

Title: Key West Oral History Interview with Dr. Julio DePoo

INTERVIEWEE: Dr. Julio DePoo

INTERVIEWER: Amelia Cabot and Mary Malone for the Key West Women's Club

TRANSCRIBER: Andrea Benitez

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Malone: [inaudible] Let's start it again.

Cabot: Alright, shall we say, "Just testing"?

M: No, we need to start with--

C: Start it from the beginning? This is another in the series of interviews on local history, a project entitled, 'Key West as it Was', sponsored by the Key West Women's Club as part of their bicentennial celebration. This Amelia Cabot speaking and our chairman Mrs. Mary Malone, taping. Tonight, our subject is the San Carlos Institute, known as the cradle of Cuban liberty. We are honored to be working at the home of Dr. Julio DePoo- a well-known and beloved physician in Key West. Dr. DePoo, we feel, is very qualified to speak to us on the subject of the San Carlos Institute as he is well-versed in Cuban history and is a past president of the San Carlos Institute. Dr. DePoo, how old are you?

DePoo: I was born in Havana in 19-- 1897 so that makes me seventy-seven years old.

C: When did you come to this country?

D: I come to this country in 1930 when Machado regime was a dictatorship-- a dictatorship and we, the doctors, most of them had to get out from Cuba and come to United States.

C: And what year did you come to Key West?

D: I came to Key West when Dr. Pintado was here and I worked with him in 1933.

C: And now, Dr. DePoo, will you tell us about the first San Carlos?

D: Yes, I am glad to talk about San Carlos because it was a big effort from those immigrants that have no money and the first San Carlos was built in Ann Street, a rooming house, and then the faith and help of the Cuban's cigar-makers, and immigration keep--
[audio cuts off]

C: --build the one on Duval Street?

D: That was in 1871, in November twenty-second-- twenty-second.

C: Now I understand that--

M: Was it 1871?

D: Eighteen seventy one.

C: Eighteen seventy one, which will make it more than a hundred years. And so what was the constitution of that San Carlos? I understand it's important.

D: The idea of the San Carlos was to conspire against Spain in the war with Cuba against Spain.

C: That was the idea of the building of San Carlos? Now, way back at that time, was the school a part of San Carlos like it was in the later years?

D: Since the beginning. Since the beginning, they started schools because Mr. Patterson- a lawyer at that time over here- told them that they had have something and not pay taxes, and then they created the schools as a good (work?) for the children in Key West.

M: May I interrupt and ask about Mr. Patterson? Is that the one that his daughter was Miss (Etta?) and they lived on Caroline Street?

D: I don't know but it has to be a very old man by this time or dead.

M: Oh, yes.

D: --because he was a (disciple?)-- he was a (disciple?) of Jose de la Luz y Caballero, see? So, it has to be possible that grandson or grandchild, grand-sister, granddaughter, because it was in 19-- 1871.

C: It has to be Mrs.--Miss (Etta?) Patterson must be--[all speak at same time]-- he must be her father.

D: --possibly her father.

M: She used to sit in a wooden swing on the porch and if she didn't want to talk to anybody, she sat with her back to the street. If she wanted a visit, she sat facing the street.

C: Yeah, she's a well-known personality in Key West. Now, this school is unique in that it has a teacher that is paid by the Cuban government.

D: Yes, it's the only--

C: It's the only--

D: The only school in the world where a foreign government maintains a school to teach the language of the foreign, eh--
[audio cuts off]

D: --country to Americans and to Cubans.

M: Now?

C: That is unique until it closed a few years ago. That was a purpose of it. You see, they paid the teacher and then the school board of this community paid for the English teacher.

M: Well, since Castro?

C: It's only been closed since Castro.

M: Oh.

C: Well, I understand that this San Carlos on Duval Street was destroyed twice.

D: Yes. The second time was the one on Duval Street. It was hurricane. And Mr. Martin Herrera- a Cuban patriot- and his (?) were the ones that bought again the San Carlos from-- in Duval Street.

C: Now that's the present San Carlos here?

D: No.

C: Not yet?

D: No.

C: Not yet.

D: Yeah.

C: So then, the second time it was destroyed, there was still a frame building, wasn't it?

D: That's right, still the frame building.

C: So, the second time it was destroyed, than this present building was built?

D: That's right.

C: Can you tell us about that?

D: Well, the second time that was destroyed was-- I don't remember the date, but it was in this century.

C: Yes, in 19--

D: Nineteen (so much?). And being the president of Cuba, Alfredo Zaya, he sent \$200,000 to build the San Carlos Institute that we have now. Was president of the San Carlos in that date, Dr. Jose Manuel Renedo was president.

C: And he was the president under his president's issue, the present San Carlos was built.

D: That's right.

C: Now, going back a little bit now, we're in the present but I'd like to go back a little bit to mention something. Now, the San Carlos, at one time was--
[audio cuts]

C: --the San Carlos Opera House? Do I understand that they used to bring--?

D: Yes, yes, yes. That was in the beginning.

C: At the beginning?

D: In the beginning.

C: It was a very cultural center of Key West.

D: I had a cousin that used to work in the theater over there, they don't charge anything for that and they was making money for the Revolution in Cuba.

C: Mm-hmm. And they used to bring all the way-- opera singers and the very best used to come to Key West at that time.

D: That was after built the second time.

C: Well, what is the present situation now at San Carlos? What is it doing now?

D: It's very hard-- very hard for us- the Cuban descendants- for the reason that we are going to lose the San Carlos.

C: We are going to lose it?

D: Possibly. I was talking to Joe Allen- Mr. Allen- and being very nice, and he promised us to give the San Carlos a new lease for twenty-five years. (?) can be extended to another twenty-five years.

C: Well, how can Joe Allen give a lease, in what way?

D: Joe Allen is the tax assessor--

C: Yes, uh-huh, that's right.

D: And Carlos is not able now to pay the taxes because two years ago-- three years ago, there was a ley [law]- a law- in the legislature of Florida that every club, don't make any difference what kind you are, we help everyone, they had to pay taxes.

C: So, Joe Allen is trying for-- where will it revert to? To--to--? Who does it belong to?

D: Well, it will-- it will in the hands of a group of Cubans (?) that take care of that and to try to keep it as clean as possible and the best that we can do for that is to be over there all the time taking care. Now, it's abandoned, I saw-- [audio cuts]

D: -- Jose (Cabaleta?) and he-- he's opposed to give us the San Carlos and is opposed at the same time of thinking that Mr. Allen tried to get the San Carlos from him for the government, for the State of Florida.

C: For the State of Florida. Well, the situation in San Carlos is like the situation at the Cuban Club. The Cuban Club doesn't belong to anyone except to the few members that are left.

D: No, but the Cuban Club is different than the other one, the San Carlos. San Carlos owe to the state three year's taxes.

C: Oh?

D: Or we pay, or the Army take the-- so Joe Allen has been so good to convert San Carlos in (centenario?) now that we're going around as a monument-- as a monument. And make in the yard Marti, what they call ('con Martiano?'), un [a] place where they put a Marti bust and flags-- Cuban flags and this and that and maintain San Carlos as a monument and don't have to pay taxes then.

C: That's its bicentennial project--

D: That's right.

C: -- to keep it that.

D: And he gonna pay for everything that gonna be done there.

C: Well, Dr. DePoo, Mrs. Malone and I wish to thank you for an interesting and informative interview on San Carlos and for a delightful evening at your home.

D: Thank you. But, I'd like to say something else, little things. Florida y Cuba- and that means Key West and Cuba most of the time- none of them can write the history without mention each other. I mean, when you make a history of Key West, you have to mention Cuba. When you make a history of Cuba, you have to mention Key West. The first after the government's-- Spanish government left Florida, the first (four?) governors was Cubans and the first (disciple?) that came Key West was a Cuban, a bishop that was (designed?) to have the-- the church in St. Augustine. That was a Cuban, and that was in 1864.

M: Now, I wanna bring up something I think would go here.

D: Go ahead.

M: I have an old, I mean it's the first Spanish-English dictionary. It's printed by the-- in Spain and I looked up the word 'hueso' like Cayo Hueso--

D: Well, that was a (phonetic?)-- it was a phonetic because the Cuban called that 'Cayo Hueso' and then the-- and the Americans called Key West the--

M: I'm just wondering-- they translated it as 'bones', but in this dictionary it said it also meant 'a sterile piece of ground', a useless place, it was the definition.

D: The Key West?

M: Yes.

D: Well--

C: 'Hueso', she means, the word 'hueso'.
[both speak at the same time]

M: 'Hueso', the word 'hueso'--

D: Yeah, hueso--

M: --what meant-- that other meaning.

D: Hueso is bones.

M: But-- it does mean bones, but it also, in this dictionary, gives the definition as a useless piece of ground.

D: Well, I have two or three theories about the name of Key West. The American call Key West--

M: Because it's the western-most--

D: Uh-huh. And then the Cuban hear 'Key West' and say 'Cayo Hueso', because phonetic.

M: Right.

D: That's why they call it--

M: The bones, they never appealed to me as being very logical.

D: No, no.

C: Well, they say the Spanish found the whitened bones of the Indians here when they settled here and called it 'Cayo Hueso'- Key of Bones.

D: You know, the first-- the first immigration was from Key West to Cuba and they was in the 500 year B.C.- 500 B.C.- and they were the Indians that come from the north and get in Key West and then in some way, they passed the sea and they went to Cuba because they found a lot of works similar made in here in Florida as those made in Cuba. Five hundred years-- 500 B.C., that being long time.

C: That's very interesting. Yes, it certainly is.

M: (We've had a lot of meetings?)

C: Really. And how they got across the Gulf in their canoes and--

D: That's right, canoes, yeah.

C: That's the only way they could get across.

M: They did it in the Pacific--

C: Mm-hmm, so they could do it there.

M: It's only ninety miles. And when I first came to Key West, the Cuban flag was displayed in the municipal offices, in the courtroom along with the American.

D: Yes.

C: What year was that?

D: And the Cuban Carlos Manuel de Cespedes was a mayor of the city of Key West being Cuban and not an American citizen or anything else and few of the countrymen, they were Cubans, that was in 19-- eighteen seventy (and so much?).

C: And they named San Carlos after him--

D: Well, the name San Carlos-- the name San Carlos, I--they-- I know two things: one, that it's named for Carlos Manuel de Cespedes, but another story about that was this (farm?) in Havana-- in Cuba where the trups-- the troops of Cuba fight the Spanish and they were all killed over there and the name of the (farm?) was San Carlos. So, we really don't know because Carlos Manuel de Cespedes, I don't think should be called 'San' because he wasn't San.

C: No.

END OF INTERVIEW