

A
SKETCH OF THE HISTORY
OF
KEY WEST, FLORIDA,

BY
WALTER C. MALONEY.

A FACSIMILE REPRODUCTION
of the 1876 EDITION
with
INTRODUCTION and INDEX
by *THELMA PETERS*

FLORIDIANA FACSIMILE & REPRINT SERIES

University of Florida Press
GAINESVILLE, 1968

FLORIDIANA FACSIMILE & REPRINT SERIES

FACSIMILE REPRODUCTION
of the 1876 EDITION
with PREFATORY MATERIAL and INDEX
ADDED

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Library of Congress Catalog Card No. 68-21658

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HIALEAH, FLORIDA

EDITORIAL PREFACE.

Beginning with Fisher Island just south of Miami Beach a chain of islands, or keys, extends south, southwest, and west for approximately 225 miles to form an arc around the tip of the Florida peninsula. From Key Largo to Key West the islands are relatively large and close together. Beyond Key West the islands are small and almost forty-five miles of water lies between the Marquesas Keys and the Dry Tortugas. Although the keys were discovered by Ponce de Leon in 1513, Spanish colonists passed them by to settle at more attractive mainland places. In 1822, the year after the United States acquired Florida, the navy used the wide, deep, natural harbor at Key West as a base in stamping out the pirates of the Caribbean. Two years later Monroe County was created with its county seat at Key West. For decades the salvaging of wrecked ships and the military establishment gave the island community its economic life. Immigrants from the Bahama Islands and Cuba arrived to earn their living by fishing in the waters surrounding the island or by rolling cigars in the newly established tobacco factories. By 1860 Key West was the second largest city in Florida with only 44 fewer residents than the 2,876 of Pensacola.

During the Civil War the military forces at Key West prevented the city from becoming Confederate territory. Former United States Senator Stephen Russell Mallory, Secretary of the Confederate Navy, grew up in Key West, and William Marvin, who was appointed governor of the state after the war, was a resident of the city. Protected by the military, the strategically located Key West grew strong during the Civil War and Reconstruction eras. For a third of a century it was Florida's largest city. By 1890 its 18,080 inhabitants out-

numbered those of Pensacola by more than 6,000 and were almost 1,000 more than the residents of fast-growing Jacksonville. But in the 1890's Jacksonville went ahead of Key West, and during the twentieth century the island city suffered both absolute and relative decline.

Located on an island three and a half miles long and a mile wide, Key West has an unusual history. Only ninety miles north of Havana, Cuba, it became a second home and a base of operations for patriotic Cubans who demanded independence from Spain. After 1900 and until the late 1950's it was the principal haven for Cubans who sought to regain power or to overthrow the existing regime in Cuba. Even in the 1960's, when the majority of Cuban refugees found new homes in Miami (by then Florida's largest city), Key West was the base for much activity against the Communist regime of Castro. For many decades the only drinking water for Key West residents came from rainfall stored in cisterns, and the only transportation to and from the city was by boat. In 1912 Flagler's East Coast Railroad connected Key West to the mainland of Florida, but the hurricane of 1935 destroyed the railway. Today the Overseas Highway, airplanes, and ships provide access to the resort city, which before the admission of Hawaii into the Union was the southernmost city in the United States.

Despite its historical significance, Key West has interested few lay or professional historians. Much of the city's written history is based on a speech given by Walter Cathcart Maloney in 1876 and later published as a pamphlet. Jefferson B. Browne relied on this source in producing his *Key West, the Old and New* in 1912. Scholars and writers of the Works Projects Administration project collected materials and wrote a guide to Key West in the 1930's, but as yet a complete history of Florida's unique city has not been written.

Thelma Peters, Chairman of the Social Science Division of Miami-Dade Junior College, is a novelist and a historian. Her dissertation at the University of Florida traced the movements of British subjects who left East Florida in 1784 to settle in the Bahama Islands. Many of these Loyalists and their descendants later established homes in the Florida Keys. She writes with the authority of a scholar in her biographical sketch of Maloney and the evaluation of his pioneer history.

The University of Florida Press acknowledges its indebtedness to Mrs. Margaret Knox Goggin, head of the University of Florida Libraries, and to Elizabeth Alexander, librarian of the P. K. Yonge Memorial Library of Florida History, for the use of a copy of Maloney's book to produce this facsimile. Dr. Peters was given aid by the staff of the Otto G. Richter Library, University of Miami, in the research for her introduction.

REMBERT W. PATRICK
GENERAL EDITOR of the
FLORIDIANA SERIES

this time Tift was probably the most important merchant in Key West. In addition to his retail store he had a large elevated coal wharf for ease in loading steamers, and even imported ice.

In 1855 Mrs. Maloney died and Maloney married again, to Miss Marie S. Debois of Brooklyn, New York. There were no children by this marriage and Maloney was outlived by his second wife.

During the 1850's Maloney was studying law and he finally was admitted to practice. Horatio Crain says of his law career: "Though in entering the profession late in life he entered it at a disadvantage, he adorned the bar by his industry, research, dignity, courtesy, and thorough integrity."¹⁷ It was not long before his worth as an attorney was recognized and he had all the clients he could handle.

In his mature years Maloney served a term as mayor of Key West, was elected to the state legislature for one term, was employed as judge advocate of several naval courts-martial held in Key West by order of the United States Naval Squadron stationed there, and for a time edited a local newspaper, the *Key West Dispatch*, published by his son Walter C. Maloney, Jr. To add to this diversity of interest and talent, at the time of his death he was also vice-consul for Sweden.

One of his dreams was to connect Key West to the mainland by a railroad, a dream some called impractical, even foolish. He had hoped that he would be given the honor of driving the last spike. The year before he died in 1884, a franchise for building an overseas railroad was given by the state legislature to General John B. Gordon of Georgia, but the project was soon abandoned. It was not until 1912 that Henry M. Flagler, riding the first train into Key West, made Maloney's dream a reality.

During Maloney's day Key West was well known for its picturesque goat carts, attended by Negro boys and serving as one-seated taxis or as delivery wagons. The carts were taxed and Maloney remarks in his history that Key West was probably the only city in the nation that derived income from such a source. Milk goats were also a familiar sight in Key West streets. The milking was done in front of a customer's house. Key West streets were described as "so narrow dogs had to wag their tails vertically."¹⁸

Maloney's interest in transportation carried over to his son

and namesake. In 1885 Walter C. Maloney, Jr., was one of a company which organized a street railway system for Key West.¹⁹ The cars consisted of two long seats with an entrance door in the rear, and each car held about a dozen people. Mules supplied the power. In the 1880's a popular pastime was to ride a car to the end of the line and visit Mrs. Alicia Carey's ice-cream parlor. One famous mule known as Tom used to climb onto the sidewalk, whereupon the passengers would have to get out and cajole him back into the street.

The issues of the Civil War split Key West into two factions and divided the Maloney family. The senior Maloney, who had once been a Whig, staunchly supported the Union. At a meeting held in the courthouse for the purpose of choosing delegates from Monroe County to a state convention to meet in Tallahassee in January, 1861, to decide the secession question, Maloney was the only speaker who favored remaining in the Union.²⁰ His son, Walter, Junior, took the more popular side and lined up with the upper-class citizens of Key West who declared for secession. Since at all times during the Civil War the city was in the control of federal troops, the local secessionists who wanted to fight for the Confederacy were obliged to sneak away from the island. This Maloney, Junior, managed to do by leaving the guarded harbor in a small boat and following the Gulf Coast to Tampa where he enlisted in the Southern army. Other Key Westers stowed away on a schooner for Nassau, found a vessel there which dropped them off at Cape Florida, and then walked north along the coast.

Those Confederates who could not get away from the island behaved as defiantly as they dared, waving Confederate flags and sneering at federal soldiers in the streets. A local drayman, W. D. Cash, was jailed for publicly wishing that every Union officer and soldier would die of yellow fever.²¹ Union sympathizers were likewise "loud and offensive in their so-called loyalty to the Union."²² They enjoyed spying on Confederates and rejoiced when a "victim" was locked in the fort.

Maloney was too mature to resort to such tactics. He did, however, help to organize a union volunteer corps and persuaded the federal commander at Fort Taylor, Major W. H. French, to supply the corps with flag, arms, and instruction. A good many of the more than one hundred volunteers were

former Bahamians who had migrated to the Florida Keys in the 1830's and 1840's. Some of these were descendants of American Loyalists who had once lived in the Carolinas or Georgia, and had gone into exile when they were proscribed and their property confiscated during the American Revolution. In 1784 they had been settled on plantations in the Bahamas by the British government. These Bahamians in two generations had reversed their stand—now they favored the United States.

The rupture in the Maloney family apparently was not permanent. After the war the young Maloney returned to Key West, and father and son were soon cooperating in a newspaper venture. Horatio Crain explained Maloney's attitude: "Deploring the fact that a son was in the Confederate Army he was proud to think he filled a worthy position. A moving conscience impelled him; hence, he was just to his own son, and in this way a parent might take a lesson from Walter C. Maloney."

But was the reconciliation genuine? In his *Sketch* Maloney saves the Civil War to the last and then says he approaches it "with great repugnance" because of the "mad passion of the hour" and "the danger of reopening wounds not yet fully healed."

Maloney lived on Division Street between Elizabeth Street and Windsor Lane. His house was surrounded by a garden and fruit grove of which he was very proud. He enjoyed having guests and on one occasion at least he gave a watermelon party in his garden. In 1867 when Jefferson Davis, the recent president of the Confederacy, broken in health and on his way to Cuba to spend the winter, stopped over in Key West, Maloney sent him a basket of fruit from his garden. Jefferson Browne, who was a boy at the time, remembered the Davises as guests in his father's home, and he described the Maloney gift of fruit, which he called "a delicate and thoughtful attention," as containing a coconut in the center surrounded by sprigs of coconut blossoms, with delicate green anonas contrasting with brown sapodillas, with mangoes of red and yellow, and pink West India cherries which he said was Maloney's favorite fruit.²³ Crain says the growing of fruits and vegetables was one of Maloney's hobbies and that in his later years the garden was his cherished retreat. It was there that he died the after-

noon of August 6, 1884, having become ill while at his office earlier in the day.

In style Maloney's *Sketch* is stiff, factual, and impersonal. Maloney is concerned with population, taxes, shipping, improvements in the postal service, lodges, churches, fires, and hurricanes. Interspersed with statistics is an occasional Latin phrase or line of poetry. Sentiment is rare but not entirely missing. In a burst of feeling, Maloney paid tribute to the mother of Stephen R. Mallory, Mrs. Ellen Mallory, who had befriended him when he came to Key West "as a poor young man." "Methinks I hear her musical voice today, as she was wont to speak, standing at the bedside of the sick and dying, in days gone by," he wrote. But there is little such writing. Though Maloney is a careful recorder, he is seldom anecdotal and never intimate. His facts are valuable for historians, but it is to be regretted that he keeps the door closed on his fancies. It must be remembered that he prepared a speech and not personal memoirs.

If ever the father lives again in the son, it can be said that Maloney's history lives again in another volume which is its literary descendant. This other and later volume is the much better known *Key West, the Old and the New* by Jefferson Browne, which was published in 1912. In his Preface, Browne acknowledges that his first intention was to copy Maloney's history and bring it down to date. He writes: "In collecting the data, however, I found that there were a great many interesting events connected with the early history of Key West which Colonel Maloney had omitted, and concluded that if my work was to be as complete as was possible with available data, I would have to write it anew. This I have done, using, however, such data as his history contains, and at times preserving even his phraseology."

Browne describes Maloney as "one of the great lawyers of his time" and, in another connection, lists Maloney with several others as "men of the highest character, distinguished alike for their ability as lawyers, and general intellectual attainments. Dignified and courtly, scrupulous and conscientious, they placed the profession of law on the high plane tradition tells us it once occupied."²⁴

He calls the brevity of the Maloney book no reflection on

Maloney's effort but says it was written in a few weeks, whereas he himself spent a year combing various state and federal records so that "the historian who writes of Key West thirty or forty years from now will have no occasion to cover the same ground."

Having made his statement that he has borrowed freely from Maloney's *Sketch*, Browne proceeds to incorporate whole paragraphs written by Maloney into his own book without further identification or acknowledgment. Browne's volume spans a longer period of time, is more detailed than Maloney's, and is even more mundane and less literary.

There is no basic disagreement between Maloney and Browne; both are stalwart citizens speaking fondly and earnestly of their island city.

THELMA PETERS

Miami-Dade Junior College

NOTES.

1. *Key of the Gulf*, July 8, 1876. As a result of fire and hurricanes, few Key West newspapers of the nineteenth century have been preserved. This copy is in the P. K. Yonge Memorial Library of Florida History, University of Florida, Gainesville.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Jefferson B. Browne, *Key West, the Old and the New* (St Augustine, Fla., 1912), 182.

4. Letter from Walter C. Maloney to his son Frank, Key West, December 30, 1874, now in the possession of Mrs. Robert Spottswood, Key West, the great-granddaughter of W. C. Maloney.

5. Horatio Crain, "Col. Walter C. Maloney, a Tribute and a Sketch," *Key of the Gulf*, August 8(?), 1884.

6. Dorothy Dodd, "Jacob Housman of Indian Key," *Tequesta*, VIII, 8.

7. *Ibid.*, 5.

8. *Ibid.*, 12.

9. *Ibid.*, 10.

10. Jeanne Bellamy (ed.), "The Perrines at Indian Key, Florida, 1838-1840," *Tequesta*, VII, 71.

11. *Ibid.*, 76.

12. Letter from Charles Howe, written at Indian Key, October 15, 1840, printed in "Reminiscences of Key West," by W. A. W. (William Adeed Whitehead [?]), in a Key West newspaper (probably *Key of the Gulf*), May 16, 1877, a clipping of which is pasted in a copy of Maloney, *A Sketch of the History of Key West*, in the Otto G. Richter Library, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Fla.

13. Letter from Walter C. Maloney, May 26, 1877, clipped from a Key West newspaper (*Key of the Gulf*[?]), and pasted in a copy of Maloney in the Richter Library.

14. Howe letter, October 15, 1840.

15. F. M. Hudson, "Beginnings in Dade County," *Tequesta*, I, 12-13.

16. *Ibid.*, 14.

17. Crain.

18. William Meyers, "The Old Key West," *The Miami News*, June 10, 1951.

19. Browne, 103.

20. *Ibid.*, 91.

21. *Ibid.*, 94.

22. *Ibid.*, 92.

23. *Ibid.*, 17.

24. *Ibid.*, 64-65.

Early in February, 1863, great excitement was created by an order from the commander of the post banishing all persons, both male and female, who had near relatives in any of the rebellious States. By this order it was estimated that about six hundred of the citizens, including a number who were recognized as staunch Union men, were directed to hold themselves in readiness to embark for Hilton-head, thence to be transferred to some Confederate post. "The town, wrote a loyal citizen at the time, "has been in the utmost state of excitement. Men sacrificing their property, selling off their all, getting ready to be shipped off; women and children crying at the thought of being sent among the rebels. It was impossible for any good citizen to remain quiet and unconcerned at such a time." Expostulations from the United States officers, and from the Naval officers on the station, were fruitless. Col. Morgan, misconstruing his instructions, was inflexible, one, if not more, of the gentlemen remonstrating being threatened with arrest for interfering.

On the 27th February a transport was to leave with some of those who were to be forever banished from their homes. Their baggage was already on the wharf when deliverance came. Information having been communicated to General Hunter at Hilton-head of the state of affairs at Key West, he immediately despatched Col. J. H. Good with the 47th Pennsylvania Regiment, to relieve Col. Morgan and his command; and Col. Good, arriving at the critical moment referred to above, at once directed the return of the banished to their houses with their goods, and revoked the order of his predecessor. It need scarcely be said that rejoicing everywhere took the place of the grief that had been so manifest.

As to the thousand and one other incidents connected with this period, some recalling scenes of pleasurable emotion, others of disgust and alarm, they are written in a Book of Chronicles to be opened for perusal when the hand which has recorded them shall have fallen lifeless by the side of an inanimate body.

APPENDIX.

THE necessary limitation as to the time to be devoted to the delivery of the foregoing address, precluded the introduction of much incidental matter that would have further illustrated the history of the island. Some of this it has been thought advisable to introduce here, under the belief that it will prove interesting to many who may wish to be made better acquainted with the men and measures that laid the foundations of our city's welfare; and other matter, since obtained, has been added also.

NOTE A, PAGE 6.

JOHN WATSON SIMONTON.

MR. SIMONTON was a native of New Jersey, but his business connections were with several Southern cities and with Cuba. After the settlement of Key West, his winters for several years were generally spent here, his northern residence being Washington, D. C. He had an extensive acquaintance among the members of Congress, and was on intimate terms with several prominent men of the then administration, his influence always being exerted for the best interests of the island. After the location here of the United States troops in 1831, he was for some time sutler of the post, and was subsequently interested in the manufacture of Salt, as the representative of a company whose stock was principally held in Mobile and New Orleans. He afterward engaged in business in the latter city and died in Washington in May, 1854. His social qualities, amiability of temper, energetic business habits, and various places of residence, caused him to have an extensive circle of friends and acquaintances.

NOTE B, PAGE 6.

JOHN WHITEHEAD.

MR. JOHN WHITEHEAD was the son of William Whitehead, Cashier of the Newark Banking and Insurance Company, the first bank chartered in New Jersey, and his early years were spent as a clerk in that institution. He subsequently entered a mercantile establishment in New York, and was among the first to organize a partnership and emigrate to Mobile. His first acquaintance with the island was in 1818. Having been shipwrecked on the Bahama banks, on his way to Mobile from New York, the vessel in which his voyage was con-

tinued put into Key West harbor, giving him an opportunity to observe its peculiar adaptation for the purposes to which it was soon after applied. He was consequently prepared to enter with alacrity into the arrangements of his friend, Mr. Simonton, for its settlement, so soon as they were made known to him. His business relations at the island were, at first, on his own individual account, but from September, 1824, to April, 1827, he was one of the firm of P. C. Greene & Co. Although that partnership was dissolved, he continued, with some intermissions, to regard the island as his residence until about the year 1832, when he established himself at New Orleans in the insurance business; and thence, a few years thereafter, removed to New York, where he died August 29th, 1864, while holding the Vice Presidency of one of the leading insurance companies of that city. He visited the island for a short time during the winter of 1863, when on a voyage for his health, accompanied by a nephew, (a son of his brother, William A.) whose early childhood had been spent on the island. This visit enabled him to renew his acquaintance with several with whom he had been associated when a resident. Mr. Whitehead was a very accomplished merchant. He left no children.

JOHN WILLIAM CHARLES FLEEMING.

MR. FLEEMING, like Mr. Whitehead, was a personal friend of Mr. Simonton, and engaged in mercantile business at Mobile when the purchase and settlement of Key West were first thought of. He accompanied the first party to the island in 1822, but left before the end of the year for New Bedford, Mass., where he married. Taking a warm interest in the projected salt works, he came to Key West in the autumn of 1832, expecting, ultimately, to make arrangements for commencing the manufacture on his own portions of the Salt Pond, but died on the 19th of December of that year, and his remains were deposited where St. Paul's Church now stands. Mr. Fleeming was a gentleman of culture and of refined tastes, and Mr. W. A. Whitehead, then Collector of the Customs, with whom he resided, in a letter written at the time, thus expressed his own and the public's estimation of their loss:

"On depositing in their last resting place the remains of him who for a short month had added so much to my pleasure and comfort, I bade adieu to many fond anticipations of enjoyment which I had expected to realize, not only during the present winter, but for many years to come. There was hardly a subject in literature, the arts or the sciences, on which he could not converse and give information, and yet unpretending in his manners, mild and amiable to an extent seldom met with in men of his age and standing.

"Everything I do reminds me of him, for his habits and pursuits were so similar to my own, notwithstanding the difference in our ages, that he seemed to be connected with me in all my desultory pursuits. Many delightful plans for amusement and instruction during the winter in which we were to be partners—our drawing—our music—in fact every employment that could tend to wile away agreeably the hours not required for our daily duties—has by

this blow been so entirely demolished that it will be long ere my feelings will resume their wonted elasticity. My private loss is great, but never has Key West experienced before a calamity to be compared with his death. Many years will pass away, before our island will have on it a man so able to bring to light the capabilities of the natural salt ponds, to which we look for the ultimate prosperity of the place, as he had for many years made the manufacture of salt his study; and probably there is not a man in the United States who understood it as thoroughly as he did."

Mr. Fleeming left one daughter. His widow became the wife of Mr. George B. Emerson, of Massachusetts.

NOTE C, PAGE 7.

PARDON C. GREENE.

MR. GREENE had been for several years master of a vessel in the merchant service, trading between Northern and Southern ports and Cuba. As stated in the text, he personally took up his permanent abode on the island soon after its first settlement, but the residence of his family continued to be in Rhode Island. He died in the autumn of 1838, having for several years been in ill health from inflammatory rheumatism. "Greene's Wharf" and "Warehouses" were for many years the only ones of any prominence. His only child, William C. Greene, died at Fort Jefferson, Tortugas, in October, 1860.

NOTE D, PAGE 9.

THE public documents printed by Congress, and the records of the Navy Department, contain a large amount of interesting information respecting the views of the Government and the events of this period. Some few extracts are here given:

REPORT OF SECRETARY OF THE NAVY TO THE PRESIDENT.

NAVY DEPARTMENT, December 29, 1822.

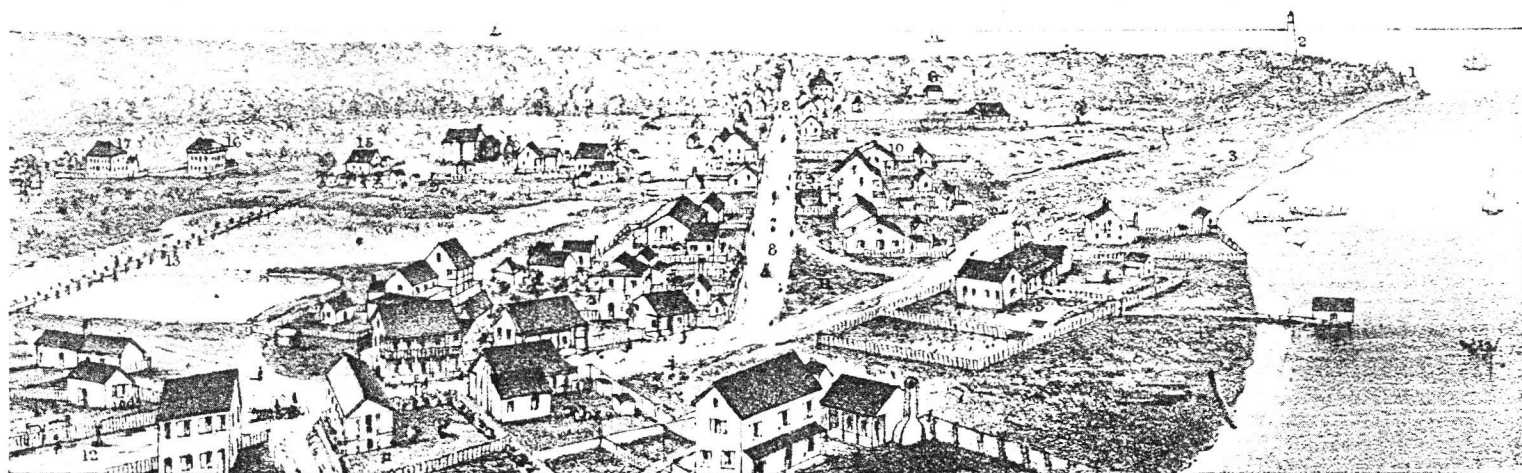
"SIR—The Secretary of the Navy, to whom has been referred the resolution of the House of Representatives of the 20th inst., requesting the President of the United States to inform the House "what appropriation will be required to enable him to fortify Thompson's Island, usually called Key West, and whether a naval depot established at that Island, protected by fortifications, will not afford facilities in defending the commerce of the United States, and in clearing the Gulf of Mexico and the adjacent seas from pirates," has the honor to report: That the geographical situation of the island referred to in the resolution, has for some time past attracted attention, and been considered peculiarly important, both as a military position and in reference to the commerce of the United States.



1. U. S. Military Cantonment. 2. Warehouses and Wharf of F. A. Browne. 3. Warehouses and Wharf of P. C. Greene. 4. Warehouses and Wharf of O. O'Hara. 5. Duval Street. 6. Front Street. 7. Fire Engine House.
8. Fleeming's Key and Naval Anchorage. 9. Turtle, Crab and Fish Market. 10. Blacksmiths Shop. 11. Tops of Conoco Nuta North of the Warehouse.

THE BUSINESS PART OF
KEY - WEST.

Looking North. Reduced from a pencil sketch by W. A. Whitehead Taken from the Cupola of the Warehouse of Messrs. A. C. Tift & Co., June 1838.



1. Whiteheads Point. 2. Light-house. 3. Old Grave Yard. 4. Residence of F. A. Browne. 5. Custom House and Collector's Residence. 6. Jail. 7. Court House.
8. Whitehead Street. 9. Caroline Street. 10. Residence of A. Gordon. 11. Clinton Place. 12. Front Street. 13. Foot-bridge across Pond on the line of Duval Street.
14. House begun by Judge Webb, unfinished. 15. Residence of Judge Marvin. 16. Residences of P. J. Fontane and Patterson, (one behind the other.) 17. Residence of Mr. Weaver.

KEY - WEST.

Looking South-East. Reduced from a pencil sketch by W. A. Whitehead taken from the Cupola of the Warehouse of Messrs. A. C. Tift & Co., June 1838.