



# The Florida Keys: A History of the Pioneers

*John Viele*

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Today, on the Keys between Key West and the mainland, some 40,000 residents and thousands of visitors fish, swim, sail, and dive in the crystal clear waters off a tropical reef; relax in the sun and cooling trade wind breezes; and sleep in the air-conditioned comfort of their homes and hotel rooms.

On these same islands, as short a time as 80 years ago, fewer than 300 inhabitants tried to eke out a living without benefit of electricity, running water, radios, or telephones. Tormented by clouds of voracious mosquitoes and no-see-ums, broiled by the tropical sun, they lived in thatched-roof homes regularly flattened by hurricane winds. Weeks would go by before some passing sailboat brought them news of the outside world or their relatives.

The stories of these hardy pioneers and their predecessors, as far back as the Native Americans who lived on the Keys at least 1,000 years ago, are told, many for the first time, in this book. As vividly portrayed as if they were characters in a novel, these true-life inhabitants of the Florida Keys will capture your admiration as you share in the dreams and realities of their daily lives. Occupations included salvaging wrecks, growing sponges, planting pineapples, making charcoal, and skinning sharks. *A History of the Pioneers* includes fascinating accounts taken from old newspapers, letters, diaries, and government records, as well as interviews with old-time Keys natives.

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