

ELIZABETH BISHOP HOUSE

624 White Street



HISTORIC STRUCTURES REPORT

April 1, 2020

Prepared for:
Key West Literary Seminar

By: *Bender & Associates Architects p.a.*
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1. Introduction:

In November 2019, Key West Literary Seminar purchased the house at 624 White Street in Key West, Florida. The house is noted for being the home of poet Elizabeth Bishop between 1938 and 1946. KWLS commissioned a team of Architects and consultants to compose a Historic Structures Report for the house and property.

Located on a prominent street in the Old Town District of Key West, the house was constructed circa 1889, and is an excellent example of an Eyebrow House, an architectural typology found only in Key West. The house is also notable for being remarkably well preserved, and largely unrestored, looking much as it did in the 1940's during the period of Bishop's ownership.

The Bishop House is an important resource that represents the history of Key West. It is also the home of a major literary figure. Because of this, it is one of the most historic sites in Key West and Monroe County, and is deserving of preservation.

The consultant team, led by Bender & Associates Architects of Key West, includes Bender & Associates of Key West, Florida, (Architectural); Atlantic Engineering, Inc., (Structural Engineering Consultant); and James J. Miller, PhD LLC (Historian, Archaeologist, Heritage Planner). Additional testing for mold, asbestos and Indoor air quality was provided by EG&G, Inc. Key West Literary Seminar Executive Director Arlo Haskell commissioned the report and provided assistance with research, including locating historic documents and photos.

The field work was begun in November 2019. The existing building was measured and photographed by Architect David Salay in November 2019. Structural Engineer Mark Keister conducted a structural assessment of the building on December 4th and 5th, 2019. Crews from EE&G, Inc. conducted testing surveys for existing lead-based paint, asbestos and mold in the building on November 15, 2019. Historian Jonathan Lammers conducted a research site visit on February 26-28, 2019. Mr. Lammers also conducted extensive research from other sources, including newspapers, property records, and the Bishop archives. David Salay completed the field work on the building in December 2019 by conducting written assessments of the existing structure. The buildings were drawn by David Salay of Bender & Associates. The written assessments were drafted with assistance from Ayn Lewis. Finally, the report was assembled and reviewed by David Salay.

The first step in an accurate restoration or rehabilitation is to prepare a Historic Structure Report. Key West Literary Seminar is committed to preserving and maintaining the Bishop House for further generations to appreciate.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

While the house is remarkably well preserved, there are several deferred maintenance items that need to be addressed. These items are listed in more detail in other parts of the report, but generally include:

1. Repair of the exterior siding as required to make the building watertight.
2. Repair of existing historic wood double hung windows and shutters to make the building watertight. Installation of removable impact-rated hurricane shutters at doors and windows.

3. Replacement of the outdated plumbing system. Historic plumbing fixtures, including the upstairs bathtub and lavatory, should be restored and reused.
4. Mitigation and/or remediation of lead-based paint, mold, and asbestos-containing materials.
5. Structural upgrades, including repair of porch columns and beams, foundation piers, cistern cap, floor joists, front porch stairs. Additionally, the building's sill beams should be structurally attached to the existing foundation piers.

After these repairs are completed, consideration should be given to restoring the structure back to its established period of significance, which is the period of the 1930s and 40s that Bishop resided in Key West. Several items are involved in this, including removal of contemporary windows, removal of the south side porch, restoration of the cistern, and restoration of the covered cistern porch, an element that, according to research, Bishop personally oversaw construction of. Consideration should also be given to restoring the landscape back to a state more in keeping with Bishop's time at the property. Further research of historic photos is needed in this area by individuals experienced in landscape design and tree identification. Finally, the building should be made ADA accessible, which will allow it to be utilized as office and exhibit space.

The building should be fitted with hurricane impact protection measures such as aluminum hurricane shutters at all door and window openings. Both the shutters and tracks should be removable so they are not visible, and both the windows and the historic wood louvered shutters should be protected by the metal storm panels. When not in use, the shutters can be stored under the house.

Finally, the Historical Background section of this report includes numerous historic photos of the house and surrounding property. Many of these photos were not previously available to researchers, and more may be found as research continues. Wherever possible, historic photos should be used to inform rehabilitation work on the property, including the potential restoration of historic materials, as well as the removal of non-historic additions or alterations.

2. Historical Background:

**HISTORY OF THE
ELIZABETH BISHOP HOUSE
624 WHITE STREET, KEY WEST, FLORIDA**



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**MARCH 31, 2020
DRAFT REPORT**

Introduction

This report discusses the history and evolution of the house at 624 White Street (aka the Elizabeth Bishop House) in Key West, Florida. The house is a wood frame “eyebrow” house constructed circa 1889. It appears to have been purpose-built as a rental property by James A. Waddell, a real estate magnate and two-term mayor of Key West. Its early history is closely associated with Key West’s cigar industry. The neighborhood was home to several cigar factories, and various records from the late 1800s through the 1920s indicate that several occupants of 624 White Street worked as cigar makers.

624 White Street was purchased by Elizabeth Bishop and her partner, Louise Crane, in 1938. At that time, Key West was still in the early stages of recovery from the Great Depression, and the quaint, cosmopolitan atmosphere and cheap cost of living appealed immensely to Bishop. The couple immediately began fixing up the property, while respecting and preserving the simple integrity of their “conch house.” Bishop and Louise Crane were soon welcomed into Key West’s literary and Bohemian society, and Bishop found welcome inspiration in the island’s unique culture.



Aerial view southwest of the Bishop House.
(Google Maps image annotated by the authors)

For the next three years she and Crane lived in the house during the winter season before returning to New York. Their relationship eventually waned, however, and Crane deeded her half-interest in the house to Elizabeth Bishop in 1942. By this time, Key West was churning with military activity, and Bishop rented the house for income while living with a new partner a few blocks away.

While Bishop would always fondly recall 624 White Street as one of her “three loved houses,” World War II irrevocably changed both Key West and Bishop. She sold the house in 1946, the same year her first poetry collection was published. Bishop then spent much of the next two decades living in Brazil, where she would continue to publish.

The house was sold to Lisbeth Sewall Weymouth, who lived in the house until 1985. The property remained in the Weymouth family until 2019 when it was sold to the Key West Literary Seminar, which is the sponsor of this historic report. Current plans include repair and rehabilitation of the building for use as an administrative headquarters, meeting and classroom space, public gardens, as well as a center dedicated to the study of Elizabeth Bishop.

In 1971, 624 White Street was listed in the National Register of Historic Places as a contributor to the Key West Historic District. It was found significant under National Register Criterion C (architecture). This report finds that the house also has individual significance under National Register Criterion B (persons), as the best property in the United States conveying significant association with Elizabeth Bishop. The house also retains outstanding historic integrity. The building’s principal character-defining features, both on the exterior and interior, remain remarkably unchanged since Bishop’s period of ownership.

Chronology

- 1513 Spanish explorer and conquistador, Ponce de León, reputedly becomes the first European to view Key West. It is named “Cayo Hueso” or “Bone Key.” For the next 300 years the island is used sporadically by fisherman and wreckers.
- 1763 Great Britain takes control of Florida from Spain. The Spanish and Native American people living at Key West are moved to Havana.
- 1783 Spain retakes control of Florida from Great Britain.
- 1815 The Spanish Governor of Cuba deeds the island of Key West to Juan Pablo Salas, an officer in the Royal Spanish Navy.
- 1821 Florida becomes a United States territory.
- 1822 U.S. Navy Lt. Commander Matthew Perry sails to Key West and claims the Keys as United States Property. Key West is declared an official port of entry.
- 1823 The Florida Territorial Legislature establishes Monroe County as the 6th county in Florida, with Key West as its seat. The county’s original boundaries were vast and included most of south Florida and the Florida Keys.
- 1825 The U.S. Congress declares that all property shipwrecked in American waters must be brought to a U.S. port of entry. The wrecking industry in Key West grows exponentially as a result.
- 1828 Key West is incorporated.
- 1830 The U.S. Census shows 517 residents of Key West, including 368 Whites, 83 free Blacks, and 66 enslaved persons.
- 1840 The U.S. Census shows 688 residents of Key West, including 516 Whites, 76 free Blacks, and 96 enslaved persons.
- 1845 Florida is admitted to the Union.
- 1846 Key West is struck by an intense hurricane resulting in dozens of deaths. This leads to the acquisition of land for the City Cemetery the following year.
- 1850 The U.S. Census shows 2,645 residents of Key West, including 2,088 Whites, 126 free Blacks, and 431 enslaved persons.
- 1860 The U.S. Census shows 2,913 residents of Key West, including 2,302 Whites, 160 free Blacks, and 451 enslaved persons.
- 1861 The State of Florida secedes from the Union. However, Key West remains under federal control owing to the presence of Fort Zachary Taylor.

- 1863 All enslaved persons in Key West are freed by the Emancipation Proclamation.
- 1867 Telegraph service is opened between Key West and Havana, Cuba via an underwater cable line.
- 1868 The first of three wars for Cuban independence begins. Many Cubans relocate to Key West, influencing Key West's economy and politics.
- 1870 The U.S. Census shows 5,675 residents of Key West, including 4,631 Whites and 1,026 free Blacks.
- 1874 The lot where 624 White Street now stands is subdivided and sold at public auction to Key West capitalist, John White.
- 1880 The U.S. Census shows 9,890 residents of Key West.
- 1886 The property where 624 White Street now stands is sold by John White to James Waddell.
- The worst fire in Key West history erupts in a hall on Duval Street and spreads to nearby buildings, damaging or destroying several blocks.
- 1889 Key West enacts a new charter allowing the entire island to be included in the city boundaries. As a result, Key West becomes the most populous city in Florida.
- 624 White Street is constructed around this time.
- 1890 The U.S. Census shows 18,080 residents of Key West.
- Cigar manufacturing in Key West reaches a zenith of over 100 million cigars.
- 1894 A labor dispute in the cigar industry leads several cigar factory owners to relocate from Key West to Tampa.
- 1898 Key West supports naval operations during the Spanish American War.
- 1900 Key West's population falls slightly to 17,114 persons.
- Census records show 624 White Street was occupied by Henry L. Roberts, a cigar factory clerk, and his wife, Ella Kemp Roberts.
- 1905 Work begins on the "Overseas Railroad," Henry Flagler's Key West Extension of the Florida East Coast Railway.
- 1907 The Key West city directory shows 624 White Street occupied by William P. McNamara, a cigar maker, and his wife, Victoria Vantayon McNamara.
- 1909 A severe hurricane strikes Key West on October 11th, destroying scores of buildings and causing heavy damage throughout the city.
- 1910 Key West's population rises to 19,945 persons.

Census records show that 624 White Street was rented by Waddell “Walter” L. Roberts, a sponger, and his extended family. Four members of the household were employed as cigar makers.

- 1911 Elizabeth Bishop is born in Worcester, Massachusetts.
- 1912 Henry Flagler completes work on the Overseas Railroad, linking Key West to the entire east coast of Florida by rail.
- 1917 The Key West city directory shows that 624 White Street was rented by Carryl Bethel, a shipping clerk, who would continue to live at the house until at least 1923.
- 1923 A fire originating at the former Nichols cigar factory at Newton and White street spreads and destroys approximately 40 homes.
- 1926 An intense hurricane strikes Miami. The crash of the Florida Land Boom begins
- 1927 The Key West city directory shows that 624 White Street was occupied by Mary A. Carstens, a widow, and extended family. Carstens would remain at the property through at least 1930.
- 1930 Key West’s population falls to 12,831, a 30 percent decline from 1920.
- Elizabeth Bishop begins studies at Vassar College.
- 1934 The City of Key West declares insolvency. The head of Florida’s Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) program, Julius F. Stone, begins efforts to beautify Key West and encourage tourism.
- 1935 The Labor Day Hurricane destroys the Overseas Railroad through the keys.
- 1937 Elizabeth Bishop and Louise Crane visit Key West for the first time in January. Later that year they complete a six-month tour of Ireland, France and Italy.
- 1938 Elizabeth Bishop and Louise Crane purchase 624 White Street from West Properties, Inc. for \$2,000. Soon after, Bishop is issued a building permit for \$500 in general repairs, which included moving the house back on its lot.
- The Overseas Highway is completed, restoring Key West’s connection to mainland Florida.
- 1941 A new screen porch is constructed at the rear of 624 White Street above the cistern.
- Elizabeth Bishop moves in with Marjorie Stevens in June and rents the White Street house to a Navy captain.

The bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7th ushers in an intense period of military buildup in Key West.

- 1942 Louise Crane conveys her half-interest in 624 White Street to Elizabeth Bishop, making Bishop sole owner.
- 1945 Elizabeth Bishop receives the Houghton Mifflin Poetry Prize Fellowship in June.
- 1946 Houghton Mifflin publishes Elizabeth Bishop's first volume, *North & South*. Elizabeth Bishop sells 624 White Street to Lisbeth Weymouth.
- 1947 Elizabeth Bishop is awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship. She spends the winter of 1947-1948 staying in Key West, first with Pauline Hemingway, and then at a friend's house at 630 Dey Street.
- 1948 Elizabeth Bishop spends the winter of 1948-1949 in Key West in an apartment at 611 Frances Street.
- 1949 Elizabeth Bishop is appointed a Consultant in Poetry at the Library of Congress (a position known today as the U.S. Poet Laureate).
- 1951 Elizabeth Bishop travels to Brazil and moves in with her friend and partner, Lota de Macedo Soares. She will remain in Brazil for nearly two decades.
- 1955 Houghton Mifflin publishes Elizabeth Bishop's second volume, *Poems: North & South and A Cold Spring*, which reprints her first book along with a new collection of poems.
- 1956 Elizabeth Bishop is awarded the Pulitzer Prize for poetry and a *Partisan Review* fellowship.
- 1965 Elizabeth Bishop's third volume of poems, *Questions of Travel*, is published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- 1969 Elizabeth Bishop's *The Complete Poems* is published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- 1970 Elizabeth Bishop receives the National Book Award for *The Complete Poems*. That year she also begins teaching at Harvard.
- 1971 The Key West Historic District is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.
- 1976 Elizabeth Bishop's *Geography III* is published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- 1977 Elizabeth Bishop receives the National Book Critics Circle Award for *Geography III*.
- 1978 Elizabeth Bishop is awarded her second Guggenheim Fellowship.

- 1979 Elizabeth Bishop dies at her home in Boston, Massachusetts.
- 1983 The Key West Historic District is expanded to include some 2,485 buildings and structures.
- 1985 Lisbeth Weymouth moves to a long-term care facility in New Hampshire. 624 White Street is rented to Maria Lenaerts, who will live there off and on for nearly 20 years.
- 1990 Lisbeth Weymouth dies in New Hampshire.
- 2019 624 White Street is sold to the Key West Literary Seminar.

Historic Context

The following section presents a brief history of Key West, with a special emphasis on identifying themes and patterns which influenced the historic development of the city and the composition of its residents. This is followed by a more detailed discussion of the initial development of 624 White Street, including early owners and occupants. Then follows a discussion of Elizabeth Bishop, focused primarily on her time in Key West and association with the property.

Early Key West History

During the pre-colonial era, Key West was inhabited by Native people. It was first visited by the Spanish in the early 1500s and named “Cayo Hueso,” or “Bone Key.” For the next 300 years, Key West was of only marginal importance to the Spanish empire.

In 1815, the Spanish Governor of Florida granted Cayo Hueso to Juan Pablo Salas in return for his services to the crown. In 1819, however, Spain ceded Florida to the United States and in 1821 Florida became a U.S. territory. As such, Salas could not exert his claim to the island until the land grant was confirmed by the United States government.¹

U.S. officials quickly recognized the strategic value of Key West, which sat astride Gulf Stream shipping routes and had a natural deep water harbor. In May 1822, the Secretary of the Navy wrote to President James Monroe about the importance of the island:

It affords a very eligible depot for wrecked property which is highly necessary and advantageous where the navigation is attended with so many dangers and difficulties ... [Key West] is considered so convenient a place of rendezvous for our public vessels on the West Indies Station, that it is intended to make it a depot for provisions and supplies, for the expedition against the pirates, lately authorized by Congress.”²

By the end of 1822 Key West had been declared an official U.S. port of entry, and the West Indies Anti-Piracy Squadron was sent to ensure safe passage for vessels operating in the area. That same year, Juan Salas decided to sell his interest in Key West rather than undertake legal proceedings to have his land grant confirmed. Salas sold Key West to John Simonton, a native of New Jersey who managed shipping interests in Havana, Mobile and New Orleans. Simonton sold off some portions of the island to individual investors who built wharves, warehouses and stores.

It later emerged, though, that Salas had also sold the island to General John Geddes of Charleston, who challenged Simonton’s ownership. To assert his claim, Simonton relied on business and political connections, and divided his claim among three northern business partners: John W. C. Fleming, John Whitehead, and Pardon C. Greene. After several years of legal and political wrangling, the U.S. Congress in 1828 confirmed the legality of the original land grant to Salas, as well as Simonton’s ownership of the island. That same year, the Town

of Key West was incorporated. According to the 1830 Census, the population of the island included 368 white persons, 83 free blacks, and 66 enslaved persons.



“The Business Part of Key West,” from a sketch by William A. Whitehead, published June 1838. (Florida Memory)

The Wrecking Industry

The Secretary of the Navy had been astute in identifying Key West as an ideal spot for “wrecking,” or the salvaging of shipwrecks. For centuries, numerous ships had been sunk or damaged on the reefs of the Florida Keys. By the 1800s, a vibrant wrecking industry had developed in the Keys and was largely managed by ship captains from the Bahamas. The process of wrecking entailed the rescue of crews, vessels and cargo for which some kind of payment was expected. Sometimes the salvage was completed by a single crew, while at other times several independent crews worked in cooperation—or in competition. The rewards could be enormous—as much as half or more of the cargo.

As the wrecking industry grew, salvage claims were typically adjudicated at Nassau or Havana, or between the ship captains and the wreckers directly. Once Florida became a U.S. territory however, government officials sought to assert control of wrecking within U.S. territorial waters. In 1825, the U.S. Congress enacted the Federal Wrecking Act. It stipulated that all property shipwrecked in American waters had to be brought to a U.S. port of entry. As a result, Key West boomed as an entrepot for wrecked cargo. John Simonton reported that from December 1824 to December 1825, some \$293,000 worth of cargo was sold at Key West. Trade in conventional goods also increased steadily. Between 1826 and 1830 some 1,360 ships—mostly American—made entrance at the Key West Customs House.³

Key West Prior to the Civil War

From its earliest days, military activity at Key West was an important factor in the island’s economy and development. In 1829, David Porter wrote to his superiors extolling the military

value of Key West. “The advantages of its location as a military and naval station has no equal except Gibraltar. It commands the outlet of all the trade from Jamaica, the Caribbean Sea, the Bay of Honduras and the Gulf of Mexico It is a check to the naval forces of whatever nation may possess Cuba.”⁴

In 1831 the U.S. Army established a temporary camp in the northwest corner of the island on lands donated by the proprietors of Key West. Additional lots were ceded to the Army during the Second Seminole War (1835-1842). Although Key West was never attacked by the Seminoles, naval schooners, gun barges and other vessels patrolled the Keys to protect settlers and stop arms smuggling to the Seminoles from Cuba and the Bahamas.

After the war, military officials sought to better fortify the island. In 1844, the first permanent buildings were constructed for the U.S. Army Barracks. The following year, the U.S. Army began construction of Fort Taylor as a coastal defense, while Florida became the 27th state to join the Union. Military activity expanded in Key West during the Mexican-American War (1846-1848), and construction of Fort Taylor continued into the 1850s, bringing in a steady stream of federal money.

For civilian residents, maritime commerce and wrecking were the primary economic drivers. Fishing also emerged as a viable pursuit, and some of the island’s residents attempted salt making. In time, the trade in sponges grew, as did catching turtles for meat. Cigar making was also in its infancy.

In 1846 Key West was struck by a devastating hurricane which damaged nearly every structure on the island. Nevertheless, between 1840 and 1850 the island’s population nearly quadrupled from approximately 690 to 2,650 persons. A major factor in this growth was the arrival of large numbers of enslaved persons who were hired out by their owners to help construct Fort Zachary Taylor. Between 1840 and 1850 the population of enslaved people increased nearly 350 percent, from 96 to 451. A growing number of Bahamians also relocated to Key West during this period. Partly in response to the 1846 hurricane, the City Cemetery was established in 1847.

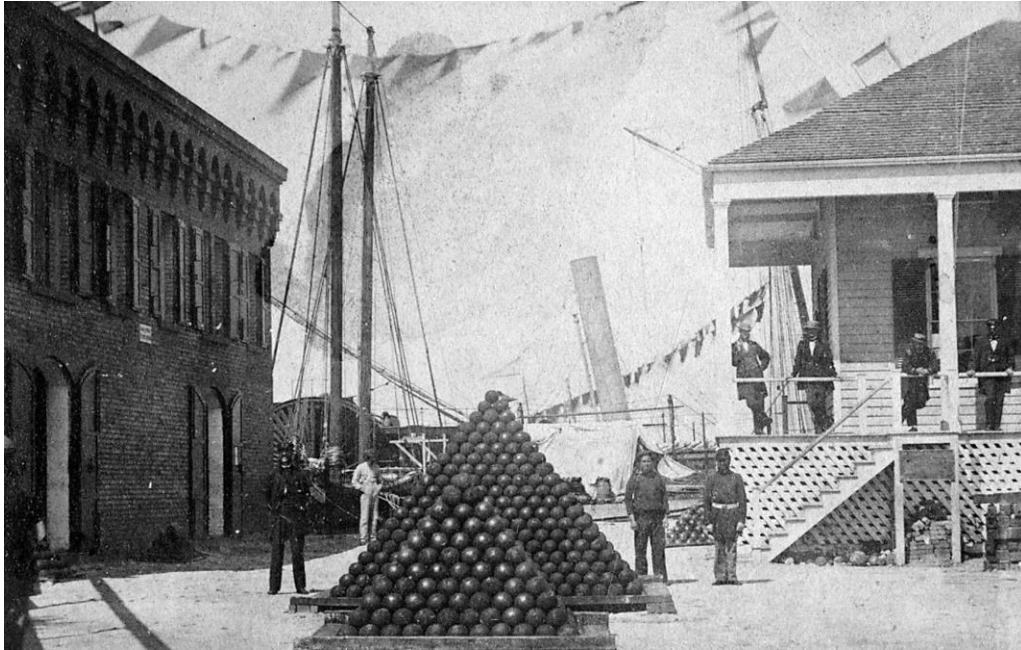


Circa 1850s photo of Key West from an observation tower near Front and Simonton streets.
(Florida Memory)

The Civil War and Reconstruction

Key West played a vital role during the Civil War because of its strategic position and established military presence. It was also the center of U.S. Navy's Gulf and East Gulf blockading forces, which focused on disrupting the flow of goods to the Confederacy. Numerous seized ships were brought to Key West for disposition, and it was the only southern city which remained in Union hands for the duration of the war.

By the time Florida seceded from the Union early in 1861, the U.S. military was already prepared to keep Key West in federal hands. On January 13, 1861, a military detachment from Fort Taylor took possession of the city. Nevertheless, the government continued to pay slave owners for work on Fort Taylor, a situation that remained unchanged until the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863. Enslaved persons in Key West were immediately freed, and many continued to work as laborers at Fort Taylor.⁵ Over 200 also volunteered as recruits for the 2nd South Carolina Volunteers, a Union African American regiment.



US Navy ammunition stored at the end of Duval Street, circa 1865.
(DeWolfe and Wood Collection, Florida Keys Public Libraries via Flickr)

During Reconstruction, Florida was formally joined with the Union after adopting a new state constitution in 1868. African Americans were enfranchised and were first able to vote in Key West's mayoral election in 1869. During the Reconstruction era, Blacks in Key West were able to achieve a measure of political power by joining with the growing Cuban émigré community as a potent force within the Republican party.⁶ Several African Americans also served as public officials in Key West or were elected to local office.

Cuban Influences

Starting in 1868, the first of three Cuban wars of independence prompted large numbers of Cubans associated with the independence movement to relocate to Key West. By 1870, more than twenty percent of Key West's residents were Cuban—the second largest Cuban émigré community outside of New York. Ten years later, Key West's population had doubled and “the city was the capital of the Cuban exiles and the conspiratorial center for their independence movement.”⁷

The nucleus of the Cuban community was the most racially diverse area of Key West, and was strung out along Thomas and Southard streets near Jackson Square.⁸ There were three Spanish language newspapers, *El Pueblo*, *La Propaganda* and *El Ecuador*, as well as Cuban-centric chapters of fraternal organizations, including the Masons and Knights of Labor.



Circa 1870s view south on Whitehead Street from what is today Greene Street.
(The DeWolfe and Wood Collection/Key West Public Libraries, via Flickr)

Many Cubans became American citizens and emerged as a potent force in local Republican party politics. As observed by Cuban scholar, Gerald E. Poyo, “the Cubans in Key West represented a highly politicized group receptive to organizing efforts of American politicians.”⁹ Republican leaders lobbied for patronage, and in 1876 the son of a Cuban patriot, Carlos de Cespedes, was elected mayor of Key West. By the 1880s, Cuban Americans held numerous civic positions, including service as members of the police force.¹⁰ During the 1890s Key West became the birthplace of Jose Marti’s successful Cuban independence movement. Two Cuban natives, including outspoken revolutionary Manuel P. Delgado, were elected Key West’s representatives in the state legislature in 1892.

The Cigar Industry

Cigar making had been a feature of Key West’s economy as early as the 1830s. But it was the rapid influx of Cubans beginning in the late 1860s that truly propelled the cigar industry. One of the pioneering cigar manufacturers was Seidenberg & Company, led by Samuel Seidenberg, a Jewish tobacco merchant from New York. At that time, the U.S. Government imposed low tariffs on Cuban tobacco leaf, but higher tariffs on rolled Cuban cigars. Given Key West’s proximity to Cuba, as well its warm, humid climate conducive to rolling tobacco, Seidenberg capitalized on this loophole. In 1868 he built a massive factory on Greene Street which employed some 600 people rolling cigars marketed under the name “La Rosa Espanola.”¹¹ Among his primary competitors was Vincente Martinez Ybor, maker of “El Principe de Gales”

By 1876 there were twenty-nine cigar factories in Key West employing more than 2,100 persons. Several cigar manufacturers built “colonies” of cottages next to their factories which could be rented or sold to employees through payroll deductions.¹² These included Pohalski Village, located adjacent to the Pohalski cigar factory on the 900 block of White Street. The cigar industry continued to expand rapidly during the 1880s, although Vicente Ybor left for Tampa in 1885 where he established what is today known as Ybor City.



Circa 1900 view of employees outside the Pohalski & Co. “Monte Cristo” cigar factory, built in 1889 at 912 White Street. (Florida Keys Public Libraries via Flickr)

The growth of the cigar industry was temporarily sidetracked by a disastrous fire in 1886, which destroyed much of the commercial section of the city, as well as city hall. The city and county governments responded with a raft of new construction, including a new city hall, county courthouse and jail, new firehouses, and a municipal waterworks. Many of the new civic buildings were constructed using brick, a fire-resistant material that was used throughout the commercial section.

The cigar industry joined in the reconstruction boom. Nearly ten new cigar factories were under construction in January 1887, and by the following year almost 10,000 cigarmakers were employed at Key West.¹³ In 1889 the cigar workers staged a major strike, supported by other labor organizations. In November, only 150 cases of cigars were shipped, versus a normal monthly output of around 1,800 cases.¹⁴ After the strike was resolved, cigar manufacturing in Key West reached a new zenith of over 100 million cigars manufactured in 1890. Nevertheless, competition from other cigar factories was growing. Following a labor

dispute in 1894, several Cuban cigar factory owners in Key West decided to relocate to Tampa. Key West's cigar output fell off for more than a decade, but in 1911 again reached the hundred million mark.¹⁵

Migration from the Bahamas

Prior to the 1860s, Bahamians or persons of Bahamian ancestry already comprised a significant portion of Key West's population. But new waves of Bahamian migration emerged in the 1870s and 1880s, driven largely by economic conditions in the British Caribbean. At the time, the economy of the Bahamas was driven primarily by sponging and pineapple cultivation, both organized by wealthy merchants who paid on a profit-sharing basis rather than a wage basis. As these industries waned, many Bahamians began migrating to Key West.

While some worked in the sponging industry, even more worked in the expanding cigar industry, which offered increased wages.¹⁶ In 1888, a Bahamian official noted that many laborers were "finding out that there are places in the world where not only a high rate of wages is paid, but the people get paid in cash."¹⁷ As a result, several islands in the Bahamas, including Abaco, Bimini, Eleuthera and Harbour Island all experienced net decreases in population at the end of the 19th century, while the numbers of Bahamians living in Key West grew.

The Most Populous City in Florida

Aided by the influx of Cubans and Bahamians, Key West's population grew from 5,675 persons in 1870 to nearly 10,000 in 1880. In 1889, the Florida Legislature allowed Key West to expand the city boundaries to include the entire island, which counted more than 18,000 persons. Thus, Key West became the most populous city in Florida.

At the turn of the 20th century, Key West provided key naval support during the Spanish American War. By March of 1898, some forty ships of the North Atlantic Squadron had assembled at Key West, and Fort Zachary Taylor was extensively altered and given a lower profile facing the sea. Key West did not serve as a troop depot, however, as the island lacked sufficient water to serve thousands of soldiers a day. Nevertheless, after the invasion of Cuba over 500 sick and wounded soldiers were sent to Key West for medical attention. Despite the military activity, the war briefly damaged Key West's economy. Key West fisherman could no longer sell their catch in Havana, and cigar manufacturers were unable to obtain shipments of Cuban tobacco.¹⁸



Circa 1900 view of Key West with Whitehead Street at center. The Monroe County Courthouse and the standpipe for the city's waterworks at Jackson Square are visible at upper right. (Keys Public Libraries)

Key West in the 20th Century

At the dawn of the 20th century, the economic signals in Key West were mixed. After three decades of robust growth, the city for the first time in its history lost population, dropping slightly to 17,100 citizens in 1900. New prospects appeared with construction of the Overseas Railroad, which brought men, materials and new commercial connections. The bursting of the Florida land boom during the 1920s led to population declines which were accentuated by the Great Depression. Key West boomed again as an important military center during World War II, and continued to grow along with the rest of Florida during the post-war years.

The Overseas Railroad & Highway

In 1905 work commenced on Henry Flagler's Overseas Railroad connecting Key West with mainland Florida. The scale of the work was immense and took seven years to complete. Thousands of laborers, many of them immigrants recruited from northern cities, were brought to Florida to work in railroad labor camps. At any one time as many as 4,000 workers were employed in construction across the keys.¹⁹ At Key West, Flagler dredged more than 100 acres of new land for a rail yard and sea terminal at what is today Trumbo Point.

Despite back-to-back hurricanes in 1909 and 1910, the island's population had grown more than 16 percent to 19,945 persons in 1910. The first train arrived in 1912 to joyous celebrations, and the railroad was heralded as an engineering marvel. Although the line earned

steady revenue, the immense outlay in capital and maintenance meant that its returns were modest at best.



Postcard depicting the arrival of the first train in Key West. (Florida Memory)

Navy Expansion

During World War I, Key West's military presence expanded. The island became headquarters of the Seventh Naval District in 1914, which conducted training and patrol operations that included destroyers, submarines and sub chasers. A navy submarine base was also established at what is today the Truman Annex. In 1917, construction began for a Naval Air Station at Trumbo Point, which emerged as the largest training center for seaplane pilots in the United States. By the war's end, the station's personnel had grown to some 1,000 enlisted men and officers and "the city was overflowing not only with military personnel but with families of servicemen and tourists."²⁰

After the World War I, the Naval Air Station was decommissioned and most of the facilities at Trumbo Point were demolished. For the following decade the station was used only occasionally for seaplane training purposes, and would not reopen until the eve of World War II. Likewise, the Naval Station continued on in a caretaker status, but by 1932 most of the navy facilities on the island were closed. The U.S. Army Barracks remained in operation during the 1930s, but with a minimal presence. During World War I, its soldiers were largely assigned to coastal artillery duties, including maintenance of the batteries at Fort Taylor and other sites on Key West.



Circa 1918 view of Trumbo Point with the railroad sheds in the foreground and the aircraft hangars of the Naval air station visible in the distance. (Florida Keys Public Libraries via Flickr).

Boom and Bust

While much of the U.S. boomed during the 1920s, conditions were far less encouraging in Key West at the start of the decade. The end of World War I, combined with the advent of Prohibition, led to a sharp decline in economic activity on the island. To the north, however, Miami emerged as the epicenter of the Florida Land Boom, a rapidly developing real estate bubble. Within a few short years, real estate promoters encouraged ever-increasing speculation, leading to soaring real estate values across the state. In 1925, real estate investor Malcolm Meacham purchased some 1,000 acres of land on the east side of Key West and began platting the tract for development. As the boom neared its climax in 1926, the La Concha Hotel opened in Key West as the tallest non-military building on the island. That same year, Monroe County floated a \$2.5 million bond issue to aid in construction of the Overseas Highway—an automobile adjunct to the Overseas Railroad.

Just months later, however, the 1926 Miami Hurricane caused extensive damage in southern Florida, followed by the Okeechobee Hurricane of 1928. The Florida Land Boom fizzled rapidly, and many investors were wiped out financially. The 1930 census indicates that more than 6,000 residents left the island during the 1920s, reducing Key West's population to approximately 12,800 persons. The situation worsened with the onset of the Great Depression, leading Key West to declare insolvency in 1934.²¹ Few cities in Florida were as severely affected by the Depression. *Time* magazine reported in 1934 that "Poverty has whipped Key West to its knees."²²

To improve conditions on the island, Julius F. Stone, the head of Florida's Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), implemented a New Deal work program designed to showcase Key West as a tourist destination. "The thing to do," stated Stone, "is to make Key

West so attractive as to revive the tourist trade.”²³ An aquarium was constructed, flowers and palm trees were planted throughout the city, and garbage collection was vastly improved. Artists and writers were also recruited via the Federal Art Project to paint murals and write guidebooks for Key West.



Circa 1935 photo of the recently completed Key West Aquarium.
(Florida Keys Public Libraries via Flickr)

Federal relief efforts suffered a severe setback following the 1935 Labor Day Hurricane, which killed hundreds and damaged significant sections of the Overseas Railroad, leaving Key West isolated. The railroad’s right-of-way was subsequently purchased by the State of Florida to expand the Overseas Highway, and construction began in 1937 using a loan from the Public Works Administration. The Works Progress Administration (WPA) also funded new sewer, water and electrical improvements for the island. By the time the Overseas Highway opened in March 1938, the level of unemployment in Key West had been cut by two-thirds.²⁴ Nevertheless, the city’s population had barely nudged, and by 1940 Key West still counted thousands fewer citizens than it had had in the mid-1880s.

Key West During World War II

World War II was arguably the most transformative event in the history of Key West. Even though the United States would not enter World War II until 1941, both the military and civilian defense industries were already expanding by the late 1930s. The Key West Naval Station was reactivated on November 1, 1939, as well as the seaplane base at Trumbo Point. Military activity accelerated rapidly during the early 1940s.

Construction of new buildings at the Naval Air Station began in March 1940, and by September the barracks were ready for occupancy. Concurrently, the Navy undertook work to develop a new freshwater aqueduct to supply Key West—in no small part to be able to mix cement for construction. By the end of 1940 there were approximately 790 officers and enlisted Navy personnel at Key West, along with 285 civilian workers. By December 31, 1941—just after the attack on Pearl Harbor—those numbers had soared to include some 2,400 Navy personnel in Key West, along with just under 1,000 civilian workers.²⁵ All this was just a prelude.

During 1943 alone, the population of the island more than doubled to 35,000 persons. Key West's civilian airport, Meacham Field, was pressed into service as a military airfield. The U.S. Navy embarked on a massive construction campaign and expanded its property from 50 to 3,200 acres—much of it by dredging new land. A new Fleet Sonar School was opened, the Naval Hospital was constructed, and the submarine basin deepened. Thousands of civilian electricians, carpenters, welders and laborers worked shifts around the clock. As related by historian Abraham Gibson:

The navy spent over \$70 million in Key West during the course of the war, and more than 14,000 ships passed through the island's harbor. It was a dizzying time, when the number of people living on the island doubled and sometimes tripled the Key West population.²⁶



Navy Day parade on Duval Street at Fleming Street, October 21, 1943.
(Florida Keys Public Libraries via Flickr)

The booming population severely strained services such as garbage collection, and housing was at a premium. In response, the Federal Housing Authority constructed hundreds of housing units along the eastern edge of Key West, and new civic facilities were opened, including a new health department building and USO building at Jackson Square. Water service was improved. Wartime needs also led to the construction of new alignments for the Overseas Highway, shortening the route to the mainland by 17 miles.

Postwar Key West

Although thousands of workers left Key West after the war, the city enjoyed renewed growth during the 1950s, a decade which ushered in a period of unprecedented population growth in Florida. The military presence also remained robust. In 1955 Key West's military population, including dependents and civil service, numbered more than 18,000 persons, while the civilian population stood at some 26,400 persons.²⁷ During this period the island's economy was boosted by a growing trade in commercial shrimp, sometimes referred to as "pink gold." Key West was also steadily increasing in popularity as a tourist destination.



Woman vacationing in Key West in the late 1950s. (shorpy.com)

Key West entered another period of population decline during the 1960s, largely the result of military cutbacks. A growing trade in illegal drugs also entrenched itself in the local economy. During the 1970s, thousands of tons of marijuana were smuggled into the United States through Key West. By the 1980s, marijuana was being replaced by cocaine, and the enormous profits led to a series of scandals involving corruption by law enforcement and civilian officials.

Key West's resources were also severely strained by the Mariel Boatlift from Cuba in 1980. In total, approximately 125,000 Cubans arrived in the United States on some 1,700 boats. The U.S. Coast Guard was overwhelmed, and processing stations were set up throughout south Florida. In 1982, the U.S. Border Patrol established a roadblock near Florida City to check the citizenship of anyone leaving the keys, as well as search for narcotics. The ensuing traffic backups were so bad that Key West declared itself the "Conch Republic" and symbolically seceded from the United States. Since that time, Key West's population has largely remained stable. The 2010 U.S. Census reported the city was home to approximately 24,650 persons.

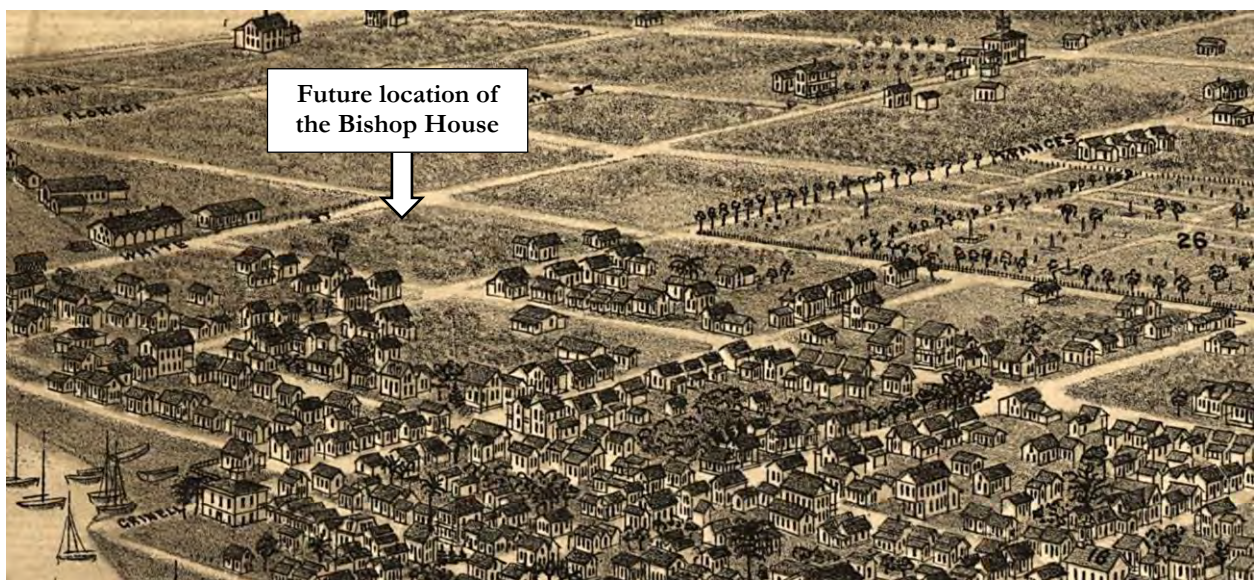


Cuban refugees on Pier B at Truman Annex during the Mariel Boatlift in 1980.
(Florida Keys Public Libraries via Flickr)

624 White Street

Neighborhood Context

The house at 624 White Street was constructed circa 1889 (see following pages for Early Owners and Occupants). Just a few years prior, the block where the Bishop House now stands was completely undeveloped. As shown on the 1884 *Bird's Eye View of Key West*, there were only a handful of houses along White Street south of Southard Street—almost all of them concentrated between what is today Olivia Street and Truman Avenue (then Division Street).



Detail from the 1884 *Bird's Eye View of Key West* with arrow pointing to the future site of the Bishop House. (Library of Congress)

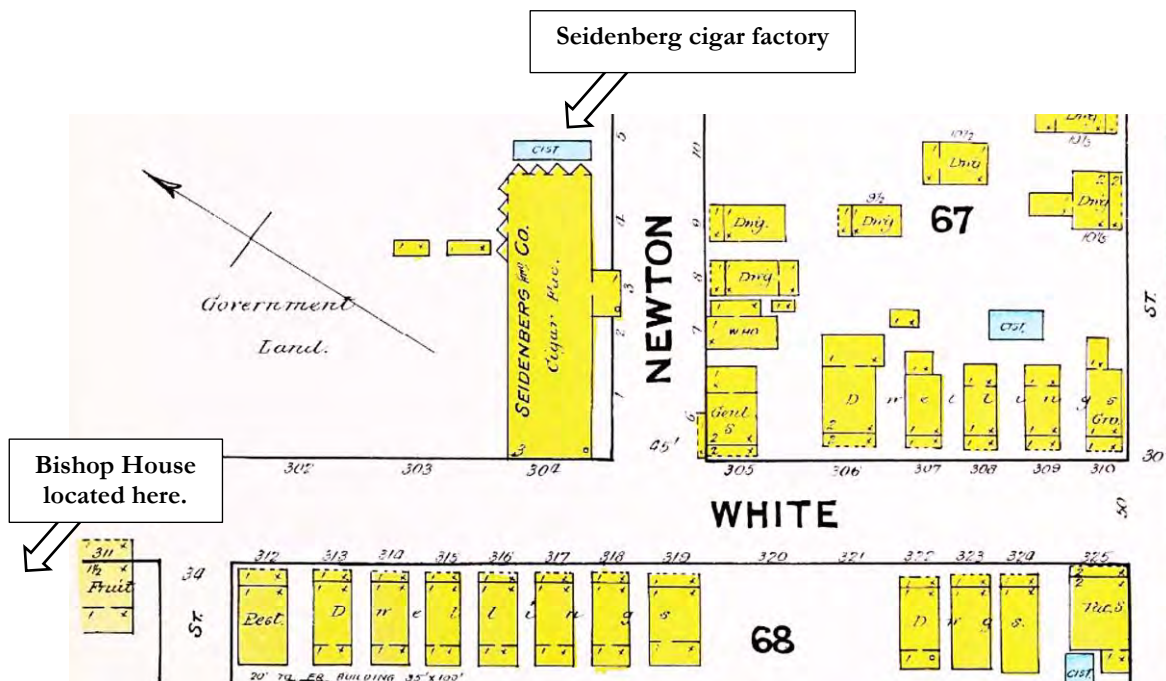
Within a few years, however, the area was rapidly built up, largely in response to the city's expanding cigar industry. At the time that 624 White Street was constructed, there were two cigar factories operating nearby. Just a half-block away was the three-story Seidenberg & Co. factory, constructed in the late 1880s at the northeast corner of White and Newton streets (later known as the Nichols & Company factory).

In April 1889 draftsmen working for the Sanborn Map Company completed a detailed map of the neighborhood. Sanborn maps were sold to insurance companies in order to help set premiums for fire risk. Structures are color coded on Sanborn maps according to how they were built (brick, wood, etc.). These maps also show sources of water. The 1889 map unfortunately cuts off immediately adjacent to the Bishop House. It may be that the house was standing at that time the map was made, but more likely it had not yet been built. Nevertheless, it shows that the neighborhood around the Seidenberg & Co. cigar factory was

already built up with a rows of wood frame worker's cottages. This is correlated with listings in the 1887-1888 Key West City Directory, which show more than a dozen cigar makers residing on "White near Angela."



Circa 1905 view of the Seidenberg & Co. cigar factory located at Newton and White Streets. It was then operating as the George W. Nichols cigar factory (Florida Keys Public Libraries, via Flickr).



1889 Sanborn map. 624 White Street may be just out of frame, or it may not yet have been constructed. Note the rows of small frame dwellings for cigar factory workers along White Street.

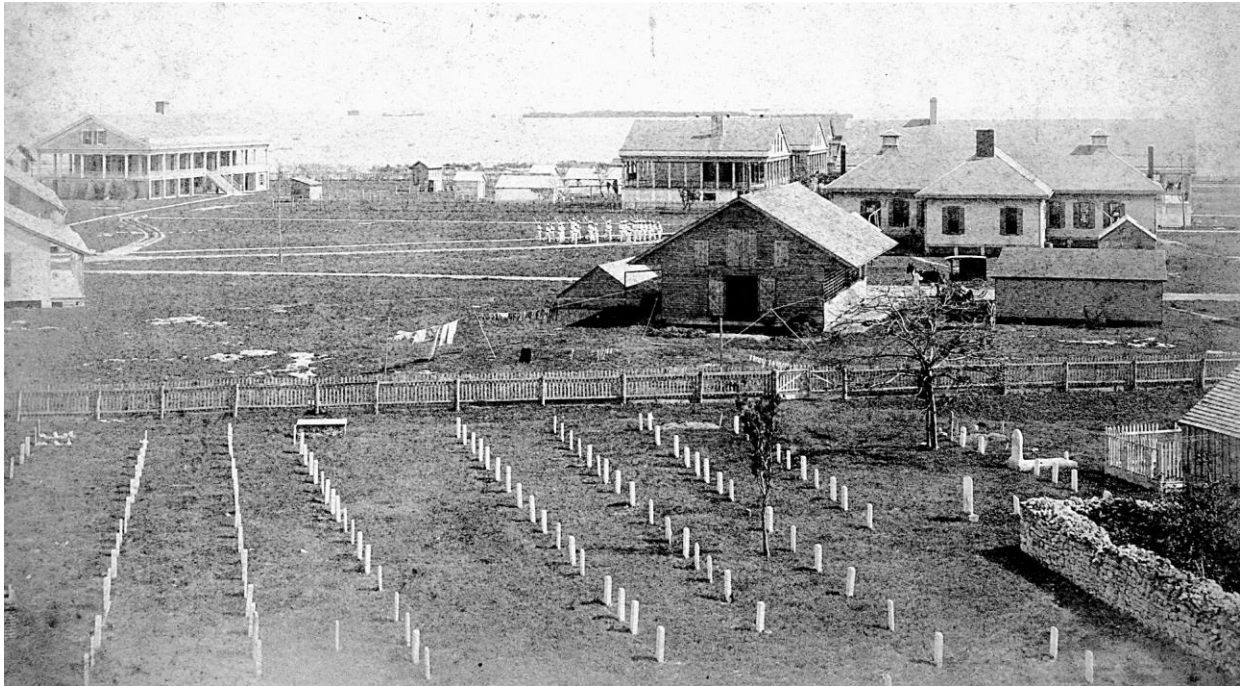
The Sanborn map also shows two commercial buildings on the corner of White and Angela streets. The site of what is today 628 White Street adjacent to the Bishop House appears to have been owned by Jose Sabater, listed in the 1888 city directory as a fruit dealer running a restaurant and coffee shop. It may have also been owned by Pedro Trebejo, listed in the city directory as operating a grocery at the corner of White and Angela streets. Immediately south across Angela Street was another restaurant, possibly owned by Eulogio Castillo, shown in the city directory as proprietor of a grocer and coffee shop in that area. Several cigar makers are also listed as living at the corner of White and Angela streets, although no addresses are given. Regardless, both of these corner buildings were later replaced by newer structures.

Another dominant presence along White Street in the late 19th century was the U.S. Army Barracks. As mentioned earlier in this report, an Army cantonment was first established in this area in 1831, but it was not until 1844 that permanent buildings were constructed. These include four buildings to house officers, and two soldiers' barracks, each measuring 125' x 20'. The camp was expanded in 1906 with additional quarters, although in 1909 the old soldiers' quarters were so damaged by a hurricane that they had to be demolished. By 1912, there was only a single Army company stationed at the post.²⁸ During World War I, the soldiers were largely employed manning coastal artillery batteries at Fort Taylor and elsewhere.



1908 E. P. Noll & Co. map of Key West from original maps and surveys.
The arrow points to the location of the Bishop House. (Library of Congress)

A prominent feature of the Army camp was the Post Cemetery, today known as the Peary Court Cemetery (MO1481). Located diagonally across White Street from the Bishop House, the first burial occurred at the cemetery in 1835, and members of the Army and their families were buried there as late as 1920.²⁹ The cemetery was partially relocated in 1927. However, a 1991 site survey made prior to a planned U.S. Navy housing development revealed the presence of intact graves.³⁰ Today the site remains undeveloped.



Circa 1890 photo of the Army Barracks and post cemetery. The cemetery was located diagonally across White Street from the Bishop House. (Florida Keys Public Libraries via Flickr)

While not part of the U.S. Army Barracks, another prominent feature of the neighborhood was the Armory at 600 White Street, designed to accommodate the local militia. A voluntary military company known as the Key West Rifles had been organized as early as 1877, but disbanded the following decade. It was succeeded by the Island City Guards, organized in 1888 with thirty-two members.³¹ In 1900 Monroe County purchased a lot directly across from the U.S. Army Barracks for a new armory, designed by T. F. Russell and built in 1901 by John T. Sawyer.³² Shortly after, the Supreme Court of Florida decided that the state had sole authority to erect armories. Thus in 1903 the Florida Legislature refunded \$10,000 to Monroe County and the State of Florida took possession of the Armory.³³ The building was subsequently used by the Key West Guard (Company I of the Florida National Guard).



Circa 1920s postcard showing the Armory at 600 White Street. The Bishop House can be seen at extreme left of the image. (Monroe County Library Collection, via Flickr)

Key West was struck by damaging hurricanes in both 1909 and 1910, although the former was far more destructive. As recalled by Jefferson B. Browne:

The wind blew steadily at about seventy-five mile per hour, but in the gusts which are characteristic of West Indian cyclones, it reached a velocity of over one hundred miles. The gusts increased in force until about noon, when the wind went to the northwest and begin to moderate The rainfall was unprecedented, 8.12 inches in five hours.³⁴

Buildings across the city were completely destroyed. These included four churches and several cigar factories—including the Nichols cigar factory on White Street (later rebuilt). Nearly all sheet metal roofs in the city were blown off, and nearly every dock severely damaged. Photos taken immediately after the storm indicate the winds snapped off power poles along White Street.



View north on White Street from near Petronia Street after the 1909 hurricane. Note the spires of the Armory at 600 White Street in the distance at center. (Florida Keys Public Libraries via Flickr)



Ruins of the Nichols cigar factory on the northeast corner of White and Newton streets after the 1909 hurricane. The factory was rebuilt. (Florida Keys Public Libraries via Flickr)

Although the hurricane badly damaged several cigar factories, the real decline of the cigar industry in Key West arrived a decade later with the transition in popularity from cigars to cigarettes. During World War I, many soldiers were issued cigarettes as part of their rations, and the fact that they were pre-rolled made them much more convenient in trench conditions. Likewise, cigarette advertising exploded during the war, and smoking cigarettes became fashionable for both men and women. Key West also continued to lose out to competition

from elsewhere, particularly Tampa. By the mid-1920s the heyday of the cigar industry had passed. Numerous cigar factories were left vacant, sometimes leading to disastrous results.

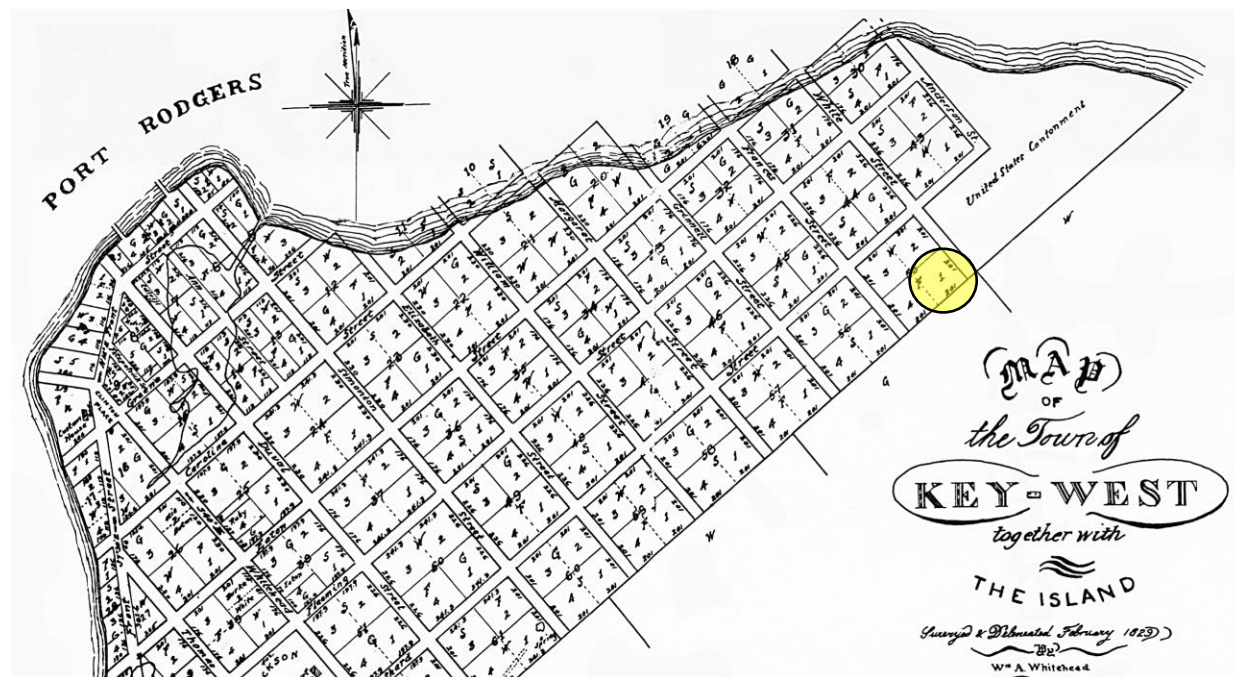
In the early morning of March 20, 1923 a fire broke out in the former Nichols Cigar Factory at White and Newton streets. A heavy northeast wind was blowing, and the flames quickly spread to other buildings. The entire block bounded by White, Georgia, Newton and Petronia streets was razed, along with a number of buildings on the block bounded by White, Ashe, Angela and Petronia streets. In all, nearly 40 homes were destroyed.³⁵



Men sifting rubble after the 1923 fire. The buildings at center right are at Petronia and Ashe streets. (Florida Memory, Image No. DM1727)

Early Owners of 624 White Street

The first official survey map of Key West was published by William A. Whitehead in 1829. The town was divided into 64 squares, each comprised of four lots. Additional fractional lots were located along the most commercially valuable land on the northwest waterfront. The house at 624 White Street was originally part of lot 1 in square 55 at the extreme southeast boundary of the survey. The line of Angela Street marked the southern boundary of town.



Detail from the 1829 map of Key West with lot 1 of square 55 highlighted.

Isekiel Stafford

The earliest owner of square 55 appears to have been Isekiel Stafford. Little about Stafford's life is known, but in December 1873, a foreclosure suit was brought by the estate of Henry H. Newcomb, plaintiff, against Stafford (deceased) and "all persons claiming any interest in lots one, two, three and four, in square number fifty five." Judge James Maglee of the circuit court ordered that the Sheriff of Monroe County, James G. Jones, sell the land at public auction. The sheriff decided that the square should be "laid out into good sized building lots, in such a way that each lot would open on a street, and that whereas in order to do so, it would be necessary to have a fraction of the said square as a street—say forty feet in width and four hundred and two feet in length for the benefit of the purchasers of the several lots bordering on said street." Accordingly, the sheriff published a subdivision map with square 55 divided into 24 building lots, bisected by what is today Ashe Street. The map was recorded

in Monroe County Deed Book "I" on February 14, 1874. The land where 624 White Street is located was lot 23 of the subdivision map.

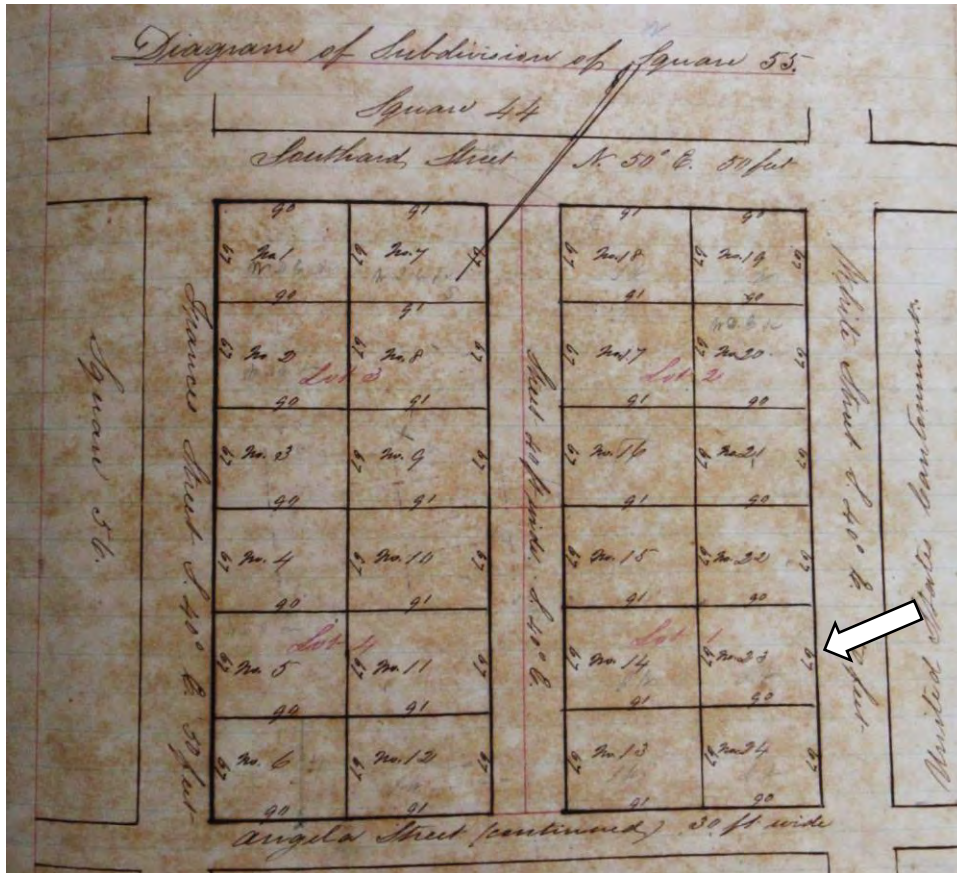


Diagram of the 1874 subdivision of Square 55. (Monroe County Deed Book "I" page 37)

John White

The auction for the lots in square 55 was held on February 2, 1874. Among the purchasers was John White, a successful Key West merchant. White purchased the southeast third of square 55, (lots 12, 13, 14, 23 and 24), as well as the northeast half-block fronting on Southard Street (lots 18 and 19). Lot 23, where 624 White Street stands today, was sold for \$130.³⁶

John White was born in 1814 in Maine. He arrived in Key West no later than the 1840s, and became a partner in White & Ferguson, a mercantile company located on Front Street. White invested in Key West real estate and by 1860 owned considerable property, as well as eleven enslaved persons. By the late 1880s he was among the wealthiest residents in the city, earning him a character sketch in Jefferson B. Browne's history of Key West.

Old John White was then one of the notable men of Key West, and one of the wealthiest ... he was always found humped up in his store, or being hauled slowly around the streets at a snail's pace in an old buggy drawn by an old horse.

He managed a large business, built and rented houses and accumulated a fortune. He commenced his rent-collecting rounds at an early hour, and his morning salutation to dilatory tenants, "You're sleeping on your rent" became a local by-word.³⁷

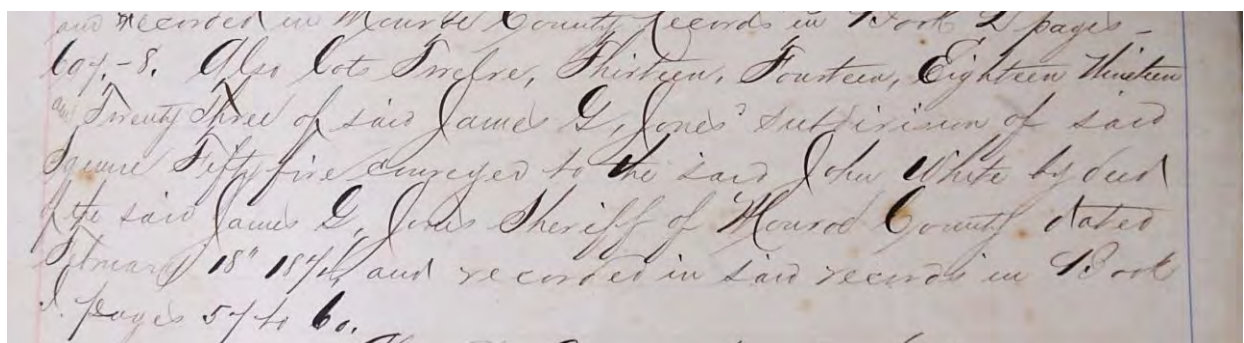
When White purchased the property in square 55, it was then far from the commercial heart of the city. He does not appear to have constructed any buildings on the property, instead being content to wait until it could be more profitably developed. That moment would arrive during the late 1880s in tandem with Key West's expanding cigar industry. But by that time the land had been acquired by a new owner, White's business partner, James A. Waddell.

James A. Waddell / Key West Investment Co.

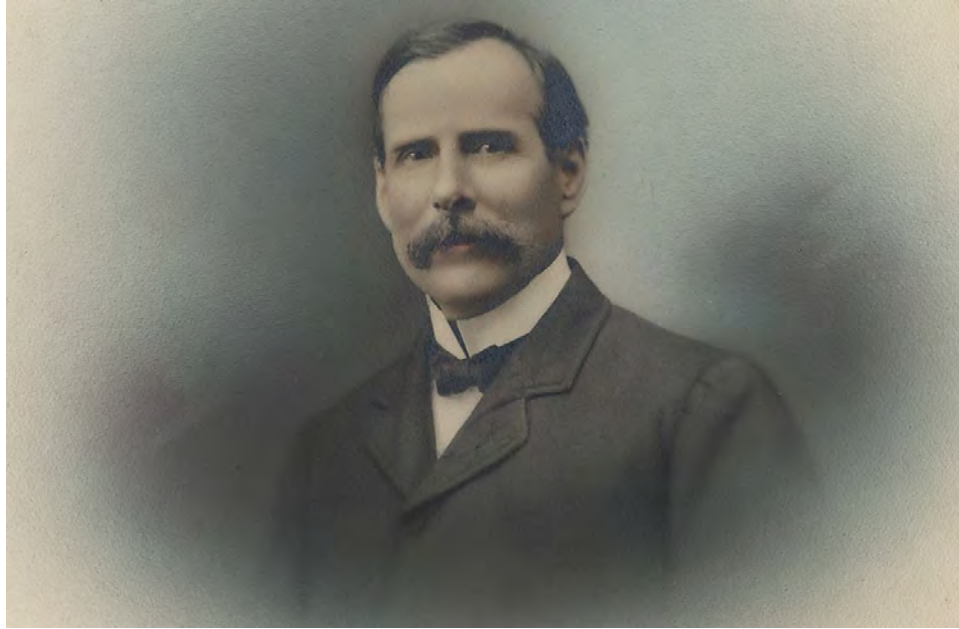
James Albert Waddell was born in 1842 in Perth, Ontario, Canada to Irish immigrants. As a young man he worked briefly as a teacher, and then in a commercial venture with his father. Waddell moved to New York in 1865 and worked for a time as a bookkeeper. During the 1870s he became affiliated with the pharmaceutical firm of Charles N. Crittendon in New York, where he worked as assistant manager.

During a visit to Florida he became acquainted with John White, who was increasingly frustrated with his business partner, George Ferguson. In 1881, White induced Waddell to move to Key West and help manage his affairs, which now included a financial firm, the John White Bank. Waddell proved to be an able assistant, and lived with White at his house on Southard Street. During this time, White offered to sell his business to Waddell, which was accepted on the condition that Waddell be allowed to pay off the debt from the ongoing proceeds of the business. The purchase price was \$200,000.³⁸

The deed of sale was made on March 1, 1886, with a mortgage back to Mr. White the following day. The amount of real estate conveyed was immense, filling up several pages in the Monroe County Deed Book. Among the property sold by White to Waddell was all his property in square 55 (lots 12, 13, 14, 18, 19, 23), except for lot 24 on the corner of Angela and White. Presumably White had already sold this prior to Waddell's purchase.



A portion of the deed conveying John White's property in square 55 to James Waddell in March 1886. (Monroe County Deed Book "O," page 239)



James A. Waddell, the developer of 624 White Street and Mayor of Key West from 1888-1889, and 1895-1897. (Key West Public Libraries via Flickr)

Only a short time after the property transfer, disaster struck. As related by Waddell, “On the 30th of the same month [March 1888], the “Big fire” destroyed \$140,000 worth of property for us. Sometime afterwards, Mr. White relinquished \$50,000 of the mortgage in consideration of the loss by fire.”³⁹ To help recoup finances Waddell and White invested in rebuilding the city. According to Waddell, this included investing in the city’s burgeoning cigar industry. However, a series of unfortunate events, put his finances in increasing jeopardy.

We erected some buildings and cigar factories to help along the business of the place, and that tied up more money; then before the business of the place ‘got on its feet again,’ the “Big Strike” of 1889 occurred, which cost us over \$7,000, then came the del Pino fire, another heavy blow to use, tying up, and finally losing the greater part of \$103,000.

That and several other serious losses in business, caused our account to be largely overdrawn with the Western National Bank ... and as the Bank Examiner would not permit the overdraft to continue, we formed the Key West Investment Company, so as to be able to put up the stock as collateral for the overdraft, also to provide for other creditors, and to enable the business to be continued ...⁴⁰

The Key West Investment Company was incorporated by Waddell in 1890, along with partners that included New York capitalists Charles J. Canda and Ferdinand Canda, as well as James Metcalf and John A. Waddell.⁴¹ John White had died a year earlier on July 29, 1889 and was buried in the Key West Cemetery.

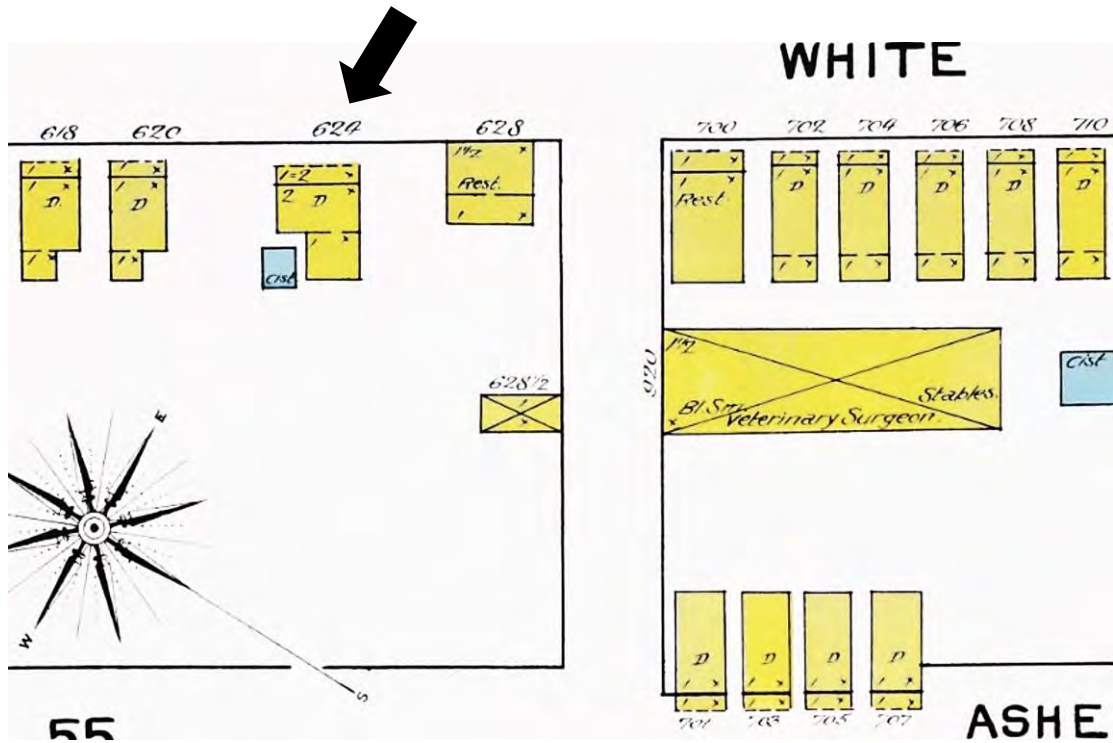
It is likely that 624 White Street was constructed circa 1889 during this period of financial instability for Waddell. It was likely specifically built as an income property to be rented to cigar factory employees. Research has not yet shown a specific year. The 1888 tax rolls indicate that Waddell still retained ownership of at least four lots in square 55. These included one facing White Street (likely 624 White) valued at \$600, and lots facing Angela (\$500), Southard (\$300), and Ashe streets (\$700). That same year, Waddell married May Virginia Rose of Philadelphia. The couple were honeymooning in Philadelphia that October when Waddell learned that he had been elected Mayor of Key West.⁴²

The house at 624 White Street first appears on a Sanborn map drawn in April 1892. It is shown in essentially its current configuration, although the house was detached from the cistern. The map shows that most of the southern third of the block owned by Waddell remained undeveloped, save for a stable located behind a restaurant at 628 White Street. To the north, the remainder of the block along White Street was built up with one-story cottages, almost certainly built for cigar factory workers.

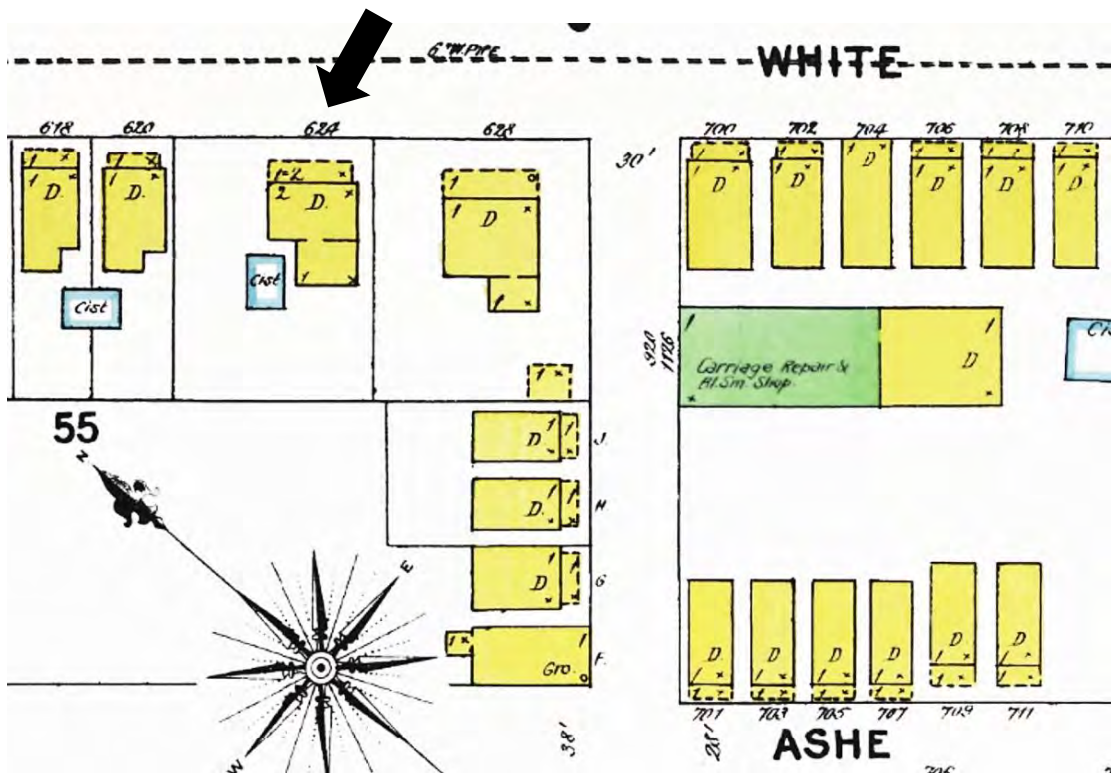
The 1894 tax rolls indicate that Waddell had sold off nearly all of his lots at the south end of Square 55, save for the house and lot at 624 White Street. The house was appraised at \$200, while the lot was valued at \$600. The 1894 tax rolls also show that Waddell retained a lot off of Southard Street valued at \$1,000. The latter may have been the same lot where the Key West Armory was later built. The other lots sold off by Waddell were quickly developed, as the 1899 Sanborn map shows a new row of cottages facing Angela Street.

In 1895, Waddell was again elected mayor of Key West, serving two years until 1897. He continued to earn considerable income from his real estate investments in Key West, including 624 White Street, which served as a rental property (see Early Occupants below). Waddell also invested in property on the Florida mainland, including an enormous coconut plantation at Middle Cape in what is today Everglades National Park. His brother, Edwin, became an important early booster of the City of Miami, and by the early 1900s was a leading real estate and banking official in that city.


James A. Waddell died in 1904. By this time his property holdings in Key West were consolidated under the name of the Key West Investment Company. The tax rolls for Key West for 1905 show the company as owners of lot 23 in square 55—the location of 624 White Street. At the time, the value of the house was appraised at \$200, while the lot was valued at \$500.



1892 Sanborn Company map (Sheet 14).

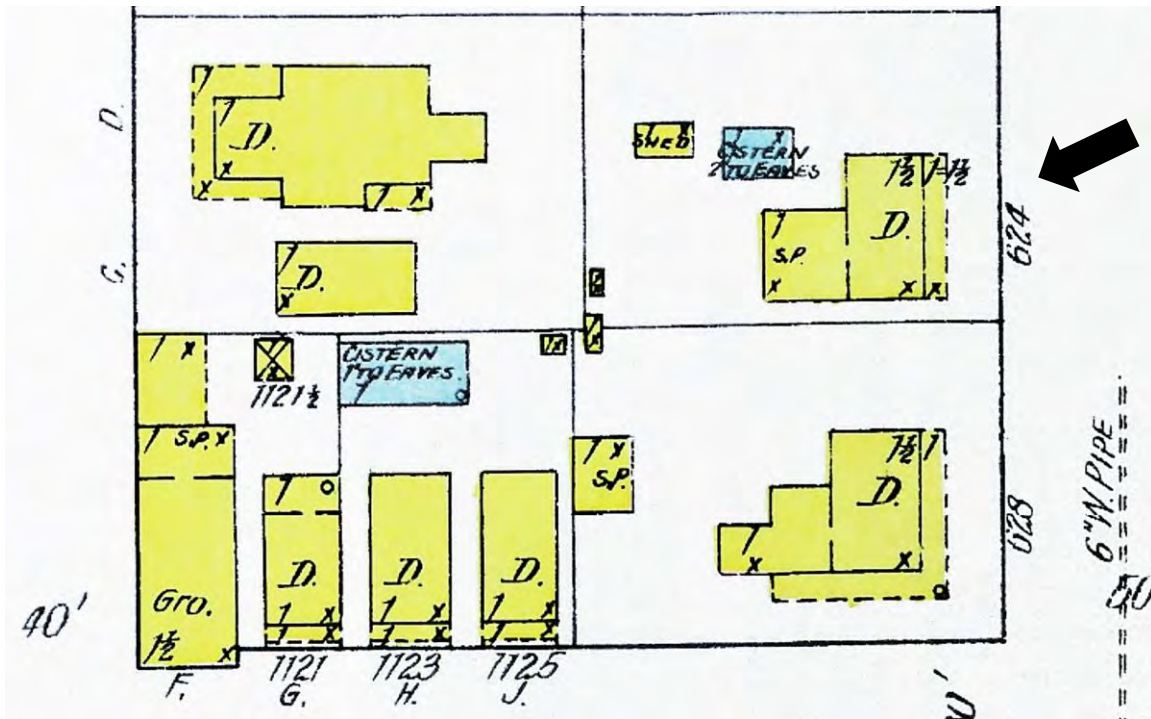


1899 Sanborn Company map (Sheet 14). Note the new development along Angela Street.

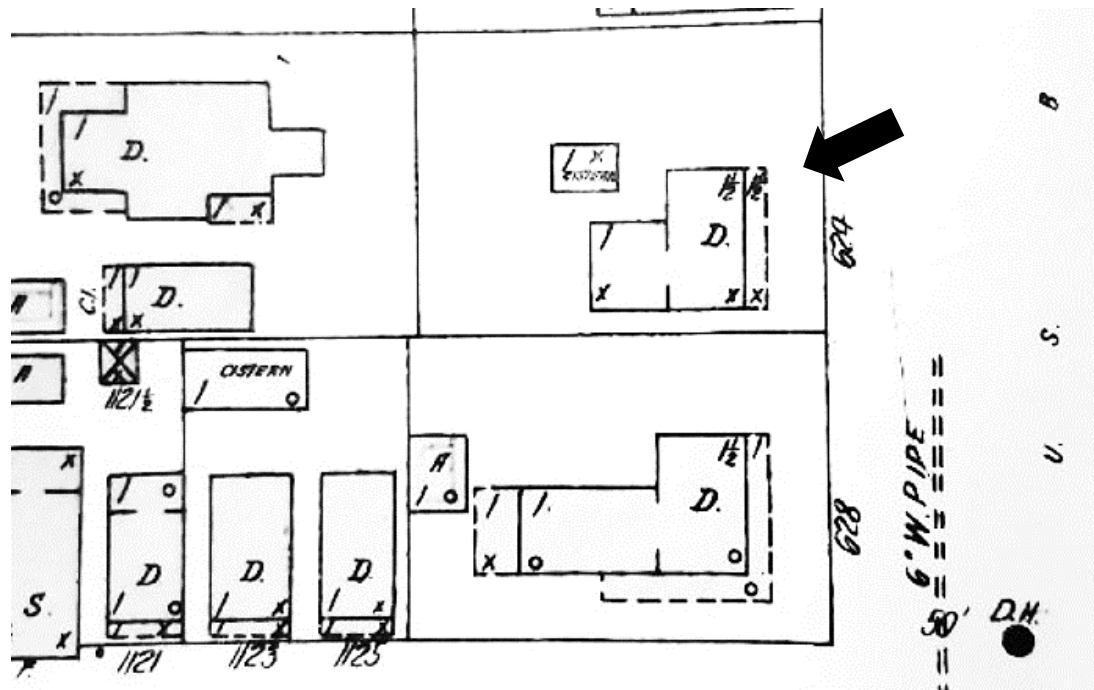
					REVENUE FOR 1905	
Subdiv's'n	Lot	Square	Tract	Number of Ac	NAME OF OWNER	
04	1	55-		St. White Angela	Kemp Eha. 	
23	1			White	Key West Insles.	
21	1				Richardson Co. R.	
21	1				Saunders W. E.	
22	1				Allen Co. M.	

1905 tax roll for Key West showing the Key West Investment Co. as the owners of 624 White Street.
(Monroe County Library, Florida History Room)

Research has not yet revealed the corporate officers for the Key West Investment Company during the early 20th century. However, it remained a viable corporation through at least the 1920s, and would be subsumed under a successor firm known as West Properties, Inc. Thus, from the time of its construction through the 1930s, 624 White Street was in continuous use as a rental property. Likewise, Sanborn maps from 1912 and 1926 indicate very little changes to the massing or configuration of the property. The 1912 map shows a wood frame shed behind the cistern, as well as a small wood-frame structure at the southwest corner of the property—almost certainly an outhouse. The 1926 map shows neither the shed nor the outhouse. However, photos of the house from the 1930s indicate that a shed was located in the same general location as the outhouse.



1912 Sanborn Company map (Sheet 7). Note the construction of a shed.



1926 Sanborn Company map. Note the shed is now gone.



Circa 1920 aerial photo showing 624 White Street. (Key West Public Libraries via Flickr)

West Properties, Inc. / Raymond Felton

In December 1934, during the depths of the Great Depression in Key West, an agreement was made between West Properties, Inc. and Raymond Felton for an assignment of land contract for 624 White Street. Felton's interest in the property remains unclear, but it was almost certainly related to a recent acquisition of the Key West Investment Company. On March 15, 1938, the *Key West Citizen* reported that, "The remaining holdings of the Key West Investment Company, Southern Land Company, End City Holding Company and West Properties, Incorporated was recently bought by Fred J. Dion, agent in Key West for the Brown Properties, Inc."⁴³

Just weeks later, in April 1938, Felton recorded an assignment of a 1934 land contract for 624 White Street to Louise Crane and Elizabeth Bishop. That same day, a warranty deed was also recorded with West Properties, Inc. granting the property to Crane and Bishop. Later that year, Felton married Mildred Olson, and by 1940 was working as a carpenter at the U.S. Navy yard in Key West and renting a house on United Street.

Early Occupants of 624 White Street

The following listings were gleaned from census, newspaper, and city directory research. Because city directories were not issued for Key West on an annual basis, this list does not include a full accounting of all the occupants of 624 White Street over time. However, it does provide a good overview of the types of persons who rented the house, including their occupations and family relationships.

1893 City Directory:

The 1893 Key West City Directory shows Francisco Carpitio, aka Francisco Carpenter / Carpentier / Carpinter / Carpentel, a cigarmaker, living at 624 White Street. Francisco was born in Cuba during the 1870s and emigrated to the United States in 1888 or 1890 (conflicting dates are given in census records for both his birth year and arrival date). On the 1900 census he is shown renting a house at 1210 Whitehead Street and living with his niece, Dolores. His World War I draft registration card from 1918 shows him employed at the Mi Favorito Cigar Company and living in a rented house at 1125 Margaret Street. The 1920 census shows he was still living at the Margaret Street address with his wife Amada and four children. He is buried in the Key West Cemetery, where his grave marker reads Francisco Carpentier, 1878-1933.

1906-07 City Directory:

In the 1906-07 Key West city directory, the occupants of 624 White Street were William P. McNamara, a cigar maker, and his wife, Victoria Vantayon McNamara. William was born in Key West in 1859 and worked as a cigar maker. In 1900 the couple had rented the house at 534 Grinnell Street where they lived with three children. A commercial traveler, Nelson Otis, also lived in the house, presumably as a boarder.

1910 Census:

The 1910 census shows the head of the household at 624 White Street was Waddell "Walter" L. Roberts and his wife Sarah Albury Roberts. The census identified Waddell as a sponger and he is shown renting the house. He and his wife had both been born in the Bahamas and naturalized as U.S. citizens in 1860 and 1868, respectively. In 1885, the Florida Census shows them living on Elisabeth Street, while in 1900 they lived at 1210 Newton Street.

Joining them at 624 White Street were two of their adult children and five grandchildren. Their son, George A. Roberts, was 36 years old and worked as a cigar maker. Their daughter Louise was 42 and married to Ernest Higgs, also cigar maker. Two of Ernest and Louise's children, Willie and Henry Higgs, likewise worked as cigar makers.

1914 City Directory:

By 1914, 624 White Street was being rented out to a variety of tenants. These included C. B. Hyer, a laborer, and his wife, Maude. Also living in the house was Charles Lewin, a salesman for William Huber, and Ms. Louisa Lyon, seamstress.

1917 City Directory:

The 1917 city directory shows 624 White Street was then occupied by Carryl Othneil Bethel (1895-1944), a shipping clerk for Armour & Co. Carryl had been born in Key West in 1895 and had grown up living on Pohalski Lane behind the Pohalski & Co. cigar factory. His father was a cigar maker.

1920 Census:

Carryl Bethel continued to live at 624 White Street in 1920, and remained in the house through at least 1923. In 1918 he had married Annie Hazel Curry and the couple had a child, Deloria, soon after. Carryl's mother, Amelia Rupell Bethel (1861-1946) lived next door at 620 White Street. Of interest, Carryl Bethel enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1942 at the age of 47. He served in India as part of the Allied forces operating in the China Burma India Theater (CBI) where he died of pneumonia in 1944. His body was returned to the United States in 1948 and buried in Barrancas National Cemetery in Pensacola.

1927 City Directory:

The 1927 city directory shows 624 White Street was then rented by Mary A. Carstens (widow of Fred W. Carstens) and her extended family. Mary had been born about 1870 in Texas, although both her parents were natives of Cuba. Joining her in the home were her daughter Agnes Marler and her husband, Karl W. Marler, who worked as a pay officer. Also living in the home was Lola Carstens Madrigan. Lola was married to Edwin P. Madrigan, an electrician at the Key West Electric Co. The house also appears to have included two boarders, William B. Compton, a school principal, and his wife Nannie Lee Compton.

1930 Census:

The 1930 census shows 624 White Street continued to be rented out Mary A. Carstens and her family. At this time it included her daughter Agnes Marler, as well as Lola and Edward Madrigan and their child, Edward.

1933 Newspaper:

The *Key West Citizen* publishes a death notice for Mary Fox, who "died at the residence 624 White Street."⁴⁴ Mrs. Fox was married to George M. Fox, a hostler, and had three sons. City directories show them living at 1121 Southard in 1914, 620 Frances Street in 1923, and 623 Grinnell Street in 1927.

Elizabeth Bishop

Early Life

Elizabeth Bishop (1911-1979) is regarded as one of the most important American poets of the 20th century. Though she only published five slim poetry volumes during her lifetime, she has since garnered an international reputation and has been the subject of dozens of books and scholarly articles. Her many honors include the Pulitzer Prize, National Book Award, and National Book Critics Circle Award. She also held the posts of United States Poet Laureate and Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets. The brief biography presented here is not in any way intended to be authoritative, but rather present an overview of her life with a focus on her time in Key West.

Elizabeth Bishop was born in Worcester, Massachusetts as the only child of William T. Bishop and Gertrude May Bulmer Bishop. Her father died while she was still an infant, and her mother, a native of Nova Scotia, descended into a depression that would result in her being confined to a mental hospital in 1916. Bishop was raised by her maternal grandparents in Nova Scotia, and then moved in with her Aunt Maud Shepherdson in Revere, Massachusetts in 1918. Bishop suffered from asthma throughout her life, but enjoyed the outdoors. Between 1924 and 1929 she spent her summers at Camp Chequesset on Cape Cod, where she was exposed to nature study under the camp founder, William Gould Vinal.⁴⁵



Elizabeth Bishop (lower center) in 1934 with members of the Vassar College yearbook staff.
(*The Nineteen Thirty Four Vassarion*, p. 103)

From 1927 to 1930, Bishop attended high school at Walnut Hill School, an elite boarding school in Natick, Massachusetts, publishing her first poems in the school magazine. In the fall of 1930 Bishop began studying at Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New York. She decided to major in English, and in 1932 joined the staff of the *Miscellany News*, writing a humor column called “Campus Chat.” The following year she and several classmates started a short-lived literary magazine called *Con Spirito*. After three issues, the staff of *Con Spirito* combined with the *Vassar Review* where Bishop became “the journal’s most consistent contributor, honing her skills as a poet, editor and writer and gaining an intellectual reputation on campus.”⁴⁶

During this period Bishop also began submitting work to publishers and writing competitions. During her senior year in 1934, a Vassar librarian arranged a meeting with the poet, Marianne Moore, who became a mentor and lifelong friend. Only a few months later, Bishop’s mother died and she began drinking heavily—ushering in a lifelong struggle with alcohol.

Relationship with Louise Crane

After graduation, Bishop moved to New York City, taking a small apartment in Greenwich Village. She continued to correspond with Marianne Moore, who the following year arranged the publication of three of Bishop’s poems for the Macmillan anthology, *Trial Balances*—the first appearance of her work in a book.

Elizabeth Bishop had been drawn to New York in no small part because of the presence of Vassar classmate, Margaret Miller, with whom she’d fallen in love. Bishop’s affections were unrequited, however, and she entered into a relationship with another Vassar classmate, Louise Crane. Louise Crane (1913-1997). Crane had been born in Dalton Massachusetts to former U.S. Senator and Massachusetts Governor, Winthrop Murry Crane and Josephine Boardman Crane.

After her father’s death in 1920, Louise and her mother moved to New York City where she became an early pupil of the noted educator, Helen Parkhurst, creator of the “Dalton Plan.”⁴⁷ She attended Fermata School in Aiken, South Carolina and then Vassar College. One of Crane’s later partners observed that, “Louise was irresistible to women; she had blue eyes, full, it seemed, of innocent candor and love of life. She adored people and parties; she wasn’t an artist herself, but she was able to spot unusual talent and to help artists with their careers.”⁴⁸

With their immense family wealth, Louise Crane’s mother had been one of the founders of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and Louise was heavily influenced by the arts throughout her life. Crane also enjoyed traveling, and Crane and Bishop embarked on several extensive trips. The couple traveled to Europe in early 1936, and then returned to New York where she lived briefly with Louise Crane and her family on 5th Avenue. That December, Crane and Bishop made their first trip to Florida, arriving at Jacksonville and then taking a train to Naples where they visited Keewaydin Island. Bishop was immediately enchanted, writing to Marianne Moore that, “From the few states I have seen I should now immediately

select Florida as my favorite. I don't know whether you have been here or not—it is so wild, and what there is of cultivation seems rather dilapidated and about to become wild again.”⁴⁹

In the same letter she mentioned that “Louise enjoys fishing more than anything else in the world, I think, so we have been doing chiefly that.” Upon hearing that the fishing was even better in the Florida Keys, the couple visited Key West where they engaged the same fishing guide that had taken out Hemingway for years. Bishop was charmed by the city. As described in *Remembering Elizabeth Bishop*, “Even more than the fishing and the literary ambience ... the lovely old houses and inexpensive lifestyle there appealed to Bishop.”⁵⁰

Bishop remained in Florida until March 1937. That summer, Bishop and Crane again traveled to Europe, visiting England, Ireland, France and Italy.⁵¹ During this trip they were joined by Margaret Miller. While driving in the Burgundy region, they were involved in a car accident which severed Margaret Miller's arm. The incident scarred Bishop, although she continued to travel. Crane and Bishop returned to the United States shortly before Christmas aboard the steamer *Exeter*, arriving in Boston. Almost immediately Bishop began preparing for another visit to Key West.



Louise Crane (left) and Elizabeth Bishop, pictured upon their return to the United States aboard the steamer *Exeter*. (*Boston Globe*, December 21, 1937)

Elizabeth Bishop in Key West

The Early Years

In January 1938, Bishop embarked on her second Florida visit, travelling to Key West along with her aunt Maude and uncle George. She rented a large room in a boarding house at 529 Whitehead Street across from the Monroe County Courthouse and fell into the pace of island life. In many ways, the next three years would be her happiest on the island. Bishop later remembered that, “The light and blaze of colors made a good impression on me, and I loved the swimming. The town was absolutely broke then. Everybody lived on the W.P.A. I seemed to have a taste for impoverished places in those days.”⁵²



Bishop in Key West in 1937.
(Elizabeth Bishop Papers, Vassar College)

At the time, Bishop's Aunt Maud and Uncle George were also staying in Key West, and she made time to dine with them most evenings. She also became fascinated by the lives of her landlady, Mrs. Pindar, as well as some of the other inhabitants of the boarding house. Peter Fountain and Peter Brazeau's biography of Elizabeth Bishop notes that she found ample poetic inspiration almost immediately.

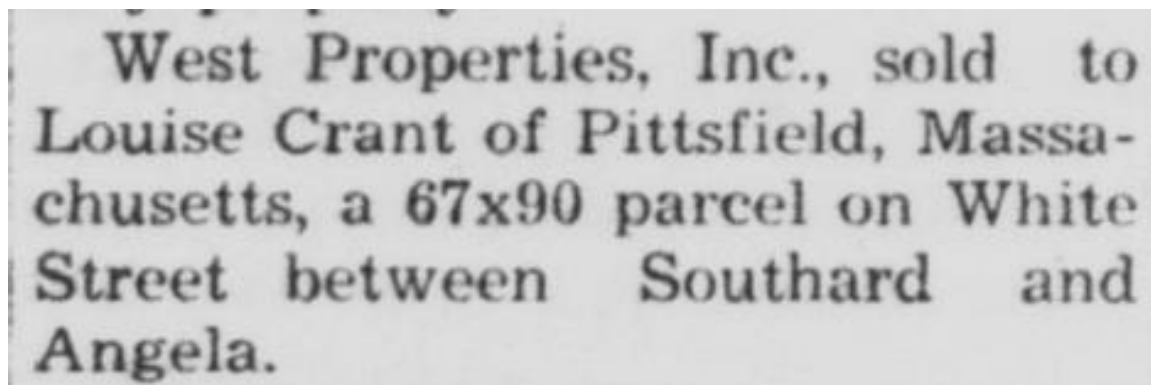
Bishop liked the homey eccentricity, the casual pace, and the general air of friendliness in Key West ... Down the street was a small house in which Bishop saw a bed, a chair, and a French horn painted silver, leaning against the wall, with a painted pith helmet hanging above it—all details that made their way into "Jerónimo's House." The gentle voices of the blacks reminded Bishop of the rhythms of her favorite hymns and poems. She was free from asthma. She rode a bicycle around the island every day."⁵³

The Purchase of 624 White Street

Louise Crane did not arrive in Key West until March, and the couple then briefly rented a house. Their landlord, Miss Lula, was cared for by an African American woman named "Cootchie," who became the subject of another of Bishop's poems. Crane and Bishop began looking for houses to purchase almost immediately. They apparently came close to buying one, but instead chose the house at 624 White Street because of the large lot. On March 27, 1938 Bishop wrote to her friend, T.C. Wilson:

We are now buying a different house—a much nicer one, although it's a little smaller. Maybe you remember the type, a "Conch" house, with four very spindly wooden pillars in front and the roof over-hanging the front bedroom windows. It has about twice as much land and there's not a termite in it.⁵⁴

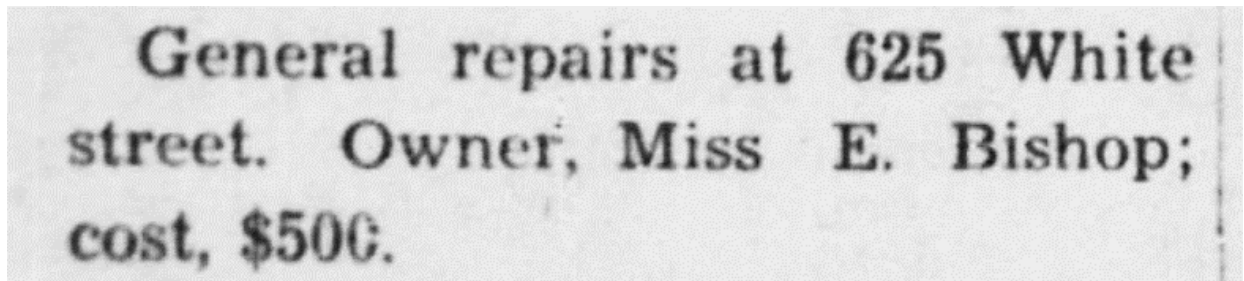
The house was purchased from Raymond Felton of West Properties, Inc. The assignment of contract was recorded at the Monroe County Assessor's on April 5th, and the warranty deed on April 15th.



West Properties, Inc., sold to Louise Crant of Pittsfield, Massachusetts, a 67x90 parcel on White Street between Southard and Angela.

Newspaper notice of the sale of 624 White Street to Louise Crane, misspelled "Crant."
(*Key West Citizen*, April 28, 1938)

Bishop and Crane immediately set out making modifications to the house. Only a day after the deed was recorded, a building permit notice in the *Key West Citizen* stated the Elizabeth Bishop had taken out a building permit for \$500 of “general repairs.” This amount was not modest. Not only did it reflect a full quarter of the price for the house, but in Depression-era Key West, that figure could likely purchase a level of work that far outstripped its nominal value in today’s dollars—even adjusting for inflation.



Key West Citizen, April 16, 1938. Note the incorrect address.

The exact nature of the alterations are not known, but they clearly included various updates to the plumbing and electrical systems. Crane and Bishop also had the house moved farther back on its lot, likely to allow for more separation from the street, as well as additional landscaping. In another letter to T. C. Wilson on April 13, 1938, Bishop wrote:

Here is a picture of the new house, as it was last week, anyway—it’s been moved a few feet now, the cement wall in front torn down, etc. We consider its lines to be the most elegant thing in Key West. Louise had to go home last Saturday. I am trying to get over my loneliness by ordering around plumbers, electricians, and carpenters, and doing a lot of reading.⁵⁵

In spite of the effort to move the house and update its systems, Crane and Bishop were otherwise determined to maintain the house’s simplicity. Charles “Red” Russell, who frequently visited the couple with his wife Charlotte, remembered that it was kept deliberately spartan:

It was ... a typical Key West house, very plain. Of course, they preserved the integrity of it by keeping it just as it was, plain inside. There was nothing fancy, though they had the means, with Louise’s help, to furnish it any way they wanted to. They kept it very plain, very severe. Never cluttered. Practically every flat surface was clear. There was a very pristine atmosphere about it, but it was a very comfortable and inviting little house. There were a lot of bookcases in that house.⁵⁶



The back room of 624 White Street with bookcases likely installed by Bishop and Crane.
(Photo 2019 by Bender & Associates)

Crane and Bishop were clearly proud of the house. Even before they closed on their purchase, they commissioned a local Cuban folk artist, Gregorio Valdes, to paint a portrait of the building. Writing to T. C. Wilson at the end of March 1938, Bishop noted that she and Crane had already begun collecting Valdes' work.

Louise bought another painting by our local Rousseau, M. Valdes—you remember the one I bought—and we went to see him. He is a very sweet little man, a sign painter with no signs to paint, apparently, but very hard to talk to because he only knows a few words of English and also has no teeth. We have commissioned him to paint a picture of the house, against a sun-set sky, with us sitting on the front porch.⁵⁷

Valdes actually painted two portraits of the house. One included several idiosyncratic details. Bishop mentions in a letter to Frani Blough and Margaret Miller that, “Did Louise tell you how we got him to do a big painting of the house? It’s awfully nice—he put in a parrot and a monkey, several types of strange palm trees, and the sky ‘all pinkee,’ as he says.”⁵⁸ The whereabouts of this painting are presently unknown, but a second version survives which depicts the vegetation around the house more realistically.

Gregorio Valdes (1879-1939) was born in Key West as one of at least five children of Rafael and Clara Valdes. His parents were both natives of Cuba and his father worked as a cigarmaker. Gregorio also worked as a cigarmaker, and during the 1910s and 1920s he lived at 520 Catherine Street. The 1920 census shows him living with his wife, Caridad, and seven children. Valdes died on May 9, 1939 and is buried in the Key West Cemetery.

Bishop was obviously touched by Valdes' work, and she published a memorial to Valdes in the *Partisan Review* in the summer of 1939. That fall, she and Louise Crane also arranged to have four of Valdes' paintings exhibited in the show "Contemporary Unknown American Painters" at the Museum of Modern Art. Two of them, "Cuban Landscape" and "624 White Street" are labeled as being part of the Collection of Elizabeth Bishop.⁵⁹



Gregorio Valdes painting of 624 White Street.
(Collection of David and Susan Goode)

Bishop and Crane frequently entertained at their new house and settled into a circle of friends that included artists, writers and other bohemians. While their friends were certainly aware of their relationship, Bishop remained extremely circumspect about her sexuality for decades—once telling the poet James Merrill that she did not want to be “typed as a lesbian.”⁶⁰

Bishop and Crane kept their new house deliberately spartan. Their friend, Martha Watson, remembered visiting them on White Street.

When you entered Elizabeth and Louise's home on White Street, you walked right into the living room. There is a stairway to the left and a door leading to a room on the left. The living room was well lighted, with lots of windows, and

wooden walls painted white. There were some nice paintings on the walls. It was a bright, sunny, very attractive room, very modestly furnished, just essentials. I remember Elizabeth being exultant because she found some white ceramic doorknobs at Curry Hardware. That's what the houses had before they changed to metal.⁶¹



View of the living room of 624 White Street with the door and stairwell described by Watson.
(Photo 2020 by Bender & Associates)

There were several other notable features of the house. One was its exterior cladding. Unlike the vast majority of houses constructed during the same period, 624 White Street is clad with vertical tongue-and-groove boards, rather than horizontal clapboards. Also unusual was the presence of two finials, or lightning rods, located at the apex of the gable ends on the roof. These are shown in both Gregorio Valdes 1938 painting of the house, as well as a photograph taken around the same time.

The lightning rods may have featured prominently in Bishop's poem, "It is Marvelous to Wake up Together," published posthumously. As described by Thomas Travisano in *Love Unknown*, the poem describes a thunderstorm above Key West, "and the pleasure of knowing that despite the apparent threat, their house is protected by lightning rods."⁶² Thus, the lines:

If lightning struck the house now, it would run / From the four blue china balls
on top / Down the roof and down the rods all around us, / And we imagine

dreamily / How the whole house caught in a bird-cage of lightning
Would be quite delightful rather than frightening



Circa 1938 photo of 624 White Street. Note the finial/lightning rod at the left end of the roof.
(Louise Crane and Victoria Kent papers, Yale University)

Within the house, Bishop maintained a large collection of records, which were played on a gramophone. They included French composers, as well as many jazz records. Betty Bruce stated that she would take care of the records when Bishop was away from Key West so they wouldn't be damaged in the heat. "That was a marvelous collection—Billie Holiday, things that had just been done on a private basis. I took care of a stack about three feet high."⁶³

Her friends remembered Bishop during this time as being very private, although also witty and interesting. Louise Crane was more energetic and frank, but also good company. Martha Watson felt they fit well into Key West's easy going and cosmopolitan atmosphere.

A writer would be considered just a regular person. Hemingway spent all his time on the docks because he liked the people. Elizabeth was a sensitive person. She wasn't terribly happy with herself. She was looking for a place she could be herself. She wasn't seeking any special appreciation. Key West had no social

stamp. People were agreeable to each other. Also, Key West was extremely inexpensive to live in in the late 1930s and early 1940s.⁶⁴

One of Bishop and Crane's friends was Betty Bruce, whose husband was very close to Ernest Hemingway. In April 1938, Elizabeth Bishop published her only known letter-to-the-editor in the *Key West Citizen*, correcting their use of the term "leftists" in *The Spanish Earth*, a 1937 propaganda film about the Spanish Civil War which was narrated by Ernest Hemingway.

GRIEVOUS ERROR

Editor, The Citizen:

I fervently hope that the grievous error in the editorial section of this afternoon's "Citizen" is a mis-print, and as such, will be corrected tomorrow for the benefit of those who depend upon the paper as a source of information. However, in case it might be overlooked, I feel that someone should point out that Mr. Hemingway's movie, "Spanish Earth", was propaganda for the Loyalists, i.e., the present Spanish Government, or Leftists. General Franco is not "generalissimo of the Leftists" as you have stated. Quite the reverse: he is generalissimo of the Rightists, the Fascist or Rebel party.

The Key West "Citizen" is the only paper that a great many of Key West's citizens read. Therefore, I feel that it should present to them, without any confusion, at least the elements of today's political situation.

E. BISHOP.

Key West, Fla.
April 28, 1938.

(Reader Bishop is right, but the confusion occurs frequently. In Spain the Loyalists are the Leftists and the Disloyalists or Rebels are the Rightists.)

Key West Citizen, April 30, 1938.

Bishop spent the summer of 1938 in New York, ushering in a routine of spending winter in Key West and the summer in the northeast. That fall, Bishop stayed with the painter Loren MacIver and her husband, the poet Lloyd Frankenberg, at a cabin at Provincetown on Cape

Cod. Returning to Key West for the winter, Bishop rented a vacant grocery store for MacIver to use as a studio. Around that time Pauline Hemingway, Ernest's second wife, joined Bishop and Crane's social circle. It may have been Pauline who first invited the couple to visit the Square Roof, a brothel at 801 Emma Street. James Laughlin remembers a visit to the Square Roof with Elizabeth Bishop and Tennessee Williams. Bishop had arranged for the group to have tea.

The madam of the Square Roof was elderly. She must have been very pretty once ... The young ladies were of various dimensions ... They were wearing their "church" dresses—their guardian informed us they were Methodists and some Baptists and they attended Sunday services regularly. They were not talkative, though Elizabeth and Louise tried to draw them out, but it was evident from their demeanor that they were glad to see us. The madam poured from an antique tea service into flowered cups that were daintily grasped by the young ladies.⁶⁵

Suddenly one of the girls—a light-skinned charmer—enquired if we would like to see her room. A moment's silence but Elizabeth said that we indeed would. We all traipsed upstairs. I found the girl's room touching and sweet. The bedstead with its high carved back could have come out of any bourgeois house in Bordeaux.... But, most moving of all, sitting propped against the bed pillows a row of dolls in dresses that surely the owner had stitched. What we saw there in that room touched us all to silence.⁶⁶



The Square Roof (left) and Elizabeth Bishop on the steps of the Square Roof, circa 1939. (James Laughlin's *The Way It Wasn't*, page 25.).

Perhaps the favorite resort of the artists and writers living in Key West at that time was a beer garden called Pena's Garden of Roses on Thomas Street.⁶⁷ Steve Boyden recalled that he likely met Bishop and Crane for the first time at Pena's.

Everybody went to Pena's at five o'clock, all the fun people in Key West. Pena's was a gathering place for all the arty types that were moving down here. Elizabeth would come in with Louise and other artists. I didn't know anything about her writing. She was very shy in a strange way, and she didn't talk a great deal, but you like her immediately. I thought she was a wonderful person. She seemed very genuine.⁶⁸



Circa 1940 photo of Pena's Garden of Roses (far left) on the 500 block of Thomas Street.
(Florida Keys Public Libraries, via Flickr)

Many gatherings also took place at Bishop and Crane's house. A friend, Steve Boyden, recalled that the couple would frequently host mint julep parties.

They would crush mint leaves, soak them in the bourbon overnight, and pour this mixture over chopped ice. At one of these parties, I noticed a man sitting with his back to everybody, looking at a fence. I asked Louise who he was, and she said he was a budding writer, Tennessee Williams.⁶⁹

Based on surviving photographs, Bishop and Crane enjoyed spending time with friends outside in the yard, often sunbathing or playing a friendly game of croquet. At that point in time the yard was far less vegetated—especially the side yard between Bishop's house and 620 White Street, which was largely a lawn. Bishop would soon commence gardening in earnest.



Louise Crane (left) and Elizabeth Bishop (3rd from left) clowning with friends in the side yard of their house. White Street runs in the background. (Louise Crane and Victoria Kent papers, Yale University).

Crane and Bishop engaged a housekeeper, Hannah Almyda, who became close to Bishop. Martha Watson described her as "... devoted to Bishop. She was little wiry woman, a simple woman, a New England spinster type. She used to ring her hands worrying about Elizabeth's health, like a mother hen. They were very fond of each other."⁷⁰

Hannah Watson Almyda (1892-1979) was born in Key West to William H. Watson and Nellie Blanche Park Watson. Her father was a carpenter/house building contractor and the son of a Cuban immigrant. Hannah grew up at 619 Simonton Street, but by 1906 the family had moved into a house on White Street, which they owned. By 1914, Hannah had married Joseph L. Almyda, the son of Bahamian sailor. The couple were then boarding at a house on Watson Street, but by 1920 had moved in with Hannah's father. The couple had two children, William and Earl.

The 1930 census shows Hannah still living with her father at 1700 Flagler Street and working as a cigar maker in a cigar factory. In 1940, when she was working for Elizabeth Bishop, she was living at 1715 Washington Street with her husband and son, Earl, who worked as a furniture salesman. Her son, William, worked for the U.S. Public Health Service at the Marine Hospital.



Circa 1940 photo of Hannah Almyda, Elizabeth Bishop's Key West housekeeper.
(Vassar College Library, reprinted in *Elizabeth Bishop: Life and the Memory of It*, p. 78)

In February 1939 Elizabeth Bishop had written to Marianne Moore about her housekeeper. "I don't believe I have ever told you about Mrs. Almyda, our wonderful housekeeper. She is very solemn, gentle, and good as gold, and a very good cook for all the exotic local dishes that we eat—turtle, conch-shell chowder (the inside of those beautiful conch shells), etc."⁷¹

In another letter she mentions a humorous incident involving Mrs. Almyda and the discovery of animal droppings inside her house.

I have one Key West story that I must tell you. It is more like the place than anything I can think of. The other day I went to the china closet to get a little white bowl to put some flowers in and when I was rinsing it I noticed some little black specks. I said to Mrs. Almyda, "I think we must have mice"—but she took the bowl over to the light and studied it and after a while she said, "No, them's lizard"⁷²

Hannah Almyda worked for Bishop until the early 1940s. During World War II she followed the footsteps of her son, Earl, and began working as a furniture salesperson. Almyda appears to have moved around Key West frequently. In 1958 she was living at 625 William Street with

her husband, Joseph. By 1960, Joseph had died and Hannah moved to 7a Porter Place. In 1973 the city directory shows her as retired and living in a small house at 1006 17th Street. A few years later she moved to Miami, where she spent the last five years of her life. She is buried in the Key West Cemetery along with several family members.



Elizabeth Bishop (second from left) with friends that included Lloyd Frankenberg and Loren MacIver (third and fourth from left) and Mrs. Almyda (far right) in the side yard of 624 White Street. The building in the background is 620 White Street.

(From *Remembering Elizabeth Bishop: An Oral Biography*)

Bishop clearly enjoyed gardening at her new home. From the outset, she had been charmed by the tropical vegetation. In May 1938 she wrote to Marianne Moore:

It is spring here now and the Royal Poinciana trees are in bloom all along the streets—brilliant flame color or dark red. Also a large tree—Spanish lime?—that sheds in some places fine green powder all over the streets, very pretty. Jasmine makes the whole town smell sweet at night—and all the cats have kittens.⁷³



January 16, 1939 photo of the rear of the Bishop House. The photo was sent by Bishop to Marianne Moore and includes one of Bishop's lime trees. Note the placement of the cistern against the house.
(Marianne Moore Collection, Rosenbach Museum and Library)

A month later she wrote to Moore again, inventorying her gardens:

The house seems perfectly beautiful to me, inside and out. In the yard we have 1 banana tree, 2 avocados, 1 mango, 1 sour-sop, 1 grapevine (1 bunch of acid-looking grapes) and 2 magnificent lime trees, one loaded with large limes. They are such thorny trees, but all the different shades of green are very pretty. We have all sorts of insects and lizards, of course. I have just read a terrifying tract called "The Truth about Termites." Someone leaving town presented me with a homely little half-grown cat called "Sister." Her only charm is the way she runs up the window and door screens, suddenly looking at you to attract attention while she perches way up in the air spread out like a spider.⁷⁴

Over the following year, her letters frequently mention improvements to the garden. In February 1939 she wrote Moore that she had been "painting tin cans and wooden tubs robin's-egg blue all week, to plant ferns, begonias, carnations and caladiums in."⁷⁵ That

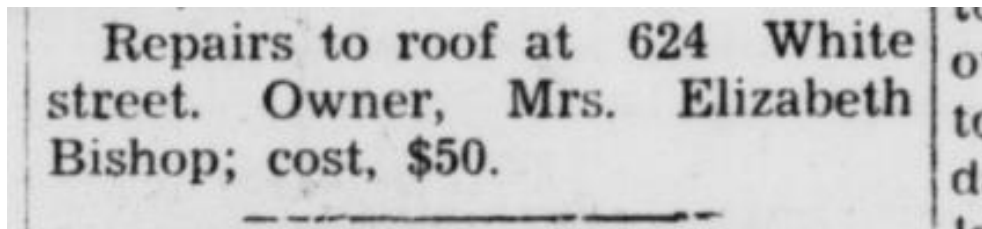
November she wrote to her friend, Frani Blough Muser, that she had a vegetable garden. “I have a lettuce bed, radishes, carrots, mint, parsley, etc. Also a trowel and a pair of gloves—exactly like a Helen Hokinson. Nothing ages one more than gardening, I’m sure.”



The side yard of 624 White Street in 1945. Note the towers of the Key West Armory at far right.
(Charles Olson Papers, Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut Libraries)

Bishop spent the summer of 1939 in New York City, but was back in Key West by November. She was electrified by the change of scenery, and wrote to Marianne Moore that she had embarked on an ambitious gardening program.

I wish at least I had written to you right away when the impact of all this greenery, this beautiful house, Mrs. Almyda’s saintliness, etc., were freshest ... Now that the weather is nice, I’ve embarked on a great planting plan. There is an old, old Negro with white hair and a large white mustache here this morning “budding” a rosebush ... I have also planted a ravaged-looking palm tree, and I hope to get a ten-foot Night Blooming Cereus planted in the front yard to make Louise open her eyes when she arrives. Mrs. Almyda had a permanent wave this summer and when I got here both she and the yard presented the same appearance of baroque abandon.⁷⁶



Key West Citizen, May 24, 1939

Bishop and Crane also continued to work on the house. The previous May, repairs had been made to the roof. Now they hired a cabinetmaker to build a table, and Bishop extolled the work of their African American carpenter, Milton Evans. "He is by far the smartest, most conscientious person I have talked to here yet. He catches on to my most "modern" ideas right away, and yields to them with great dignity."⁷⁷ Bishop quipped more than once in her letters about "modern" ideas when it came to her projects. These may have been tongue-and-cheek references to her actual aesthetic, which was to keep things plain and simple in accordance with the historic character of the house.

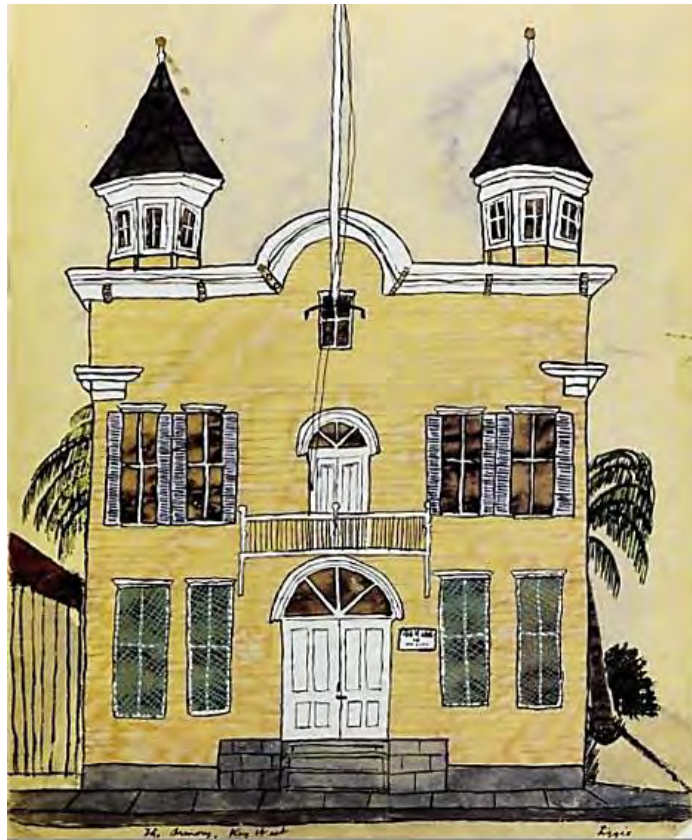
The carpenter, Alfred "Milton" Evans (1894-1986), was born in Key West to Sydney and Sarah Evans, both natives of the Bahamas. His father worked as a carpenter and the family lived in their house at 909 Pauline Street during the early 1900s. By 1920 Milton was working as a carpenter and living with his wife, Gladys, and their two children, Edith Eloise and Dorothy Faustina, in the rear of his parent's house. Census records show he continued to work as a carpenter through at least 1940, when he was living at 412 Thomas Street along with his wife and, by this time, eleven children. No later than 1939, however, he was also serving as the pastor of Trinity Presbyterian Church at 717 Simonton Street.⁷⁸

In December of 1939 Bishop and Crane went on an extended canoeing trip with their friends, the Russells, through the Ten Thousand Islands. Bishop "hoped to write an article on what she saw and did."⁷⁹ The group traveled south from Marco Island to Cape Romano, sleeping in tents along the way.

That same winter Bishop published her poem "Florida" in the *Partisan Review*. The poem drew much of its inspiration from Bishop's 1937 visit to Florida and the Keewaydin fish camp. It also marked a transition in her career. As observed by Thomas Trivisano:

During her early years in Key West, Bishop's poetic style underwent a significant and lasting transformation. Bishop moved away from such introspective fables as "The Man-Moth," "The Weed," and "In Prison" and toward more representational poems that could directly respond to the exotic natural world she found around her on the island. Bishop discovered in this semitropical setting the "always-more-successful surrealism of everyday life."⁸⁰

Bishop also began painting local scenes, including many views of the Key West Cemetery, as well as the Armory at the end of her block on White Street. Considered an "amateur watercolorist of genuine talent since her early years, Bishop often claimed that she would have "preferred to be a painter rather than a poet."⁸¹



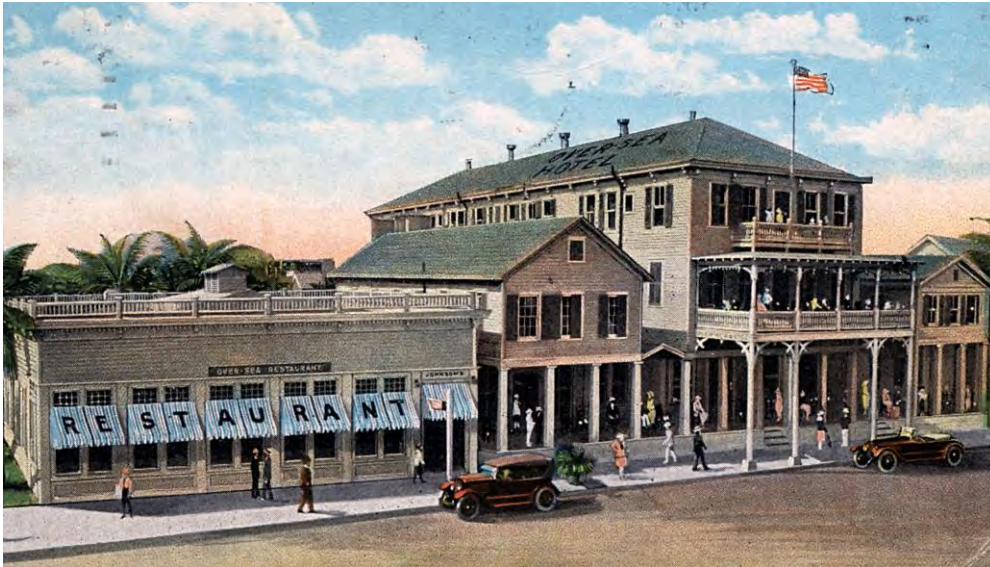
Elizabeth Bishop painting of the Key West Armory.
(Collection of Margaret Miller, published in *Exchanging Hats: Paintings*, 1996.)

Crane and Bishop continued to entertain friends while also spending time exploring the island. Bishop grew fond of fishing, and often rented a motorboat and went out by herself on fishing expeditions. These trips were doubtless the inspiration for her poem, “The Fish,” which for many years after its initial publication was considered her signature work. In February 1940 she also sent drafts of her poems “Jerónimo’s House” and “Cootchie” to Marianne Moore.⁸²

By 1940 Europe was already at war and the United States was rapidly embarking on a major program of military preparedness. The Key West Naval Air Station had already been reactivated, and Bishop began to fret about the implications. Writing to Marianne Moore in June 1940 she noted that, “more and more Navy ships keep coming, and they are building a tremendous airplane hangar. I am very much afraid that this is the last season we’ll be able to live here for a long time.”⁸³

In this same letter, Bishop relates that she had taken a room in a local hotel where she wrote in the mornings.

It is the “rainy season” and we have had the most magnificent thunderstorms almost every day. I have taken a little room in our favorite hotel here to work in in the mornings. The hotel is rather like a ship—all white paint, shutter doors, long red carpets, and views of the ocean, and almost deserted at this time of year. It is very nice. On the third floor (very high for Key West) is a little balcony with a flagpole, and two benches where one can sit and watch the palm trees wave all over town and see the ocean on three sides.⁸⁴



The Overseas Hotel at 917 Fleming Street, circa 1920s.
(Florida Keys Public Libraries via Flickr)

Based on Bishop’s description, the hotel appears to have been the Overseas Hotel at 917 Fleming Street, just a short walk from 624 White Street. The hotel had been constructed in 1913 shortly after the completion of the Overseas Railroad. It was condemned by the city in the early 1960s and destroyed by arson in 1967.⁸⁵

In September 1940, Bishop and Crane traveled to the mountain resort community of Brevard, North Carolina where they stayed with the Russells. Still, the news of war in Europe brought her thoughts back to Key West and what might come. “The news seems to fill me with such frantic haste and I am so worried about what may become of Key West.”⁸⁶ They then traveled north for a brief stay in New York where Bishop was working on revisions to “Roosters.” They moved on to visit Louise Crane’s family in Massachusetts, where they were also visited by Pauline Hemingway and her sister.

Bishop returned to the island around the middle of November. She wrote little during the winter, but did work on a draft of a poem about her housekeeper, entitled “Hannah A.” It included a prose passage, “Her heavy pats of affection, are like the clumsy pelican taking off

on one of her wonderful, powerful flights—once off the water she soars—Mrs. A’s love is like that.”⁸⁷

By this time Bishop’s relationship with Louise Crane was souring. A contributing factor was likely Bishop’s drinking. But doubtless another facet was Crane’s love of New York society, and affairs with other women. One apocryphal story states that Bishop once walked in on Louise Crane and the jazz singer, Billie Holiday together. Thomas Travisano writes that Crane now “seemed ready to leave Key West behind and settle in her new role as patron of the arts in New York.”⁸⁸

Relationship with Marjorie Stevens

Around 1940 Elizabeth Bishop met Marjorie Carr Stevens (1904-1959). At the time, Marjorie was married but separated from her husband, Albert Stevens, who worked for a book publisher in Boston. Stevens had been born in Massachusetts and grew up in Newton where her father worked as a school principal. She studied art and was an amateur painter.

Stevens arrived in Key West no later than August 1939 when the *Key West Citizen* mentions her attending a lecture on Chinese art held by the Art Appreciation Group of Key West.⁸⁹ She also exhibited her watercolors at the Key West Art Center and other locations on several occasions. The 1940 census shows her living alone at 417 United Street in Key West, but by the time she met Bishop she had moved to 623 Margaret Street, located almost immediately north of the Key West Cemetery.



The Key West Art Center, circa 1940s. (Key West Public Libraries via Flickr)

WE WERE GLAD to have Marjorie Stevens, Loren MacIver and Elizabeth Bishop call at the gallery this week to view the Van Gogh paintings being shown.

Key West Citizen notice about an exhibition at the Key West WPA Art Center, July 9, 1940.

MRS. MARJORIE STEVENS donated a very interesting Key West watercolor to be awarded as the prize for the draw of the votes to be cast during the exhibition for the most popular picture. This prize goes on display

Key West Citizen, August 9, 1940.

Bishop and Stevens evidently had grown close by the beginning of 1941. This was a vulnerable time for Bishop, and Stevens appears to have been drawn by an innate sense of caring. They also shared several traits in common. As related by Thomas Travisano:

Like Bishop, Stevens lived in Key West at least partly because of her delicate health. Stevens liked to drink, too, and they began their relationship after Stevens helped Bishop up from a gutter into which she had fallen on their way home from a bar. Bishop told Ruth Foster that Marjorie Stevens had said to her that Bishop lying there with the streetlights playing on her face was “the most beautiful thing she’d ever seen.”⁹⁰



1941 passport photo of Marjorie Carr Stevens.
(Key West Public Libraries)

Bishop was now at a crossroads. Without Louise Crane’s financial support, Bishop decided to rent out 624 White Street and in June 1941 she moved in with Marjorie Stevens. She wrote to Charlotte Russell, “Mrs. Almyda and I packed and moved in *one day*. I would have given up in the first half hour, if it hadn’t been for her. Everything is stored except for a few clothes and books I brought to Marjorie’s, and I’ve settled down for a heat-endurance-economic race with her. She is broke, too, so it all works out quite well.”⁹¹

Bishop also wrote to Marianne Moore, describing her new living situation. “I have moved in with a friend of mine for a while. Her house is one of the little ones set in one of the most beautiful, largest yards in Key West. I think I’ll send you some pictures of it. There are wonderful trees and vines, Spanish Lime, Sea Grapes, Sugar Apple, etc.”⁹² Only two months earlier, one of Bishop’s poems, “The Rooster,” had been published in “American Writing: 1941” in the *New Republic*.

At the time she moved in with Marjorie Stevens, Bishop had just supervised a project to build a new screen porch at the rear of 624 White Street above the cistern. She described the work to Charlotte Russell. “I wish I could have had Red [Charlotte’s husband] build my new screened porch—or Louise’s rather, because I just supervised. It is beautiful—the cistern has a tin roof, and is all screened in, and is going to have shutters all around. The floor is dark green, the shutters gray like the house, and the ceiling a heavenly pale blue.”⁹³



Circa 1947 photo of Anna Kizevich holding her granddaughter, Lisa Weymouth, beside the back porch of 624 White Street.
(Courtesy Laura Weymouth)

The White Street house was rented out to a Navy submarine captain who had been transferred to Key West from New London, Connecticut. Bishop wrote to Russell that, “I rented the house to Navy people—they moved in Saturday. They have two children, but I think that Navy people without children are probably harder on furniture, etc., than Navy people with them. ... The trees here are perfectly beautiful now and it’s much quieter [at Marjorie Stevens’ house] than my house—but I hate to leave White St. and can’t bear to bicycle by it even.”⁹⁴

By the end of July, Bishop was already fretting about her house and the new tenants. Writing to Marianne Moore she noted that, “They are not the best of housekeepers, I’m afraid, but quite uncomplaining. In fact, they almost seem to like adversities like broken pumps, clogged drains, etc., and of course I am piling up rent money.”⁹⁵ For her part, Marjorie Stevens continued to paint during the summer of 1941, exhibiting a watercolor of a turtle boat at the Key West Art Center.⁹⁶ That May, she had also received a first year certificate in Spanish language from the San Carlos Institute.⁹⁷

That fall Bishop and Stevens spent two months staying with the Russells again in Brevard, North Carolina at the Holly House. Bishop then traveled alone to New York City where she stayed for six weeks at the Hotel Murray. Bishop felt it was important to maintain contacts with her New York friends, but not overstay. She wrote in her notebook, “Lester [Littlefield] says if I only come to N.Y. for a brief visit once a year my friends will all stop loving me and forget me, but I think on the other hand that it is the best way of perpetuating friendship & interest & curiosity, the greatest help to both.”⁹⁸ By late December she was back in Key West living with Stevens on Margaret Street.

The War Years

Bishop’s growing concern about the war and its implications for Key West had been well founded. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, the military presence in Key West ramped up and the air was charged with tension. Indeed, the next eighteen months would usher in the most concentrated period of change in the island’s history, and ultimately close the curtain on the relaxed, close-knit Key West that Bishop had fallen in love with.

Bishop was despondent over the changes. On December 28, 1941 she wrote to Marianne Moore about the atmosphere in the town, and her displeasure with her former tenants who had recently moved out.

I am rather depressed about Key West—and my house—just now. The town is terribly overcrowded and noisy (at least on White Street) and not a bit like itself. It is one of those things one can’t resent, of course, because it’s all necessary, but I really feel that this is no place to be unless one is of some use. They are talking of evacuating the civilians. I don’t believe they will, but still, what I want to do is to rent the house again and go somewhere. I haven’t given up the idea of South America. I’m not a bit sure of the ethics of it all—what do you think? If the government stops issuing passports, I guess I’ll stay here with Marjorie at

Margaret Street where it is quieter, probably. The house [on White Street] was in a FRIGHTFUL condition—indescribable—and it is impossible to get any kind of help. . . . Red (the canoe man, who is giving an Instructor Course in First Aid here, working for the Red Cross) has almost repaired my tenants' damage—painting and carpentering, etc. We've scrubbed the floors and waxed the furniture and even done our laundry, and now things are fairly normal again.⁹⁹

On January 11, 1942 Bishop again wrote to Moore about the house, relating how pleased she was with the repairs, but sad that she planned to rent it out again.

Everything is getting done, done, done, and the house looks so beautiful I hate to lose it. There are new trellises in all directions, a new front step, all the drawers & door open & shut, millions of termites have been massacred & best of all the anonymous little carpenter I told you about has built a drain-board out of a piece of zinc & many large flat-headed nails . . . I've leased the house for a year, to another submarine captain — but the captain of a more important submarine, and he seems extremely nice. They have a colored girl who has been with them a long time, & an old canary, & gardenia trees in tubs [or troughs] at they carry around from place to place, & I think those are all good signs. His name is James Hardin — in case your brother might know of him.¹⁰⁰

On March 19, 1942, Louise Crane deeded her half-interest in 624 White Street to Elizabeth Bishop. Although it was now hers, Bishop nevertheless continued to live apart from the White Street property. The reasons may have been primarily financial, but it is likely that Bishop also found the constant hum of vehicles and construction activity on White Street, un-nerving. Writing to Charlotte Russell on April 2, 1942, she stated that she and Marjorie Stevens were planning to travel to Mexico later in the month. Bishop again laments the changes that had come to Key West, and expresses bitterness over the Navy's endless construction projects. She also states that the house was occupied by a "housekeeper" rather than the submarine captain, but it is unclear if the housekeeper was Hannah Almyda.

It is impossible to live here any longer. The Navy takes over and tears down and eats up one or two blocks of beautiful little houses for dinner every day. Probably the house on White Street will go, too. At present it's rented by a divine housekeeper—even if she does take boarders (I know) and has two men sleeping in every bed, and a row of blue, yellow and red tin chairs along the front porch. One poor old man committed suicide two days ago because he heard they were going to take his house. And the point is that it is unnecessary—you have all these vast tracts of land in other parts of the island. They are just tearing down all the good work the government has been doing here in the last ten years, and when the war is finally over, Key West will be more ruined than ever—nothing but a naval base and a bunch of bars and cheap apartments. Pauline [Hemingway] and I are now conducting a campaign to wire Pepper about it [Florida Senator Claude Pepper], but I'm afraid it won't do much good.¹⁰¹

Bishop's mention of the Navy eating up "one or two blocks of beautiful little houses" was doubtless tied to the military's acquisition of land in what is today known as the Truman Annex. On April 24, 1942, the Navy acquired some four blocks of land through condemnation proceedings. This included the block bounded by Whitehead, Fleming, Thomas, and Eaton streets, as well as three other blocks extending from Eaton to Angela between Thomas and Emma streets. Scores of old buildings were torn down, while some were remodeled and utilized for other purposes. These included Pena's Garden of Roses, which was put out of business. Bishop related that the owner "cries and cries."¹⁰² The remainder of the area was quickly "... built up with barracks, mess halls, recreation areas, swimming pools, and officers quarters."¹⁰³

**NAVY TO ACQUIRE
KEY WEST LAND**

(Miami Daily News Bureau)

KEY WEST, April 3.—Home owners of city squares 39 and 40 were in receipt of letters notifying them that the navy plans to acquire their property.

The notices warned the residents of the two blocks which are to be condemned that they should arrange their future plans accordingly.

Both squares adjoin the naval operating base. Two blocks have already been converted by the navy into barracks for personnel.

The U. S. army has obtained an option on 60 acres of land adjoining the airfield on Roosevelt blvd. The property is owned by the Key West Realty Co., and is valued at \$30,000.

The Miami News, April 3, 1942.

**CIVILIAN BUILDING
SOARS IN KEY WEST**

(Daily News Bureau)

KEY WEST, Jan. 1.—Despite priorities and the acute shortage in materials, this island city experienced the greatest building boom in its history during the year 1941.

Construction, exclusive of government buildings, defense projects and two large low cost housing units totaled \$578,284.

This amount is \$228,000 more than the total for the previous year and more than three times as much as the \$161,815 recorded for 1939.

The building increase is attributed to demand for housing created by the influx of army and navy officer personnel and defense workers.

The Miami News, January 1, 1942.

In mid-April 1942 Bishop left with Marjorie Stevens on their trip to Mexico, leaving a rental agent to handle the management of 624 White Street. She obviously felt possessive of the White Street house, and the stress of having it occupied by others wore on her. Writing to Marianne Moore in May she notes that:

At the moment I don't know anything about the house & I am rather worried. I left it in the hands of the other Key West agent—a nice old-fashioned one whom I love, & who is very slow but extremely dependable & understanding of what kind of tenant I want ... he even went to my house himself to count

over the sheets, so you see I really shouldn't be worried too much. I am getting \$90.00 a month (\$81.00 with his commission) for it.¹⁰⁴

Bishop and Stevens first stop in Mexico was in Mérida, where they met the Chilean poet, Pablo Neruda, then assigned to a diplomatic post. Neruda and his wife, Delia, were solicitous of the couple. Bishop biographer, Brett C. Millier writes that, "Here in Mexico, Neruda helped Elizabeth find a Spanish tutor, and he and Delia acted as hosts to the two travelers, taking them on automobile trips and inviting them to spend the month of August at their home in Cuernavaca."¹⁰⁵ In the meantime, the Nerudas helped the couple find an apartment in Mexico City, where they stayed until leaving for Cuernavaca.

Bishop returned to New York at the end of September, writing to Marianne Moore just before she left that she'd heard her garden at 624 White Street was doing well under the watchful eye of Charles [Red] Russell.

The house in Key West is still a nuisance, but not the garden. Charles has been so good all summer and writes regularly about everything. In his last letter he says: "The pears on the trees are growing fine. (Alligator.) The vine has a lot of Grapes one of the Coconut trees in front has started to shoot and everything is beginning to look fine since we had a little rain and no dogs to disturb anything."¹⁰⁶

Bishop spent October and November of 1942 living at the Murray Hill Hotel in New York. It was there that she first met the Brazilian Lota de Macedo Soares for the first time. The two would later become lovers, with Bishop moving to Brazil for nearly two decades. Bishop was nevertheless depressed in New York. Marjorie Stevens wrote to her regularly, with admonitions such as, "Be Brave," "Don't drink when you're overtired," "Don't stay in New York."¹⁰⁷ At the time Stevens was still in Key West working as a bookkeeper at the naval station.



Circa 1930s photo of the Murray Hill Hotel. (Wikipedia)

Bishop returned to Florida on November 29, 1942 and once again joined Marjorie at the Margaret Street house. This was the start of her longest stay on the island. As observed by Millier, “She stayed there longer than she had ever stayed in one house or one place, until May 1944.”¹⁰⁸ Research has not yet revealed any historic photos of the Margaret Street House. In later years, a porch addition was made to the house, and more recently it was extensively renovated.

The Margaret Street house, so close to the Key West Cemetery, apparently found its way into Bishop’s writing. In “The Street by the Cemetery” published posthumously, Bishop writes:

The people on little verandahs in the moonlight / are looking at the graveyard
/ like passengers on ship-board. / How did it happen on this warm & brilliant
night / that steerage passengers / were given deck chairs.¹⁰⁹



623 Margaret Street (obscured by Banyan tree roots) as it appeared in 2011. (Google Maps)

Bishop published no poems in 1943 and wrote relatively few letters. Her withdrawal may have been a reaction to the constant churn of military activity in Key West, which was peaking during that period. By early 1943, ration board officers estimated the population of Key West had swelled to more than 31,000, not counting nearly 10,000 military personnel. Taken together, Key West’s population was now triple what it had been in 1940. Pauline Hemingway wrote a friend that Key West was a boom town “with wages in the clouds and housing accommodations in the gutter.”¹¹⁰ Hannah Almyda took a job working with her son at a furniture store. Bishop donated to the Red Cross War Fund.¹¹¹

In addition to the deluge of humanity, construction was near continuous at the naval air station, only a few hundred yards from Bishop's house at 624 White Street. Beyond that, military dredging operations were creating thousands of acres of new land at Fleming Key for ammunition storage. In July 1943 she wrote to Marianne Moore.

I am still at Marjorie Stevens's house. She is working as a bookkeeper and is away all day long and it is very quiet and lonely here—although the town has now reached something like 50,000 inhabitants. ... My house troubles continue and are much too tedious to go into. I had a wonderful garden, really wonderful, for a while. I didn't know I was capable of such farming—now it is getting too hot, but I still have tomatoes, zucchini, and some endive, herbs, etc. I'm planning to come North about the first of September for several months—maybe for good.¹¹²



April 6, 1943 photo showing dredged land at Fleming Key (far left) and the naval air station. The location of Elizabeth Bishop's house is marked with a yellow circle. (Key West Libraries, via Flickr)

Bishop did not go north. Instead, in September of 1943 she briefly took a job at a military optical shop at the naval base, taking binoculars apart and reassembling them. She disliked the job and quit after a week, but related in a letter to Marianne Moore that she had taken it partly because of her curiosity about military activities on the island.

I'm glad I tried it—it was the only way of ever finding out what is going on in Key West now, seeing the inside of the Navy Yard & all of the ships & learning lots of things I had no idea about before. It took three whole days of red tape to get in, before I could wear a large tin button with my photograph on it & “Industrial Worker” printed underneath, & it is taking me at least 2 weeks to get my “honorable discharge.” I got \$5.04 a day to begin with. The shop was very nice, open across one end & right on the edge of the water where hundreds of ships, submarines & all kinds are coming & going, being repaired & painted all day long. The water is jade green, the gray ships looked bright blue against it, & of course I could spend a lot of time—had to—watching everything through magnificent optical instruments of every kind, including periscopes . . . The men I worked with were all sailors. They worked in their undershirts & were all, every single one, heavily tattooed—I've never seen so much tattooing, some very interesting Oriental varieties, too.¹¹³

In the same letter, Bishop tells Moore that Marjorie Stevens was travelling north to Asheville, North Carolina to spend her vacation with her husband. Bishop considered travelling with her and then moving on to New York, but decided to stay in Key West out of fear that Stevens' landlady would immediately rent out the unoccupied house to someone else because of the island's housing shortage.

After three weeks alone at the Margaret Street house, Bishop wrote to Marianne Moore in October 1943 about a growing sense of ennui. “I feel I must do something about my Life & Works very soon—this wastefulness is a sin—but I just can't figure out what. I wish it were 1934 all over again. I'd do everything quite differently.”¹¹⁴ Nevertheless, Bishop was writing again that fall, sending drafts of “Large Bad Picture” and a collection of poems, “Songs for a Colored Singer” to Marianne Moore to review. It is almost certain that the latter was written with Billie Holiday in mind.

Bishop suffered severely from asthma during the winter of the 1943-1944, but the following spring she sent Marianne Moore the draft of another poem, “Anaphora.” She also asked Moore's opinion of the title “North & South,” which Bishop was considering using for her first collected work of poems.¹¹⁵ Bishop returned to New York in August 1944, staying in an apartment at 46 King Street in lower Manhattan. Marjorie Stevens came for a visit that October, partly out of concern for Bishop, who was still suffering from asthma and drinking compulsively.

Bishop's four poems, “Songs for a Colored Singer,” were published in the fall of 1944 in the *Partisan Review*. The work drew the notice of Jean Pedrick of Houghton Mifflin, who wrote to Bishop and invited her to submit a manuscript for the company's annual Poetry Prize Fellowship. The prize carried a \$1,000 award—as well as publication of the manuscript. Bishop submitted the manuscript on January 15, 1945, and then departed for Key West on February 20.¹¹⁶

Bishop again stayed with Marjorie Stevens at 623 Margaret Street. By this time, Steven's husband, Albert, who was serving in the Navy, had been transferred to Key West and was

living at the house. The 1945 Florida State Census shows the household also included Arthur Frank (also in the Navy) and his wife Geneveve. Bishop gave her employment as a writer.

"	Gerald P.	"	"	9	"	College	Navy
Frank	Arthur L.	623	"	31	N.Y.	High	H.W.
"	Geneveve	"	"	29	Ill	High	Navy
Turner	Albert W.	"	"	41	Mass	High	College
"	Marjorie	"	"	40	"	College	writer
Bishop	Elizabeth	"	"	34	"	College	Navy
William L.	621	"	"	39	Ala	College	Navy
				27	Ind	"	H.W.

Excerpt from the 1945 Florida State Census showing the occupants of 623 Margaret Street.

Bishop's house at 624 White Street continued to have a succession of tenants. In April 1944, the *Key West Citizen* noted that "The Friends of Music Club met at the home of Mrs. James Pritchett of 624 White st., recently."¹¹⁷ Sometime in early 1945 the poet and writer Charles Olson—then relatively unknown—briefly lived at 624 White Street until the close of the winter season. Prior to that time he had been staying in the studio at Pauline Hemingway's house. In June 1945, the "home of Mrs. La Carva, 624 White street" was the setting for a ceremony honoring the Hospital and Recreation Corps, a chapter of the American Red Cross.¹¹⁸



Charles Olson entering 624 White Street in 1945.

(Charles Olson Papers, Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut Libraries)

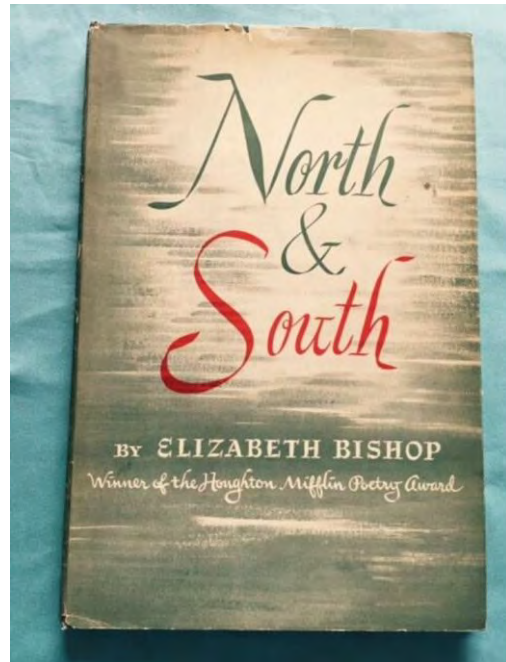
In May 1945 Bishop learned she'd won the Houghton Mifflin prize. She left Key West at the end of May and returned to New York where she began assembling works for her forthcoming book, *North & South*. In the fall Bishop returned to Key West to stay with Marjorie Stevens on Margaret Street. Bishop traveled to New York in December, but was back on the island in early January 1946. She stayed only three weeks before returning to New York. Bishop was struggling with deadlines for her book, while at the same time her relationship with Marjorie Stevens was fracturing. As recounted in *Elizabeth Bishop: Life and the Memory of It*:

Marjorie's letters to her [Bishop] in the spring of 1946 suggest that Elizabeth was drinking heavily, that her lifelong tendency to use the long-distance telephone when she was drunk had begun to irritate the recipients of her calls, and that she was wavering painfully in her decision to leave both Marjorie and Key West. Finally Marjorie, essentially out of kindness, forbade her to come back. "I don't think you should consider it a possibility any more, for as long as you do you obviously aren't going to adjust yourself to anything else [We've been] trying to make something work that doesn't."¹¹⁹

The Final Years

As Bishop prepared to leave Key West in January 1946, it was the last time she would be on the island while still owning 624 White Street. Back in New York, Bishop seemed obsessed with fine-tuning her book manuscript, writing letters to her editor about various items including the space between the page numbers. She also began seeing Dr. Anny Baumann, who was alarmed by Bishop's depression and compulsive alcohol binges. She recommended Elizabeth began psychoanalysis, which she did for a time. It may have helped clarify her decisions. Bishop decided to sell her Key West house.

By July 1946 Bishop was in Nova Scotia, visiting Halifax and Great Village where her mother had been born, and where she had briefly lived as a child. While there, she received advance copies of *North & South*, which was released to the public on August 20, 1946. Almost simultaneously, Bishop traveled to Boston in order to sign papers to sell 624 White Street. She wrote to Marianne Moore about the trip. "My plan was to take a room at a nearby farm so that I could have a little peace and privacy to work in, and stay on a few weeks. But the deed to the Key West house had to be signed right away, and in the U.S. for some legal reason, so I had to leave."¹²⁰



Press photo of Elizabeth Bishop after winning the Houghton Mifflin Poetry Prize (left), along with the cover of *North & South*. (Private collection)

That fall Bishop was back at her King Street apartment in New York, and settled into her first winter in the north for almost a decade. She was apparently miserable, but brightened when news arrived in April that she had been awarded a \$2,500 Guggenheim fellowship to work on a new book called *Faustina*. Bishop continued to correspond with Marjorie Stevens, who wrote her at least six letters between July and September while Bishop was travelling in Nova Scotia. However, Bishop's papers in the collection of Vassar College contain no letters from Marjorie for the entire year of 1947.

Bishop continued to visit Key West during the winter for several years after selling her home. In the winter of 1947 Bishop stayed with Pauline Hemingway at 907 Whitehead Street. On November 25th she wrote to the poet and art critic, Selden Rodman, who had included Bishop's poem, "The Fish," in the book *One Hundred American Poems*, which he edited. She told Rodman that Pauline was not due at the house until early December, and that Key West seemed to be "getting more American- Miami-ized, rather, every day."¹²¹

By this time, Pauline Hemingway had become even closer with Marjorie Stevens. In March 1947, the *Key West Citizen* noted that the Bahama House at 408 William Street was owned by Pauline Hemingway, Marjorie Stevens, and Jeanne Taylor. The trio were then using it for a theater performance of "The Guardsman" by the Key West Players.¹²² The Bahama House also served as the home of Jeanne Taylor, who operated a designer curtain and fabric shop. Around the same time, the store was renamed the Caroline Shop and moved to 223 Ann

Street, located on an alley behind 525 Caroline Street. This same Caroline Street address would later be the home of Marjorie Stevens, who divorced her husband in 1951.



1930s photo of the Bahama House at 408 William Street, owned by Pauline Hemingway, Marjorie Stevens, and Jeanne Taylor. (Key West Public Libraries via Flickr)

Around New Year's Day 1948 Bishop moved from Pauline Hemingway's house to the upstairs apartment at 630 Dey Street, which was owned by the philosopher John Dewey. Bishop had first met Dewey in 1939 and became a close friend of his daughter, Jane. She wrote to Robert Lowell on January 15th that the apartment "... isn't as deluxe as my other quarters were but better to work in in a way—the kind of meager hideousness you can look at once and forget completely—and it has a beautiful view over the harbor, the fishmarket, etc."¹²³ Bishop stayed on the island, through the end of April, writing to an acquaintance that, "I don't know why, but Key West has always been a very hard place to get away from at a definite date."¹²⁴

In October of 1948 Bishop met up with Pauline Hemingway and Marjorie Stevens in New York. Hemingway apparently stayed for some time, and Bishop rode on the train with her south to attend a function in Washington, D.C. By December she was back in Key West for her final winter season, staying at 611 Frances Street where she "had the good luck to find a huge, wonderful apartment with my former landlady, Mrs. Pindar—upstairs, with the biggest Poinciana tree in Key West shading the screened porch."¹²⁵ The location was only a stone's

throw away from her old house on White Street. Bishop continued to be troubled by her asthma, but managed to bicycle and swim.



Circa 1965 photo of 611 Frances Street, where Bishop stayed in the winter of 1948-1949.
(Key West Public Libraries via Flickr)

In January 1949 she visited with Selden Rodman, who was on the island to host a Haitian art exhibition. The *Key West Citizen* noted that, “Mr. Rodman stated that he is doubly pleased to be in Key West at this time, for during his visit here he had an opportunity to see again Elizabeth Bishop, who lives here, and whom he considers one of the finest poets writing in America today.”¹²⁶ Bishop attended the exhibition with Pauline Hemingway. Later that same month, the newspaper mentions attendees at an exhibit of David Newton’s paintings at the Woman’s Club, including “Mrs. Pauline Hemmingway, Miss Marjorie Stevens, Mrs. Elizabeth Bishop”¹²⁷

In February, the *New Yorker* published Bishop’s poem, “The Bight – On My Birthday.” The following month the poem was reprinted in the *Key West Citizen* under the headline “Excavations at Garrison Bight Inspire Local Poet.”

The sight and sound of dredging and excavations sets most people’s teeth on edge—particularly in the early morning ... Not so with Elizabeth Bishop, however, who has for many years been a popular Winter resident. Whether it’s just because she is one of our more capable young American poets and writers, or because she is truly a poet—at any rate, she sees bits of the universe dredged

up along with the “jawful of marl” and what’s more sold her impressions to the New Yorker Magazine.¹²⁸

On February 8, Bishop turned 38. The birthday was apparently depressing for her, and to cheer up she decided to travel to Haiti with Pauline Hemingway’s sister, Virginia Pfeiffer. It was evidently an enjoyable trip, but Bishop was troubled on her return to Key West. On March 22, 1949 she wrote to Dr. Anny Baumann from her room at 611 Frances Street.

The prescriptions came yesterday and I had them filled. I had felt pretty good up in Miami but Facing Things back here was bad; after I talked to you Saturday, everything seemed to start clearing up and I have been progressively less nervous & melancholy, etc., ever since.

Things had been neither too good nor too bad all winter, but about the 1st of February they took a decided turn for the worse, I don’t know why. I—or my friends—decided a “change” might help, so I went to Haiti and everything was fine there and I had a wonderful time, but a day or so after I got back everything just seemed to blow up ... The asthma, strange to say, has been gradually going away, I think. I had none at all in Haiti and have less & less here. I am hoping it is a good sign and that this last sad business I put my friends and myself through may mark the beginning of some kind of metamorphosis.¹²⁹

Bishop remained in Key West through April. By this time, she’d learned that she had won an appointment as the Consultant in Poetry at the Library of Congress, a position today known as the United States Poet Laureate. That summer she had a breakdown and stayed for a time in a psychiatric facility. But by September she was starting her new job in Washington, D.C. After nearly 12 years of wintering in Key West, Bishop was starting a new chapter in her life. She later told an interviewer that, “... my Key West period dwindled away. I went back for winters till 1949, but after the war it wasn’t the same.”¹³⁰

In 1951, Bishop traveled to Brazil and moved in with her friend and partner, Lota de Macedo Soares. She begins translating and editing Brazilian books, including Henrique Mindlin’s *Modern Architecture in Brazil* and *The Diary of “Helena Morley.”* She would remain in Brazil until 1967, again enjoying domestic life. Soares and Bishop’s relationship became unstable in the late 1960s, and Soares committed suicide in 1967. Bishop then moved into a historic house in Ouro Preto Brazil. She later told an interviewer that she had three favorite houses, “one in Key West, one in Petrópolis, just west of Rio Bay, and one in Ouro Preto, also in Brazil.”¹³¹ During this period she continued to publish, though sporadically. In 1955, Houghton Mifflin published her second volume, *Poems: North & South and A Cold Spring*, which reprinted her first book along with a new collection of poems. However, it was not until a decade later that her third volume, *Questions of Travel*, was published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

During her last decade, Bishop was increasingly recognized for her work. In 1969, *The Complete Poems* was published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux. The following year she began teaching, and in 1975 published another work, *Geography III*. In 1977 she received the National

Book Critics Circle Award, and the following year was awarded her second Guggenheim Fellowship. Bishop was living in Boston when she died of a cerebral aneurysm on October 6, 1979.



The house in Petrópolis shared by Bishop and Lota de Macedo Soares in the 1950s and 1960s.
(Photo by Leonardo Finotti, published in casa.com.br)

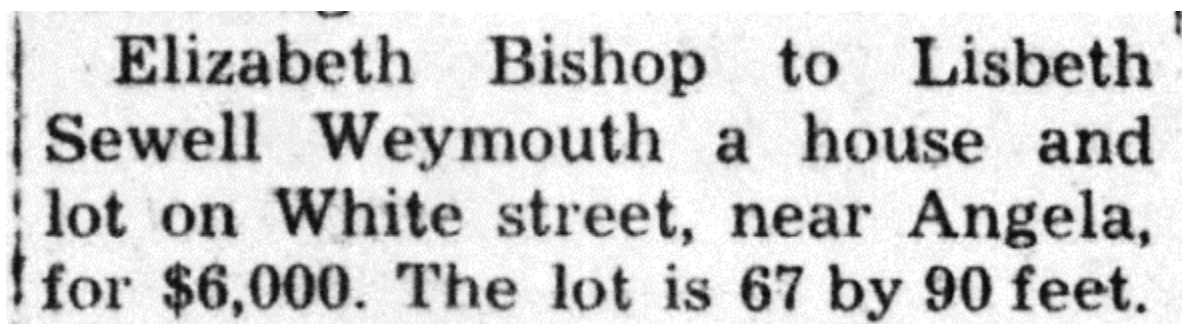


Bishop's house in Ouro Preto, Brazil where she stayed sporadically between 1969 and 1974.
(UP Magazine)

624 White Street After Elizabeth Bishop

Lisbeth Cunningham Sewall Weymouth

Elizabeth Bishop sold 624 White Street to Lisbeth Sewall Weymouth (1897-1990) on August 30, 1946. Lisbeth Weymouth would become the house's longest-term owner and occupant, living there continuously for nearly 40 years. After her death, the property remained in the Weymouth family until 2019. Like Elizabeth Bishop, Weymouth enjoyed gardening and enjoyed the company of artists. She left her own mark on the landscaping, but relatively few modifications were made to the house during her period of ownership.



Elizabeth Bishop to Lisbeth
Sewall Weymouth a house and
lot on White street, near Angela,
for \$6,000. The lot is 67 by 90 feet.

“\$7,000 Profit Made Same Day on Realty Deal,” *The Key West Citizen*, September 5, 1946.

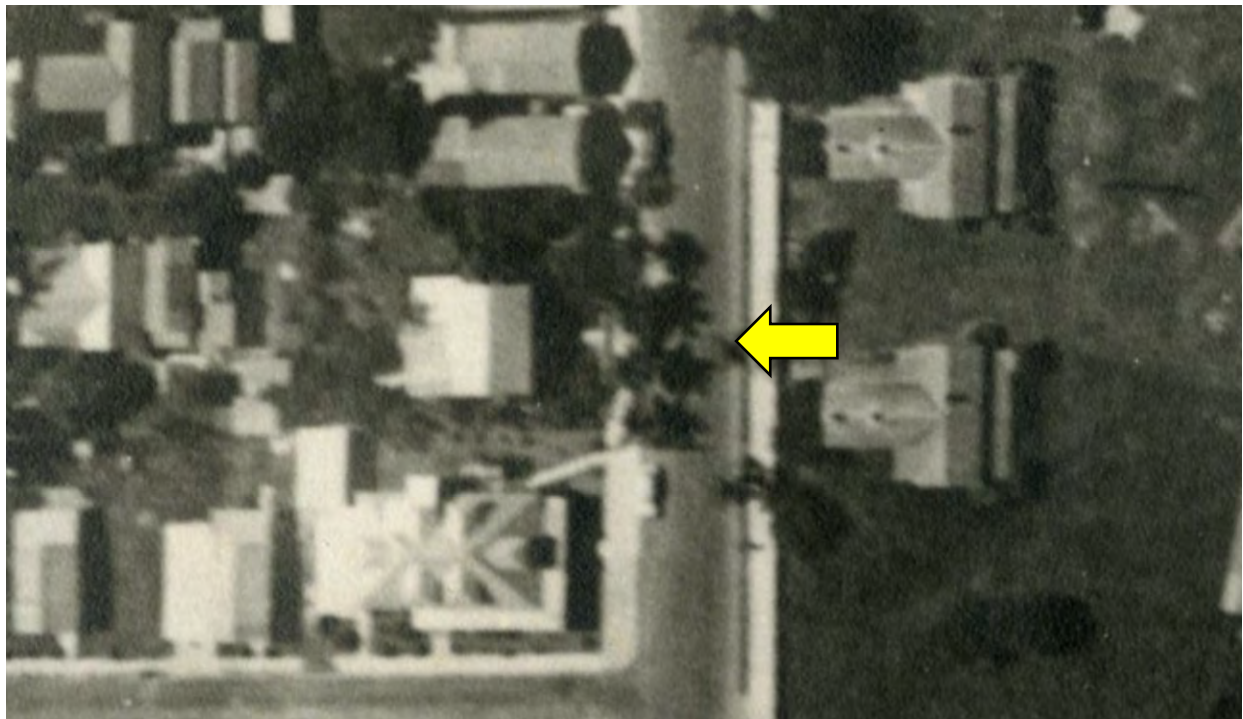
Lisbeth Weymouth was born in Washington, D.C. on October 31, 1897 to Eugene Dutilh Sewall and Marion Crowell Sewall (1872-1942). At the time, her father worked in the U.S. Patent Office, and by the 1910s had risen to become the Examiner of Classifications. In 1916, Lisbeth traveled to San Francisco where she married Ralph W. Weymouth, a civil engineer and president of the Construction and Engineering Company. Ralph's work took the couple to China, where he was employed as a “mining engineer at Hong-kong.”¹³² Between 1917 and 1920 the couple traveled back to the United States for the birth of their three children: Ralph Jr. in Seattle, Colin in Rock Springs, Wyoming, and Richard in New York City.

City directory listings show that the Weymouths moved to Seattle in the 1920s, and would remain in the area through the early 1930s. The marriage was strained, however, and for some time Lisbeth lived apart from her husband on Frost Island, a tiny island in Puget Sound, along with her three sons. The separation ended in a divorce, and afterward Lisbeth lived with her parents, who had moved to Detroit in the late 1920s. The 1940 census shows her father

employed as a patent attorney in the auto industry, while Lisbeth worked as a “general secretary” in the air conditioning industry. Her mother died in 1942, and that same year Lisbeth was back living in her hometown of Washington, D.C.

The move appears associated with the careers of her children. Her son Richard was a Navy flyer assigned to the Naval Air Station at Anacostia, Virginia while Colin worked in Baltimore.¹³³ Ralph Weymouth, Jr. had graduated from the Naval Academy in 1938, and after training in Pensacola became a decorated bomber pilot during World War II. In 1943, he was awarded the Air Medal for heroism during fighting in the Solomon Islands.¹³⁴ The following year he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.¹³⁵

After the war, the entire family except for Ralph relocated to Key West, where Richard and Colin Weymouth planned to establish themselves as commercial fisherman. An apocryphal family story relates that Bishop had wanted the house to be sold to someone with artistic sensibilities, and that Lisbeth agreed to Bishop’s request not to change the house.¹³⁶



Circa mid-1940s aerial view showing 624 White Street.
(U.S. Navy Photo from the Ida Woodward Barron collection / Florida Keys Public Libraries)

Living together at 624 White Street were Lisbeth, Richard, Colin, his wife Nellie, and their daughter Lisa. In 1948, Colin and Nellie welcomed another child, Peter. With four adults and two children living in the house, a bathroom was added on the ground floor, the only major interior alteration that would be made by the Weymouths.

Lisbeth's grandson, Peter Weymouth, recalls that, "There were so many people staying there we made a little bathroom for her [Lisbeth] downstairs. The bathroom and the bookshelves next to the bathroom were definitely added by my father and uncle. The bookshelves in the dining room were already there, I'm pretty sure. There are also some very thin shelves in the kitchen, those were also there. There's a little pantry in the kitchen, that's original with the house as well."¹³⁷



Pantry (left) and shelves (right) in the kitchen of 624 White Street. The shelves were almost certainly installed for Bishop and Louise Crane. (Bender & Associates)

Lisbeth's granddaughter, Lisa Weymouth, recalls that the new downstairs bathroom originally did not have a shower.

My parents lived upstairs, and thought adding a bathroom would allow for more privacy. They [Colin and Richard] were really good carpenters and they built the bathroom. The sink and toilet were small as they are now, but they didn't have a shower. They put in a beautiful tub like a Japanese pool with aqua tile. On the opposite side they made those built-in bookshelves. But all the other bookshelves were already there, and the cabinets in the dining room, and the shelves in the stairs. We had a lot of books ourselves and filled them right up.¹³⁸

Colin and Richard Weymouth decided to become crawfisherman, and built a boat in the side yard of 624 White Street which they christened *The Lisa*. After completing the boat, Lisa Weymouth believes they built the picket fence to keep the front yard safe for the children.

“They were real workmen, they could do anything.”¹³⁹ Richard Weymouth built another crawfish boat, and then they partnered with William Gibson to form the Key West Fish Company, located on the waterfront near Elizabeth and Green streets.



Circa 1947 photo of Lisbeth Weymouth holding her granddaughter, Lisa, along with a cousin on the front porch of 624 White Street. (Courtesy Laura Weymouth)

Richard moved out of the house around 1950, and in 1953 Colin Weymouth and his family moved into another house at 629 Dey Street. The larger neighborhood was likewise in transition during this time. In 1951, the Army Barracks were converted to the Navy Wherry Family Housing, and eventually completely redeveloped.

Lisbeth Weymouth now had the house to herself. She enjoyed the company of artists and was friends with Marion Stevens, owner of the art gallery Artists Unlimited, as well as the Key West artist, Marie DeMarsan. She also knew Pauline Hemingway. One of Lisbeth’s other passions was gardening. Peter Weymouth remembers a number of plantings in the yard.

All Lisbeth liked to do was read books and garden. There was an avocado tree in the backyard that was there when we moved in. There were lots of crotons out front, and there was also what my grandmother called a “money tree” on the left side of the steps. There are some sour oranges that the neighbor planted for my grandmother. There’s also a pigeon plum that my grandmother said was a rare tree. That’s still back there. The hibiscus is still there. There was a flame tree that had to be removed, and a poinciana that was original. There was some

night-blooming cereus that was in the backyard until the 1970s. The mahogany tree and the tabebuia tree sprang up from the neighbor's yard.



Circa 1947 photo of Lisbeth Weymouth.
(Courtesy Laura Weymouth)

Now the silver palms. My grandmother knew David Fairchild, and she got all those silver palm seeds from him. Recently people planted some other palms with spikes on the branches, and they are not original. And the Christmas palms are not original. There were a lot of oleanders in the front making a sort of hedge, but there's only one left. Also snow on the mountain. There were two original avocado trees, but one of them died in the 1960s.

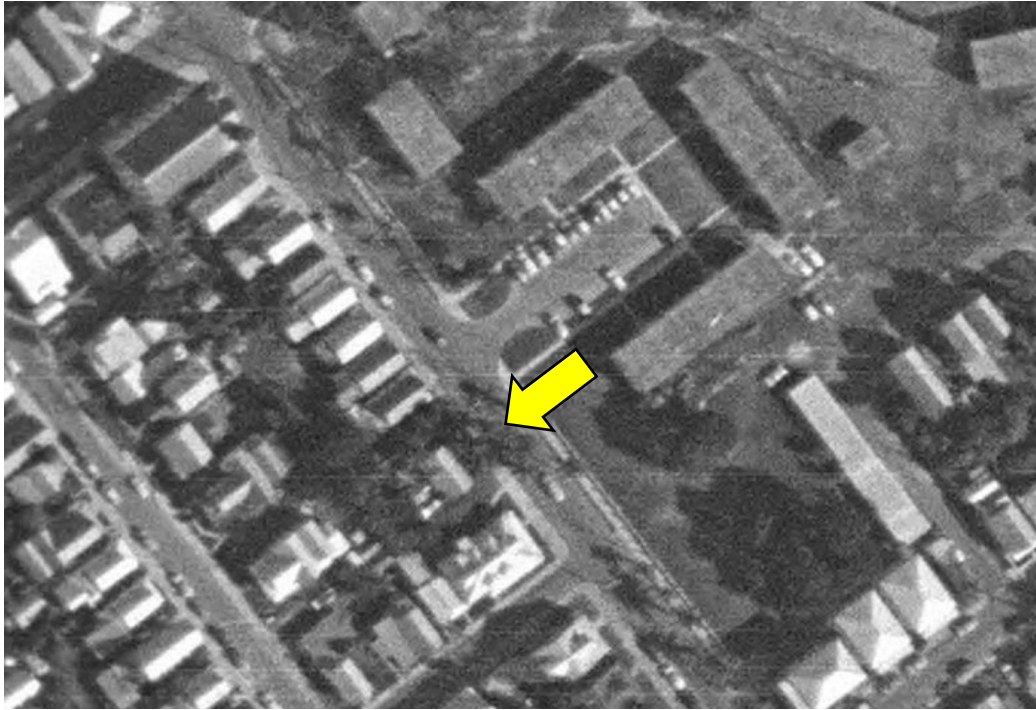
My grandmother had a little pool in the back, like a little grotto, which had tree frogs in it. She built it using a pickaxe to dig out between some existing coral rocks to make the pool. It was really cool, about four feet long and two feet wide. My grandmother had a well, and you can see the wellhead. The cistern was also operating and my grandmother used that to water the yard. There was a pump for the well. It would pump out of the well either into the yard, or into the cistern. It was all interconnected.¹⁴⁰

In that 1965 photo you can see a giant pandanus tree on the left. It so big that when the Conch Train drove by the house you'd hear them say "that's the biggest pandanus tree in Key West." Later, the renter's son built a fort inside the massive root structure of the tree and cut the roots. We called an arborist to look at it, but it couldn't be saved. I loved that tree because it blocked a lot of the street noise. There's also a small silver palm in that photo. That may be from a seed or maybe Lisbeth planted young potted silver palms.

What must have been an old privy was used as the garden shed for the tools. It had a floor on it, but underneath it went down like ten feet. I think it collapsed after Hurricane Irma. I had a worker throw all the pieces down in there and then cover it with plywood.¹⁴¹



Circa 1965 photo taken by the Key West Appraiser's Office.
(Key West Public Libraries via Flickr)



Detail from a 1959 aerial photo showing 624 White Street. Note the redevelopment of the former Army Barracks land across the street. (Key West Public Libraries via Flickr)

Over time, other portions of the house deteriorated. Lisa Weymouth particularly recalls the window shutters.

When we moved in, every window had the old-fashioned Bahamian shutters like in front. The back door to the porch above the cistern, which we called the deck, had one of those shutter doors, and the front door had shutters and a screen. So those old Bahamian shutters were in every window. And as they became deteriorated, we took them down and stored them, but most were stolen. When I lived there [in the 2000s] I built the shutters on the east side, modeled on the ones that renters had put on the other side.

There were no railings for any of the steps outside; we had to put those in later because of insurance for the renters. Off the side door to the kitchen where there is now a concrete pad, there were two laundry tubs which came with the house. The corrugated metal roof that is there now was put in by renters. When I was a child it was just very open lattice work with grape leaves growing in there. There's also a little shower enclosure there, with wood slats to let the water run down. That was built by Ralph when he came down for a visit in the 1970s.¹⁴²

In 1985, Lisbeth moved to New Hampshire where she lived in a care facility near her son, Ralph. The house was soon rented, and for the next twenty years was occupied primarily by Maria Lenaerts, a native of Germany, her son, and various housemates. About 2007 the house had to be completely rewired and Lisa Weymouth moved into the house afterward and lived there around a year-and-a-half. Lisa recalls that, “All my life there was a certain light over the door, but the electrician said it wasn’t compatible so we saved it and its still in the house.”¹⁴³ The house was then rented again. Peter Weymouth states that one of the renters cut out a beam running above the stairs.¹⁴⁴

As previously noted, Hurricane Irma in 2017 destroyed the former tool shed. It also caused damage to the main house. Peter Weymouth states that one of the porch posts had begun sinking and broke during the storm. “I saw this big, big, gap up there and was expecting to find a beam running the length of the eyebrow, but there’s just a two by six, and then the tongue-and-groove making a kind of box beam. I was so surprised not to see a beam.”¹⁴⁵

In November 2019 the house was sold to the Key West Literary Seminar. As noted on the Literary Seminar’s website:

We’ve purchased the former home of celebrated American poet Elizabeth Bishop at 624 White Street. The 19th-century eyebrow house is a registered Literary Landmark and one of Key West’s most important literary sites. Our goal is to restore and preserve the house to the way it was when Bishop lived there in the 1930s and 1940s.

Bishop is part of our DNA as an organization. It’s both an honor and a serious responsibility to become the home’s new owners. This acquisition will expand our reach and visibility, while deepening our connections to Key West.¹⁴⁶

Eyebrow Houses

The Bishop House is designed in a vernacular style colloquially known as an “eyebrow house,” so-named because the deeply overhanging roofline shades the upper windows. The form is sometimes attributed to influences from “saltbox” houses of New England, as well as similar residences in Louisiana. The 1998 *City of Key West Historic Sites Survey* discusses the relative rarity of the form: “The Eyebrow House is architecture unique to Key West. These houses are particularly important because they have not yet been identified in other communities. Seventy nine examples were found in the Key West Survey.”¹⁴⁷

Some of the earlier known eyebrow houses were built in the 1870s. Construction of this form appears to have peaked, though, around the same time the Bishop House was constructed. Indeed, the Bishop House is one of numerous “eyebrow” houses constructed around 1890. Examples include the following properties.¹⁴⁸

- 710 Ashe Street (c. 1889)
- 1409 Duncan Street (c. 1889)
- 807 Elizabeth Street (c. 1889)
- 608 Griffin Lane (c. 1889)
- 614 Grinnell Street (c. 1889)
- 618 Grinnell Street (c. 1889)
- 917 Grinnell Street (c. 1889)
- 711 Simonton (c.1890)
- 714 Simonton (c. 1889)
- 1204 Simonton Street (1889)
- 1115 Southard Street (c. 1889)
- 1121 Southard Street (c. 1889)
- 512 William Street (c. 1889)
- 823 Windsor Lane (c. 1890s)

The Bishop House is a relative anomaly in its immediate context; it is the only eyebrow house on its block, and one of only two eyebrow houses on White Street as a whole. Even more striking, is that the Bishop House is the only eyebrow house reviewed by this study that has vertical tongue-and-groove cladding. All the other examples have horizontal cladding, typically clapboards, and tongue-and-groove cladding is virtually unknown on any building in Key West.



Circa 1965 photos of eyebrow Houses in Key West. Clockwise from top: 1204 Simonton (c. 1889), 1409 Duncan Street (c. 1889), 608 Griffin Lane (c. 1889), and 710 Ashe Street (c. 1889).
(Monroe County Property Appraiser, Florida Keys Public Libraries via Flickr)

Evaluation

National Register of Historic Places

The National Register of Historic Places (National Register) is the nation's official inventory of historic resources. The National Register is administered by the National Park Service and includes buildings, structures, sites, objects, and districts that possess historic, architectural, engineering, archaeological, or cultural significance at the national, state, or local level.

Typically, resources over fifty years of age are eligible for listing in the National Register if they meet one of the four significance criteria (listed below), as well as retain sufficient historic integrity. Resources under fifty years of age can be eligible only if it can be demonstrated that they are of "exceptional importance" or if they are contributors to a potential historic district.

National Register Criteria

National Register criteria are defined in depth in *National Register Bulletin Number 15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*. A property can be considered significant on a local, state, or national level in a variety of areas, including history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, and culture.

The four criteria under which a structure, site, building, district, or object can qualify for listing in the National Register include:

- *Criterion A (Event)*: Properties associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history;
- *Criterion B (Person)*: Properties associated with the lives of persons significant in our past;
- *Criterion C (Design/Construction)*: Properties that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction; and
- *Criterion D (Information Potential)*: Properties that have yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

In 1971, 624 White Street was listed in the National Register of Historic Places as a contributor to the original Key West Historic District (the boundaries of the district were expanded in 1982). The house was found significant under National Register Criterion C.



Map included with the 1982 National Register of Historic Places registration form showing 624 White Street as a contributor to the Key West Historic District. (Florida Master Site File)

The house was also addressed by subsequent architectural surveys. These included the 1998 City of Key West Historic Sites Survey, which assigned the house the Florida Master Site File number MO1617. It was described as an eyebrow house built circa 1889. It was subsequently addressed in a 2004 URS survey, which called it the “L. A. Weymouth House.” Neither the original National Register listing, nor any of the subsequent surveys focused on the house’s connection to Elizabeth Bishop.

Significance of 624 White Street

Statement of Significance

Based on the research presented in this report, the house at 624 White Street appears individually eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion B (Persons) as the best property in the United States conveying significant association with Elizabeth Bishop. Bishop was largely an unknown poet at the time she and Louise Crane purchased the house. But her years in Key West mark an important period in her life and career. Many of the poems published in her first collection, *North & South*, were written in Key West. She wrote extensively about her experiences on the island in letters, stories, essays, notebooks, and other poems that were published after her death. This body of work

documents numerous features of the house and grounds, providing a unique resource for understanding the rich literary significance associated with her time on the island.

During her period of ownership, Bishop was awarded the Houghton Mifflin Poetry Prize fellowship, and began assembling poems for her first book, published only a short time after the house was sold. Bishop also left her personal mark on many physical features in the house, including the porch above the cistern, the bookcases in the dining room, and shelves in the kitchen. These features thus allow the house to significantly convey its association with Bishop.

The house at 624 White Street is the only residence in the United States capable of conveying significant association with Bishop. The other two buildings are in Great Village, Nova Scotia, where her grandparents raised her, and the home she shared with her partner in Petropolis, Brazil.

Period of Significance

The “period of significance” is the time when a particular property was associated with the event, or events, for which it is historically significant. For example, many properties listed for their architecture have a period of significance that corresponds to the year they were constructed.

- Under Criterion B (Persons), the period of significance for 624 White Street is 1938 to 1946, marking the years the house was owned by Elizabeth Bishop.
- Under Criterion C (Design/Construction), the period of significance is circa 1889 to 1946, marking its original construction through the time it was owned by Elizabeth Bishop. This period includes alterations to the property made by Bishop and Louise Crane, including moving the house back on its lot, building a porch above the cistern, and building the bookcases in the dining room.

Integrity

Historic integrity relates to the survival of intact features, finishes and materials that allow a property to convey its age and the reasons for which it is significant. As defined by the National Park Service:

Integrity is the ability of a property to convey its significance. To be listed in the National Register of Historic Places, a property must not only be shown to be significant under the National Register criteria, but it also must have integrity. The evaluation of integrity is sometimes a subjective judgment, but it must always be grounded in an understanding of a property's physical features and how they relate to its significance. Historic properties either retain integrity (this is, convey their significance) or they do not. Within the

concept of integrity, the National Register criteria recognizes seven aspects or qualities that, in various combinations, define integrity.¹

1. **Location** is the place where the historic property was constructed or the place where the historic event occurred.
2. **Design** is the combination of elements that create the form, plan, space, structure, and style of a property.
3. **Setting** is the physical environment of a historic property.
4. **Materials** are the physical elements that were combined or deposited during a particular period of time and in a particular pattern or configuration to form a historic property.
5. **Workmanship** is the physical evidence of the crafts of a particular culture or people during any given period in history or prehistory.
6. **Feeling** is a property's expression of the aesthetic or historic sense of a particular period of time.
7. **Association** is the direct link between an important historic event or person and a historic property.

The house at 624 White Street retains integrity. The building has experienced remarkably few changes and readily conveys its association with Elizabeth Bishop. There have been no major modifications to the exterior of the building since the time it was owned by Bishop. On the interior, the only notable changes are the installation of a bathroom on the ground floor, and minor modifications to the finishes and appliances in the kitchen.

Character-Defining Features

The following are principal character-defining features of 624 White Street.

Exterior

- The plan and massing of the building. This includes the configuration of the rooflines and associated elements such as exposed rafters, outriggers, and attic vents. It also includes the configuration of the porch with its wooden steps and railings.
- Vertical tongue-and-groove wood cladding.
- Double-hung wood windows with six-over-six sashes.
- Louvered wood window shutters.

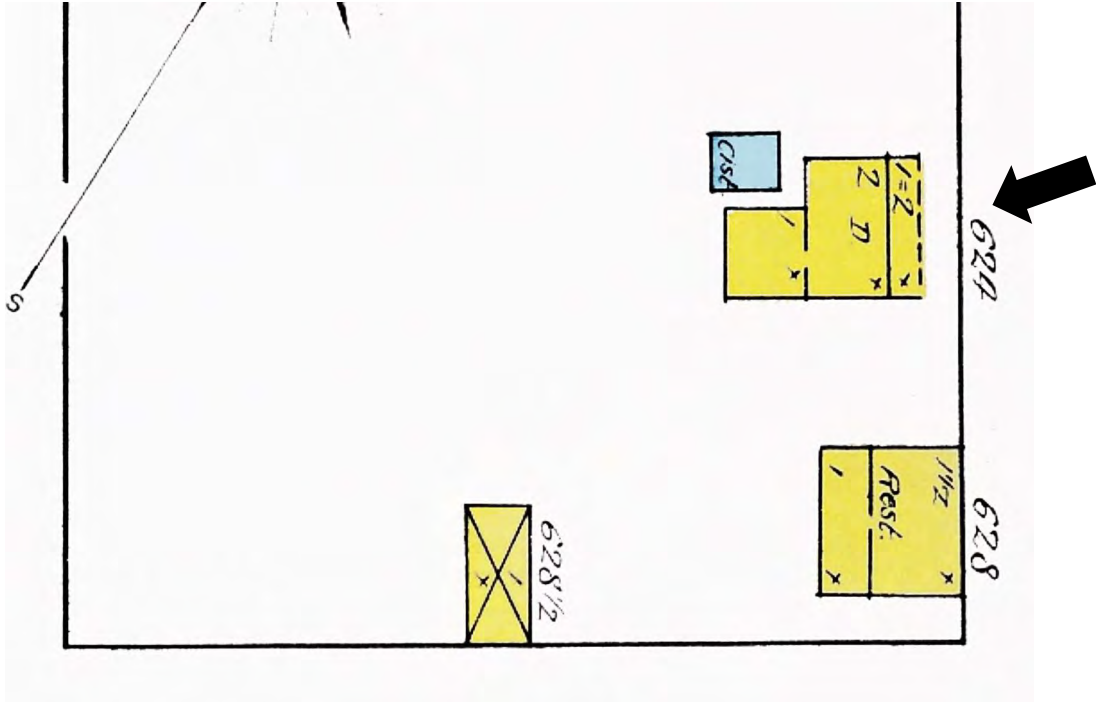
¹ Ibid: 44.

Interior

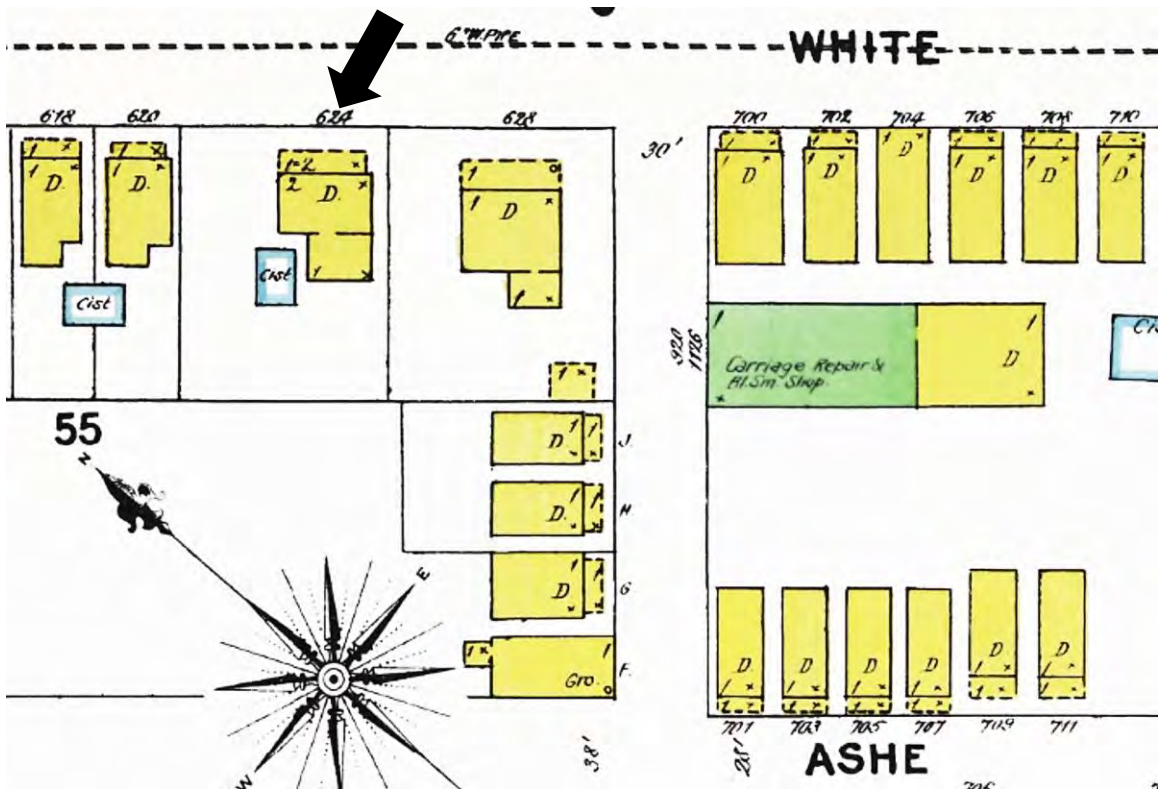
- Combination of vertical and horizontal wood tongue-and-groove walls and ceilings.
- Wood (pine) floors.
- Flat board trim around windows and doors.
- Built in bookshelves and cabinets in dining room.
- Kitchen pantry and thin wood shelves in kitchen at the northeast corner.
- Wood stairs with half-turn and built-in bookshelves.
- Paneled wood doors.
- Bathroom tub and hinged, four-light windows above.

Additional Information

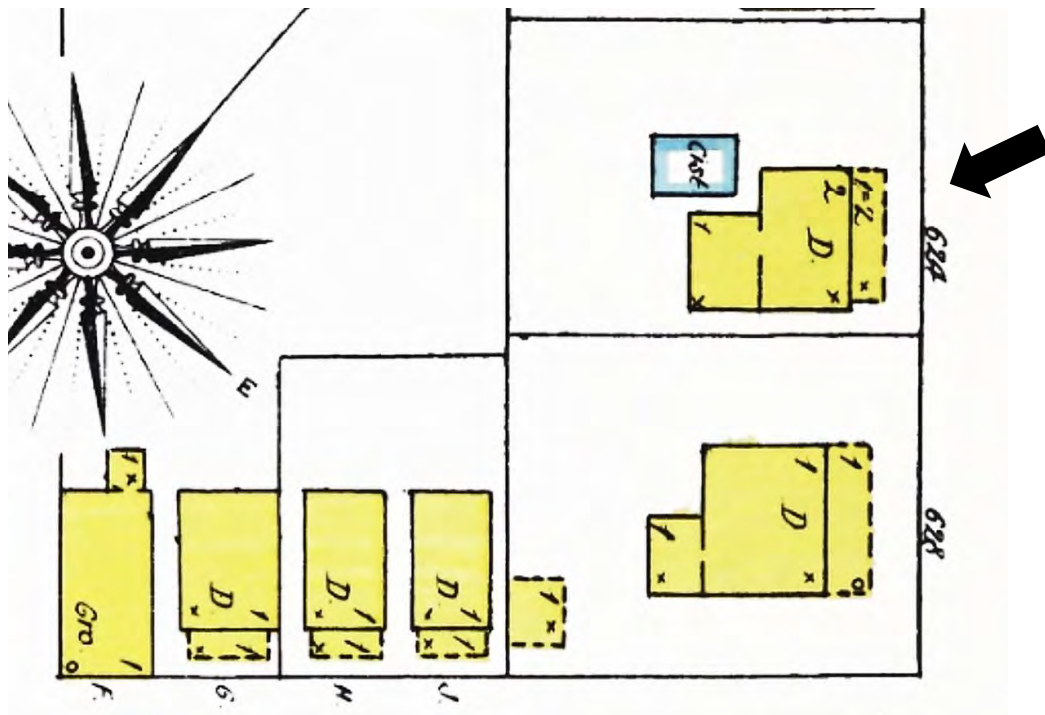
Sanborn Maps (Full Set)



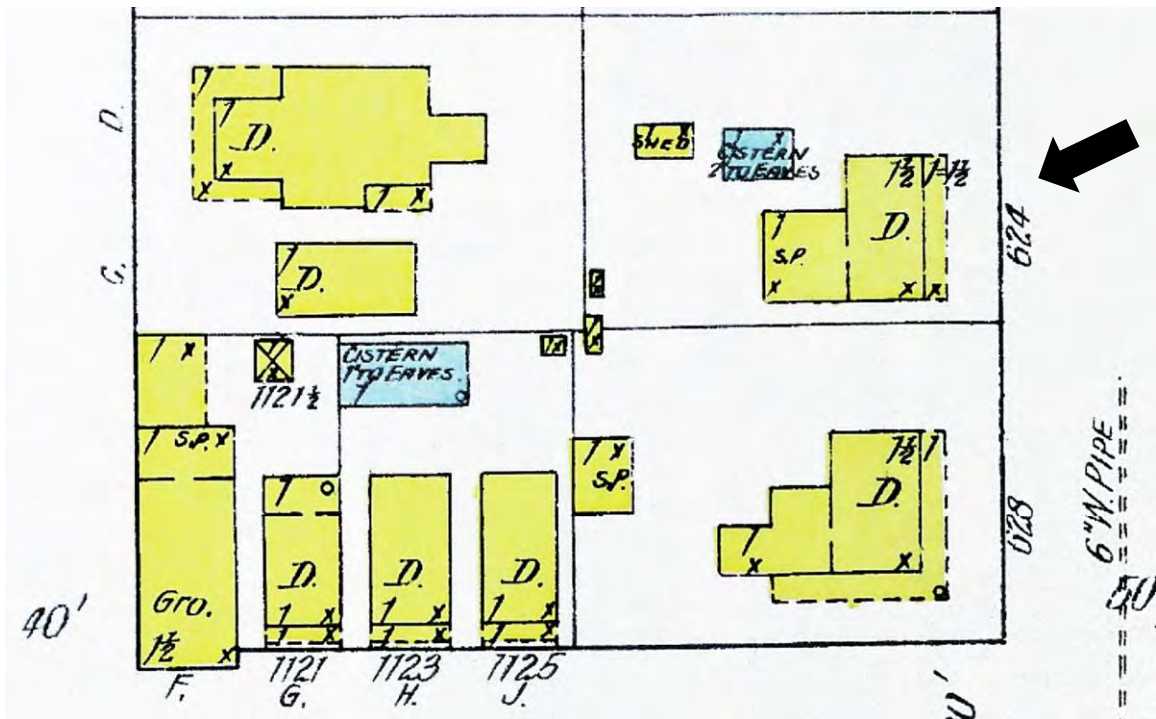
1892 Sanborn Company map (Sheet 14).



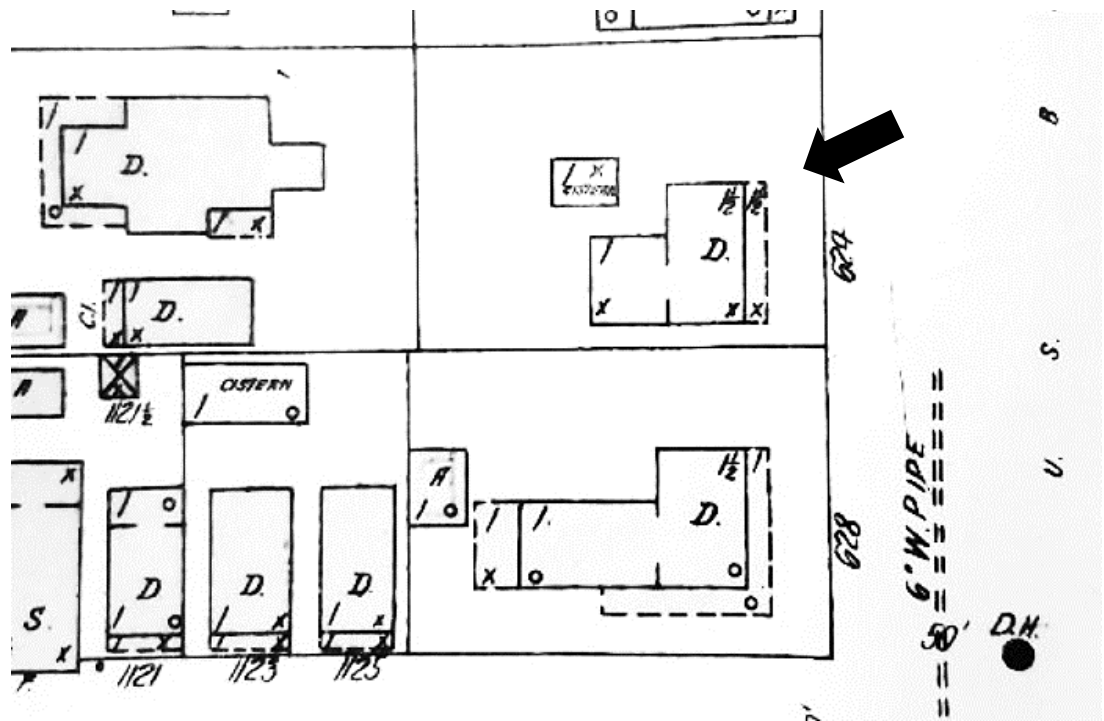
1899 Sanborn Company map (Sheet 14). Note the new development along Angela Street.



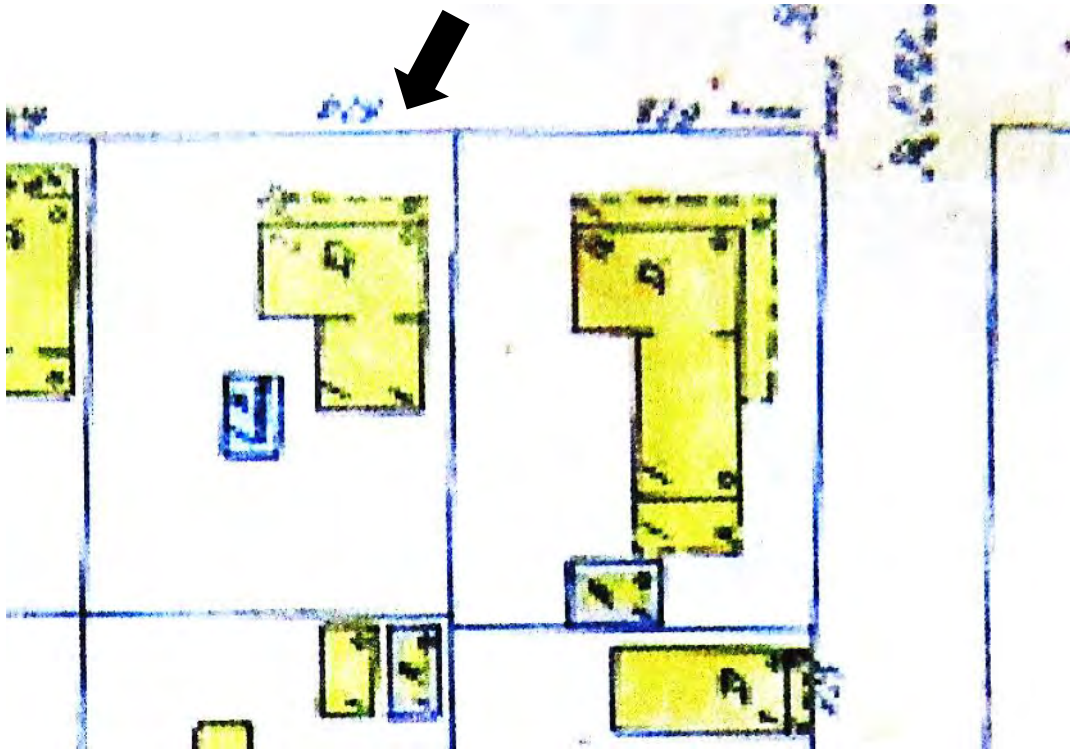
1899 Sanborn Company map (Sheet 14). Note the new development along Angela Street.



1912 Sanborn Company map (Sheet 7). Note the construction of a shed.



1926 Sanborn Company map. Note the shed is now gone.



1948 Sanborn Company map. It is unclear why the cistern is still shown separate from the house.



1962 Sanborn Company map, with the cistern scratched out.

Endnotes

- ¹ Love Dean, *Lighthouses of the Florida Keys*, (Pineapple Press: Sarasota, FL, 1998), 23.
- ² URS, Historic Resources Survey of Key West, Monroe County Florida, (URS: Gaithersburg, MD, September 20, 2004).
- ³ Albert W. Diddle, "Adjudication of Shipwrecking Claims at Key West in 1831." *Tequesta*, No. 6, 1946, 49.
- ⁴ Jefferson B. Browne, *Key West: The Old and the New*, (St. Augustine: The Record Company, 1912), 213.
- ⁵ Bender and Associates, *Master Plan for Fort Zachary Taylor Historic State Park*, May 25, 2006: 2-13.
- ⁶ Gerald E. Poyo, "Cuban Revolutionaries and Monroe County Reconstruction Politics, 1868-1876," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 55, No. 4 (April, 1977). 413.
- ⁷ Antonio Rafael de la Cova, "Cuban Exiles in Key West during the Ten Years' War, 1868-1878," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 89, No. 3 (Winter 2011), 287.
- ⁸ Ibid: 298-299.
- ⁹ Gerald E. Poyo, "Cuban Revolutionaries and Monroe County Reconstruction Politics, 1868-1876," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 55, No. 4 (April, 1977), 411.
- ¹⁰ Antonio Rafael de la Cova, "Cuban Exiles in Key West during the Ten Years' War, 1868-1878," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 89, No. 3 (Winter 2011), 318.
- ¹¹ Arlo Haskell, *The Jews of Key West*, (Key West: Sand Paper Press, 2017), 30-31.
- ¹² Ibid: 299-302.
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