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First **FRIDAYS**
6-7 PM

Oct 3
Nov 7
Dec 5
Jan 2
Feb 6
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Photo by Karen Beal

"I suppose it is the hope of every man that he may have contributed something to the betterment of the world during his lifetime. Fortunately for me I have, more through luck than plan, changed the face of the earth in a way that is a great satisfaction to me. That I will be remembered for this, I doubt."

- Marvin D. Adams

by Karen Beal

In this 'hurry-up' age everyone looks for a shortcut to save time and travel. But, 100 years ago, life in Key Largo was unhurried and laid-back. Residents did their fishing and boating on the ocean or the bay, depending on where they lived. If they wanted to switch sides, it was a 60-mile round trip by water—a full day's journey to go around the island.

Not until the 1920s did anyone give serious thought to finding a shorter route by making a cut across Key Largo. When Marvin Dow Adams arrived in Miami in 1925, he didn't know that more than 30 years later he would become a 'hero' for his vision and persistence in finding a way to create this passage for boat traffic.

In the early '50s Adams and his wife owned 50 acres a half mile north of the 103

mile marker on Key Largo. It was the narrowest point on the island, half-a-mile wide and the highest elevation at 13 feet above sea level. As Adams dreamed of a 'cut' 80 feet wide and six feet deep across that tract, he didn't anticipate the extent of military and civil agency involvement in his project.

It took 18 months to get all the necessary county, state and federal permits after permission was granted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to cut through the fossilized coral rock. Approval for the bridge was obtained from federal and state road departments, and utility companies' cooperation was sought to minimize disruption of service during construction. The U.S. Navy built the bridge and moved the water pipeline.

The multitude of preliminary problems paled in comparison with

Adams' major concern of funding the actual cutting of the water passage. A sum of \$690,000 had been estimated for engineering fees, excavation and rock removal. It was at this point that Adams learned of a machine that cut coral rock "like it was cheese," developed by Mathew Bernard "Barney" Waldin, who agreed to trade his rock-cutting services for the crushed limestone. That left Adams with only \$7,500 in engineering costs.

The excavation began on the bayside where two parallel trenches were cut about 100 feet apart and 18 feet deep. Dynamite was placed in the center between the trenches and the fossilized coral was blasted and hauled away. This created an average depth of 30 feet below the waterline, with the area under the bridge only 12 feet deep, to provide a ledge for



Barney Waldin working on the "Key Largo Waterway" - 1956.
Courtesy of Florida Keys History Museum

the span's support.

The Key Largo Waterway, known to locals as "the cut," was opened to boat traffic in 1958, although it took another five years to complete the bridge and utility lines. It was dedicated to Marvin D. Adams in May of 1976 by Mayor Harry Harris with a 20-minute ceremony alongside the highway.

The boaters in the Upper Keys probably take the Marvin D. Adams Waterway for granted, but if they feel impatient going five miles per hour through the cut, they might pause to consider how much longer that trip would be if Marvin D. Adams hadn't been so persistent.



Adam's Canal Cut, Key Largo, Florida. Paleoecology and morphometrics of the *Montastraea annularis* species complex, from University of Iowa Dept. of Geoscience.



It's Back!

Sunday Brunch

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