

MANASOTA KEY, FLORIDA

*"Some Reminiscences"*

*by*

WALTER VAN B. ROBERTS

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INTRODUCTION

February, 1968

As the oldest living resident (nearly a third of a century) I was recently asked if I would not like to write a history of the Key, especially the early days. This seemed like a simple enough thing to do but it turns out that there is so much that could be said about the Key and life here that I will not attempt to write its definitive history. I will limit myself to my own recollections, plus some heresay, and rely for dates on a sort of diary that I have kept. It is thus inevitable that some of my factual statements will be disputed, and that not everyone will agree with all my opinions. However the general trend of my story should be informative to strangers and perhaps even to recent residents.

I have often been asked how I ever came to Manasota Key in the first place. As this is to be a more or less personal story, it may be appropriate to answer the question here. As a young boy who had never been further south than Philadelphia I had been infected by the romance of the south seas and the tropics as described in stories. Thus when my parents joined the Highland Park Club at Lake Wales, Florida, my wife and I visited them in the early spring of 1936, borrowed their car, and started off to look for a romantic spot on a deserted island beach backed up by high ground covered with dense jungle, and within our means to buy. There may have been such places on the East Coast but we did not find any. Then a coincidence helped us out: the author Percival Wilde had heard that we were also going to explore the West Coast and asked us to take his wife with us and leave her at a place called the Palm Ridge Club where he was to join her later. We did so, and liked the place so much that after some further exploration we returned there to stay a while. (The Palm Ridge Club was what is now the Manasota Beach Club, but was then only about half the size of the present club). While staying there we met Col. Douglas A. Graham who was very enthusiastic about buying a large acreage on the Key and wanted someone to go in with him on the deal. He took us and Charles F. Fitter (known as "Spike") by rowboat to see the property with the result that we and Spike each agreed to take a strip of 300 feet, gulf to bay.

With this background, it is time to get on with the story.

## I

## Physical Nature of our Key

All around the coasts there are long islands which we here call keys paralleling the mainland and separated from it by bays. How did these keys get formed in such a systematic manner? A geologist could probably give the correct answer, but the theory that appeals to me is that the ocean (or gulf) waves tend for some unknown reason to form shallow bars off shore, such as we have right now along our key. Once a bit of such a bar becomes exposed, seeds from bird droppings are blown by the wind start some sort of vegetation. This in turn catches sand and builds up to form dry land. Then the wind blows dry sand up and gradually builds up high land and dunes. Perhaps ten thousand years from now there may be another

key where our present bar is. At any rate, the rising of land caused by the blowing of dry sand can be seen to be true: I recently had to dig out a dead palm on our ridge and found that its base was much deeper in the ground than trees on the bay side, indicating that the level had risen appreciably even during its life. The key seems to be made of sand and shell as our deep well did not hit rock until about 50 feet down.

Along with the building up process and the increase of land area by accretion there is also the process of erosion by wave action. Before the keys were inhabited this did not make much difference to anyone-- parts of the beach would wash away and other parts build up. But now, if a house is built too near the beach the owner may be faced with a very expensive fight against erosion. In the natural state, sand tends to drift southward along our beach so that what is lost at one point is replaced by sand drifting in from the north. But if the normal drifting is prevented, the beach downdrift from the stoppage gets less sand than it loses, and the shoreline is eroded. This happened south of the Venice inlet after the long stone jetties were installed. The moral of all this would seem to be to build well back from the beach to allow for erosion, and to leave sea oats and other vegetation on the dunes and beach to collect wind-blown sand, and to keep trees around the house to help protect it from hurricanes.

This particular key is fortunate in several respects. Although some 15 miles long it is narrow enough to permit use of both the beach and the bay shore, the latter being the only place where sizeable boats can be kept. It also has high enough ground to be safe from high tides which sometimes rise as much as five feet above normal. And finally it is well covered with trees and other growth which afford cover for wild life and privacy for residents. This jungle however is a constant fire hazard and the blackened trunks of palm trees, even on uninhabited islands nearby, show that fires, produced by lightning or otherwise, have swept over practically every acre within the past hundred years or so. Palm trees are not killed by the fire and the jungle reasserts itself but the land is a sorry sight for a few years after a fire. When we built our house we had to take a hoe and scrape off black carbon from all the nearby trees to make them look more natural. Our residents have become very careful about burning trash, especially in a wind, as there have been at least half a dozen bad fires in my time alone. I remember fighting one of these in Charlotte County for at least three days. After we thought we had it out, it would start up again. Mr. Lasman was especially effective in this fight as he was able to throw sand up into the tops of palm trees with his shovel and stop the fire from spreading through the tops. A wind driven fire propagates through the dead fronds of closely spaced palms like a sea of flame.

With respect to water we are not so fortunate. Shallow wells are not really "sweet" in spite of what some people think. (Put a little silver nitrate in a water sample and see how much white precipitate forms from the salt content). And in dry spells they become very definitely salty. Nor can salt-free or soft water be obtained by going deep. The only answer, if soft water is wanted, seems to be rain water and a couple of big cisterns, one to use while the other is being cleaned. To economize on rainwater, toilets can run on well water. This however is about to become an academic question as city water is already supplied to the southern half of the key and will probably soon reach the northern part.

We had an architect for the original part of our house and he gave a good deal of attention to cross ventilation so that we would not suffer from too much tropical heat. Neither he nor I realized that what we would suffer from in winter would be the cold. We are not really fully tropical here and there have been freezes several times, although not so bad as on the mainland. So we huddled around our one fireplace in cold weather for twenty years before installing central heat. Now when anyone asks me for advice about building in this vicinity, I tell them that a good heating plant is the first necessity, and an ample rainwater system the second. It should be ample because while we have some 60 inches or rain per year, we also have frequent long dry spells.

In connection with climate, the presence of salt in the air, particularly when there is a strong wind off the gulf, should be mentioned as it makes everything rust or corrode unbelievably rapidly. It also clouds up windows, kills many kinds of plants, and even shuts off television reception by making a conductive coating of salt on the lead-in wires from the out-door antenna. (This however can be cured by using a different kind of wire. I used to cure it by washing off with a wet sponge).

Again related to climate we have the phenomenon of the Red Tide. Every few years some critical combination of temperature, phosphorous content, and low salinity (we have several large rivers emptying into the gulf in this region) results in an explosive increase in the population of a marine organism in the gulf. Toxic emanations from these are picked up by the wind and blown ashore, making breathing unpleasant and producing some of the symptoms of a cold. In addition, vast quantities of fish are killed by it and drift ashore to decay on the beach, making a nasty mess as well as a bad smell. So far nothing has been developed to prevent the occurrence of the red tide and all we can do is to grin and bear it or move away temporarily. However, it usually does not last very long and I don't believe it is noticeable more than one per-cent of the time on the average.

The west coast is not in the normal path of hurricanes but once in a while they come up the gulf side of the state or come across the state but generally speaking they have not caused great damage as a direct result of high winds. They may however cause high tides and beach erosion. We have not had personal experience of any bad ones as they usually come when we are away for the summer.

If we were to live here all summer, air-conditioning would be very welcome, not so much for lowering the temperature as for reducing the humidity. A friend who lives on Siesta Key the year around tells me that he acts the same way here in summer as he used to in winter up north: he stays in the house (air-conditioned) most of the day, going out only before it gets too hot and again in the late afternoon and evening.

### Vegetation

We have no earth in the usual sense on the key. It is nearly pure sand and shell, with an overlay of decayed vegetation. It is also very

alkaline. I took samples to our county agent to measure the pH factor and he found that samples taken near the gulf were at the extreme of the range of alkalinity but this tapered off with distance from the gulf to about the middle of the range near the bay. Thus our soil is not suited to all the plants we might like to have. One's first thought then is to bring in some good earth and use plenty of the right kind of fertilizer and chemicals and water and thus be able to grow anything. Unfortunately we found out that if there are any palms or sea grapes or possibly other species anywhere near, fine roots rush in to sieze the water, fertilizer, or good earth and they form a dense mass like coconut matting that gradually chokes the life out of the desired plant. These roots are all through the ground, even six or eight feet down, so that they cannot be kept out by deep barriers surrounding a garden. Incidentally, the roots regularly get into cisterns and septic tanks through microscopic holes and then grow into a solid mass. I had one septic tank filled up nearly solid with such a mass which had to be cut up into chunks small enough for the plumbers to be able to lift out. One way to avoid plant trouble is to stick to indigenous things which will compete with the roots without water or fertilizer. We have plenty of different kinds of trees and bushes to make a good showing. Just for the fun of it we even have a "weed garden" which is truly nothing but a lot of various kinds of weeds we find around the place, and it looks quite attractive.

In spite of the poor soil our native jungle contains a suprising variety of trees and smaller things. The main constituent is of course the cabbage palm, (*Sabal Palmetto*). Sea grapes also grow in profusion, except that the big freeze of Dec. 13, 1962 killed the tops of most of them. They are coming back from the roots now but are slow growing so that we will not have big trees again for a long while. The "live oaks" are fine trees too and were not killed by the freeze. Some of us are lucky enough to have pines and cedars. The undergrowth is too varied to detail, but a few species may be mentioned. One of these is the wild coffee, *psychotria undata*. Another common one is a smooth leaved bush with no common name that I know of but which I have been told is "*Rapanea guianensis*".\* There are also a good many coontie ferns, a very old form from which pine trees are descended. Cacti of all kinds thrive. So do Australian pines or casuarinas, but the kind we had do not stand freezing. On the bay side we have the fine black mangrove tree and the shore is normally ringed with the red mangrove which not only protects from erosion but also tends to build out the shore line. Altogether we don't need to go to a nursery to buy plants--just look around the jungle.

In April 1957, I interested Mr. Bibee of the Palmer Nurseries in trying to find out what things from his nursery would do well on the key. He came down with a truckfull of plants, 40 different kinds, and spotted them around several people's places nearby. Some were put on the gulf side to see if they would stand salt. The idea was to leave them alone and see if they survived. At our place the only really successful one (out of four plants) was "Clarissa Boxwood Beauty, Spikeless" which is still going strong on the gulf side of our house. An "*Ilex Rotunda*", also on the gulf side, did all right until killed by a plague of soft little white worms. I wonder if there were any other successes? I wish the experiment could be repeated, this time with the expert checking up on results and keeping recor'. Meantime I had made an experiment of my own that has been very successful. In 1954 I brought back from the Barothy Lodge fishing resort on Islamarada Key one square foot of some special kind of *Zoysia* grass which the proprietor assured me would grow right up to the

\*This name, and that of the wild coffee, were supplied by Dr. George Saunders.

edge of salt water and required no mowing if it were kept well walked on. I put the whole square foot down in one piece on our gulf side and after a couple of years it had sent out runners to a distance of ten feet or so. We dug up bits of the runners and moved them elsewhere and now all the space between our house and the beach is covered with the grass, as well as the area around our boat basin. Several friends have started it from our stock and it is mostly doing well. It does stand walking on and seems to crowd out most weeds. The only trouble with it is that it seems to take a year or two to really get going after transplanting.

A more detailed discussion of vegetation on our key appeared in the Bulletin of the Garden Club of America, Vol. 46, No. 6, Nov. 1958 under the title "KEY NOTES". This was based on a talk my wife and I jointly gave at a meeting of the Garden Club of Princeton.

## WILD LIFE ON THE KEY

### Birds

I started to make a list of all the kinds of birds that I have seen on the key but when I got to 24 and realized that I had only make a good start as Dr. Dorothy Saunders' list was well over a hundred, I gave up. However, I cannot refrain from mentioning one pest, the robin. Now robins are very welcome up north where they stake out claims and keep their population density within limits, but here they arrive by the million once a winter and stay for a couple of weeks or more. They are all males and are popularly supposed to come to get drunk and disorderly on our palm berries. They dirty up walls and make it impossible to leave a car outdoors. They come in such dense flocks that there is a great roar when you go out and scare them up. Once so many roosted on my antenna wire that their weight broke it. Robins used to be shot as game birds and are supposed to be good eating. I wonder if an open season on robins would give us a lot of tasty pies, or if they would not be scared away before making one good pie? My experience in hunting suggests the latter, as no game ever seems to stay plentiful.

### Animals

Our most familiar animal is of course the coon. He is a cute little fellow and many of us enjoy feeding him but others do not like his messing up garbage and clawing up papaya trees etc. The coon's staple diet (when not given handouts) is palm berries and when the crop of berries is bad, as it was a couple of years ago, the poor things starve to death. Then I have to bury them. The less plentiful common animals include rabbits, gray squirrels, spotted skunks, opossums, and armadillos, (a recent arrival). I have even heard of sightings of mink and otter. House cats gone wild on the key used to be quite frequent, their owners unkindly having abandoned them here. Their big cousins however, the bob cat and the panther, are our most spectacular visitors. They seem to stay only long enough to clean out the coons. I have seen quite a few bob cats and once a panther. Mrs. Vanderbilt said she saw a big panther walking along the top of her garden wall, followed by her kittens. Mrs. Saunders followed one, pistol in hand,

for quite a distance. I have also heard reports of a "black panther", whatever that may be. But except for the coons, we do not often run across these animals.

### Snakes

I have myself never seen a rattler on the key but there have been some. I would just as soon that there were none at all. Perhaps we could get rid of them if everyone were like George Saunders who likes to eat them. Other than rattlers I have not heard of any sort of poisonous snake on the key although I have seen some in Englewood. The snakes we do have are definitely beneficial although some are so big as to be frightening. Last spring I watched a long yellow snake with black stripes that had been around some time, eating a rat. I hope he stays around.

Not a snake, but still a reptile, is the big gopher turtle that lives in holes in the ground. I don't think anyone objects to these, although I suspect one of eating a pineapple I once tried to grow. They are great on eating green stuff.

### Salt water denizens

Fishing is supposed to be extraordinarily good in this vicinity, but this is too big a subject to tackle here. Besides, fish do not live on the key. I will only repeat what I tell people who ask "how is the fishing?" --- "it is just about perfect. That is, if it were any better I might get tired of it, and if it was any worse I would give it up." (As time goes on, the latter alternative seems to be getting closer.)

Not being a shell collector myself I can only note that our beach has plenty of them. I shovel them up by the wheelbarrowfull and use them on driveways and paths. But I think the serious collectors find the beach rewarding for their purposes too.

The shells that interest me more are those enclosing live oysters and clams. We used to be able to go out and pick up a bucket of clams from the the bay shoals in a short time but they seem to be getting scarcer, now that I have found the easy way to open them which is to freeze them hard in the deep freeze after which a knife can be inserted easily. Allied to clams were the plentiful scallops we had for a time in our bay. It seems remarkable that they should have disappeared completely. The oysters have not disappeared but due to increasing pollution of the bay water there is growing doubt about the safety of eating them, and besides the best beds have been pretty well tramped over and picked out. Quoting from Alice Through the Looking-Glass: "With sobs and tears he sorted out those of the largest size."

On the gulf beach however we seem to have an inexhaustible supply of the tiny coquina clams. These make a very tasty and delicate broth by merely boiling a kettlefull with a few ounces of water until the shells open. Until recently I never heard of any other way to eat them, but a friend of ours from Venice actually opens the raw ones, one by one, until he has a dishful of solid meat which he serves on crackers with cocktails. Personally I prefer ordinary raw clams.

There are plenty of blue crabs in the vicinity but our great delicacy is the stone crab. We used to buy the claws for fifty cents a pound and once or twice there have been so many in the edge of the gulf that we could pick up all we wanted with a net. (Females and small ones are protected).

Finally, the region of Stump Pass is unique in having live *Lingula Brachiopods*, one of the earliest forms of life. These are tiny things, useless to us but of such interest to biologists that Dr. Britten of the Carnegie Institute of Washington came down here last Christmas just to look for some. He got a few, too.

### Insects

Everybody knows about mosquitoes, which are not bad here in the winter, but a newcomer should be warned about chiggers and ticks. When the chiggers are in force they will crawl up one's shoes and bury themselves in the ankles or further up and the result is miserable. They are too small to see, although the name "red bug" would indicate that they have been seen, possibly with a microscope, so they cannot be removed. We used to apply a cream called "Kwell" which may be effective in killing them if rubbed well in. There are now sprays that can be used on the ankles before going into infested areas to keep them from climbing aboard. The tick also climbs up and finds a tender spot and anchors his claws into the skin. It is remarkable how it can do this without its feeling like a sting, but it may not be discovered until it is half buried and then it is a real job to get it out. I have tried the burning cigarette scheme to make it back out, and ether to try to put it to sleep so it will let go, and some other ideas, but brutally pulling it out with pliers seems the only sure way. I have heard that the pliers should be turned so as to sort of unscrew the claws but have not found that it helped any.

Most of the other insect life here is harmless enough, except perhaps the scorpion which gives as bad a bite as a hornet, but some of it is a great nuisance and some scares the ladies. The "palm beetle" which is a kind of cockroach is very annoying scuttling around in the house and smells horrible when stepped on. Spiders are not really insects, being more nearly related to crabs, and I suppose we should be glad to have them around catching insects but the ladies seem terrified of them, especially the great big brown ones that prefer living indoors, and move around lightening fast.

Another nuisance is the ant. Indoors we never used to be able to leave any food around, even candy in a closed can, without finding it full of tiny ants by morning. Regular service by the Orkin man in recent years has pretty well put an end to insect nuisance inside the house.

An interesting phenomenon is a hatch of blackish, soft, antlike things with wings. These are sometimes called blind ants and don't seem to do anything but bumble into wet paint and shortly die. They are sometimes so thick that the ground gets covered with dead ones.

On the other hand a flight of winged ants may mean big trouble if they are termites. If such a flight is seen coming out of part of a house, call for a specialist at once.

## II THE FLORIDA BOOM, AND AFTER

I have very little information about the key before the great boom (and bust) that occurred somewhere around 1925. Presumably Indians lived here, or came over for fishing or for clams. There is also the story that pirates buried some of their treasure here, in fact on the bay side of my own property. I think it was a surveyor named Green who told Douglas Graham that his compass would not work right in the vicinity of a large oak there. Having heard this from Doug, I picked up a surplus mine detector in New York and sent it to Doug. He could not get it working and when I got here and tried it I found that it was a type designed for plastic mines and about the best it could do on metal was to find an automobile license plate buried only a few inches. So the treasure chest is still there, or never was, as the case may be.

Mr. Bill Davis of Englewood says he remembers one or two houses or shacks on the key before the Chadwicks built the first bridge over the bay. He says they came over by boat to a dock here. I don't know what happened except that in 1937 there still were some remains of a shack on my bay side, some of the wood from which was used by Graham in building his own cottage. But in a general way it appears that most of the key was abandoned for taxes after the "bust". People had bought lots here like mad, purely for speculation, paying as high as \$300 per front foot, gulf to bay, without ever having seen the land. They had no intention of using the land so just let it go for taxes.

Perhaps the real estate agents who sold these lots really tried to make a going development, for someone cut a great avenue a hundred feet wide, from gulf to bay, and put up posts marked "REDONDO AVENUE" along it. (One of these now marks my old driveway) This avenue was half on my property and half on the lot to the south. On the bay side it ended at a big dock, the pilings of which were still above water when we moved in.

Mr. Alexander figures that the old part of his place near Blind Pass was built about ninety years ago and presumably occupied at one time by a hermit, since the place used to be called the Hermitage. Anyway, it certainly was in existence at the time of the boom. I think Mr. Davis told me there may have been another place on the bay side a little north of the shack I mentioned. This seems likely, as up until some ten years ago there was a small flow of sulphur water from a rusted out casing that looked like the remains of a deep well. Someone must have lived there to have drilled a well, unless it was for irrigation only. There had apparently been some sort of fruit grove in the vicinity as one lemon tree is still feebly alive there and actually a few years ago after some pruning and fertilizing gave us a dozen fine big lemons.

To recapitulate all this, at the time of the boom and bust there was pretty surely one inhabited house on the key, one probable and several possibles. By contrast, in 1936 there were only two, the Hermitage and the Palm Ridge Club. (I am speaking now of the key well north of the little settlement at the end of the bridge, or at least the part in Sarasota County)

Sometime before 1936 and probably during the boom, there was a road or trail of sorts up the key. If it went all the way it was so overgrown by 1936 that it was hard to find, let alone try to drive a car along it, anywhere

south of the Hermitage. It was passable however from the Hermitage north to the Manasota bridge in 1936 and most likely had been kept in use since the Hermitage was built. To the south from our place however it had to be reopened personally by Graham so that we could get building materials in for our houses in 1938. Later on we cut the bushes away between our places and the P.R. Club so that we could drive up there for occasional meals. When I say road, it will be understood that I mean jungle floor with just enough trees cut out to let a car insinuate itself through. Actually, it was not as bad as it may sound, for the cut was so narrow that the road surface did not dry out and form bottomless sand the way it did in places where there was no jungle umbrella over it. We often got stuck in the deep sand in certain dry places, the worst of which was the open stretch by Alexander Island (Blind Pass) and the next worst the road in Charlotte County after it was widened about 1940 so that it dried out. We always carried a shovel and ax and some boards and gunny sacks. Half the danger of getting stuck was when it was necessary to pass someone which meant getting out of the ruts and into the softer sand. The main trick was to keep the momentum up so that the wheels did not have to exert any more force than necessary. You can hit a soft stretch at good speed and get through without trouble by letting the car slow down gradually although still pulling as much as you judge the road will permit.

### III THE NUDIST YEARS

As far as I know, I am the only person in this vicinity who can speak from personal experience about these years. If anyone should question anything I have to say, my reply will be (phonetically spelled) the old line: "Vas you d'ere Tcharlie?"

In the early thirties the nudist philosophy was taking hold in the United States to such an extent that Professor Warren, Head of the Psychology Department in Princeton University, decided that it should be investigated by a trained scientist. So he spent considerable time at several nudist resorts and published his conclusions in the leading American Journal of Psychology. To put his lengthy report in a nut-shell, he was all for it. It was he who suggested that my wife and I might give it a try. This is by way of explaining how we originally happened to have stayed at the Palm Ridge Club. Later vacations that we spent there with the children were because we liked the place and the life there and found the people congenial.

This region, with its deserted beaches, was in the thirties ideally adapted for nudist resorts. Besides the Palm Ridge Club and the smaller and less luxurious Hermitage on our key, there was one called New Pass Haven on the next key to the south which used relatively primitive buildings reputed to have been the former center of operations of a bootlegger named something like Flint. The red roof of one of these buildings can still be seen from outside Stump Pass. (Incidentally, Stump Pass was in those days half a mile or more south of the present pass which broke through about 1944). There may also have been something of the sort in a small way on Casey Key, but of this I have no personal knowledge. Anyway, as of 1936 the Palm Ridge Club was the place to stay. Its accommodations were very good, the food excellent, and there was usually a congenial crowd of a dozen or so guests. There was even an electric light plant which however shut down at about ten in the evening. The entire work of running the place was miraculously done by the hard working German-born owners, Otto and Dorothy Pfundstein. In addition, in his

spare (!) time and in summers, Otto kept all the buildings covered with aluminum paint, built new ones, and hauled hundreds of hand-wagons of shells up from the beach to form driveways and paths.

Otto now owns the mile-square Tiger Creek Ranch, P.O. Box 338, Babson Park, Fla. 33827 and has a phone, 813-635-3144 where I have just called him to verify some of my dates. He tells me he bought the nucleus of his place in 1935 but added a good deal to it. His remembrance was that the building he bought was then some forty years old, so that makes it of nearly the same vintage as the Hermitage. The Hermitage was the first to start operating as a nudist resort I feel sure, as I know people who stayed there several years before 1936, but it was also the first to cease such operation as it was sold in '37 or '38. Otto kept in operation until 1950 when he sold out to Mr. Gwynne, though he changed over from nudist operation to conventional in 1941. I asked him why he changed and he said it was for several reasons -- the war, the beach becoming less deserted, and falling off in clientele. He did not say so but I remember that after the outbreak of war there were rumors spread around that he was a German spy. I am sure there was no foundation for these rumors; they were merely malicious. However they may have influenced him to give up a controversial kind of operation.

Before proceeding any further it is high time to dispel some illusions about nudism in general, and in particular as it was practiced at the Palm Ridge Club. One illusion cherished by some people is that nudism means "free love" or some sort of orgies. Nothing could be further from the truth. Nudist resorts are attended largely by family groups and everyone behaves with the utmost decorum. There is nothing erotic about large scale nudity per se. This may be one reason why nudism is not a general practice. To cause erotic reactions it is more effective to have recourse to a clothing stylist, as was pointed out by Anatole France in "L'Isle des Penguins". Actually, at the Palm Ridge Club ordinary informal clothing was usually worn except for swimming and sunbathing. (Incidental Note: people who were too fat made a better appearance on the beach than those who were ultra-fashionably skinny)

There was one aspect of life at the club that now seems quite incomprehensible. Nobody did any drinking at all that I can remember, yet I do not think that Otto had any rule against it. Nowadays I wouldn't think of missing my pre-dinner cocktail, but then we must have been content with the simple life and a pretty general good-fellowship. The guests were on the whole a remarkably interesting group and were highly individualistic, as might have been expected. Eight or ten of them left their imprints on key history by becoming residents and I will close this chapter with some reminiscences of a few of these.

One of the most memorable personalities was Louise Plumer (pronounced like plumber). No one could call her pretty but she was jolly and fat and most outgoing and had the proverbial heart of gold. It was she who stepped into the breach and bought the Hermitage when we heard it was to be sold and were afraid it might fall into unfriendly hands. She moved into it about 1938 and lived there, taking in paying guests (but not as a nudist resort) until a little before the Alexanders bought the place in 1943. We used to eat dinners there quite regularly after we were in our own house. The price of dinner was one dollar and they were great meals. I remember that I could run up the beach in four minutes flat. Now we use a car to go next door. Louise's husband Dick was a quiet pleasant fellow who did not get away from his northern business much until a few years before the Alexanders took over. For something to do with himself while here, he started the Englewood Chamber of Commerce. Louise finally developed cancer and the Plumers moved back to New Jersey. I went to see her there shortly before she died and it was a pitiful sight to see her great frame wasted away to a skeleton. Dick married again and lived at Winter Park until he died.

Another outstanding personality was Dr. Alfred R. Whitney, a retired building contractor or engineer who had done important work all over the world and never let you forget it. He was conscious of his social position as a member of the noted Whitney family. He also fancied himself as a yachtsman, having sailed with Harold Vanderbilt in transatlantic yacht races. His remarkable house just south of the Hermitage was completed by July 1941. He built this with the arrangement that he would live in it but take his meals with Louise. He continued this arrangement with the Alexanders until he was killed by a taxicab in New York about 1944. Whitney was tall and thin with a narrow face over an aggressive pointed beard and with a little make-up could have been made to look like a goat or the devil. He was always very positive and not easy to get along with but a most interesting person in spite of his sometimes annoying sense of self-importance. Of his several nicknames the one I used was Felix which someone had bestowed on him because of his habit of pacing about with his hands clasped behind his back like the comic strip character "Felix the Cat". His best contribution to our life on the key was meeting the Alexanders on a trip in South America and getting them to visit the key and thus resulting in their buying Louise's place.

Douglas Adair Graham was a retired colonel, a pleasant and reasonable man with a lot of good engineering sense. He and his attractive wife Dorothy must be considered as the pioneers of private residence on the key. He had the foresight and imagination to see the possibilities of the undeveloped land and the initiative to go through all the red tape involved in buying as much of it as he could afford through a sheriff's sale. One bit of this tape was having to announce the proposed sale in a loud voice from the steps of the court house in Tallahassee. I believe he paid only about three dollars a front foot, gulf to bay, but there were other expenses involved in getting a clear title and Fitter and I were content to pay him eight dollars a foot. We each took 300 feet, mine being paid for mostly from my world war bonus money. Doug's first purchase was a stretch of 1800 feet, running from a line 300 feet north of my present property down to and including the present Drouet place. His wife named this stretch Galleon's Reach from the title of a book she thought sounded romantic. Later he bought another strip which included the place bought from the Vanderbilts by the Mc Brides and ran up to the Whitney house. He called this strip North Galleon's Reach. By this time Doug had invested his all in the land so when the army failed to give him the pension he had been counting on, he had to live on piecemeal sales of lots. If he could only have held on long enough he would have made a good thing of his investments, but as it was, the most he ever got for any of his holdings was the thirty dollars a foot that I paid him in 1949 for an extra hundred feet to widen out my lot on the south. Doug said he was the first to start building but Fitter and I were close on his heels and we were all three in residence in the spring of '39. His cottage was sold to the Dunhams in 1949 because Dorothy had never learned to drive a car and felt marooned here. He then built a very nice house on St. Armand's Key, then another in Harbor Acres in Sarasota, and finally bought an old house near the Ringling Museum where he died Feb. 11, 1958. I hope these transactions were profitable as Dorothy is still living in Sarasota. He also left two daughters, "Bobbie", now Mrs. Barrett Green of Dayton, Ohio and Kitty, Mrs. John Bryce of Toledo.

Charles F. (Spike) Fitter and Charlotte were two of the gentlest and most lovable people I ever knew. Their first building was their guest house which was later moved to the bay and is where Dr. Breder now lives. Later they built their main house, now occupied by Mr. Landis. I think Charlotte must have contracted cancer of the liver early in their residence, although being

Christian Scientists, this was not admitted. However, she lived uncomplainingly for quite a few years, probably as long as if she had had the best medical attention. Her mother "Gram", a fine old sport then lived with Spike until he got to be mentally quite vague and his daughter persuaded him to sell out and come to live with her on her goat farm at Manassas. He was later put into some sort of home where he died. Spike had been before retirement the owner of the "Wallabout Market" in Brooklyn, a big butter-and-egg wholesaler. Charlotte was a great conservationist and horticulturist and with her exquisite taste made their place the loveliest on the key.

Fred Seward had a double claim to fame: he was a survivor of the sinking of the Titanic in about 1911 or 1912 and he was also the nephew of the Seward who bought Alaska. Naturally when he built his house he called it "Seward's Folly". It was completed before Christmas 1940 and burned to the ground early in July 1941. He had lent it to some friends for a week-end and I believe they must have dropped a cigarette among the blankets when they moved out for by lunch time when the fire was discovered it was too far along for anything to be done. The chimney is still a landmark on the key. I had lunch with Fred in New York at his club shortly afterward and he would not admit that the fire could have been the fault of his friends. He preferred to think that someone from Englewood had set it because they resented his having bought the property which they had been accustomed to use as a picnic place. He refused to consider rebuilding as he said he felt he was unwelcome there. But he was heartbroken at the loss and died shortly afterwards. Martin Beck of Princeton, N.J. was the architect for his house as well as for my original house. Fred was a lawyer from Forest Hills and was a most sociable "beaver" who delighted in throwing parties and playing the lavish host. He was a widower and left a fine big son, Fred Jr.

Paul Runyon of Staten Island never built here but in a way his memory still lives on in the name of the de Clairville's place. It was this way: at the Palm Ridge Club single men were put in a small shed-like structure a little north of the main buildings and Paul was the dean of these residents. I used to josh him about being put in "the dog house", much to Otto's annoyance, but the name stuck and is still used.

I cannot conclude without paying tribute to the proprietors of the Palm Ridge Club, Dorothy and Otto Pfundstein. They were (I use the past tense because I am speaking of the times when they were running the club) the most remarkably efficient couple imaginable, and really wonderful people. Otto was big and very handsome and Dorothy small and cute and the amount of work they did is just unimaginable. They were also most congenial, to me at least, although Otto may have ruffled a few feathers at times as he ran a "tight ship" and stood for no nonsense or misuse of his property. Since I respected his attitude I got along fine with him, and we still keep in touch. After selling the club he operated an orange grove near Sarasota for a while but now has the Babson Park Ranch I have already mentioned. It was only within the last year or so that he finally sold the last of his key property, a house he had built north of the club for his own residence. I hope his real estate deals have left him as well off as he deserves and that they will both have happy years and many of them of their ranch.

These thumb-nail sketches have been dryly factual but later on I intend to include a few anecdotes in which some of the same characters will play more interesting roles.

## THE PRIMITIVE LIFE

Establishing a residence, even if only a vacation cottage in the isolated jungle here, was quite an undertaking. As mentioned before, there was no passable road from the Palm Ridge Club south so we had to row down the gulf in a boat to inspect our proposed lot. Then to be able to get building materials in, a road of sorts had to be hacked out to let trucks come in by way of the old south bridge. We were very lucky in having a builder recommended to us who had retired to Sarasota and who did the entire job for us by remote control and not only did it perfectly but even saved us money by having the initiative to write and ask if we would not permit him to depart from the architect's specifications by panelling the rooms with cypress instead of Celotex! Incidentally one of his common laborers on the job, then a young fellow just starting his career as a builder, was our own Clayton Wiggins who has since built so many of our fine homes on the key. We arrived here March 21, 1939 to find the house complete except for the cook stove which arrived later the same day. Amazingly, from to-day's viewpoint, the entire cost was only about \$4300 including equipment. Seven hundred dollars worth of furniture sent down by Bambergers (freightfree in those days) made the place complete. And taxes then were only about \$32 a year as contrasted with about a thousand now.

There was of course no electricity. Everything was run on kerosene or by hand power. It took a lot of time and some skill to keep all the ordinary oil lamps, the Aladdin lamps, hot water heater, stove, and refrigerator running properly. The latter in particular was quite temperamental and frequently made queer interior noises and gurglings as if kerosene did not agree with it.

The water supply was a well point driven down about 13 feet from which water was pumped by hand up into a 20 gallon tank only 8 or 9 feet above the floor. Surprisingly enough, this small head of water was enough even for a satisfactory shower. But it seemed as if we had to keep pumping every few minutes, 114 strokes to fill the tank. If it was allowed to run dry, some sort of airlock formed and it was quite a trick to get the water flowing again. The water was of course too hard to wash with satisfactorily and it was not long before we had a 500 gallon tank put in and enough rain guttering installed to fill it. This rain water was perfectly good for drinking but for something a little tastier we used to bring water in five gallon bottles from Dr. Allbee's well just north of Nokomis. (This is still running and as good as ever. Pay \$2 per season to the Post Office at Nokomis).

We kept our trips to the mainland to a minimum because of the road condition. We could market at Tate's or Aingers, and there was a small combined hardware store and post office run by Leo Kropp but there was very little else in Englewood in the way of shops. For most things we had to go to Venice or more likely to Sarasota. There was no doctor or dentist in Englewood.

Our social life was pretty much limited to our two neighbors and to going up to the Hermitage or the Palm Ridge Club for meals. It does not sound like a very exciting life but we were at first only here for one or two short vacations a year and usually had a good many friends or family with us and the time seemed to fly what with fishing, swimming, and sunbathing to say nothing of housework. I used to hate leaving so much that I would kneel down and kiss the beach good-bye. I wonder if the gulf was not warmer then, or was it merely that we had better tolerance for cold water?

## THE WAR YEARS

Gas rationing made things tougher. We pooled our marketing so that one family marketed once a week for us all, or in a pinch we would row over to Tate's. Then the army built a large radar camp in the vicinity of the present Hoadley cottages and their trucks chewed up the sand road in Charlotte county so that it was harder than ever to get through. As has been mentioned, we always carried shovel, ax, and some boards or the like to dig out with. And there was a human road hazard too, in the form of a lot of orientals who were supposed to be learning to drive trucks.

There were blackout restrictions and spy scares and submarine alarms----a famous U-boat captain was reputed to refuel somewhere along the coast. I don't know that there was any real basis for any of this, but it was exciting at the time.

From the first we had intended to get electric power in sometime, but I guess we procrastinated until shortages of wire prevented the company from running a line up the key. However, they did finally manage to get the wire in spite of the war and the line was run up as far as the Hermitage. The cost of running the line was shared by half a dozen of us and we expected to be reimbursed to a large extent by newcomers paying their shares. A few of them actually did but those who bought lots after the line was already in use did not think that the original cost was any of their responsibility.

With the coming of electric power I was able to set up a "ham" radio rig with which I could keep in touch with the outside world, especially friends and relatives back in Princeton. And for local communication I installed a primitive phone system between our house, the Grahams and the Fitters. It was primitive because in lieu of a regular telephone instrument at each house I used just a simple one dollar dynamic loud speaker, such as are used in any radio receiver. By shouting loudly into one of these, a person in another house could hear well enough provided he kept his ear close up to the cone speaker. The three speakers were interconnected by some Signal Corps telephone wire that a friend picked out of a dump. Ordinary door bells with batteries operated over the same wire for the purpose of ringing.

It was in 1943 that a storm washed out the key road at Blind Pass, just north of the Hermitage so that the key was divided into two parts without convenient communication between them. The war can not be blamed for this, but perhaps it can be blamed for the road not being repaired at once. Twelve long years were destined to pass before it was again made passable, and even then some of us had to chip in and pay the county for the marl they had to use for the job. The cutting of the road put an end to going up to the club for meals and later on prevented us from going to see friends living to the north, and vice versa. It probably also accounts for the formation of two different property owners associations, one for each part of the key.

## YEARS OF INCREASING CONVENIENCES

For a few years after the war, life went on pretty much as before except for having electricity but no road to the north. Then in 1950

the Charlotte County road was covered with marl, thus ending the business of getting stuck in the sand. And in 1952 it was hard-topped. The two counties each improved their roads but at the county line the two sections of road failed to meet by about 150 feet. For years we had a sharp S curve there.

About 1953 I happened to have some business with the president of the Stromberg-Carlson Telephone Co. in the course of which I told him about our primitive communication system on the key. He thereupon gave me eight fine hand-cranked phones and half a mile of indestructible phone line. The instruments were installed in our house, Dunhams, Saunders, Landis, Olson, Quirk, Fickeissen, and the house now occupied by Dr. Breder. This private telephone exchange continued in use for several years after the coming of regular service and I used to use it to connect people to the outside phone until they had all got their own outside phones. The regular phone service was installed on the key in 1955 and I should have made the company pay me for the franchise for the territory I had been serving. Now these private phone instruments (except for one burned up in the fire at Landis' house in 1957) are still in use as intercom phones in my house here and also in Princeton.

Thanks largely to the efforts of Mr. Landis the road up the key was reopened in 1955 and shortly thereafter Rural Free Delivery mail service began. Our first mail box was smashed by vandals during the evening of Dec. 31, 1955.

The fine black-top road past our place was made during the summer of 1963, then in 1965 the stretch of road past the Manasota Beach Club was "seal-coated" and in 1967 the new road running south from the Manasota bridge was completed in May to join up with the seal-coated portion.

During all these years the key population had grown from a tiny handful to such a number that the Manasota Key Association now numbers over a hundred properties, and many more houses have been built north of the Manasota Bridge where they have a separate owners association. As a result of the increasing population and improved road conditions new services came into being and we now have milk and paper delivery, laundry service, Orkin service, garbage collection and perhaps others that I do not know about.

The Manasota Key Ass'n by the way is the new name for the old Galleon's Reach Conservation and Protective Ass'n which a few of us incorporated in 1950. (That name was perhaps influenced by the swing of such names as "Boston Clam Chowder and Marching Ass'n") At about the same time a number of contiguous property owners in Galleon's Reach put voluntary restrictions into their deeds which amount roughly to the present R-1 zoning we have for the entire Sarasota county portion of the key. These restrictions expire in a few more years.

In addition to electricity and improved roads, we now have one further great convenience, city water, with a number of fire hydrants along the key road. The water started flowing late in 1963, only a year or so after I had completed an expensive new rainwater cistern. If anyone should think the water rates are high, let him compare them with the cost of providing an adequate rainwater supply, to say nothing of the cost and work involved in keeping it up. So far the water mains run only as far north as the Hermitage but it seems likely that it will be extended at least as far as the north bridge in the not too distant future.

A less essential convenience that has improved in the last year or two is television reception. I have been told that this is the result of channels 8 and 13 (the NBC and CBS network stations) having their origin in 1500 foot high towers near US 301 between Tampa and Bradenton. Whatever the reason, we now enjoy good color TV from both these networks and lack only a reliable signal from channel 10, the ABC outlet.

After more than twenty years of wrangling the Intracoastal Waterway was completed to Venice in 1966. I circumnavigated the key Nov. 8, before the dredge had finished removing the last barrier. With this waterway complete and well marked, those of us who like boating can now go south and across the state and up the east coast in safety, or northward well beyond Tampa I am told. The waterway necessitated rebuilding both the bridges to the key to give the clearance required by the Corps of Engineers. The south bridge was made alongside the old one and did not interrupt traffic, but the new north bridge had to be in the same place as the old one and traffic was shut off for over a year, much to the inconvenience of north key residents who had to go way around by the south bridge to get to Venice. This new bridge was finally opened toward the end of 1965.

#### WHAT OF THE FUTURE?

My story should stop right here, but I can't help putting in a question about the future of the key. Except for water for the north part, and possibly a sewer system, what more could we ask for than we have right now? We have most of the advantages of civilization while still enjoying natural surroundings and a considerable degree of privacy. But living in the wilds does not appeal to everyone and at the rate things are going the key may be on its way to becoming a series of suburban type estates with manicured lawns and nursery plantings replacing the natural growth. Perhaps ultimately another Miami Beach with pavement all over and great hotels and apartments and crowded beaches. At any rate, this is something to be pondered by those young enough to be affected by such possibilities.

#### SOME MEMORABLE INCIDENTS AND ANECDOTES

It has been suggested that I add to these memoirs a few items that may be of some interest in themselves or because of the persons involved.

I suppose that swimming in the gulf is much safer than riding in an automobile, but I must report that in 1937 while swimming a couple of hundred feet off shore I was badly bitten by some sort of big fish. It nearly got two fingers of my left hand but fortunately for me there happened to be a doctor on the beach who gave effective first aid and the job of saving the fingers was completed at the Venice Medical Center which was then run by the famous Dr. Albee. The fish may have been a shark. What I saw of its forehead above the waterline was about ten inches wide. But if it was a shark I don't understand why it did not follow me up for another bite.

Rattlesnakes are rare on the key but they have been killed by Dr. Whitney, George Saunders, Warren Drouet, the Emigs and probably others. If you find any please notify the Saunders who find them good eating.

In April 1962 Helen Johnson called me to report finding a sea-serpent on the beach. I referred her to Dr. Breder who identified it as an oarfish, a very rare specimen in the new world although more common in Europe where they grow to over twenty feet in length and are responsible for many stories about sea-serpents. This one was about nine feet in length and not in very good condition, so the neighbors all contributed ice cubes to keep it cool, coiled up in a big wash-tub. Meanwhile we went to Sarasota to get a gallon of preservative fluid from Genie Clark of the Cape Haze Marine Laboratory.

Apropos of the possible decline in fishing hereabouts, my diary notes that in 1939 four of us brought in 112 kingfish weighing 1100 pounds.

Dr. Whitney had a housewarming party for his new house on the Fourth of July, 1941. He was very proud of all the precautions he had taken to make it insect-proof. Every way by which an insect could have crawled into it was barred by a tray of oil. But my reprehensible son and my nephew smuggled a cigar box of assorted bugs into the house and turned them loose on the party.

As a boy I had read in the St. Nicholas magazine how to make a little boat that would sail directly into the wind. On mentioning this to Dr. Whitney he not only asserted that it was impossible but indicated that his authority as a yachtsman was not to be questioned. He got under my skin to such an extent that I went home and built the gadget using an old lamp shade for the windmill and tin from a tobacco can for the propellor and took it up to his dock the next morning and demonstrated it. When Whitney saw it chugging off into the teeth of the breeze he just looked at it for a few moments, then turned on his heel and walked away without a word, the only time I ever saw him speechless.

Whitney would leap in where angels feared to tread. Once while driving him back from Punta Gorda I was stopped by a traffic officer for some alleged infraction that I now forget. But I vividly remember how Felix jumped out of the car and went up to the officer and gave him such a tongue lashing that he was completely non-plussed and could have almost be said to have slunk off with his tail between his legs.

Our place has been rented several times for short periods. One of the first renters was my boss at RCA. Ruth Beck told me she found him and his wife locked in the house and afraid to set foot outside. He later told me that coming in at night along the jungle road he imagined lions and tigers behind every tree and would have turned back then and there if he could have got his car turned around.

Spike Fitter's daughter divorced her first husband and later married the man who ran her goat ranch. He arrived here with Spike's power of attorney to sell the Fitter place and told us that a South American was buying it who wanted everything cleaned out except for some pieces of furniture that he had tagged with yellow labels. So Russ, (the goat farmer) told all the neighbors to help themselves and we all went in like a bunch of pack rats and salvaged an enormous number of things, from good furniture and books to old lumber and plumbing supplies. Even so there was enough left over to make a bon-fire about six feet high. Then the purchaser re-neged so that when Mr. Landis bought the place it was relatively bare. Russ must have had a sense of humor for during lunch with us he said (nearly verbatim) "It is very sad, the fall of the house of Fitter. Poor Spike, first he loses his wife, then his mind, and now his daughter runs off with the hired man."

When my brother Tom first came to visit us, he immediately rushed off to buy a boat. For \$25 he got a nice-looking lap-strake rowboat that had been stored for years in a house in Englewood. He and my son started off gaily with a tiny outboard motor while we in the car rushed back to be on hand to greet them. But although they had started in the middle of the afternoon they had not arrived by dark and we went and got Beryl Chadwick to take us out in his boat to hunt for them. We never did find them but they finally showed up at nine or ten at night. Their story was that the vibration of the motor had soon loosened the planking and the boat sank. (We later called it "The Sieve"). They swam it to shallow water and unraveled their socks to make caulking. They got across to the key in an hour or so but being in bathing suits only they didn't want to try to get through the dense mangroves and Spanish bayonets to the road, and it took hours of alternate sinkings and caulking before they had done the two miles or so north to our place.

Finally a few quickies: Ed Miller, our caretaker, used to pole a boat across the bay to work----Dr. Gaines taught us to make string hammocks---Louise Plumer drove to Tampa to bring back a harpoon and rope to use on a giant ray which of course did not wait around long enough----Dorothy Graham dropped a diamond studded wrist watch on the beach and could never find it again----the end of the club dock was decorated with palm leaves for an Easter sunrise service by Bishop Morse, to which my brother Tom drove us in ten minutes, a race driver's feat over the deep sandy ruts----Bill Vanderbilt, working around his horses was hailed by a motorist stuck in the sand: "can you get your horse and pull us out?". Bill did and the man handed him fifty cents, which Bill accepted rather than embarrass the man----Tom Dunham was warned not to fall into an eight foot deep hole we had dug and immediately came closer to see it better, and did----The same Tom Dunham and my son-in-law appeared dripping water in the house after some night giggling during which one of them had tripped over the fish tub and flipped the boat over.

Since writing the foregoing Mrs. Alexander has contributed an incident from the days when she took paying guests at the Hermitage, about 1945 plus or minus a year or so. It seems that a friend of Micky Breslin's, whom we will call Mrs. C had engaged accommodations with Ruth and was to arrive on a certain evening. She got to Venice all right but not knowing how to go from there, engaged the Venice taxi to drive on ahead of her and show the way. At the time the road was washed out so they had to go around by the south bridge. Incidentally, there was only one taxi in Venice then and it was driven by Mrs. Wilson, an erudite woman who had played a part in the founding of the Out-Of-Door School on Siesta Key. Well, the procession got quite a way up the key and the road kept getting worse until finally one spot looked so bad that Mrs. Wilson told the others that she thought she had better walk on ahead with a flashlight to see if they could get through. ----I am too lazy to rewrite this but I should have noted that Mrs. C was accompanied by another lady and driven in a big car by a colored chauffeur in livery----Anyway, when Mrs. Wilson returned to say it was all right, the big car had disappeared. So Mrs. Wilson continued the little remaining distance to Ruth's and enlisted a search party to go back and help if the other c. was stuck. No luck; they had vanished.

What had happened was that Mrs. C and the chauffeur had been getting more and more scared by the jungle road at night and when Mrs. Wilson told them to wait they made sure that she was going ahead to rendezvous with a gang that would rob them. So they backed up a long way until they found a place to turn around and high-tailed it back to the Myakka Hotel

in Venice for the night.

They finally did arrive somehow the next morning but then it started to rain hard and the roof leaked and after taking it for a while Mrs. C announced that "this is the end" and took her party off, presumably to the bright lights of Miami, where they should have gone in the first place.

#### CHRONOLOGY

- 1936            Only two structures existed on the key as far south of the county line and probably considerably further. One of these was the Palm Ridge Club (now the Manasota Beach Club) and the other the Hermitage (also called Sea Island Sanctuary, which is the old part of the present Alexander property opposite Alexander Island.) The Hermitage was operated by Bill Hewitt, but was owned I was told by a man named Parks who was associated with Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt in publishing a magazine called "Just Babies" or something like that.
- Col. Graham started the process of buying at Sheriff's sale his first 1800 foot stretch of the key which he called Galleon's Reach.
- 1937            During this year or possibly a little later, Louise Plumer bought the Hermitage, reputedly for \$700.
- March 30 I received the deed to my present place.
- 1938            Graham roughed out a road to the south and he and Fitter and I started our houses.
- 1939            March 21 we found our house complete and furnished.
- 1940            Fred Seward's house, "Seward's Folly" was completed by Christmas.
- First inter-house phone system installed between our house and the Grahams and the Fitters.
- 1941            In early July Seward's house burned to the ground.
- By July 4 Dr. Whitney's house "Liability Lodge" was completed and housewarming held on the Fourth.
- 1942            Electric power installed as far north as the Hermitage in March at a cost of \$1476 which was shared by Graham, Fitter, myself, Morse Realty Co., and Gladys Hager who lived at "Dolphin Dunes" just south of the county line. She had previously lived in the Fitter's guest house which was later moved to the bay side and is now occupied by Dr. Breder
- Fitter's main house (now occupied by Jack Landis) was completed.
- Louise Plumer built her guest house just south of the Hermitage.
- 1943            The Alexanders bought the Plumer property in Oct.
- This year or possibly a little later the road washed out at Blind Pass and remained impassable for twelve years. At about the same time, the present Stump Pass broke through.

- 1944 This year or a little later Dr. Whitney was killed by a taxicab in New York City, leaving his estate to his nephew Whitney Griswold, then president of Yale University.
- 1947 Several days of high tides and strong currents eroded away some 20 feet of high ground in front of the Alexander's Hermitage.
- The Alexanders bought the Whitney house from his estate.
- Red Tide bad in February.
- 1948 The Dunhams bought the Graham cottage in October.
- 1949 Wellington Quirk bought the Fitter guest house that had been moved to the bay side, (Dr. Breder's present home) in March.
- Big woods fire between the county line and the south bridge.
- Mr. Landis bought the Fitter place from gulf to road, early this year.
- 1950 The Palm Ridge Club sold to Mr. Gwynne
- The Galleon's Reach Conservation and Protective Association incorporated.
- Marl put on the Charlotte county road and the old south bridge rebuilt with new pilings and timber
- 1952 The Charlotte Co. road hard-topped.
- The Vanderbilts first season in residence here.
- 1953 Red Tide bad.
- 1955 Commercial telephones installed (mine Feb. 25)
- Key road opened, bridge to bridge. My share of cost of marl was \$50.
- 1957 Lightning burned out part of the Landis house.
- Englewood Bank started.
- 1959 Constable Rigby was engaged by the property owners to patrol the key. He quit after a few months.
- 1960 The Manasota Beach Club bought from Mr. Gwynne by the Robert Buffums.
- Hurricane Brenda cut back our ridge some ten feet but Donna did no permanent damage.
- 1961 Sea wall built by Landis in February, and 1500 feet of Budd "Dog-Bone" groins installed by July from our place south to the Drouets.
- 1962 The Alexanders bought the two center houses of the Vanderbilt's

place, the south one having been bought by the Mc Brides and the north one by Miss Rasmussen

Dec. 13 marked the start of the big freeze. It got down into the low twenties in the early morning and went below freezing several days in succession. This killed all the fine big sea grape trees on the place the Alexanders had bought just the day before, the trees for which the place had been named "The Sea Grapes".

Sea serpent found on the beach (a rare Oarfish).

1963 Fine new blacktop road from the county line to the former Vanderbilt place; made during the summer.

City water connected Dec. 19.

Woods fire just south of the Rounds Place in Charlotte County.

Red tide on and off all year.

1964 New, larger phone cable run up the key.

Alexander's Golden Wedding Anniversary Jan. 1.

1965 The section of the road from a little north of Blind Pass for some two or three miles was seal-coated.

A "Lot Clearing Law" that threatened to require destruction of all our jungle was held not to apply.

Intracoastal Waterway Dredge "The Charleston" entered Lemon Bay Jan. 1 and reached the south bridge March 11.

The new north or Manasota bridge was finally opened towards the end of the year after a year or more of great inconvenience to key residents who had to go a long way around by the south bridge to get to Venice. The new south bridge had been completed previously without interruption of traffic because it was put in a different place from the old one which continued in use until the new one was ready to use. It was most commendable that the old one has been left for fishermen.

1966 Channel marker posts installed along the waterway in March.

Manasota Key circumnavigated Nov. 8.

Hurricane about May 30 did no great damage.

1967 Mobil Oil Co. drilling rig six miles off Stump Pass caused excellent fishing for a month or two after March 17 but found no oil.

Fine new black top road completed in May, from the north bridge down to join up with the previously seal-coated section.