

# The Story of Green Turtle Soup

Key West, Florida, is the Home of an Unusual Enterprise, Conducted by A. Granday Canning Co.

**W**HEN the sails of the Turtle Boat appear at the Bay at Key West, Florida, it's an occasion, for its cargo is one of the strangest, and it comes in only about once in every eight or ten weeks. The name of this unusual two-masted sailing schooner, from which eventually comes Green Turtle Soup is the *A. M. Adams*, which is owned and commanded by Capt. Allie O. Ebanks.

Numerous small boats are engaged regularly in catching turtles for the Key West concern. The schooner *A. M. Adams* is engaged to keep the small boats supplied with food stores, tackle, etc., and take delivery of the turtles from them and carry the turtles to Key West.

Looking down the top deck of the boat as it nears port one sees a strange cargo. From Mosquito Cays off the Nicaraguan Coast comes the cargo of huge green turtles.

The vessel, built three years ago, is of English registry with Georgetown, Grand Cayman, B.W.I., her home port.

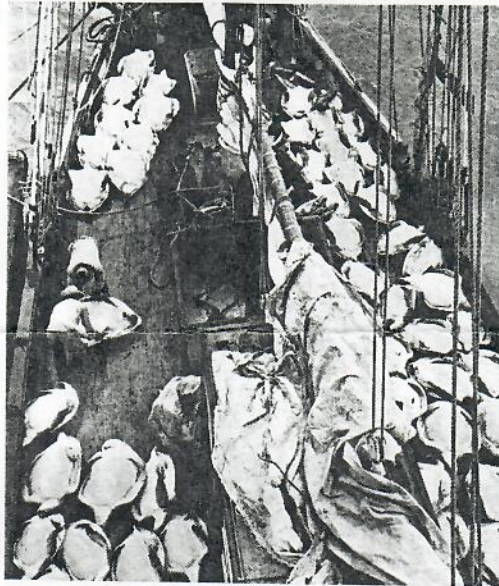
When the turtles are taken on, all available space on the boat is used for loading them. They are packed closely together in lines on the deck. To keep them from shoving about, front and back flippers are fastened with thatched cords. Below the upper deck, in the hold of the ship, two tiers are packed with turtles so tightly that their shells overlap.

As the turtle schooner approaches Key West with its live cargo, it is anchored out in the harbor. Barges are towed out and brought alongside the schooner. The turtles are delivered to the barge to be brought back to the "crawls."

With block and tackle the turtles are lifted from the hold. With some of the big turtles weighing 500 lbs., it takes five men to swing a turtle over the gunwale of the schooner. It requires three to four barge loads to empty the boat.

When a member of the crew catches a turtle he cuts his initials in the bottom shell to identify his catch. Each man gets credit and payment according to the number of pounds that bear his initials.

Before taking the load of turtles off the schooner, the barge is flushed with water. On the barge, the live turtles are



*Cargo of green turtles on the "A. M. Adams".*

packed tightly like sardines. During the trip to shore, they are continually "wet down."

While the unloading from the schooner has been taking place, a man has been busily preparing for the landing of the catch. On the wharf, every nail has to be hammered down so that the turtle's shell will not be gouged when it is dragged along on its way to the "crawls."

After the barge has reached the dock, the captain of the boat and a representative of the cannery check the initials on the bottom shell of each turtle, thus keeping a careful record of the catch.

One by one the turtles are dragged to the dock. A rope is slipped around a flipper and the turtle is dragged away on his back. On the dock behind the cannery two men cut the thatched cords binding the turtle's flippers on each side, carry it over to a chute and slide it down

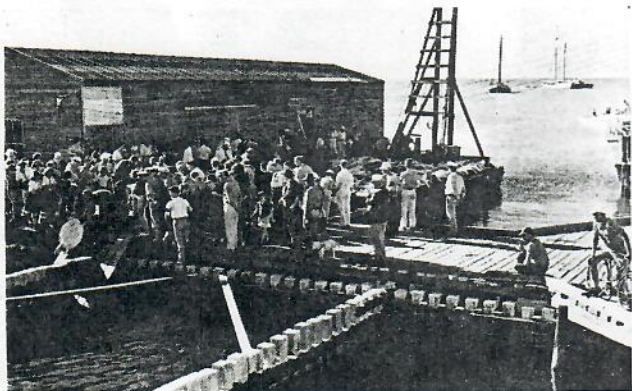
into a pen, known as a crawl. Here the turtles are kept in captivity, in water, until their turn comes to be slaughtered.

Whenever a turtle is needed for soup, a noose is slipped around one of its flippers and it is hauled up the chute. Taken to the cannery slaughter house, the turtles, unaware of their impending doom, await decapitation.

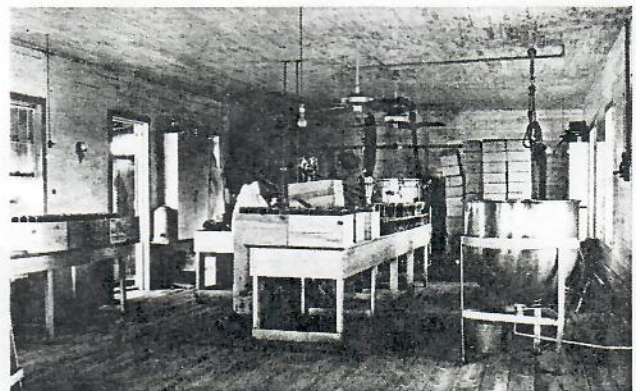
The turtle cannery, established in 1890 by a famous French chef, who had a secret recipe for Green Turtle Soup, is now owned by a native Key Wester, Norberg Thompson, who operates the plant as A. Granday Canning Co. The turtle cannery is one of the many Thompson fishing interests at Key West, including Thompson Fish Co., Inc. The general manager is A. M. Adams.

Nobody has ever been allowed to see the actual canning operations, obviously to preserve the secrecy of the process. Operations are carried on in a spotless, modernly equipped canning and packing room.

No. 1 (10 ounce), No. 2 and No. 3 cans are supplied by American Can Company, while 1 lb. 4 ounce glass tumblers are furnished by Capstan Glass Co. The can sealing machine is from American Can Company, and the vacuum glass capping machine from Anchor Cap and Closure Corp. Canning machinery, retorts, etc., are from Food Machinery Corp.



*Dock showing turtles being unloaded from barge and slid down chute into crawl.*



*The interior of the turtle soup cannery of A. Granday Canning Co., Key West, Fla.*



# Turtle Kraals-Where Turtles Crawl

By DICK FACKLER

The most unique sight and story to be found by tourists along the Key West waterfront is probably the storied Turtle Kraals.

Kraals, a Dutch word meaning pens, are large tanks with wooden fences around the circumference. Inside, giant green turtles cavort about eating their vegetarian diet — the keepers feed them cabbage and lettuce.

The Kraals is a double edged operation — the commercial side and the tourist end — which adults and children may learn of.

The commercial business: Every four to six weeks, a turtle schooner manned by Grand Cayman natives arrives at the Kraals with about 400 green turtles weighing up

A gift shop with curios and souvenirs leads in to the Kraals — the tourist business — where besides turtles, raccoons, monkeys, stuffed birds and other forms of local wildlife are on display.

The majority of the green turtles are caught off Nicaragua but some are taken in the waters off Mexico and Costa Rica.

For persons curious to taste the turtle meat, frozen steaks and turtleburgers may be purchased in the Kraal area. Most of the green turtle soup — considered a gourmet's dish — is sold in the New

York area to luxury hotels and similar commercial accommodations.

A "Shell Factory" exists inside the Kraal, where such items as Conch Shells, sponges, coral, and turtle shell may be bought.

Some of the shells are advertised as oven-proof baking dishes and sell for 10-25 cents.

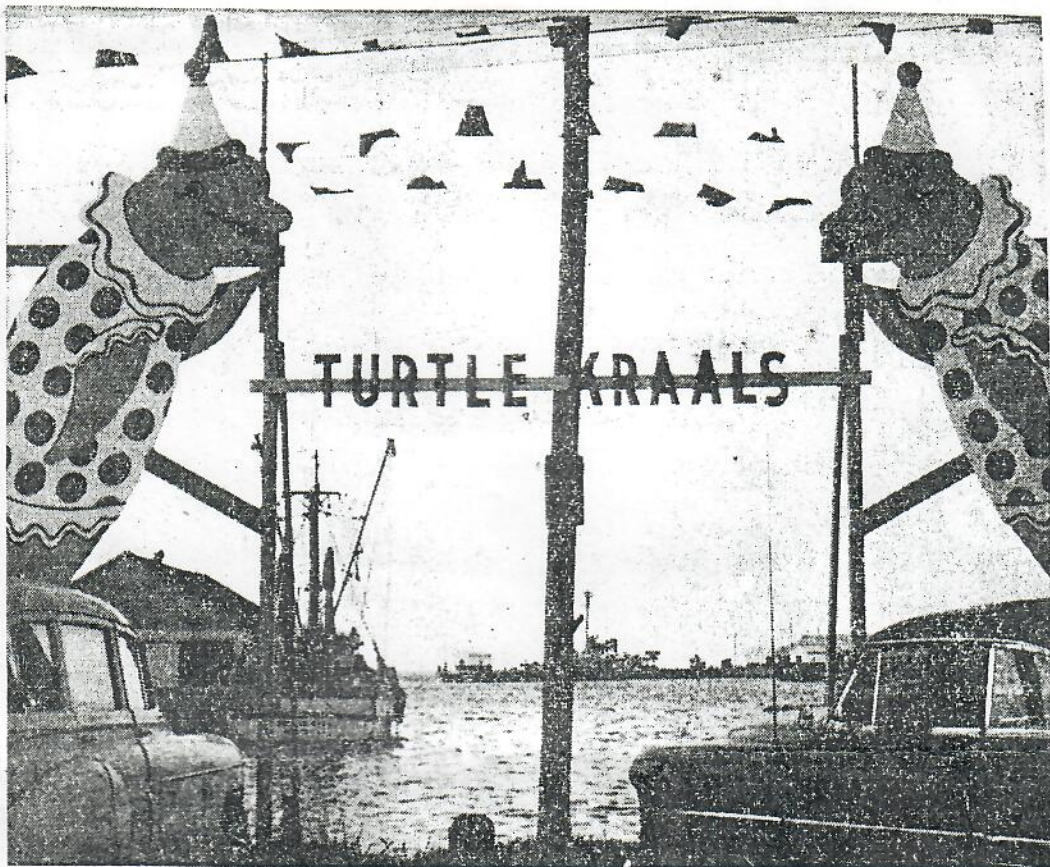
The business was started about 85 years ago. The Kraals are found on the north side of Key West near the Shrimp boat docks and there is a parking lot available for tourists' cars.



to 500 pounds. These are unloaded and placed in the pens. The turtles are butchered at the rate of about 25 daily.

After being butchered, the remains are converted into turtle soup at a New York plant or sent to a quick-freeze plant in Miami where they may end up as steaks or turtleburgers.

Green turtle is popular with Key Westers and is found in many food stores. It is relatively inexpensive as compared with other meats.



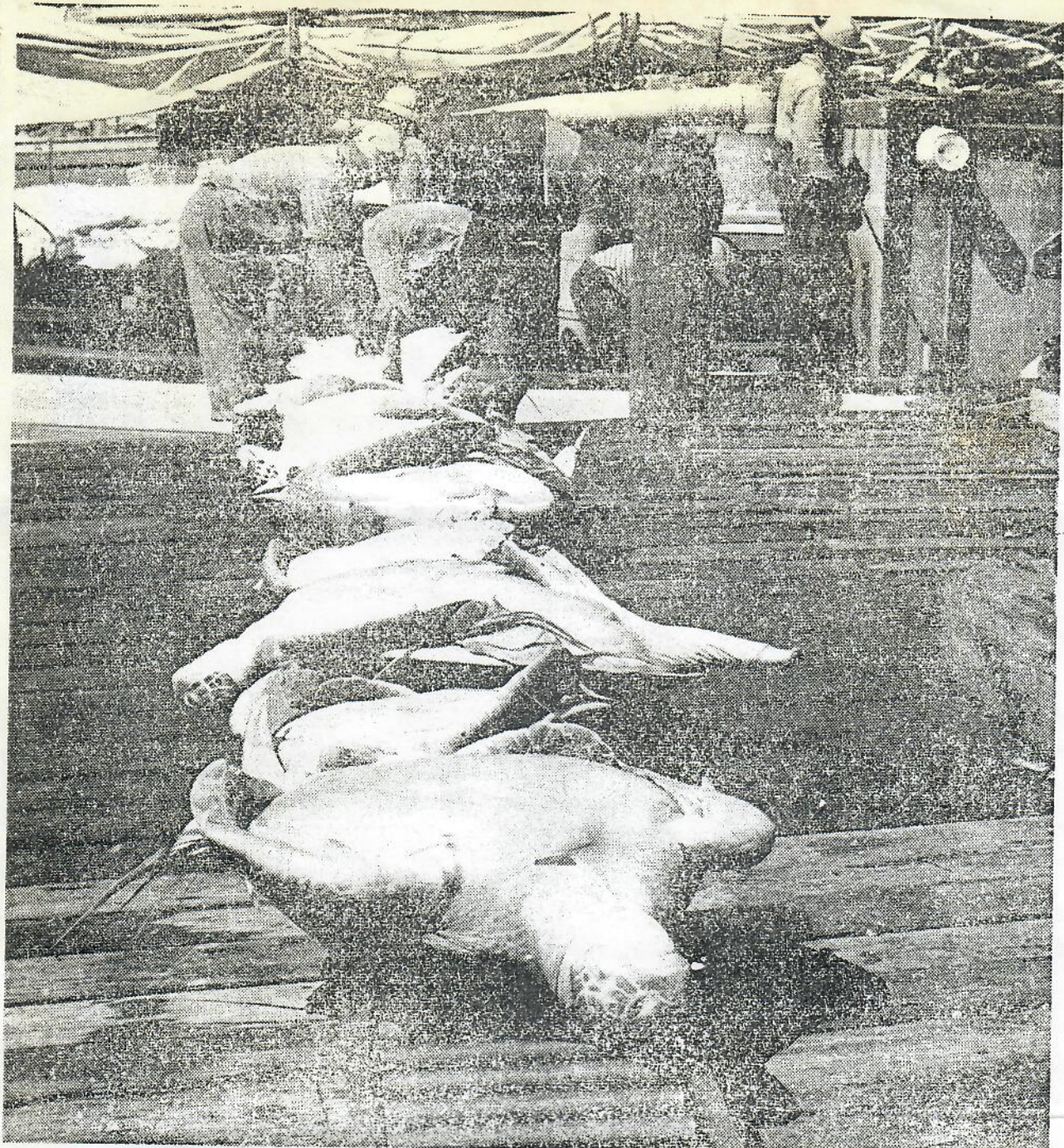
**STORIED TURTLE KRAALS (PENS)**—Crews of natives from Grand Cayman Island take giant 500-pound green turtles from the waters off Mexico, Nicaragua and Costa Rica in a turtle schooner and deliver the catch in Key West

every 6-8 weeks. The giant reptiles are converted to soup and steak. The turtles are kept in pens named kraals while awaiting slaughter and are on display to tourists for a minimum fee, along with other items of interest.—Citizen Staff Photo, Dick Fackler.

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Last Year's Turtle Crop Being Unloaded at Key West Docks  
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George,  
Thanks for the  
info! See you in  
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