

Title: Key West Oral History Interview with Pete Chase Jr.

INTERVIEWEE: Pete Chase Jr.

INTERVIEWER: Sally Whalton

TRANSCRIBER: Sonia Olivella

TRANSCRIBED: September 21, 2007

INTERVIEW LENGTH: 01:27:26

Chase: Ready?

Unknown: Yes.

C: Oh. Well, as I was saying, one day we decided we were-- we'd shut down the sponge farm at that time because the war was on and there was nothing much going on and Hattie and I decided, "Well, let's sail in our canoe,"- I had a canoe there that you could sail as well as paddle- "Let's sail up to Miami." So we said, "Okay, we'll sail to Miami in this canoe." Little--

W: How long-- how long was the canoe?

C: It was about-- oh, let's see, it must have been about twelve or fourteen, fifteen feet- it was a regular size. It was an Old Town canoe and they were the best that were made. I'd bought it from the Old Town people up in Maine and had them ship it down to me. So my dad, he tried to persuade us not to take a trip like that but, you know, you're young and--

W: You know more that your father.

C: That's right. So anyhow, we loaded up with provisions and blankets and we had a temporary make-shift little tent that we could get under in case it rained at night and a couple of folding cots. And we started out from Sugarloaf around noontime. Well, we only got as far as about five miles away that whole day because we had north winds all the time and we had to really paddle more than we sailed and we put up the night there. And the next day we started out thinking we would at least get to Sug-- to Big Pine. And we started out and still we had these north winds all the time- head-on winds- and we had to paddle, paddle, paddle, paddle. When night came, we found we hadn't even gotten to Big Pine Key. So, we pulled up to a swampy little shore just a few inches above water and got out and fixed up our blankets and things and the next morning we started out. And sure enough that afternoon around-- I guess around three o'clock, we finally pulled into Big Pine right there on the beach just where the road would come down from the railroad station to that sandy beach and right near where the Johnson's family built that nice place that the Johnson family built there on Big Pine. Well, there were two families living on Big Pine at that time- only two- they were the only ones. One was named Sands- S-A-N-D-S, Sands- and the other one, I can't remember the name but they were related. One lived on one side of the railroad track; one lived on the other side right opposite each other. I'd known them because one of their-- one of the Sands boys had worked for us down at the sponge farm. So we-- they helped us get the canoe up from the beach up to the railroad track and we sat in their home-- we sat in the Sands home and the train didn't come 'til about midnight. It was due, I think, around seven or eight o'clock but it didn't get there 'til about midnight. We flagged it down- we had to flag them to make them stop. And when the train stopped, the conductor, he got off and I told him we had a canoe, we wanted to go back to Sugarloaf. He says, "A canoe?" He said, "We don't take canoes." I said, "Well, this is a canoe that I've just got to have." He says, "Oh, hell," he says, "okay, put it in the baggage car." So we put it in the baggage car and we went back to Sugarloaf and boy, were we glad to get home.

[both laugh]

[audio cuts off]

C: Well, I got back from the war and thought-- said I had joined up as an ensign and I was assigned to one of the old coal-burning two-stack torpedo boats. And about six months after I was on there, the executive-- oh, I was an engineer officer. And what did I know about torpedo boat engines? Nothing! But they put this boat back into commission that had been put out of commission and put back in and I was assigned to it before it was commissioned and I used to sit down in the engine room- the boiler room- and listen to the men talk and that's how I learned to be an engineer: just listening to them. But anyhow, the executive officer [clears throat] after I was on there for about, oh, three months, he was transferred to some place out in Texas and the captain seemed to like me so he pushed me up to being executive officer. Now, the captain of the ship, he was a college graduate and a very fine man

and a good officer and they made him some job in Norfolk. Oh yeah, well, they switched us from Jacksonville to Norfolk. So he became something in the Naval Station there in Norfolk and it required him to spend most of his time on land and so I took command of the ship and I had command of the ship for, oh, a little over a year, I think it was. It was very, very enjoyable. We did-- mostly, we did ex-- hunting for German submarines off the Virginia Capes. The Virginia Capes was the second most important location for German submarines to operate because so many ships would come into those-- into the harbors there and go on up to Philadelphia and Washington and Norfolk. And it was quite an experience. We never found or never saw a German submarine but we were out there. We'd be out there about two weeks and then come into Norfolk for a week. So when the war ended, I went up to Washington to see if I could get a transfer down to Key West and I finally did get my orders to go back-- to get out of the Navy and I think it was along in March of 1919 that I got my orders to go to here. Well, when I got to Key West, I found out that the Johnson family had just finished building the very lovely camping site down on Big Pine Key right on the bay front. And it was a long beautifully built building elevated about four feet above the ground. It had about one, two, three-- about four bedrooms in it and a nice great big long living room and dining room and then the kitchen. The porch outside- not covered, but a porch- and there were trees outside on the banks of the bay there and a dock. And the Johnson families used to go up there and take turns- some of them from the William Johnson family, and some of them from the Uncle Colt family. And it was a very, very enjoyable thing and a wonderful thing and by the way, the first time I ever heard a radio over the air was when Joe Whalton brought a little tiny bit of an apparatus up from Key West up to Big Pine and he sat it on the long table there one night and we all gathered around- this thing was only as big as my two hands- and we listened to voices coming from Pittsburg, Pennsylvania and we said, "My God! Just think of that! What we're listening to is from Pittsburg, Pennsylvania!" It was the first radio noise-- talk that any of us had ever heard and it was Joe Whalton- he was a mechanic you know, he was quite a guy- he was the one that brought the first one up there and we listened to it and we used to have a great time.

W: How did he generate the power for it?

C: Batteries.

W: Batteries.

C: Uh-huh, generated on batteries. But it was-- it-- I'll tell you, it just took our breath away and he was quite a guy, he was quite some guy. So the old family used to-- we used to go up there, oh, about once a year, at least, and it was quite a place for us all to go to.

W: What about the building of it? As far as you know, it was built from scratch.

C: From scratch, yes, and it was built on piling. It was a built up about-- I'd say four to five feet above ground.

W: Now, this colored man who lived down the road--

C: Yeah.

W: Joe Sears?

C: Joe Sears.

W: When did he get into Big Pine?

C: I don't know.

W: While you were gone, I guess.

C: I imagine while I was gone because he was there with his little donkey and his little cart and that was a God-send to us because that saved us from all-- lugging stuff from the railroad tracks down the camp. And amongst my pictures that I have that-- there's one showing the family all gathered around the mule and the wagon and loaded up on our way back up to the railroad track to go back to Key West.

[audio cuts off]

C: When I was a small boy- about five years old- my folks, who were in the theater business- theatrical business- decided they were going to take me along and be little boy actor. So, when I was five, I had been living with my grandparents in Benton Harbor, Michigan. But when I was five, they decided I was old enough, so I did. I became a small boy actor. Now, my mother was a very-- she was a well-known actress and she was also--

W: What was her theater name?

C: Hettie- H-E-T-T-I-E- Hettie Bernard Chase. She was also more-- even-- more even famous as a banjo player than she was an actress- she was one of the best banjo players of that era. And I joined up with them and I was a boy actor from then until I became almost thirteen years of age.

W: What did your daddy do? He was an actor?

C: He was also an actor and a playwright. He wrote quite a number of plays and he was also an actor. His final, oh, six or eight years, he didn't do any acting at all, he just wrote plays and produced plays. But anyhow, we traveled all over the United States and Canada and when I was getting close to thirteen years of age, my father took me in the bedroom one day and he said, "Now listen," he said, "I don't want you to be an actor. If you turn out to be an actor, I'm gonna shoot you." And he says, "It's time for you to go off to school, so we're sending you off to school and you will live with an aunt and an uncle of yours in Aurora, Illinois where he teaches school". So, that was down in Texas. So sure enough, they put me on the train one night after the show and I went right on through to Chicago where I met some relatives and went on over there to Aurora which is close to Chicago and went to school- a private school- where he taught. The next year, he was transferred from that school to a school out in Des Moines, Iowa and it was not a boarding school so I decided I would go to school in Benton Harbor, Michigan where my grandparents lived and I went there for one year. And by that time, my father had quit acting and was just producing plays both in New York and out on the road. So I went to New York to live with them and that year they sent me off to boarding school- military school- in Nyack, New York.

W: And that's where you got your name Pete.

C: Oh, did I let you how I got it?

W: Susie was telling me this morning.

C: Oh yeah?

W: So you tell.

C: Yeah. Well I went to this military school up in Nyack, New York not far from New York City. And the first day I landed there, I was a stranger and I was walking down one of the halls in the dormitory and one of the big upper classmen- I think he was a captain- he stopped me and he said, "Hey kid!" And I said, "Huh?" He says, "Don't you say 'huh' to me, you say, 'Yes, sir!'" Well, I said, "Oh, yes sir." He says, "What's your name?" Well, my father's name was Charles (Wathen?) and they didn't want call me 'Charles' or 'Charlie' because everybody called him that, so they called me by my middle name which was (Wathen?). So I said, "My name is (Wathen?)." He says, "You say my name is (Wathen), sir!" "Oh," I said, "Excuse me, yes. My name is (Wathen?), sir!" He says, "(Wathen?)?" I said, "Yes sir?" He said, "Listen kid, we don't have any (Wathens?) in this school. From now on, your name is Pete!" And there's my name and it stuck to me ever since [laughs].  
[audio cuts off]

C: Well, as I said sometime back, in the early days of Sugarloaf before the railroad came through, we used to have to send our launch boats into Key West every two weeks to load up with sides of beef and groceries and supplies of all different kinds and we used Curry Sons' dock right there in Key West because we bought most of our stuff from Curry Sons. And one time we were-- this was in the summer of 1911. We were there and I was sitting on the boat waiting for the groceries to come from the store and two young men came up to talk to me. One was-- the name was Lance Lester and the other's name was Busto- B-U-S-T-O. They were both young lawyers in Key West. So Lance was the spokesman for the two and he said that they were planning on getting up a Sunday trip some Sunday of a bunch of young boys and girls to go somewhere and they wondered if it would be okay for them to come up and dock at Sugarloaf. So I said, "Yeah, sure, that'll be fine. We'd be glad to see you". So sure enough, a week or two later, one Sunday, oh, I guess it was around noon, I happened to look over toward where the entrance to Sugarloaf Bay was

there and here I see this boat coming in. So sure enough, here was the boat. And they came in and they docked and the girls were mostly in bathing suites. So, they--

W: Bikini's? [laughs]

C: No, not in those days. Long sleeves and long stockings. [laughs] So, I welcomed them and they wanted to know if it was alright to stay there and I said, "Sure." And they said, "How about bath-- toilets?" And I said, "Sure, we got them right here." So we took care of them and by the way, I have a picture of Hattie sitting on a pile of logs right there where-- near where the boat was- she and two or three other- couple of other girls and a couple of other fellows and myself.

W: On this first trip up?

C: On this very first trip up.

W: What kind of camera did you have, Uncle Pete?

C: Well, it's a French camera and it takes two pictures- double picture- on glass, then you send them off and you have to have them done, you know, developed. And then from them, they'd take a picture on glass, showing it in black and white.

W: Oh, so that you can get a print from it?

C: You can get a print from the originals, yeah. So, anyhow, amongst the crowd of girls, was this girl Hattie Johnson. Beautiful blond, boy was she blond- a real blond, natural- and I kind of liked her. So, before they had left that afternoon-- well, they went in swimming in there diving off the dock and so forth and we let them change their clothes in the bedroom. And before they left, I asked her who she was and where she lived, and so on and so forth. Well, at that time she was clerking in one of the stores that was owned by the Johnson Brothers on Duval Street just a half a block north of the First National Bank- the building's not there anymore, it's been burned down. And it was a-- it was a combination hardware and stuff like that store and Hattie used to clerk there about two hours every afternoon. So she told me where she was and where I'd be and so forth. So the next time I got into Key West, sure enough I looked her up. So I wanted to know if she'd like to go to the movies- that was the big thing to do back in those days, the si-- silent movies they were I guess. Yeah. And so she said yes so then and I began dating her right along. And every time I'd get into Key West, I'd look her up and make a date and so on and so forth. So we got to where we were going fairly steady and then one summer- the Summer of 1912-- in 1912- she and three of her girlfriends, they decided they were going to take a trip up north- go around and see New York, Niagara Falls, Atlantic City, and so on and so forth. And there was some apartment they could get up there in New York on sixty something street. So, I told her that I always planned-- I had planned the year before to go to New York and I was planning it again so I would be up there when she was up there and how about meeting her up there and so she said yes. So, I went up there. By that time, I was crazy about her. And I remember it was on a Sunday, I called her and I took her for a ride on the ferry from the south end of New York over to the Staten Island and back, you know, and then I took her home and to the upstairs-- they lived on the second floor. And when we got to the second floor, just to say good-bye, I said, "You know what? I love you."

W: [chuckles]

C: So, uh, she said it was okay.

W: When did you get married?

C: So I said-- I said, "Now, I've got to go to Chicago on a trip for the sponge farm,"-that was the headquarters of the United States, that's where my father's brother lived- "I gotta go." And I said, "How about getting married and we'll go there on our honeymoon?" She says, "Oh no!" [laughs] She said, "I don't know you well enough for that," she says, "I love you, but (I'm not trying?) to marry you." She says, "We're going to wait a year." So sure enough, we waited a year.

[audio cuts off]

C: You know, when I first met Hattie, she had a brother-in-law- the man that married her sister- his name was Joe Whalton [clears throat] and Joe was a-- he was one of these natural born mechanics. Well at that time, he ran a little bicycle shop on Duval Street across-- almost across the street from where she clerked. And I got to know him through her and this time that she went off to New York, I used to go to him to find out where she was, what they were doing and so forth because she and I had not gotten that intimate yet but we were writing each other letters. And he used to tell me about her and he'd also tell me about her boyfriend that she had over in Nassau and so I asked him one time, I said, "You think that's serious?" He says, "Well I don't know," he says, "It used to be serious when we lived in Nassau and Hattie lived over there with us, but whether it is now or not, I don't know." I found out afterwards that this same guy from Nassau had come to New York to see her and he had wanted her to marry him.

W: Good thing you put in a word.

C: Well she turned him down.

W: Oh. She was waiting for you to put in a good word.

C: Well I hope she was anyhow. So, whenever she was-- when she was out of town like that, I would always drop into Joe's bicycle shop to talk to him. Well, after we got engaged and I used to come down to Key West to see her on weekends, come down the railroad. Joe Whalton had an automobile- it was an old automobile that he had gotten I think from some doctor who had had it before- and it was one of those old ones that you even drove it on the right hand side. And he was a wonderful mechanic and he used to take us out on Sunday afternoons. Every Sunday afternoon, he would take us out for a ride in this old- old but (?), you know- in this automobile and he would sit on the right hand side. And when you shifted your gears, [clears throat] the gear shift was not down underneath like this, it was on the outside of the car. You shifted it from three different (positions?) just like now but they had three different slots that you would shift in but you had to put your hand outside in order to shift the gears.

W: What year was that, Uncle Pete?

C: That was 1911-- no, 1912, 1912. Nineteen twelve and '13 because we didn't get married 'til September of '13. But he had that automobile-- [both speak at same time]

W: Now, was Joe married then?

C: Which Joe?

W: Joe to Effie?

C: Oh yeah, sure.

W: He was? He had (Flivver?) then already?

C: He had (Flivver?) and he had Sue. Sue was a little girl. Yeah.

W: Uh-huh. Okay. I couldn't remember how--

C: When we would go out on these automobile rides, Joe and I would sit in this front seat and in the back seat would be Effie, (Flivver?), and Hattie and then Sue would stand up 'cause she was a little tiny tot. She would stand up and lean over on to Joe and me and talk to us. And your dad-- Joe, your granddad, he taught me how to drive. He taught me how to drive in that car.

W: And what kind of car was it, do you have any idea?

C: No, I don't remember. It was one of the old models, one of the old makes, one of the old standard kind. But by that time, the new models had come out and how he got it or why he got it, or where he got it, but as I remember, it had belonged to some doctor in Key West.

W: Well now, did his father-- did you know Joe's father?

C: Oh! Did I know Joe's father? I should say I did.

W: Okay now, he's the one who had the horses that ran around the island? I heard--

C: Yeah!

W: --from Dr. Sanchez that they used to have horse races on the island.

C: That right, yeah. Well, that was before my time.

W: Was it?

C: Yeah, I didn't know about him. But he used to sit there in Joe's shop. Around the time that Hattie and I had gotten engaged, Joe moved from his-- from his Duval Street shop to the one on Fleming Street, not very far from the William-Johnson home. He had a big store and--

W: And that was a bicycle shop, too?

C: That was a bicycle shop, also and he also did some automobile repairing. And Joe's father used to come there and sit every day and I remember he had a watch chain that ran from one pocket in his vest clear on over to the other pocket on the other side with this beautiful chain. I often wondered what ever became of--

W: Sue has that chain. I think she has a necklace, it's beautiful.

C: Beautiful!

W: Yes.

C: I can see that watch chain just as well. And he was very interesting to talk to, very interesting.

W: That would have been Joseph Charles the second--

C: The second, that's right.

W: --because Joe's daddy was the third, Joe is the fourth, and Joey is the fifth. Now, Joe the first lived 'til 1898--

C: He did?

W: --and the paper I have from the Key West paper, a very interesting obituary. That was back in the days when they wrote the whole life of the person, you know, they had time to-- and space. Now they don't do that, but it was very interesting. And he died in 1898. Effie used to say that she knew everyone of the Joseph's from the first to the fifth.

C: Oh yes? Is that-- well, wonderful.

W: Of course, now, she wasn't married when he died but she knew him.

C: When the old man died?

W: When-- the first.

C: No, she wasn't married. No, not the first.

W: I forget when she was married. Nineteen four, I guess, or something like that.

C: Uh-huh, that's just about the time because they came up to New York around 1906 and spent part of the summer just outside of New York. Effie-- and she had the little girl--

W: (Flivver?).

C: --(Flivver?) at that time and Hattie came with them and Alice came with them. Just young girl-- I didn't know them then but I knew that they had come up there.

W: Now, after Joe lost his bicycle business or whatever happened to it, I don't know, what did he do then?

C: I think he stuck strictly to automobile repairs. Seems to me that--

W: Now, at one time-- when did he go to Nassau? He went to Nassau to do the power-- the lights?

C: He installed the electric power in the city of Nassau when they put in their first electricity. He was the one--

W: So he was an electrician as well as a mechanic?

C: As a mech-- yes, an electrician as well, yes. And he put in the first power that Nassau ever had. He put in their-- all their electric wiring in the streets and so on and so forth.

W: I think they lived there about four years, didn't they? Or--

C: No, it seems to me it was more-- maybe. Maybe it was about-- I know it was all of two years or more.

W: Uh-huh, yeah. Now, did you ever go to Harbour Island?

C: Yes.

W: Where they were born- well, where Hattie-- Hattie and Effie were born in Key West but their older brothers and sisters were born in Harbour Island.

C: That's right. Harbour Island is where they came from originally and then they moved to Nassau and then they moved to Key West.

W: So you knew Effie's mother?

C: No.

W: You didn't?

C: No. No, she passed away, oh, several years before I met Hattie. No.

W: That's right because Aunt Hattie lived with Uncle-- Grandpa Johnson and his new wife.

C: That's right.

W: Aunt Dolly.

C: Yes. And she lived with them even before he married Dolly and she was with him when he married Dolly and she and Dolly never liked each other.

W: No, that's what Effie used to say: Aunt Dolly didn't like Aunt Hattie.

C: No, no.

W: She gave a birthday party for Aunt Alice and she wouldn't give one for Aunt Hattie.

C: No. Hattie had told her some-- Hattie was very frank and she had made some remark about how she didn't like her or something like that so they were never very good friends.

W: Now, at Harbour Island, did you see the old homestead?

C: I did. Hattie, Sarah, and I, we hired a boat in Nassau to take us up there and when we got there, there was long dock coming out into the water--

W: When was this, Uncle Pete?

C: This was about 19-- oh, I'd say '23 or somewhere along there. Maybe '23--

W: Sarah was just a little girl.

C: Yeah, '23 or '24. It might have been about 1924. And there was this long dock and we came in there and there wasn't a soul, you couldn't see anybody moving around or any-- and then there's a high bluff in this town, in this locality. And finally when somebody saw us coming into the dock, about a half a dozen little colored boys came running down there. So the man that was running the boat said, "Where is everybody?" And they said, "Oh, they're having a big wedding up in the church!" He said, "A big wedding, huh?" "Yeah, everybody's up there to the wedding!" So we got out and Hattie knew where the church was, we just walked up just a block and then over a block. So we went right on up to the church before going to where we were going to stay in some boarding house down on the waterfront. So we went in-- we got in there right in the middle of the ceremony. [laughs] Everybody stopped looking at the bride and groom and turned around and said, "Well, who the hell are these people?" [laughs] We took the center of attraction all away from the bride and the groom. So-- well, anyhow, we finally-- they finished the ceremony so we got outside and [clears throat] then we went on down to the boarding house- it was right down near the dock right on the waterfront. Of course the woman that ran it, she was up there to the wedding, nobody could--

W: Sure.

C: So, we stayed there overnight and stayed there 'til part of the next day. And while we were there, Hattie walked us up and we stood across the street from where the-- where their original home was. And we walked down that one street- it's up on a bluff- and everywhere we would walk, people would run out of their houses, you know. To see a stranger was an odd thing for them.

W: I bet.

C: And they'd all come running out, "Look, look, look, look, look, look." Oh, we were never the center of attraction more than we were at that trip. [laughs]

W: I think Sue and Effie went over, oh, like ten years before Effie died.

C: Oh yeah?

W: Yeah, they flew back over to-- of course, it was so changed--

C: Well, we went over by boat, there were no planes back in those days. But there was a man, one of Cope-- no, not Cope but the other Johnson that lived-- stayed in-- you know there was three brothers- one of them stayed in Nassau, became quite a merchant over there.

W: Tom? It wasn't Tom. No.



C: No. But anyhow, he had two or three boys and one of them ran a boat from Nassau--

W: Thatius!

C: Thatius, yeah. Uncle Thad they called him, that's right. Well, he had a boy that ran this boat from Miami to Nassau and back, passenger and freight.

W: Oh. They're gonna have a ferry to the Yucatan. Been reading--?

C: Yes, I heard about that, from Key West.

W: Well, it's sort of a strange thing the way they do it.  
[audio cuts off]

C: That hurricane [clears throat] of 1910 that hit Sugarloaf Key, the reason we had so much water on the island was that the railroad had built a lot of embankments that the railroad was going to use when they were crossing the different bays of water. And as the wind would blow the water in, these banks would stop it from flowing on through and it backed up, of course, on Sugarloaf Key. And when it was all over and the storm was all over and the water subsided, we had an inch or two of white silt all over.

W: Do you think this was caused by the embankments or would it have been anyway? Do you think it just came up from the bottom?

C: Well, I think if the embankment hadn't been there, I think the water would have flowed on through and on out into the ocean more readily. But with the embankment there, it just hit that embankment and then stopped and had no place to go so it settled right there. And we did, we had that white silt all over Sugarloaf Key there for a couple of years.

W: Did it hurt the sponge growth, do you think?

C: No, it didn't affect the sponge one particle. Of course at that time, we had no sponges that we had planted. It had gotten too early--

W: I don't think you told me about the disease either of the sponges.

C: No, I didn't tell you that. Oh yes, let me tell you. I told you about my dad and those being over in England when the war broke out in 1914 and they came back and they had to shut down and we thought that the sponges would start to ripen and we would be able to sell them along about 1915 and '16 but they had not matured sufficiently. Well, along in 1917, there was a disease that hit the sponges down in the lower keys and it practically wiped out all-- almost all of the sponges, and particularly it hit those in the bays of Sugarloaf. We had then planted in two different bays: the northwest and the southwest bays and it practically wiped them out.

W: Did the government send anybody down to check out why?

C: Nope, not a soul.

W: Why?

C: I don't know why. I wasn't there at that time so I don't know. But anyhow, my father and my uncle, they decided that they'd better sell the property and get what they could for it and--

W: And forget the sponges.

C: --divide it amongst the stockholders. So they did. That was in 1916 and in 1917, my father moved away from Sugarloaf and Perky took over- he was the one who bought them out.

W: And he's the one who out the bath-tower?

C: He's the one who put the bath-tower there. And my father moved into Key West and he started the Chamber of Commerce there and he was there for, oh, two or three-- four or five years with the Chamber of Commerce. But that was his last time at Sugarloaf.

W: That was 1917?

C: That was 1916 or '17, yeah.  
[audio cuts off]

C: Those were just swampland or just-- well, just a kind of growth that grow about that high and--

W: Shrubbery?

C: Shrubbery, yes.

W: It was very rocky or was it was very swampy?

C: No, it was-- it wasn't terribly rocky, but there were very few places where there was sufficiently depth of the soil to warrant planting things to grow.

W: Mm-hmm. Did you have any freshwater wells anywhere?

C: No, we caught all of our water from the rain and we had-- and still is, right joining where my father's residence was- the one that Dr. Harris built that I said was elevated up about--

W: Yes.

C: Right adjoining that, there was-- there is still a very large cistern--

W: Above land?

C: Above land that, oh, it was tremendous. And that gave us most of our water supply. Now, also, when Hattie and I had built our home, we built another cistern of our own to catch our own water and--

W: How did you purify it, Uncle Pete, or didn't you?

C: We didn't.

W: You just drank it like it was.

C: It was pure. There was no smog or anything in the air, there was nothing to contaminate the air, there was nothing to contaminate the rain water. When it came down, it came down on pure roofs with no smoke or no tar or no anything on them and the water was wonderful. Oh, we had a lovely drink, clear as crystal.

W: Did you use that metal for roofing? What kind of roof--?

C: Well, we had different kinds. Now, the roof on my home- the home that Hattie and I built- that was tile; that was a tile roof.

W: Cuban tile?

C: Cuban tile.

W: Curved? I mean, the regular Cuban tile?

C: Yeah. Right. But most of the other houses were shingles- wooden shingles.

W: Oh. Because I know Annie Hick's house was the metal shingles.

C: Oh, yes.

W: Remember, like so many of the Key West homes?

C: That's right.

W: Yeah.

C: Well, the other houses, there were all practically wooden shingle.

W: What about mosquitoes?

C: [groans] Mosquitoes! Every house that you lived in had a double entrance. You walked into the first entrance and there was a screen door and then you were in a little screened opening about half or two-thirds the size of this table. And then there was another door that you opened- another screen door- that led you into the porch. So the first bunch of mosquitoes that you happen to bring in with you--

W: You stood there and slapped them.

C: -- you slapped them and got rid of them if you could, and then you got inside. And once in awhile, you'd carry a few in with you but, oh, the mosquitoes at certain times of the year were terrible, just terrible. But we didn't seem to mind. I don't know--

W: You get used to it.

C: Yeah.

W: And they get to where you don't feel them.

C: Well, I don't remember that part. I remember-- oh, the mosquitoes sometimes would be awful. Awful.  
[audio cuts off]

C: We very, very seldom got over on the ocean-side-- of course, we didn't own the oceanfront. There was a place where you could go out through the little creek and land on the beach, (?) there was a beach, but it was very, very seldom. I remember one time, we gave a party to the engineers that were on the end of Sugarloaf- where you first land on Sugarloaf- and a couple of them had their wives there and we gave them a beach party. We had a man there working for us that was kind-of an expert on digging a hole in the grounds, you know, and putting things in there to cook and to bake and everything. But very, very, very seldom we ever-- now one time when Hattie and I were still engaged, that's right, she and four or five of her girlfriends decided they'd like to come up to Sugarloaf and camp on the beach there in a tent. We-- and we had a big-- I want to say a big tent- a tent maybe a little bit bigger than this room- and they came up there and spent a week there. And I remember nights-- or afternoons after work hours, a boy named Gideon Thomas around my age, he and I would go down and we'd stay down there with them until around 9 o'clock and then we'd come back to Chase and then go to bed--

W: But they didn't go shelling or diving like they do these days?

C: No, no. We used to go swimming but nobody seemed to hunt shells or anything of that kind, I don't know why.

W: I was just wondering if there were many-- what about-- now, when you harvested your sponges- that's something I wanted to ask you- did you hook them from the boat or did you have to get into the water?

C: Now, you're talking about the sponges after they were grown--

W: Yes.

C: --or the ones that we hooked to cut up and transplant?

W: Well--

C: Which ones?

W: Either one. You hooked-- you hooked the originals off the--?

C: Yeah. Most of that was done up around Marathon.

W: Yes. Now, the others, once they had grown on these plates--

C: They never got to the size where we --

W: You never got a harvest out of them?

C: No. We got a few that we would send off as samples to show what they were doing, but they hadn't reached the mature size --

W: Oh. You never had one single--?

C: Not to sell.

W: For goodness sakes, all that work.

C: Yeah. We did have, oh, maybe 100 or something like that, but we would-- just show people what they could become a little later on. But we never got to the point of where they matured to where they would sell.

W: Isn't that strange? At the same time that the disease wiped out yours, were there others around the keys wiped out also?

C: Oh, yes.

W: Everything?

C: Yes, mm-hmm. There's-- very, very few sponging went on after this disease hit. Very, very--

W: Then they all moved-- all the people went up to Tarpon Springs, I think the name--

C: Uh-huh, that's right.  
[audio cuts off]

C: The railroad had not gone all the way through yet but that group of engineers and workmen were still working on the upper-end of Sugarloaf, and they had finished the railroad on-- what's the next to, uh, is it Boca Chi-- is Boca Chica--? No.

W: South of it?

C: No, toward you. What's the next key?

W: Oh, uh--

C: Whatever it is--

W: Ramrod, Cudjoe, and--

C: Cudjoe!

W: Cudjoe?

C: They had finished building the road across Cudjoe and they were building it across Sugarloaf. And the head engineer, he invited us all to come up there and have lunch one day at Sugarloaf at the camp and he thought maybe we'd like to see what the railroad looked like, so he sent these handcars down to Sugarloaf and we all- the white folks- we all got in these handcars and--

W: And that's when that picture--?

C: -- that's when that picture was taken.  
[audio cuts off]

C: And it was a lovely little old Spanish town back in those days. Now in-- we skip now to about 1909 and my father had gone into business in New York City, but he often remembered his trip down to Key West and he remembered that the United States government was interested in trying to grow sponges- grow them-- instead of letting them grow naturally, grow them artificially. And he kept in touch with that and he finally found that the government said yes, it was feasible, it was practical and it could be done. And they had done their experimenting in Sugarloaf, on Sugarloaf Key.

W: In other words, the government was there before your father ever went--?

C: Oh, yes, doing their experiments only. Now the reason they picked Sugarloaf Key was that because Sugarloaf has four very large land-locked bays. If you remember the map, it has four very large land-locked bays that you can do something with and yet keep outsiders from coming in. So, they picked that location and my father got in touch with old Dr. Harris- one of the old time Key Westers who owned practically all of Sugarloaf Key except what was along the oceanfront- and my father made a deal with him whereby my father and my father's brother would buy all of Sugarloaf except that oceanfront part that faced on the ocean, and the price was to be \$25,000 dollars for the whole thing, and they bought it.

W: Now, at this time, the oceanfront was on the other side of a big bay, right?

C: Yes, on the--

W: And so he had everything from that bay on over to the Florida Bay, really.

C: To the north, yes. That's right.

W: What was your father's name?

C: Charles (Wathen?) Chase.

W: And your brother's name?

C: His brother's name?

W: His brother's name.

C: George Chase. Now, George Chase was a businessman in Chicago and he didn't come down there very much, only occasionally, but he had some money and my father had some money enough to buy the property with but they didn't have enough money to go ahead and do the planting that they planned to do to grow sponges. So, my father and his brother, they were Englishmen. They had both come from England as young men and my father went over to England that winter of 1909, 1910 to raise the money to go ahead and do this sponge-- well, they called it 'sponge farming'.

[audio cuts off]

C: Now what is sponge farming? Well, you get a sponge which grows naturally and is attached and grows to a rock or some kind of hard surface in the water so it won't float away and it attaches itself there as a very small seed and then grows and grows and grows until it becomes large. Well--

W: How big?

C: Well, they sometimes grow as big as my head and at that size, they're wonderful for gathering and for shipping north. Now, the idea of sponge planting and growing sponges was you go and you get a sponge such like that up off of the bottom, you keep it in water and never let it get out of the water for over a few seconds at a time, and then you cut it up into small pieces about the size of a hen's egg and those pieces you attach to a concrete plate with an aluminum wire and you put it back in the water and there it will attach itself finally to that concrete plate just like it attaches itself--

W: Did you manufacture the concrete plates?

C: We made the concrete plates. We had to make them. They had two little holes in the bottom so that you put the wire through the sponge and then through these holes and then gave it a twist and that held it there until finally it attached itself right to the plate itself. Finally, those aluminum wires that were (shown?), they finally dissolved and float away but in the meantime, the sponges gathered there. So, the way to do this sponge farming was: first of all, you had to go out and get the big sponges, keeping them in the water all the time, and then you would have a day when you would plant them in your own bay and in planting them, you'd cut them up as I said into things about the size of a hen's egg, attach them to the plate, throw the plates over board, then move the barge on to another fifty feet or so, and then do the same thing again until you've got one long string of sponges- probably twelve sponges in a row- and then you move up about ten feet or twenty feet and then you plant another row of sponges and then you move up and plant another.

W: How deep was the water?

C: The water varied. You shouldn't plant those sponges in water that's less than two or three feet deep because that makes it too hot. But the average is anywhere from three to six and seven feet in those bays. And we used to-- some days, if we had enough big sponges to cut up, we would plant as many as three and four and 500 of these little sponges. Well, to get back to the beginning, yes, my father went over to England that winter of 1909, 1910 and he raised the money through-- mostly through family connections- the Chase family was a well-to-do family over there- and he came back with enough money to go ahead and start the thing going and with the prospects that more money would be coming continuously from England until the sponges themselves had grown to the size that you could commercially pull them up, peel them off of those plates, and then ship them north as full grown, beautiful, lovely sponges- much nicer than the natural sponge because the natural sponge where it was torn off from the bottom in gathering it- it left the sponge all ragged on the bottom. But these sponges that grew on the plates, the bottom of them where it grew on the plate was just as nice and smooth as a carpet and it made them to-- turned out to be very fine sponges. Well, my father came back, I think along in February, came back from England and he had succeeded, as I say, in raising enough money to get the thing started and get it going. So, he left me behind in New York City to close out the business that he had there and he and the family moved down to Sugarloaf.

W: Now, by family, who else?

C: At that time, my father had married again and the lady that he married had a little niece- a little girl about, oh, thirteen or fourteen years old. So, they all went down to Sugarloaf. Now, the only thing that was at Sugarloaf at the time that he bought it was one home. There was one home that Dr. Harris had built that he used to go up there

different times of the year and relax and have enjoyment. And this home was a home that was built on a high piling about-- at least six feet above the ground.

W: Just one piling?

C: No, no.

W: Lot's of piling?

C: Piling-- lot's of piling.

W: Because the (bare?) house is on (?)--

C: Yes. No, but this was on a series of pilings and the home consisted of one, two, th-- one-- one, two, three bedrooms and a kitchen-- and the kitchen and the dining room. Well, the first thing my father had to do was to, of course, build better accommodations because it was going to require more than just he and his wife to run the place down there. So he started out building and they built that building that is now there- that white building with a kind-of a tower right next to it, open up on the top- and that was the first building he built and he enlarged his home and built a large living room on it and then they-- the railroad had built a dining room hall for their help while they were building the railroad and then when they got through with Sugarloaf, they just left it there, they didn't tear it down so that was the dining room for the colored help, to be. And also there were a few little scattered bunk houses that the railroad that left behind and my father started out building up Sugarloaf. This building that is now there- that large white building- was the office downstairs and then upstairs there were three bedrooms and there was an open porch all around it, both top and bottom. That porch has now been closed in and it's not an open porch now but the building has been enlarged to make it more livable and more room. Now, I came-- I closed up dad's business in, oh, I think it was August of that year and I came down to Sugarloaf. And at that time, as I say, he had about thirty to forty colored people working there for him and there were about six or eight whites. We had two launches that would go to Key West and back. And by the way, the only connection that Sugarloaf had with the outside world at that time was that you had to go by boat from Sugarloaf out into the keys, down through the keys, and then we'd get into Key West at old Curry Sons' dock. And we used to get all of our food from Key West. We'd send these boats in, one of them at a time, about once every two weeks and load up with raw beef just as the way they cut it in the butcher's shop-- not cut it into pieces but the whole beef, you know, and load up with ice and load up with groceries and provisions and tools and whatever--

W: How did the launches-- how were you-- were they sailboats?

C: No, no, they were gas.

W: Gas, oh.

C: Motors- gasoline motor boats. No, you couldn't very well rely on sailboats for that because the winds sometimes just might hold you up for a day before you'd get back in.

W: And your ice would all melt.

C: Yes, and that's right. So, as I say, I got down there at that time and there were about six or eight whites and about thirty colored people and they were all doing this-- building up-- building these bunkhouses and so forth and getting ready to go out in the fall to gather in the growing sponges and bring them back to cut up into smaller sponges. Now, I landed there along in the latter part of August and the first of September. And as I say, there was no telephone down there- you had no telephone- no telegraph, no electricity- we all burned kerosene lamps- there was no television, no outside world, no nothing, you were just there by yourself- no doctor or anything- and you were just like- - you were there and there was no other world but yours. And yet, in all the six years that I was there, we only once had to send a man into Key West on account of sickness. And as I say, we used to have anywhere from, oh, thirty to forty colored people and six to eight or nine white people there at a time. We were a little world all of our own.

W: No germs?

C: No germs, no. So now, my father, he had to go up north to meet his brother up in Chicago and go over some affairs and he left and he had an Englishman there who had come over from England after he did who was in charge because I was a newcomer and I was only a young man and I wasn't capable of being in charge. But we-- I came there and in October, we had a hurricane. Well, nobody--

W: This was 1910?

C: In 1910. Nobody knew when the hurricane was coming or if it was coming. We knew it was stormy and we knew it was windy but the only thing we had was a barometer to show us that, yes, it was coming down, but we didn't have what they have now that you can get ready and so forth. And this hurricane came and fortunately, along about four o'clock in the afternoon, the water started coming up over the land and it came up until it got to be about knee-high--

W: Fortunately?

C: Fortunately it was in the daytime that it came up instead of at night. And it got up to about knee-high and the wind was just, oh, it was terrible. That building that's right next to that white home that has an open platform halfway up, that was a tower that was twice as high but in this 1910 hurricane, the upper part of it just went off. I remember seeing it float off through the air. And finally, we had to tell the colored people, "Come on, get out of those shacks and come on up to this house of my dad's,"- it's Dr. Harris's house, which fortunately had a screened porch all around it. And the water kept coming up and kept coming up and we got a boat and we tied the boat underneath the house there, and finally through the middle of the night that water was up over my shoulders and the wind blowing and howling and we didn't know whether that was the end or what it was.

W: But were you all in water? Everybody? Or were you upstairs? Was there a second story?

C: No, but the first floor-- the building was about 6 feet above ground on pilings and the water came up to about nearly five feet. And the white people all gathered in the kitchen and the bedrooms and the colored people were all out on the screened porch on the lee side of the house packed jammed, just standing there.

W: Scared to death?

C: Oh, absolutely, we didn't know-- we thought that was the end of it. Well, about three o'clock in the morning, it started to subside and by eight o'clock in the morning we could get out and again walk on the land, it had all gone down. Now, the reason for that was the Florida East Coast Railroad had started to build the railroad and where the railroad tracks were and there was open water, they filled it in. And when the wind blew out of the north, the water just blew and piled up again and it had no outlet, it couldn't get out anywhere. So what did it do? I just kept backing up and backing up and backing up. And so as I said, it was about five feet deep right around our house and we never knew what was going to happen.

W: Now, when the railroad was at-- came to Knight's Key--

C: Yes.

W: --then they started building from Key West towards--

C: No, they started building from Knight's Key towards Key West.

W: They did? I thought they met somewhere in the middle.

C: Well, now, when I say they started building from Knight's Key to Key West, the headquarters- the engineer's headquarters- were there where you live now.

W: Marathon.



C: That-- Marathon. And they called it Marathon then, they gave it its name. But they also would go-- they would send a group of men in these big houseboats to certain sections and they would build a section and then they would go down to maybe Sugarloaf and they would build a section by filling it in but not laying the tracks.

W: Mm-hmm. They just get it ready.

C: Just get it ready, yes. And that's what they had done at Sugarloaf before we moved in there and that's why this colored dining room was there and these little colored shacks were there. Well, now, as I say, that storm finally subsided and we all got back into natural living once again. You want to--  
[audio cuts off]

W: Alright. Are we on?

C: Okay. So now, the gathering of sponges to plant had to be done not during the hot summer months because the sponges would die in the hot warm weather after they were pulled off the bottom before they could be cut up into smaller sponges and planted. So, along in October-- no, November or December, we sent two schooners-- two small schooners up around Marathon and that at that time was where most of all of the sponges that were picked--

W: Natural?

C: --were growing. The natural sponges. The ones further down through the keys had been pretty much cleaned out and the Key West spongers would mostly all go up there in their boats-- live up onboard their boats and they would gather the sponges. They would let their sponges of course die because they wanted to--

W: They didn't replenish.

C: No. But with us, we had wells built in a lot of the dinghies. We had-- maybe each dinghy would have two wells in it, enough to hold maybe, oh, twenty or thirty sponges. And twice a week, we would send our launches up to the sponge grounds.

W: And this would be in the bay?

C: This would be right there in the bay around Marathon and all up and down there until you got up to the keys. And we would cut them up right up there and fasten them to some slats- a whole tray of slats- and we would fasten them with this aluminum wire through these slats in this tray. And then we had a long thing like a-- oh, like a long wooden torpedo and these slats would fit into it in the water and we would then cut all the sponges that they had in their boats into these small pieces, fasten them on to these slats--

W: So they'd stay submerged, right?

C: So they'd stay submerged and put the slats down in the water in this long tube- wooden tube- and when we finished all that they'd gotten, then we would hook that on to our launch and the launch would then go back to Sugarloaf. Three or four days later, another boat would go on up so that we would get up there about twice a week to be sure to get what they had before it spoiled or died. Now, when we would get those sponges back to Sugarloaf, then the very first day that the weather would let us- and it was nearly always okay- we would then plant them, as I said, on these concrete plates or disks and leave them there until they would mature.

W: How long did it take them to mature?

C: Well, the government thought it would take about four years, but we found out it took more like five or six before they got to be a nice, marketable size that you could sell in a drug store, you know, for your bath and so forth. Now, that would go on until along about March or April and then by that time, the waters were getting warm and we could call the schooners back and they would anchor right there just outside of Sugarloaf-- one of them could come inside, the other one was a little too large and it would anchor at the mouth of the entrance into Sugarloaf. And we kept a track, of course, everyday of how many sponges we would plant and so on and so forth, and then the whole system dies down. And then in the summertime-- spring and the summer and early fall, we would not have so many men working for us, but those that did work, why, we used them for planting sisal and for planting lime trees and doing odd

jobs getting ready for the next year. Now, let me see where we are. Oh. Now, we made those concrete disks ourselves with the cement and the gravel and we made them in a disk house. And that disk house was right where there's a dining room and a group of homes when you first land on Sugarloaf- right up the bend of the-- uh, huh, and we had a disk house right there. Well anyhow, in 1912, we all got the news of course, that Flagler was coming down on the first through train that would go all the way through without stopping here and there and everywhere else until a section was built. So we decorated that and I have a picture of that on this little thing that I showed you and there is the red, white, and blue banners, and so forth and--

W: On your disk house?

C: On the disk house, showing our celebration. And when we got word that Flagler was coming. Of course, we all rushed over there and as the train pulled by slowly, we all waved and there was Flagler- I saw him- sitting there waving back to us. Then the train went on into Key West and that's when they had their big celebration in Key West, but we also celebrated the first train to arrive and go through. Now, that train went through before the railroad was really finished to the point of where it later became because they wanted to get it through fast, but some of these concrete and cement places going over stretches of water were not finished yet. So the railroad went ahead and they built wooden piling track kind-of around where the (real one?) went. And one day, sure enough, here a tug-boat comes in towing one of these men's boathouses. It would have maybe 100 or 200 men working and they kept them and slept them and ate them on these bunkhouses. And they tied this bunkhouse up to-- just before you would get to that eating place on Sugarloaf, there's a little bridge where the water goes from one bay into another one and they tied that bunk house up there because they were building a wooden piling across this little opening. Well, when I landed in Sugarloaf about a few months after I got there, the only person of authority was that we had one colored man and he kind of acted as boss around there, but they thought they'd better have a deputy sheriff. So I was appointed deputy sheriff and never had to do anything until this boat came in there and one day, somebody came running over from the boat saying, "My God, the man's killed another man! Come on over and get him!" So, that was up to me.

W: Where was the sheriff? Or was this-- you were it?

C: I was deputy sheriff, I was the deputy sheriff. So, I had to over and this guy was down there in the bunkhouse and here was this guy he'd killed laying right there in the bunk right along side of him. So fortunately, I took a pistol- a revolver- right along with me so when I got over there, I pulled the gun on him and I said, "Mister, I'm the deputy sheriff and you're under arrest." Well, you know, he didn't object at all.

W: [laughs] Good thing.

C: Good thing for me.  
[both laugh]

C: But he was crazy, that's what was the matter with him; he was a crazy drunk. So I took him back over to our settlement and we had a little stable at that time because we had two horses. And by the way, one of those horses, my father had bought from your grandfather- Joe's father.

W: Joe's father.

C: Uh-huh. It was a saddle horse and Joe's father-- it was a nice horse and one stall in that stable was for his horse. So anyhow, we had no place to lock this guy up, the only place we would lock him up was the stable because we couldn't take him to Key West 'til the next train came along and that was several hours later on. So anyhow, we locked him up in the stable and when the train came along, fortunately, I had handcuffs that they furnished me with so we handcuffed the guy and I took him on the train and I took him down to Key West handcuffed, and when I got there then I took him over to the county jail and turned him over to the sheriff.

W: How often did the train come through?

C: The trains would come through at the beginning about once a day and then later on, there would be about two trains a day.

W: Oh.

C: Uh-huh. And they would stop at our place if we flagged them down, we had the flag, it was not a-- it was a no-stop unless it was flagged or unless somebody was on the train that they wanted to get off at Chase and that happened one night after I got married. You know, I married a Key West girl- Hattie Johnson. And, oh, it was one time about six months-- I was married in 1913. And about six months after we were married, she went into Key West one time on a visit and she said she would be out on a certain evening on the night train. The night train would leave Key West about seven or eight or nine o'clock at night and get up to Sugarloaf about nine o'clock at night. Well anyhow, I went over to meet the train and the train came and damn, it didn't stop! Went right on through. Right on through.

W: [chuckles] With your wife?

C: Well, I didn't know. I said, "Well, she must have decided she wasn't coming, but at least she should have let me know." So anyhow, I turned back around and walked to my home-- my home has since burned down, it isn't there anymore. It was a nice concrete block house. So I turned around and walked back home. So anyhow, what happened was after the train went through Sugarloaf, she notified the conductor, "My God, my husband is waiting for me!" And she had either Pricilla or Harriet with her as a little child. I think it was Harriet-- yes, it was Harriet. And so, they stopped the train at-- where the camp was- the camp for the working men- it was right on the very end of Sugarloaf. As you're coming south, the very first--

W: Now, they call them 'Upper' and 'Lower' Sugarloaf now.

C: Yeah, well, this was Upper Sugarloaf. So they stopped the train there and the engineer who was in charge of that particular group of buildings, he was a very good man and a very good friend of ours so he told the conductor of the train, "Well, you let them off and I'll take them back to Sugarloaf in a hand car."

W: Oh! [chuckles]

C: So as I say, I went back to the house and I was feeling pretty bad. And anyhow, I remember that one of the things I promised Hattie when we got married was that I'd quit smoking cigars. So, we went to Havana on our honeymoon and I bought a box of cigars when I was over there to hand out to friends of mine and I felt so upset and so mad and everything, I said "Damn. I'm going to smoke a cigar." So I sat down and smoked a cigar. Well, about fifteen minutes I saw some lanterns coming down the road from the railroad tracks, see? And I said, "I wonder what this is. This is unusual for anything like this to happen." So I stepped out on the porch and sure enough, there was Hattie with Harriet with the--

W: Catching you with the cigar?

C: Catching me with the cigar. [laughs]  
[audio cuts off]

C: Ready? Now, what was our amusement in a place like that? Well, as I say, we had plenty of daylight time and in order to have even more daylight time, we had our own time down there. Daylight savings time was not in existence in this country at that time. That only come in the last several years, but we had our own and that was that year round, we set our clocks one hour ahead of time. But in the summer from about June 'til October, we set our clocks two hours ahead of time. Consequently, we had plenty of day time after our working days was over and we could take a bath or a shower and then after dinner, we could play tennis and take another (nap?) and still be able to get to bed before dark. And it was a very nice way to do it. It was my father's idea and we all enjoyed it. Now, as I say, tennis was one of the main thing that we had to do there because, well, there was nothing else except fishing and some of them loved to fish, I never cared much about fishing but some of them did. But anyhow, we used to play quite a lot of tennis and we finally found out that at Marathon- which was the headquarters of the building of the extension of the railroad- there were a group of young engineers- young college fellas that had just gotten out of college. They were young engineers and there were about six or eight of them and they played tennis up there- they had a tennis court- and the only thing in Marathon at that time was about three big bunkhouses for the help and a home for the white people and this tennis court. Nothing else at all- not another person lived there or no houses, no stores, no nothing.

W: A big dock at Knight's Key, though?

C: At Knight's Key, yeah. At Knight's Key, there was a dock, ran out into the ocean on the ocean-side. Well, we'd finally found out that these young fellas there played (?) tennis and so we finally got so that we used to exchange

dates. We'd go up there for a weekend, stay with them, play tennis, and have a good time. And maybe a couple of weeks or three weeks, they'd come down to Chase and do the same thing down there.

W: And what was their job there? They were the civil engineers?

C: They were young civil engineers doing-- in charge of different sections of what to do to build the railroad. They were very fine group of boys. Now, everything went along that-- pretty much that way and everything until 1914. And in 1914, the sponges were just about getting ready-- not quite ready yet to pick and send north, it needed about another year. And the money was getting low, so my father and his brother, they decided to go back over to England and raise some more money so as to carry on the thing for another year, and they went over there. Well, while they were there and they had made the arrangements for the money to be sent over, the First World War broke out over in Europe. The minute that war broke out, everything was clamped down in England, no more loans, no more money--

W: No money for sponges.

C: -- no more money for anything outside of England. And my father and his brother, they were held over there for about two or three months until they could get back. Well, when they got back, we found out that we could shut down everything except keep the place up. But as far as planting any sponges or doing anything like that, we only had about enough money for about another year and we didn't know when any more money was coming in. So they shut down the sponge farm.

W: And what happened to all the slave help? Or the Negroes? They weren't slaves--

C: Oh no, no. Well, they all went back to Key West or the Bahamas. And there were plenty of jobs for them because war had broken out and the United States was getting ready to ship things over. So, it got down to a point where it was just my father and his family and Hattie and me and a white boy to run the boats. We laid the boats up and-- all but one, and neither my father nor I were an engineer, so kept one white man. So, I didn't know what to do. So, the thought struck me, why not get into the cigar business in Key West by doing a mail-order business? Of course, I had no connections with wholesalers throughout the country but I thought maybe I could work up a mail-order cigar business. So, I contacted a very nice man in Key West who-- he had something to do with a cigar place. And I talked the matter over with Mr. Allen, who was the president of the Key West First National Bank, and he suggested that he would give me book that showed the names of all the banks in the United States and in there would be the names of the presidents, the vice presidents, and so on and so forth. And he thought I was getting out a circular to send and he thought that they would be a good group to send things to and maybe get their business. So I had this thing printed and it was beautiful. I had a copy until recently and I can't find it because it was beautiful lovely circular that showed these cigars just in a magnificent-- and I got this thing up, had it printed in Chicago- a very fine firm up there- and I went into the cigar business. Now, by that time, we had a post office in Chase; we had our own post office and it was under the name of not Sugarloaf, but Chase. So, what I would do, I would get the cigars in Key West, maybe I'd get fifty boxes at a time or something, bring them up to Key-- up to Sugarloaf, and I would mail them from there, but when I would stamp the stamps by mail, I would just stamp it so that the stamp was obliterated but it didn't show the name of Chase on it, it just showed that the stamp had been stamped and they would think that they came right directly from Key West because Key West at that time was known throughout the United States as the finest cigar place in the United States. So, I went into that business in along about 1915 and it worked alright for awhile but I knew nothing about making cigars and finally, the people that were making them for me started cutting down on the quality and I didn't know it, so I began to get a lot of cigars returned to me, "No good. No good. No good." So finally in 1916- in the very early part of 1916- I decided I'd better get out of that business, so I got out of it. So, I decided to move to Key West- move to Key West and find something to do in Key West. Well, I'd gotten a letter from an uncle of mine in Chicago and the Chevrolet automobile had just started putting out their Chevrolet's and they were evidently making quite a hit and people were liking them. So he wrote and told me all about this wonderful little Chevrolet that he had bought. So I went into Key West and there was no Chevrolet in Key West. Nobody had seen or heard of a Chevrolet. So I thought, "Well, now here is my chance to get a Chevrolet at cost." I didn't think anything about the agency. I'd get it at cost by telling them that I want-- there was no Chevrolet in Key West and if I could get one for cost and I would show the people in Key West. So, pretty soon, three or four-- Hattie and I moved into Key West and I was looking around for something to do. I went to work for Ike (Glokowski?).

W: Oh.

C: Uh-huh, keep the-- straightening out his books. He had some guy who was cheating on him- doing some gambling- and Ike thought there was something wrong there in the collections. So, I went to work in his furniture store

on Fleming Street- it isn't there anymore. So, a couple of weeks and in comes this man from Atlanta, he was with the Chevrolet agent for that section. So he looked me up and he said, "Okay, we'll give you the agency, you get the car but," he says, "you've got to buy three cars. You can't have the agency unless you buy three cars right now." Well, I didn't have any money to buy three cars so I said, "Well, have you have some pictures of the cars so I can show people?" And he said, "Yes," so he gave me some pictures. So I said, "Okay, send me the three cars." So I went all around with these pictures before the cars came there so see if I could sell the cars. Well, they looked nice, you know, and at that time, the Chevrolet was the only car that you could step your foot on the button and it started automatically.

W: Oh, self-starting.

C: The old Fords you had to grind them. So anyhow, I got two of the cars sold- one to the iceman and one to some other fella, I forgot. So, the cars came in down the railroad in a big boxcar and they notified me they were there, so I went over and I'd forgotten who the agent's name was but anyhow I said, "Harry, I've come over to get my car." And I said, "Here's the money." He says, "You only got enough money for one car." I said, "Yeah, I only want--" He says, "No, this is come what's called bill of lading attached." He said, "You've got to pay for all three of those cars before you can get them out of the boxcar" I said, "Harry, I haven't got enough money. I only got enough for one." So we finally cooked up a deal and this is absolutely against the rules, he'd of gotten fired if they'd known about it.  
[audio cuts off]

C: So anyhow, we worked out a deal and I gave him enough money for one car and I got the car out. Well, I knew nothing about automobiles, not a thing, but your grandfather Joe Whalton, he was an expert on automobiles; he'd had an automobile of his own. So he got the car out of the boxcar for me and put it together and got it started and I went around to the iceman and I had to teach him how to drive because nearly everybody back in those days-- well, everybody that I ever sold a car to, you had to teach them because people-- very few people knew anything about automobiles. So I sold him the car, got enough money to get the next one, and that's the way I got going. And I had that agency- that was in 1916- and I think I sold twelve automobiles in the next year in Key West. Well anyhow, when I lived in New York City before I ever came down here to Florida, I belonged to the New York Naval Militia. Just like an ordinary Militia only this was Naval Militia and I was only an ordinary sailor on it. But anyhow, I had had six years of military school and I learned a little bit about military so I-- and when I came down to Key West [clears throat] to go into this automobile business, they had a Naval Militia outfit there that they were just organizing and getting going. So, I could feel and there were a lot of people who could feel that there was a war coming on by 1916. See, the buildup had been going on in Europe then for two years. So, they offered me a job as an ensign if I could-- if I would join them. So I joined up as an ensign and then the war broke out in March, I think, of 1917 and I went off to the war and I left my agency with Joe Whalton and that's how I happened to get in and get out of the automobile business in Key West. But I sold twelve cars there in a year and things were booming in Key West, the war was on in Europe and things were booming and I went off to the war.  
[audio cuts off]

C: You know, [clears throat] Hattie was-- she was quite a sport, quite a gal, and she played tennis and everything and I had a canoe and in addition to paddling, it was also a sailing canoe- it had a place for a sail, a mast up in the fore part of it. So, we did a lot of funny, foolish things. Did I tell (?) about the walk to Key West, did I mention that to you?

W: No, no.

C: Well, we did a lot of silly things. One day we said, "Let's walk to Key West." Key West, eighteen miles on the railroad track and it isn't like walking on a nice smooth dirt road or a cement sidewalk, you have to walk the ties and they're all-- neither of them-- there's no uniformity of distances between them. So we said, "Okay, we'll walk. We'll walk to Key West." So we started out [laughs] and my gosh, there we went and we walked the whole eighteen miles in the hot sun and we landed there and we were just as good as if we had only walked for about eighteen blocks. Oh, she was some gal. Well another time, we had this canoe and as I say, we used to sail in it. So we said, "Let's sail to Miami. Let's sail in the canoe to Miami." So, we said, "Okay, we'll sail to Miami." So, we loaded up a lot of provisions and we had a tent- a little tent that you could-- very lightweight and just enough for two people to get under- and cots, folding cots. So, one day, oh, I guess it was around--  
[audio cuts off]

**END OF INTERVIEW**