

The Matecumbe Historical Trust Corp. is a 501(c) 3 non-profit organization dedicated to the education, history, and preservation of the Florida Keys. Our founder, Mr. Irving Eyster, has been our local Keys historian for over 60 years - collecting artifacts, memorabilia, and photos. He is an archaeologist, historian, and a professor.

The Matecumbe Historical Trust is committed to the creation of the definitive anthropological and historical museum of the Florida Keys. The museum will preserve the unique history of the Keys, and it will become the pre-eminent repository of artifacts as well as a venue for academic symposia and research about the Keys and related subjects worldwide. It will house Mr. Eyster's vast collection of artifacts, photographs, historical articles, and memorabilia. It will be enhanced by individual items and collections donated or loaned from others who have directly contacted us to express their most sincere interest. It will be a significant educational center for residents and tourists.

Some of the themes to be included in the permanent collection will be: *Geologic, Prehistoric, Explorations, Shipwrecks, Wreckers, Settlers, Pirates, Lighthouse, Military Presence, Spanish Connection, Flagler Railway, Fishing, Hurricanes, Post Hurricane, Overseas Highway, Tourism, and Commercial.*

This Trust has worked extensively for the past several years photographing, cataloging and laying out the exhibits of the permanent collections as well as the layout of each individual exhibit. This is an immeasurably impactful project with substantial historical significance for the entire Florida Keys.

“Please don’t allow these precious historical artifacts, imagery, and most importantly knowledge to disappear from future generations.”

Please consider a tax deductible donation to the “Matecumbe Historical Trust” or go to www.MatecumbeHistoricalTrust.com and click on the donate button. For more information or to volunteer, please contact Barbara Edgar at 305-393-0940.

“The past belongs to the future but only the present can preserve it.” ~ Irving R. Eyster

A Guide
to

HISTORIC
ISLAMORADA



www.MatecumbeHistoricalTrust.com

Historic ISLAMORADA

Welcome to Islamorada.

Our history spans more than 3,000 years and represents a fascinating story of nature's power and human courage in an island paradise.

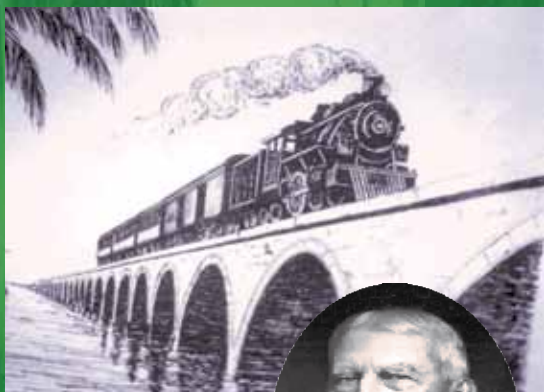
Tropical Contentment

Today's Islamorada area was settled in the 1850's by the Russell's and their children, who homesteaded 160 acres overlooking the ocean. They planted pineapples, melons, and tomatoes. In the 1870's, the Pinders took a land grant in the middle of the island. Later settlers included the Parkers.



Trust Highlights

- Creation of the Heritage Monument Trail – Markers and descriptive plaques located throughout the Islands marking sites of historical interest.
- A colorful self-guided tour brochure mapping out the locations of the markers and a brief history of each location.



“The Railway That Went to Sea”

Henry M. Flagler’s Florida east coast railway represented an important element in the economic life of the Florida Keys. Construction of the Overseas Railway commenced from the tip of the Florida mainland in 1905. Two years later, it reached Islamorada and was considered a spectacular engineering feat, second only to the Panama Canal. The Chief Engineer of the railway construction built a home in Islamorada and platted the first streets. A scheduled railway stop could be made only in named towns, so William J. Krome called this place Islamorada (“Island Home”) after a schooner owned by J.B. Pinder. After the railway was completed, Islamorada’s income from fishing increased, while the produce trade was ruined. Cuban pineapples and limes could be loaded onto train cars in Havana, ferried to Key West, then moved to New York without being unloaded. Low Cuban labor costs limited competition.





Tourists and Fish

The entry of Railway to the Florida Keys brought many tourists who came to fish and relax in a subtropical setting. Local residents served as fishing guides, and small resorts and hotels arose to accommodate the visitors.





The Road to Ruin

Transportation in the Keys was aided by the Overseas Highway, begun in 1926 and completed in 1938. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, World War I Veterans clamored for bonuses promised them in the aftermath of the Great War. Many accepted jobs instead; 600 veterans came to the area to build bridges to replace the ferry. They lived in camps and got \$1 per day plus food, clothing, and medicine.



Following the 1935 hurricane, the angel of Etta Pinder's grave was damaged. It stands today in the cemetery at Cheeca Lodge. Deeded to Richard Pinder in 1882 by President Chester A. Arthur, the cemetery at Cheeca Lodge is now the property of Matecumbe United Methodist Church. It has been surrounded by a resort since 1937.



The Great Hurricane

On Labor Day 1935, a killer hurricane with winds in excess of 200-mph, devastated the Matecumbe area. The heavy winds and turbulent seas sent a 17-foot tidal surge across the island, killing hundreds of veterans and permanent residents. A rescue train sent from Miami reached Islamorada but was blown off the track by the force of the tidal surge. Flagler's unique Overseas Railway was destroyed forever.



Monthly meetings are held featuring programs of interest to the area – slide shows, lectures, videos and symposia. Tours, dinners, excavations and things of interest to most everyone are scheduled throughout the year.

We are currently in the process of building a historical museum so everyone visiting the area may share in the rich history of the Florida Keys.

The Trust is actively collecting pictures, maps, books and papers – either as donations or for duplication (originals returned to owner) for our archives. Credit in the museum will be given to the donor for any donated items.

Islamorada Heritage

1500 B.C.

Native Americans enjoyed the Upper Keys for about 3,000 years before Europeans arrived. Evidence of their living areas can still be found.

1513

Ponce de Leon sailed through the Keys, naming them Los Martires owing to their tangled, twisted appearances.

1733

The Spanish treasure fleet was destroyed on Islamorada reefs by a hurricane. One ship, the San Pedro, is now an underwater State Park.

1882

The Russell's acquired the first land grant followed by the Pinder's and Parker's.

1905

Construction of Henry Flagler's Overseas Railway began.

1908

Islamorada railway station and Islamorada's first Post Office opened.

1906, 1908, 1910

Hurricanes struck the Matecumbe area during railway construction.

1912

The Overseas Railway was completed to Key West.

1926

Construction began on the Overseas Highway and bridges.

1934

Over 600 World War I veterans were sent to the Lower Matecumbe area to work on roadway bridges.

1935

On September 2, Labor Day, the "Big One," a mighty hurricane with winds in excess of 200 miles per hour, sent a 17-foot tidal wave across Islamorada, killing hundreds of veterans and local citizens.

1937

Monument dedicated to those who lost their lives in the killer hurricane of 1935.

1938

The Overseas Highway was completed to Key West.

1942

Water was piped from the mainland.

1943

Electricity officially arrived.

1960

Hurricane Donna struck Islamorada.

1997

Incorporation of Islamorada, Village of Islands.



Islamorada, Village of Islands, has an intriguing history. We invite you to walk or drive from site to site as you learn about and explore our rich historical past.

MM = Mile Marker / BS = Bayside / OS = Oceanside

MM 86.9 - BS/OS
Plantation Key

Johnny "Brush" Pinder had a pineapple plantation from the sea to the bay. The plaque is between the Old Highway and US1. Pinder built the Schooner "Island Home" in his yard by the ocean.



MM 84.1 - OS
Theater of the Sea

The second marine attraction of it's kind in the World, Theater of the Sea was opened in one of Henry Flagler's quarry pits in 1946 by Phelps and Martha McKenney.

MM 83.8 - OS
Whale Harbor

Whale Harbor was the first property sold from the Russell land grant of 1882 and was the first marina on the island. It received national publicity when visited by radio personality Arthur Godfrey, a friend of Al Lucky, owner during the 40's and 50's. Whale Harbor was demolished in 2014.



MM 83.8 - BS
Indian Wells

In the woods, next to the ball field on what is now the property of Island Christian School is the remains of an Indian Colony. Wells dug at the time of the settlement are located on the site.



MM 82.7 - OS Post Office / Railway Station
BS - Village of Islamorada

The original site of both the Islamorada Post Office and the Railway Station is now the parking lot of today's Post Office where a plaque has been placed on the front lawn. Across US1 was the first subdivision, constructed by William J. Krome, who built the railway for Flagler.



MM 82.5 - BS
Railway Caboose

The historic railway caboose displays plaques commemorating four of the most important events in Islamorada's history:

1. Overseas Highway
2. Early Settlers
3. Labor Day storm Sept 2, 1935
4. Memorial to those who lost their lives in the Labor Day storm of 1935



MM 81.7 - OS
The Cemetery

The original settlers built a church behind today's Post Office in 1895. In 1907 it was floated to where Cheeca Lodge is today. A school, parsonage, and cemetery were all built at the site where only the cemetery remains.



MM 81.6 - BS**Helen Wadley Library**

The Helen Wadley Library was built by the WPA and Red Cross in 1938 as a hurricane shelter and has been utilized as a school, church, and Coast Guard building.

**MM 81.6 - OS****Hurricane Monument**

The Hurricane Monument was erected by the WPA in 1937 to memorialize the hundreds of WWI veterans and citizens who lost their lives in the storm. The ashes of 300 victims are buried in the crypt.

**MM 81.6 - OS****Albury House**

Following the Labor Day storm of 1935 Ed Albury built this house. After being remodeled it is now home to the restaurant Kaiyo.

MM 81.6 - OS**Sweeting House**

The Sweeting house was different from the others constructed by the WPA and the Red Cross in that The Sweetings asked theirs be built as a grocery store with an apartment above.

**MM 81.6 - OS****“Hurricane Houses”**

On the Oceanside just south of the Hurricane Monument are several Hurricane houses and south of the Green Turtle Inn on the Old Highway are two more. There is a plaque in front of the Rodberg's and another at the Wagner's. Several others are located on the Oceanside of the east end of the island.

MM 81.6 - OS
Green Turtle Inn

After being almost blown away in 1935, the Rustic Inn originally constructed in 1928 was rebuilt and renamed Green Turtle Inn by Sid and Roxie Siderius. It was then owned by Henry Rosenthal and was recently sold again and rebuilt in 2007.



MM 81.2 - OS
Islamorada Baptist Church

When the new Methodist Church was built next to the Hurricane Monument, the old building was given to the Baptists. It was moved by truck to it's present location.

MM 79.8 - BS
Papa Joe's
(former location)

Papa Joe's was built by the Fowler's in 1937. This location housed a marina, restaurant and bar known as Caribee Resort and was host to the first Florida Keys fishing tournament. Papa Joe's was demolished in 2010.



MM 79.1 - OS
Tea Table Key
Ft. Paulding

Tea Table Key, also known as Fort Paulding was a Navy base providing protection from the Indians.

MM 78.5 - OS
Historic Memorials

Memorial to the rafters so desperate to leave Communist Cuba they attempted to cross in anything that would float resulting in hundreds being lost at sea. Memorial to the Spanish Treasure Fleet lost in a hurricane on July 14, 1733. Ponce de Leon stopped here in May, 1513 to get water from the wells on Lower Matecumbe.





MM 77.8 (OS)

Lignum Vitae Fill / Indian Key

Indian Key was the Dade County seat in 1836 and was destroyed by the Indians on August 7, 1840. It was a regular village with over 40 houses, paved streets, a warehouse, many shops, a Post Office, Court House, docks, the Tropical Hotel, ballroom, and bowling alley.

MM 73.5 - BS

Ferry Landing / Toll Gate

The ferry landing was at what is now the Florida High Adventure Sea Base. When the road was finished in 1938, a toll booth was installed.

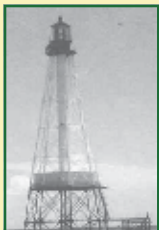


MM 73.1 - BS

Channel 2 Pilings

These pilings were built to support a bridge to replace the ferry when the Labor Day storm struck. The project was never completed as the railway was destroyed and replaced by the highway.

Additional Points of Interest



Alligator Reef Lighthouse.

Named for the USS

Alligator which ran aground on the reef on November 19, 1822. The light was assembled on Indian Key then taken to the reef and lit November 25, 1873.



Bay Bourne. The 1935 hurricane washed a house boat up on property owned by Clara Mae Downey, now owned by Cheeca Lodge. Harry and Bess Truman stayed on the boat in 1955 and 1957, as well as Ed Murrow, commentator, who also visited here.

Notable Additions to the Collection



The Pacific Lighthouse located at Founder's Park is also part of the Trust's collection.

A 9 foot cannon from the Spanish ship, San Jose of 1733 was donated to the Trust by Dr. Ronald Molinari. It is now on display at the Murray Nelson Government Center at mile marker 102.



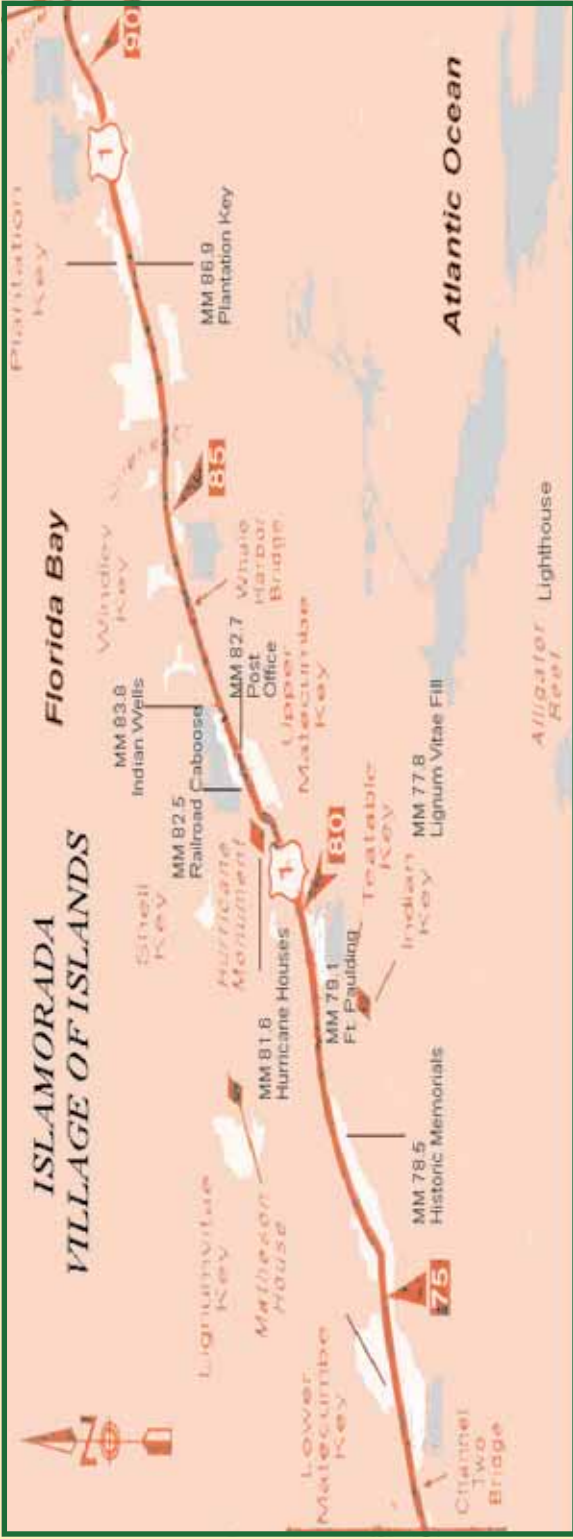
This 1970 Willy Roberts backcountry skiff was donated to the Matecumbe Historical Trust by Mr. & Mrs. Gilbert Reese in May of 2009. William Henry "Willy" Roberts, an Islamorada boat builder, hand-crafted his boats, one at a time, for many of the Florida Keys' top shallow water fishing guides. It is now displayed at the Islamorada Fish Company, MM 81.5.

*"The past belongs to the future, but
only the present can preserve it."
- Irving Eyster*

ISLAMORADA VILLAGE OF ISLANDS

Florida Bay

Atlantic Ocean



*We offer monthly programs and
lectures Open to the Public, and
distribute a quarterly newsletter.*

*For information call 305.393.0940
or visit us online*

www.MatecumbeHistoricalTrust.com

Email: info@matecumbehistoricaltrust.com



**Like Us
on Facebook**



Membership Application

Join us in preserving the rich heritage
of the Florida Keys.

Annual Memberships:

___ (\$ 15) Individual ___ (\$ 25) Family
___ (\$250) Corporate ___ (\$500) Patron

Lifetime Membership:

___ (\$1,000) Lifetime

Non-Member Donation:

\$ _____ Donation Amount

All Donations are Tax Deductible.

Name: _____

Company: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State _____ Zip _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____

Make checks payable to:

***MATECUMBE HISTORICAL TRUST
CORPORATION***

P.O. Box 1175
Islamorada, FL 33036