

# Pioneer Cemetery

by Josephine Johnson

What was known as Pinder Cemetery<sup>1</sup> in Islamorada, Florida, is sequestered among Bahamian-style villas, now part of Cheeca Lodge resort at mile marker 82, a run of exquisite coastline traditionally visited by presidents. Cheeca Lodge's own small history is important to this study because the land on which it is built once belonged to pioneer Conch settlers. In fact, it was in December, 1880, that Richard Pinder paid a balance of \$3.27 required by law for his beachfront property. Pinder had arrived first in Key West from Green Turtle Key in the Bahamas in the 1850s. Before coming to Islamorada he stopped at Indian Key and, with his two sons Adolphus and Cephas, helped to construct Alligator Reef Lighthouse. By April 26, 1883, Richard Pinder had homesteaded 130 acres and by 1890, had planted the land with limes, pineapples and tomatoes.<sup>2</sup>

In 1883, when President Chester A. Arthur deeded him his land "To Have and To Hold . . . unto the said Richard Pinder and to his heirs and assigns forever," (because of a default in the payment of taxes by his descendants in 1932) Pinder would have thought it improbable that the land would someday belong to Florida developer Hugh M. Matheson. The 1862 Homestead Act exempted homesteads from attachment for debt.<sup>3</sup>

---

Josephine Johnson, Ph.D. is professor of speech communications at the University of Miami and was instrumental in saving the Pioneer Cemetery.

Cephas Pinder acquired another 148.46/100 acres for \$3.72 in January 1883, after filing on November 19, 1880. Through the first decade of the next century, legal documents bear witness to family disputes regarding title and division of land to heirs.

A Warranty Deed filed June 27, 1917, shows R.W. Carter, a single man of Lawrence, Kansas, conveying Pinder heirs' family land to the Biscayne Company, whose President was William J. Matheson. In September, 1925, Matheson conveyed it to his son, Hugh M. Matheson. Various Quit Claim Deeds from Pinder descendants occurred throughout 1933. Most important is a Quit Claim Deed dated April 11, 1914, and filed on April 23, between R.W. Carter and Preston B. Pinder, Jerome B. Pinder, and William H. Parker, as Trustees of the Matecumbe Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Carter conveyed part of Lot 2, Section 32, T. 63, S.R. 37E. "In trust, that all said premises shall be used, kept, maintained, and disposed of as a place of divine worship for the use of the ministry and membership of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. . . . Said lot having on it the present church building and burial ground."<sup>4</sup>

Vick's Chemical Company, owned by two Richardson families, purchased the acres surrounding the graveyard and its church from Hugh Matheson in 1937 and erected a two and one half-story building there. On the advice of Bernard Russell, caretaker, Leslie M. Stratton bought the land after World War II. In 1946, Clara May Downey, owner of the fashionable Olney Inn in Olney, Maryland, became the owner of the Richardson building and purchased an additional 14 acres from Stratton to build the Olney Inn of Islamorada. Carl and Cynthia Twitchell, heirs to the A and P grocery chain, bought it and named it Cheeca. Following this tenure, Herb Fischbach of Simplicity Patterns became the inn-keeper before selling to George F. Allen who was in partnership with Carl Navarre, a Chicago Coca-Cola bottler.<sup>5</sup> A letter from Allen written on December 10, 1987, brought attention to the then named Pinder cemetery.

When I purchased Cheeca Lodge it was closed and I had to reopen it. I went to the family whose ancestors are buried in the cemetery because my bank did not like the idea of having a cemetery along the beach of a luxury resort. I met with the gentleman who managed People's [Public] Gas adjacent to Cheeca Lodge [Franklin (Dick) Parker], and he told me the story of. . . the 1935 hurricane. The family had a two story wood frame house in Islamorada, and when the wind became

very strong his mother and father tied all eight [10] children to a brass [iron] bed on the second floor of the house. The wind hit the house and the second floor was blown loose and into the gulf like a raft, and the children were saved. Their mother and father were drowned and buried along the beach [they are buried in the cemetery but did not die in the hurricane]. I immediately forgot about plans to close the cemetery . . . it is an important part of local history and folklore.<sup>6</sup>

(Pioneer descendant Dick Parker had told his story to Allen with slight hyperbole in order to make certain that the remains of his ancestors, unlike the Indians, would not one day be removed to make way for yet another building site.)<sup>7</sup>

Completing the record of what is now known as Cheeca Lodge includes the fact that Carl Navarre became sole owner in 1977 before selling latterly to the Chicago Coastal Hotel Group. Mrs. Navarre, after her husband's death, is presently associated with this organization, that has owned Cheeca since 1988.<sup>8</sup>

It is within this context that land rights had to be assessed<sup>9</sup> and relationships built. Resort owners, pioneer descendants and local supporters would all need to agree that the old graveyard should be saved and acknowledged as a historical site.

The Russell family, to which Bernard Russell belongs, pioneered before the Pinders. Richard H. Russell arrived from the Bahamas in 1837 or 1838 to begin his new life in Key Vaca (Marathon) where he lived until coming to Upper Matecumbe (Islamorada) in 1854.<sup>10</sup> Russell requested his land grant in 1882 but died before it was granted to his wife Mary Ann on March 14, 1883. Mary Ann Russell homesteaded her 163 acres with sons John Henry and James. Third in a triumverate of original Conch families was William H. Parker (ancestor to Dick Parker): who homesteaded about 1898.

All three pioneer families were Methodists:<sup>11</sup> all of the men served as lay preachers. Their hard lives included clearing the land "inch by inch," (an important reminder from Bernard Russell) farming, fishing and building homes for their large progeny. Their descendants became first post-master,<sup>12</sup> first police chief, first filling-station owner, the first to establish a marine dock, a restaurant, and a chicken farm. They, like their parents and grandparents before them, fought the heat in a tropical jungle plagued by mosquitoes in order to plant the land and to fish while protecting the bounty of the ocean.

Work and play were intermingled in an exchange of labor with whomever required assistance to build a homestead. There are stories about “mud-throwing” being a good children’s game and recollections of someone playing a harmonica and beating a small drum.<sup>13</sup> When ill (a lack of medical attention often delivered victims to too young a death), “you tended yourself . . . used kerosene for a bad nail and beat your foot with a board.”<sup>14</sup> Aloe, and later on, condensed milk were used for dangerous burns. “Terrible” Dick Parker remembers that for a prophylactic, the “black draught cleaned you out once a year.”<sup>15</sup>

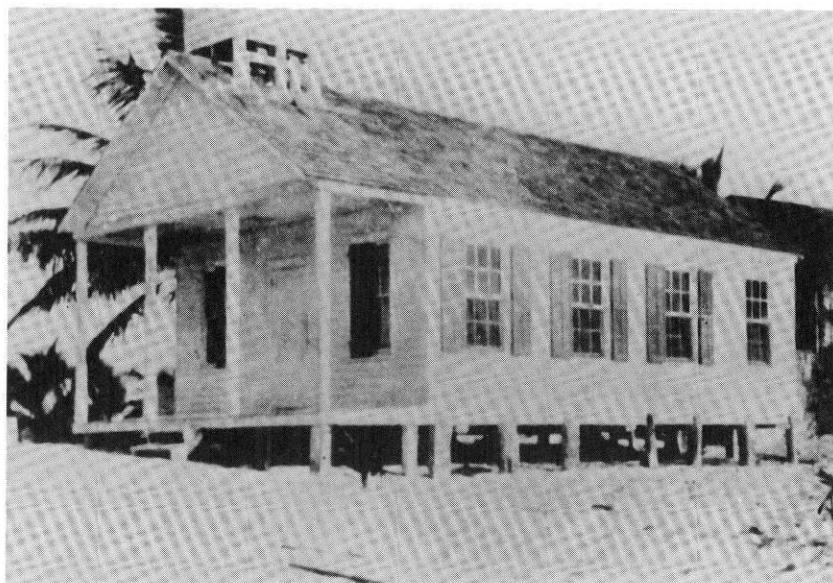
What these sturdy pioneers wished for and lacked above all else in the 1800s was a house of worship to express their faith and gratitude for hard new lives, and the gifts of abundant nature and much goodness of family (they were advised by elders to marry among their own settlers). Richard Pinder organized a Sunday school around 1891 and in 1894 oversaw the building of a frame church north of what became Pinder graveyard. The wood church was a convenient sail for the Russells who lived at the “East End” of the key, and for the Pinders who occupied the center of the island. Later on, it also served the Parkers who homesteaded the “West End.” In 1959, Joseph Pinder attempted to preserve the oral history of these beginnings in a written document about the church. His recollections are handed down from his father, Preston Brooks Pinder, who was Richard Pinder’s grandson.

Preston Pinder, my father, took over the responsibility of that church in [1897] and he preached and kept this little church going for about twenty years. He was Superintendent of the Church School for fifty-five years. He worked under many difficulties but never one time did he become discouraged. He always tithed and when I was a boy if he earned six hundred dollars per year he had a good year. He raised a family of six children. . . . But good years or bad years he put ten cents of ever dollar he earned into the church fund.<sup>16</sup>

(In the year this was written, Preston Pinder’s six children lived to beget him 12 grandchildren, 23 great-grandchildren and one great-great-grandchild.)

Removal of the church from its original site to where, until 1935, it stood close to the graveyard, occurred around the turn of, or slightly later into the new century. Pioneer descendants say that the church was set upon two large rafts and brought up to the present Cheeca Lodge site during a flood tide.<sup>17</sup> As time progressed, members of the three pioneer

families served as Sunday school teachers and lay preachers. (Visiting pastors to the church are partially listed in Appendix II.)



**Original frame church built in 1894 and brought from farther north up the coast on a raft to its position next to Pioneer Cemetery. It was destroyed in 1935 except for the church bell discovered 11 miles away on Rabbit Key. Reprint courtesy of Dick Parker.**

The legal document of April 11, 1914 (referred to on page 28), shows that a tract of land was deeded to Preston B. Pinder, K. Jerome B. Pinder and William H. Parker, as Trustees of the Matecumbe Methodist Episcopal Church, South, “for school purposes, adjoining said church lot on the east.” A wooden structure, however, once stood in this position after 1900. After 1914, a coral-rock schoolhouse served the key until its destruction with the church during the 1935 hurricane. In 1925, documents record that the schoolhouse, the church site and the graveyard were part of the property that suffered a default in taxes. It was also the year that Hugh Matheson bequeathed the property back to the church in perpetuity. The land size of the bequest changed considerably, it must appear, when the church and the school house were rebuilt after 1935 on land between the old U.S. 1. and the new Overseas Highway (that replaced Henry Flagler’s Florida East Coast Railway).

Burial for the pioneer families had been simple enough from the time the church came to rest at its Cheeca site. Wooden coffins were sometimes set in the sand without an identifying marker or headstone. Often when a pipe was inserted to test the sand "right to a six-foot depth" for a new grave, Bernard Russell remembers, it went through rotted wood, once an enclosure for a now-unremembered corpse. Bernard Russell, once a skipper for the Vick's schooner, grave-digger and caretaker, and Dick Parker both admit there must be well over a third of the cemetery's buried who no one will ever be able to recall. Early records were not kept and church journals that might have noted dates of birth and death (Elders were admittedly less than precise in their journal keeping), were destroyed in the storm of '35. Family papers, Bibles and prayer books that could have given evidence, were lost as well. Pioneers sometimes went south to Key West to give birth, if the wind was quick enough. But the fire that swept that city in the late 1800s eliminated records too. Therefore at the onset of this inquiry, the names of only 11 Conch burials in Pinder graveyard were known.

Tucked away as it is, Conch descendants seldom ventured into Cheeca Lodge to visit (right-of-way to the resort on the west perimeter of the property was agreed upon by Cheeca owners for church access to the graveyard), or to bring flowers to their dead. Nor might a casual tourist have noticed the few headstones or edges of unmarked concrete crypts; nor ever know how that poetic place symbolizes the great faith and determination of spirit of those buried there. It may be fitting that Preston Pinder (1875-1963) was the last to be buried in the sand. After 1963, prompted by the ravages of hurricane "Donna" in 1960, church Elders decided that further storm damage made burial impractical. (Or that suasion from various resort owners had convinced the church that further burials might cause pressure to relinquish the land.) The most photographed gravesite is of the marble angel that adorns the grave of Jerome (Brammy) Pinder's daughter, Etta Delores,<sup>18</sup> on which is written:

This lovely but so young so fair  
 Called hence to early doom  
 Just called to show how sweet a flower  
 In Paradise would bloom

Fifteen year-old Etta Delores Pinder died of acute appendicitis (or a "brain tumor," says another) because there were no doctors or medical





**Angel before 1935 hurricane. Photo courtesy of Etta Sweeting.**

facilities on the key. Other remaining headstones bear witness to “Our Daddy,” Edney B. Parker 1887-1961, and “Our Mama,” Edna M. Parker 1893-1960 (parents of Dick Parker). Edna was Mrs. Bernard Russell’s (née Pinder) father’s sister and daughter of (Adolphus) Dolphus Pinder. Edney Parker is credited with assisting the government to

capture smugglers, in contrast to his own father's habits of being a "rum-runner."

Mae McManus 1883-1960, lies in the graveyard too because, Bernard Russell says, she was the "mother of a daughter who married an old Conch." Jerome (Brammy) Pinder set three more concrete crypts in the sand near his daughter Etta Delores. One is surely for his first wife Ella: the second for his second wife Mamie, who was trapped for eight hours during the hurricane of '35. She was found alive but buried by October of that year. Family say that a third unmarked crypt was prepared by Brammy for his third wife, but she was buried in Homestead. (A complete list of known burials appears in Appendix 1.)

By June, 1933, there were 92 pioneer family members belonging to the Matecumbe Methodist Church. When the Florida Methodist Annual Conference met in June 1935, it noted an increase of membership to 112. But in 1936, the number was only 49 because on Labor Day, September 2, 1935, a hurricane hit the key with winds estimated between 200 to 250 miles an hour destroying Matecumbe with an 18 ft. tidal wave.<sup>19</sup> Clocks stopped ticking at 8:23 p.m., the barometer measured the lowest ever recorded in the western hemisphere (there were readings of 26.36 or 27.35 inches) and "life was lived by the barometer," Russell remembers. The Russell family house blew apart in the falling pressure and Edna and Edney Parker's children did indeed lie strapped to a mattress when it floated like a raft on water that covered the entire key from bay to ocean. A cousin of Bernard Russell was washed 40 miles away to the mainland where she miraculously crawled onto the sand with her baby, only to later die from overexposure. In all, the Russell family lost more than 50 of its clan.<sup>20</sup>

Marjorie Stoneman Douglas movingly described the terror of that hurricane in a fictionalized story, "September—Remember."<sup>21</sup>

The racing waves caught them high above their waists. They clung to one another, a small mass of human life, leaning, groping, stumbling for a foothold on the uncertain earth. Water, rain or sea, choked them, smashed at them, dragged them down, battered at their breathless bodies.

But it was far worse than that. All personal and business properties were totally destroyed with the massive loss of life. The pioneer church and coral-rock schoolhouse were not spared either, although the church bell was later discovered high and dry 11 miles away on Rabbit Key.



The minister and his wife who lived in the parsonage on Pinder Street<sup>22</sup> were killed and the corporation executives who lived in extravagant, oceanfront properties met the same fate.<sup>23</sup> Florida East Coast railway tracks, looked like “twisted pretzel,” Russell remembers. The surviving “Bonus March” veterans from the First World War who were among a group of 684<sup>24</sup> in WPA camps (one on Windley Key and two on Lower Matecumbe) working on new bridges for the present highway. They later said that they had seen nothing in Europe to compare with the sight and smell of nature’s carnage in Islamorada.

There was little refrigeration and no burial facilities (kerosene lamps were used before electricity was generally available to the key in the 1940s) so that decaying corpses, estimated upwards to 1000 deaths<sup>25</sup> were identified, if possible, before mass cremations. Funeral pyres could be seen belching black smoke all over Matecumbe and in the surrounding lesser islands following that drear September 2nd. The Veterans Storm Relief, under the auspices of Lt. Commander William H. Green, attempted to record the dead on a government map identifying cremation or burial sites. On that map, only 164 civilians could be recognized for identification, but over five decades later, remains are still found under rubble or in the undergrowth. Whether pioneer descendants or veterans, ashes are now placed in a communal burial crypt, constructed in 1937, where an opening was left for adding additional ashes. The crypt was built beneath an Art-Deco concrete relief, possibly the work of an artist working for the Works Progress Administration of the “New Deal,”<sup>26</sup> who has visually reconstructed the storm-blown palms and churning waves. Dedicated on November 14, 1937,<sup>27</sup> the commemoration reads “To The Memory of The Civilians and War Veterans Whose Lives Were Lost In The Hurricane of September Second, 1935.”<sup>28</sup>

The hurricane of 1935 ravaged the Pinder cemetery (as it did again in 1960). The angel guarding Etta Delores Pinder was uprooted and blown to the old highway; lesser headstones completely disappeared, and lovingly cared-for landscaping was torn from the sand.

Over a period of 15 months, Bernard Russell, Franklin Parker, and information from the government map, led me to the identification of 28 known burials in the old Pinder graveyard. Among the newly identified are Kasper Sweeting (the Sweetings married Parkers), whose father, Norman Sweeting, died in his automobile during the 1935 hurricane and was cremated and buried on Barnes Key. “Little Baby Dennis” (now remembered by Bernard Russell, and so is “Little Baby

Delaisse”), whose mother gave birth to him during hurricane “Donna,” lived only for a day. Frank H. Lowe, two-years-old, was cremated after the storm of ’35 and his ashes, according to the government map, were placed in Pinder cemetery, probably alongside Mrs. Jerome B. Pinder when she was buried in October. There are more Pinders and Parkers identified and a Brycie Fine—an old fisherman from Key West without family who received a charity burial, Bernard Russell says, before 1935. Evelyn Faye T. Woods, wife of Conch Robert Woods, also shares the Pinder family burial ground.<sup>29</sup> Bernard Russell had to persuade Mr. Woods to part with his wife’s headstone, which he kept in his house, and place it on her grave.

Fortunately for this research, Bernard Russell is blessed with good memory; moreover, he was a living witness to modern burials, for he had dug many a grave. His mind’s eye reconstructed names and approximate positions of burial in the sand. Then he prepared a rough drawing before placing new wood markers in the cemetery. These were photographed before vandals uprooted the new markers. After this, a decision was made to place one large domestic granite headstone in the sand that would list only names of burials otherwise unidentified.<sup>30</sup>



**Wooden markers re-established burial sites. Notice angel with broken wing. Photo courtesy of Chris Pearson, Cheeca Lodge.**

Additionally, it seemed imperative to also add a historical plaque.<sup>31</sup> Thus, on June 26, 1990, descendants of pioneers, contributors to the project, Reverend Ray Honaker, present pastor to the First Methodist Church of Matecumbe, initiator of the project, Josephine Johnson, and representatives from the Historical Association of Southern Florida, gathered on the white sand at Cheeca Lodge to commemorate what the Russells, the Pinders and the Parkers now agreed should be called Pioneer Cemetery. The narration on the plaque reads:

This cemetery memorializes the determination and vision of over 50 pioneer Anglo-Bahamian Conchs who labored to settle and organize the first community on Matecumbe Key. Descendants of three pioneer families, the Russells who homesteaded in 1854, the Pinders in 1873, and the Parkers in 1898, are buried on this land. Deeded to Richard Pinder on January 20, 1883, by President Chester A. Arthur, the land now is the property of the Matecumbe United Methodist Church. North and adjacent to the cemetery lay the first church on the key, built in 1884, and transported to this site by raft ca. 1890. Next to it the first two-room frame schoolhouse was built ca. 1900, and later replaced by a coral-rock building. A raging hurricane struck Islamorada on Labor Day in 1935, killing 50 members of the Russell family alone. The storm also destroyed the church, the schoolhouse and the "Millionaires' Row" of beachfront homes adjacent to this property. The survivors' descendants rebuilt their homes, a new church and a school west of this site and east of Henry Flagler's Overseas Railway, now U.S. 1.

The plaque is "sponsored by Cheeca Lodge in cooperation with the Historical Association of Southern Florida." (Note years 1884 and 1890 differ to years in narration due to lack of reconciliation.)

A white fence now sequesters the cemetery on four sides. New palm trees, silver button-woods, and other species that can root in the sand and find their way down to the ocean water to survive, have been planted.<sup>32</sup> Content that restoration is accomplished, Bernard Russell can be seen many evenings looking out across the ocean after he has raked the sand in the cemetery. He had always hoped to be buried next to his father, John A. Russell. Bernard Russell is the only Russell escaping the 1935 hurricane who is not buried in the Russell cemetery. "There could be no more perfect resting place," he says quietly, standing in that idyllic geography.



**Dr. Josephine Johnson, with Mr. and Mrs. Bernard Russell née Pinder at the cemetery dedication in June, 1990. Photo courtesy of Pam Sheldon.**

And often standing sentry nearby is a great white egret Cheeca Lodge has named "Sam."<sup>33</sup> Not unlike W. B. Yeat's bird in his play *Calvary*, the bird stands

Motionless under the moon beam,  
Up to his feathers in the stream;  
Although fish leap, the white heron  
Shivers in a dumbfounded dream<sup>34</sup>

Perhaps, in Sam's case, the dream is of turtles coming from the sea to lay their eggs under the old wooden church's pilings, and of pelicans turned into guardians on every piece of flotsam that floated by from some old galleon. But now in the midst of the "Sports Fishing Capital of the World," tourists walking by Pioneer Cemetery learn something of the ways and mores of another time.

## Appendix 1

### Pioneer Cemetery Burials

\* 1. Betty- Jo Delaisse: b. March 31, 1962, d. April 1, 1962. Born on stretcher during hurricane "Donna." Mr. Bernard Russell was present during birth.

\* 2. Willard Preston Dennis, Jr: Still-born.

\* 3. Brice (Brycie) Fine: b. Key West, d. ca. 1933. No family: a commercial fisherman: lived in boat house: m. Jimmy Wood's aunt.

\* 4. Johnson: d. before 1935. Young daughter of Rufus Johnson. Rufus m. Mrs. Bernard Russell's father's sister Sally in 1920s. Sally came from old Key West family. Sally is Dick Parker's mother's oldest sister. Rufus is mentioned in *The Key West Citizen* (September 7, 1935):1.

\* 5. Frank H. Lowe: 2 years old: cremated at Matecumbe #10 (data taken from government map): ashes probably buried in Mamie Pinder's crypt on October 10, 1935.

6. Mae McManus:1889-1963: cremated: mother of daughter who m. "an old Conch."

7. Amy Parker: b. May 20, 1916, d. March 28, 1958: wife of W. H. Parker, Sr.

\* 8. Edith Parker: sister to William Parker, Jr.: daughter of Milton Parker.

9. Edna M. Parker: 1893-1960: Dick Parker's mother: Mrs. Bernard Russell's father's sister: née Pinder: daughter of Dolphus (Adolphus) Pinder: m. Edney Parker July 22, 1910.

10. Edney B. Parker: 1887-1961: Dick Parker's father: deputy sheriff: assisted government in catching smugglers off the reefs.

\* 11. William Henry Parker, Sr.: b. November 19, 1857: d. October 17, 1928: came from Eleutheria to Plantation Key in 1898: had eight children.

\* 12. William Parker, Jr.: son of Milton Parker: d. before 1935.

\* 13. William H. Parker: died in his teens: grandson to William Henry: son of Milton Parker.

\* 14. Alvin Pinder: b. Key West: native of Islamorada: son of Dolphus Pinder and Elizabeth Russell: grandson of Richard Pinder: m. Lenora, first wife: brother of Mrs. Bernard Russell's father.

15. Benjamin Lee Pinder: 1878-1940: Dick Parker's uncle: brother of Mrs. Bernard Russell's father: brother of Jerome (Brammy) Pinder: brother of Dick Parker's mother Edna.



16. Catherine Russell Pinder: 1881-1938: Mrs. Bernard Russell's mother (not an Islamorada Russell).

\* 17. Ella Pinder: née Cash: second wife of Alvin Pinder: buried with Alvin Pinder.

18. Etta Delores Pinder: July 15, 1899-February 21, 1914: Jerome (Brammy)Pinder's daughter: Etta Sweeting's mother's brother's child. (Etta Sweeting is sister of Dick Parker).

\* 19. Ella Pinder: first wife of Jerome (Brammy) Pinder.

\* 20. Ida Pinder: d. 1932 or 1933: Mrs. Bernard Russell's brother's wife.

\* 21. Mrs. Jerome Pinder (Mamie): buried October 10, 1935 (according to government map): second wife of Brammy Pinder: lived for eight hours trapped in hurricane débris. (Brammy Pinder prepared a third crypt for third wife Lorina, an Albury. Lorina is buried in Homestead.)

22. Marion Yulee Pinder: 1881-1960: from Key West: née Albury: family to Booths in Homestead.

23. Preston Brooks Pinder: 1878-1963: b. Key West: son of Dolphus (Adolphus) Pinder and Elizabeth Russell: grandson of Richard Pinder: Mrs. Bernard Russell's father: Dick Parker's mother's brother: brother of Jerome (Brammy) Pinder: m. Catherine (Jenny) Russell from Umbrella (Windley) Key in 1895: last to be buried in Pinder graveyard.

\* 24. Edward Roberts: d. January 18, 1931: "crippled:" brother of Reggie Roberts. Family lives behind police station on Windley Key. Mrs. Roberts lives with son Charles Roberts, a cook at the hospital, and son Jack, a fishing guide.

25. John A. Russell: 1852-1919; son of John Henry Russell: grandson of Richard H. Russell who arrived at Key Vaca(s) in 1838 and at Upper Matecumbe in 1854: father of Bernard Russell.

\* 26. Reggie Roberts.

\* 27. Kasper Sweeting: son of Norman Sweeting who was buried at Barnes Key in 1935. Family of Kasper moved to Coconut Grove and Kasper's body was removed from Pinder graveyard at some later date.

28. Evelyn Faye T. Woods: wife of conch Robert Woods. Mrs. Woods choked to death. Husband still survives in Islamorada. Mr. Woods kept headstone in house until Bernard Russell persuaded him to place it on grave.

\* Asterisks are beside names identified during research. Not all dates and histories are complete.

## Appendix 2

### Church Pastors

List of names provided by Joseph Bertram Pinder in 1959. He was unable to recall Christian names or dates of visiting services. See Beare, 49 for pastors between 1935-1961.

Rev. K. Hollester

Rev. E. L. Lee

Rev. D. Cook

Rev. W.E. Dennis

Rev. O.C. Howell

Rev. Jack Hagler

Rev. W. Swagert

Rev. Willard Parker

Rev. Morelock

Rev. Jones

Rev. Lane

Rev. John Watkins

Rev. Jack Weisinger

Rev. Bommemm

Rev. K. Martin

Rev. Robins

Rev. Poiser

Rev. Flويد Bowery

Rev. Nancy

Rev. Nelson

Rev. Larry Winebrenner

## NOTES

1. This is the name of the cemetery recorded on a government map prepared in 1935 to record the deaths, missing, and injured after the 1935 hurricane at Islamorada. Franklin (Dick) Parker, son of Edna and Edney Parker, whose grandfather homesteaded in 1898 on the key, kindly made an original copy of the map available during this research. It is reproduced in the official government *Hearings Florida Hurricane Disaster* (H.R. 9486, March 26, 1939).

2. Legal document No.1 dated December 15, 1880, filed October 6, 1882 in Deed Book K, 693 reads "Lots Nos. 1 and 2 of Section 32, Township 64 South of Range 37 East, containing 130.76/100 acres." Document No. 3 dated July 21, 1880, filed November 19, 1880 for the amount of \$3.72 is issued on behalf of Cephas Pinder. It reads "Lot No.3 of section 32, Township 63 South, Range 37 East, and Lot No. 1 of Section 5 in Township 64 South, of Range 37 East, containing 148.46/100 acres." Dick Parker removed copies of legal documents from the safety deposit box of the Matecumbe Methodist Church for my inspection.

3. Charlton W. Tebeau, *A History of Florida* (Coral Gables, Florida: University of Miami Press, 1971), 266. Homestead Act of 1866 "ended all cash sales in five public land states of the South and reserved land for homesteaders until January 1, 1867." Land office opened in Florida, August 1866. In October 1876, law was repealed.

4. R.W. Carter appears to have no particular significance to the history of the land. For legal purposes he may simply have acted as a convenient conveyer.

5. Christopher Pearson (with Pearson McGuire Associates, Coral Gables), public relations director for Cheeca Lodge, was extraordinarily supportive throughout the project. He, Bernard Russell, and Jeanne Hunter contributed to this information. Pearson also arranged for my presentation to Cheeca Lodge management, which resulted in their generous financial support for the historic marker and for a ceremony and luncheon on June 26, 1990 to honor Conch descendants.

6. Pearson discovered letter in Cheeca Lodge files. Allen writes from the firm of Adorno, Allen, Yoss and Goodkind, P.A., #3225 Aviation Avenue, Miami. Edna and Edney Parker were also on the bed with their 10 children (another was safe in Tavernier). Also on the bed were Eddie Sweeting and his brother Alton Sweeting. Eddie married Dick Parker's sister Etta.

7. Nikki Beare, *Pirates, Pineapple & People* (Miami: Hurricane House, 1961), 92.

8. Mrs. Priscilla (Dick) Parker clarified this last fact.

9. There are still questions concerning the whereabouts of a formal document providing the church access.

10. Mrs. Bernard Russell (née Pinder) assisted me in sorting out genealogy. Key Vaca also referred to as Key Vacas in 1935.

11. Jean U. Guerry "The Matecumbe Methodist Church," *Tequesta* (1970), 64-68.

12. John Henry Russell set up the first post office June 1, 1908.

He was succeeded by son John A. Russell (d. 1954) and then by John Henry Russell's brother Clifton in 1909. See Beare, 11, 55. Mrs. Bernard Russell adds that John Henry Russell (d. November 22, 1919) married Rosalee Sawyer and their children were Rosalee, John A., Richard H., Clifton J., H. Eugene, and Dorris.

13. From a recorded interview with Norma Jewett Adams Wilcott by Love Dean on June 29, 1986. Jim Clipper, head librarian of Matecumbe Public Library (once the schoolhouse after the 1935 hurricane destroyed the coral-rock building next to the old wooden church), discovered and transcribed the tapes.

14. Wilcott's great-great-great-grandfather traded meat with the Indians for tobacco in 1800s. She alleges that when the old "Mr. Pinder got off the train there was going to be a boat hit the reef." She refers to smugglers turning off light at Alligator Lighthouse to encourage wrecks on the reefs.

15. The qualifier "terrible" is attributed to Parker for his humorous but highly mischievous behavior in school-days.

16. There are two documents in Matecumbe Methodist Church files. The one not signed is obviously also the work of Joseph Bertram Pinder, Mrs. Bernard Russell's brother. Richard Pinder died ca. 1896.

17. Also stated in Guerry who must have read the same documents.

18. Beare, 74; Wright Langley and Stan Windhorn, *Yesterdays Florida Keys* (Miami Seaman, 1974), 59.

19. *The New York Times* (9 September 1935), 10.

20. The exact number differs among newspaper reports as in "Only 11 of 79 in Florida Key Family Alive," *New York Times* (7 September 1935), 3. Bernard Russell claims 50. The Congressional Hearings, 144, list 76 Russell deaths.

21. Kevin M. McCarthy, (ed.), *Nine Florida Stories* (Jacksonville, Fl.: University of Florida Press, 1990), 161-180.

22. Irving Eister, local Islamorada historian, led me to the overgrown lot on Pinder Street where there is still evidence of the old parsonage foundation.

In Special Warranty Deed #72754, official Record 156, p. 578, on June 1, 1959, Clara May Downey “an unmarried woman” gave the Matecumbe Methodist Church, Inc. for \$1. “Lot One of Block or Square Four” to “be held, kept, and maintained as a place of residence for the use and occupancy of the ministers of the Methodist Church . . . “ This is the site of the new parsonage.

23. “Millionaires Row” included the Matecumbe Club and millionaires L.M. Stratton, J.P. Norfleet, Arm and Hammer Baking Soda owners, Le Branch, Edward W. Scudder (Owner of New York *Evening News*), according to Mrs. Bernard Russell.

24. Tebeau gives this number (404). There were, however, at least 696 men on the payroll as of August 31, 1935, cited in *New York Times* (14 September 1935), 13.

25. *The Miami Herald*, *New York Times*, *Congressional Hearings*, and the government map offer different figures and are not conclusive.

26. The first New Deal agency in Florida was the Civilian Conservation Corps in August 1933 (Tebeau, 402). In 1935 state legislature took first steps for state welfare program awarding \$1 m. for “skilled labor and material for public works.”

27. See photograph in Langley, 92. Ashes of 23 victims were interred during ceremony, *The Key West Citizen* (17 November 1937), 1.

The memorial plaque, made by artists in the Works Projects Administration (WPA), was dedicated on November 11, 1937 with an invocation led by First Matecumbe Methodist Church pastor, the Reverend J.Y. Yancy. He was joined by representatives from the Protestant, Catholic and Jewish clergy.

Over three thousand visitors attended the memorial ceremony for victims of the 1935 hurricane that devastated Islamorada. John A. Russell, Islamorada post-master, whose family pioneered Matecumbe in 1854, laid a wreath in memory of fifty of his family killed in the hurricane. Fay Marie Parker, a nine-year old survivor and descendant of the third family to homestead in 1898, unveiled the plaque. A WPA symphony orchestra played music for the occasion. A message from President Franklin Delano Roosevelt read:

I join in the dedication of the monument to those who met death in the awful visitations that swept the Florida Keys on Labor Day 1935. The disaster which made desolate the hearts of many of our people brought a personal sorrow to me because some years ago I knew many residents of the Keys. I tender to all those whose hearts were torn by the loss of loved ones an assurance of heartfelt sympathy.

F.D.R.

Ashes of 23 victims, discovered after mass burials in funeral pyres in

September 1935, were interred in the monument crypt, where an opening remains for victims still discovered.

Of the 699 World War I "Bonus Army" veterans working on local highway bridges, 327 were reported dead, another 138 injured. Only 179 civilian dead could be identified. Florida Governor David Sholz's office claimed "one thousand" dead veterans and civilians.

28. A replica of the art work is reproduced in gold by Islamorada jeweler Mark Meade. It may only be purchased and worn by conch descendants.

29. Mr. Woods is still living.

30. Names listed are: Willard Preston Dennis, Jr., Ida Pinder, Edith Parker, Kasper Sweeting, Brice Fine, Betty-Jo Delaisse, William Parker Jr., Alvin Pinder, Johnson, Ella Pinder, William H. Parker, Ella Cash Pinder, Mamie Pinder, Frank H. Lowe, Reggie Roberts. Mr. and Mrs. Dick Parker decided to provide a separate headstone for William Henry Parker, Sr.: November 19, 1857-October 17, 1928. Appendix 1 lists fuller histories, a copy of which is to be deposited with the Matecumbe Methodist Church. Donors' names listed on the reverse of the memorial headstone are: Jeanne and Burt Hunter, First National Bank, Citizens and Southern Bank, TIB Bank of the Keys, Priscilla and Dick Parker, Pam and Dana Sheldon, Gateway Monument Company, Stanley L. Harrison and Josephine Johnson. (Professor Harrison's enthusiasm and support for the project is gratefully acknowledged.)

31. Application to the state was not made for a marker because of their essential requirements for the site to be made readily available to the public.

32. Bill Walsh, head groundsman at Cheeca Lodge was exceptionally helpful. Note that in the Florida Key *Keynotes* 37, No. 38 (30 June 1990) date of ceremony is in error. The date was June 26.

33. "Sam" is widely photographed. He posed recently for *Upper Keys Entertainment Guide* (June, 1990), 7.

34. *The Collected Plays of W.B. Yeats* (New York: The MacMillan Company: 1967), 288.