

Tequesta



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Cover—Fowey Rocks Light, within Biscayne National Park. Kirsten Hines, photographer. © Kirsten Hines, <http://www.KirstenNatureTravel.com>.

A History of Southern Biscayne Bay and its National Park

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That a national park exists within sight of the high-rises of Miami and Miami Beach is both unexpected and little known to most southeast Florida residents and visitors, even to many boating the park's waters. Traffic-bound Miamians might think of Biscayne Bay primarily as an impediment in getting to and from Miami Beach. But this watery stretch is only the northern part of the bay, a portion no more than three miles wide and about ten miles long. Most of Biscayne Bay lies south of Rickenbacker Causeway, forming a waterbody three times as long and three times as wide as the northern part. The northern bay of today is unrecognizable from its late nineteenth century form, littered with dredged-up islands, tide-blocking causeways, and deep channels cut through to the ocean. The story of northern Biscayne Bay is well known because it is the story of Miami and Miami Beach and of greater Miami-Dade County.¹ That of the southern bay is less so, as it is a place farther away, accessible only by water, and offering few artificial attractions. Much of the southern part of the bay lies within Biscayne National Park, as does the mangrove shore, rocky islands, tropical forests, seagrass flats, and the coral reef. Established in 1968, Biscayne National Park is fifty years old; in recognition of that anniversary, this paper captures in brief some of the history of the southern Biscayne area. To complement this concise history, we reference two illustrated books that provide historical images and further context.²

Biscayne's Setting

Occupying Florida's southeastern corner, Biscayne Bay is a body of water unlike any other in North America, a tropical marine lagoon only about 140 miles from the Tropic of Cancer and warmed by the offshore passage of the Gulf Stream. It bears more resemblance to the nearby Bahamas than to the rest of North America,



Boca Chita Light. Kirsten Hines, photographer.

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sharing with the Bahamas not only its biology, but its history and its nomenclature—such as calling islands “keys” and channels, “cuts.”³ The southern bay’s islands are outcrops of a 125,000-year old ridge of lithified coral and sand, the northernmost of the Florida Keys.⁴ The bay itself originated about 5000 years ago behind a linear stretch of these rocky keys and coastal barrier islands and the shoal flats between them.⁵ Freshwater flowed seasonally into the bay from streams heading in the Everglades and at low tide from springs emerging along its coast and from the sea bottom itself. The earliest surveyor considered the northern bay a stream of freshwater. The bay’s mixture of marine waters from the Atlantic and fresh waters from the Everglades created an environment rich in marine life with waters as clear as those of the Bahamas today. The mangrove swamps that line the coast, terrestrial plants on the islands, many of the birds, megafaunal marine life, such as manatee and crocodiles, beds of seagrass, corals of the living reef tract, and the fish and invertebrates that inhabit the reef all come from the West Indies. The flora and fauna mixing with temperate elements uniquely characterize the bay and its waters.

This bay was sufficiently productive to support populations of Native Americans for millennia. And it was this productive bay that was encountered by the first Europeans, used by Bahamian mariners and Cuban fishermen, exploited by turtle and sponge boats, and occupied by pioneer settlers. Throughout most of this long history, the bay was characterized, too, by its isolation. It was not an easy place to enter, leave, or traverse, and was accessible, as it remains today, only by boat. And it was this still enchanting bay and adjacent waters and lands that inspired its protection.

Biscayne Bay’s Indigenous Peoples

Proven human history in South Florida predates the existence of Biscayne Bay itself. By about 10,000 years ago, Native Americans inhabited the then extensive uplands. Once the bay and inland wetlands flooded the landscape, from at least 3000 BC people lived in villages on the scarce high ground along the river banks and islands, forming a water-dependent culture. As did

other Southeastern Indians, they created midden mounds, which are known from such locations as Miami River, Key Biscayne, Cutler, Totten Key and Sands Key.⁶ Artifacts including incised pottery shards from Sands Key show its use by Glades culture Indians from about 2500 years ago until a few decades after Spanish contact. Clearly, for these thousands of years the bay, the pine and hammock covered uplands, offshore islands, rivers, and freshwater wetlands provided sufficient food and other materials of life to support a persistent hunter-gatherer, non-agricultural society, ending with those people called by the Spanish “Tequesta.”

The Miami River Indians traveled seasonally, finding food in the pinewoods and marshes on the mainland, in the shallows of the bay, and on the bay’s islands.⁷ They were in communication with villages along the east coast, the keys, and gulf coast. Their food was primarily marine, including mussels, oysters, conch, fish, turtles, dolphin, seal, manatee, upland game, tropical fruit such as mastic, cocoplum, sea grape and palm, and bread made from plant roots.⁸ They did not farm and so had no maize until introduced during the Spanish era. They used bone, conch shells and wood as tools and worked them for ornamentation.⁹

Biscayne Bay’s Indians first encountered the Spanish in the early 1500s, when slavers captured Indians in the keys. Juan Ponce de León made the first official European landing at the bay in 1513, possibly on what is now Key Biscayne, and outbound revisited the area and its Indians, both of which he referred to as Chequeschà.¹⁰ At the time the main village occupied the banks of what would be called the Miami River and at least seasonally what is now Miami Beach and Key Biscayne. Over fifty years later, Pedro Menéndez de Avilés made a second official Spanish incursion into the bay area to engage Miami River’s Indians.¹¹ Starting in 1567 as part of his strategy to docilize the natives through alliances, he took bay Indians back to Spain and Havana for indoctrination and left a short-lived mission. With its failure, Spain did not try to establish missions as it did with the agricultural Indians farther north in Florida. Spanish authorities in St. Augustine pretty much ignored the bay’s Indians other than arranging to se-

cure shipwrecks and to make sure Indians did not kill survivors. Biscayne Bay was far closer to Havana than to St. Augustine, so South Florida's Indians over time developed relations with Spanish authorities to the south.

Access to European wrecked ships and pressures from the new paramount chief in St. Augustine evoked a long-term cultural shift in Biscayne Bay Indians. South Florida Indians immediately came to appreciate the boon in high class ornamentation and utilitarian objects wrecks provided. They became skilled wreckers and were used by Spanish salvors as such. While accommodating to Spanish dominance, they also maintained their independence. European-derived disease and cultural disorganization took their toll and the population along the bay declined. Noted only episodically in European accounts, Native Americans continued to occupy the region, especially the Miami River bank and headland.

Who these native peoples were changed over time in ways that are not yet clear, and may never be.¹² Spanish identified Indians by their location, irrespective of who they really were. Ponce's name Chequeschà for the local Indians evolved into Tequesta and also Tegesta and Tekesta, and they were referred to as Ratones after the charted river outlet Boca Ratones.¹³ In the mid-1600s, the Indians of the Miami River were referred to as Vizcayanos (later to become Biscayano on charts, translating in English to Biscayne, giving its name to Key Biscayne and later to Biscayne Bay).¹⁴ A century later, Miami River Indians were called Costas or coastal Indians.¹⁵ Although living in the same place, these were not the same peoples. As Indian populations declined and pressures from the north intensified, Indians of several cultural groups accumulated on the bay. Harassed Indians also moved toward the lower Keys. In the early 1700s, Spanish began removing Florida Indians to Cuba, and in 1716 returning the few survivors to the keys; in 1743, Spanish Jesuits established a mission lasting only a few months on the old Tequesta site on the Miami River to service remnant Indians who were under pressure from other Indians raiding from the north, likely the reason they had accumulated at the former Tequesta site in the first place.¹⁶ The Uchises

took slaves from the much weakened Florida tribes, whom they sold in the British colonies to the north. They attacked the Indians at the Miami River at the time of the Spanish mission. In 1761, Indians abandoned the millennia-old Miami River site, fleeing to Cayo Hueso (Key West) and to Cuba.¹⁷

After the Seven Year War in 1763, Spain ceded Florida to England, and it was reported by surveyor Bernard Romans that the Miami River village, which he called Pueblo Ratton, was deserted, and he reported that the remaining Spanish-influenced Indians had left with the Spanish government for Cuba.¹⁸ The English were presented a new colony that included a Biscayne Bay empty of native people other than overgrown village sites.

The United States acquired Florida in 1821 and by 1825 had established a lighthouse on Cape Florida at the north end of southern Biscayne Bay, providing a governmental presence that encouraged the first American settlement. But in January 1836, the Second Seminole War came to the bay; in July, Seminole Indians attacked the Cape Florida lighthouse.¹⁹ The government responded to the attack with its customary vigor.²⁰ In March 1838, troops led by Lt. Col. James Bankhead established a beachhead on Key Biscayne at the Cape Florida lighthouse. During this period of military activity the bay and nearby land were thoroughly explored by the military. By the end of the Second Seminole War, 1842, the military withdrew from the bay area, and the remaining Seminoles, who were Creeks who had entered Spanish Florida from Georgia in the early 1700s, and had settled into a dispersed life in the interior wetlands. During the Third Seminole War, in 1856, two men gathering coontie were killed by Indians on the mainland, causing Biscayne Bay settlers to flee to Cape Florida. The military returned, reactivated Ft. Dallas on the Miami River, and resumed their excursions into the interior.

By the time the conflict was over in 1858, it is believed that fewer than 100 Seminoles remained in South Florida, mostly in the interior wetlands.²¹ Seminoles were traditionally agriculturalists and herders. Other than war parties, there is no evidence

of local Seminoles using the bay before trading posts were established. With the resumption of American settlement, the local Miami Seminoles participated in trade economy and became a distinctive, inclusive, and colorful part of the early Biscayne Bay pioneer society.²²

Colonial Engagement in Biscayne Bay

The existence of a land north of Cuba and west of the Bahamas was known to the Spanish soon after Christopher Columbus' voyages. A 1507 map shows a Florida-like peninsula with bays and islands at its bottom.²³ Officially, the western history of southern North America begins with the voyage of Juan Ponce de León in 1513, and Biscayne was part of that discovery, as it was with his second documented continental landfall. Ponce applied names to his discoveries of the bay's islands of Key Biscayne (Santa Marta) and Elliott Key or more likely Elliott plus Key Largo (Pola)²⁶ and to the Indians, which evolved into Tegesta and Tequesta. Chronicler Antonio de Herrera y Tordesillas reported that "between the bank and reef of islands and the mainland stands a great sea, like a bay"—the first written European notice of Biscayne Bay, but the Spanish did not name it for centuries.²⁴ The name Tegesta was charted for the bay area and sometimes South Florida as a whole as late as the 1800s.²⁵ The freshwater Ponce discovered in springs emerging from the shore, bay bottom and up the Miami River were used by mariners for centuries.

Spain ruled Florida for 250 years in its first occupancy and 38 years in its second. Other than the attempted settlements by Menéndez and a second launched 178 years later, there were no documented Spanish attempts at settling the Biscayne Bay area or even interacting with it. There is in fact slim evidence remaining of the long Spanish centuries around Biscayne Bay, amounting to items washed up on the shores, found buried in the mangroves, or incorporated into post-contact midden debris.²⁷ As the native American population decreased over the decades, Biscayne Bay was increasingly deserted save for the occasional wreck on nearby reefs followed by Spanish and Indian salvors, and later by seasonal Bahamian mariners.

Sailing along Florida, Ponce encountered and discovered the Gulf Stream, with its swift flowing current that allowed north-bound ships to avoid the tradewinds pressing against them out of the east and slowing significantly their return to the Iberian Peninsula. Thus the Gulfstream immediately became the favored route for northward bound ships heading from the West Indies to Spain, a process created by Menéndez. Given their importance to navigation along this route, the Florida Keys and Cape Florida were critical features on subsequent navigation charts to identify the reefs. For two centuries, from 1566 to 1790, Spain's *Flota de Indies* sailed up the Florida Straits, transporting silver and other American and Asian precious goods to Europe. It worked well in fine weather, but in the autumn sailing in square-rigged ships, going before the current, contending with eddies, and beating into the prevailing northeasterly wind, storms occasionally brought ships, including those of the *Flota*, onto the reefs. Historically the greatest threats were autumn hurricanes, such as those in 1622, 1715, 1733, and 1750, the latter bankrupting Spain. The 1733 hurricane drove the fleet onto the reef and one of the support ships, the *Nuestra Señora del Populo*, wrecked off Biscayne Bay.²⁹

New Providence in the nearby Bahamas had been settled, beginning in the 1660s, and its mariners extended their maritime activities into the nearly adjacent Florida Keys and Biscayne Bay. They sailed there seasonally to fish, turtle, lumber, and salvage wrecks. Spanish fishermen from Havana also worked the keys and likely also ventured Biscayne Bay. English Bahamians continued visiting South Florida unimpeded through both Spanish and British colonial eras. Only after the United States took control was their engagement curtailed. A remnant of this British engagement during a Spanish period is the wreck of the HMS *Fowey*, which grounded in 1748 and then was scuttled in the Legare Anchorage off Elliott Key.³⁰ By the time of its rediscovery in 1975, the ship's name had been applied to the reef miles north.

Starting in the 1690s, New Providence was headquarters for mariners functioning alternately as merchants, pirates, or privateers, and in fact controlling Nassau in the 1710s. Although

they clearly traveled the nearby waters, there is no evidence for pirate activity in Biscayne Bay. Likely the bay was not very useful to pirates, being shallow, having restricted access across the shoals, being fenced in by offshore reefs, and lying five miles from the Bahama Channel [Florida Straits]. There remains the issue of a famous pirate story from the bay, that of Black Caesar. Unfortunately for local color, there is no evidence for this pirate's existence, much less occupancy of Caesar Creek. This tale is best appreciated as a Miami founding legend originating with Bahamians.³¹ The story was retold by settling conchs, learned by new-comers, and used by authors Kirk Munroe and Albert Payson Terhune in their fiction. But there is no evidence of a pirate named Black Caesar in the bay.

In 1763, when Spain yielded Florida to Britain, the first land grants were made in the bay area. In order to effectuate these claims the grantees had to have their property surveyed. These surveys were conducted by William Gerard De Brahm and the aforementioned Bernard Romans, who also were surveying the coast for the colonial government and the Board of Trade.³² Their surveys and reports resulted in the first scientific descriptions and charts of the bay and its islands. De Brahm called the northern bay the Dartmouth Stream and the southern bay the Sandwich Gulf. Key Biscayne (Biscayano) was prominent as was Cape Florida owing to their importance to navigation. The cape was inconsistently placed on charts as the surveyors disagreed on what was an allowable location for a feature to be named a cape. Most of the English names failed to hold—with such exceptions as Hawke [Hawk] Channel and Elliott's [Elliott] Key. The English land grants were never taken up.

Spain regained Florida after the American revolution in 1783, ruling for nearly four decades. In its second colonial era, Spain, too, thought it wise to populate its possession and began making private land grants. In 1805, Pedro Fornells of St. Augustine received a grant for 175 acres on Key Biscayne.³³ The Fornells established a homesite but never dwelled there long. The other settlers in the area were Bahamians who had lived along the Miami River from the 1790s.³⁴

Biscayne Bay's Pioneer Community

When the United States acquired Florida in 1821, it set out to secure its new coast. By 1825, the Cape Florida lighthouse was built and the town and port of Key West were established, finally opening the bay area as an option for American and Bahamian pioneers. In 1824 and 1825, the United States, as was required by the treaty with Spain, confirmed ownership of Biscayne area land grants. The first American titled owner in the Biscayne Bay area was Mary Ann Davis on Key Biscayne, who had bought the Fornells' grant. The first Bahamians were the Eagans—James Eagan, Rebecca Eagan, and Polly and Jonathan Lewis—who owned the land along “river Miami.”³⁵ The Eagans were listed as Hagen in the documents, as would be the pronunciation in Bahamian dialect, leading to court challenges later. James Eagan in 1832 served as the primary guide for John James Audubon during his expedition to the Florida Keys and was responsible for many of his important scientific discoveries.³⁶ From 1830 to 1835, the Eagans and Lewises sold their Miami River properties to Key West resident Richard Fitzpatrick, who established a slave-worked cotton plantation and cut down miles of the bay-front hammock and planting in its place tropical fruit, such as guavas and limes.³⁷ To keep his slaves from deserting to the Seminoles, Fitzpatrick abandoned the plantation during the Seminole war, after which his nephew William English re-established a slave-worked plantation in 1844. He also sold lots in his “Village of Miami.” One of English's buildings, having been repurposed as part of Fort Dallas during the Seminole War and as Julia Tuttle's homestead, remains, having been moved to Miami's Lummus Park and the Lummus Park local historic district.

The Cape Florida lighthouse and the Davis grant around it on Key Biscayne became the de facto center point of the bay's community, and its place of security. Cape Florida Lighthouse keepers were locals. The first, John Dubois, had his home and farm in the Big Hunting Grounds, to become Cutler and much later Palmetto Bay.³⁸ He hunted, grew food, and planted plants sent by Henry Perrine. In 1844, the Dade County seat was moved from Indian Key to Biscayne Bay, elections taking place at the lighthouse. Be-

cause of the importance of the lighthouse to navigation, the bay had come to be called Key Biscayne Bay through the late 1800s.

The bay community's access to the world was through Key West. When the U. S. closed wrecking and fishing to unregistered Bahamian boats and required salvage be brought to Key West rather than to Nassau for adjudication, Bahamians immigrated to Key West and from there began colonizing islands running north-eastward to Biscayne Bay. Wrecking soon became the dominating commercial enterprise of the region, underpinning the economy of Key West, with some wreckers working as far north as the bay.³⁹

The Indian wars inhibited further settlement of the bay area. The military, stationed at Cape Florida on Key Biscayne and at Fort Dallas on the Miami River, controlled the bay which they explored and documented thoroughly. Key Biscayne's proprietor Mary Ann Davis, from the safety of St. Augustine, continued planning the island's development in collaboration with one of the officers leading the war, Colonel William Harney, who bought lots from her that later eroded away.⁴⁰ The plat of the town was printed in 1839, and the region's first post office was approved, although it never opened.⁴¹ The military importance of the bay was not lost on Washington.⁴² The Cape Florida lighthouse was rebuilt and relit in 1847, and in 1849 the entire island was set aside as a military reservation, an action that ignored the Davis grant and set up future legal real estate conflicts. The lighthouse, its light being within rifle shot and not being visible far out to sea, had proven less than ideal for its purpose, and in 1855 the tower was elevated so as to be seen further offshore. In the meantime, starting in 1849, the federal government surveyed the entire bay and reef, documenting the region's geography, studying the reef's biology, and cementing place names such as the Miami River, Virginia, Soldier, Ragged, Arsenicker, and Elliott's keys and Black, Convoy, and Turkey points.⁴³

Further settlement continued to be discouraged by the Civil War, during which the Union maintained control of the bay. After darkening of the Cape Florida light as the war began by Confeder-



Postcard: Fowey Rocks Light ... Portland, Maine: Hugh C. Leighton Co.,
circa 1910. Stan Cooper Collection, HistoryMiami, 1988-275-14.

ate sympathizers, there was not much wartime activity. Blockade running was impractical given the lack of land based transport in southeast Florida. After the war in 1868, immigration picked up again as pioneer settlers enabled by Homestead Acts sought land and opportunities, tradesman arrived, and post-war carpetbaggers came looking for political and economic fortunes. New development settled, not on Key Biscayne as Davis and Harney had planned, but at what would become Coconut Grove, the Miami River, and on southern Biscayne Bay keys, The Cape Florida light was replaced in 1878 by a new facility on Fowey Rocks, implanted on the reef itself and about five miles beyond the Key Biscayne shoreline.⁴⁴ In what was to become Coconut Grove, Englishmen Charles and Isabella Peacock built their home in 1882-3, at the same time opened Biscayne's first hotel; and New Englander Ralph Munroe came permanently in 1886.⁴⁵ On the Miami River, Mary and William Brickell began purchasing land on the south bank in 1871; there they established a home, trading post, and eventually accumulated a vast tract of land.⁴⁶

Farther south, settlers on Biscayne Bay keys were mostly Bahamian from Key West, mostly descendants of royalists who left the North American colonies during the Revolution. They were called conchs, and as immigrants retained that name when they moved to the Keys. Even today in the Bahamas a white, multi-generational native Bahamian may be called a "conchy joe." The earliest claim on Elliott Key was that of Bahamian Joseph R. Albury in 1871.⁴⁷ By the 1880s, the southern Biscayne Bay's keys supported over forty claims, including those of William D. Albury, Henry Filers, Arthur and Edgar Higgs, Henry Pinder, Alfred Acheson and the Sweetings. Pioneers located their houses initially on the sandy ridge just above the rocky shoreline on the ocean side of the islands, with docks extending well offshore above the shallow rocky shelf. Early homes were simple, initially tents and then made from lumber brought from Key West or high quality lumber found on the shore. Freshwater came from springs in the bay and later from cisterns. Shutters inhibited mosquitos and sandflies, as did smoky "smudge pot" fires. Life was not easy in pioneer homesteads.



Home on Elliott Key, circa 1890. Ralph Munroe Collection, HistoryMiami, 78D.

The Sweeting family story exemplifies conch life on Southern Biscayne's keys.⁴⁸ In 1882, Asa and Lillian Sweeting and their two sons, George and Thomas, homesteaded Seagrape Point on Elliott Key. Their plantation successfully grew pineapples, limes, tomatoes, coconuts, and other produce, their pineapples eventually covering 100 acres. They ran cargo boats, carried their pineapples directly to market, and built the hull of their *Mt. Vernon* on Elliott Key from local wood. They maintained homes and businesses in Key West. The Great Depression forced them to give up in 1930, ending 50 years of residence on the island during which their family settlement came to include multiple houses, school, store and hurricane house.⁴⁹ The Sweeting home site is on the National Register of Historic Places, but only some foundation remnants remain today.⁵⁰

Among the pioneer American settlers of the southern bay keys was Israel Lafayette "Parson" Jones, a black man originally from North Carolina, who in 1897 began purchasing land to farm.⁵¹ In

the late 1800s, the lives of early pioneers settling around Coconut Grove, primarily northern whites and Bahamian blacks, intertwined cooperatively. But as the decades went on and South Florida society centered in Miami rather than Coconut Grove, it became increasingly segregated, reflecting the rest of the Jim Crow South. Through this period, Parson Jones thrived to become one of the most respected and successful men in Miami.⁵² Jones gave his sons, Lancelot and Arthur, the family home and lime plantation on Porgy and Old Rhodes Keys in 1929. By late 1930s as lime prices fell, they gave up farming. Lancelot became a well-known local personality, a fishing guide, boat captain, makeshift environmental educator, and raconteur from his home and dock on Porgy Key across the channel from the Cocolobo Club and later ranger station.⁵³ The Jones family spent nearly a century on the southern bay's keys. The family home site is on the National Register of Historic Places, but not much is left beyond steps and foundation of the main house.⁵⁴

From its initial settlement, the Biscayne Bay community was a maritime one. It had to be. There was not a land trail going north from the Miami River until the Seminole War and no cart path until the late 1800s. Actual roads came after the railroad arrived in Miami. Pioneers' boats supported diverse income streams derived from transporting cargo and passengers, fishing, turtling, sponging, chartering, guiding, and wrecking. Commercial ships ran among Key West, Newport on Key Largo, Cutler, Coconut Grove, Miami-Fort Dallas, Lemon City, Havana, Charleston, and New York.⁵⁵

In the early years of the bay's American era a profitable wrecker enterprise was headquartered in Key West, which for a time became one of America's richest towns per capita. Everyone with a boat could register and participate when the opportunity might arise. Relatively few wrecks occurred as far north as Biscayne's reefs, although they did not go too far to the South, Carysfort Reef being an epicenter of wrecking incidents. But settlers beach-combed for wrecked spoils as they washed up on shore, providing excellent building materials and useful goods.

Post-Civil War, when the bay began to be settled permanently, lighthouses, and steam power had reduced the number of wrecks, thereby decreasing wrecking opportunities for the pioneer community.

Another profitable maritime enterprise was smuggling. The ease of sailing from the Bahamas or Havana to Biscayne Bay had long put these ports in the neighborhood. Intercepting movement of wrecked cargo, undocumented imports, and escaping slaves was a primary function of the the Revenue Fleet based in Charleston working the keys. During the war the Navy blockaded the coast against Confederate exports, although as already mentioned lack of land transport to the bay meant that it was not an important blockade running location. By the late 1800s, smuggling focused on running guns to Cuban rebels. The most celebrated of the filibusters, if not a very successful one, was Napoleon Bonaparte Broward, a future progressive, Everglades-draining governor.⁵⁶ Smuggling continued to be a core part of southern Biscayne Bay's history involving not only arms, but alcohol during prohibition, illegal drugs, people smuggling and political and economic refugees.

Most of the first pioneer residents of the Biscayne Bay keys farmed their plots, because this was the easiest way to prove their Homestead claim and because they knew how. Conchs drew on their experience farming rocky limestone islands in the Bahamas to deal with the exceptionally difficult conditions of Biscayne's similar islands. Plantations initially provided for home consumption and the limited Key West market. Given transportation difficulties, market farming was restricted to West Indian sea cotton and processing mainland coontie plants for starch. Settlers cleared the West Indian forest and burned the downed vegetation, pulverizing the limestone and releasing nutrients, useful at least for the short term. Because the islands lacked topsoil, especially after burning, plants were often rooted in humus-filled holes in the limestone. Invasive Australian pines were planted as wind breaks and other exotic plants were brought in to decorate the plantations.



Illustration from "Pineapples of the Florida Keys," by Kirk Munroe. Harper's Weekly (August 22, 1896), p. 825. HistoryMiami, 1993-450-1.

Southern Biscayne Bay keys' first market crop was pineapples, which grew well initially and shipped fairly well to a welcoming northern market.⁵⁷ By 1910 more than a dozen families were rais-

ing “pines” on Elliott Key. Fruit was transported by boat to Key West for packing and canning or, for those who had their own ocean-going boats like the Sweetings, directly to northern ports.⁵⁹ Transport was initially coastwise by sailboat and later by train, although Flagler’s monopolistic rates made private ocean shipping more profitable. Disease and storm surge from the hurricane of 1906 reduced pineapple farming and by 1925 limes imported from Mexico became the bay area’s primary crop. Elliott Key’s groves produced 7,500 barrels annually. “Sours” were farmed on the keys for over 50 years before being outcompeted by the Mexican lime industry aided by railroad discounts. As rapid transportation options increased, additional tropical fruits and vegetables were grown. Over the years production included pineapples, limes, coconuts, sapodilla, tomatoes, yams, papayas, bananas, guavas, mangoes, chickens and hogs.⁵⁸ Through the pioneer period, nearly all of the southern bay keys were cleared and farmed. This may be hard to imagine today as one encounters what appears to be pristine tropical forest where the plantations used to be.

On the more northern Biscayne Bay keys, farming was undertaken by large-scale landowners rather than small homesteaders. Taking advantage of deals being offered by the state in the early 1880s, Ezra Osborn and Elnathan Field of New Jersey planted coconuts on the barrier islands.⁶⁰ Although unsuccessful, the plantations allowed them to gain title to miles of beachfront from Key Biscayne northward. On Key Biscayne, Mary Ann Davis’ descendants cleared land for pineapples, which were meant to be processed in the overseer Ralph Munroe’s nearby short-lived factory.⁶¹ William J. Matheson went farther on his part of Key Biscayne where he and his son Hugh created a diverse tropical plantation.⁶² Matheson began purchasing plots on the key in 1908 from Ezra Osborn’s heirs, eventually accumulating two thirds of the island north of the Davis holdings. Farming began in 1910 with Persian lime trees, which turned out not to prosper in Key Biscayne’s sand; but they then re-tried coconuts, which became one of the major investments on the Matheson plantation. By 1920, 36,000 coconut palms were on the Key. Economic viability was another matter, as the business could not compete with coconut products

derived from the Pacific Islands so other outputs were found such as supplying trees to developers and providing husked coconuts for Miami tourists to mail home.

Beyond farming, fishing of one sort or another dominated the pioneer Biscayne area economy. Biscayne Bay was a nursery for juvenile green turtles, and adults nested on the beaches and assembled offshore in the nesting season. Colonial-era Bahamian and Cuban fishermen worked the waters netting turtles in the 1700s and early 1800s, as did locals through the late 1800s. Easily transportable live turtles were taken to Key West for processing.⁶³ The heavy harvest eventually depleted sea turtle stocks, after which the Key West canning industry came to depend on imports.

Sponge harvest in the bay supported over a hundred boats by the 1890s. The Key West based industry was a million dollar annual business.⁶⁴ The fishery was led by conchs such as the Thompson, Roberts, and Russell families. In the bay and nearby offshore waters, it was a shallow water fishery. Spongers used long poles to hook specific species of sponges from the shallow bay bottom. They then placed them in crawls (derived from the Bahamian pronunciation of corral) until cleaned and transported to Key West for auction. Ralph Monroe failed at sponge farming off Elliott Key, which he attributed to thievery.⁶⁵ Owing to a blight and overfishing, this first round of sponging ended in the bay by the early 1930s. It was taken up again in the 1960s by immigrant Cuban fishermen but suspended a few decades later as it was learned that the fast-disappearing sponges were important biological filters in the bay.

The early settlers caught fish and lobsters mostly to feed themselves. Fish such as grunt, hogfish, snapper, grouper and mullet that were able to be brought to Key West in live wells or salted or smoked could be marketed to Havana.⁶⁶ Similarly, hunting on the mainland for deer, turkey and other game was mainly for home consumption, but could also produce salable pelts, alligator and crocodile skins, and bird plumes. Eventually, the real business of fishing in the bay became guiding. Once visitors could access the

area a guiding and sport fishing industry thrived. Early fishing guides such as Charlie Thompson became nationally famous. As the late 1800s proceeded, sport fishing became a national pastime, inspired by presidents who themselves came to the area to fish and have themselves photographed doing it.

The maritime-based community of pioneers and their successors of the 1800s changed fundamentally when Henry Flagler brought his railroad to Miami in 1896. Miami expanded at exponential speed as a port of departure for cruising ships, attractor of wealthy seasonal guests and new residents to service them, and as the region's main city. Most arrived by the railroad, some by a new rough road, others by private yachts or ferries. Some were just passing through on their way to visit Flagler's hotels in Cuba or Nassau; some others came for the winter; some eventually built houses of increasing grandness. Miami's development was the turning point for the bay's early history. Soon after its founding, residents of the southern Biscayne Bay area were no longer isolated, but could shop or meet a train 20 miles away. Key West was no longer their shipping port. The southern bay communities of Cutler, Coconut Grove, and Elliott Key were soon superseded by Miami. Sail gave way to engines, allowing quick transport around the bay. As the economy shifted and agriculture and marine profits faltered, the pioneer families moved on, selling their land to a new generation of settlers, who dreamed of living apart in rustic shacks, of running fish camps, of enticing Miami's wealthy to visit, or of selling out to them. The final bell for the old homestead families was the 1926 Hurricane followed by the Great Depression, but as they gave up their lands there were buyers with money to buy them.

Biscayne Bay's Gilded Era

Traveling in comfort and style, from 1896 through the 1930s and even into the 1940s, the rich and the powerful came to the southern bay area. As resident and visitor populations grew and Miami expanded after the railroad's arrival, the natural environment of northern Biscayne Bay was soon obliterated by dredging,

causeways, the creation of artificial islands, upland drainage, and sewage. Miami's hoteliers then found the southern bay to be a more attractive adjunct for their guests. Pioneer homesteads became camps, lodges, homes, and mansions, allowing the wealthy to enjoy the area's more pristine boating, fishing, and adventures.

The first of the wealthy owners was Waters Davis, who at the death of his mother, Mary Ann, in 1885, secured rights to the family's holding at Cape Florida and built a vacation home near the then-abandoned lighthouse.⁶⁷ The estate was managed by Ralph Munroe, and the first caretaker was Israel Lafayette Jones. Cape House and the planted estate was used as a vacation retreat. In 1912, James Deering, who would soon build the grandiose Villa Vizcaya on the mainland, bought the Davis tract but did not manage to do much beyond the difficult task of securing the title, stabilizing the lighthouse, and impeding shoreline erosion.⁶⁸ In 1948 the Deering heirs sold the property to Jose Manuel Áleman, using assets secured while a Cuban government official.⁶⁹ Industrialist William J. Matheson, who built the first of his seasonal homes in Coconut Grove in the early 1900s, built a family entertainment center, Mashta House, on his Key Biscayne plantation.⁷⁰

On the shoals between Key Biscayne channel and Soldier Key, starting in the 1920s, barges and boats rammed onto the bank became the nucleus of a community of "shacks."⁷¹ Eddie "Crawfish" Walker built his shack in 1933 to sell a lobster-based chowder called chilau, bait, and gambling. This was followed by others, such as the Calvert Club, built in 1938. As more cabins joined the community, located just outside the effect of City of Miami's laws, the settlement began to gain fame. A 1941 *Life Magazine* article called it "an extraordinary American community dedicated solely to sunlight, saltwater, and the well-being of the human spirit." Visitors enjoyed other activities as well, such as at Harry Chuchville's Bikini Club, cored by a grounded yacht, that offered a clothes optional sundeck and free drinks to bikini-clad women. It was closed down in 1965 for not possessing a liquor license. The Quarterback Club was a barge suspended on pilings, which was featured in the aforementioned article in *Life Magazine*.



Postcard: Soldier Key clubhouse. Portland, Maine: Hugh C. Leighton Co, 1910.
HistoryMiami, x-2221-1.

In the 1950s, the most famous house likely was that of Jimmy Ellenburg, Coral Gables restaurant owner, who entertained the rich and powerful in both places. One such guest was Governor Leroy Collins, who likened the house to heaven. Structures came and went with hurricanes, peaking at about 27 in the 1960s. After Hurricane Betsy in 1965, building codes required houses be built at a 10 foot elevation, earning the community its contemporary name, Stiltsville.

In 1904, on tiny Soldier Key five miles south of Cape Florida, Henry Flagler built a day trip club for his Royal Palm Hotel guests.⁷² On this tiny piece of land, guests arrived via boat to a fully staffed luncheon. Flagler's cruise ships met his railroad in Miami to take guests to his properties in Nassau and Havana, leading to the first major channel dredging in the bay, first south of Key Biscayne and then one straight from Flagler's docks through what was to become Miami Beach. It was called Government Cut since its funding came from the federal government through the U. S. Congress's River and Harbor committees. He also dredged

the Miami River, placing the spoil wherever, much to the annoyance of the sailing-dependent bay community.

To the south, Boca Chita Key was first homesteaded by Brainard Ball, who sold it to Miami Beach developer Carl Fisher.⁷³ Fisher and later owner Milton W. Harrison bulkheaded and dredged the now-popular boat basin. In 1937, industrialist and thermostat inventor Mark C. Honeywell built a private resort designed by architect August Geiger to augment his Miami Beach home; it included a 65 foot-tall lighthouse as a landmark, which became the principal icon of southern Biscayne Bay.⁷⁴ Boca Chita was the scene of society parties and charity events. Honeywell sold the property in 1942. In the late 1950s the island was owned by G. F. Carlson and then Dan Rivers, who invited the Dinner Key Cruising Club to use the island and eventually to take over its management. Boca Chita's remaining structures, built of concrete and native limestone and refurbished after Hurricane Andrew, are recognized within a National Historic District.

On nearby Elliott Key, pioneer homesteads were redeveloped. Dr. John Gifford, former and future forestry professor, writer, banker and land developer, bought William D. Albury's plot near Billy's Point to create a subdivision.⁷⁵ He wrote widely of the virtues of Elliott Key and of why the government should build a road to get there. Charlie Brookfield bought 20 acres from Gifford, building the 8-room Ledbury Lodge of salvaged wood, which despite its rusticity attracted distinguished personages. When Bahamian fishermen showed Brookfield a canon-strewn wreck site, later determined to be the TMS *Winchester*, he enticed a party from the Biscayne Bay Yacht Club to salvage the canons, which were widely distributed including to the Boca Chita harbor entrance. Brookfield wrote about it in the *National Geographic Magazine* in 1941. In the 1960s the lodge site was taken over by the CIA, which trained Cuban exiles there and elsewhere in the remote islands of the southern bay.⁷⁶

The Gilded Era was also one of the many periods of smuggling in the southern bay.⁷⁷ During Prohibition, liquor smuggling from



Cocolobo Club, circa 1925. Claude Matlack Collection, HistoryMiami, 118-10.

the Bahamas was an enterprise not frowned upon by influential alcohol-using Miami residents.⁷⁸ Liquor was transported in boats from warehouses in Bimini and offloaded in international waters to smaller boats whose local captains knew the waters well. Owing to the tight immigration laws of the time, people also were smuggled through the southern bay keys.⁷⁹ For a year, 1934-1935, Charlotte and Russ Niedhauk lived in a house on the north end of Elliott Key. Charlotte wrote of her experiences, including life among rum runners, in a book *Charlotte's Story*.⁸⁰ They departed after the 1935 hurricane.

On Adams Key, south of Elliott, in 1916, Miami Beach developer Carl Fisher built the Cocolobo Club for his guests.⁸¹ Exclusive membership included such worthies as C. W. Chase, T. Coleman DuPont, Harvey Firestone, and Garfield Wood. Inventor-adventurer Wood purchased Fisher Island from the Vanderbuilts and acquired Adams Key. In 1954, he sold the Adams Key property to Key Biscayne banker Charles "Bebe" Rebozo and his partners, including Senator George Smathers. Their Coco Lobo Fishing Club continued to entertain the rich and powerful, including then Senator Lyndon Johnson.⁸²

Fishing camps were also developed on nearby Key Largo, which unlike the southern bay islands, was connected to the mainland by a road. The first bridge was constructed as part of the Overseas Highway in 1926. After suffering from a fire and hurri-

cane, the bridge was removed in the mid-1940s coincident with the opening of a new highway following the old Flagler railroad line, now U.S. Highway 1. The most persistent of these camps were the Key Largo Angler's Club and Ocean Reef.

The Key Largo Angler's Club's history began in 1912 when W. A. Scott built a stone house as a fishing camp and trading post on the bay side.⁸³ In the 1930s, L. J. Stranahan sold the property to Henry Doherty of Cities Services Oil Corporation. Following the example of Flagler and Fisher, Doherty established a destination for guests of his Biltmore and Roney Plaza hotels, part of his "Florida Year Round Club." The rustic but elegant Key Largo Angler's Club attracted members such as then former President Herbert Hoover.

Another of the early north Key Largo fishing lodges was the Dispatch Creek Fishing Camp, which was purchased in 1945 by Morris and Alice Baker, who had decided to build a small fishing marina.⁸⁴ By the mid-1950s, they had increased their holdings to about 1300 acres and began adding home sites, a golf course, and an airport, creating Ocean Reef. The club's fishing guides became world famous. Other Key Largo developments were planned and even started, but none succeeded.

As the southern bay's gilded era drew to a close in the 1930s under the clouds of the Depression and World War II, private development pressures on southern Biscayne Bay eased. The wealthy continued to visit their resorts and camps as military matters, such as U-boat surveillance, security, and military training, assumed the region's priorities.

Islandia and Southern Bay Development

With the end of the War and increased population growth around Miami, new owners took over the southern bay keys and its dredgeable bay bottom, creating a new community of owners of second homes, fishing shacks, camps, philanthropies, and a couple permanent residences. Many also had an eye on development, others thought development should be curtailed.⁸⁵

In 1950, Dade County revealed that it intended to build a causeway connecting Key Biscayne to Key Largo, passing through the Key Biscayne properties that had belonged to the Mathesons and still belonged to Carlos Áleman's wife and heir Elena Garcia. The causeway would be built by dredging and filling across the flats through Elliott Key to Key Largo.⁸⁶ Proposals for a road to Elliott Key went back to the late 1920s, when advocated by owner/developer John Gifford and later by the Upper Keys Improvement Association. Various proposals included plans for causeways from Key Largo, Black Point, Convoy Point, and even down the center of the bay. In 1958, the county commission proposed dredging bay bottom to create a twelve and a half square mile airport.⁸⁷ The plan impressed those in favor of development of the southern bay and appalled those who did not.

In 1959, Daniel K. Ludwig, once listed as America's wealthiest person, announced impending development of 28 square miles of southern Biscayne Bay shoreline.⁸⁹ His plans eventually came to be revealed to include a cargo port, 40-foot deep basin, 30-foot deep channel and then an oil refinery. Initially well received by local government, the plans outraged environmentally-concerned citizens. It took years for the plan to die, but its unveiling brought the idea of conserving southern Biscayne Bay to public consciousness.

In 1963, Florida Power and Light announced plans to build oil-fired power plants at Turkey Point along the landward shore of southern Biscayne Bay. The station was to take its cooling water from and return it to the bay. In 1967 and 1968, Florida Power and Light Company completed two oil fueled-plants but the heated discharge water was found to damage bay bottom communities,⁹⁰ leading to the company's digging a cooling canal system eventually covering 20 square miles. Three nuclear plants followed on the site's 3,300 acres, making the Turkey Point Nuclear Generating Station the largest in Florida and sixth largest in the U. S. Turkey Point's cooling canals unexpectedly became a prime habitat for the American crocodile. The canals, their berms, and nearby marshes provided year-round habitat and nesting sites, making the canals one of the important factors in the recovery of South Florida's crocodile population.⁹¹

Another industrial project was the Aerojet rocket engine testing and manufacturing facility.⁹² The Aerojet Canal (C111) was dug from Manatee Bay to transport engines. The canal and levee altered coastal surface hydrology. Flames from a 1965 test were visible in Miami. A 1967 test spewed acid onto Homestead. NASA's 1969 decision against using Aerojet's rocket ended the enterprise. The 180-foot deep test silo remains, buried, with an engine still inside.

Personal development continued on Elliott and nearby keys as Miamians, especially from Coconut Grove, built second homes.⁹³ Virginia and Paul Tannehill built their home from wood recovered from the wreck of the *Mandalay*.⁹⁴ Other developments on Elliott Key were for charitable purposes. A local television personality cofounded the Jim Dooley Fishing Club, the membership of which grew to an astounding 16,000 youths.⁹⁵ In the 1950s and 1960s, the camp was free to participants, funded by commercial sponsors of the daily Jim Dooley Show. Also on Elliott Key, in 1956, Andre J. Mathieu founded an alcohol rehabilitation center on 90 acres of cleared land called Camp Recovery.⁹⁶

A few public developments occurred as well.⁹⁷ For decades, people with small private boats could access south Biscayne Bay only from Miami or the Keys. Homestead Bayfront Park was created at Convoy Point in 1938, although not re-opened until after World War II. In 1955, across the canal, Homestead Bayfront Park North opened for the black population.⁹⁸ Very separate, and not quite equal, north park was accessed only by a long and pitted rock road. It closed in response to the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In 1953, Dade County opened a park on Elliott Key.⁹⁹ The park provided dockage, primitive camping, and access to the interior forests of the key. Elliott Key Park became a well-known and well-appreciated public destination for boaters, one of the few accessible public sites on the southern bay keys.

Owners of land on the southern Biscayne Bay keys were inspired by the thought that a causeway would open their islands to development possibilities. As causeway proposals failed to reach



The Islandia Ferry operated between Homestead Bayfront Park and Elliott Key County Park. HistoryMiami, 2002-374-15.



Elliott Key transportation included this Volkswagen van, June 1968. HistoryMiami, 1976-041-19.



Islandia landowners put a voting machine on a pickup truck, ferried it over to Elliott Key, parked it on the future Spite Highway, and held its first city council election, March 6, 1962. Bill Kuenzel, photographer. HistoryMiami, 2002-374-6.

fruition, development-minded people decided that creation of a municipality would allow them to fund a causeway through municipal bonding. In 1960, the town of Islandia was incorporated by 13 votes of 18 registered landowner-voters drawn from 300 property owners.⁸⁸ The city of Islandia cobbled together 33 mostly uninhabited south bay islands. The town officials and voters led the campaign for development and a causeway. The city remained on the books, even after the park service took over the land, so it persisted for decades before being formally abolished in 2012.

The Conservation Movement for Southern Biscayne Bay

The concept that southern Biscayne Bay and the coral reef should be protected was not a new one. At the time of the original proposals for the creation of a park in the Everglades in the 1930s, it was proposed that the southern portion of Biscayne Bay, the islands and the coral reef be incorporated into the planned park.¹⁰⁰ In the 1950s and 1960s a movement arose that in its entirety proposed exactly that. The movement began as opposition to causeway proposals, crystalizing in 1953 with the formation of the Biscayne Bay Conservation Association led by Charles D. Leffler and R. Hardy Matheson.¹⁰¹ Their arguments became well known: causeways impede tidal flow, increase pollution, destroy bay bottom and fisheries, create navigation hazards and obstructions, enable bay bottom dredging and filling, and assure development of natural landscapes. As early as 1949, author Philip Wylie had publicized such environmental effects in northern Biscayne Bay.¹⁰² Ludwig's plans for Seadade led members of the Isaac Walton League to create the Safe Progress Association with the singular purpose of raising public awareness of the threat to the southern bay.¹⁰³ The movement was led by Lloyd Miller with the journalistic help of Juanita Greene and financial and political support of businessman Herbert Hoover, Jr. Others involved were Joe Browder, Ed Corlett, Dave Davenport, Donald DeSylva, Lai Guthrie, Clarence P. Idyll, Carl Karman, Bill Lazarus, Charles Leffler, Arthur Marshall, R. Hardy Matheson, Joe Penford, Al Pflueger, Sr., James Redford, Polly



Previous page: Anti-Islandia bumper stickers. Miami News Collection, HistoryMiami, 1989-011-8832 and -8833.

Redford, Nathaniel Reed, Janet Reno, Belle Scheffel, and Philip Wylie.¹⁰⁴ The public awareness and political campaigns were ambitious and inclusive, eventually enlisting a support list of hundreds of thousands of people and national publicity.¹⁰⁵ Politicians began to come around to the idea that the area should become a federal park, including Florida Governor Claude Kirk, local congressman Dante Fascell, Congressional leaders and President Lyndon Johnson and his Interior secretary Stewart Udall. Fascell and Kirk became the political leaders of the plan, which faced a prolonged uphill battle in Florida and in Congress.

The Isaac Walton League in Washington convinced Secretary Udall to take a look at the issue. Herbert Hoover, Jr., brought down biologist and Assistant Interior Secretary Stanley A. Cain and plane-loads of congressmen to inspect. Udall came to observe the area by blimp. In 1966, a report to the Secretary found that the proposed park with its tropical forest contained a rare combination of "terrestrial, marine and amphibious life, as well as significant recreational value ... clear, sparkling waters, marine life, and the submerged lands of Biscayne Bay and the Atlantic Ocean. Here in shallow water is a veritable wonderland."¹⁰⁶ With the Interior Department, National Park Service's influential director George B. Hartzog, Jr., powerful



Biscayne National Monument's first superintendent, Dale Engquist, poses with a chart showing the original monument boundaries, 1972. George Kochanieg, photographer. Miami News Collection, HistoryMiami, 1989-011-13290.

congressmen, national business leaders, and the local newspapers behind the proposal, Congress created Biscayne National Monument. The bill was signed by President Lyndon Johnson on October 18, 1968, during which he reminisced fondly about the time he spent in Biscayne Bay, at the CocoLobo Club.¹⁰⁷

The owners and backers of Islandia, including CocoLobo's influential Bebe Rebozo, were fierce opponents of the national monument plan. The town officials continued their attempts to get approval for a causeway and to stop the state's transfer of bay bottom to the federal government. Both county and state officials denied the necessary permissions. In February 1968, when the bill to establish a national monument was being prepared in Congress, Luther Brooks and others floated a bulldozer to Elliott Key and used it to widen the existing car trail into a 125 foot wide path



Ranger Carol McNulty shows sponges to park visitors, 1981. Miami News Collection, HistoryMiami, 1989-011-13285.

down the forested backbone of the island. Their expanded “Elliott Key Boulevard” became known as “Spite Highway.”¹⁰⁸ Today, with the trees grown back, it is a peaceful hiking trail.¹⁰⁹

The National Monument protected the extreme southern portion of the bay and the reef beyond. This complemented the first protective actions in the area, in 1963, when the state established John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park offshore of Key Largo.¹¹⁰ Other pieces were added in later years. The Largo Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary was established in 1975 to expand reef protection beyond state boundaries. On Key Largo, the Crocodile Lake Wildlife Refuge was established in 1980. The state added its own park in 1982, the Dagny Johnson Hammock Botanical Park at a failed development site. In 1990, the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary was established to encompass the keys marine environment. By then much of southern Biscayne Bay, the southern bay keys, coral reefs and offshore waters were governmentally protected areas.

Biscayne National Park

The original boundary of Biscayne National Monument stretched north to Sands Key, leaving out Boca Chita and Ragged Keys; headed east to the 60 foot offshore contour; and west to 700 feet of the bulkhead line. Provision was made for a future shipping channel to cut between the islands to accommodate Ludwig's seaport. On the south there was a hiatus between the monument and the Coral Reef State Park. Within this boundary, the state transferred submerged lands and the county transferred its park land to the monument, but most land remained in private ownership and not always by willing sellers. Opposition to the monument remained, as lack of information about what a federal monument meant, which was not unexpected as a congressionally approved monument was a unique designation.

Following its establishment, the new monument slowly organized itself. Properties needed to be acquired, existing structures removed or repurposed, rules made and enforced, and visitors accommodated. The monument at first was managed out of Everglades National Park and received its own superintendent, Dale Engquist, in 1971, but had few facilities or staff. Acquisitions were managed by the US Army Corps of Engineers; assessment values had to be set and bids made.¹¹¹ Owners proposed new developments to increase the value of their properties. On Adams Key, Bebe Rebozo's brother-in-law and former caretaker, Howard Bourterse, continued in residence as a park service employee, where he entertained Rebozo and the now president Richard Nixon, sometimes without informing the Park Service. Bourterse's supervision was thought by the long-time park service director George Hertzog to be the cause for his own removal as director.¹¹² Whether true or not, the story shows that Biscayne National Monument continued to experience political sensitivities.

Lancelot Jones and his brother's widow Kathleen sold their 225 acres to the government on the condition that he could continue to live on Porgy Key, which he did.¹¹³ The family home burnt down in 1982, but Lancelot continued to live on the key in a small-

er cabin, until he was evacuated for 1992's Hurricane Andrew. The second residents granted life tenancy were Virginia and Paul Tannehill.¹¹⁴ Virginia continued living in her house on the ocean side of Elliott Key. As an indefatigable explorer of the shores, she found among other artifacts a stash of Spanish silver coins dated to the 1600s. She donated many of the artifacts she found to the monument, including a wooden Madonna statue, now on display at the visitor center.¹¹⁵ Her house, too, was demolished by Hurricane Andrew. With the acquisition of properties, habitats were freed to restore themselves, which over time they did.

The original Congressional act called for visitor centers at Key Largo and Homestead Bayfront Park. It was decided that the former was not needed, and headquarters was established at the site of the previous colored beach. The buildings were mostly repurposed structures, some from other places.¹¹⁶ These structures were dismantled by Hurricane Andrew; and the replacement visitor center was named for Congressman Dante Fascell, who above all else was responsible for making the monument a reality. Ranger stations were established on the previous county park site on Elliott Key and at the Cocolobo site on Adams Key. The Cocolobo clubhouse was destroyed by fire in 1974 and the rest of the old club by Hurricane Andrew.

Movement to expand the monument's boundaries began in the early 1970s.¹¹⁷ The initial boundaries needed rearranging to close the gap to the State Park, add Swan Key (owned by a member of Congress), and eliminate the ship channel easement, all of which was accomplished in 1974. In January 1980, Congress changed the area's designation from a national monument to a national park. Park boundaries then reached north nearly to Key Biscayne, taking in Stiltsville and Fowey Rocks and to the south to Broad Creek. The original act placed the western boundary where it was possible for development to occur, and the county later re-defined the location of the bulkhead line.¹¹⁸ But with the 1980 expansion, the park was allowed to work with land owners and local authorities to add the fringing mangrove swamp along the coast to the park. These acquisitions occurred over time, leaving the park with



Sailing between Cape Florida Light and the Sessions-Baldwin-Shaw house in Stiltsville, circa 1975. Miami News Collection, HistoryMiami, 1989-011-15650.

an undevelopable western buffer of mangrove swamp. Several of the islands within the park boundary did remain privately owned after the expansion, with Soldier Key being purchased in 1993. Through its national park designation, Biscayne National Park was recognized as protecting a significant area having a diversity of historic and natural resources. The park now included most of southern Biscayne Bay.

With the expansion, Boca Chita and Stiltsville became part of the park. August Geiger's structures, including the iconic fake lighthouse, were restored after Hurricane Andrew put ten feet of water over the island.¹¹⁹ Bay bottom "campsite" leases of the Stiltsville structures were transferred to the federal government from the state in 1985. Hurricane Andrew destroyed all but seven of the houses and a radio tower. When the leases on the seven that remained expired in 1999 the Park Service announced it would tear them down. But bowing to local public and political pressure, changed its proposal and created the Stiltsville Trust to manage their use in a partnership with their former owners as caretakers.¹²⁰ Fowey Lighthouse ownership also was assumed by the park and is considered one of Florida's most endangered historic structures.¹²¹



Schaus' Swallowtail. Linda Cooper, photographer. ©Linda Cooper.

Protecting natural resources was a prime reason for the park's establishment. Owing to federal legislation and federal-state agreements, recreational and commercial fishing have continued in the park.¹²² The southern bay is part of the state's Biscayne Bay-Card Sound Lobster Sanctuary, where take has been prohibited to protect nursery stock. But most monitored fish stocks in the park have been in long term decline and show unsustainable size class distribution, due mostly to overfishing.¹²³ Public resistance to increased regulation and additional sanctuary zones has proven to be overpowering to alternative management strategies. Commercial bait shrimping continues in the park using trawls and affecting over 20 per cent of the bay bottom, annually crushing and uprooting sponges and corals and taking substantial bycatch.¹²⁴ Protecting the reef tract from damage by grounding, boat anchors, and divers has proven a long-term challenge, acerbated by coral deaths due to disease and increasing sea temperatures.¹²⁵

On land, the park assumed responsibility for managing one of the most important remaining stands of West Indian forested and

shore habitat in Florida, supporting such rare species as Schaus' Swallowtail, Beach Jacquemontia, and Buccaneer Palm.¹²⁶

The park protects historic resources, especially nationally listed historic sites that recognize pioneer settlers, the gilded era, and shipwrecks. Remains of hundreds of ships that wrecked on the reef remain in what is now park waters, about 40 such sites having been documented.¹²⁷ Many of the wreck sites remain unidentified. Acknowledging the Reef's maritime history, the reefs from Triumph to Pacific were made a National Historic Area, and the park created an underwater Maritime Heritage Trail.

Hurricanes, too, are a part of the historic fabric of southern Biscayne Bay. The storm of 1906 over-washed Elliott Key's pineapple plantations and wrecked Henry Flagler's famous paddle-wheeled boat, *St. Lucie*, drowning at least 21 men near Elliott Key. Hurricanes also hit what is now the park in 1926, 1935, 1950, 1960 and 1962. In 1992, Hurricane Andrew essentially destroyed the park's infrastructure and leveled non-native vegetation, especially Australian pines.¹²⁸ In the immediate aftermath of the storm, the park was managed by an emergency team and did not completely reopen for two years. The natural environment that took the brunt of the wind and surge recovered. Natural systems are resilient. The built environment was pulverized. Twenty-five years later, its damage can scarcely be seen as the native habitat revived and park structures were renewed.

Conclusion

Nineteen-ninety-two, Hurricane Andrew, was a historic watershed for southern Biscayne Bay and Biscayne National Park, literally so, as the storm's water and wind established once again that the bay area belongs to nature. There is meaning in this outcome: southern Biscayne Bay has always been ruled by the forces of nature, not man. Unfortunately, it has also seen that environment altered, animal populations diminished, and some endangered species reduced to a few specimens in the wild. Looking to the casual observer like an untrammelled wilderness, it has been cited as one of the most threat-

ened of the national parks.¹²⁹ One of Biscayne National Park's unique aspects is its location next door to Miami's sprawling metropolis. It is not unexpected that there would be impacts of this nearness. But the islands once stripped for farming and slated for development are once again covered with West Indian forest and ringed by tropical mangroves. Crocodiles inhabit its lagoons; bonefish, its flats; frigatebirds, its air; pelicans, its mangroves; endangered butterflies, its hammocks; and weekend boaters, its waters. Biscayne Bay remains a unique place in North America where tropics and temperate meet, and a place that has seen five centuries of western culture and millennia of Native American culture before that come, and go.

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