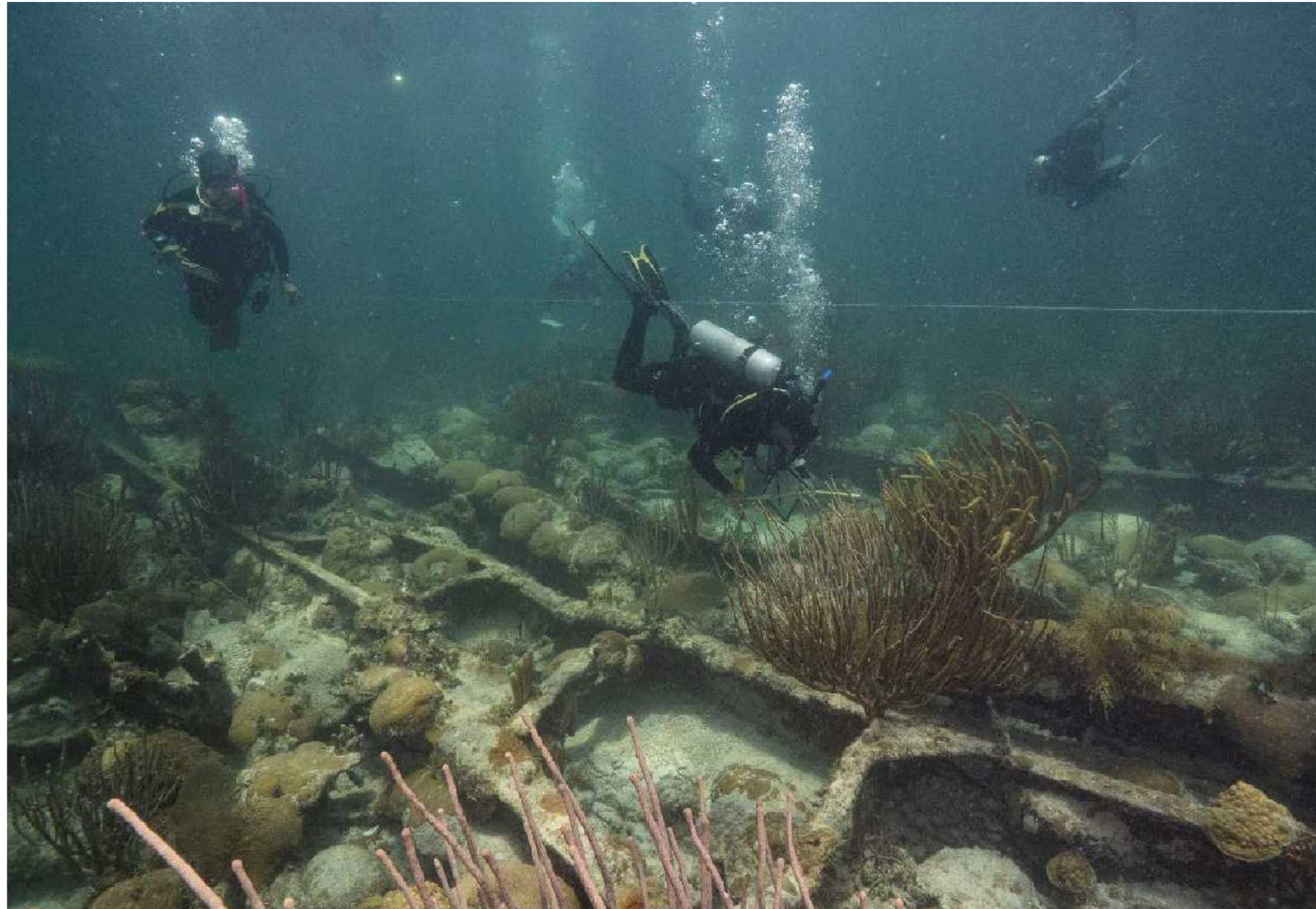


HISTORY HEN & CHICKENS BRICK SHIPWRECK



The “Brick Wreck” MO01308 lies on the inshore side of Hen and Chickens Reef approximately 3.3 km southeast of the southern end of Plantation Key. The reef is an inshore patch reef comprised of an aggregation of coral heads rising from surrounding seafloor that is 7 meters deep. Cartographer Bernard Romans drew the first nautical chart located thus far that depicted Hen and Chickens Reef from surveys conducted in 1774. His chart of Southern Florida was published in New York in 1781. Hen and Chickens Reef was accurately noted off Upper Matecumbe Key. Hen and Chickens Reef appeared on a U. S. Coast and Geodetic Survey nautical charts under that name in 1878. Unlike the adjacent outer reef crest, relatively few shipwrecks are reported to have been lost at this location in Hawk Channel. This is likely due to the experienced local mariners who were the ones using Hawk Channel, the area behind the outer reef within which Hen and Chickens Reef lies, for intra -Florida Keys navigation. The great preponderance of maritime traffic in the area stayed well offshore to avoid the hazardous Florida reef line.

The earliest reported vessel loss at Hen and Chickens Reef occurred during the Spanish American War. The Mexican gunboat *Asturias* struck the reef and sank sometime between 1896 and 1898 (Bureau of Navigation 1898). The Key West Wrecking Company was contracted to raise the vessel and reportedly did so under suspicious circumstances that may have involved gun-running to Cuban insurgents. Following extensive salvage efforts, the gunboat was renamed *Biscayne* and continued in operation for some time afterwards (Gilpin 1941:27). In November 1916, the wooden schooner *Limit* was lost at Hen and Chickens Reef with four crewmen. The small schooner was en route to Cuba from Miami with a cargo of lumber. The schooner’s captain and crew were all African-Americans. Wreckage found by the crew of a fishing vessel consisted of the schooner’s cabin and keel on the reef and pieces of lumber scattered on the adjacent beaches. They surmised that the schooner had anchored near the reef during the preceding stormy weather and that during the storm it had drug its anchor before striking the reef (Miami News 25 November 1916).

Popular local histories and dive guides report that shipwreck MO01308 was an unnamed barge carrying bricks. Some histories further embellish the story and attribute the casualty to German U-boat activity. Primary source research located newspaper articles indicating that a barge with a brick cargo broke free from its tow eight miles northeast of Alligator Reef Light in late July 1949. The barge, carrying father Macey O. Scott and his 18-year old son, Orville, drifted inshore before grounding on the Hen and Chickens Reef. Father and son clung to the barge’s mast protruding above the water through the night. In the morning, Orville swam ashore at Snake Creek, a distance of three miles, to secure help. A boat carrying Orville returned to the wreck, rescued his father, and met up with the tugboat that had moved inshore and anchored after losing its tow (Miami Herald 28 July 1949). The brick cargo was intended for the construction of a Key West home by George Aston. Ultimately, the newspaper articles say he lost 8,000 of the 26,000 bricks ordered from Georgia before a barge finally landed its cargo in Key West (Miami News 4 September 1949). Newspaper reports do not clearly indicate that the same barge that departed Georgia carrying the brick cargo was raised and towed all the way to Key West. Based upon the timing of the newspaper reports, salvage of the brick cargo took less than a month. A U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey chart published in 1951 depicted Hen and Chickens Reef with a new obstruction that was not printed on previous maps of the area. Text by Matthew Lawrence. The chart had a wreck symbol and the notation “mast” located northwest of the Hen and Chickens light tower where MO01308 is located today.

Drawn by Gayle Carter Patrick

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DIVING WITH A PURPOSE UNDERWATER ARCHAEOLOGY

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FLORIDA KEYS NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY

PROJ.	HEN & CHICKENS BRICK SHIPWRECK
SCALE:	NA
DATE:	JUNE 2022
SESSION:	DWP XVI
SHIP HISTORY	A-2