

Behind the Scenes

Next to Alaska, Florida boasts more coastline than any other continental state. Many stirring sagas from the past enrich the dramatic history of its coasts. These nautical incidents include the wreck of European and American ships along the southeast Florida coast. The episodes stretch from the earliest recorded European ocean travel to the recent past. This issue of BROWARD LEGACY concentrates upon two aspects of shipwrecks from different but relative perspectives.

With the advent of modern and sophisticated methods of ship construction and safety, much of the stirring drama of past oceanic catastrophes along the south Florida coast has dropped from sight and memory. And this has occurred in the past eighty years. In the year 1906, upon the occasion of Miami's tenth anniversary, the editor of THE MIAMI METROPOLIS reminded his readers that from 1821 until Miami's incorporation in 1896 "wrecking" had the distinction of being the chief occupation among the inhabitants along the lower southeast Florida coast. Only with the arrival of the railroad and ambitious settlers in 1896 was this region transformed into the winter vegetable capital of the United States.

James Dean, a member of the Marine Archaeological Advisory Council of the Broward County Historical Commission, herein tells the fascinating story of the nautical lore held by this region, with a concentration upon Broward County's seacoast. Dean, a native of New York State, graduated from Colgate University with a degree in Anthropology. Upon his arrival in Broward County in the early 1970s, the ocean captivated his imagination. With diversified talents and in-

terests, Dean now concentrates upon the restoration and sale of British antique automobiles. Compensation for his researched writings will be achieved if his article results in a more generous search for county nautical lore and in the restoration and preservation of the historical artifacts for the public.

From the earliest American occupation, Florida has been a land of charm and mystery for the nation. Throughout the 19th century prominent national periodicals, as well as a mass of privately printed material, chronicled savage and rustic events in a huge peninsula that was barely populated. For even until the advent of the 20th century, fewer than one-half million inhabitants lived in Florida. Even more sobering was that, up to this time, only a bare handful of these lived along the southeast Florida coast.

In such a scantily inhabited area ships that wrecked along the coast depended upon skilled, burly and often uncouth "wreckers" for the safety of persons and cargoes. Wreckers risked their own lives to rescue and salvage ships, crews, passengers and cargoes from endangered vessels. Gales and hurricanes accounted for most wrecked and distressed vessels. Internal evidence indicates that the events related in the article, "Wrecking on the Florida Keys," reprinted from HARPER'S NEW MONTHLY MAGAZINE of 1859, occurred in the 1830s or 1840s. The article is a

grim reminder of our nautical past.

For nearly two generations Dr. Thomas Simpson Kennedy unassumingly, and with niggardly compensation, ministered to pioneer southeast Floridians, although he concentrated upon the inhabitants of what is present day Broward County. As his "Autobiography" graphically relates, he became the county's first medical doctor in 1899 under distressing conditions. In 1900 Fort Lauderdale, Precinct #7, had a white and black population of 95 inhabitants.

Legends have grown up about Kennedy's tireless and unorthodox techniques for the treatment of residents in a backward, pioneer area. One legend maintains that he never formally billed a patient. He refrained from sending statements to clients from whom he did not receive payment upon treatment.

Except for an occasional stylistic change, his career, as told in the first person, is printed as he wrote it. After a lifetime of ministering to the suffering, Dr. Kennedy died in Fort Lauderdale in March, 1939.

Dating from the creation of Broward County from Dade and Palm Beach counties on October 1, 1915, sterling and, sometimes, colorful citizens have been elected to county offices. The present generation owes a debt of gratitude to those citizens who were elevated to responsible positions during the early years of the county's existence. With the exception of an up-to-date list of county commissioners, the published lists of county officials is limited to the years between 1915 and 1961. The startling growth of the county, which began in the 1960s, and the subsequent proliferation of public officials make it unfeasible to extend those lists beyond the year 1961.

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