and the New* (St. Augustine: The Record Company, 1912; reprint, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1973), 90.

Restrictions on blacks' behavior and movements became more prevalent as the threat of a Southern and Northern split appeared inevitable. Abolitionary fervor also rose in the early 1820s and this attack on southern slave holders resulted in an increased uncertainty for all the blacks in the region as whites' defense of slavery caused the backlash of more oppression of all blacks irregardless of their free or slave status.<sup>14</sup>

In Key West, the City Council's charter reflected the trends of the rest of the South in regards to restrictions placed on blacks. It forbade free blacks to be out on the streets after nine-thirty at night unless they had written permission to do so from the mayor or alderman, while slaves needed a written pass from their owners. The penalties for lack of adequate documentation included whipping or a stint of labor on the street repair crew which usually lasted three days.<sup>15</sup> All blacks could not make any type of noise after nine-thirty without written permission from the mayor or alderman. The noise ordinance stated specific activities which violated the ruling, for example blacks "were not permitted to play the fiddle, beat a drum, or make any other kind of noise."<sup>16</sup> Every white citizen had the power to stop noisy behavior and take the offender to the mayor who then sent the perpetrator to jail. Five minutes before nine-thirty a bell rang to announce the onset of these ordinances. Jefferson Browne recalled watching a black person run for home when the first chimes tolled. A refrain which white bystanders

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<sup>14</sup> Eugene D. Genovese, *The World the Slaveholders Made: Two Essays in Interpretation* (New England: Wesleyan University Press, 1988), 134-135.

<sup>15</sup> Browne, 50. The charter for the city of Key West was written in 1832.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.



yelled at the runner went: "Run nigger, run, The patrol catch you!"<sup>17</sup> This recollection by an elite, white male revealed the negative element found in racial interactions in the city.

Into this atmosphere, the migration of Black Bahamians began to occur as they sought opportunities found in industries such as sponging, fishing and salt raking. The largest movement of Bahamians to Key West drawn by these industries transpired around 1870.<sup>18</sup> But the presence of an emancipated Bahamas, not far from the shores of Florida, set up the tension concerning foreign blacks and their subversive influence long before large amounts of them decided to leave the Bahamas. The British government declared emancipation for all slaves in its colonies by August 1, 1834.<sup>19</sup> Even before this date, many of the slaves in the Bahamas had secured positions which paralleled that of a type of protopeasantry after the collapse of the cotton industry in 1800.<sup>20</sup> The slaves left behind on failed plantations had developed a limited autonomy as they had few chores to do which allowed them to work on their own plots of land.<sup>21</sup> The Bahamas legislative body also allowed free blacks to serve in the militia,<sup>22</sup> enfranchised them if they met

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Howard Johnson, "Bahamian Labor Migration to Florida in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," *International Migration Review* XXII (1985): 85.

<sup>19</sup> William A. Green, *British Slave Emancipation: The Sugar Colonies and the Great Experiment, 1830-1865* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 121.

<sup>20</sup> Howard Johnson, *Bahamas from Slavery to Servitude, 1783-1933* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), 46.

<sup>21</sup> Whittington B. Johnson, *Race Relations in the Bahamas, 1784-1834* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 2000), 27.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 74.

property requirements, and eventually allowed them to sit on juries.<sup>23</sup> All of these factors proved anathema to the beliefs of the dominant elites of the southern United States. The lure of freedom for slaves living in Florida proved irresistible at times and successful escapes to the Bahamas occurred in the antebellum period. Several slaves who escaped from St. Augustine and reportedly killed a white settler on Key Biscayne braved the crossing of the Gulfstream in 1843. They received sanctuary in the Bahamas where the British Court effectively stopped the Grand Jury of Monroe County from extraditing them for murder back to the Key West.<sup>24</sup> Thus, the Black Bahamians and their experiences gained under British rule appeared as interlopers to the system established by the white leaders of Key West.<sup>25</sup>

The arrival of free blacks to Florida worried officials who established a law in 1832 which prevented free Negroes from entering the territory.<sup>26</sup> State laws were later established which reinforced the territorial legislation. These rulings impacted Black Bahamians hoping to migrate to Key West in order to earn revenue, but they also had unexpected effects on the Black Bahamians who maintained ties with their former

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 172-173. All of these rights were given to free blacks and people of color before emancipation.

<sup>24</sup> *St. Augustine News* (St. Augustine), 4 November 1843-20 January 1844. Articles concerning this case appeared in most of the editions of this paper between these dates.

<sup>25</sup> Edward E. Baptist, *Creating an Old South: Middle Florida's Plantation Frontier before the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 202. While white Key Westers saw the influence of the foreign born Blacks as a possible encouragement to slave resistance, the escape of slaves into Florida's frontiers in the north also occurred. They failed to acknowledge that the system bred resistance and proved the greatest threat.

<sup>26</sup> Free Black Folder (1834), Special Collections, Monroe County Public Library, Key West, Florida.

homeland. Isabella Roma's story exemplified the strange twists which happened within families living on different sides of the Gulfstream. Isabella lived in Nassau while her father resided in Key West. Upon hearing that her father lay sick, she petitioned to have the law modified in order that she could visit with him; she was denied.<sup>27</sup> The arrest of free Black Bahamians proved that many of them did not petition for entry into Key West but simply subverted the law. John Hepburn, described as a mulatto, had a warrant sworn for his arrest on May 21<sup>st</sup> of 1834 for violating the immigration law. The Hepburn name identifies him as a Bahamian as the Hepburns went to the Bahamas from the United States with their dependents and settled on Cat Island.<sup>28</sup> Felix C. Ruby, a freedman from New Providence, came under suspicion of violating the law of 1832 due to the itinerant nature of his residency in Key West. While he was acknowledged as one of the earliest settlers in Key West, he married a woman in Nassau after 1832 and established a home in Nassau. Testimony gathered against him mentioned that "when speaking of Nassau since his last marriage he always mentioned it as his home, and that in reference to his trips to the place, he has invariably spoken of going home."<sup>29</sup> Ruby attempted to disguise his frequent trips to Nassau under the guise that he worked as a seaman, but evidence proved

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<sup>27</sup>Julia Floyd Smith, *Slavery and Plantation Growth in Antebellum Florida, 1821-1860* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1973), 119.

<sup>28</sup>Michael Craton and Gail Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, Volume One: From Aboriginal Times to the End of Slavery* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1992), 190-191. James Hepburn was a Loyalist who at one time held the office of Attorney General in East Florida. He became a representative of Cat Island in the government of the Bahamas who represented Loyalists' ambitions.

<sup>29</sup>Exparte, John W. Stewart et al., from Judge Webb, Free Black Folder (1834), Special Collections, Monroe County Public Library, Key West, Florida.

that Ruby's profession was that of a carpenter. Ruby hid his residency in Nassau because he feared losing his status of a free black resident of Key West. His guilt in violating the law of 1832 resulted in his arrest.<sup>30</sup> Thus, the Black Bahamians continued to impact the burgeoning growth of the community of Key West. The lure of economic gain and strong ties between the regions fostered an undeniable linkage in this portion of the Circum Caribbean.

The salt raking industry in Key West attracted many of the early Black immigrants from the Bahamas. Bahamians raked salt for export beginning in the seventeenth century and the use of slave labor dominated the business of harvesting salt in the islands. Many of the slaves engaged in salt raking worked on small isolated islands where they preserved meat and fish for themselves and their masters. For example, slaves owned by Lord John Rolle in Great Exuma raked salt from at least two small island salt pans.<sup>31</sup> The prerequisites for salt raking remained few and many of the islands satisfied all of the elements necessary for the industry. The small brackish inland lakes which existed on many of the smaller cays and some islands allowed for the evaporation of water leaving chunks of salt at the water's edge. The salt would be raked and then packed for shipping. Later developments in the business included the building of a system of ponds and sluices which allowed more area for the solar evaporation process to occur.<sup>32</sup> Thousands of tons of salt were shipped to North America from the Bahamas prior to the

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Michael Craton, "Hobbesian or Panglossian? The Two Extremes of Slave Conditions in the British Caribbean," *William and Mary Quarterly* 35 (1978): 334.

<sup>32</sup> Mark Kurlansky, *Salt: A World History* (New York: Penguin Books, 2002), 210-212.

Civil War.<sup>33</sup> The Key Westers hoped to capitalize on Bahamians' expertise in salt raking and a notice in the *Key West Register and Commercial Advertiser* in 1829 announced that a "gentleman interested in the soil of Key West, has gone to the Bahamas for the purpose of procuring information respecting the making of salt."<sup>34</sup> The gentlemen mentioned in the announcement appeared to have been Richard Fitzpatrick as he was credited with beginning the first salt raking enterprise in Key West.<sup>35</sup> The enterprise promised enormous profits and the employment of up to 5,000 laborers with the extent of the existing ponds on Key West.<sup>36</sup>

The arrival of free Black Bahamians to work in the city's salt industry began with Fitzpatrick's recruitment. The first person to run the salt works for Fitzpatrick, a man simply called Hart, was a Black Bahamian. The presence of these workers worried the locals and Walters C. Maloney, one of the prominent citizens of early Key West conveyed the fears of the whites of the town. He feared the "coloreds" would bring degradation and vice to the island. He especially worried that the free time the workers gained due to the seasonal nature of salt raking would lead to problems, such as vagrancy, in the community.<sup>37</sup> Mr. Maloney's worries proved unfounded as Fitzpatrick soon realized that high demands for labor in the wrecking industry lured many of his

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<sup>33</sup>Paul Albury, *The Story of the Bahamas* (London: Macmillan Education, 1975), 79-80.

<sup>34</sup> *Key West Register and Commercial Advertiser*, (Key West), 12 February 1829.

<sup>35</sup> Browne, 112.

<sup>36</sup> *Key West Register and Commercial Advertiser*, (Key West), 12 February 1829.

<sup>37</sup> Walter C. Maloney, *A Sketch of the History of Key West, Florida* (Newark, N.J.: Advertiser Printing House, 1876; facsimile reproduction, Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1968), 24.

workers to seek employment on the docks. By 1834, Fitzpatrick conceded defeat in the business due to unsatisfactory returns on his investment.<sup>38</sup> Two extremely wet seasons slowed the production of salt which required many bright, sunny days for drying. The industry did not end and continued in spurts until the hurricane of October 19<sup>th</sup> in 1876 which caused such devastation to the salt works they never opened again.<sup>39</sup>

The Black Bahamians who chose to remain in Key West endured many of the racial repressions typical of the experiences shared by blacks in all of the Southern States. The events of the 1860s impacted the city as severely as other areas in the South. The Civil War divided the city as many of the dominant elites aligned themselves on the side of the Confederacy. The events which transpired in Key West jeopardized their hegemony as soon as most of the politically powerful voted in favor of secession.<sup>40</sup> The presence of federal military troops in the city soon stopped many of the pro-South factions as the military secured important positions in the Keys such as Fort Taylor and Fort Jefferson. Many southern sympathizers traveled north to join the Confederacy, while some openly defied the edicts of the Union. One Union Captain reported that "several secession flags floated from buildings in view of the fort and upon the court-house of the town."<sup>41</sup> But by 1862 the Union had a firm hold on the city and its strategic position helped to maintain the Federal Blockade of the southern coastline. The presence of the

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>39</sup> Browne, 113.

<sup>40</sup> Tebeau, 200. Florida seceded from the Union on January 10, 1861. Stephen Mallory from Key West was one of the Florida senators and he firmly supported secession.

<sup>41</sup> M.C. Meigs, Captain of Engineers, U.S. Troop-Ship *Atlantic*, Havana, to brigadier General J.G. Totten, Chief of Engineers, Washington, D.C., 25 April 1861.

Union troops, free blacks, southern sympathizers, slaves and foreign-born blacks kept the tensions in the city at a breaking point. When the Union decided to station four companies of colored troops in the city, many of the whites feared for their lives.<sup>42</sup> Then in July of 1862 the Second Federal Confiscation Act went into effect and forever changed the status of slaves in Key West.<sup>43</sup> Under this Act, slaves held by the disloyal within federal territory were considered free and classified as captives of war; they could be taken and made to work for the Union war effort. Because Key West remained under the control of Union troops, the commander Colonel Morgan, an ardent abolitionist, declared slavery unlawful in a local newspaper on August 9, 1862. Reports in the *New York Herald* stated that the Negroes in Key West considered themselves free.<sup>44</sup> On the day of the announcement of Emancipation in 1863, Key West's black community openly celebrated with a parade.<sup>45</sup> Emancipation Day continued to be celebrated by the black citizens of the city as late as 1915.<sup>46</sup> The future appeared bright for the members of the newly freed population who could now integrate themselves into the society which had a strong free black presence to guide them.

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<sup>42</sup>William Watson Davis, *The Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1913; reprint, Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1964), 235. It was well documented that black soldiers caused a feeling of terror to the whites in the South.

<sup>43</sup>Maureen Ogle, *Key West: History of an Island of Dreams* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 67.

<sup>44</sup>Davis, 240-241.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, 237.

<sup>46</sup>*New York Age*, (New York), 11 February 1915.

The tumultuous times of reconstruction saw the struggle for power in Florida escalate as the issue of voting privileges for blacks proved divisive within the State.<sup>47</sup> In Key West it appeared more promising for blacks as it seemed they would gain a political presence in Monroe County as it had a popularly elected black sheriff and the first elected black judge in the State in 1888.<sup>48</sup> The atmosphere also appeared upbeat for the Black Bahamians who arrived in this period following a boom in the sponging industry after 1870.<sup>49</sup> The population growth of the island continued into the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>50</sup> Many of the new members of Key West's society in that era were immigrants, although the 1870 census does not give an exact point of origin for that portion of the population; nor did it distinguish between foreign born blacks and whites.<sup>51</sup> The *New York Age* on December 1, 1888 reflected the promise of a better experience for blacks as it reported on the different atmosphere generated by the large foreign presence in the city. Calling it the "Freest Town in the South," the reporter gave the main reason for this phenomena as "there is a liberal sentiment here due to the presence of foreigners,

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<sup>47</sup> Davis, 446.

<sup>48</sup> Larry E. Rivers and Cantor Brown, Jr., "African Americans in South Florida: A Home and a Haven for Reconstruction-Era leaders," *Tequesta* LVI (1996): 6.

<sup>49</sup> Johnson, "Bahamian Labor Migration," 84.

<sup>50</sup> Department of the Interior, *Ninth Census, The Statistics of the Population of the United States*, Vol. I, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1872). The white population of Monroe County had reached 4631 (over double from 1860 which showed 2302 whites). While the black population had reached 1026: an increase from 1860 when the total black population was 577.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* Of the total population of 5657 the census counted 2508 as being born in other countries.



for any ex-slave-holding foreigner is better than an ex-slave holder."<sup>52</sup> Thus, Key West appeared to have a unique racial harmony in its society in this period of rapid growth; the sponging boom and the continuation of wrecking promised prosperity and a new beginning for the freed people who could now join the free black community.

Although the tone of the social milieu generated in Key West appeared promising between the end of the Civil War and the end of the nineteenth century for the black community, underlying tensions arose as the immigrants desperately sought fairer working conditions. The Black Bahamians worked in their native land under a system established to keep them in a type of debt peonage. Much like the freed people of the southern United States and most of the British West Indies, whereby the creation of the company store and a rent-wage system respectively guaranteed indebtedness of the free black laborer to the old plantocracy,<sup>53</sup> the remnants of the Loyalists and their descendants worked on controlling black laborers in the Bahamas after Emancipation in 1834.<sup>54</sup> The truck system, used by the owners of salt ponds, sponging boats and fishing boats, allowed payment for labor with goods which placed many of the Black Bahamians outside of the

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<sup>52</sup>*New York Age*, (New York), 1 December 1888.

<sup>53</sup>Eric Foner, *Nothing but Freedom: Emancipation and its Legacy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), 88-90. Examples of the development of the company store credit system existed in areas such as South Carolina as old land owners sought to reconsolidate their power over the labor pool during the age of Reconstruction; Green, 297. In the places such as Jamaica where landowners charged rent to the freedmen for use of land, they refused to accept currency for rent and instead insisted upon rents being deducted from wages thus forcing the freedmen to labor for them.

<sup>54</sup>Johnson, *Bahamas from Slavery to Servitude*, 98.

cash economy.<sup>55</sup> L. D. Powles, a magistrate in the 1880s, wrote on the inequities of the system which relied on a network set up by the white minority to ensure that profits remained in its hands. He illustrated his point by writing on the plight of the fisherman who was forced to take payment for his catch in kind. Powles related how the payments “are generally made in kind consisting of flour, sugar, tobacco, articles of clothing, or some other portion of the rubbish that constitutes the employer’s stock-in-trade.”<sup>56</sup> Powles then informed his readers that the fisherman sold the goods to make cash although “the goods are usually worth next to nothing, whereas they are charged to the fisherman at a price which would be dear for a first-rate article.”<sup>57</sup> The lure of cash wages as opposed to the abusive truck system eventually drew many struggling Bahamian workers to Key West.<sup>58</sup>

The wise Black Bahamians who bolted to Key West, as Powles so succinctly stated, found that they had to compete with the native-born African Americans for jobs.<sup>59</sup> They settled for lesser wages as they eagerly pursued a more promising future. Their willingness to work at any cost immediately put them at odds with others seeking work; especially in the sponging industry. Earlier incoming white Bahamians had started

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>56</sup> L.D. Powles, *The Land of the Pink Pearl: Recollections of Life in the Bahamas* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, Limited, 1888; reprint, Nassau: Media Publishing LTD, 1996), 87.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. Powles was conscious that Black Bahamians, through contact with Key West, were cognizant of the better labor situation in the Florida Keys.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 89.

sponging in the Keys<sup>60</sup> and the Black Bahamians quickly took work in the familiar industry. They isolated themselves from the native African American population as they were perceived as being different. This became abundantly clear in the census taken by the city of Key West in 1873 which counted them as Nassau coloreds.<sup>61</sup> A distinctive foreign black community with its own identity which competed with African Americans for jobs immediately caused tension between the two factions.<sup>62</sup> When native African Americans rioted in 1874 against the presence of the Black Bahamians, the Federal troops stationed at Fort Taylor intervened to quell the protest.<sup>63</sup> The overall atmosphere toward the Black Bahamians remained tense even as many established permanent residents on the key.<sup>64</sup> In 1892, a news story from Key West on the deportation of “four negro passengers back to Nassau” garnered the wholehearted approval of the reporter who felt “we have had enough of that class and Key West had better not grow at all than

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<sup>60</sup> “Florida Sponges,” *Scientific American* No. 748 (May 3, 1890): 11945.

<sup>61</sup> Common Council of Key West, *Census of the City of Key West with a Valuation of the Real estate and Stores, Manufactories, etc. Taken from November 5 to December 11, 1873*, Special Collections, Monroe County Public Library, Key West, Florida.

<sup>62</sup> Mary C. Waters, *Black Identities: West Indian Immigration Dreams and American Realities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 65. Even today this phenomenon continues as most immigrants from the Caribbean zone refuse to identify themselves with African Americans. They see themselves as having a different culture.

<sup>63</sup> Jerrell H. Shofner, “Militant Florida Negro Laborers,” *The Journal of Southern History* (August 1973): 407.

<sup>64</sup> Daniel J. Tichenor, *Dividing Lines: The Politics of Immigration Control in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 69. The perception that immigrants compete for jobs at a lesser wage scale and thus hold down wages characterizes many aspects of the acrimonious relationship between natives and the new arrivals.

to increase by their importation.”<sup>65</sup> Even though this sentiment existed in Key West, the influx of Black Bahamians into the city continued on unabated into the twentieth century.

The black community’s growth in the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was mostly attributed to immigration from the surrounding islands.<sup>66</sup> When comparing the 1850 census to the 1905 census, one sees the percentage of blacks in Monroe County had grown from twenty-one percent of the entire population to thirty-two percent of the population. The flood of Black Bahamians into Key West increased as work on Henry Flagler’s Overseas Railroad began in 1905 and drew them increasingly to Florida’s peninsula.<sup>67</sup> The visit by Bahamian Governor, William Gray Wilson, to Key West in 1907, confirmed that the Black Bahamian presence was an important factor in the evolution of the city. Wilson visited as a guest of Henry Flagler and during his stay he attended a reception given for him by Black Bahamians at the local Good Samaritan Hall. The Governor’s speech to the former islanders included a final admonition to “conduct themselves by fealty, industry, and sobriety as to make themselves worthy citizens of their new home.”<sup>68</sup> A later visit by British Ambassador Bryce acknowledged the presence

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<sup>65</sup> *Florida Times Union* (Jacksonville), 1 September 1892.

<sup>66</sup> Department of Agriculture, *Third Census of the State of Florida Taken in the Year 1905* (Tallahassee: T.J. Appleyard, State Printer, 1905), 73. The British West Indian Blacks in this census totaled 4096 men and women while the entire black population reached 6674 at this point. This meant that 61 percent of the black community had origins in other countries. The immigrants from other islands, such as Cuba, were counted but the scope of this project limits me to concentrating on the Bahamas.

<sup>67</sup> Howard Johnson, “Bahamian Labor Migration,” 90.

<sup>68</sup> *Florida Times Union* (Jacksonville), 9 March 1907.

of the Black Bahamians and advised them be law-abiding citizens.<sup>69</sup> The large number of the immigrants made them an important element in Key West as they were acknowledged by visiting dignitaries and reminded of their duties to follow the dictates of the ruling elites in their new country.

For many of the Black Bahamians, Key West became their new home and the first generation immigrants made sure to keep the traditions from their old homes alive. Frank Pinder's family characterized the feeling of difference experienced by Black Bahamians as they had "acquired British cultural patterns."<sup>70</sup> In 1895, his parents left Nassau for Key West on a dangerous hundred mile journey in a small boat to start their new lives. They had relatives already living in Florida which included two stepsisters of Frank senior and his mother. Frank Pinder senior worked in the sponging industry and actively participated in the social life of the community. The junior Pinder related his father's participation in Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association, even though the white citizens of Key West disapproved of the organization. The elderly Pinders also talked about their political participation in front of their son and he remembered "hearing my father and mother talk, they had always voted."<sup>71</sup> Pinder felt that the influence of the West Indian Blacks had mellowed the experience of the island's black community. Not until the advent of World War I, did Pinder perceive a change in the trajectory of the

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<sup>69</sup> *Florida Times Union* (Jacksonville), 18 February 1910.

<sup>70</sup> Frank E. Pinder, II, *Pinder: from Little Acorns* (Tallahassee: Florida Agricultural and University Foundation, 1986), 22.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

development of the community as racial tensions increased; it was at that time that the influx of Bahamian immigrants decreased due to a variety of factors.<sup>72</sup>

The Florida State Census of 1915 showed a decrease in the black population from 1905. In 1905, there had been 6673 blacks in Monroe County: by 1915 that population had shrunk to 4909, a decline of 26.5 percent. In that same period, the white population had remained fairly stable with a slight decrease of 6.4 percent.<sup>73</sup> One of the explanations for this decline included the overall deterioration of the sponging industry due to over harvesting. A severe sponge blight in 1917 signaled the end of large scale sponging in the Keys; thus cutting off a main source of employment for many of the immigrants from the Bahamas.<sup>74</sup> The completion of the Overseas Railroad in 1912 also contributed to job shortages in Monroe County. The influx of the Black Bahamians into Florida also slowed with the Immigration Act of 1917 imposed by the U.S.<sup>75</sup> The Act, based on a literacy test, targeted other groups such as Asians, but many Black Bahamians also failed to gain admittance to the United States under this Act.<sup>76</sup> These changes caused a contraction in the size of the black community but did not deter those of Bahamian

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 17. Pinder felt that Key West at that point had acquired most of the traits of the South insofar as the oppression of blacks increased.

<sup>73</sup> Department of Agriculture, *The Fourth Census of the State of Florida, Taken in the Year 1915* (Tallahassee: T.J. Appleyard State Printer), Table No. 4.

<sup>74</sup> John Viele, *The Florida Keys: A History of the Pioneers* (Sarasota: Pineapple Press, 1996), 119.

<sup>75</sup> Tichenor, 3.

<sup>76</sup> Johnson, "Bahamian Labor Migration," 96.

decent from clinging to their old roots. They kept alive the connections fostered in the Florida/Bahamas zone.

As the first generation Black Bahamians' numbers shrank, later generations began to see themselves as black conchs. Many of them left the city as the prohibitive property taxes become impossible to pay.<sup>77</sup> Their island legacy formed during their Bahamian sojourn remained behind as they maintained strong ties to their heritage which have become a type of symbol for the city.<sup>78</sup> Black Bahamians impacted the development of Key West most strongly during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Their immigration to the Keys looking for gainful employment in that period made the region unique in its demographic composition; consequently its resulting atmosphere appeared more conducive for the development of a strong black community. Although many aspects of those expectations did not develop, the brevity of their influence must be taken into account. The complexity of their experience makes them a difficult population to follow. The first portion of their journey began with many of their ancestors being taken from the United States to the Bahamas as slaves during the Loyalist exodus at the end of

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<sup>77</sup> In 1996, I attended a meeting concerning the return of land to the city taken by the Navy in the 1940s. The land had originally belonged to residents of Bahama Village and its position on the water made it extremely valuable. The city proposed its sale to developers who hoped to make it a charming tourist attraction. At the meeting, I heard older residents, whose families had built their houses upon their arrival to the city from the Bahamas, complain bitterly that they were being driven from their traditional homes. The lack of affordable housing has caused a general northward migration by all of the Conchs of Key West.

<sup>78</sup> The architecture of the Bahamians, both Black and white, the food they loved such as Conch fritters, and the idea that Key West was a part of the larger island experience of the Bahamas all remain as a legacy which attests to the strength of the Bahamians' connection to their old homes. This heritage has been touted as being a part of the Key West experience in all sorts of media associated with tourism.

the American Revolution. Their period as slaves in the Bahamas mutated their experiences to include an early limited autonomy as plantations failed and then freedom came earlier for them than their U.S. counterparts. Some of the next generation made its way back to the U.S. thus completing a migratory circle. The incongruity of returning to a land whose white population was known for its hardened racist attitude towards blacks remains a part of the Black Conchs' odyssey. In spite of their continued movement, as many now leave ancestral homes in Key West, they leave behind an enduring imprint on the southernmost city.



## **PART TWO**

### **The Creation of the Florida/Bahamas Architectural Aesthetic**

## Chapter Six

### A New World Aesthetic

The Circum Caribbean world of the Florida/Bahamas zone developed after the arrival of the Europeans as a frontier outpost for the Empires which attempted to spur its growth. Due to the political machinations of the two colonial powers, both of these areas acted as buffer zones for more important colonies. The importance of the Circum Caribbean world for architectural studies lies in the strong retention of aesthetics from separate groups who entered the sphere of the forgotten colonies. Pushed to the side as the more important colonies produced untold riches, Florida embodies this outsider status in its early colonial period. Neglected and struggling for survival, the early colonists, along with the Amerindians and later new immigrants and their slaves, managed to create their own pleasing environment. A distinct Circum Caribbean architecture developed based on the involvement of a diverse population whose multinational background broadened the architectural language used to fashion the complex aesthetic expressed in cities such as St. Augustine. Surviving the predations of enemies and the weather, this expression invites the viewer to engage in the multiplicity found within the Circum Caribbean world. Forged in the borderlands of the Americas, the new aesthetic reflected the experience of the people who embraced it.

The Spanish began to build in the Circum Caribbean long before the British arrived on the scene. They settled La Florida and the marks of their endeavors survive in the coastal town of St. Augustine in the northern half of the peninsula. The Spanish experience in building began with the incorporation of the motifs and models which already existed in the region. The indigenous peoples of Florida had a distinct mode of

construction which relied on the available materials and forms they inherited from their forefathers. A description of an Amerindian structure from 1595 describes construction materials and its shape:

Round in form, built of entire pine trees that lacked only their branches and poorly stripped of their bark. They had their foot fixed in the ground and their tips were all joined together at the top like a pavilion-style tent or like the ribs of a parasol.<sup>1</sup>

As ascertained from these types of accounts, circular structures had cone shaped roofs and the builders used a timber framework. Additional studies into Amerindian methods relate that the builders then covered the structures with thatch.<sup>2</sup> Due to the immediate need for shelter, the Spanish co-opted the thatch structures of the Amerindians. The first construction that the new colonists attempted was not a brand new structure but the remodeling of an existing chief's house.<sup>3</sup> This indigenous style building did not satisfy the Europeans who longed for rooms, which they delineated in this first Florida remodeling project, and the lack of permanence of the structure must have felt extremely alien. The majority of the Spanish who came on the initial trips to the New World came from the arid South of Spain which experienced little or no rain. The vernacular dwellings of the region employed available material: stone and adobe. The hot climate

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<sup>1</sup> Fray Andrés de San Miguel, *An Early Florida Adventure Story* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), 65.

<sup>2</sup> Elsbeth K. Gordon, *Florida's Colonial Architectural Heritage* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), 19.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

encouraged the building of thick walls with smaller windows to keep out the brutal sun.<sup>4</sup> Most of the surfaces of the homes of even the wealthiest had few adornments although a Moorish influence in a plastic application of decoration could be observed among the larger structures.<sup>5</sup> The Spanish experiences in the round, seemingly flimsy huts of the Amerindians surely must have been surreal to them as they entered this dangerous New World.

The shape of the indigenous structures may possibly have proven to be the most difficult feature of the unfamiliar structures for the Europeans to adjust to in their new colonies. Round structures rarely exist in the history of European building. When examining other cultures, the reason for this may become clearer. For example, the Maya build round, hut like homes which suit their environment.<sup>6</sup> With little furnishings, they easily empty the interior to clean, which includes taking out the bedding (hammocks), and this keeps the presence of insects to a minimum in the tropical climate. This hints at the reason for the European dislike of round structures. Where does furniture which is large and predominantly geometric in shape fit into this arrangement? The idea of furniture fundamentally means stability to most westerners and the lack thereof implies

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<sup>4</sup> Pamela Gosner, *Caribbean Baroque: Historic Architecture of the Spanish Antilles* (Colorado: Passeggiata Press, 1996), 27.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 24-25.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Oliver, *Dwellings: The Vernacular House World Wide* (New York: Phaidon Press, 2003), 111.

impermanence and lack of status.<sup>7</sup> The architectural aesthetic of Europeans depends on the traditional rectangular type arrangement found in the history of the development of their shelters. This shape also lends itself to the urbanization of large populations. Stacks of boxes or rectangles characterize the urban experience; as many scholars have noted the Spanish came from an urban tradition.<sup>8</sup>

The incorporation of Amerindian shapes into the New World aesthetic appears minimal to the average observer. The knowledge of available materials emerged as the arena in which the Europeans learned from the Amerindians in Florida. Thatching became a valuable skill in the construction of New World vernacular architecture. The technology of thatching existed in Europe before contact with the Americas.<sup>9</sup> It appears as a cheap and reasonable alternative to harder material: such as tile. The Spanish had to adjust to this new technology and the lack of permanence inherent in this construction. The Amerindians, and later Caribbean peoples soon learned that thatchings' flimsy quality benefited them as it could be easily replaced after a tropical hurricane. The Spanish initially adapted thatch as an expedient solution to vaulting systems but they

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<sup>7</sup> Marcelin Defourneaux, *Daily Life in Spain in the Golden Age* (California: Stanford University Press, 1979), 149-150. The taste for ostentatious furnishings was seen as a way to express wealth and social status.

<sup>8</sup> Gosner, 27.

<sup>9</sup> Jacqueline Fern, *Thatch and Thatching*, 2d ed. (United Kingdom: Shire Books, 2004), 6. The history of thatching in Europe concentrates in the Northern European countries. For example, in England its use can be traced back to the Saxons who used this technology at the very least prior to the tenth century.

eventually replaced the material with tiles: a material they employed in Spain.<sup>10</sup> The reversion to old forms seemed habitual when feasible.

This earliest incorporation of Old World forms in vernacular architecture in early Florida was limited at best and this reflects the situation of the colony as it had few resources to allow the more labor intensive and expensive reproduction of the Spanish native house form.<sup>11</sup> In large scale architectural projects, it soon became necessary, as well as symbolic, to refer back to Spain as a reminder of the roots of the colony. Large scale projects such as the fort demanded a harder more durable material for construction. Stone became the primary material for these larger schemes in designing the city of St. Augustine. It also provided for a more secure defense of the city in all of the structures as stone's invulnerability to fire allowed a more enduring cityscape to develop.

The need for the development of more permanent structures and fortifications in St. Augustine seemed more pressing after the arrival of the British onto the North American mainland.<sup>12</sup> In 1648, the English had settled in the nearby Bahama Islands which wedged Spain's East Florida colony directly between the pinchers of the

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<sup>10</sup>Rexford Newcomb, *Spanish-Colonial Architecture in the United States* (New York: J.J. Augustin, 1937; reprint, New York: Dover Publications, 1990), 25 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

<sup>11</sup> Karen Harvey, *America's First City: St. Augustine's Historic Neighborhoods*, 2d ed. (Lake Buena Vista, Florida: Tailored Tours Publications, 1997), 24.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Gannon, ed., *The New History of Florida* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), 100. Although the British arrived on the North American continent in the early 1600s, it was the founding of the royal colony of Carolina in 1670 which concerned the Spanish in Florida the most.

encroaching British Empire.<sup>13</sup> Unlike the Spanish in East Florida, the British arrivals in the Bahamas did not have the Amerindians to look to for temporary housing solutions. The original Pre-Columbian inhabitants of the region had already disappeared by this time.<sup>14</sup> The base for the inception of a New World architecture appeared shaky at best. The European Circum Caribbean world had to rely on the ingenuity of the first two immigrant groups in this region under examination to concoct a functional and aesthetically pleasing architectural form.

The Spanish and the British were the dominant colonizers in the early years after the contact period in Florida and the Bahamas, but the arrival of a third group also played a part in the evolution of the new architectural form of the region. African slaves arrived early in the history of the area.<sup>15</sup> They became the engine which drove the schemes for reconstructing the memories of the traditional homelands of the Europeans. Their influence on the look of the colonizers' public buildings appears minimal yet in vernacular structures they possibly dictated a more far reaching adaptation to some of the climatic circumstances found in the islands and cays of the two areas. Instances of slaves recreating the aesthetics of African house forms could be found in the southern half of the

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<sup>13</sup>Michael Craton and Gail Saunders, *A History of the Bahamian People*, vol. 1, *From Aboriginal Times to the End of Slavery* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 77.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 54-57. The Spanish had transported the docile Lucayans of the Bahamas to the goldfields of Hispaniola and the pearl beds off of Venezuela as laborers before the arrival of the British.

<sup>15</sup>Jane Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 13-15. Slaves came with Lucas Vázquez de Ayllón's expedition to Florida in 1526.

United States; like that region the Circum Caribbean more than likely encouraged the same preoccupation with the retention of cultural forms.<sup>16</sup>

The multiplicity of house forms found in Africa makes it difficult to pinpoint the exact duplication process carried into the New World. The many Africans who arrived into the Circum Caribbean came from diverse regions in Africa with their accompanying diverse aesthetic realities. But when looking at the surviving forms found in slave architecture of the region under discussion, even when the material seemed more traditionally European, a shape began to emerge which suggests strong ties to West Africa. John Vlach agrees with this in his work on plantation architecture and also includes Central Africa as a foundational geographical sphere to the box form of African American architecture.<sup>17</sup> The small, box-like shape capped with a pyramidal style vault still exists in Africa, as well as in the Bahamas. To some extent, the influence of this shape survives in the wood framed homes of Key West, Florida. Looking at the homes of the Africans living in Western Cameroon today the observer could note the use of bamboo, raffia palms, thatching materials and a type of daub to pack the walls. The house shape, a small box which usually measures twelve square feet, serves its inhabitants admirably as the small interior space complements the fact that most of the daily living activities occur outside.<sup>18</sup> The interior then relays a feeling of privacy and security

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<sup>16</sup> John Michael Vlach, *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 165.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 165-166. The use of space in the Circum Caribbean region of the Bahamas is almost identical in the Out Islanders' lives which remain unaffected by the persuasive images seen on American television as to what American families do with their living



conducive to sleeping. The method of thatching includes a framework built of bamboo which receives a dense layer of grass, the main thatching material in the region, packed into the threaded purlins.<sup>19</sup> This method of thatching still exists in the Bahamas (fig. 6.1) although on the islands which draw tourists it constitutes a novelty for the visitors to enjoy. This technology depended heavily on the experience of the Africans who came to the islands as forced laborers.

The three groups which encountered each other in this new arena would then co-opt forms from each other which suited their individual needs. As mentioned before, this collision of cultures appears more evident in vernacular structures. They retain the modes and methods used to create a New World aesthetic in the Circum Caribbean. To see this evolution of a new form one must look at geographical areas which remained fairly isolated from the transformation of a nineteenth-century sensibility concerning architecture to the twentieth century reliance on steel and concrete. Thus, the remote cays and islands of the Bahamas have been heavily scrutinized to find this link between the various factions of the New World in the Circum Caribbean. The reliance on available materials and the knowledge that climatic occurrences, such as hurricanes, must be acknowledged by the builders played a large part in the evolution of the vernacular house form in this new sphere.

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space. The older generations tend to follow the tradition of living mostly outside. For example, my oldest Aunt, who lives on Long Island in the Bahamas, still keeps her outdoor kitchen and on a usual day when you stop to hail her she can be found sitting outside in a shady spot.

<sup>19</sup>Oliver, 119. The construction methods of this region are rigorously explained by Oliver, but are not for novices concerning construction terms. Purlins are pieces of timber, or in the case mentioned above, bamboo, laid horizontally on the main rafters of the roof to support the common rafters used for the covering material such as grass thatch.

The intersection of the Amerindian, Spanish, English and African architectural styles in the Florida/Bahamas zone began in the city of St. Augustine in the year 1763. In that year, England received the territory of Florida in exchange for Havana at the end of the Seven Years' War.<sup>20</sup> During the influx of the British, the Spanish civilians prepared to leave with many of them choosing to go to Havana.<sup>21</sup> Spanish representatives remained to take care of the sale of property while half of the garrison and the Governor stayed behind. The arriving British troops had few choices for procuring lodging.<sup>22</sup> Their use of existing structures and then the eventual adaptations they made to better fit into their own ideological precepts concerning form and function would direct them to create a syncretic form based on their own aesthetic considerations.

The look of St. Augustine by 1763 had its foundations on an urban plan established after Sir Francis Drake's raid on the city in 1586.<sup>23</sup> Drake burned the city and in effect forced the Spanish to renovate as well as rethink the outlay of the city and the materials used to build new structures. This left the inhabitants with the laborious chore of trying to fireproof structures: an impossibility with the most available material being

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<sup>20</sup> Charles Loch Mowat, *East Florida as a British Province, 1763-1784* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1943; reprint, Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1964), 5-7 (page citations are to the reprint edition). For a full accounting of the treaty which lead to the cession of Florida and the British takeover Mowat's work has been considered the original authority on this subject.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> George R. Fairbanks, *The History and Antiquities of the City of St. Augustine, Florida Founded A. D. 1565. Some of the Most Interesting Portions of the Early History of Florida* (New York: Charles B. Norton, 1858; facsimile reproduction, Gainesville: The University Presses of Florida, 1975), 112 (page citations are to the facsimile edition).

wood. Thus, the lower classes fell back on using wood and thatch while the middle and upper classes concentrated on using more flame retardant materials. As noted by Albert Manucy, vernacular structures of the poor relied on thatch-roofs and thatch-walls fashioned using Amerindian technology.<sup>24</sup> Wattle and daub<sup>25</sup> construction also could be found in some of the houses of the people who made up the working class in early St. Augustine. This type of construction lasts longer and still exists in areas of the Caribbean as an expedient and more economical solution to building vernacular structures.

The abundance of timber in the earliest days of the settlement of St. Augustine allowed for the use of a wood frame construction for the more affluent and knowledgeable. Timber construction, and the skill to do this type of work, may have been a northern technique brought to the New World, as Manucy proposes perhaps a knowledge employed by those who came from the Basque region of Spain, but it also lies within the ability of carpenter shipwrights to configure this type of structure.<sup>26</sup> The solution to the vaulting of these wooden houses again relied on the use of thatch. The palm fronds predominately used in thatching in Florida were from the cabbage palm. The reliance on the material and methods available depended heavily on the ability of the builders to adapt to the new conditions found by the colonists.

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<sup>24</sup> Albert Manucy, *Sixteenth-Century St. Augustine: The People and Their Homes* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997), 78.

<sup>25</sup> Cyril M. Harris, ed., *Illustrated Dictionary of Historic Architecture* (New York: Dover Publications, 1977), 569. Wattle and daub consist of a coarse weave of twigs woven between thicker timber poles and then filled in with mud.

<sup>26</sup> Manucy, 90.

While the settlers from the lower rungs of the established hierarchy found in Spanish society availed themselves of the abundant natural materials found in the New World, the elites struggled to recreate a permanent setting which reminded them of home. This preoccupation lies within all sectors of society, but the full expression of this desire takes greater financial resources to achieve. Within the grasp of the upper classes, they expressed their aesthetic with unavoidable adaptations but included traditional forms. The builders adapted to the use of tabby<sup>27</sup> which replaced stone. Tabby hardens to a rocklike consistency and recreates the appearance of an enduring stone structure. The use of coquina shellstone (fig. 6.2) in the eighteenth century<sup>28</sup> allowed a new stonecutting industry to develop and the importation of masons and stonecutters from the Old World saw the development of a New World aesthetic for the material. While the artisans from the European continent followed all of the old formulas, such as cutting decorative columns and cornice moldings, they had to meld them with the material as coquina has a rather pitted appearance when compared to stone such as marble. Marbles' virtuosity as a decorative stones lies in its luminescent quality while coquina's rougher appearance means the stonecutter would have to embellish its texture rather than attempting a smooth, seamless finish. Its rougher texture recreated in a surface decoration the rougher experiences found in the New World. In addition, the builders probably used cedar or

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<sup>27</sup>Tabby is a mixture of lime and water with stones and shells added to it. When it hardens it is durable, although it does not weather well. This technology is used in the more arid islands of the Bahamas and big lime burning pits can be found near settlements on Cat Island in the southern Bahamas.

<sup>28</sup>Gordon, 82.

cypress shingles for roofs on these New World structures of the elites: instead of the smoother tiled roofs of Spain.<sup>29</sup>

This setting of a variety of vernacular structures based on the socio-economic circumstances of the owners greeted the British when they arrived in St. Augustine. This unfamiliar world, enhanced by the public building which retained their indisputable Spanish flavor, influenced the new arrivals to attempt to weld their own aesthetic onto what existed. The English had a history of building that included the idea that houses and villages implied permanence.<sup>30</sup> The act of building represented the possession of this new territory. But, the necessity of obtaining living quarters quickly mandated speedy solutions to aesthetic concerns. These factors led to the development of the St. Augustine Style which incorporated both Spanish and English features in architecture.<sup>31</sup> The main difference between the British conversions and the original Spanish style homes of St. Augustine appeared as the additions of fireplaces and chimneys.<sup>32</sup> The use of glass for windows also increased under British influence. The basic form of the square or rectangular house remained with these embellishments added to relieve the austerity evident in Spanish architecture. The emphasis on the inward facing façade (fig. 6.3) of

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<sup>29</sup> Manucy, 118.

<sup>30</sup> Patricia Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe's Conquest of the New World, 1492-1640* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 18.

<sup>31</sup> Gordon, 146.

<sup>32</sup> Albert Manucy, *The Houses of St. Augustine, 1565-1821*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1992), 38-40.

the Spanish house lessened under the British whose homes orientated themselves outward as a part of the villager mentalité they brought with them.<sup>33</sup>

The British occupation of Florida lasted for only twenty years, but in that period their impetus for building plantations changed the face of the manmade landscape. They also arrived with a set tradition for the look of town architecture based on the Georgian style of England.<sup>34</sup> In addition, the style had flourished in the southern colonies of Anglo-America prior to the years before the American Revolution. The rebellion of the thirteen British colonies to the north of Florida saw the arrival of the largest influx of immigrants to St. Augustine: the Loyalists. They impacted the aesthetic of the evolving Circum Caribbean under study as they brought ideas about Georgian architecture with them which had already gone through a mutation in colonial America.

Using Charleston as an inception point for the urban architecture which the Loyalists relied on as a foundation for the development of their own material preferences, the style which they so clearly copied came out of the aforementioned Georgian period in British architecture. Based on the Renaissance architecture of Palladio, the Georgian style demonstrated a restrained taste in the evolution of British architecture. The style itself

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<sup>33</sup>The Spanish experience in architecture came from a tradition of building for defense. The invasion by the Moors mandated a type of fortress idea in vernacular architecture. Houses centered on a courtyard where outdoor living occurred. The British experience differed greatly as the insulated islanders with limited room for expansion seemed to have developed a taste for an outward expression in their architecture as a part of the homogeneous nature of the demographic make-up of Britain. The village lifestyle was more conducive to this rather than the experiences of those living in an urban setting behind walls.

<sup>34</sup>Pamela Gosner *Caribbean Georgian: The Great and Small Houses of the West Indies* (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1992), 13. Georgian architecture became popular in Britain when the first King George ascended the throne in 1714.

flourished in England in the eighteenth century. It continued to be popular in the colonies of Great Britain long after it fell from favor in the metropolis due to the proliferation of architectural pattern books which promoted the Georgian ethos.<sup>35</sup> Based on principals of symmetrical balance and using such adornments as quoining, dentil-molding on the cornice, engaged pilasters around the centered doorway and dormers the Georgian style survived in cities like Charleston due to the stagnation of its population growth after colonial times.<sup>36</sup> The austere aesthetic adopted by the Charlestonians reflected their willingness to embrace the house form which represented power, wealth and an appreciation of classical antiquity.<sup>37</sup> The message to the observer of a Charleston townhouse reflected the social standing of the owner.

Charleston's architecture combined with the St. Augustine style established by the Spanish produced a house type which transferred into the Circum Caribbean zones of Florida and the Bahamas. The two most influential configurations in building from Charleston were the single house and the double house. This example of a single house in Charleston (fig. 6.4) shows the short side of the home and displays its slender appearance. The single house in Charleston developed due to the scarcity of available land. Charleston sits on a slender peninsula shaped by the confluence of the Ashley and

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<sup>35</sup>John Summerson, *Georgian London*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: Pimlico, 1991), 49-50.

<sup>36</sup>Virginia and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 139-140.

<sup>37</sup>James Stevens Curl, *Georgian Architecture* (United Kingdom: David & Charles, 1993; reprint, United Kingdom: David & Charles, 2002), 18.

Cooper Rivers.<sup>38</sup> The plotting of the lots which constituted the town of Charleston resulted in long, narrow properties, with the short end on the street, on which to build. The result was the orientation of the house on the longer portion of the property with the front door being on the long side of the house.<sup>39</sup> The other dominant house form in the city survives in fine examples of the double house. The double house (fig. 6.5) was twice the size of the single house, usually almost square, with its entranceway in the exact center facing the street.<sup>40</sup> The builders of both of these examples used non-flammable materials for their construction due to the law enacted by the colonial Assembly in 1740 which mandated no more wooden buildings in the city.<sup>41</sup> The use of stucco and brick would only add to the technologies already available in construction in St. Augustine.

The suspended balconies of St. Augustine (fig. 6.6) probably had the greatest impact on the Loyalist arrivals. The form arrived into the city with the Spanish who had been using it for centuries.<sup>42</sup> In contrast to this cantilevered form, the builders of balconies in Charleston typically used the double piazza (fig. 6.7) configuration whereby two balconies were stacked on top of each other. These additions allowed the occupants

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<sup>38</sup>Mills Lane, *Architecture of the Old South: South Carolina* (New York: Beehive Press, 1984), 11.

<sup>39</sup>Kenneth Severens, *Southern Architecture: 350 Years of Distinctive American Buildings* (New York: Elsevier-Dutton Publishing, 1981), 13.

<sup>40</sup> Albert Simmons and Samuel, eds., *The Early Architecture of Charleston* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1990), 22.

<sup>41</sup>Hugh Morrison, *Early American Architecture: From the First Colonial Settlements to the National Period* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952; reprint, New York: Dover Publications, 1987), 171.

<sup>42</sup>Gordon, 150.



to enjoy any prevailing cool breezes during hot summer evenings. The balconies in St. Augustine served an additional function as many of these permitted views of the streets they hung over. As one traveler to the city in 1784 remarked on its appearance:

The houses are built quite after the Spanish fashion with flat roofs and few windows; here and there the English have houses with more windows, especially on the street side. They also built the first chimneys for the Spanish formerly were content with no more than a charcoal fire placed under a tapestry hung table.<sup>43</sup>

The melding of the two aesthetics was evident after the relatively short time of twenty years. The syncretism of these two styles, along with building technologies from Africa and the Amerindians, allowed a different message to develop in this architecture. The borderlands of vast empires encouraged ad hoc solutions posed by frontier territories. Although some of the Loyalist refugees had to live in “hastily built cabins”<sup>44</sup> which they then roofed with thatch made from palmetto palms, they still believed in the ideologies of the dominant elite; displayed in Georgian architecture. However, they had to distort this aesthetic though to serve them in their migrations to the Circum Caribbean.

When investigating the aesthetic concerns displayed by persons of wealth, one sees the almost desperate attempts to recreate a certain stylistic mode from their former circumstances. When looking at the background of men such as Roger Kelsall,<sup>45</sup> a peculiar factor evolves in this examination. People maintain their foundational aesthetic definitions even when leaving the area from which they originated. Unfortunately for

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<sup>43</sup> Johann David Schöpfung, *Travels in the Confederation, 1783-1784* (Philadelphia: William J. Campbell, 1911; reprint, New York: B. Franklin, 1968), 229.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

<sup>45</sup> The Kelsall family came to East Florida from South Carolina. An in-depth discussion of them can be found in Chapter Two.

this researcher, no signs of Kelsall's family home remains. The city of Sunbury, Georgia, where Kelsall built his home after obtaining his trading company, disappeared sometime after the Revolutionary period. Strathy Hall remains the only structure which survives from Kelsall's personal history.<sup>46</sup> Built in the early "Plantation Plain" style, Strathy Hall has elements which typified vernacular architecture from the southern coastal region. Its central hall arrangement hinged on the dedication in the colonies to Georgian principles in architecture.<sup>47</sup> It has an uncommon, for the region, central chimney, but this possibly could be due to where the origins of the builder who may have come from a colder climate and been familiar with this configuration. In the southern colonies, builders more commonly attached chimneys to the ends of the structure in order to keep interior heat to a minimum. Strathy Hall's shed-roofed front porch became a widespread addition to the traditional interpretation of the Georgian mode in vernacular forms. It provided a shady retreat from the brutal heat of the region's summer. Thus, Roger Kelsall and others like him had established ideas of aesthetic preferences which came from the southern portions

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<sup>46</sup>Kelsall, "The Kelsall Family." The material provided on Strathy Hall by the website sponsored by the Richmond Hill Visiter's Bureau ([www.gacoast.com](http://www.gacoast.com)), as well as other websites, dates Strathy Hall to c. 1840. This date would put the Hall's construction at about the time when the better known McAllister family purchased the property. The descendants of Roger Kelsall, John and Anne Kelsall, along with Roger's sister Lewin sold Strathy Hall in 1817 for 9,000 dollars. The McAllister family purchased the plantation sometime after 1820 and worked the land as rice planters (this information is also on the Richmond Hill website). It does not seem feasible that they built a new house after their purchase and the style of the house does not appear to corroborate this dating. They more than likely added to the existing structure: a more practical solution when attempting an update. In addition, the Federal style and then Revival styles dominated the region, for the wealthy, after the American Revolution, as all things British were rejected.

<sup>47</sup> McAlester and McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses*, 140. Georgian was the dominant style in the colonies from about 1700 to 1780. It adheres to strict principles of balance which came out of the British interpretation of the Renaissance.

of North America. Based on the Georgian style of England, its adaptation to the climate and available material created a New World aesthetic fostered under the harshest conditions.

The Loyalist refugees with fewer resources fell back on cheap alternatives in building. Some never acquired anything close to the grand Georgian structures of the Charleston townhouse even before their arrival into St. Augustine; although attaining that symbol of prosperity undoubtedly lingered as a goal for their futures. One traveler noted that in St. Augustine “stand the hastily built cabins of these poor fugitives, walled and thatched with palmetto leaves.”<sup>48</sup> The Loyalists with few resources fell back upon the cheapest form of housing available in the old town. They utilized Amerindian technologies much as the early Spanish settlers had when they first arrived. They created rushed solutions to living space as they entered East Florida. For example, Robert Cunningham’s house close to St. Mary’s “was a log house, the logs squared on each side; rather small but a tolerably good one for that country; it seemed more than one story high; it was floored and shingled.”<sup>49</sup> Thus, the perception that all of the Loyalists arrived in East Florida with an upper class background and a surplus of economic resources deserves reconsideration as many of the structures produced in East Florida by the refugees belie that assumption.

Thus, the stage seemed set for the next portion of a continuing emergence of a Circum Caribbean aesthetic centered in Florida. The loss of Florida by the British

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Wilbur Henry Siebert, *Loyalists in East Florida, 1774 to 1775; The Most Important Documents Pertaining to Thereto, Edited with an Accompanying Narrative* (Boston: Gregg Press, 1972), 8.

necessitated that this experience within the Florida/Bahamas context leaped over the Gulf Stream and continued within a new milieu. The Bahamas, as well as other areas of the Caribbean, received many of the fleeing immigrants to its islands. They had an enormous impact on the Bahamian architecture, perhaps more than any other British Caribbean possession, due to the few settlements at this point in the Bahama Islands, especially on the Out Islands. They brought set ideas with them concerning the appearance of their world. Their ambitious building projects, such as the development of plantations on unsettled islands such as Crooked Island, unfolded within two decades of their arrival to the Bahamas.

The Loyalists' departure from St. Augustine gave the group a new identity as being different due to the nature of their experiences on the American continent. Two major upheavals within a decade for some forged a persona which had learned to accommodate societal changes. The peculiar nature of the phenomena in humans to retain the aesthetics of past experiences would see them build a new capital city in Nassau. But, they learned to accept changes in their building concerns by adapting forms which proved expedient solutions to conditions found in the tropics. The in-put of the Amerindians and Africans allowed the Europeans to flourish in the Americas. The Spanish realized the importance of this early in their occupation of Florida. The British North Americans had rejected the influence of the Amerindians, but the Loyalists inculcated at least some of their technologies as they adapted materials the Spanish had already incorporated from the Amerindians. As the British refugees attempted to move all of their worldly possessions, which for some proved a quite pitiful collection, they hoped to find a new Shangri-la in the archipelago of the Bahamas. The many types of experiences they

brought with them gave them an edge over the colonists already in the Bahamas. They assumed a superior attitude as to their own aesthetic background as they took in the underdeveloped environs of Nassau; the Loyalists' ambitions instituted the first building boom in the Bahamas.



Fig. 6.1  
Example of Thatching  
Eleuthera, Bahamas  
Construction Date: c. 1920  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 2001



**Fig. 6.2**  
**Example of Coquina Stone Work**  
**St. Augustine, Florida**  
**Construction Date: c. 1820**  
**Photo by Astrid Whidden**  
**Year Taken: 2006**

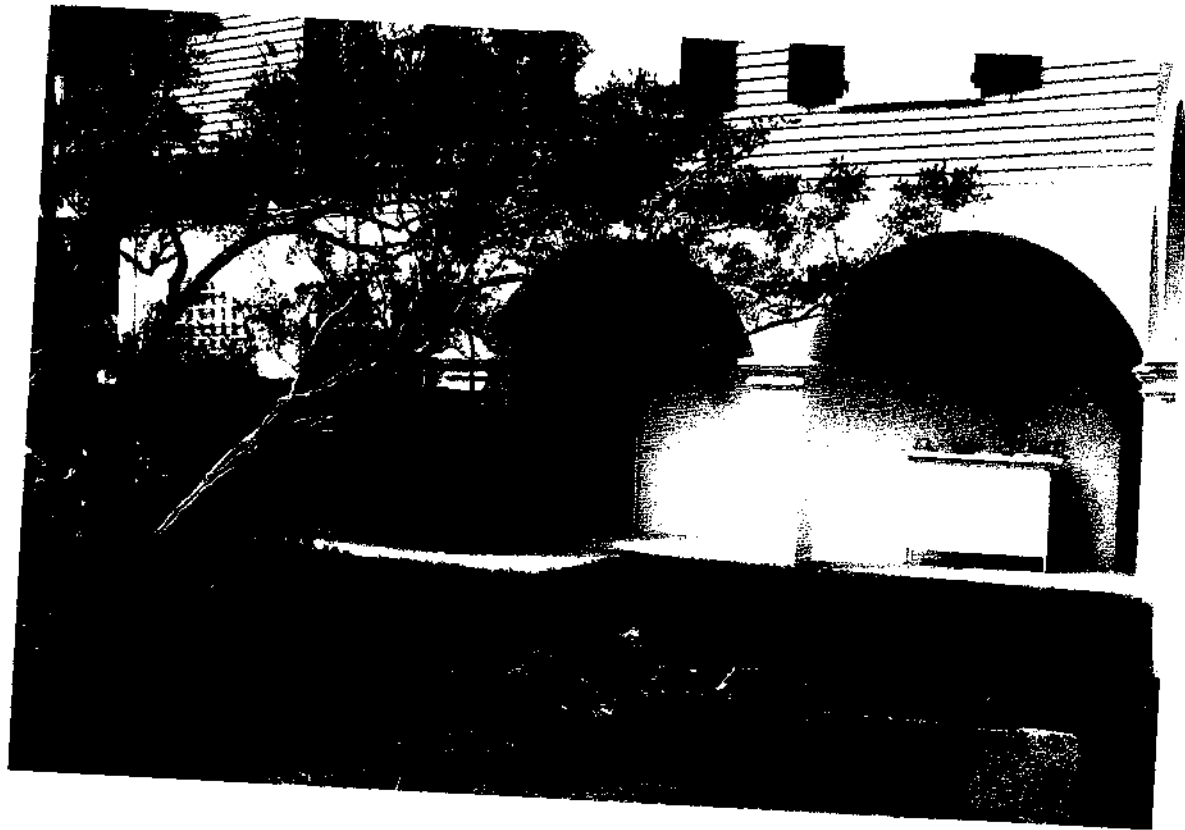


Fig. 6.3  
Spanish Style Interior Courtyard  
Peña-Peck House, St. Augustine, Florida  
Construction Date: c. 1750  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 2006





Fig. 6.4  
Example of Single House  
71 Church St., Robert Brewton House  
Charleston, South Carolina  
Construction Date: c. 1721  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 1994



**Fig. 6.5**  
**Example of Double House**  
**87 Church St., Thomas Heyward House**  
**Charleston, South Carolina**  
**Construction Date: c. 1772**  
**Photo by Astrid Whidden**  
**Year Taken: 1994**



Fig. 6.6  
Cantilevered Balcony  
Llabias House  
St. Augustine, Florida  
Construction Date: c. 1770  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 2006



**Fig. 6.7**  
**Example of Double Piazza**  
**22 Legare St., Charles Elliot House**  
**Charleston, South Carolina**  
**Construction Date: c. 1764**  
**Photo Taken by Astrid Whidden**  
**Year Taken: 1994**

## Chapter Seven

### Aesthetic Mutations in the Bahamas

The departure of the Loyalists from East Florida in 1785 to the Bahamas proved traumatic to many of them as they left the American mainland behind. They took as many of their possessions with them as possible, but their building skills and an aesthetic sensibility shaped in the crucible of East Florida proved the most enduring, although intangible, of the effects they carried to the new land. Although the Bahamian Islands superficially repeated the physical atmosphere of the territories of the southern American colonies in climate, its poor soil and lack of rain presented new challenges to the Loyalists. Their ability to inculcate native Conch<sup>1</sup> forms and the adaptive skills of the émigrés eventually dictated the successes of the Loyalists and their descendants. The diverse group who immigrated included mostly former colonists from the southern American colonies and their slaves. They represented many socio-economic levels, although the members of the plantocracy who hoped to dictate a new plantation society originally dominated the political and social milieu of the capital city of Nassau. In architecture, they melded the material aspects of island building with a mind-set determined to reproduce their old worlds. The idea that architectural styles retain visual remnants of ideologies shapes this analysis of the architectural heritage of the Loyalists and their slaves.

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<sup>1</sup> The evolution of the nickname Conch was explained in the introduction (n.16). Its usage by the Loyalists, this was what they called the inhabitants of the Bahamas who were there when they arrived, was derisive. It implied the Bahamians were slow like the Conch which pulls itself across the ocean floor with one claw; if it moves ten feet in one day that is an amazing effort.

Some of the Loyalists attempted a direct transference of their built world with them: they ventured to load already constructed buildings onto transport ships as they left St. Augustine. The difficult task of moving entire structures, with the ensuing dismantling and reassembling process, in a period before modern machinery, seemed impractical, but the economic hardship foreseen in rebuilding from scratch probably drove some of these efforts. Men such as Peter Edwards and John Wood both tried to take wood frame structures with them to the Bahamas.<sup>2</sup> Those who successfully transported buildings usually managed to do so because they owned their own ships or had the resources to rent a ship.<sup>3</sup> Many of them simply left everything behind with little hope for remuneration. A letter from the settler Mary Stout of East Florida to her brother in England voices the despair of many concerning their lost property. Mary Stout wrote on April 28<sup>th</sup> 1783: "My Dear Brother, if you but see our plantation you would be very sorry to Leave it and have such poor hopes of ever getting anything for it."<sup>4</sup> Those who owned slaves transported them as they represented a main source of wealth for many of the Loyalists.<sup>5</sup> Mary Stout wrote how her husband Joseph managed to transport "our slaves of negro

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<sup>2</sup> Thelma Peterson Peters, "Loyalists and the Plantation Period in the Bahamas Islands" (Ph.D. diss., University of Florida, 1960), 38; Lydia Austin Parrish, "Records of Some Southern Loyalists; Being a Collection of Manuscripts About Some Eighty Families, Most of Whom Immigrated to the Bahamas During and After the American Revolution," p. 470, Sorted Indexed and Bound by Maxfield Parrish, Jr., 1953.

<sup>3</sup>Peters, 38.

<sup>4</sup> Barbara Gorely Teller, "The Case of Some Inhabitants of East Florida, 1767-1785," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 23 (October 1954): 103. Teller published Mary Stout's letters to her brother in this article.

<sup>5</sup> Peters, 124.

men and women and children with us here to this place.”<sup>6</sup> Although the devastated Loyalists’ attempts at transportation of houses and material possessions seemed for the most part to fail, their slaves dramatically increased the number of blacks in the Bahamas. The Loyalists’ and their slaves’ aesthetic preferences in architecture dramatically changed the appearance of the archipelago.

The lack of housing for the arriving refugees made it imperative that development of the main island of Nassau commence for those wishing to remain. The few houses in the town were of “wood, all lightly built and of simple construction, according to the need of the climate here . . .”<sup>7</sup> The built world of the Bahamas probably appeared as a shabby outpost in comparison to St. Augustine. Although within the larger scope of the architectural realm in the American colonies St. Augustine seemed to have hardly progressed at all, it had a long history of building which had provided a solid foundation for an evolution of certain style. This could not be said about the Bahamas. Upon arrival into Nassau in 1784, the traveler of the period would have noted a church, a goal, and an open building used for the public sale of goods with only a few substantial homes.<sup>8</sup> Unpaved streets connected the small port town with only one major road running next to the water, which later became known as Bay Street.<sup>9</sup> The scarcity of housing allowed landlords to charge exorbitant rents which the new arrivals could not afford. For

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<sup>6</sup> Teller, 106. This letter was written in April of 1787 from Nassau.

<sup>7</sup> Johann David Schöpf, *Travels in the Confederation, 1783-84* (Philadelphia: William J. Campbell, 1911; reprint; New York: B. Franklin, 1968) 262.

<sup>8</sup> Schöpf, 263.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 262.

example, a receipt for rent made out to James Brown bears a notation on the bottom commenting on the high price paid for the rent on a small dwelling.<sup>10</sup> The Loyalists and their slaves arrived under desperate circumstances. They faced the challenges found in regions which had suffered under the neglect of a government that had little use for imperial outposts that produced no profit. This impacted the development of Bahamian society, government and also the creation of a new Bahamian aesthetic in architecture. It allowed a certain leeway in the influence of the Loyalists on the evolution of the appearance of the Bahamas. The autonomy enjoyed in decision making on the frontier trickled into the visual expression found in the remains of the Loyalist building boom.

Little architecture remains in Nassau from the period prior to the arrival of the refugees. This phenomenon relates directly to the fact that the old inhabitants' way of life had inculcated a certain cavalier attitude toward building. Most people had made a living in some way related to the sea. Pirates, sailors, wreckers, and fisher folk have little use for the building of grand structures. Their haphazard lifestyle produced a haphazard vernacular architecture which evolved based on necessity. The difficulty of obtaining permanent materials, such as stone or brick, hampered the building endeavors of the Conchs. One example of a larger original Conch<sup>11</sup> structure survives in a house called Greycliff (fig. 7.1). It sits on the ridge in Nassau which overlooks the harbor. Its name

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<sup>10</sup>Brown was the former Rector and Chaplain for the Anglican Church in Pensacola. This receipt was sent to a Richard Hutchinson on November third in 1785. CO 23/15.

<sup>11</sup>I make this designation of original Conch architecture because of the misuse of the word today. Every house in Key West, Florida is called a Conch house although this has never been defined. Bahamian architecture today is a melding of styles influenced by America, African motifs and modern conveniences. I am not sure that a true Conch style exists.



comes from a combination of a description of its setting with the first portion of the owner's last name. Captain John Howard Graysmith allegedly retired from piracy to this house after the sinking of his ship off Nassau in 1726.<sup>12</sup> The interior of the house had a Georgian<sup>13</sup> floor plan with four rooms divided by a wide center hallway running through the house to the back (fig. 7.2). A shipwright or someone familiar with wood construction of ships possibly did the wood detail around the front door and the knee braces used on the back porch (fig. 7.3). The rooms' high ceilings (fig. 7.4) allowed for the circulation of air and the exterior verandahs accommodated the residents during the sultry days of Bahamian summers. In Graycliff, one finds a combination of the West Indian cottage with Georgian design elements. The West Indian elements include the reliance on an open plan whereby all the rooms flow into each other and also the use of wide, shaded verandahs. The Georgian style promoted a severe symmetry which can be seen in the arrangement of the rooms. The hall, which splits the house in half, had an equal amount of rooms situated on each side of it. This arrangement would have been familiar to some of the arriving Loyalists and the builders they brought with them. They would have felt comfortable spending an afternoon at Graycliff. Unfortunately, the

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<sup>12</sup>Steve Dodge, *The Complete Guide to Nassau* (Illinois: White Sound Press, 1987), 16 ; Gail Saunders and Linda M. Huber, *Nassau's Historic Landmarks* (London: Macmillan Education LTD, 2001), 7-8.

<sup>13</sup> The term Georgian in architectural history is confusing at best. The Georgian style lost popularity in England long before the colonies rejected the traditional, highly symmetrical style. It remained popular in the English Caribbean after the Americans rejected it following the American Revolution. It was so popular due to the pattern books which English architects popularized in the eighteenth century. It continues to be a popular form in the Bahamas today. For example, I have a cousin who constructed an enormous house in the Lyford Cay area which is typically Georgian. It has certain characteristics, such as quoining, which appear immutable throughout the history of the region.

surrounding town required modification in order to begin building and this task proved the fortitude of these people.

As commented on by Schöpf, the German traveler, earlier in this chapter, Nassau consisted of poorly maintained dirt roads except for parts of the main street which ran down by the harbor.<sup>14</sup> The Loyalists helped to enact legislation which mandated a general conscription calling for all men, black and white, regardless if free or slave, between the ages of sixteen and sixty, to work on the streets several days out of each year. By 1788, the city of Nassau appeared much as it would in the twentieth century.<sup>15</sup> Mandating the regulating of roads facilitated the movement of building materials and the first building boom in Nassau began in this period.<sup>16</sup> The greatest difficulty faced in construction in the Bahamas, and most of the West Indies, remains the scarcity of material. Deforestation of the region began with the building of the great sugar plantations in the Greater and Lesser Antilles. The sugar industry did not affect the Bahamas as severely because this agricultural product never grew there, but it experienced a lack of material due to a lack of labor. The local materials, while not plentiful could be found, but skills for building structures simply had not developed in the population at this point. Unless it related to ship building, few people worried about acquiring these skills. Thus, instances where skilled masons or carpenters were sought

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<sup>14</sup>Schöpf, 262.

<sup>15</sup> Peters, 134; Gail Saunders and Donald Cartwright, *Historic Nassau* (London: Macmillan Education, 1991), 11.

<sup>16</sup>I would argue that this first building boom in the Bahamas remained unsurpassed until the latest developing frenzy started in approximately the late 1990s or early 2000.

necessitated that the recruitment of people from other areas occur. For instance, in 1745

Peter Henry Bruce had worked on Fort Montagu. He reported that:

My greatest difficulty was the want of masons, of whom there was not one in the place, which obliged me to commission some from the northern colonies; but all I could get were two bricklayers from Philadelphia, who knew nothing of masonry.<sup>17</sup>

Bruce also provided details on the suitability of available building materials. His observations on the limestone found on the islands and quarrying methods<sup>18</sup> established the feasibility of constructing more durable structures, but the use of wood predominated in local building practices until the Loyalists arrived and began to change the appearance of the material world of the Bahamas.

The challenges to the fortitude of these people remained immense. They scrambled to continue to live in a fashion which approximated their former lives. Land grants issued by the Government in England included forty acres to heads of families and additional twenty acres given to each additional member of the family including slaves.<sup>19</sup> The more prosperous of the refugees attempting to create large plantations would take these grants on the southern Out Islands, while for the most part the working class remained in Nassau or moved to the northern Bahamas. Hope for a new beginning for the

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<sup>17</sup>Peter Henry Bruce, *Bahamian Interlude* (London: John Culmer Ltd., 1949), 19. Bruce was a military engineer who originally published his memoirs in England in 1782.

<sup>18</sup>Bruce, 26. Bruce's report stated that: "All the stone on this and the adjacent islands is so soft of Nature, when raised from the quarries, that we could cut and shape them into forms with very little labour; exposed in the air they turn hard as flint."

<sup>19</sup>*Bahama Gazette* (New Providence), 10-17 September 1785. The announcement of the land grants had been made by the King In September of 1784. This further notice delayed the payment of quit rents from two to ten years.

Loyalists emerged in the early years after their arrival to the Bahamas. They ambitiously reinvented the world they found and architecturally redefined the small colony.

The incipient promise of the reinvention of the formerly dormant economic milieu of the Bahamas gained a physical presence under the urging of the Loyalists. By 1789, many had gained places in government and a committee of eight from the House of Assembly commissioned a new Public Building for the government; four of the members of the committee had come from East Florida.<sup>20</sup> The location chosen faced the harbor on Bay Street. The buildings on the east and west side of the square were commissioned prior to the center structure. The builder, James Tait, experienced some difficulties in completing the project because a fine appeared in the records from the project charging him six hundred pounds for not living up to the contract.<sup>21</sup> But by August of 1805, Tait received the last of his money for completing the two wings. The center pavilion's contractor, John Fowler, received this commission in 1809. He finished the structure in 1816.<sup>22</sup> These buildings remain the focus of the Bahamian government to the present. They symbolize the syncretism in architecture which occurred in the period ushered in by the arrival of the refugees from East Florida.

The appearance of the Public Buildings harkens back to another time. A visitor in 1823 commented on their loveliness and on the vibrant social affairs which centered on

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<sup>20</sup>Wilbur Henry Siebert, *Loyalists in East Florida, 1774 to 1775; The Most Important Documents Pertaining Thereto, Edited with an Accompanying Narrative*, vol. I (Gregg Press, 1972), 195.

<sup>21</sup>C. Sieghbert Russell, *Nassau's Historic Buildings* (Nassau: Bahamas National Trust, 1979), 4.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*

the Assembly Room of the Public Buildings.<sup>23</sup> Constructed of coral limestone, stuccoed and then painted a pastel pink, the buildings form a cohesive courtyard type arrangement. Often credited to relying on an earlier governmental structure in North Carolina<sup>24</sup> as an antecedent for its design, this author believes it expresses the mutation experienced in architecture in the Florida/Bahamas experience. The Public Buildings' (fig. 7.5) roofs follow the tradition of using a hipped construction in locations exposed to the vagaries of tropical hurricanes. This roof line allows for the pushing up of wind away from the eaves which when exposed allow winds to lift roofs off. The portico of the main center pavilion projects out with an ornate classical pediment (fig. 7.6). The large Doric columns suggest the monumental quality found in American public buildings which refer to the classicism of the Georgian period. The flat façades of the structures give a restrained nuance to the whole arrangement which belies the whimsical pink color used. Over the door of the central Public Building, a decorative arched window (fig 7.7) links the structure to the mature Georgian style.<sup>25</sup> The windows of the Public Buildings employ stone lintels with an unusual triple keystone arrangement in the center (fig. 7.8). This motif probably came from a source found in an architectural pattern book of the period or possibly the builders

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<sup>23</sup>Richard Kent, ed., *Letters from the Bahamas Islands Written in 1823-4* (London: John Culmer, 1948), 35. These letters were written by a Miss Hart to a friend in the United States. She describes a dance held at the Public Buildings.

<sup>24</sup>Saunders and Cartwright, 19; Dodge, 6; Russell, 6. All of these sources make the connection between the Public Buildings in Nassau and Tryon's Palace in New Bern, North Carolina. After visiting both structures, I find there to be a superficial resemblance between them insofar as they both employ an open, horseshoe shaped grouping with three buildings.

<sup>25</sup>Carole Rifkind, *A Field Guide to American Architecture* (New York: New American Library, 1980), 19.

created this as an added decorative touch. The entire arrangement suggests an orderly, governmental mind set. The hegemony of the Loyalists at this point in the history of the Bahamas remains visible in the Public Buildings.

The older house forms of the dominant elite which remain in Nassau from the Loyalist period demonstrate the durability of aesthetic tastes developed during early adulthood. People inculcate aesthetic preferences very early in their childhood and they remain in the fabric of their personal tastes throughout their lives. If the Public Buildings reflect the ideas of stability in government, stylistic choices in architecture for the Loyalists had to by necessity reflect the changeable nature of their many experiences. One of the earliest private residences built in Nassau by a Loyalist acquired the name of Balcony House (fig. 7.9) because of its distinctive cantilevered balcony. The construction date of the house remains undetermined, but a structure appears on this site on an early map of the town from 1788.<sup>26</sup> The builder of the two-story house used American soft cedar to construct Balcony House. This proved an exception in building in Nassau; after this time most houses were constructed of limestone and coral. The distinctive knee braces supporting the balcony (fig. 7.10) suggest the work of a ship's carpenter because of their shape and level of craftsmanship.<sup>27</sup> The cantilevered balcony also infers that the builder saw this in St. Augustine (fig. 7.11) where balconies of this type had arrived with Spanish builders to the region. These wood balconies had seen centuries of use in Islamic

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<sup>26</sup>Brochure from the Department of Archives the Bahamas.

<sup>27</sup> *Visual Dictionary of Ships and Sailing* (New York: Dorling Kindersley, 1991), 18. In old wooden ships certain sections of the keel and transom (the back of the ship) had parts with this shape to support the overhanging portions of the upper deck.

Spain.<sup>28</sup> The transference of this particular form seemed feasible as carpenters from East Florida also migrated to Nassau. For example, David Ross's death, announced in the *Bahama Gazette*, noted his occupation as carpenter and former place of residence as East Florida.<sup>29</sup> Other wooden elements, such as the curved railing on the step's landing (7.12), reinforce the conjecture that a shipwright worked at the site. Ship like elements in wood construction remained a phenomenon in Bahamian architecture throughout the history of wood craftsmanship in the region.

Balcony House's wood elements make it unique in the architecture of the capital city of the Bahamas. The durability of limestone and coral made these the prevailing materials used to assemble new houses, although wood, a cheaper alternative, continued to be used. One structure which demonstrated the durability of limestone remains in use into the twenty-first century. Magna Carta House (fig. 7.13) became the home of the loyalist Aaron Dixon after he purchased the land it sits on in 1785. By 1802, Dixon resided at his splendid new residence. Its limestone construction withstood the virulent qualities of the climate. It must have its antecedents in the house forms of St. Augustine as its orientation, unlike that found in the Georgian style, faces inward. A classic St. Augustine house orients itself around the courtyard of the structure, such as seen at Magna Carta house (fig. 7.14).<sup>30</sup> This motif established itself in Spain in architecture due

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<sup>28</sup>Elsbeth K. Gordon, *Florida's Colonial Architectural Heritage* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), 150.

<sup>29</sup> *Bahama Gazette* (New Providence) 24 September to 1 November 1785.

<sup>30</sup>Residents would spend time in the cool shade offered by the protection of the loggia in the summer and rooms opened off of the courtyard.

to centuries of warfare.<sup>31</sup> The street façade remains protected and fairly plain while most decoration occurs in the courtyard area. The similarities of the garden entrance to the one at the Gonzalez-Alvarez house (fig. 7.15) in St. Augustine reinforce the possible antecedents of this structure. Magna Carta lacks the symmetry of the Georgian style and possibly represents the best transference of the St. Augustine style.

Loyalists and their descendents continued to build in Nassau well into the nineteenth century. The influence of their aesthetic preferences remained strong even after additional influences from outside sources. The wealthier planters who left Nassau and lived on the Out Islands took these forms with them, but on the Out Islands the inclusion of more practical solutions in building by slaves marked another mutation of the styles which developed. Married with traditional folk architecture or vernacular architecture of the borderlands and coastal regions of the southeastern United States, Out Island builders developed their own interpretation of what their built world should resemble.

The Loyalists eagerly began building on their newly acquired land on the Out Islands and for the brief time that many of them spent in the Bahamas they accomplished a great deal. While examining the architecture in the region, it becomes obvious that two distinct styles developed under the Loyalists' direction: the seafarers of the northern Bahamas relied on a wood building technology while the southern plantation owners and their slaves developed a tabby type of construction. The northern islands of Abaco and Eleuthera became islands whose inhabitants developed patterns in building dominated by

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<sup>31</sup> Pamela Gosner, *Caribbean Baroque: Historic Architecture of the Spanish Antilles* (Colorado: Passeggiata Press, 1996), 27.



wood working skills due to their links with the sea. The small cays of the Abacos contain some of the best examples of the aesthetic brought to the Bahamas by the Loyalists. Wood became the dominant material in house building because of the availability of the resource; today the island of Great Abaco still contains reserves of wood and lumbering continues to be a part Abaco's economy. The entire land area of the Abaco chain only contains six hundred forty-nine square miles and virtually all of this land rests on a limestone and coral base. The poor quality of the soil led the new settlers to engage in industries which relied on the sea, such as fishing and wrecking. While the industries flourished, by necessity the Abaconians became skilled boat builders in order to continue their main sources of work for revenue. The craftsman of the period transferred their skill in wood working into architecture as many shipwrights had the skills to work as carpenter-joiners. The ship lap siding (fig. 7.16) which completes many of the homes' exteriors in the Abacos bears that name because of its relation to ship building.

The Wyannie Malone Museum's quarters, in Hope Town Abaco (fig. 7.17), stands as a testament to the skills of Abaco's builders. Although this house contains the Museum's collection, Wyannie Malone<sup>32</sup> never lived here. As far as this study can ascertain, her home no longer exists. The building's actual inhabitants were descendents of Malone. It typifies the cottage style Conch house which arose in the islands of the Abacos. The siding, configuration of a hall and parlor type house, along with an unusual roofline and dormer windows all mark this as an Abaco structure. Houses of this type usually employed a three room spatial relationship, on the bottom floor, set within a box

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<sup>32</sup>The history of Wyannie Malone can be found in Chapter Three.

like foot print. The three rooms on the first floor consisted of the parlor, a bedroom, and a sitting room which was also called a shed. The dormer windows on the attic space allowed the circulation of air into the attic which the occupants used as one large room or two smaller rooms. The angle of the roofline (fig. 7.18) appears to have been an innovation in Bahamian building although this particular slant existed in houses in North Carolina (fig. 7.19).<sup>33</sup> This observation overturns the assumption that the Abacos resemble New England. Many visitors to the island note this and comment on the similarity but, they fail to recognize the fluid nature of a seafaring community. The shipbuilders of the colonial world traveled to many coastal areas. Similarities in design and plastic adornments seem inevitable.

In the back of the house, the kitchen area would have been detached. This common feature provided relief from the heat of the cooking fire and also in the event of a fire the detached structure could quickly be pulled down so as not to affect the main house. The placement of an outhouse, as far away from the main house as possible, also provided a practical solution to sanitary issues. The incorporation of the kitchen and plumbing facilities into the main structure only occurred in the twentieth century in most of the Out Islands.<sup>34</sup> A cistern (fig. 7.20)) in the backyard of the Malone Museum

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<sup>33</sup>I have seen this roof angle in Halifax, North Carolina. The Constitution-Burgess house has the slight change in pitch seen in the houses in Hope Town. This pitch change usually indicated a later addition, but in this case this is not true. The most practical explanation for this feature in Abaco and North Carolina would be that it allowed more head room. These attics were used as bedrooms to accommodate a large family.

<sup>34</sup>The kitchen is still detached from many main house structures in the Out Islands which only recently received electricity. My Aunt, who lives in Long Island, Bahamas only received electricity in 1995 and her kitchen still remains detached from the main house so that she keeps her house cool.

provides an insight into the main problem facing the settlers on the small cays of the Abacos. Although Great Abaco had a fresh water source, the outer cays had none. Despite the lack of fresh water, the Loyalists who chose to move to Hope Town did so due to its close proximity to Elbow Reef. Here they lived close to the best fishing in the region and later practiced wrecking on the reef.<sup>35</sup> In this particular photo, the cistern sits next to the kitchen. Its limestone construction proceeded in the following manner: first a hole was dug; the builders then lined the hole with slabs of stone, usually eight inches thick. Next a brick lining, laid half way up the sides covered the stones; finally, hardwood beams, cut from local wood, were laid across the top to support the covering of cut stone. Then, if desired the builder could have the cistern plastered with lime.<sup>36</sup> The cisterns of Hope Town managed to support the population of the island and still remain the only source of water found on Elbow Cay.<sup>37</sup>

The houses of Hope Town appear to bear little resemblance to the high Georgian style favored in Nassau, but the builders still employed an inherent sense of symmetry which related to this conservative mode in building. The structures either have one door set in the middle of their façade (fig. 7.21), or multiple doors set a proscribed distance apart in order to help balance the façade (fig. 7.22). Dormer windows also reinforce the impression of harmonious proportions in many of these fine old homes (fig. 7.23). These

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<sup>35</sup> Steve Dodge and Vernon Malone, *A Guide and History of Hope Town* (Illinois: White Sound Press, 1990), 12.

<sup>36</sup> Byrle Patterson Malone, "Essays of Hope Town" (Hope Town, Abaco: Wyannie Malone Historical Museum).

<sup>37</sup> The technology of cistern building developed in the Abacos helped the Bahamians who later migrated to Key West. They took this knowledge with them and then used it in Key West which also has no water source except for rain.

windows set within the forward slope of the roof helped to ventilate the attic and to add living space to the small houses. The Loyalists adapted the Georgian cottage in the Abacos to suit their needs in the harsh climate.

The Loyalists also began to develop Green Turtle Cay, located in the Abacos but closer to the mainland of Great Abaco due to the narrowing of the Abaco sound at this point, after the overall decline in the Loyalist population in the Bahamas; Loyalists' influence in architecture did not wane with the departure of a large number of them in 1788.<sup>38</sup> The remaining Loyalists in the Abacos were the poorest in the communities who could not afford to depart after their initial investment of immigrating to the region. Instead, many of the intrepid few who remained eventually married seafarers from Harbour Island, Eleuthera, situated south of the Abacos. Eleuthera had the first English settlers in the Bahamas who arrived in 1648.<sup>39</sup> The Loyalists left in the Abacos embraced the Conch lifestyle and learned to survive the harsh conditions presented to them in their new home.<sup>40</sup>

New Plymouth became the main settlement on Green Turtle Cay and the most prosperous. Visiting the Albert Lowe Museum, gives more insight into the evolution of the Loyalists' stories. The Lowes became some of the most intrepid seamen of the area

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<sup>38</sup> Steve Dodge, *Abaco: A History of an Out Island and Its Cays*, 2d. ed. (Illinois: White Sound Press, 1995), 49.

<sup>39</sup> Everild Young, *Eleuthera: the Island Called Freedom* (London: Regency Press, 1966), 54.

<sup>40</sup> Sandra Riley, *Homeward Bound: A History of the Bahama Islands to 1850 with a Definitive Study of Abaco in the American Loyalist Plantation Period* (St. Petersburg, Florida: Byron Kenedy and Co., 1983; reprint, Miami: Island Research, 1985), 193 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

and the cottage constructed (fig. 7.24) typically used the features already extant in the architecture of the Abacos. The centered doorway on the façade with the two dormer windows reflects the evolution of the Conch's inculcation of the Georgian adherence to symmetry. The porch skews this symmetrical composition, but the practicality of outdoor living space required this adjustment. Across the street from the Museum (fig. 7.25), a large two-story house reflects the prosperity eventually found on the cay by the inhabitants. By the middle of the eighteenth century, Green Turtle Cay gained preeminence as the wrecking capital of the region.<sup>41</sup> The arrangement of this stacked, two-storied house required more labor and technical skills; the owners of the structure needed more capital to attempt this construction. After examining the house, this configuration clearly adheres to the rationale behind the Georgian style. Its severe symmetry gives this structure a solid, static appearance. The triple stacking of the windows and doorways (fig. 7.26) relies on repetition to convey the immutable nature of the Loyalist/Conch aesthetic. The pedimented gable on the double porch shows the continued influence of the southern seaboard of America. The pediment motif came out of the Greek revival movement which became popular in the United States in the 1830s.<sup>42</sup> This porch style with this type of pediment arrangement possibly evolved in the West Indies, but its origins in folk architecture remain obscure.<sup>43</sup> The orientation of the house was suited to the narrow lots found in the center of Green Turtle Cay. The shape

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 196.

<sup>42</sup>Virginia and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1984), 90.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

and configuration would remain a popular solution to land usage and would transfer to Key West (fig. 7.27).

These types of wooden structures repeatedly appear throughout the northern portion of the Bahamas. The Harbour Islanders used the Georgian innovations brought to the Bahamas with the Loyalists (fig. 7.28). Even though Harbour Island had been settled much earlier, the fluid nature of the mariner life made incorporating diverse elements into an acknowledged aesthetic simpler. The original settlers of Eleuthera settled on the main island in the seventeenth century.<sup>44</sup> They quickly spread out to the surrounding cays of Harbour Island and Spanish Wells. On Eleuthera, as well as on the cays mentioned, the existence of the Loyalists' influence survives. For example, on Spanish Wells the small Georgian cottages of the inhabitants continue to flourish as an established aesthetic of the islanders (fig. 7.29). On the mainland of Eleuthera, two storied, pedimented structures with symmetrical arrangements of windows and doors, as seen in Green Turtle Cay, still exist (fig. 7.30). Through their architecture, the people of the northern islands of the Bahamas continue to attest to the strength of the aesthetic preferences formed during this period precipitated by the Loyalists' move from East Florida to the Bahamas.

The southern Out Islands developed different architectural forms which must be seen as a product of the plantation experience. A definite split in the trajectory of architectural mutations exists at the point when the more prosperous Loyalists chose agricultural endeavors over maritime occupations. Many of the people in this portion of the population refused to accept the Conch ways of life. Consequently, many of them did not remain on the Out Islands as the prospect of rich returns never materialized from their

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<sup>44</sup>Craton and Saunders, 77.

agricultural projects and as they left, their neglected plantation buildings simply faded into the terrain. Instead, the slave population brought with them skills developed in plantation building and the pyramid house which developed as the main house form reflects their input. The structures erected proved more of a continuation of the slave architectural traditions developed in the American South. When using the designation of plantation architecture in a project of this type, difficulties in interpretation by the reader exist. Most people associate the grand structures of the Antebellum South with this designation; a type of Tara-like picture springs to mind. Instead, the structures of the planters tended to reflect rudimentary attempts to duplicate great houses and most of them soon fell into disrepair. The hall and parlor style house married to a triangulated, hipped roof formed the pyramid house (fig. 7.31); these were the houses of the poor whites and blacks of the Out Islands.

Southward from Eleuthera lies Cat Island, reportedly originally called Columba by the Spanish.<sup>45</sup> It contained the highest land in the Bahamas and was considered to have good land for livestock and large savannas. By the time the Loyalists arrived, Cat Island had a number of sheep and wild hogs on it.<sup>46</sup> Andrew Deveau, Jr., the great liberator of the Bahamas from Spanish occupation during the American Revolution,

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<sup>45</sup> Answers to Query from the Right Honorable Lord Commissioners for Trade and Plantations. Received with Captain Rogers Letter of 14 October 1731, CO 23/3 f.19. This reply notes Cat Island was the first land in America discovered by Columbus. It was also considered to have a settlement of Spaniards on it before they found Hispaniola and Cuba.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

decided to acquire his family's land grant on Cat Island<sup>47</sup> Deveaux and his father Andrew Deveaux Sr. lost their estate in South Carolina and moved all of their slaves and livestock to southern Cat Island.<sup>48</sup> The mansion the family built (fig. 7.32) remains one of the finest plantation ruins in the southern Bahamas. The two storied house bears resemblance to the double houses<sup>49</sup> found in Charleston. The Deveauxs came from South Carolina, where they gained reputations as important planters;<sup>50</sup> their house shows the necessary adjustments made for Out Island building. The hipped roof has dormers for ventilation and at one time porches ran along the side facing the water. The interior beams (fig. 7.33) appeared to have been manufactured from a tropical hardwood (possibly madeira a local wood). The interior door frames (also see fig. 7.33) show the symmetrical arrangements of Georgian space. The lights over the doors commonly occurred in the Georgian homes of South Carolina. The proximity of the slave quarters (fig. 7.34) seen in the lower left corner of this photo suggest a close relationship between master and slave.<sup>51</sup> The

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<sup>47</sup>Craton and Saunders, 170.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>49</sup> Kenneth Severens, *Southern Architecture: 350 Years of Distinctive American Buildings* (New York: Elsevier-Dutton Publishing, 1981), 13. The double house was an expanded version of the famous Charleston single house which possibly came to the Carolinas from Barbados.

<sup>50</sup>Ruth M.L. Bowe, "Colonel Andrew Deveaux, Jr. 1758-1812," *Journal of the Bahamas Historical Society* 5 (October 1983): 29; Samuel Gaillard Stoney, *Plantations of the Carolina Low Country* (New York: Dover Publications, 1989), 28. Stoney's text relates that Deveaux was the neighbor of the Lucas family whose daughter Eliza, with his help, began the establishment of indigo as a major cash crop in South Carolina.

<sup>51</sup> John Michael Vlach, *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 13. Vlach noted that most frequently slave quarters in the south were set apart from the master's house. Most



excellent chimney of the kitchen (fig.7.35) shows a high degree of craftsmanship in its articulated chimney stack traditionally seen in folk architecture of the southern United States. Chimneys in the South by necessity were attached to the outside of the structure in case of fire and to keep the heat level at a minimum. The massing of the chimney suggests a large cooking space which leads to the assumption of a busy plantation.

Another ruin on Cat Island, the Armbrister plantation (fig. 7.36), came about with the arrival of the brothers John and James to the Bahamas as Loyalist exiles in the 1780s. John planted cotton at his plantation on Cat Island. The main house's distinctive arch (fig. 7.37) appears today to have served a functional purpose as it almost seems as if a road led right to it (fig. 7.38) and away from it (fig. 7.39). If this occurred in the ensuing years after the house lay empty could not be ascertained by the examination done by this author; possibly supplies may have come right into the home and the lower floor served as a storage area. The Armbristers prospered because they tried different types of crops and today the family owns a resort on the island. The family<sup>52</sup> eventually made the most profit from exporting sisal. W.E. Armbrister, the son of John,<sup>53</sup> built a small gauge

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scholars commenting on the proximity of Deveaux's slaves' quarters to his house note that this indicated an element of trust between the master and his slaves. I would also like to add that this also took away the autonomy that slaves gained living apart from the master's realm.

<sup>52</sup>Field notes taken during my visit to Cat Island in June of 1997.

<sup>53</sup>W. Armbrister, "A Short History of the Bahamas of Recent Date" (c. 1890), Copy Made from Original in Possession of Sandra Riley, Special Collections, Historical Museum of South Florida, Miami, Florida.

railroad here to transport sisal to his small factory (fig. 7.40)<sup>54</sup> where it was shipped out to be sold. The great plantation houses of the Out Islands have not all survived in as good of condition as these two.<sup>55</sup> Traveling further south down the chain of the Bahamas the search for remains becomes more difficult.

Southwest of Cat Island on Exuma, the Kelsall family received quite a bit of land for their troubles in America. They had forfeited an estate in East Florida and lost hope of ever regaining what they had in Georgia. The Kelsall family had 180 acres on Great Exuma; 100 acres at Master's Harbour in Exuma; 25 acres on a cay located in Exuma's harbor; 340 acres on Rum Cay, and 310 acres on Little Exuma.<sup>56</sup> Little remains of the estate Roger Kelsall and his son John built on their Exuma property. The Hermitage, located on Little Exuma, was the family estate and one small structure remains on the site of the old plantation. Called the Cotton House by the locals (fig. 7.41), it stands on a hill overlooking the ocean. Roger Kelsall supposedly lived here for a short while with his slave mistress.<sup>57</sup> The house had a steeply pitched roof (fig. 7.42) and a cistern connected to the roof system to collect rain water. The attached kitchen (fig. 7.43) does not follow the normal procedure of keeping the kitchen separate in this period, but a

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<sup>54</sup>This structure may or may not be the factory which W.E. Armbrister constructed. I am making this assumption based on the description given to me by a local in 1997 and the remains of what appear to be an old railway bed which led to this area near the settlement of The Village.

<sup>55</sup>I have not been to Cat Island since 1997. I can only speculate as to how the recent severe hurricane seasons affected these two houses.

<sup>56</sup>Parrish, 360.

<sup>57</sup>Robert Douglas, *Island Heritage: Architecture of the Bahamas* (Nassau: Darkstream Publications, 1992), 61.

separate exterior door in the kitchen suggests the attachment of the kitchen to the main house at a later date. The rear of the main building (also see fig. 7.42) lacked glass in the windows and had three hinged doors which when opened allowed the sea breeze to cool the house. Shutters protected the windows while the doorways employed two planks closed by a bar from the outside. The front door contained the most decorative elements of the structure (fig. 7.44), with panels on the interior. The front and back doors faced each other to allow cross ventilation and all of the rooms opened onto each other in order to ensure the circulation of air. The structures simplicity allowed it to survive the ravages of time. The Kelsall family did not prosper in the Bahamas and in 1812 when John Kelsall died from fever at the age of thirty six the estate was put up for sale.<sup>58</sup>

South of Exuma, one the largest plantation islands lies close to one of the most important passages in the Bahamas: the Crooked Island passage. It seemed an ideal spot to develop as it allowed the close passage of ships. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Crooked Island had forty plantations at one time and about 3000 acres in cotton cultivation. The estates of the planters attained good returns even after a chenille bug infestation ruined the cotton crops in 1788. Planters in the Bahamas continued to grow the crop until 1810, but they could not overcome the fundamental problem: the soil in the Bahamas could not sustain large, agricultural endeavors.<sup>59</sup> The years of prosperity saw some of the Loyalists like William Moss of Crooked Island accumulate quite a bit of territory. On his death, his Crooked Island property, called Prospect Hill, contained a

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<sup>58</sup> Parrish, 365.

<sup>59</sup> Craton and Saunders, 197.

two-story wooden frame building which included a stone-built kitchen, cellar and piazzas, in addition to a barn, four office houses, and a boat house.<sup>60</sup> Another Moss family member, Henry, purchased the Great Hope Plantation in 1818. Great Hope had already been developed by a former owner who also built the house.<sup>61</sup> By the time this author examined this site, the manor house had deteriorated to the point that speculative judgments as to the look of its original façade (fig. 7.45) have to be made. It appeared as if two doors pierced the entrance. The pillars toward the west of the house (fig. 7.46) possibly belonged to some type of entrance way. The first floor's remains expose the aggregate rubble used to mortar stones together. The second-story window embrasures (fig. 7.47), which by looking at them suggest this part of the structure was added on at a later date, have a smooth stucco still adhered to them in most places. The large chimney (fig. 7.48), visible over the top of the trees, points to the Loyalist presence as they brought chimneys to the Bahamas: the Conchs cooked over open fires.<sup>62</sup> People reported that a portion of the great house had inhabitants in the late nineteenth century. When arriving to the property in 2000 (as seen in fig. 7.45), the encroachment of the surrounding bush made it almost impossible to reach the site. A clear path reaches

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<sup>60</sup>Peters, 154.

<sup>61</sup>Paul Farnsworth and Laurie A. Wilkie, "Excavations at Marine Farm and Great Hope Plantation, Crooked Island, Bahamas," *Journal of the Bahamas Historical Society* 20 (October 1998): 22-23.

<sup>62</sup>Peters, 185. Detached kitchens were common in the Out Islands of the Bahamas and are still in use. Before the advent of propane fuel and electricity, Bahamians cooked on open fires. This memory survives in many of the population who grew up on the Out Islands. My mother, from Long Island, Bahamas, remembers cooking on an open fire in the yard.

through to the property, but like many of the old Loyalists' houses this one has faded into the vegetation of the Bahamian landscape.

The Crooked Island group of cays also contained one of the most prosperous of the Out Islands in the eighteenth century, Fortune Island. After the failure of plantations some of those planters in the area who remained looked to deserted Fortune Island's salt pans as a way to make money. Salt raking in the southeastern Bahamas proved very profitable and more salt was shipped out of the Bahamas and the Caribbean Islands than any other product.<sup>63</sup> The main settlement of Albert Town, on Fortune Island, flourished after salt raking combined with its advantageous position bordering a passage that many ships used on their way to Cuba and Jamaica.<sup>64</sup> In 1822, a visitor noted that "Fortune Island is thickly settled, there are two windmills for ginning cotton of which quantities are produced, the South side is rocky, but near salt pond, is a sandy beach."<sup>65</sup>

The increase of Fortune Island's population by the late 1800s relied on its importance as a stop-over for vessels. It became a port of call for the New York based Atlas Steamer Company and people would arrive there by sailing vessel and wait for sometimes up to a week for the New York ship.<sup>66</sup> The magistrate L. D. Powles noted that

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<sup>63</sup>Mark Kurlansky, *Salt: A World History* (New York: Penguin Books, 2002), 211.

<sup>64</sup> Paul Albury, *The Story of the Bahamas* (London: Macmillan Education, LTD, 1975; reprint, London Macmillan education, 1981), 201.

<sup>65</sup> James Freeman Curtis, Sea Log Entry 23 August 1822, Curtis-Stevenson Family Papers, 1775-1920, MS. N-288, Box 12, Vol. 2, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

<sup>66</sup>L.D. Powles, *The Land of the Pink Pearl: Recollections of Life in the Bahamas* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Limited, 1888; reprint, Nassau: Media Publishing LTD, 1996), 129 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

it could possibly “take the place of Nassau as a centre of trade of the whole colony.”<sup>67</sup>

The burgeoning population on the Island built many structures based upon the Loyalist’s aesthetics. Due to the reportedly pious nature of the inhabitants, the erection of a large church took place (fig. 7.49). It attests to the once large population as it sat approximately 3000 people during the peak of Fortune Island’s boom.<sup>68</sup> The section of the church which employs the red door and red shutters (fig. 7.50) has been the only section maintained as the congregation consisted of only the remaining fifteen people on the island. The division of that section became necessary as the population diminished and aged. While walking through Long Cay (fig. 7.51), this author noticed ruins all around. Taking a trek through the community, trying to follow the old overgrown streets, will eventual lead to the jail (fig. 7.52). Its unusual shape echoes the shape of the jail built by the Loyalists in Nassau (fig. 7.53), reinforcing the importance of this cay’s location.<sup>69</sup> This hexagonal shape made the perfect prison. It required only one jailor seated in the center of the structure to watch all of the prisoners. This jail’s size, very large for the Out Islands, leads to the conclusion that the sailors and stevedores waiting for work created difficulties for the local magistrate and the cost-prohibitive construction of the jail was

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<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 130.

<sup>68</sup>This number was told to me by a local of Fortune Island (today called Long Cay). The number of people this church could seat was impossible to determine as it was in such poor condition and most of it was closed off.

<sup>69</sup>Russell, 9; Saunders and Cartwright, 19. The jail in Nassau was constructed by Joseph Eve, a Cat Island resident and Loyalist. Its decorative appearance with keystones over the windows reflected the importance of the capital. The use of this shape, Eve employed an octagonal form, may have antecedents in the Powder Magazine in Williamsburg, Virginia. James Gibbs’s architectural pattern book, *Book of Architecture*, which was widely used in the colonies, had a round structure in it, the Radcliffe Camera structure at Oxford. This may be the inspiration for these types of rounded structures.

necessary. The inspiration of the Loyalist buildings permeated all portions of the islands even remote spots such as Fortune Island.

The impact of the large number of slaves the Loyalists brought with them had a far reaching affect on the built world of the Bahamas. They physically constructed the world that the elites attempted to recreate and they imposed their own aesthetic on the folk architecture which evolved in the Out Islands. The building efforts by one Out Island plantation slave testifies to the reliance on the skill of slave workers by the Loyalists: one slave built the overseer's house, four slave cabins, a carpenter's shed, and a cotton house.<sup>70</sup> In the southern colonies of America, the separation of the slaves' quarters from the sphere of the master's great house characterized the plantation world that created a sense of separateness reflected in the slaves' architectural preferences. The slaves used house forms which had their roots in Africa. In the beginnings of the use of chattel labor, slave houses were for the most part "small rectangular huts constructed with mud walls and thatched roofs"<sup>71</sup> These rudimentary huts evolved into the hall-and-parlor houses of the American slaves. They came under the influence of Anglo-American tastes for rectangular structures. They had rectangular floor plans with two rooms. In the southern colonies, the larger of the two rooms served as the main living area, which at times included a kitchen, and the smaller room served as the bedroom.<sup>72</sup> Slave artisans arriving in the Bahamas duplicated the hall-and-parlor style they had developed in America. This form dominated the slave world across the plantation sphere of the wider Caribbean.

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<sup>70</sup>Peters, 122.

<sup>71</sup>Vlach, 158.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

When looking at the type of structures under discussion, the symmetry of the structures devised becomes apparent to the viewer. The doorway in these hall-and-parlor type structures sits in the middle of the façade leading right into the hall or larger room. This arrival into the main living area upon entering a structure had little precedence in high Georgian structures mode because in those a long narrow hall bifurcated the structure into two symmetrical halves. The situating of the door in the center makes little sense in the hall-and-parlor plan. It requires that the entrance abuts the interior wall dividing the space. Thus, the central door on the façade in no way reflects the configuration of the interior space. Aesthetic preferences superseded practicality of function in this feature of the hall-and-parlor style house.

The slave cabin all over the Americas developed out of an adjustment to new circumstances. The building technology varied with the available materials. The slaves in the Bahamas brought with them construction knowledge gleaned from a variety of circumstances. In Florida, the slave artisans would have seen and learned tabby construction as well as thatching. The use of tabby at the Kingsley Plantation on Fort George Island in northeast Florida for the slave cabins (fig. 7.54) shows the slave artisans had adapted to the use of this material. The reconstructed cabin at this site (fig. 7.55) shows the symmetrical arrangement of windows and doors which dominates southern slave architecture. The row of slave dwellings (fig. 7.56) sits away from the main house, but is still within sight of it. At first, Kingsley had to provide temporary shelters for his slaves but while the men did the hard construction work the “woman gathered palmetto



fronds to fashion African-style thatch roofs for temporary quarters.”<sup>73</sup> The unwilling immigrants had the skills to devise their own temporal space. This transference of an African, Anglo-American aesthetic continued on unabated after the end of slavery.

The slaves and then freed men and women on the Out Islands continued living on abandoned Loyalists’ properties or squatted on empty crown land. Even before the time of Emancipation in the Bahamas, many plantation owners simply abandoned their properties and left. The black workers of the Bahamas adjusted to dictating their own lives quickly and they represented the majority of the new Bahamians in the old southern plantation islands and cays who evolved out of the Loyalist period. Their histories remain obscured by the lack of material generated by them in the formative years of the Loyalists dominance of Bahamian society. Thus, an examination of architecture becomes another lens for explaining the development of this society which hovered at the periphery of an all encompassing institution such as the plantation complex.

Starting back at the Crooked Island region (fig. 7.57), the ruins of the small structure depicted reveal the reliance on stone technology of the Out Islanders. Unfortunately, the difficulties of tracing the original owners of vernacular architecture remain enormous. An abandoned structure presents even greater challenges. The style must tell the history of the structure and this particular building has its inception rooted in the slaves’ experiences. Traveling back up the Bahamas chain to Long Island (fig. 7.58) one finds many of the houses there rely on the hall-and-parlor type of home as a solution to affordable and practical housing. A small house in Cat Island (fig. 7.59) shows a strong

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<sup>73</sup>Daniel L. Schafer, *Anna Kingsley* (Florida: St. Augustine Historical Society, 1994; revised, Florida: St. Augustine Historical Society, 1997), 27.

resemblance to the slave architecture of the American South. These houses lack chimneys but still display the centralized plan with its symmetrical placement of openings. Also on Cat Island, this structure (fig. 7.60) shows the addition of a raised front porch, possibly to accommodate a cistern underneath the porch. The porch set on the façade of homes may have been an invention of the West Indian experience as porches or verandahs appear in the American colonies after contact with places such as Barbados. It seemed that after 1700 wherever the West Indian traders reached the eastern seaboard of America and around Florida to Louisiana the cottage with verandah form evolved.<sup>74</sup> A small abandoned church outside of Port Howe on Cat Island (fig. 7.61), in the vicinity of the Deveaux House, reemphasizes the dispersion of aesthetic ideas from the dominant elite. The Church of Christ in Port Howe combined the symmetry of the Georgian, the decorative quoining (fig. 7.62) of elite structures and the gabled roof found on folk structures (fig. 7.63); the hipped roof of the high Georgian style proved more expensive and labor intensive to construct. This delightful building demonstrates the creative nature of the islander living in almost total isolation from the rest of the world. Its age would be hard to determine, but its style belongs to an era set within the context of the aesthetics developed in the late eighteenth/early nineteenth centuries.

The island of New Providence never really approximated the concentration of the plantation experience as described on the southern Out Islands of the Bahamas. Instead, Nassau bridged the gap between the northern Bahamians and southern Bahamians. It was where the different factions met and coalesced into the foundations of

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<sup>74</sup> Roger G. Kennedy, *Architecture, Men, Women and Money in America, 1600-1860* (New York: Random House, 1985), 68.

the modern Bahamian's identity. While merchants and the government's officials ruled Nassau's social milieu, some plantations did thrive for awhile on the island. The Clifton Plantation ruins survive in the best condition on Nassau. Their recent excavation provides invaluable data concerning the lives of the inhabitants, mainly the slaves. The slaves' cabins reassert the high level of masonry employed by the builders. The main building (fig. 7.64) dates back to the first owner, John Woods, who received a land grant and built the house in 1788-89. Wood, a Loyalist, then sold the house and returned to St. Mary's, Georgia.<sup>75</sup> The ten or eleven slave cabins which were on Clifton show the hierarchy which developed in the plantation slave system. Married couples were given stone houses with two rooms.<sup>76</sup> The houses were a street's distance away from the great house. They still had roofs on them as late as 1925.<sup>77</sup> The ruins today<sup>78</sup> (fig. 7.66) hold the secret, like all of the small houses found in the Bahamas which follow this form, of Bahamian survival: adaptability.

All of the islands of the Bahamas mutated under the direction of the Loyalists' ambitions. The changed the appearance of the capital and the surrounding Out Islands,

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<sup>75</sup>Parrish, 472. Wood built the house called Orange Hall in St Mary's for his daughter Jane in 1822. Although influenced by the Greek Revival style, this house still bears the mark of the taste for symmetrical buildings fostered by the aesthetic set by the Loyalists' experiences.

<sup>76</sup>Craton and Saunders, 298.

<sup>77</sup>Adderley, Paul L., "The History of The Clifton Plantation, 1788-2000: A radio interview with the Hon. Paul L. Adderley," interview by Wendall K. Jones *Journal of the Bahamas Historical Society* 22 (October 2000): 10.

<sup>78</sup> By the summer of 2006, the ruins had been surrounded by a chain link fence in order to keep intruders from scavenging through them. A guard has also been posted there as the Bahamian government attempts to preserve this site.

but they failed to establish a viable plantation system. The legacy left by the Loyalist elite lies in the ideal of the Georgian aesthetic. The descendants of the Loyalists and their slaves still refer to the style which represented wealth and influence in pre-revolutionary America. The northern islands and the southern islands developed differently as experiences in each area dictated different solutions to surviving in the new land. Neither of these two groups had easy lives, but in their architecture the tale of their struggles and the building solutions they forged lasted into modern times. The irony of Bahamian architectural manifestations lays in the reality: the downtrodden took the aesthetics of the elites and molded them into something new which came to represent an anti-elitists statement. Conch architecture is highly prized today for its individuality and durability, but it continued to impact another small island as the new Conchs of the Bahamas eventually traveled back across the Gulfstream.



Fig. 7.1  
Entranceway to Greycliff  
Captain John Howard Graysmith House  
West Hill Street, Nassau, Bahamas  
Construction Date; c. 1720  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 1992

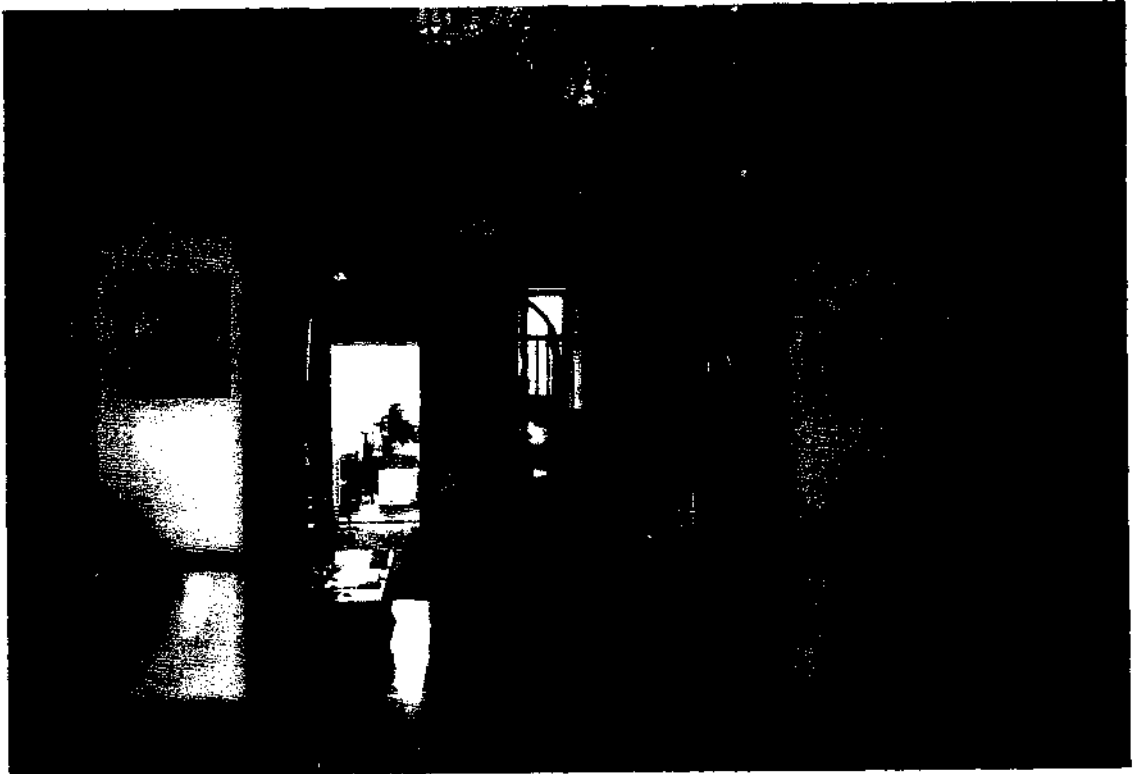
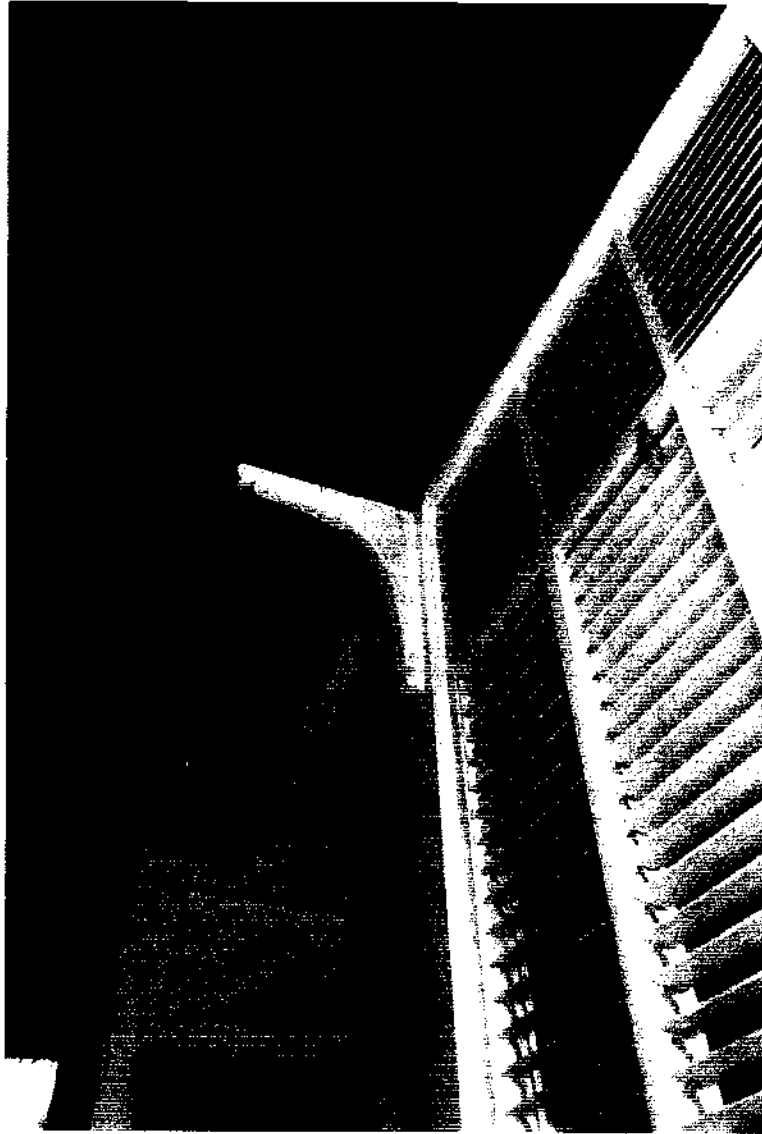


Fig. 7.2  
Greycliff's Interior Hallway  
Captain John Howard Graysmith House  
West Hill Street, Nassau, Bahamas  
Construction Date; c. 1720  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 1992



**Fig. 7.3**  
**Knee Braces, Back Porch of Greycliff**  
**Captain John Howard Graysmith House**  
**West Hill Street, Nassau, Bahamas**  
**Construction Date; c. 1720**  
**Photo by Astrid Whidden**  
**Year Taken: 1992**



Fig. 7.4  
Interior Room at Greycliff  
Captain John Howard Graysmith House  
West Hill Street, Nassau, Bahamas  
Construction Date; c. 1720  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 1992

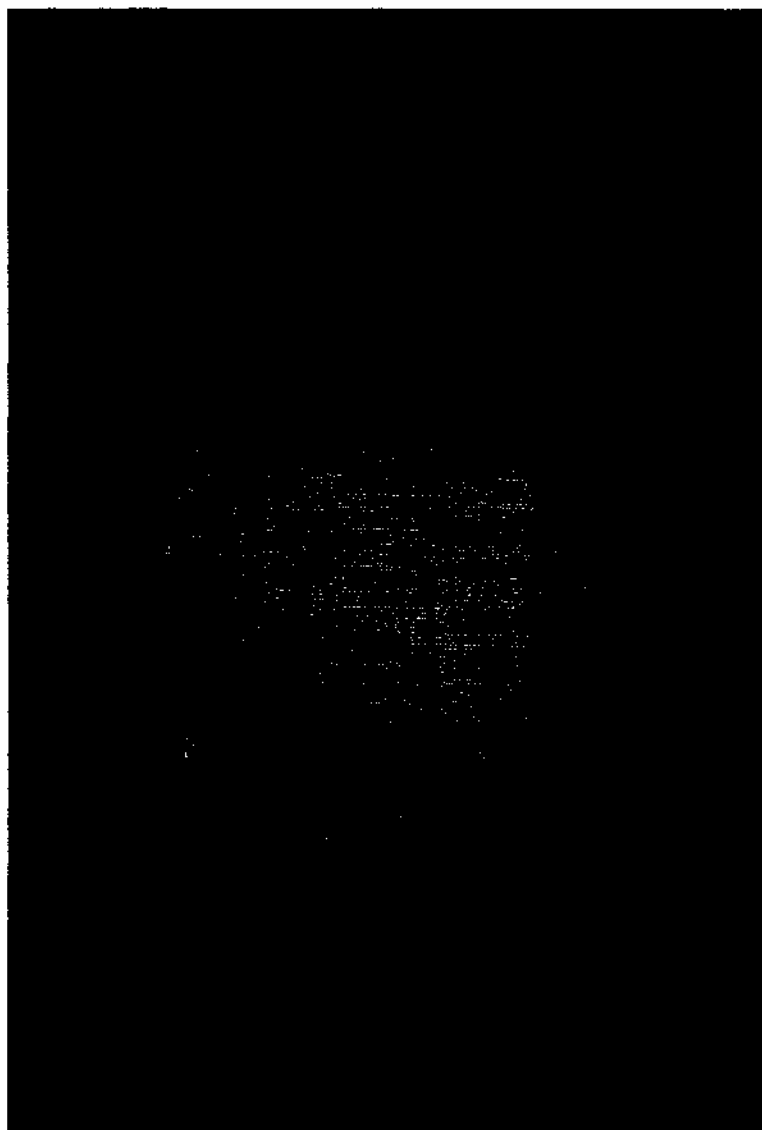




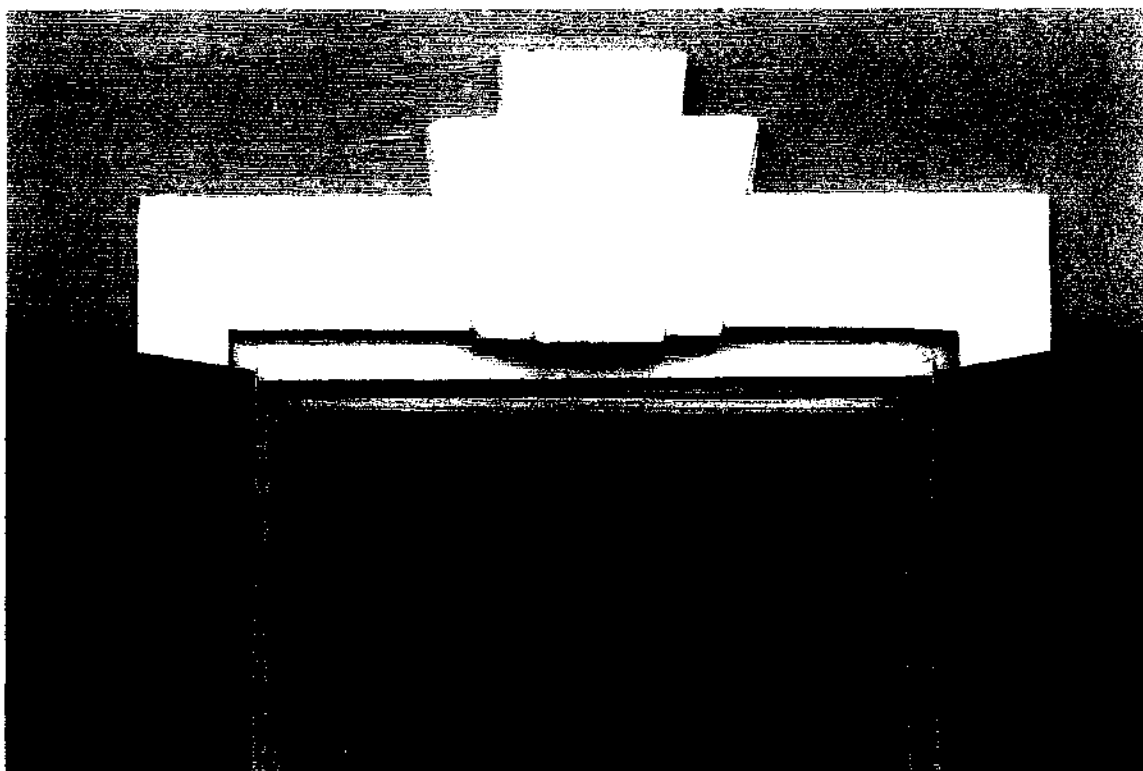
Fig. 7.5  
Public Buildings  
Bay Street, Nassau, Bahamas  
Builder: James Tait  
Construction Date: 1805-1816  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 2006



**Fig. 7.6**  
**Center Pavilion, Public Buildings**  
**Bay Street, Nassau, Bahamas**  
**Builder: James Tait**  
**Construction Date: 1805-1816**  
**Photo by Astrid Whidden**  
**Year Taken: 2006**



**Fig. 7.7**  
**Doorway of Center Pavilion, Public Buildings**  
**Bay Street, Nassau, Bahamas**  
**Builder: James Tait**  
**Construction Date: 1805-1816**  
**Photo by Astrid Whidden**  
**Year Taken: 2006**



**Fig. 7.8**  
**Triple Keystone Lintel, Public Buildings**  
**Bay Street, Nassau, Bahamas**  
**Builder: James Tait**  
**Construction Date: 1805-1816**  
**Photo by Astrid Whidden**  
**Year Taken: 2006**



Fig. 7.9  
Balcony House  
Market Street, Nassau, Bahamas  
Construction Date: c. 1790  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 1993



**Fig. 7.10**  
**Cantilevered Balcony, Balcony House**  
**Market Street, Nassau, Bahamas**  
**Construction Date: c. 1790**  
**Photo by Astrid Whidden**  
**Year Taken: 1993**



Fig. 7.11  
Cantilevered Balcony, Balcony House  
Market Street, Nassau, Bahamas  
Construction Date: c. 1790  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 1993

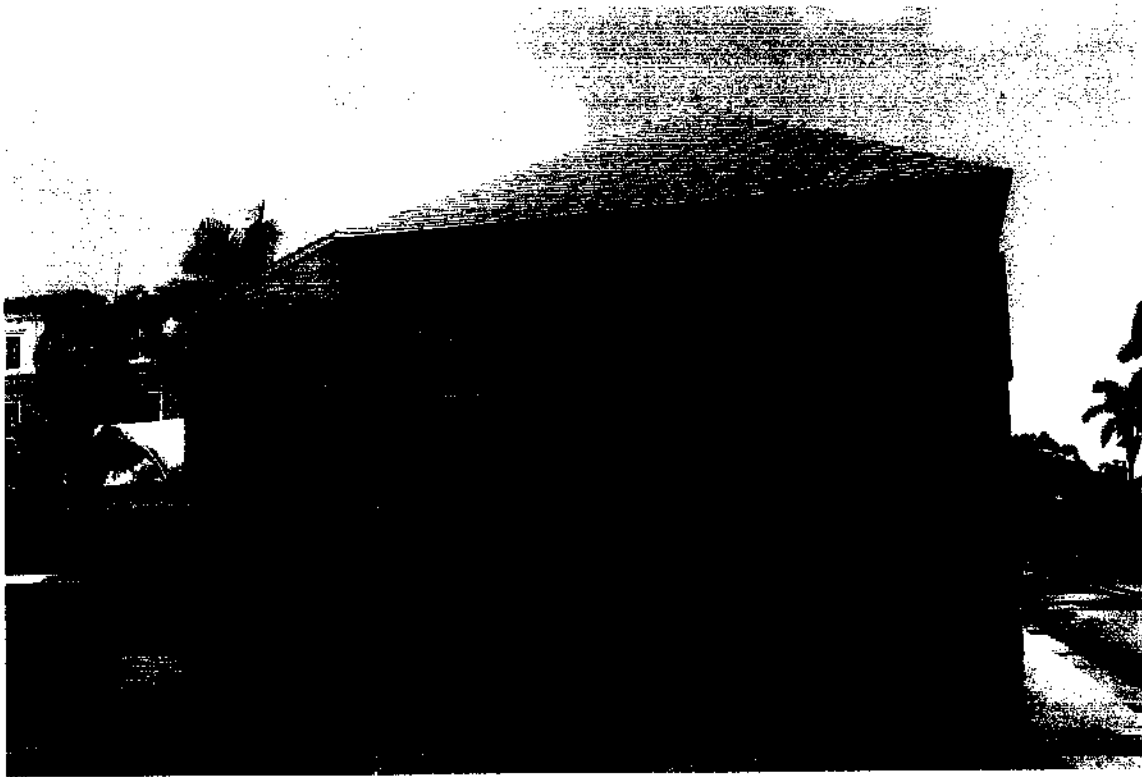


Fig. 7.12  
Front Steps, Balcony House  
Market Street, Nassau, Bahamas  
Construction Date: c. 1790  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 1993





**Fig. 7.13**  
**Magna Carta House**  
**North West Corner of Parliament and Shirley Street**  
**Nassau, Bahamas**  
**Owners: David Rogers (1802); Aaron Dixon (1802-1809)**  
**Construction Date: c. 1802**  
**Photo by Astrid Whidden**  
**Year Taken: 2006**



**Fig. 7.14**  
**Magna Carta House**  
**North West Corner of Parliament and Shirley Street**  
**Nassau, Bahamas**  
**Owners: David Rogers (1802); Aaron Dixon (1802-1809)**  
**Construction Date: c. 1802**  
**Photo by Astrid Whidden**  
**Year Taken: 2006**



Fig. 7.15  
Gonzalez-Alvarez House  
14 St. Francis Street, St. Augustine, Florida  
Construction Date: c. 1723  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 2006



**Fig. 7.16**  
**Example of Ship Lap Siding**  
**Hope Town, Abaco, Bahamas**  
**Photo by Astrid Whidden**  
**Year Taken: 1998**



Fig. 7.17  
Wyannie Malone Museum  
Hope Town, Abaco, Bahamas  
Recent Private Owner: Jack Malone  
Construction Date: c. 1880-1890  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 1994



Fig. 7.18  
Roofline of Wyannie Malone Museum  
Hope Town, Abaco, Bahamas  
Recent Private Owner: Jack Malone  
Construction Date: c. 1880-1890  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 1994



Fig. 7.19  
Constitution-Burgess House  
Halifax, North Carolina  
Construction Date: c. 1790  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 1994



Fig. 7.20  
Cistern of Wyannie Malone Museum  
Hope Town, Abaco, Bahamas  
Recent Private Owner: Jack Malone  
Construction Date: c. 1880-1890  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 1994





Fig. 7.21  
Vernacular Structure  
Hope Town, Abaco, Bahamas  
Construction Date: c. 1940  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 1994



Fig. 7.22  
Vernacular Structure  
Hope Town, Abaco, Bahamas  
Construction Date: c. 1880  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 1994



Fig. 7.23  
Vernacular Structure  
Hope Town, Abaco, Bahamas  
Construction Date: c. 1880  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 1994



Fig. 7.24  
Albert Lowe Museum  
Green Turtle Cay, Abaco, Bahamas  
Construction Date: c. 1870  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 1998



**Fig. 7.25**  
**Two Story Structure**  
**Green Turtle Cay, Abaco, Bahamas**  
**Construction Date: c. 1870**  
**Photo by Astrid Whidden**  
**Year Taken: 1998**



Fig. 7.26  
Façade Two Story Structure  
Green Turtle Cay, Abaco, Bahamas  
Construction Date: c. 1870  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 1998

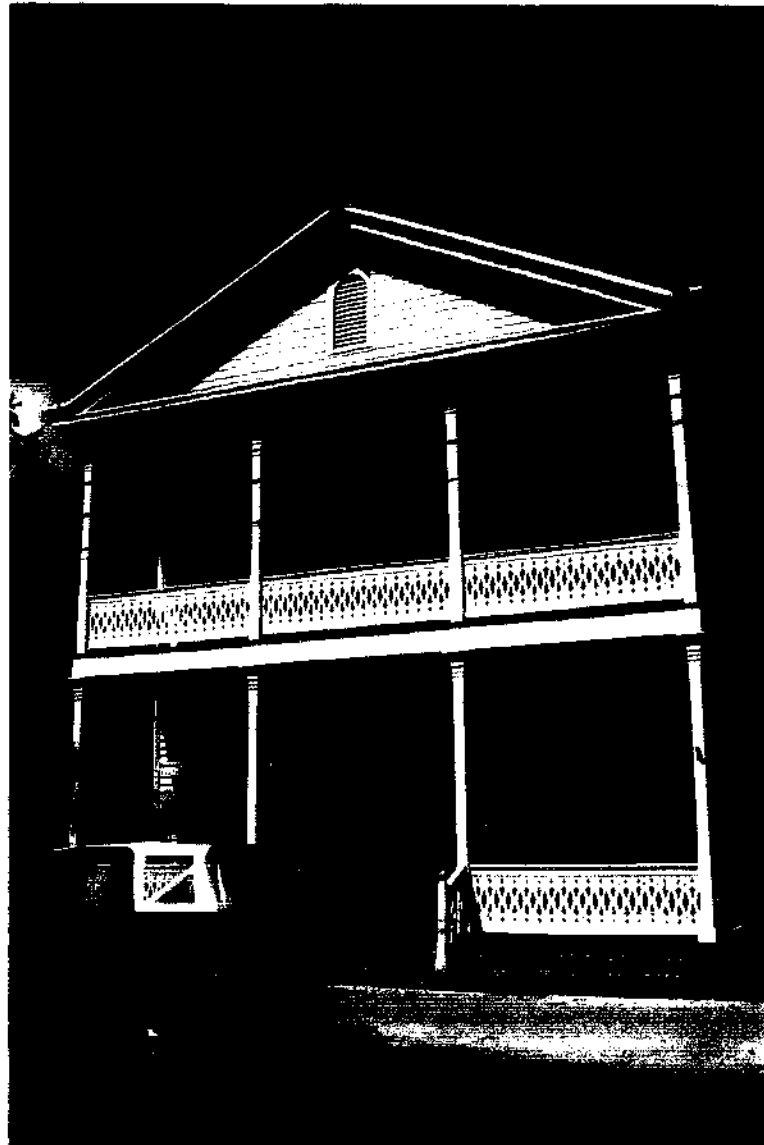


Fig. 7.27  
Two Story Structure  
Key West, Florida  
Construction Date: c. 1900  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 2006

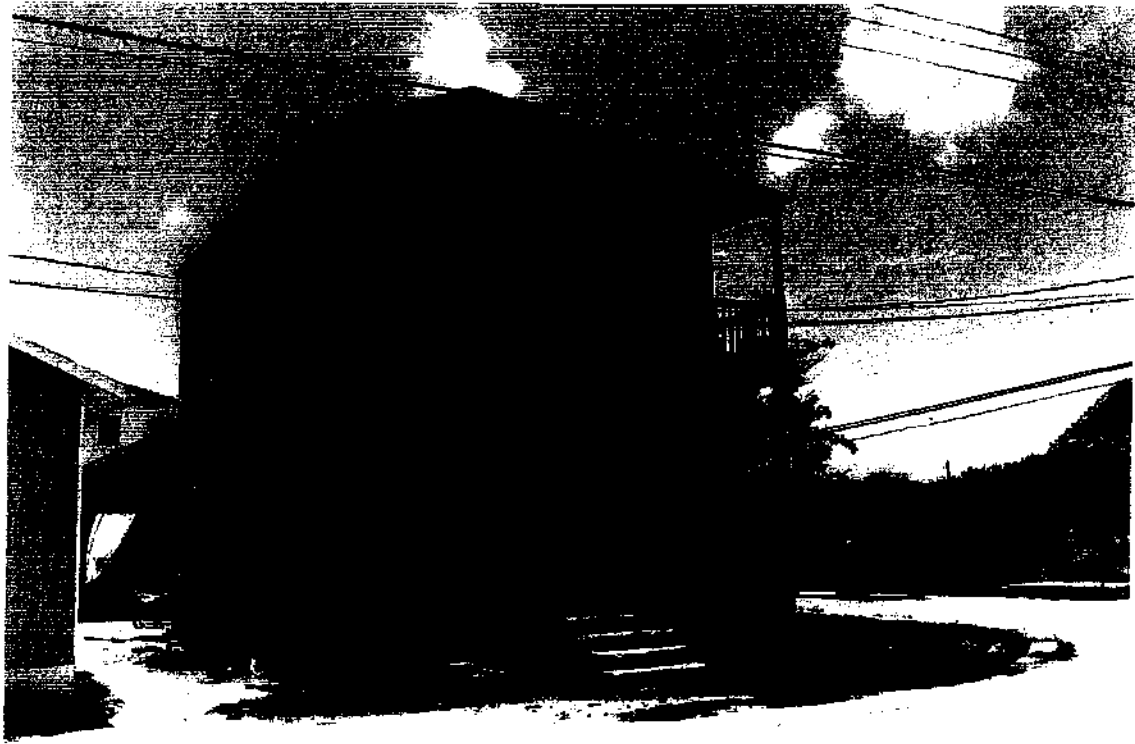


Fig. 7.28  
Loyalist Cottage  
Harbour Island, Eleuthera, Bahamas  
Construction Date: 1797  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 2005





**Fig. 7.29**  
**Georgian Style Cottage**  
**Spanish Wells, Eleuthera, Bahamas**  
**Construction Date: c. 1890**  
**Photo by Astrid Whidden**  
**Year Taken: 2001**



**Fig. 7.30**  
**Two Story Vernacular Structure**  
**Eleuthera, Bahamas**  
**Construction Date: c. 1890**  
**Photo by Astrid Whidden**  
**Year Taken: 2005**

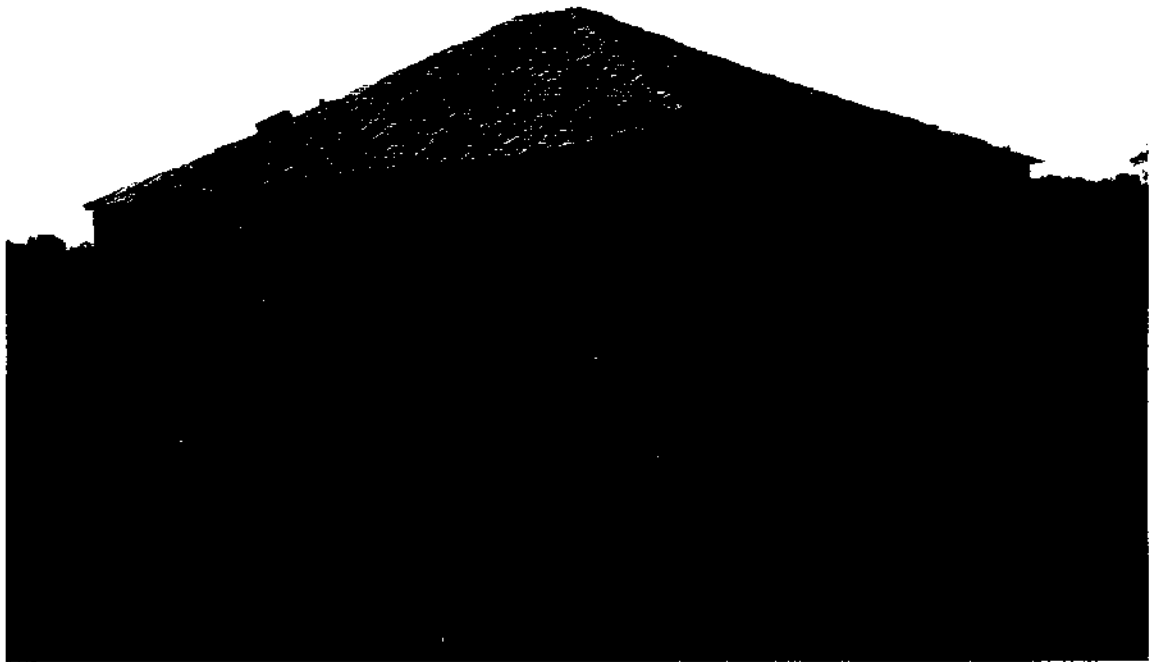


Fig. 7.31  
Pyramid House  
Cat Island, Bahamas  
Construction Date: c. 1850  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 1997



Fig. 7.32  
Deveau House  
Cat Island, Bahamas  
Builder: Andrew Deveau Sr. from South Carolina  
and his sons William, Nathaniel, and John  
Construction Date: c. 1790  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 1997

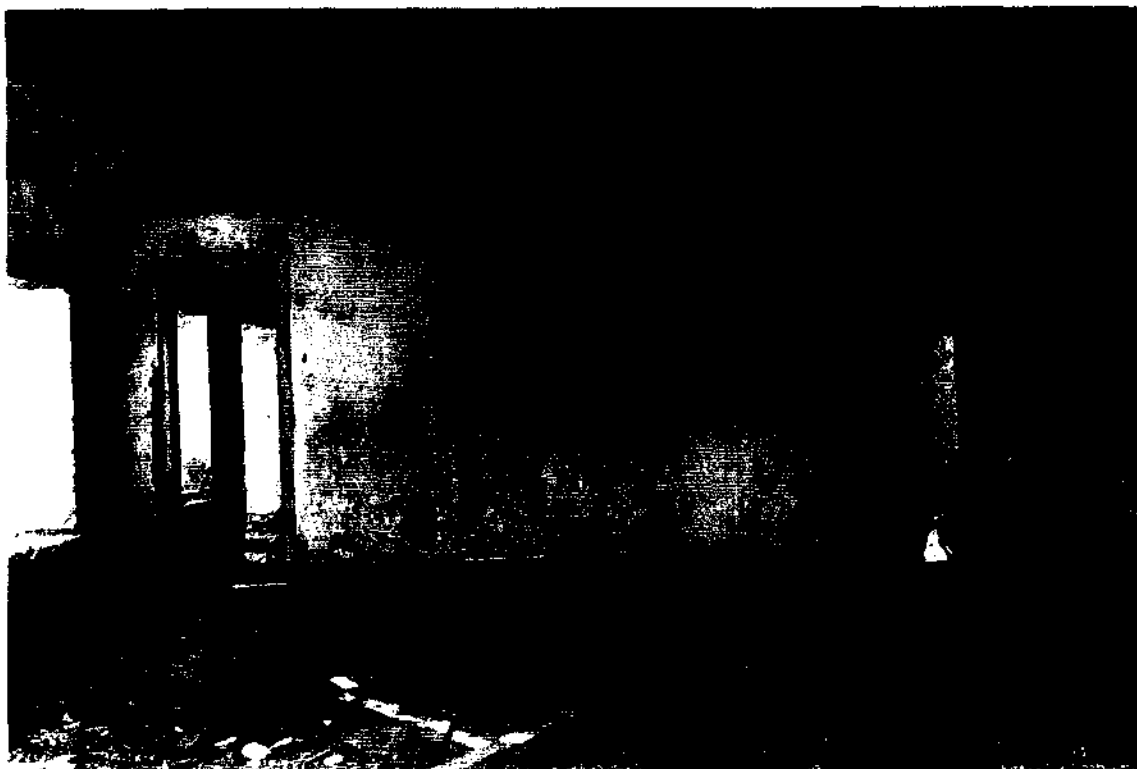
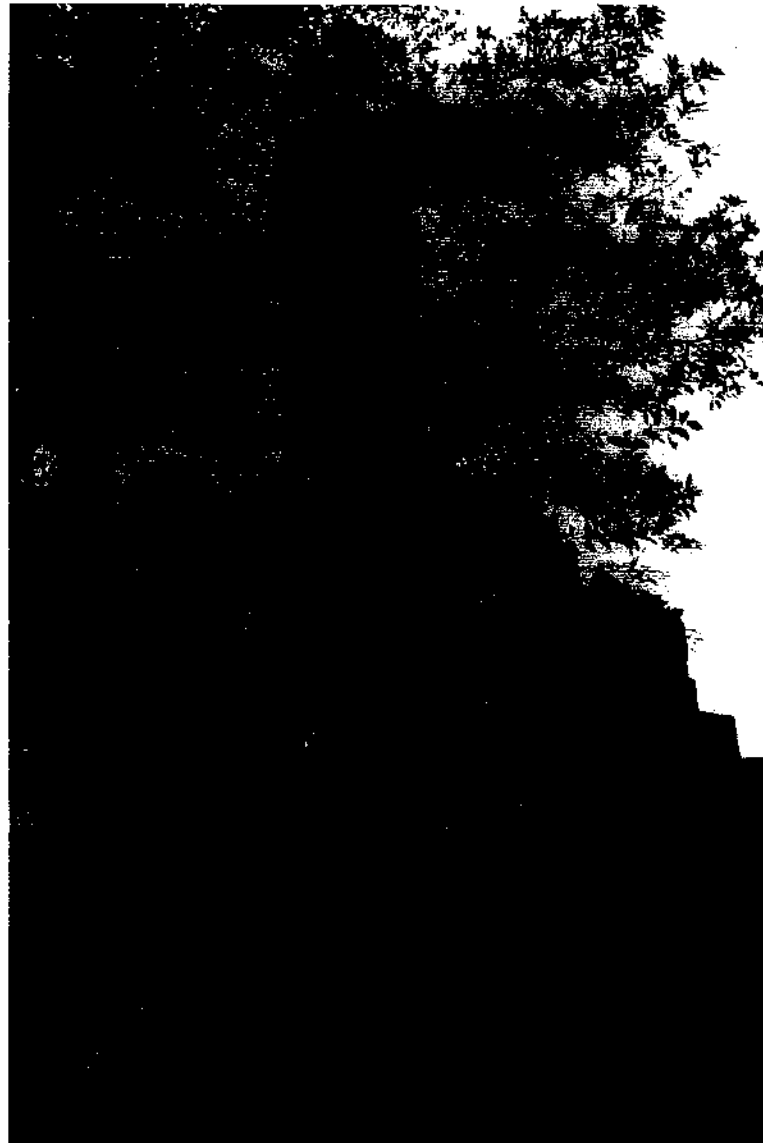


Fig. 7.33  
Interior Ground Floor Deveaux House  
Cat Island, Bahamas  
Builder: Andrew Deveaux Sr. from South Carolina  
and his sons William, Nathaniel, and John  
Construction Date: c. 1790  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 1997



Fig. 7.34  
Slave Quarters at Deveau's House  
Cat Island, Bahamas  
Builder: Andrew Deveau Sr. from South Carolina  
and his sons William, Nathaniel, and John  
Construction Date: c. 1790  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 1997



**Fig. 7.35**  
**Kitchen Chimney at Deveau House**  
**Cat Island, Bahamas**  
**Builder: Andrew Deveau Sr. from South Carolina**  
**and his sons William, Nathaniel, and John**  
**Construction Date: c. 1790**  
**Photo by Astrid Whidden**  
**Year Taken: 1997**



**Fig. 7.36**  
**Armbrister Plantation**  
**Cat Island, Bahamas**  
**Builder: John Armbrister**  
**Construction Date: c. 1800**  
**Photo by Astrid Whidden**  
**Year Taken: 1997**





**Fig. 7.37**  
**Doorway of Main House, Armbrister Plantation**  
**Cat Island, Bahamas**  
**Builder: John Armbrister**  
**Construction Date: c. 1800**  
**Photo by Astrid Whidden**  
**Year Taken: 1997**

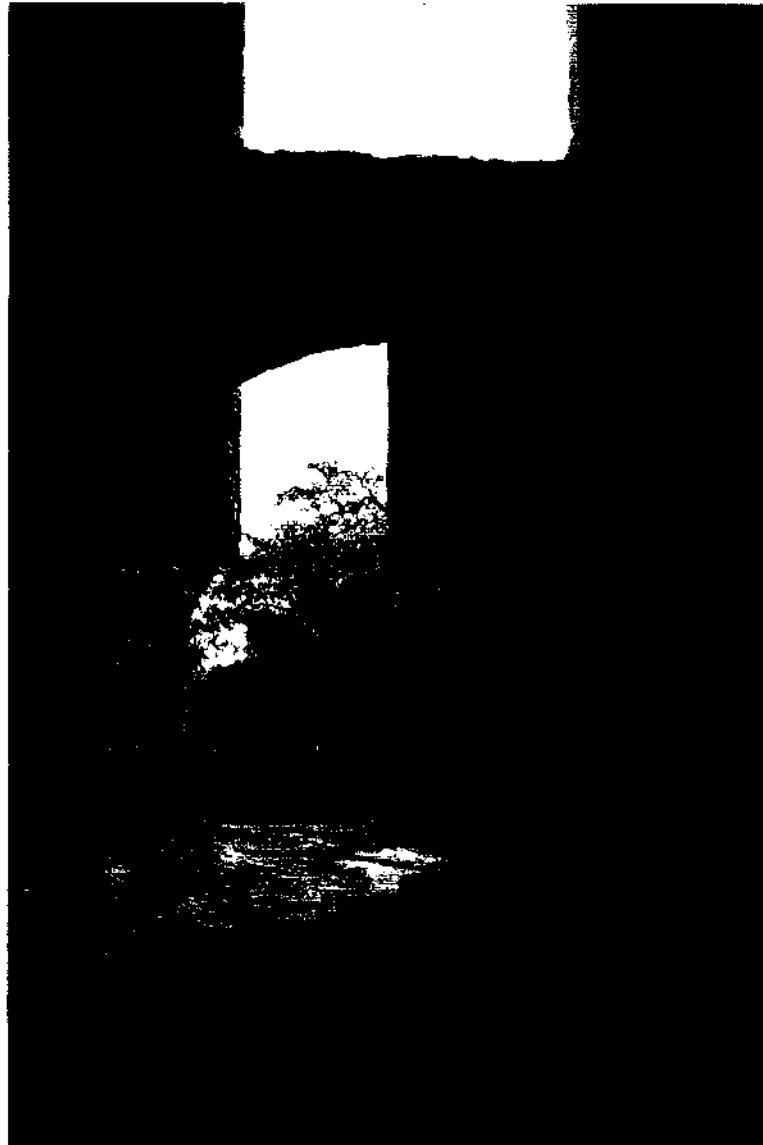


Fig. 7.38  
Doorway of Main House, Armbrister Plantation  
Cat Island, Bahamas  
Builder: John Armbrister  
Construction Date: c. 1800  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 1997



**Fig. 7.39**  
**View from Back of Main House, Armbrister Plantation**  
**Cat Island, Bahamas**  
**Builder: John Armbrister**  
**Construction Date: c. 1800**  
**Photo by Astrid Whidden**  
**Year Taken: 1997**



Fig. 7.40  
Armbrister Sisal Factory  
Cat Island, Bahamas  
Builder: W.E. Armbrister  
Construction Date: c. 1880  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 1997



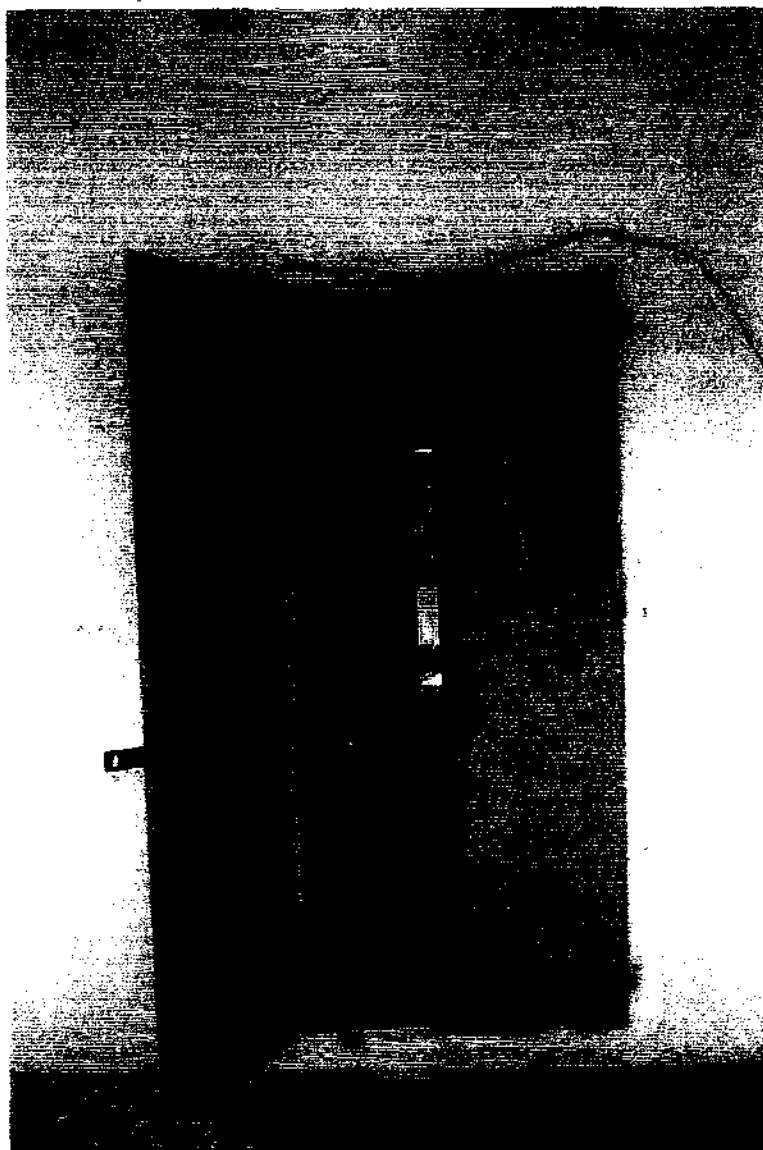
Fig. 7.41  
Cotton House  
Little Exuma, Bahamas  
Builder: Roger and John Kelsall  
Construction Date: c. 1790  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 1993



**Fig. 7.42**  
**Rear of Cotton House**  
**Little Exuma, Bahamas**  
**Builder: Roger and John Kelsall**  
**Construction Date: c. 1790**  
**Photo by Astrid Whidden**  
**Year Taken: 1993**



Fig. 7.43  
Kitchen of Cotton House  
Little Exuma, Bahamas  
Builder: Roger and John Kelsall  
Construction Date: c. 1790  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 1993

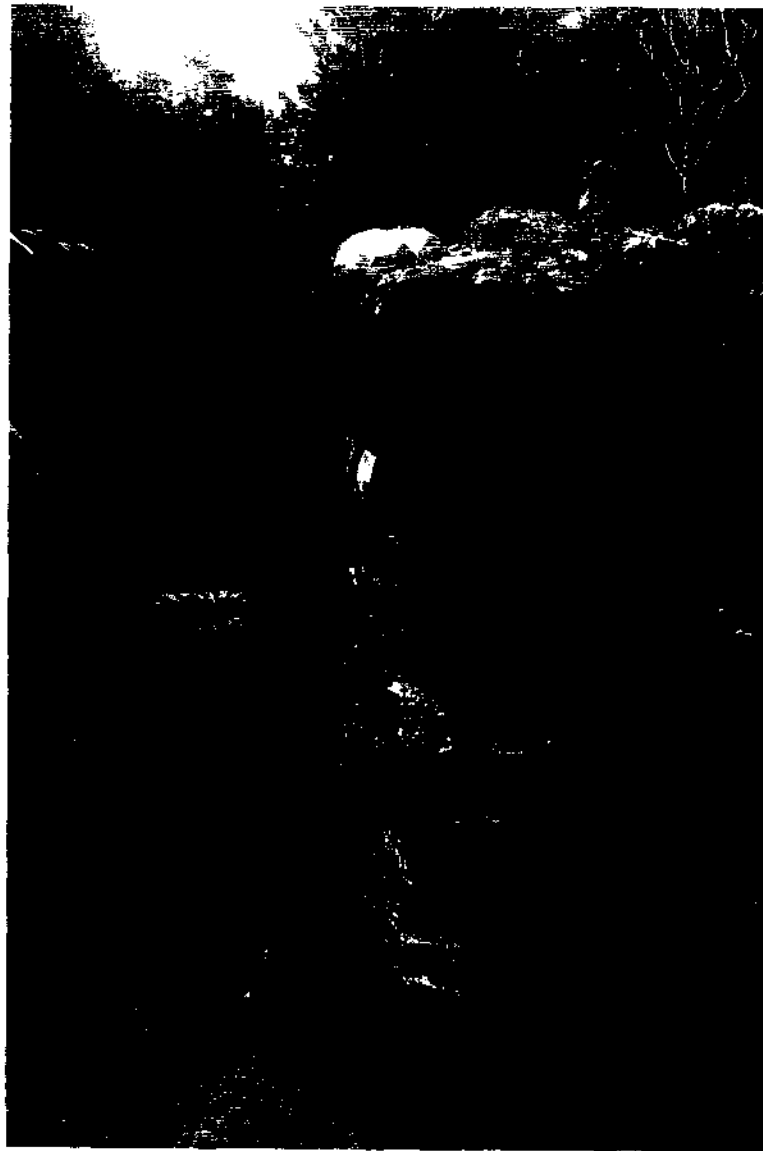


**Fig. 7.44**  
**Front Door of Cotton House**  
**Little Exuma, Bahamas**  
**Builder: Roger and John Kelsall**  
**Construction Date: c. 1790**  
**Photo by Astrid Whidden**  
**Year Taken: 1993**

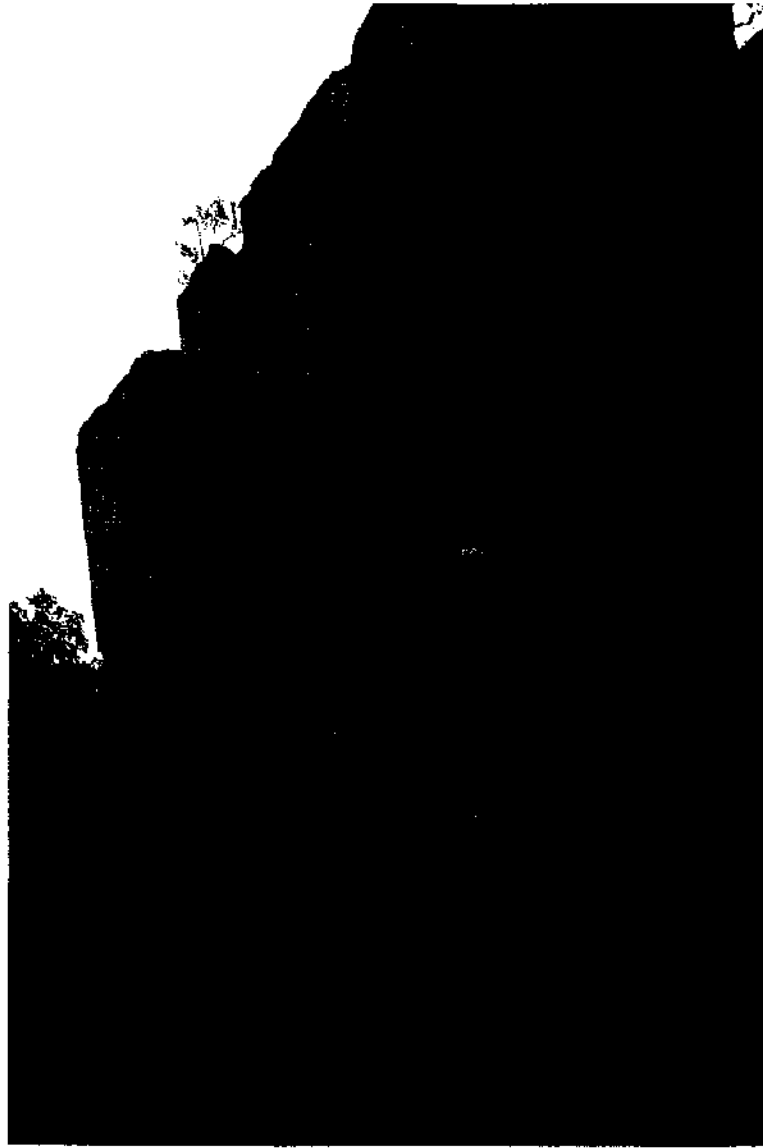




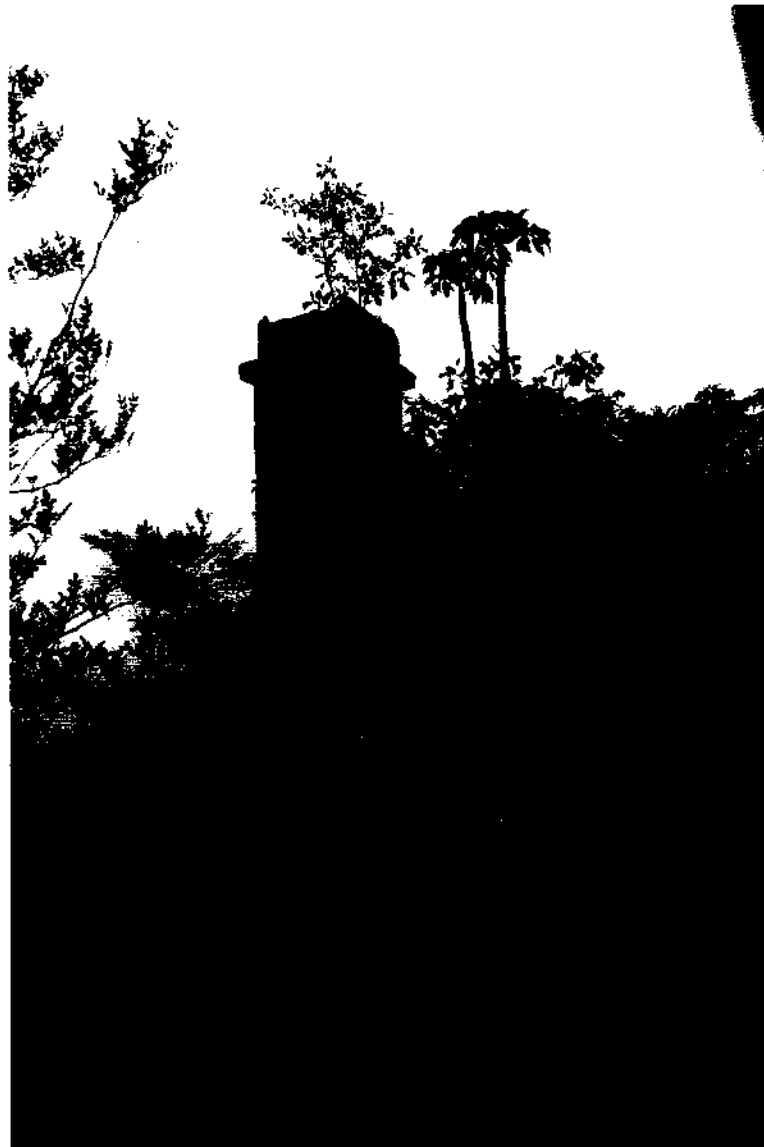
**Fig. 7.45**  
**Overgrown Façade of Great Hope Plantation**  
**Crooked Island, Bahamas**  
**Owner: Henry Moss from 1818 to 1847**  
**Construction Date: c. 1800**  
**Photo by Astrid Whidden**  
**Year Taken: 2000**



**Fig. 7.46**  
**Entrance Pillars of Great Hope Plantation**  
**Crooked Island, Bahamas**  
**Owner: Henry Moss from 1818 to 1847**  
**Construction Date: c. 1800**  
**Photo by Astrid Whidden**  
**Year Taken: 2000**



**Fig. 7.47**  
**Second Story of Great Hope Plantation**  
**Crooked Island, Bahamas**  
**Owner: Henry Moss from 1818 to 1847**  
**Construction Date: c. 1800**  
**Photo by Astrid Whidden**  
**Year Taken: 2000**



**Fig. 7.48**  
**Chimney of Great Hope Plantation**  
**Crooked Island, Bahamas**  
**Owner: Henry Moss from 1818 to 1847**  
**Construction Date: c. 1800**  
**Photo by Astrid Whidden**  
**Year Taken: 2000**

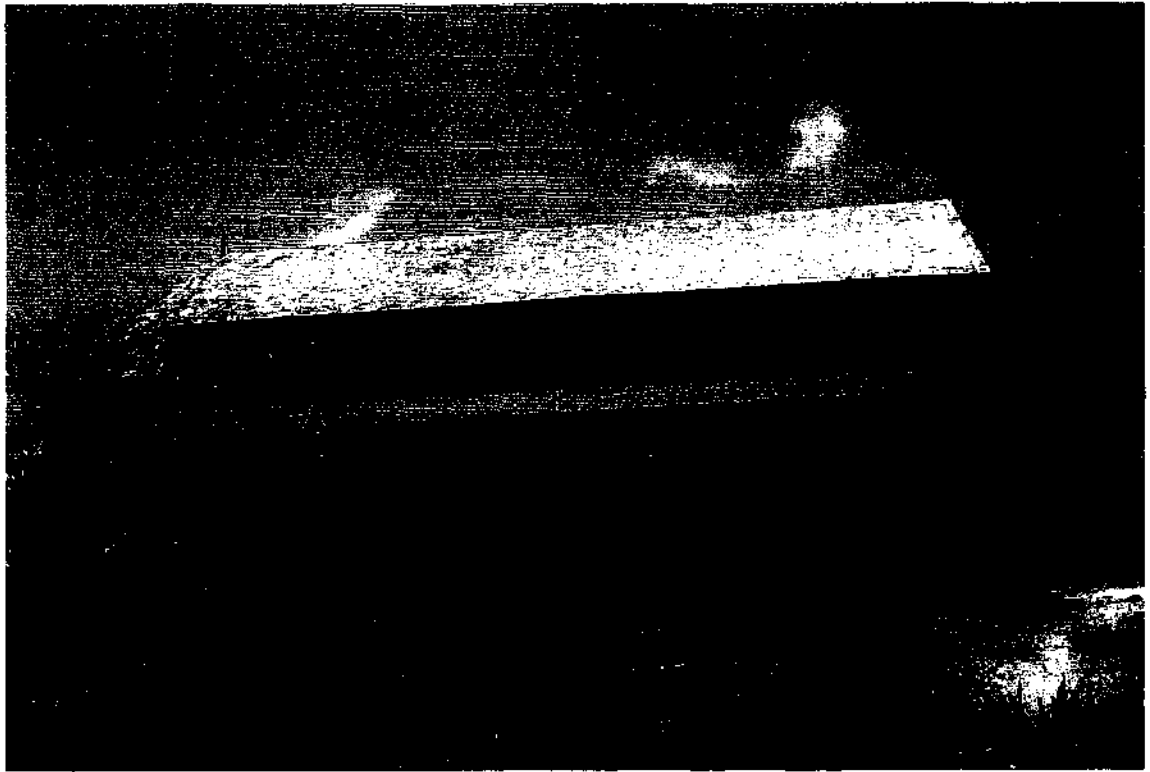
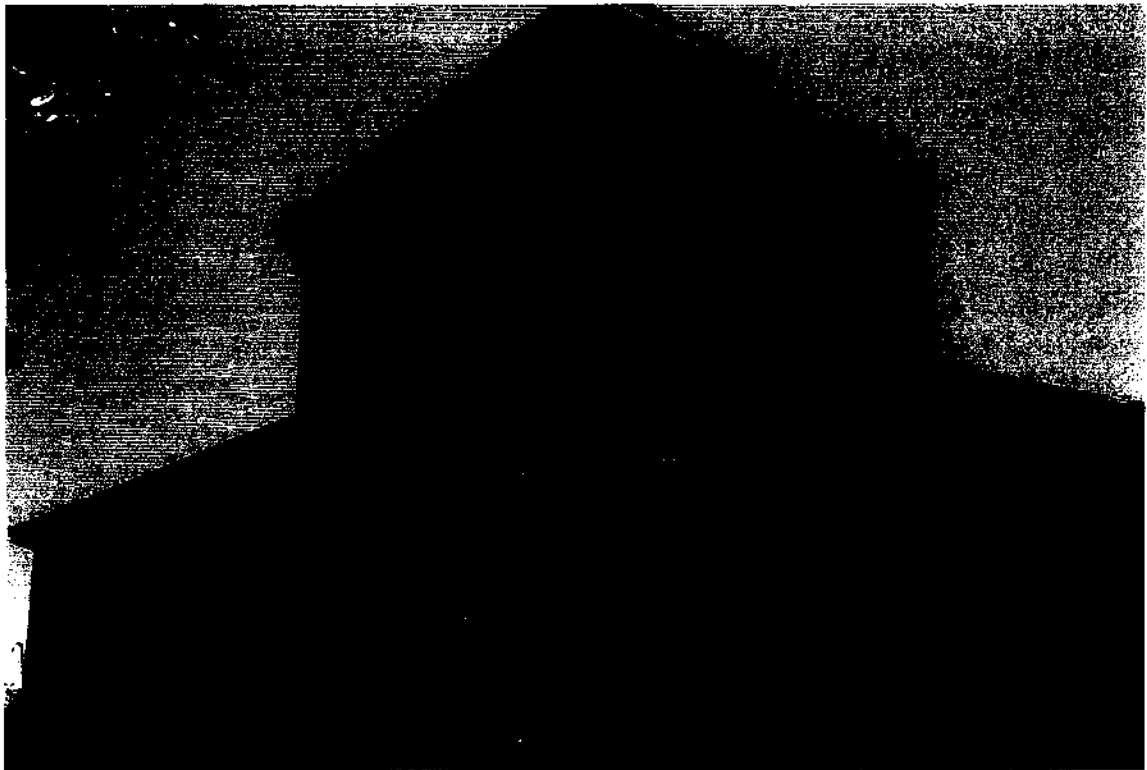


Fig. 7.49  
Main Church in Albert Town  
Fortune Island, Bahamas  
Construction Date: c. 1850  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 2000



**Fig. 7.50**  
**Main Church Façade in Albert Town**  
**Fortune Island, Bahamas**  
**Construction Date: c. 1850**  
**Photo by Astrid Whidden**  
**Year Taken: 2000**



**Fig. 7.51**  
**Landscape with Ruins**  
**Fortune Island, Bahamas**  
**Photo by Astrid Whidden**  
**Year Taken: 2000**

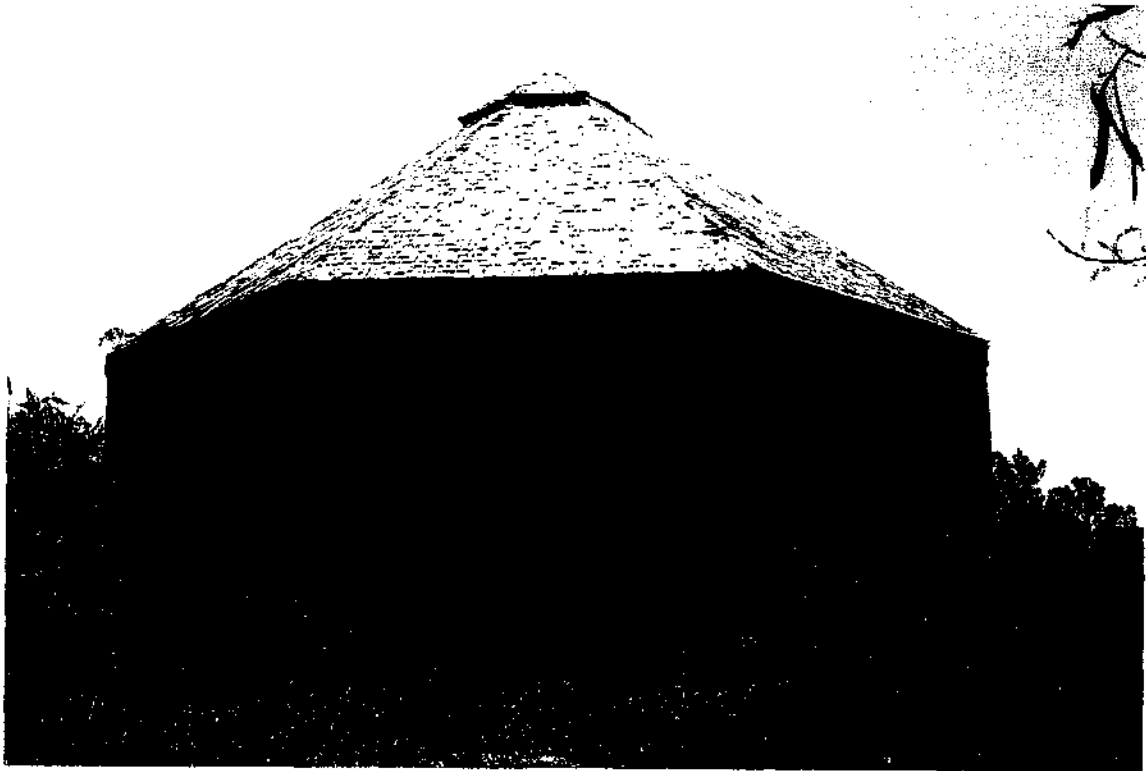
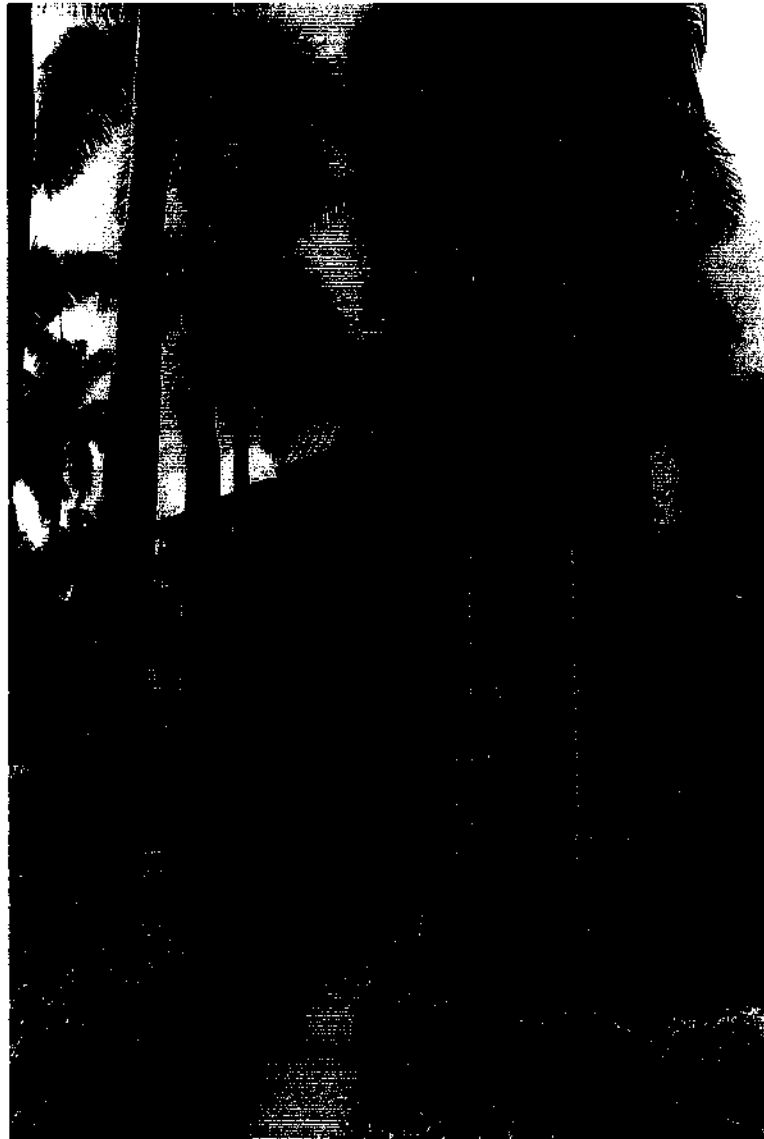


Fig. 7.52  
Hexagonal Jail  
Fortune Island, Bahamas  
Construction Date: c. 1850  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 2000





**Fig. 7.53**  
**Octagonal Old Jail (converted to Nassau Public Library in 1873)**  
**Nassau, Bahamas**  
**Builder: Joseph Eve**  
**Design inspired by Powder Magazine of Williamsburg, Virginia**  
**Construction Date: 1798-1799**  
**Photo by Astrid Whidden**  
**Year Taken: 2002**



**Fig. 7.54**  
**Tabby Construction Shown in Slave Cabin**  
**Kingsley Plantation, Fort George Island, Florida**  
**Constructed by the slaves of Zephaniah Kingsley**  
**Construction Date: c. 1817**  
**Photo by Astrid Whidden**  
**Year Taken: 1996**

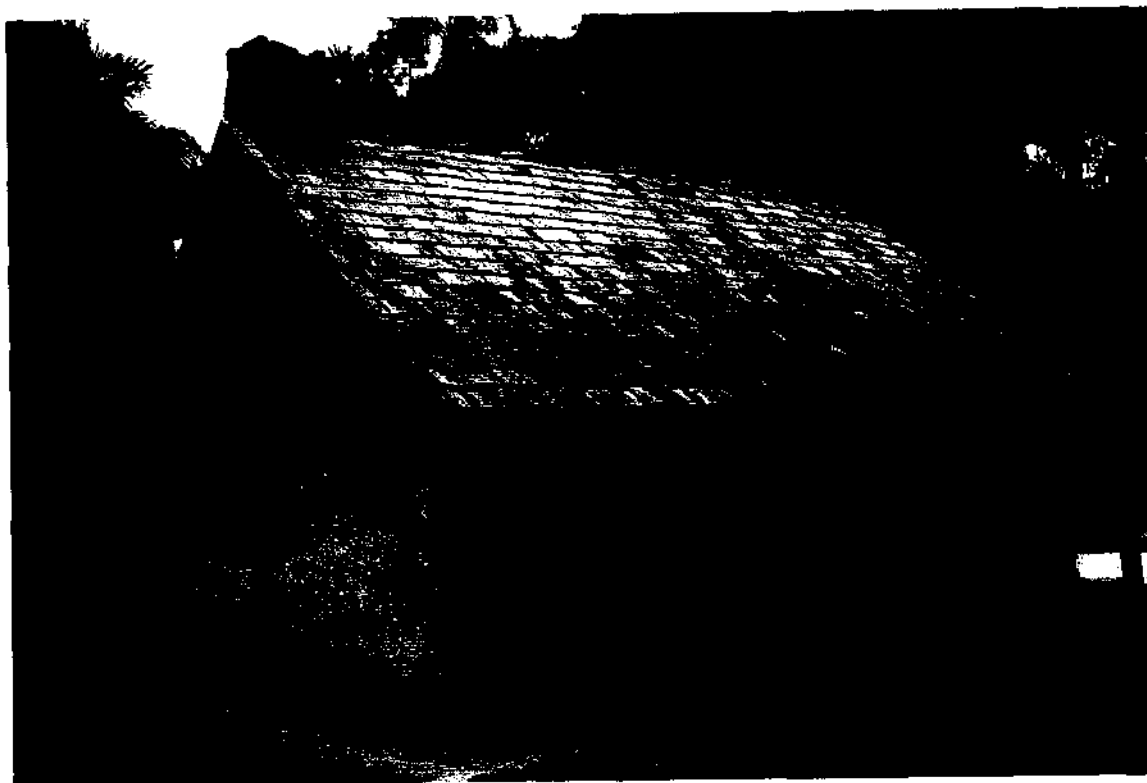
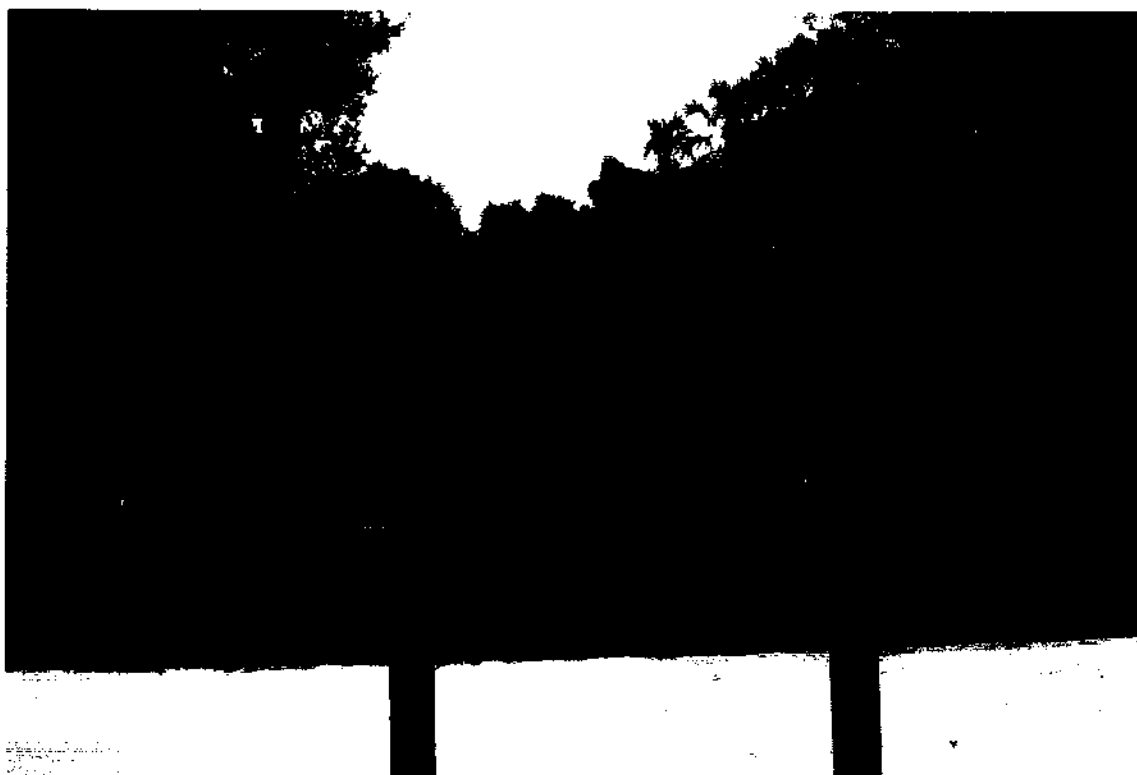


Fig. 7.55  
Reconstructed Slave Cabin  
Kingsley Plantation, Fort George Island, Florida  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 1996



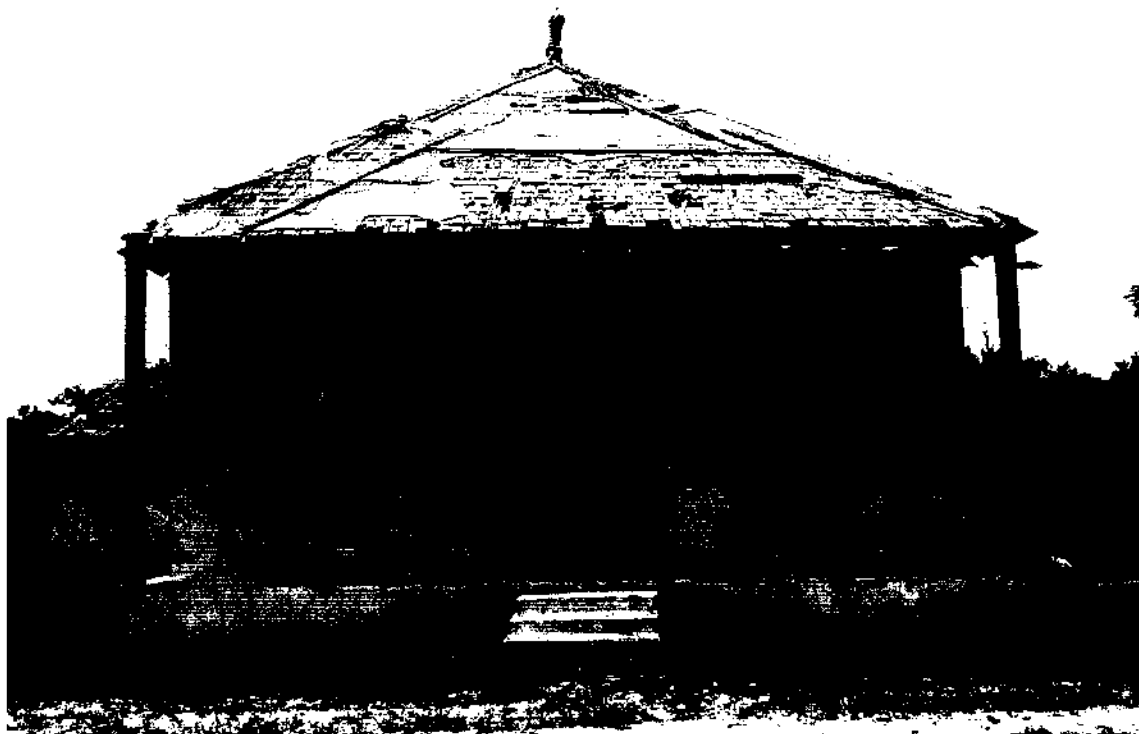
**Fig. 7.56**  
**Row of Slave Cabins**  
**Kingsley Plantation, Fort George Island, Florida**  
**Constructed by the slaves of Zephaniah Kingsley**  
**Construction Date: c. 1817**  
**Photo by Astrid Whidden**  
**Year Taken: 1996**



**Fig. 7.57**  
**Slave Cabin Form-Ruins**  
**Crooked Island, Bahamas**  
**Material: Limestone Aggregate**  
**Construction Date: c. 1800**  
**Photo by Astrid Whidden**  
**Year Taken: 2000**



**Fig. 7.58**  
**Hall-and-Parlor Style Structure**  
**Long Island, Bahamas**  
**Construction Date: c. 1940**  
**Photo by Astrid Whidden**  
**Year Taken: 1995**



**Fig. 7.59**  
**Pyramid Style Structure with Porch**  
**Cat Island, Bahamas**  
**Construction Date: c. 1880**  
**Photo by Astrid Whidden**  
**Year Taken: 1997**

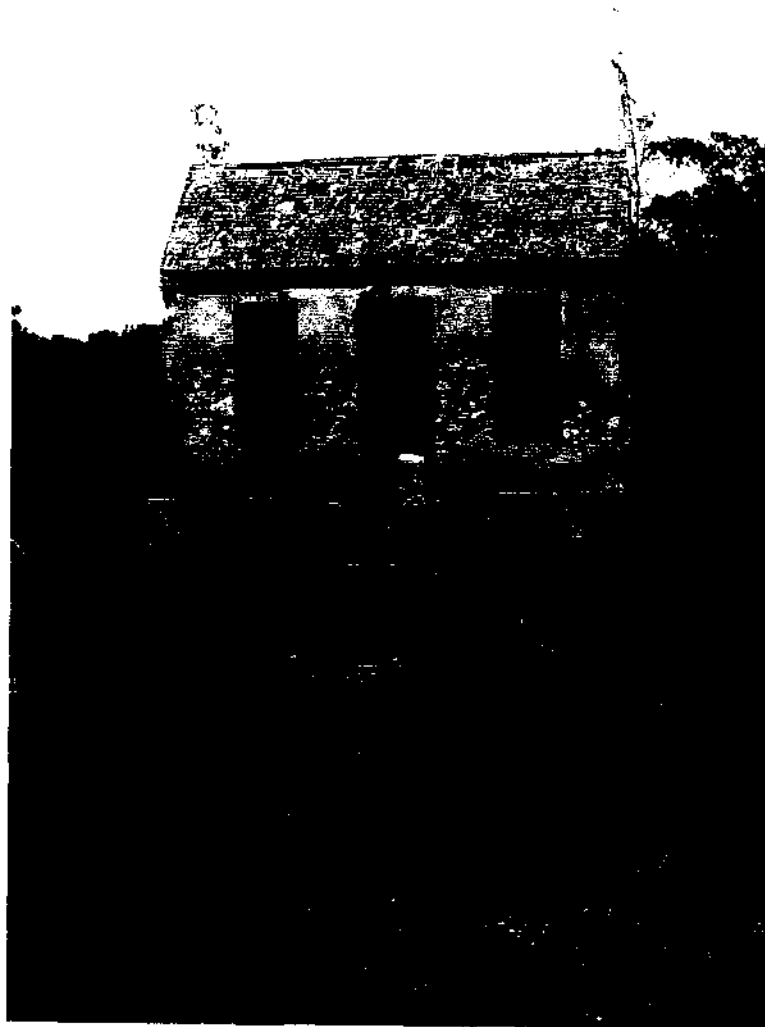


Fig. 7.60  
Hall-and-Parlor Style Structure with Gable Roof and Raised Porch  
Cat Island, Bahamas  
Material: Limestone Aggregate  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 1997





Fig. 7.61  
Church of Christ  
Port Howe, Cat Island, Bahamas  
Construction Date: c. 1850  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 1997

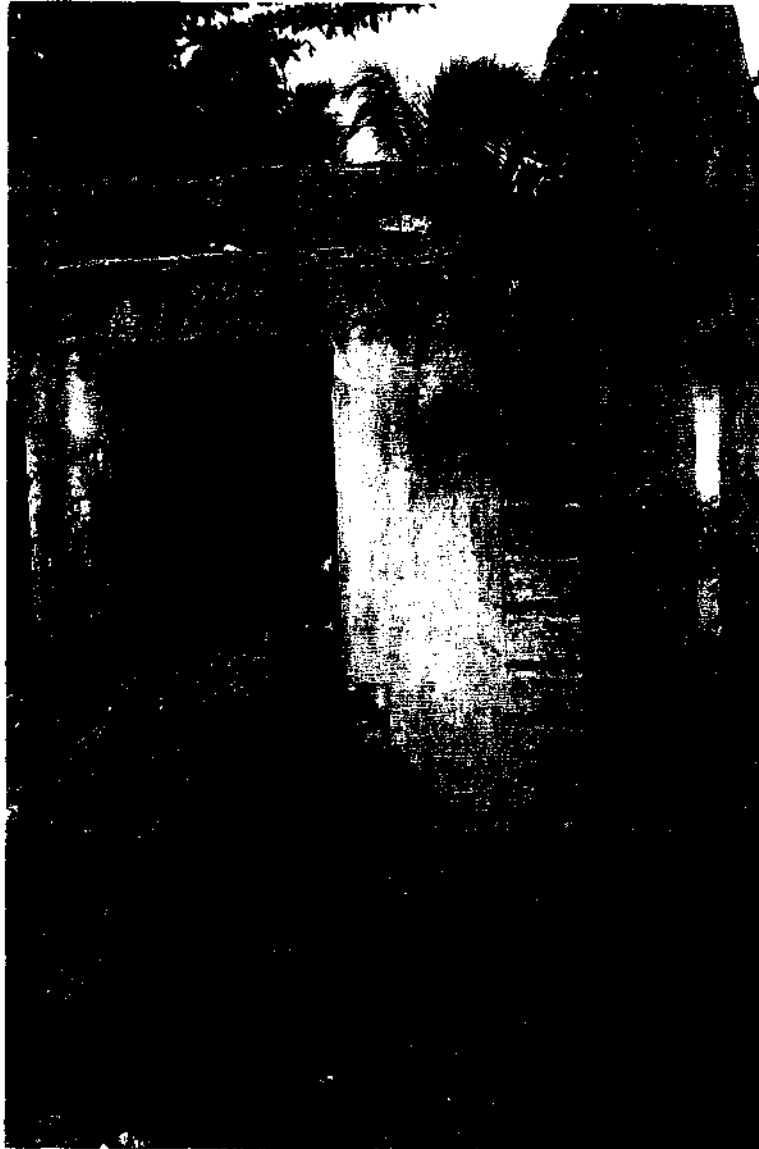


Fig. 7.62  
Decorative Quoining of Church of Christ  
Port Howe, Cat Island, Bahamas  
Construction Date: c. 1850  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 1997



**Fig. 7.63**  
**Ruins of Main House at Clifton Plantation**  
**Nassau, Bahamas**  
**Builder: John Wood**  
**Construction Date: 1788-1789**  
**Photo by Astrid Whidden**  
**Year Taken: 2000**



**Fig. 7.64**  
**Slave Cabin Ruins at Clifton Plantation**  
**Nassau, Bahamas**  
**Builder: John Wood**  
**Construction Date: 1788-1789**  
**Photo by Astrid Whidden**  
**Year Taken: 2006**

## Chapter Eight

### Back Across the Gulfstream

The island of Key West appears to the casual observer as a tropical paradise attached to the mainland United States both geographically and culturally. But many of Key West's cultural traditions came from the islands of the Bahamas, not from mainland America. The contributions of the immigrants from the Bahamas have been dealt with in some texts written on the island, but the problems with these works include the lack of proper documentation and no attempt to do an in-depth analysis of the different immigrant groups who came to the island. The lack of historical work on Key West is most dramatic when attempting to find a comprehensive work on the material culture of the Bahamians and who came to the city in the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> Many architectural texts on the city deal with Conch architecture but none define what this means. The Bahamians brought architectural styles with them but what was their origin and what does this ambiguous term indicate visually? They also brought a rich tradition of storytelling and many of the early social institutions which helped to create the rich tapestry of this island city. A closer look at the Conch population reveals a larger influence of Bahamians on all aspects of Key West's architecture and society.

Bahamians lived on islands surrounded by the Caribbean Sea which provided them with sustenance and just as quickly spawned devastating natural disasters, such as

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<sup>1</sup> Although there are many works which give insight into the history of the city, none of them successfully portrays the larger Bahamian experience. They have not attempted to accomplish this because it seemed unnecessary to the overall understanding of Key West's history. My approach to this topic is fresh because it synthesizes the many aspects of the Bahamian's contributions to the creation of this island's culture.

hurricanes. They understood life informed by this island experience. They developed a culture based on a willingness to challenge obstacles and survive no matter how difficult the circumstances. The value of their contribution to Key West cannot be underestimated although it often has been. Every section of society on this tiny island city lives with the inheritance of the Conchs. It manifests itself in different forms found in the architecture of the island. The basis for this style they carried with them could be found in earlier events which happened in the United States and then the Bahamas.

The American Revolution divided the people of the British North American colony because many of them did not want to surrender the security found in being part of the powerful British Empire. Many saw their status as one which favored them economically because it linked them to a European power.<sup>2</sup> The southern colonies contained the largest majority of this population. In an earlier chapter, their flight from the United States and the events which led up to them arriving in the Bahamas has been dealt with in a more in-depth analysis. The English crown relocated many of these people to the island colony due to its proximity to America. The British government officials realized that the Bahama Islands would be the perfect place for this displaced portion of their former colony because in 1782 the islands were almost uninhabited. The Loyalists arrived in the Bahamas with few possessions but they carried with them certain ideas about architecture and the stylistic rules it should adhere to when they began rebuilding their lives. The Georgian style influenced the immigrants to the islands who used it to recreate some of their experiences from the fertile southern regions of America. Their

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<sup>2</sup> Egerton Ryerson, *The Loyalists of America and Their Times* (New York: Haskell House, 1970), 463.

knowledge of the adaptation of this highly ordered style to a hot climate allowed them to modify the forms of the Georgian style into what has been called the Caribbean Georgian mode. The Loyalists who lived in the Bahamas managed to modify the appearance of the capital of Nassau to the point that it resembled the Georgian architecture of larger port cities such as Charleston, South Carolina. The cross fertilization of material culture which began in the United States during the tumultuous events precipitated by the American Revolution continued unabated in the Bahamas and eventually make its way back to the mainland. Certain aesthetics in building would be repeated over and over again throughout the Bahamas /Florida region. The Georgian style that transferred to the Bahamas then influenced the appearance of structures in Key West (fig. 8.1).

The decision by many of the original Bahamian immigrants to relocate to Key West was motivated by their desire to continue to use the waters of the Florida Keys as a major source of revenue based on maritime activities such as wrecking, fishing, and sponging. The change of government in Florida from Spanish to American in 1821 came with new regulations on the ability of foreigners to work in American territorial waters.<sup>3</sup> The largest concentration of Bahamians who went to Key West came from the Abacos<sup>4</sup> which unlike Nassau or some of the larger plantation islands were very small and families barely managed to eke out an existence on these cays. A look at their material culture

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<sup>3</sup>The new laws which affected the Bahamians were discussed in Chapter Four, "Opportunities and Contacts." Essentially a Bill passed by Congress in 1824 disallowed the selling of salvaged goods, taken in Florida waters, in any foreign port.

<sup>4</sup> *Bahamas Argus* (New Providence), 27 September 1834. The affect of this outward migration from the Abacos can be seen in advertisements for settlers to the area after 1821.

reveals the average Abaconian home in Hope Town, Abaco (fig. 8.2) was built of wood with an attic space where the children usually slept, while the downstairs was divided into two rooms, one for the adults while the other served as a parlor. The kitchen was separated from the house and cisterns played a major role in the considerations of the house builders. These small houses were primarily built by ship's carpenters; this explains the shiplap siding used on many of the structures. Gingerbread work commonly decorated many of the houses (fig. 8.3). Contrary to the information given by guides who tour visitors through Key West, this gingerbreadding was not a sign of a New England influence but instead was a common element found among seafaring communities.<sup>5</sup> The symmetry of these small homes was perfected in the simple cottages of the Out Islanders (fig. 8.4). Additional Bahamian building motifs, such as this twin gabled roof found on a structure in the Government square of Grand Turk<sup>6</sup> (fig. 8.5), would show up again and again in Key West's buildings. In Grand Turk, one also finds exterior staircases on larger structures (fig. 8.6), a feature often found in West Indian architecture, and then in Key West (fig. 8.7). The homes of the original immigrants to Key West resembled wooden structures of the Out Islanders of the Bahamas.

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<sup>5</sup>Ian Sutton, *Western Architecture: A Survey from Ancient Greece to the Present* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999), 272. Gingerbread adornment on houses abounds throughout island architecture. It became popular with the Gothic Revival movement in England in the 1840s and then was transferred to the Americas via pattern books of the mid nineteenth century. It was supposed to replicate the stone tracery work of Gothic buildings in wood. This author has observed it in such diverse places such as Barbados, the Dominican Republic and Tahiti. Ship's carpenters could duplicate the gingerbread they saw as they had skill with carving diverse elements on ships such as railings.

<sup>6</sup> Grand Turk was a part of the Bahamas although now it is in the British West Indies.



The Bahamians who came to Key West eventually helped to make Key West one of the richest cities in America by 1840, based on the industry of wrecking. Men like John Lowe, Jr., whose family came from the Abacos some time around the 1830's, actively pursued the industry and by 1863 he had seven vessels engaged in salvaging.<sup>7</sup> His prosperity displayed itself in the magnificent home he built after 1855 at 620 Southard Street (fig. 8.8). The house also reflected his Bahamian heritage. Built of heart of pine and Honduran mahogany, it had a porch on the front, so common in West Indian architecture. The centered front door reproduced the balance inherent in Georgian architecture, which dominated Bahamian building in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Even more revealing of his Conch heritage, was the means of construction. The Lowe's contractor used no nails; rather wooden pegs fasten the house together. This points to the ships carpentry skills used by Bahamian builders.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, the Bahamians changed Key West in more than one way, not only did its economy improve, its architecture changed. Men and women from the Bahamas wanted to visually reinvent the city of Key West to reflect their experience on the small islands in the Caribbean basin. The irony of this desired style transfer lay in its originally being from the United States. The flow of immigrants back and forth across the Gulf Stream allowed the Georgian style to return to America even after it had fallen out of favor in the new Republic. Americans rejected the Georgian mode after the American Revolution

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<sup>7</sup> Register of Licenses Granted to Vessels, Owners and Masters to be Employed in the Business of Wrecking on the Coast of Florida, by the Judge of States District Court for the Southern District of Florida, 1863 and 1891.

<sup>8</sup> Gosner, 20.

because it smacked of the British Empire. Americans had embraced a new style based on ancient Greece. They felt an affinity with the ancient democracy and many of their buildings echoed this ideological message.<sup>9</sup> But the Conchs who came to Key West had not inculcated this belief; they wanted their new island home to echo their former visual environment. They had defined ideas about the proposed appearances of their new homes. They had to be functional for the climate and yet meet an aesthetic criteria formed by their experiences and surroundings. Because many of the Bahamian house builders who went to Key West had traditionally also been ship builders, wood working was familiar to them and this material dominates in the city. In 1829, Nicolas Pinder advertised his services as “house and ship carpenter, joiner, and cabinet maker” in the local newspaper.<sup>10</sup> His skills would be highly valued in this town which needed housing by this period.

The oldest house in Key West (fig.8.9) owed its construction to a Bahamian. In about 1828, Richard W. Coussans, a Bahamian carpenter and joiner, built the house for himself. He occupied it until 1839 when he sold it to a wrecker captain named William Wall.<sup>11</sup> The house sits on a high foundation because flooding plagued the city for many years until sea walls were built. Wood siding on the exterior and metal shingles for the roof, although these probably were wood shake shingles originally, show the care which

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<sup>9</sup> Roger G. Kennedy, *Architecture, Men, Women and Money in America, 1600-1860* (New York: Random House, 1985), 223.

<sup>10</sup> *Key West Register and Commercial Advertiser*, (Key West), 12 March 1829.

<sup>11</sup> James R. Warnke, *Balustrades and Gingerbread: Key West's Handcrafted Homes and Buildings* (Miami: Banyon Books, 1978), 27.

went into building such a structure. The three dormer windows<sup>12</sup> allowed heat to escape from the upstairs rooms which usually contained sleeping quarters. These windows were later enlarged and so the balance of the facade was destroyed, but the transfer of the Georgian style could still be seen in the symmetry of the door and window placements. Georgian architecture relied on a strict sense of balance which the Bahamian builders altered to suit their needs.<sup>13</sup> The doorway's placement in the direct center of the house was common in Georgian homes. The front porch not only shaded the open windows, but became a spot for people to sit in the hot evenings of the summer. This house is located at 322 Duval Street and is now the site of the Wreckers' Museum. Its association with wrecking draws visitors and thus its restoration returns its appearance to the time when the wrecker captain enlarged the dormer windows.

Possibly the second oldest house on the island (fig. 8.10), located at 803 Whitehead Street, is a wooden structure with an obscure history. Although little information could be traced as to who built the house, its construction date of 1836 indicated its builder may have followed the same tradition as the Coussan's house.<sup>14</sup> This Whitehead Street dwelling exhibits certain motifs associated with Conch builders such as wood siding laid in the shiplap manner, indicating siding applied horizontally and overlapped, with a centered doorway. In addition, the door has a window over the top of

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<sup>12</sup>Dormer windows project from the portion of the roof which slopes down toward the eaves.

<sup>13</sup> Gail Saunders and Donald Cartwright, *Historic Nassau* (London: Macmillan Education, 1979), 11.

<sup>14</sup> Architectural History Collection, Monroe County Public Library's Florida Collection, Key West, Florida.

it known as a light; doors with lights over them were common in Georgian architecture. The large, main windows allowed the circulation of air while the smaller windows, under the eaves, released the hot air of the day. This house has a very crude overhang which rests on truncated stone pillars. Stone work had been perfected by Bahamian builders in the Bahamas because of the availability of the material.<sup>15</sup> The knowledge of stonework had arrived in the Bahamas with the migration of the Loyalists to that region. From the construction of these early houses, the Conchs continued to rely on many of their old house forms.

A house which suddenly appeared in 1847 showed the most direct type of transfer of material culture which occurred on the island. Called the Bahama House (fig. 8.11), it belonged to the Bahamian wrecker, Captain John Bartlum. Captain Bartlum was born in Green Turtle Cay, Abaco in November of 1814. He was acknowledged by many to be a mechanical genius who made his reputation as a ship builder. The clipper ship he built, the *Stephen R. Mallory*, was launched from Key West in 1856 and was the largest ship ever built in Florida up to that point.<sup>16</sup> Bartlum's ingenuity and drive helped him to make the decision to move to Key West. On 20 April 1847, he purchased a portion of a lot from his brother who had bought it the previous year. Then Bartlum sold a part of his land to his wrecking partner and brother-in-law Richard "Tuggy" Roberts.<sup>17</sup> Bartlum planned his move to Key West in 1847, but he chose a bad year for his move

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<sup>15</sup> Saunders and Cartwright, *Historic Nassau*, 11.

<sup>16</sup> Walter C. Maloney, *A Sketch of the History of Key West, Florida* (Newark, N.J.: Advertiser Printing House, 1876), 78.

<sup>17</sup> Monroe County Records, Deed Book D, pgs. 519; 521.

because in the previous year a hurricane had destroyed many of the houses on the island. So Captain Bartlum decided to load his home in Abaco aboard his ship and take it to Key West. His lot was located in a section of town which at that time was almost a wilderness, and there was some question as to which way the street would run. Bartlum added two porches on the house to insure one of them would face the street.<sup>18</sup> The house today can hardly be seen due to the shrubbery which surrounds it, but the distinctive twin gabled roof can be seen from its side exposure (fig. 8.12).

The center of the roof's configuration, where the downward slopes of the two gables met, caught rain waters which then were carried to a cistern by metal pipes. The Conchs knew how to deal with problems like these: Key West had no fresh water just like many of the Bahamian islands.<sup>19</sup> The house was built entirely out of white pine and was "pegged," like the John Lowe Jr. house. This type of joining was common among ship builders, since nails were expensive, hard to come by, and rusted ships' carpenters mortised and tenoned timbers together. This "process involved the joining of timbers by means of wooden pegs, hence the name as often heard on the island, pegged houses."<sup>20</sup> The artisans who did the hand planed shiplap siding and hand-turned spindles of the porches also used pine. Fireplaces had no place in the subtropical climate of the island and Bartlum never added one to his Bahama house. Because of Bartlum's skill with shipbuilding, this house probably reflected his own labor and ideas. He decided to place

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<sup>18</sup>Undated and unsigned letter in the Florida History Collection at Monroe County Public Library, Key West, Florida.

<sup>19</sup>Alex Caemmerer, *The Houses of Key West* (Sarasota: Pineapple Press, 1992), 90.

<sup>20</sup>Marie Cappick, "The Key West Story, 1818-1950," *The Coral Tribune*, July 6, 1956.

both of the staircases on the exterior porches which left them covered but also allowed more interior space. This fine home stands as a testament to the durability of Conch houses; not until the 1960s did the house receive restoration work and today it exemplifies the Conch's heritage in Key West.

Captain Bartlum and his family did not make this journey with their house alone, aboard the same ship he carried Tuggy Roberts' house (fig. 8.13). Its position to the street, only its side shows, gives the viewer an obstructed glimpse of its construction. Unfortunately for Roberts, he built his porch facing the north, where he thought the street would run, and it turned out his porch faced the back of Bartlum's.<sup>21</sup> Tuggy eventually added another porch so the house achieved a better balance. The Roberts' house also has a symmetrical interior. A hall and parlor plan was used for its design; this included a center hall divided it into two identical halves. The rooms stack on top of each other and doors would have opened among all of the rooms allowing air to circulate freely. The Roberts' house also had an exterior kitchen, another common feature in Bahamian architecture.<sup>22</sup> The Bahamian aesthetic truly characterized the city by this point.

In addition to prominent wreckers like Bartlum, the lure to immigrants in other maritime industries helped to define the city's visual atmosphere. The sponging as well as salt raking industries lured the less intrepid with their promise of profitable returns. Spongers prospered in Key West from 1848 until the collapse of the industry due to a

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<sup>21</sup> Undated and unsigned letter in the Florida History collection at Monroe County Public Library, Key West, Florida.

<sup>22</sup> Sharon Wells and Lawson Little, *Wooden Houses of Key West* (Florida: Historic Florida Keys Preservation Board, Florida Department of State, 1991), 15.

virulent blight which affected the animals in 1917.<sup>23</sup> The Conchs had developed sponging in the Bahamas and not surprisingly they introduced the industry to Key West. William Kemp, a Bahamian, was credited with bringing the occupation to the small key.<sup>24</sup> The prosperity the Conchs gained while harvesting sponges could be seen in their homes. The building of the Richard Moore Kemp home (fig. 8.14), at 601 Caroline Street, resulted from the families' fortune made in sponging. William Kemp sold this land to his brother in 1886.<sup>25</sup> The home on the site, now called the Cypress house and used as a bed and breakfast, was built by the contractor John T. Sawyer for the Kemps in about 1887-1888. It probably replaced an older structure which had burned in the big fire of 1886. It rested on brick piers which were used by island builders to elevate homes and allowed air to circulate around the entire structure. The attic had scuttles added to it which were vents that allowed hot air to escape in the tropical heat of the summers. The house showed the simple balance which Bahamians clung to even by this later date. Although elements of classicism had permeated Key West's architecture by this time, for example on this house it can be seen in the small wooden pediments over the windows, the Conch builder relied on symmetry to tie his design together. The house also had pegged boards in the attic which showed Sawyer used either a ship's carpenter or he knew this technique. The

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<sup>23</sup> John Viele, *The Florida Keys: A History of the Pioneers* (Sarasote, Florida: Pineapple Press, 1996), 109-118.

<sup>24</sup> *Key West Citizen*, December 1915, Centennial Issue.

<sup>25</sup> Monroe County Deed Book G, p. 403.

Kemps, Richard and his wife, remained tied to sponging and their daughter eventually married A.J. Arapian, the first sponge merchant of Florida.<sup>26</sup>

John T. Sawyer, the Kemp's contractor, also came from the Bahamas. His father was a native of the Bahamas while his grandfather had left Georgia for the Bahamas after the American Revolution. John had spent nineteen years in Spanish Wells, Eleuthera where he learned the ship building trade and then decided to move to Key West in 1872 at the age of nineteen. There he outfitted sponging vessels and their crews from his mercantile shop on Francis Street. He also continued to advertise as a contractor and was listed as such in *Bensels Key West Directory* of 1888. Sawyer also owned the first steamship which traveled regularly between Key West and Miami. He commissioned it in Baltimore in 1886 and named it the *City of Key West*. Sawyer's house (fig. 8.15) reflected his growing economic prosperity. Started in the same year in which he purchased his steamship, the original square portion of it followed the tradition of building he learned in the Bahamas. But Sawyer was not the isolated Conch which many people believed the islanders to be. His daughter Mrs. Agnes Reardon confirmed in a 1982 interview that her father made frequent trips to New York and in 1912 he added a two-storied octagon turret to his house. The influence of the mainland on Conch culture could be seen in Sawyer's own house. This home has often been referred to as a Victorian house but it still retains many Conch features. The door had been offset to the left but the house has a more Georgian feel to it than many ornate Victorian structures. The windows lack any excessive decorative treatment and the door has a simple light

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<sup>26</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, *Historic American Building Survey of Key West, Florida*, (Washington D.C., 1966).



over the top of it. This house had a transitional quality to it which mirrored the evolving society of Key West. The island had large influxes of people by this point and in 1912 it was joined to the mainland by the Overseas Railroad which Henry Flagler built.<sup>27</sup>

In addition to sponging and wrecking, the Bahamians also brought the industry of salt-raking to Key West. This industry attracted many free Black Bahamians who came to Key West and found themselves in the unenviable position of living in a community which had acquired a larger number of slaves by 1845. The influence of Black Bahamians in Key West proved to be pivotal in the development of the city. The early arrivals entered into a city which still allowed slavery and the free black immigrants created a new sphere in which the different races interacted, not always in good ways.<sup>28</sup> But in spite of the racial tension which Key Westers experienced between whites and free blacks, the Black Conchs soon began to accumulate property after their arrival to the city. For example, in 1844 Thomas Romer, Sr., a Black Bahamian, acquired a piece of property on Whitehead Street.<sup>29</sup> In the 1873 census done by the city which included a real estate valuation, an interesting final sheet recapitulated the census and divided the property owners into categories of gender, nationality and race. The racial category

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<sup>27</sup> All information on Sawyer came either from an interview with his daughter in the *Miami Metropolis* 18 April, 1982 or from *Bensels Key West Directory*, 1888.

<sup>28</sup> The influence of Black Bahamians in Key West is discussed in more in-depth in Chapter Five.

<sup>29</sup> Sharon Wells, *Forgotten Legacy* (Key West: Historic Florida Keys Preservation Board, 1982), 16.

included both “native colored” and “Nassau colored.”<sup>30</sup> The total number of Nassau blacks listed in the census was 428. The population of native blacks was recorded as 508. The entire black population had been counted as 1026 in 1870 by the official United States government census.<sup>31</sup> So by 1873, if this information was correct, only about 90 of the blacks living in Key West were not property owners; of the ones who owned property nearly half of them originally came from the Bahamas if the category “Nassau coloreds” had been recorded with accuracy. This distinct category showed the awareness the Bahamians had of being different from the rest of the black community. The largest number of them lived together in the area which was designated Bahama Village (fig.8.16). An example of their property holdings exists in Square 51, as designated by the Census of 1873. Bordered by Whitehead Street and Duval Street on the west and east and by Fleming Street and Southard Street on the north and south, Square 51 contained nineteen Bahamian Blacks. While looking at the schematic of this square included with the census, the names Roberts, Ferguson, Russell, Sawyer, Bethell and Simmons all stood out as Bahamian surnames. The most expensive property, a store worth seven thousand dollars, was not owned by a Bahamian, but the next most valuable was owned by John Sawyer; its value was five thousand dollars. Sawyer had a house on his lot, not a commercial property. Two women also owned property in this square and they both had Bahamian surnames: Sophia Simmons and Louisa Roberts. Roberts may have had her family living with her because her property had two houses on it.

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<sup>30</sup>Common Council of Key West, *Census of the City of Key West with a Valuation of the Real Estate-Stores, Manufactories, etc.* Taken from November 5 to December 11, 1873.

<sup>31</sup> Browne, 173.

The houses which these people constructed for the most part were small Georgian cottage types. Located on Olivia Street in Bahama Village, this small home (fig. 8.17) showed the distinctive roof line of a Conch house. It also had a small front porch which employed the truncated stone pilasters for the porch beams. These devices were common in the Bahamas and these small houses also displayed the symmetry which carried over from the Bahamas. The double-doored home on Whitehead Street (fig.8.18) perhaps housed two generations or followed the model for more than one entrance found in many Bahamian homes. This wooden house rested on limestone piers and had shiplap siding on it. The builder probably used pine as the material and chose to give the porch railing a decorative crossed pattern instead of upright balusters. The small Georgian cottage style brought to Key West from the Bahamas by those from the lower socio economic rungs dominated in many sectors of the city.

The Black Bahama Villagers continue to display a deep pride in their community, although today its survival is threatened by outrageous property prices, which force the locals out due to an increased tax base, and developers who wish to acquire the land. This forgotten portion of Key West's architectural heritage carried the same themes which the larger structures employed but their location in Bahama Village discouraged many architectural historians from writing about them. They need further study because they hold the stories of the laboring class of Black Bahamians who came to Key West.

The Conchs also transferred social institutions to the island. Many of the churches on the island owe their inception to Conch desires for a familiar religion. Educational institutions also grew in number when the Conchs arrived; at least two well-known teachers on the island came from the Bahamas. Because the schools were not

conducted in public buildings, but usually operated out of private homes or stores, their remains have been difficult to trace. But the churches in Key West continue to draw attention from visitors to the city. The oldest established church on the island, St. Paul's Episcopal Church (fig. 8.19), started in 1832. The original church structure was built in 1838 but blew down in the hurricane of 1846.<sup>32</sup> The existing church structure on Duval Street was finished in 1857 and then enlarged in 1860. Its builder employed a Gothic revival style which did not come from the Bahamas but instead from the mainland. Therefore, it did not follow the Conch's traditional method of building. This perhaps was due to the mixed origins of the congregation's members who came from all over the United States. But the Bahamians had a strong presence in the parish, and continued supporting the church throughout the nineteenth century.

In Bahama Village, the black Bahamians helped establish many churches; the oldest church, Bethel AME Church (fig. 8.20), was founded in 1870. The original structure fronted Duval Street, the main avenue of Key West, and it mysteriously burned in 1921. The parish chose to look for another site on which to rebuild. The congregation managed to purchase some land on Truman Avenue in Bahama Village and built a new sanctuary in 1925. The new structure had its inception based on Georgian design. The facade displayed perfect balance with the two towers on the opposing sides. The quoining (fig. 8.21), the brick work on the sides of the towers, was typical of the Caribbean Georgian style. In an informal discussion with a leader of the congregation, he related some of the names of current members of the church. The list of names was not surprisingly like a role from a church in the Bahamas. The Sawyers, Currys, Roberts,

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 28.

Lowes and Alburys had all been long-standing members of this institution. The Black Bahamians were important to the community and church.

This paper has so far mentioned famous Conchs in Key West and the black Conchs who helped to create the city. This society had other members which helped to keep the Conch heritage alive. Some of their small homes do not receive the attention, much like the Bahama Villagers' homes, which they deserve. For example, the merchants who supplied the residents with goods had established ideas about what types of buildings they preferred. In 1886, the Pinder and Curry families built a building on speculation for commercial use. Known as the Red Doors building (fig. 8.22),<sup>33</sup> it housed various business enterprises over the years. The Pinders and Currys knew what they were doing when they had this structure built. The bottom floor contained an open space for the proprietor to display goods or seat patrons while the upper floor housed the proprietor's family. The large veranda increased the living space for the merchant's family by almost one half of the interior space. The two heat vents, located in the roof, could be opened to allow the rooms to cool off in the summer. It also had twin gables to capture rain water for storage in the cistern.<sup>34</sup>

The smaller homes which sit near the old bight, the name Key Westers gave to their harbors, show the average Conch's home. These homes' inhabitants came to the city to work in the many industries spawned by the city. The John Curry house

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<sup>33</sup> Key West felt the effects of Hurricanes Katrina and Wilma during the 2005 hurricane season. I took this picture in June of 2006 when this structure was being repaired from damaged sustained by those storms.

<sup>34</sup> Warnke, *Balustrades*, 41.

(fig. 8.23) at 311 Williams Street was built in 1840.<sup>35</sup> It had a front porch which employed the familiar dormer windows. This location gave Curry the advantage of being near the water. His neighbor at 309 William (fig. 8.24) probably was a ship's carpenter because of the scuttles on the roof. These almost appear to be hatches like those used on boats to ventilate cabins. The slanting roof line also indicates some connection to the Abacos. This particular configuration remained popular in the Abacos until the twentieth century. It still remains a silhouette found in Hope Town, Abaco up to the present date<sup>36</sup>.

The Conchs began their odyssey with their architectural aesthetic firmly fixed in their Bahamian roots, but as they remained on the isle of Key West other influences began to creep into their building styles. The Arch house located at 810 Eaton (fig. 25) demonstrated this infiltration into the Conch's aesthetic reality. The Johnson brothers William and Copeland came from the Bahamas and erected this house for themselves in approximately 1890. It served both the brothers but allowed them to maintain separate quarters on the bottom floor. The arch for which this house received its name had the elaborate ornamentation which the mainland builders employed in revival type architecture. The Johnsons would have been influenced by this because they were apprentices to the architect William Kerr and helped him build the Post Office in Key

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<sup>35</sup> Architectural History Collection, Monroe County Public Library's Florida Collection, Key West, Florida.

<sup>36</sup> I traveled to Hope Town in 2002 and even after the ravages of hurricanes the population continues to use this roof form.

West.<sup>37</sup> They may have been the first professionally trained architects of the city who were Conchs. They also built the Overseas Hotel which stood on Fleming Street until it burned. They represented the new Conchs of Key West who began to accept some of the mainland culture but still hung onto many of the traditions of the past. They still employed a certain balance in their home but very superficially added certain American elements.

The most famous Conch to inhabit Key West had to have been the man William Curry. He earned his fortune wrecking and became Florida's first millionaire. His background included a father who participated in the American Revolution as a Loyalist and then moved to Harbor Island when the war ended where he received a land grant.<sup>38</sup> The life of William Curry had no mention in many of the major texts on Florida which was surprising because of his auspicious position in the society of Key West. The land he owned in the city included many business enterprises and he speculated in residential lots early in the nineteenth century. William Curry's family arrived early in Key West shortly after 1836. He began his career as a clerk in a store until he formed a partnership with Mr. George Bowne and they bought and sold wrecked goods.<sup>39</sup> He served the city as a mayor and was a major contributor to St. Paul's Episcopal Church. He also founded the first Merchant's Protective Association in 1889 which started in order to "protect the

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<sup>37</sup>All information concerning the Johnsons was found in the Monroe County Public Library's Florida Collection. The information was in a letter dated January 7, 1976 from S.B. Buckner to Dr. Jude.

<sup>38</sup> Riley, 263.

<sup>39</sup>Browne, 12.

old Key West merchants from the competition of the Jew peddlers who had just begun to come to Key West.”<sup>40</sup> Curry decided to build his residence at 511 Caroline Street, two conflicting stories say either this original home washed away in the hurricane of 1846 while another source said it was torn down by his son in 1905.<sup>41</sup> Whatever happened to that house, the home which stands at this location now has no remnants of the Conch style. Milton Curry, William’s son, had this elaborate Victorian mansion built in 1905 (fig. 8.26); it is now operated as a bed and breakfast. It was indicative of the end of the dominance of the Conchs and their material culture. The house even received a short review in the *Miami Metropolis* in the year of its completion. This would be the same year that the Overseas Railroad’s construction began. The project of Henry Flagler, the railroad’s construction started in the upper Keys in 1905. It and the Curry Mansion were the dual symbols of the end of a unique time in Key West’s history. The Conchs quickly became the minority in the town which had seemed like just another island home to them before this time.

In 1948 Dorothy Raymer, a journalist, decided to move to Key West. She immediately received warnings from friends that the Conchs were “descendants of pirates and wreckers who lured ships onto the reefs with placement of false lights. If Conchs didn’t like you, you were ambushed and bopped on the head, and perhaps they might set

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 101.

<sup>41</sup> Browne, 158. Browne told the story of the house washing away and also reported that an old black servant was in the house that was never found. A letter in the Monroe County Public Library reported that Curry’s son tore the house down.



fire to your abode.”<sup>42</sup> Did the Conchs deserve this reputation? Their nature seemed to encourage these types of stories. In the twentieth century, many of them began to insulate themselves from the mainstream culture of Key West; this behavior no doubt encouraged the myths which surrounded them. The town of Key West retained a strong tradition based on the continuing influx of immigrants from the Bahama Islands. The people who made this journey influenced all sectors of the community and helped to shape the architectural appearance of the town. The irony of their becoming the outsiders in the community should not be dismissed. Even though spurious rumors surround them, their contributions to Key West have been capitalized upon by many newcomers to town. The local tour guides apply the term Conch architecture to every building in the town because it sounds exotic and has the somewhat disreputable allure associated with Conchs and wrecking. But many people do not understand the nature of the Conchs. They displayed the characteristics of island people: insulated and family oriented.

The Conchs typically had large and extended families; they touted the benefits of hard work. Their isolation encouraged outsiders to consider them inferior because they did not assimilate well into the dominant culture. But when looking at the evidence left by the Conchs from the nineteenth century, this isolation did not seem apparent. They helped to build the city into a unique architectural expression of individualism in the United States. They also carried values with them that fit into what most nineteenth-century Americans considered normative: they believed in education and hard work. The marginalization of the Conchs began to occur after the island of Key West linked up to the mainland via Henry Flagler’s Overseas Railroad. The Conchs no longer lived on an

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<sup>42</sup> Dorothy Raymer, *Key West Collection* (Key West: Key West Bookstore, 1981), 7.

island, a natural insulation from the world, but now had to deal with the cultural onslaught of many new arrivals into Key West. This upheaval explained the Conchs: they had come to an island which suddenly was an island no more. They were foreigners once again.



Fig. 8.1  
Double Gable Structure  
Key West, Florida  
Construction Date: c.1880  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 2001



Fig. 8.2  
Vernacular Structure  
Hope Town, Abaco, Bahamas  
Construction Date: c. 1880  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 1999



**Fig. 8.3**  
**Gingerbread on Structure**  
**Green Turtle Cay, Abaco, Bahamas**  
**Construction Date: c. 1900**  
**Photo by Astrid Whidden**  
**Year Taken: 1999**

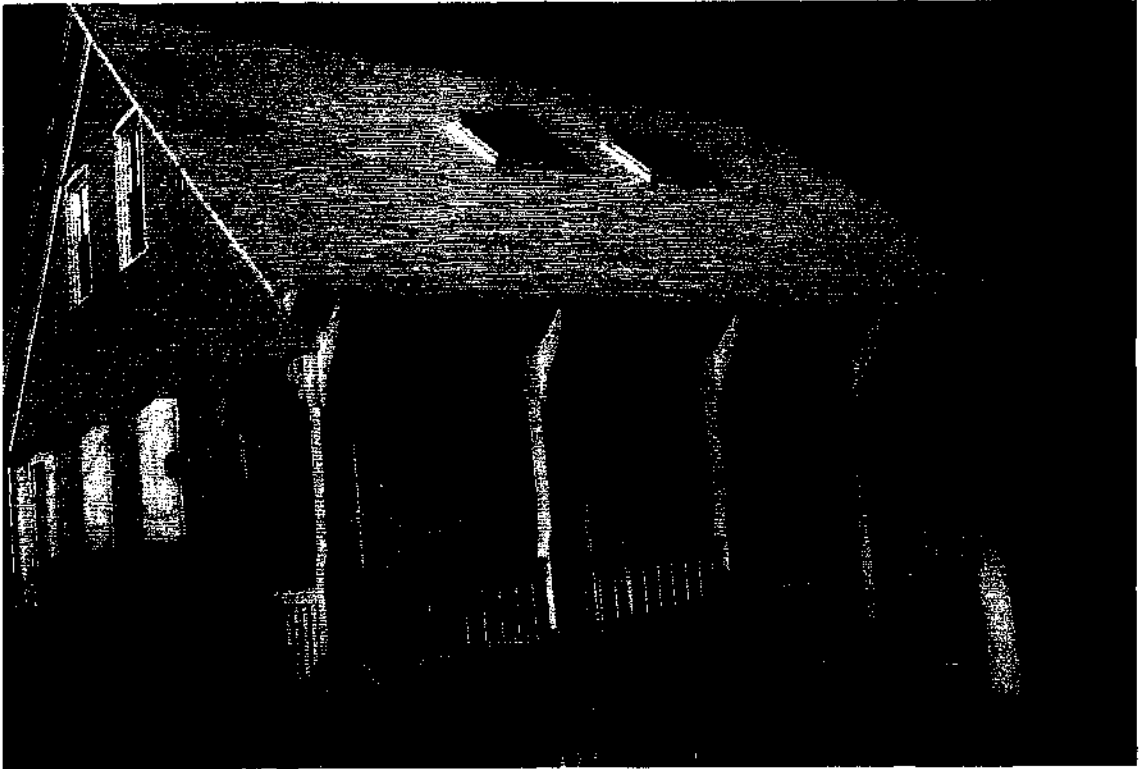


Fig. 8.4  
Vernacular Structure with Roof Scuttles  
Abaco, Bahamas  
Construction Date: c. 1850  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 1999



Fig. 8.5  
Government Structure with Twin Gables  
Grand Turk, British West Indies  
Construction Date: c. 1820  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 1996

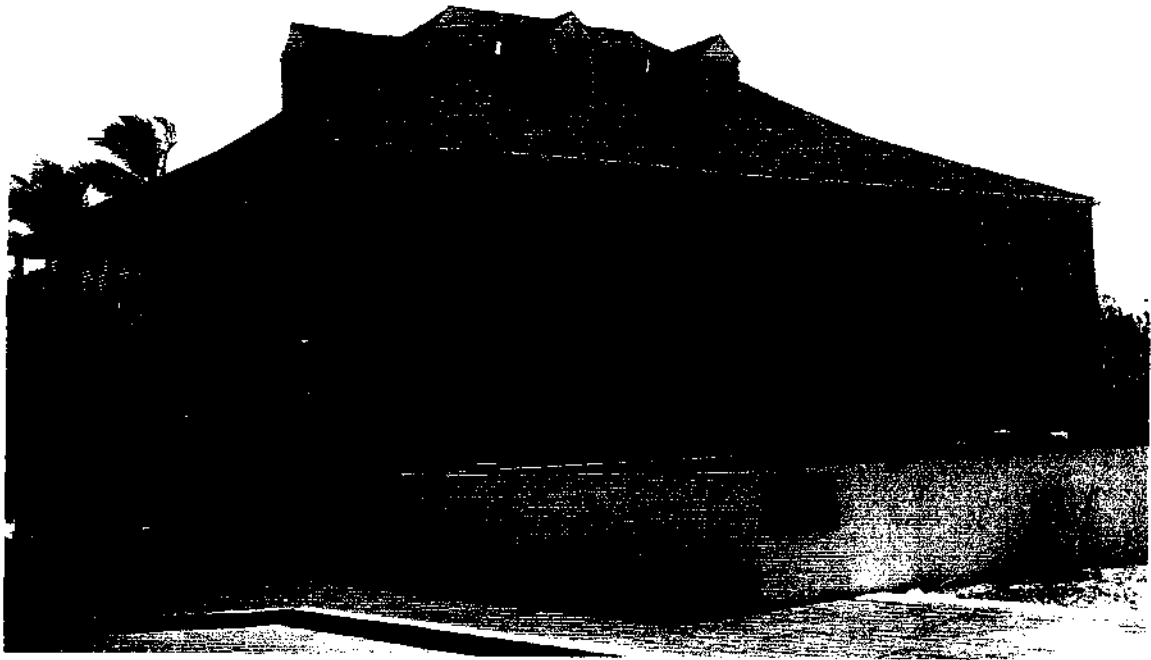


Fig. 8.6  
Two Story Structure with Exterior Staircase  
Grand Turk, British West Indies  
Construction Date: c. 1800  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 1996





Fig. 8.7  
701 Southard Street  
Structure with Exterior Staircase and Twin Gables  
Key West, Florida  
Owners: Randall Adams; John H. Roberts  
Construction Date: c. 1850  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 1996



Fig. 8.8

620 Southard Street

Key West, Florida

Owner: John Lowe Jr. (a wrecker and businessman he was born in Key West to Bahamian immigrants)

Construction Date: c. 1857-1865

Photo by Astrid Whidden

Year Taken: 1996



Fig. 8.9  
322 Duval Street  
Wrecker's Museum  
Key West, Florida  
Builder: Captain Richard Cussan (born in Nassau on Dec. 11, 1806)  
Material: Cuban Cedar  
Construction Date: 1825  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 2006



Fig. 8.10  
803 Whitehead Street  
Key West, Florida  
Construction Date: 1836  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 1996



Fig. 8. 11

730 Eaton Street

Bahama House

Key West, Florida

Owner: Captain John Bartlum

Construction Date: First erected in Green Turtle Cay, Abaco, Bahamas of white pine sometime before 1847. Disassembled and transported by ship to Key West in 1847; reassembled in 1847 on the current site.

Photo by Astrid Whidden

Year Taken: 1993



Fig. 8.12

730 Eaton Street

Bahama House Twin Gables and Porch

Key West, Florida

Owner: Captain John Bartlum

Construction Date: First erected in Green Turtle Cay, Abaco, Bahamas of white pine sometime before 1847. Disassembled and transported by ship to Key West in 1847; reassembled in 1847 on the current site.

Photo by Astrid Whidden

Year Taken: 1993



**Fig. 8.13**

**408 William Street**

**Key West, Florida**

**Owner: Captain Richard "Tuggy" Roberts**

**Construction Date: First erected in Green Turtle Cay, Abaco, Bahamas sometime before 1847. Disassembled and transported by ship to Key West in 1847 with Captain John Bartlum's house and reassembled late in 1847 on the current site.**

**Photo by Astrid Whidden**

**Year Taken: 1993**

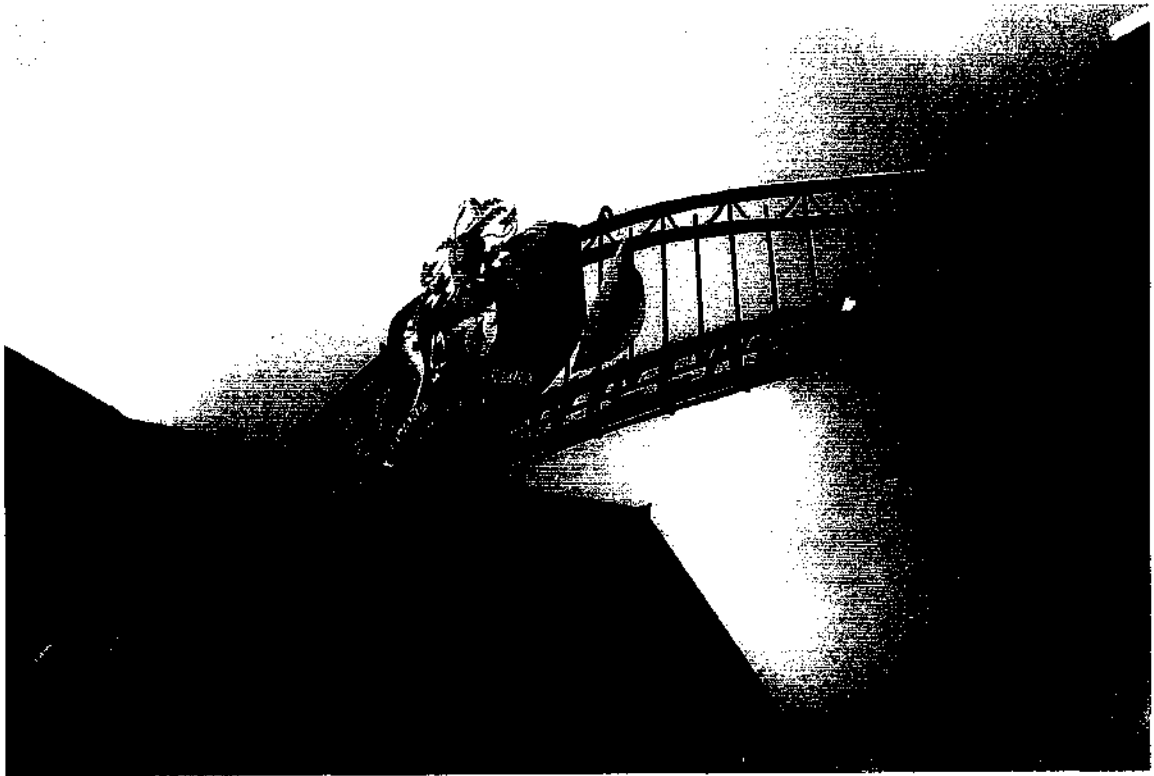


Fig. 8.14  
601 Caroline Street  
Key West, Florida  
Owner: Richard Moore Kemp  
Builder: John T. Sawyer  
Construction Date: 1887  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 2006





Fig. 8.15  
609 Francis Street  
Key West, Florida  
Builder and Owner: John T. Sawyer (he was a contractor who came from Spanish Wells,  
Eleuthera in 1872)  
Construction Date: 1886  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 1996



**Fig. 8.16**  
**Bahama Village Sign at Petronia and Duval Streets**  
**Key West, Florida**  
**Photo by Astrid Whidden**  
**Year Taken: 2006**



**Fig. 8.17**  
**Vernacular Structure with Twin Gables**  
**Bahama Village, Key West, Florida**  
**Construction Date: c. 1890**  
**Photo by Astrid Whidden**  
**Year Taken: 1996**



Fig. 8.18  
Vernacular Structure with Twin Gables and Double Doors  
Bahama Village, Key West, Florida  
Construction Date: c. 1890  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 1996

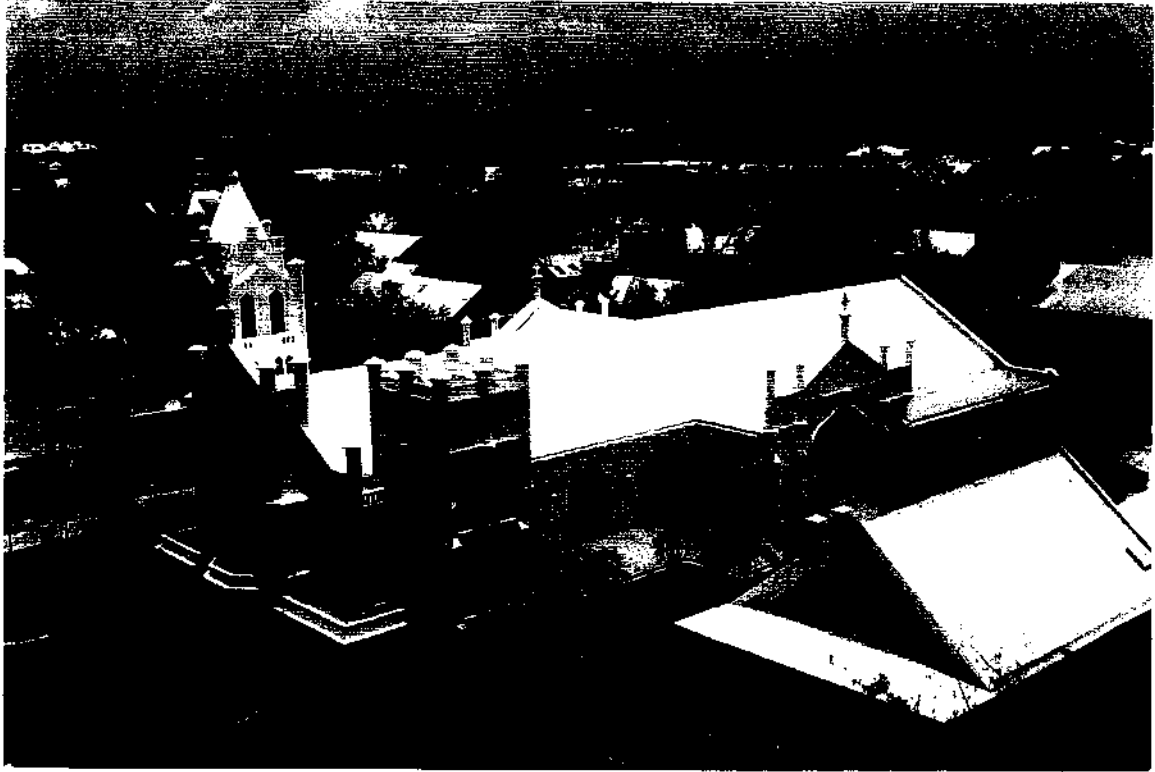


Fig. 8.19  
401 Duval Street  
St. Paul's Episcopal Church  
Key West, Florida  
Construction Date: 1857  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 2006



**Fig. 8.20**  
**223 Truman Avenue**  
**Bethel AME Church**  
**Bahama Village, Key West, Florida**  
**Construction Date: 1925 (older building, in a more desirable location, was built in 1870**  
**and then burned in 1921)**  
**Photo by Astrid Whidden**  
**Year Taken: 2006**



Fig. 8.21  
223 Truman Avenue  
Quoining of Bethel AME Church  
Bahama Village, Key West, Florida  
Construction Date: 1925 (older building, in a more desirable location, was built in 1870  
and then burned in 1921)  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 2006

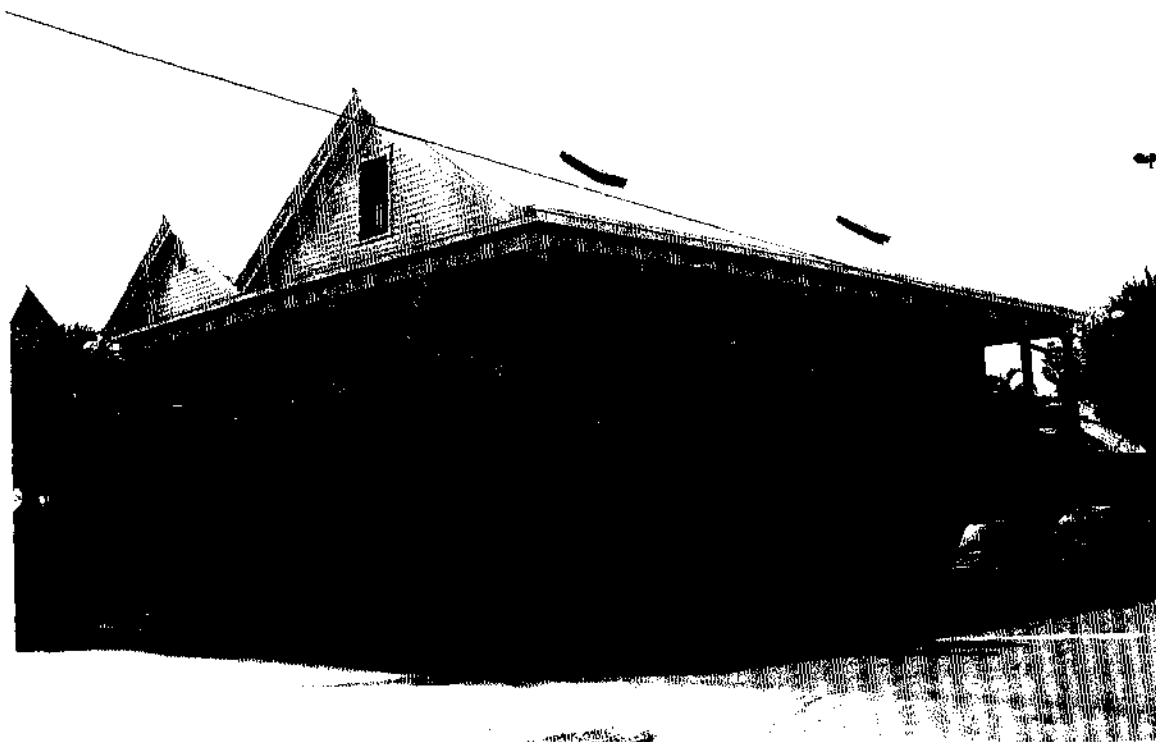


Fig. 8.22  
800 Caroline Street  
Red Doors Building  
Key West, Florida  
Owner: Theopolis Pinder  
Construction Date: 1886  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 2006





**Fig. 8.23**  
**311 William Street**  
**Key West, Florida**  
**Owner: John Curry**  
**Construction Date: 1840**  
**Photo by Astrid Whidden**  
**Year Taken: 2006**

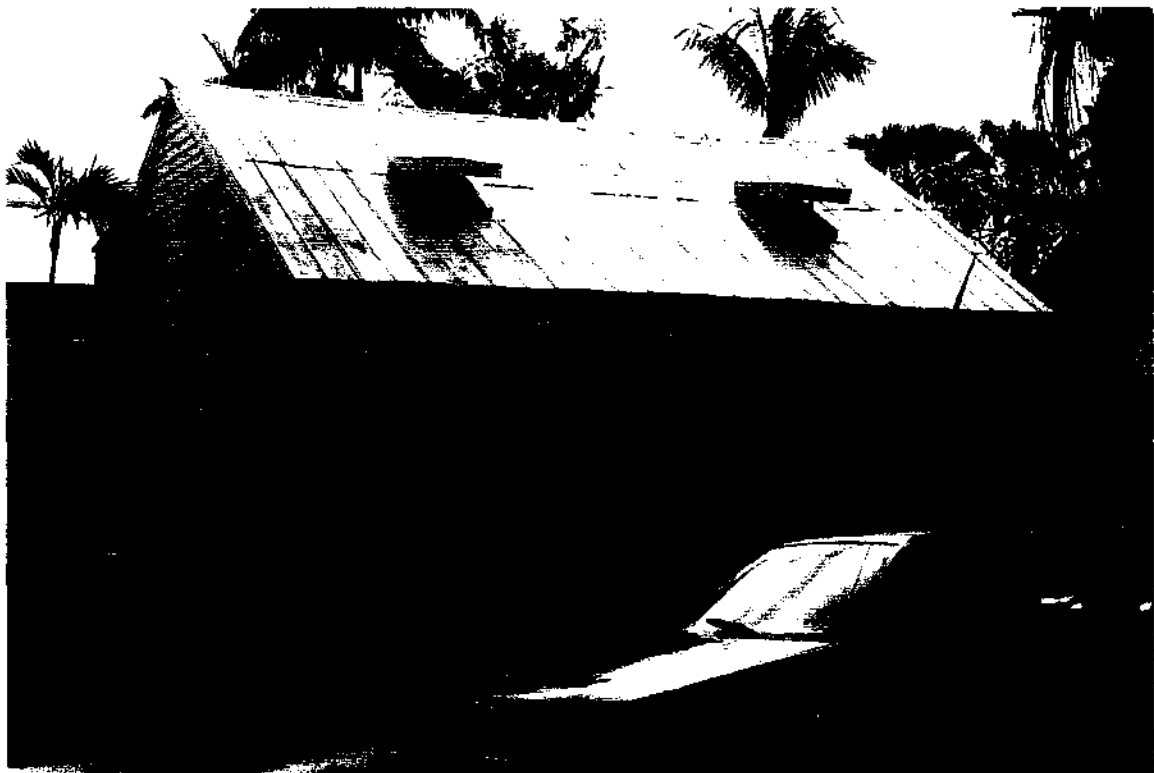
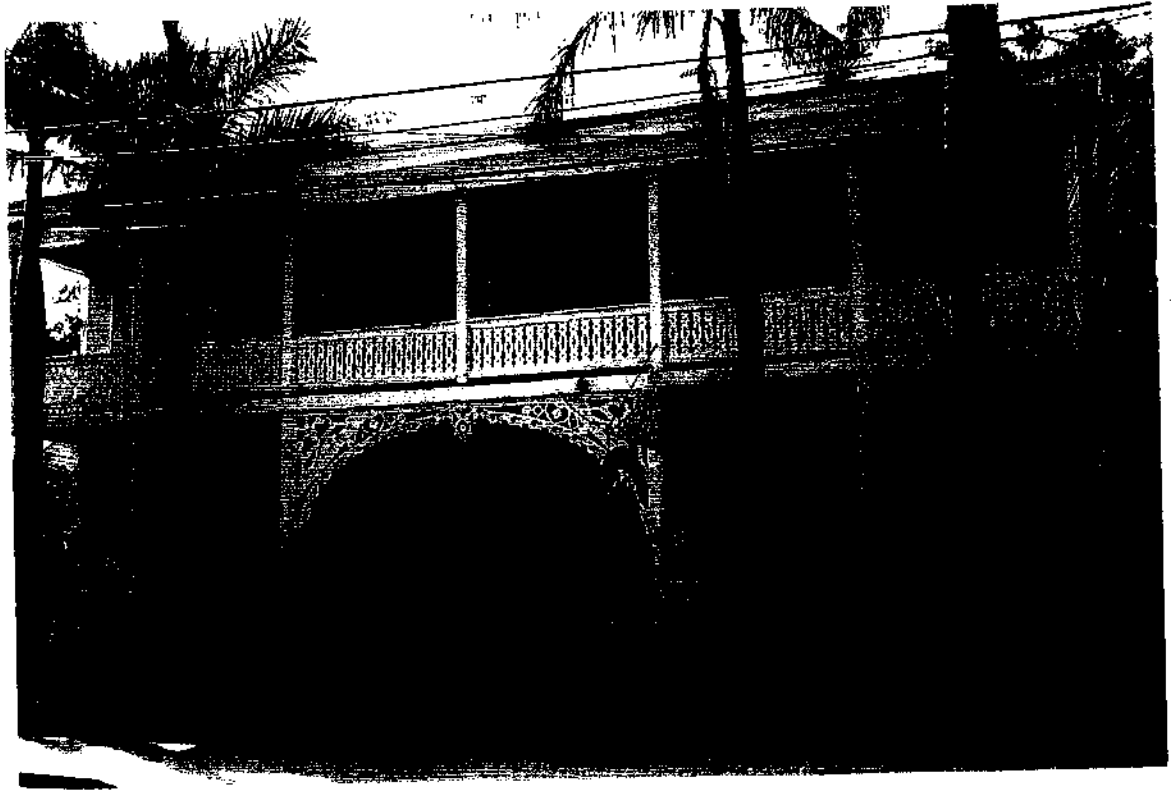


Fig. 8.24  
309 William Street  
Key West, Florida  
Construction Date: c. 1840  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 2006



**Fig. 8.25**  
**808 Eaton Street**  
**Arch House**  
**Key West, Florida**  
**Builders: William and Copeland Johnson (they were possibly the first Conchs who became trained architects in Key West)**  
**Construction Date: c. 1890**  
**Photo by Astrid Whidden**  
**Year Taken: 2006**



Fig. 8.26  
511 Caroline Street  
Curry Mansion  
Key West, Florida  
Builder: possible was William Ward  
Owner: Milton Curry  
Construction Date: 1905  
Photo by Astrid Whidden  
Year Taken: 2006

## Chapter Nine

### Conclusion

The connections between the people of the Florida/Bahamas zone materialized as soon as both regions contained permanent European colonies.<sup>1</sup> The artificial boundary lines imposed by the dominant colonial powers did little to counteract the reality of cross cultural seepages into these two separate spheres. The manifestations of this lie in the tangible remnants found in the architectural trends of the lands bordered by the mighty Gulfstream. While the Stream proved a fearsome challenge to the mariners from both sides of the Florida/Bahamas region, it also provided the conduit which lured ships from all over the Caribbean. The mariners of the northern Bahamas and Florida Keys thrived on the challenges dictated by the vicissitudes of the ocean which also provided economic gain. The fluidity of the lifestyle fostered by the atmosphere found in the outposts of the Florida/Bahamas nexus allowed all members of those societies to benefit from each group's adaptations to new challenges. The outcome of the self imposed exile of many of the American Loyalists resulted in unbreakable linkages which circulated from Florida to the Bahamas and then back to Florida. These ties formed originally in East Florida revealed themselves in later societal patterns and architectural expressions.

East Florida became an outpost for Spanish imperial aspirations in the wider domain of the New World. Its development never occupied the colonial powers to the point where its early backward plunges, due to such events as Drake's burning of St.

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<sup>1</sup> William F. Keegan, *The People Who Discovered Columbus: The Prehistory of the Bahamas* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1992), 3. There may have been contact between the Amerindians of these two regions prior to the arrival of the Europeans.

Augustine,<sup>2</sup> overly concerned Spain's government. Instead, St. Augustine's future was relegated to that of an entrepôt for the ships traveling between the Old World and the New World. Its acquisition by the British after the Seven Years' War opened an avenue for the dissenting Loyalists of North America to fall back on when it became obvious that the patriots would win the war in the American Revolution. Beginning to flood into East Florida during the final stages of the conflict, the Loyalist refugees, with their slaves, numbered 7579 by the spring of 1783.<sup>3</sup> Most of them sought refuge in the main city of St. Augustine; there they came under the influence of the existing cultural milieu which had antecedents in the mingling of Amerindian, Spanish, African and then British imprints left on the city.

While the city languished under the benign neglect of the officials in Spain, its unique position as an outpost allowed its own architectural style to develop. The culmination of this process survives in the distinct St. Augustine style associated with the city. This style matured under the influences of Spanish, English, and West Indian aesthetics.<sup>4</sup> It flourished during the eighteenth century and made St. Augustine's material environment markedly different from the material world of the colonies found on the rest of America's eastern seaboard. The contributions of the dominant elites continue to characterize the architecture associated with the city. This phenomenon remains constant

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<sup>2</sup>Michael Gannon, ed., *The New History of Florida* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), 58.

<sup>3</sup>Charles Loch Mowat, *East Florida as a British Province, 1763-1784* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1943; facsimile, Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1964), 137.

<sup>4</sup>Elsbeth K. Gordon, *Florida's Colonial Architectural Heritage* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), 78.

in the historiography of the study of architecture due to the undeniable reality that the structures built by the elites were the most enduring. They could afford the materials which could weather the ravages of time and climate. The British and then the Loyalists who arrived to St. Augustine brought new ideas concerning the appearance of their built world. They incorporated their own additions to the architecture of St. Augustine. They added glass to windows and built chimneys<sup>5</sup> to combat the chilly climate which this portion of the peninsula experiences in the winter months. The architectural mutations found in the city contained manifestations of the aesthetic preferences of all of its settlers.

The dream of recreating their lives based on models already developed in the southern colonies such as Georgia and South Carolina never materialized for the Loyalists in East Florida. The seceding of Florida back to Spain at the end of the American Revolution saw most of the Loyalists choosing to migrate to other portions of the British Empire. One of the opportunities opened to them by imperial officials included relocating to the Bahamas; some of them chose this destination to once again attempt to rebuild their lives. Those of the upper class hoped to create a new plantocracy which would reap the economic benefits of the plantation system and enjoy the social atmosphere of the capital. The refugees comprised of members from the lower socio economic rungs looked for opportunities as merchants, farmers and tradesmen in the

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 263.

Bahamas. The slaves brought in by the Loyalists gained little in this forced move although their numbers forever changed the demographics of the colony.<sup>6</sup>

Although the relocation appeared promising for the planters coming to the Bahamas, the archipelago never fit the paradigm of the more successful plantation colonies of the West Indies. Unlike the prosperous planters on islands such as Jamaica and Barbados who depended on sugar as their main crop, the Loyalists decided to cultivate cotton, in the southern portion of the Bahamas chain. The knowledge of the Loyalist agriculturalists in planting had come from experience with the rich soil of Georgia and South Carolina; this left them little prepared for the thin and rocky soil found in the Bahamas. The ultimate failure of the cotton plantations of the Loyalists appeared predestined when all of the adverse conditions were eventually realized.<sup>7</sup> This failure had additional repercussions for the slave labor force which then had to be employed in other ways.<sup>8</sup> Many planters encouraged the self sufficiency of their slaves and they either removed to Nassau or returned to the United States. The abandoned slaves by necessity learned to fend for themselves and eventually after emancipation they

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<sup>6</sup> Gail Saunders, *Slavery in the Bahamas* (Nassau: The Nassau Guardian, 1985; reprint, Nassau: The Nassau Guardian, 1990), 17. The Loyalists' slaves made the black population numerically greater in the Bahamas.

<sup>7</sup> Wm. J. Godfrey Eneas, *Agriculture in the Bahamas: Its Historical Development, 1492-1992* (Nassau: Media Publishing, 1998), 13. The combination of insect infestations, poor soil and poor tillage methods have all been attributed to the failure of cotton.

<sup>8</sup> B. W. Higman, *Slave Populations of the British Caribbean, 1807-1834* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 71-72. In the period just before emancipation in 1834, no slaves were recorded as still engaged in cotton production in the Bahamas.



became peasant farmers on the Out Islands.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the grandiose plans of the planters never fully materialized and in a census from 1800, taken by the Royal Government of the Bahamas, the reason for the failure of the cotton industry was given succinctly by John Kelsall. Kelsall was the son of Roger Kelsall, who had left East Florida in the hopes of building a large plantation on Exuma. In John Kelsall's answer to the question posed as to why cotton had failed he stated that:

The Principal causes of our failures, for so many successive years, is . . . unquestionably the exhausted State of our Soil, arising from constant and unintermitted culture; there has doubtless been much injudicious Planting nor is it . . . to be wondered at, that men, very many of whom, were unused to agriculture, all of them Strangers to the Soil and Climate, and unable to procure from the few Cotton Planters whom they found in the Country, any information that could be relied on, Should in cultivating Cotton for the first time in their lives, fall into error.<sup>10</sup>

The lack of productive soil remained problematic in Bahamian agriculture until the introduction of intensive fertilization. Even today the primary way the Out Islanders grow food stuffs relies on the ancient tradition of potash cultivation.<sup>11</sup> The plantations of the Loyalists were abandoned and fell into disrepair after cotton failed.

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<sup>9</sup>Michael Craton, *Empire, Enslavement and Freedom in the Caribbean* (Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 1997), 237.

<sup>10</sup> Lydia Austin Parrish, "Records of Some Southern Loyalists: Being a Collection of Manuscripts about Some Eighty Families, Most of Whom Immigrated to the Bahamas During and After the American Revolution," p. 359, Sorted Indexed and Bound by Maxfield Parrish Jr., 1953.

<sup>11</sup> My aunt who lives on old family land on Long Island in the southern Bahamas farms in this method. The rocky substratum of the topography dictates that she finds holes in the rocks where she decides to plant. She will burn an area that will go into cultivation in the future and let it sit with the ashes creating a more fertile growing bed. She then plants in little mixed groupings crops such as celery, tomatoes, thyme and corn. She saves her open land for growing bananas which are her primary money making crop.

The northern Bahamas developed on a different trajectory as the Loyalists in that region integrated themselves into the fabric of the society developed by the early Conchs.<sup>12</sup> They became audacious seafarers who plied the local waters as well as the waters off Florida's coast for wrecks and fish. Wrecking dominated the economy of the Abacos and New Providence as millions of dollars accumulated from the assets taken from foundered ships. These materials and goods included such items as copper, timber, household goods and raw materials being shipped to and from the Caribbean and into the Gulf of Mexico. The location of the islands proved perfect to the mariners who searched reefs and shoals for the injured vessels. The treacherous waters between Florida and the Bahamas were regarded as being as dangerous as the waters located around Horn of South America.<sup>13</sup> The mariners built small communities on the outer cays of the Abacos which reflected the ingenuity of the people. They developed an economy based on the available resources; not on agriculture.

The remnants of the impact of the Loyalists and their slaves survive in the architectural styles which dominate the Bahamas. The multiple aesthetic ideas expressed in the material milieu of St. Augustine traveled with the Loyalists from St. Augustine to the Bahamas. They had internalized a conception of beautiful based on the Anglo-

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<sup>12</sup> The irony of this cannot be dismissed as the incoming Loyalists had originally looked down on the Conchs (what they called the local population who relied on a heavy diet of the mollusk) whom they thought were inferior and lazy.

<sup>13</sup> Dorothy Dodd, "The Wrecking Business on the Florida Reef, 1822-1860," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 22 (April 1944): 173. By 1849, the insurance rate charged to vessels traveling in the region to the Gulf of Mexico reached the same heights as those charged to vessels making the Horn passage.

American<sup>14</sup> world married with the solutions found to climatic occurrences. Bind these two factors with the creative input of enslaved African peoples and a unique architecture emerged in the Florida/Bahamas zone. Although the generic pyramid house and West Indian cottage form characterized most of the Caribbean world,<sup>15</sup> the few but necessary mutations they took in the regions under discussion allowed for a more lasting retention of the basic form and a much wider usage of the conservative principal which anchored the form. The travails of the Loyalists made a lasting impression on the Bahamas which then carried over into the wider scope of the built world. The capital of Nassau and the Out Islands both retain the remnants of this time left over from the revolutionary age of the late eighteenth century.

The dilapidated appearance of Nassau in 1784, when many of the Loyalist arrived, changed dramatically under their building programs by 1813. John Melish wrote in 1813 that:

The streets are regular and well paved. The houses are mostly built of stone and many of them are handsome. The principle public buildings are an elegant house for the governor-general; a courthouse, two churches, a jail, work-house, and commodious barracks for the troops.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Hugh Morrison, *Early American Architecture: From the First Colonial Settlements to the National Period* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952; reprint, New York: Dover Publications, 1987), 289. The Georgian style was influenced by Renaissance ideas of symmetry and austerity. This style dominated in the southern colonies prior to the American Revolution.

<sup>15</sup>Sidney W. Mintz, *Caribbean Transformations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 231-232. Due to the parallels found in the histories of the regions as well as in the wider Caribbean, house forms developed which have similarities to each other especially within the peasantry population.

<sup>16</sup>John Melish, *A Description of East and West Florida and the Bahama Islands; With an Account of the Most Important Places in the United States, Bordering Upon Florida and the Gulf of Mexico* (Philadelphia: T. and G. Palmer, 1813), 8. John Melish was sent by

Within thirty years, the destitute refugees helped remodel Nassau. When examining the relics of the old plantation structures and their outbuildings, one realizes the amount of labor and time invested into these ventures. For example, Deveaux House on Cat Island with its large hewn beams and detailed stone work defines a dream of unimagined proportion for such a region. The Out Islands still present a building challenge to the inhabitants who live on them today. Even with the present building boom, the amount of funds necessary to build a moderate structure reaches phenomenal proportions at times. Combine this with the lack of skilled labor and small problems become huge problems. Compound these modern problems with the realities of the late eighteenth century, such as lack of transportation and tools, and the achievements of the Loyalists and their slaves survive as a testimony to their fortitude. Include the northern Bahamas into this overview, and the poorer settlers who went to the Abacos and eventually attained great wealth by adopting the lifestyle of the Conchs, and the Loyalists emerge as intrepid entrepreneurs who overcame conditions of great adversity. They linked their material world to their internalized concepts of what constituted an aesthetically pleasing structure.

The Bahamas by the 1820s had undergone an immense change with the influx of the Loyalists into its society. The odyssey they embarked upon caused many of them to flounder as its demands proved too great. The survivors who managed to thrive, or at least create their own niche within the evolving colony, soon had to deal with other events which impacted them as the century progressed. The emancipation of slaves in 1834 which caused the restructuring of the Bahamian economy and society challenged

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the Americans to access British fortifications and troop strength in the Bahamas during the War of 1812.

1834 which caused the restructuring of the Bahamian economy and society challenged the population in the nineteenth century. In addition, a small minority seemed to make most of the profits from triumphs such as those found in the cultivation of sisal and pineapple which made the Bahamas a successful competitor in the world market in the second half of the century.<sup>17</sup> As a result, dissatisfied workers and entrepreneurs looked for other avenues to gain increased returns on their efforts to accumulate capital.

The tensions found within the Bahamas as the population struggled to adapt the changes of the nineteenth caused many of the more intrepid to decide to continue the odyssey begun by their ancestors. Lured by the promise of gains in the newly acquired territory of Florida,<sup>18</sup> the influx of the Bahamians into Florida continued into the early part of the twentieth century. The Bahamians who migrated to Key West arrived to capitalize on the maritime industries of wrecking, sponging, salt raking and fishing. They came with isolationist tendencies fostered in the insulated atmosphere found on many of the small cays of the Bahamas. They quickly banded together as a people separate from the Americans coming into the new territory. Their skills developed while coping with the ocean's demands in the Bahamas allowed some of them to dominate the community and some of the more successful assumed leadership roles in Key West. For example, the

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<sup>17</sup> Eneas, 14.

<sup>18</sup> Charleton W. Tebeau, *A History of Florida* (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1971; reprint, Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1991), 117. The United States gained Florida from Spain in 1821 with the signing of the Adams-Onís treaty.

Lowe family arrived in Key West in the 1830s. The Green Turtle Cay<sup>19</sup> native John Lowe, Jr., became one of Key West's most prominent businessmen.<sup>20</sup>

The Bahamians in Key West also included black workers who perceived the opportunities available in the city. The free Black Bahamians who decided to move to the city initially had to combat the atmosphere of racial prejudices held by white Key Westers before the Civil War. Although this caused them problems, Black Bahamians still traveled to Key West even though territorial legislation had disallowed the immigration of free blacks to the region.<sup>21</sup> Many of the surnames of free blacks arrested in Key West for violating the law had Bahamian origins. For example, John Hepburn had a warrant sworn for his arrest on May 21<sup>st</sup> of 1834.<sup>22</sup> While the difficulty of moving between the Bahamas and Florida for black Bahamians proved challenging, it did not dissuade them from immigrating to Key West. The lure of jobs validated their decisions to move. They eventually established a separate community on the tiny island which

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<sup>19</sup>This cay is located in the Northern Bahamas in a group of small cays known as the Abacos.

<sup>20</sup>Biographical Notes on John Lowe, Jr., Special Collections, Monroe County Public Library, Key West, Florida. Lowe had a fleet of sponging boats, ran a mercantile business and fathered nine children who intermarried with other Conch families on the island.

<sup>21</sup>Free Black Folder (1834), Special Collections, Monroe County Public Library, Key West, Florida.

<sup>22</sup> Michael Craton and Gail Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, Volume One: From Aboriginal Times to the End of Slavery* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1992), 190-191. James Hepburn had held the office of attorney general in East Florida. He became a representative of Cat Island in the government of the Bahamas who represented the Loyalists' ambitions.

became known as Bahama Village and left an enduring legacy based on their island culture.

Along with the immigrants, came the Bahamian architectural style which dominated in the Abacos and reflected the lifestyle of a seafaring community and the earlier influences of the Loyalists' Georgian motifs. Often their homes constructed in the Bahamas relied on shipbuilding skills and would be pegged together with wooden dowels; this type of technology transferred to Key West.<sup>23</sup> Pegged construction allowed the builders of wooden homes to rely on their own resources. They did not need nails, thus, they did not need to import this material. The ability to remain self sufficient continued as an important factor when remoteness from manufacturing centers constituted a daily reality. Their aesthetic relied on a plain, symmetrical façade which characterizes many old Key West structures. The mutations found in the city on this basic building premise occurred as the influence of the Americans increased during the second half of the nineteenth century when more of them migrated to the key.

The Black Bahamians also demonstrated their incorporation of the aesthetics set by the dominant elites. Depending on their socio-economic standing, their diligence in duplicating the Bahamian style varied. Many copied the style derived from the white Abaconians, which demonstrated shipbuilding skills, while others adapted the old slave form of the hall and parlor style. A visual testimony to the feeling of difference which many of the Black Bahamians experienced in Key West remains in their architecture. Today old Bahama Villagers cling to that heritage. The incursion of developers into

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<sup>23</sup> Andrew Gravette, *Architectural Heritage of the Caribbean: An A-Z of Historic Buildings* (Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 2000), 99.

Bahama Village threatens the world these people built which helped shape their identity based on their origins in the Bahamas.

Thus, the circulation of ideas and historical precedents continued as the Loyalists turned into Conchs and then turned into Key West Conchs. The Bahamas had been called a colony of America,<sup>24</sup> but the exchanges between the two regions appear more equitable when enlarging the scope of the lens used to establish this conclusion. While the reason for the colony comment rests on the economic reliance of the Bahamas on the United States for goods, the Southeast Florida region drew on the Bahamas for some of the traditions which make it unique on the Eastern Seaboard of the United States. The use of architecture as an historical tool with which to examine evolutionary trends of a specific portion of society as it mutates and progresses has validity insofar that the buildings left behind testify to certain inculcated beliefs by the people who constructed them. As Henry Glassie argues, the study of vernacular architecture “accommodates cultural diversity.”<sup>25</sup> The use of architecture as a tool for a more inclusive interpretation of the historical processes which occur in the borderlands regions such as the Florida/Bahamas zone acknowledges the entire scope of the projects that the peoples of the area succeeded in accomplishing with the limited resources at their disposal. The resources had to be welded to fit the aesthetic they wished to emulate. What that aesthetic represented went

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<sup>24</sup> Whittington B. Johnson, *Race Relations in the Bahamas, 1784-1834: The Nonviolent Transformation from a Slave to Free Society* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2000), 18.

<sup>25</sup> Henry Glassie, *Vernacular Architecture* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000), 20.



beyond a mere reproduction of the world they came from prior to their arrival in the difficult environments of the neglected regions.

The idea that the transference of the familiar provides comfort supports the continuing phenomena of immigrants' attempts to surround themselves with the soothing aesthetic symbols of their former homes. In the Florida/Bahamas zone the repetition of form occurred as the builders attempted to express their beliefs in a concrete fashion; thus, architecture becomes the site for the transportation of meaning.<sup>26</sup> It voices the ideas of the creators as it visually articulates their backgrounds and beliefs. Only with the advent of advanced technology in construction, which took the fundamental processes of construction from the vernacular builders, did this change. The builders in the older Florida/Bahamas' environment made decisions such as which materials to use, the forms they would take, and the way volume would be enclosed in order to create a comfortable interior micro-climate.<sup>27</sup> They learned what material to use in order to obtain the most comfortable living quarters to suit their needs. The process of keeping an internalized aesthetic along with accommodating the surrounding conditions gradually evolved through ad hoc solutions and the syncretism of multiple influences. Though built on the dichotomies of native and alien; of familiar and unfamiliar; old and new, the solutions found by the builders satisfied their requirements as they shaped Florida and the Bahamas.

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<sup>26</sup>Vernon Hyde Minor, *Art History's History*, 2d ed. (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 2001), 155.

<sup>27</sup> Paul Oliver, *Dwellings: The Vernacular House Worldwide* (London: Phaidon Press, 2003), 130.

The Florida/Bahamas zone of the Circum Caribbean evolved under the influences of a multicultural society at the edge of two vast empires in the late eighteenth century. The continuous interaction between the people of the peninsula and the islands reinforced the changes which occurred as the political machinations of the metropolises created or destroyed boundaries which did not affect the reality of the connections forged. The continuation of the interactions in this region created a society which was characterized by diversity and change. The people who prospered did so by adapting to new circumstances while at the same time clinging to certain traditions which made transitions more agreeable. The desire for order prevailed at times due to the tumultuous times which disrupted the people who lived through the period under discussion. The movement of the people of the Florida/Bahamas zone continues into the twenty-first century. The Conchs leaving Key West do so under severe economic pressures which they cannot combat, although they still identify themselves as Conchs.<sup>28</sup> The irony contained in their saga must not be dismissed as the people who helped to shape the region became the eventual outsiders. They left America, they left the Bahamas, and now they are leaving Key West. Yet, their influence remains behind in the places they inhabited and their legacy is still considered one of the defining symbols of their old homes.

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<sup>28</sup> The old Conchs of Key West who have left the island have reunions and keep in touch via a website ([www.conchs2000.com](http://www.conchs2000.com)) where they attempt to maintain their association with each other.

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