

A photograph of three fishermen in a wooden boat on the water. They are wearing light-colored shirts, dark pants, and wide-brimmed hats. They are focused on their work, with one man in the center holding a large, tangled net. The water is a vibrant greenish-blue, and the overall scene is captured in a warm, slightly desaturated color palette.

SHARIKA D. CRAWFORD

*The* **Last**  
**Turtlemen**  
*of the Caribbean*

WATERSCAPES OF LABOR, CONSERVATION,  
AND BOUNDARY MAKING

# The Last Turtlemen of the Caribbean

FLOWS, MIGRATIONS, AND EXCHANGES

*Mart A. Stewart and Harriet Ritvo, editors*

The Flows, Migrations, and Exchanges series publishes new works of environmental history that explore the cross-border movements of organisms and materials that have shaped the modern world, as well as the varied human attempts to understand, regulate, and manage these movements.

# The Last Turtlemen of the Caribbean

*Waterscapes of Labor, Conservation,  
and Boundary Making*

Sharika D. Crawford

The University of North Carolina Press CHAPEL HILL



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*For the men in my life,  
Kwesi, Yoshua, and Kalev*

*The Turtles' ABC*

BY HILARY THOMPSON

A is for Anchor the Cayman boys weigh,  
B is for Bobell that steers them away,  
C is for Compass that always points right,  
D is for Danger we fear in the night.  
[Chorus:] So wet and tired and hungry are we,  
There's no one who suffers like a turtle on sea.  
E is for Ensign we always fly high,  
F is for Farewell that makes all the girls cry,  
G is for Galley, our breads are secure,  
H is for Halyard that makes our hands sore.  
[Chorus]  
I is for Interest the turtle to procure,  
J is for Judgment we use on our oars,  
K is for Kettle we boil our tea,  
L is for Lookout we keep on our lee.  
[Chorus]  
M is for Mainsail we often times reef,  
N is for North wind that blows very bleak,  
O is for Oars we pull with our might,  
P is for Poverty we seen in plain sight.  
[Chorus]  
Q is for Quadrant our hearts all cheer,  
R is for Rain that never goes clear,  
S is for Staysail we haul quickly down,  
T is for Tea we often pass round.  
[Chorus]  
U is for Union Jack we fly up and down,  
V is for Vessel that's now in the Sound,  
W is for Waiting for North Wind to blow,  
And off to Jamaica the whole fleet will go.  
X, Y, Z, now will end you our song,  
See how sweetly and smoothly it all goes along!  
[Chorus repeated twice.]

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# Introduction

## *Navigators of the Sea*

Sea captain Cadian Ebanks—or Captain Cadie, as many called him—was the last to make the change. As master of the *Lydia E. Wilson*, built in 1931, it was the only schooner from the old turtle fleet to resist modernity. For thirty years, the vessel traversed the tropical waters of the Caribbean in search of sea turtles without the conveniences of modern amenities. While other turtle schooners had converted to engines and were outfitted with radiotelephones, electricity, and even fathometers by 1960, for a short while the classic two-mast *Wilson* staunchly defied this trend and became an island treasure. Caymanians celebrated Ebanks's defiance. The image of the *Wilson* graced a 1962 Cayman Islands postage stamp, testifying to the islands' rich maritime vernacular culture of shipbuilding and turtle hunting but, more ominously, acknowledging a bygone era, as within a few years, Captain Cadie finally clipped the vessel's two masts and replaced them with an engine, since he was no longer able to maintain the traditional turtle schooner.

By the middle of the twentieth century, turtling grew increasingly difficult and forced many turtlemen to adopt new approaches. Captain Cadie found “too much competition” with all of the motorboats plying the sea. The other two remaining turtle schooners—the *Jimson* and the *Adams*—had converted to engines long before, while the rest of the old Caymanian fleet “had been sunk or sold.”<sup>1</sup> Now equipped with an engineer and a radiotelephone for the first time, the seasoned captain departed Grand Cayman in April 1966 for the start of another turtle hunting season. Captain Cadie carried a diverse crew, which included veteran seamen, a merchant marine, and a turtler, as well as two Hondurans from the English-speaking Bay Islands and an adventurous American eager to observe the hunt in the outlying banks that faced Honduras and Nicaragua in the Caribbean Sea.

Before setting turtle nets, Captain Cadie dutifully obtained his permit to hunt turtles in Nicaraguan territorial waters. Despite the inconvenience, turtling captains had long made such trips to the mainland. Since the late nineteenth century, various Central and South American governments had required foreign fishermen to acquire a license to extract resources from national waters. With a sextant to guide his path between shallow and deep



waters, Captain Cadie navigated the *Wilson* around familiar patches of coral and mangroves, where in groups known as “gangs,” his crew sailed out on catboats to place between twenty-five to thirty long nets anchored by a log buoy. Keenly aware of the competition from other turtlemen as well as his understanding of sea turtle mobility, the old turtling captain understood how empty these grounds would be in the coming months. Like generations of other Caymanian turtlemen, Captain Cadie believed that his prey, the green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*), after foraging around the Miskito Cays in Nicaraguan territorial waters migrated south to nest along a northern stretch of sandy tropical coastline known to them as Turtle Bogue (or Tortuguero in Spanish) in Costa Rica. The *Wilson* crew had no time to lose.

Turtlemen had to endure challenges beyond fierce competition from other turtle hunters and sea turtle migratory patterns. Poor weather stymied Captain Cadie and his crew’s quest to secure a sizable catch. The months of April and May were typically free from stormy weather. Strong winds, however, blew so heavily that it made routine tasks such as anchoring the schooner or lowering catboats into the open sea more arduous. Despite the rough water and high swells, the *Wilson* crew managed to stake out turtling grounds, where they worked along reefs and nearby shoals avoiding sharks in their pursuit of the green turtle. In these first weeks of the voyage, Captain Cadie captured considerably less “greens” than he had anticipated.<sup>2</sup> In previous years, it was common to find at least five turtles trapped alive in the nets each morning. Some turtlemen considered ten turtles in a net a “big catch.”<sup>3</sup> The *Wilson* crew, however, could barely entrap two green turtles per day. When Captain Cadie and the crew did snare a sea turtle, it was usually the undesirable loggerhead (*Caretta caretta*), which was neither a marketable commodity nor a source of food for Caymanians. The 1966 turtling season was a bust. The veteran sea captain had confronted the roughest sea and poorest catch in all his forty years of turtle fishing.<sup>4</sup>

The turtlemen’s story—hunting sea turtles—is fascinating, but it is only a part of a much broader story. This book tells the story of the circum-Caribbean as a waterscape where imperial and national governments vied to control maritime frontiers, while harvesters like turtlemen plied the sea for profitable marine commodities. As Caymanians depleted local supplies of turtles and turned to hunting them across transnational waters, they drew the ire of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century nation builders in Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Colombia, as they exposed the limits of these states’ sovereignty over both their borders and their resources. Going beyond “an Atlantic commons”—a space where Caribbean people exploited raw

materials in salt raking, wreck salvage, or timber harvesting to generate a livelihood outside the view of state officials—these border crossers threatened multiple Spanish-speaking circum-Caribbean states.<sup>5</sup> Seeking to govern their mobility, Nicaraguan, Costa Rican, and Colombian governments created and increasingly enforced legislation to delimit maritime boundaries and regulate access to foreign turtlemen between 1890 and 1960. In doing so, multiple Caribbean state actors asserted power outside continental borders into waters their nations sought to defend and claim in a period traditionally known for U.S. hegemonic maritime presence in the region.

From the decks of turtling schooners or the hulls of catboats, it is clear how protection of waterscapes and marine animal resources allowed states—both imperial and national—to integrate peripheral spaces in order to draw them into fiscal and strategic goals. James C. Scott called this process “the last enclosure,” when states sought to integrate peripheral spaces with the objective of monetizing resources or people.<sup>6</sup> While most studies on such places focus on terrestrial spaces, this book examines the challenges of a fluid maritime space. To the dismay of state actors, the Caribbean Sea, unlike fenced land, is difficult to enclose. Like American oceanic empire builders in the nineteenth century, circum-Caribbean nation builders tried to claim and protect a maritime space for their countries.<sup>7</sup> Caymanian turtlemen became ensnared in these national projects of incorporation, whether it was Nicaraguan authorities integrating Mosquitia in the 1890s or the Colombian state enclosing the insular territory of San Andrés and Providencia Islands in the 1910s. Throughout the southwestern waters of the Caribbean, unfettered Caymanian access to the turtle commons threatened newfound interests of state actors in the region. Caymanian turtlemen as peripheral populations, however, drew in the state in an effort to preserve their zones of refuge, which happened to intersect with imperial policies.

Diplomatic disputes over turtle fishing between the British empire and the governments of Nicaragua, Colombia, and Costa Rica reflected the waning British influence in the region. As officials in the Colonial and Foreign Offices grappled to defend the British policy of “freedom of the seas,” an insistence that the sea was free and open to all nations with only limited maritime jurisdiction as needed for defense, in the face of an energetic modernizing nation-state. A rebuke of this long-held principle not only forecasted a tragic reality for Caymanian turtlemen but also foreshadowed the fading role of the British empire as a sea power in the Caribbean. This book joins a fledgling number of studies showing how maritime spaces and marine animals figured prominently in the projects of state builders eager to consolidate frontiers,

whether terrestrial or maritime.<sup>8</sup> Drawing attention to turtlemen and turtle disputes highlights the significance of delimitation of maritime boundaries as part of state building, a process that was far from complete. In sum, *The Last Turtlemen* argues that turtlemen helped to redraw the maritime boundaries of the modern Caribbean.

The watery spaces of the Caribbean are unfamiliar to most people acquainted with the region. The importation of enslaved Africans and their subsequent labor on sugar plantations continues to shape historical thinking on the economic, political, and social organization of the region.<sup>9</sup> The Cayman Islands—the home of the turtlemen in this study—existed under a different set of conditions, however. Due to the region’s size and settlement process, historians have considered the Cayman Islands a marginal colony, a nomenclature, reflecting its insignificance to the British imperial state.<sup>10</sup> Yet a growing number of scholars push back on such conceptualizations of the Caribbean as exclusively linked to the sugar plantation.<sup>11</sup> These historians insist on the diversification of the labor and economy of the Caribbean. This is especially true on many of the small islands and coastal colonies, such as the Bahamas, Barbuda, Turks and Caicos, and the Dutch “ABC” islands (Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao), which never became massive producers of sugar and exploited other resources in the forest and sea. The miniscule size of these islands and many others may help us to understand how they served as important nodes in commercial networks, bases of operation for pirates, and sites of imperial experimentation.<sup>12</sup> An extended view toward the small islands of the maritime Caribbean challenges the overly monolithic portrait of the region as rural and plantation based.

In an effort to enrich and expand our knowledge of the Caribbean beyond sugar and the plantation complex, some historians are paying closer attention to what I call the “maritime Caribbean.” Loosely speaking, a regional approach situates the sea rather than the land as the central focus for an examination of the past.<sup>13</sup> Scholars have used a variety of terms to define such spaces in the Caribbean and the wider Atlantic world, from “aqueous territory” to “saltwater frontier.”<sup>14</sup> All recognize the flexible and often contested nature of these fluid spaces. These scholars also challenge master narratives telling of the triumphs of terrestrial conquests against indigenous populations in the Americas. In doing so, these maritime perspectives have recovered the role of coastal indigenous peoples—from the Wampanoag in the northeastern United States to the Wayuu in northeastern Colombia—in cross-cultural encounters, imperial conquests, and interregional trade.<sup>15</sup>

Beyond the focus on indigenous peoples and waterscapes, there is an array of historical subjects who crossed cultural, linguistic, and political borders due to cultural and social flexibility, akin to Ira Berlin's "Atlantic creoles."<sup>16</sup> From the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries, residents of the greater Caribbean migrated across transimperial and transnational boundaries to exploit opportunities in fluid political and racial climates, such as transient free women of color moving among the ceded islands of Grenada, Trinidad, and Demerara in the British late colonial period.<sup>17</sup> Sometimes religious rather than racial identities offered enslaved and non-elite white people avenues to maneuver in an increasingly capitalistic Caribbean.<sup>18</sup> Port cities and illicit trade among pirates and smugglers have also informed our thinking about the maritime Caribbean.<sup>19</sup> Some historians have produced engrossing environmental histories, focusing, for example, on how hurricanes affected the region's politics and society.<sup>20</sup> Yet seafarers continue to attract much scholarly attention.

Unsurprisingly, seafarers and even enslaved Africans worked in a variety of maritime activities in the early modern Caribbean. Some dived for pearls, while others salvaged wrecks alongside their owners in the warm waters of the Caribbean Sea.<sup>21</sup> While labor conditions were perilous, maritime work offered greater independence to some. Hardworking enslaved mariners earned privileges, which compelled more work from some of them. Yet slaveholders sometimes viewed mariners suspiciously and viewed their mobility as dangerous. During the age of Atlantic revolutions, some considered enslaved mariners as vectors of rebellion because they spread news of revolution from France, Haiti, and elsewhere to masses of enslaved peoples in the Americas. Most studies on enslaved mariners tend to stop short of emancipation.<sup>22</sup> This book charts a different course. It begins years after the abolition of slavery in the British Caribbean and argues that seafaring continued to attract the descendants of enslaved and free peoples living on small islands and coastal settlements at the margins of global processes of capitalist development.

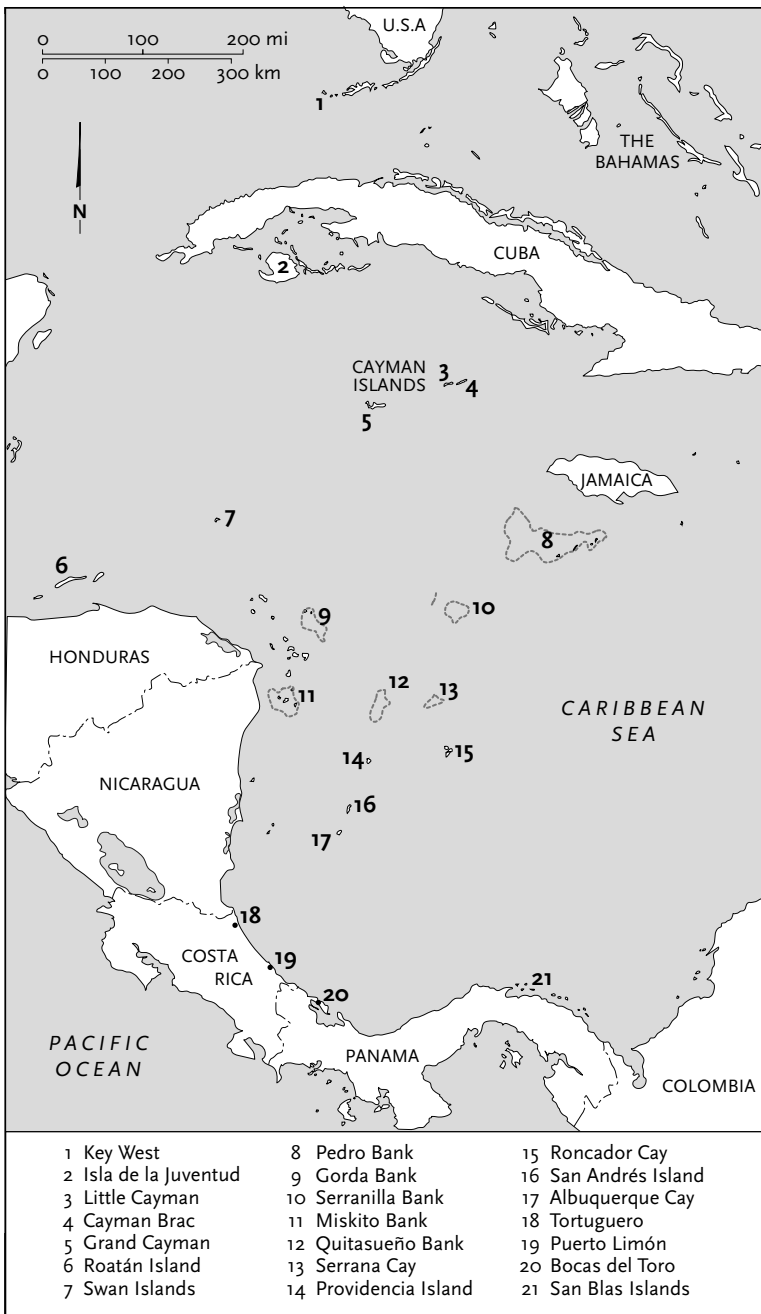
Like several islands and mainland territories from Anguilla to Belize, the Cayman Islands belonged to the non-sugar-producing maritime Caribbean. With a small transient population, settlers lived outside the close purview of state officials and became fiercely independent and resourceful. One seventeenth-century historian lauded Caymanian peaceful existence: "They live happily, without scarcely any form of civil government."<sup>23</sup> In addition to fish, seafood, and turtle, Caymanians raised chicken and hogs to supplement

their food. Despite the high quality of the sugarcane, settlers used it largely to fatten their hogs rather than export it for profit. Sometimes money and necessary goods came after they salvaged a wreck or sold turtle harvested from Grand Cayman's beaches to passing-by vessels. When they did import slaves, Caymanian slaveholders had them fell timber, cultivate cotton, or tend to subsistence gardens. By the eve of British emancipation in 1834, Caymanian emancipated slaves had largely worked in agriculture, while a small but significant minority performed artisanal work.<sup>24</sup> Only a fraction of Caymanian slaves held maritime employment. That process, as the book will show, occurred in the post-emancipation period. As in other parts of the Caribbean, many ex slaves headed to the hills to form a "reconstituted peasantry," while others headed out to sea.<sup>25</sup> Due to the small size of the individual islands that make up the Cayman Islands, many former enslaved people departed for other locales, and others gained maritime employment. In other parts of the anglophone Caribbean, freed people and the descendants of freed people migrated to Cuba as well as Central and South America, attracted to foreign-run agro-export businesses or infrastructure projects.<sup>26</sup> *The Last Turtlemen* shows how the sea itself offered a lifeline, which promised autonomy but not necessarily better pay.

For the historical actors in this book, most of their lives were spent on the water or on isolated sand bars and cays. The sea framed their worldviews, shaped trade networks, and lived geographies. The maritime Caribbean of turtlemen links familiar locales, like Georgetown (Grand Cayman), Bluefields (Nicaragua), Kingston (Jamaica), and Key West (Florida), to unfamiliar nodes in the region: Miskito Cays (Nicaragua), Turtle Bogue (Costa Rica), and San Andrés and Providencia Islands (Colombia) (see map 0.1). This book's story plays out in these regional nooks, which were the center, not the periphery, of the turtlemen's world. It was also in these locations that imperial and national contests over territorial waters ensued in the late nineteenth century. By examining the turtlemen, we gain a greater insight into how these contests ruptured the transimperial, transnational, and mobile world of the maritime Caribbean.

Finally, turtlemen transformed the region's natural environment. Turtle hunting depleted turtle populations and sounded the alarm to environmentalists, thus situating the Caribbean at the center of one of the earliest international marine conservation campaigns. During the Second World War and the immediate postwar period, new technology—such as scuba diving equipment and undersea photography—permitted oceanographers to make tremendous discoveries about the sea and its environs, and this knowledge





MAP 0.1 Western Caribbean. Map by Bill Nelson; original base map by Christian Medina Fandiño.

became more accessible to the public. Environmentalists like Rachel Carson captivated readers with her poetic and intimate examination of the sea in her classic 1951 work *The Sea around Us*. Three years later, Jacques Cousteau's *The Silent World: A Story of Undersea Discovery and Adventure* chronicled his scientific underwater exploits. Carson and Cousteau, along with many other oceanographers, marine biologists, and ocean explorers, challenged people to stop thinking of an endless sea forever capable of satiating human appetites. By the 1960s, marine conservationists formed a fledgling international movement to protect a host of marine animals, including whales, dolphins, and sea turtles.<sup>27</sup> While much attention has been given toward the protection of forested wildernesses, less attention has been given to marine animals, with the exception of whales and the whaling industry.<sup>28</sup> Although whaling and turtling have similarities, whaling was a massive operation, which circumvented the globe in the hunt for whales. Unlike turtling, it was a multimillion-dollar industry.

Attention to sea turtles is due largely to the scientific work and conservation efforts of Floridian herpetologist Archie Carr. During the 1950s, Carr traveled to eastern Central America and the small Caribbean islands to study sea turtles and the people who captured and consumed them. Carr mesmerized readers with his whimsical tales of colorful locals hunting and eating green and hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) turtles along the Caribbean coasts of Costa Rica, Panama, and the Windward Islands. His objective was not only to highlight the scarcity of sea turtles in the region but also to explain how turtles served as an important protein in the diet of these humble peoples. His books *The Windward Road* and *So Excellent a Fish* exposed thousands of readers to the desperate plight of these marine reptiles. Carr did not work alone. During these research trips, he drew heavily on the accounts shared by Caymanian captains who hunted turtles at sea as well as Caribbean coastal populations who raided eggs and took impregnated turtles at nesting sites. Unbeknownst to them, their stories led Carr and other conservationists to conclude that various species of turtles were on the verge of extinction, leading to a successful international campaign to designate them threatened and endangered species in 1975, thus effectively ending the maritime vernacular of turtle fishing in the Caribbean.

Yet Carr's work on sea turtles and the Caribbean people who hunted them sparked interest from novelists to geographers. In the 1960s and 1970s, his work inspired historical geographers who studied and lived in the region to better explain the origins of the consumption of turtles in little-known locales like the Colombian Island of San Andrés or the indigenous eastern

Nicaraguan village of Tasbapauni.<sup>29</sup> Literary figures such as Ernest Hemingway and Peter Matthiessen told romanticized and heroic tales of these turtlemen in *Old Man and the Sea* and *Far Tortuga*. Many forget that Hemingway's principle character, Santiago, was a retired turtler or that Matthiessen drew much of *Far Tortuga's* plot from his 1966 voyage to the Miskito Cays with Caymanian turtlemen. Recently, scholarly interest in sea turtles and the turtlemen has either focused on general aspects of Caymanian maritime history or examined the social and economic structures of turtle hunting communities in Costa Rica and Nicaragua.<sup>30</sup> Other scholars have examined the dynamics of interracial and transnational love affairs, while environmental scholars have investigated the politics behind Carr's successful international sea turtle conservation campaign in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>31</sup>

Unlike North Atlantic scholars, Latin American and Caribbean historians have traditionally paid little attention to fishery as a regional economic or social activity. Given the dominance of plantation agriculture and mineral resource extraction, fishery played a minor (albeit ubiquitous) role in the region's development in comparison to sugar or banana cultivation and silver or gold mining, which may explain the lack of scholarly interest in the subject. Yet in spite of the scant scholarship on fishery, some scholars have attempted to correct the gap. In 1966, Caribbean anthropologist Richard Price sketched a typology of different historical Caribbean fishing communities. He argued that Indian and enslaved African fishermen of all sorts held a privileged position within the colonial hierarchy, which allowed them to have an easier transition into freedom during post-emancipation.<sup>32</sup> Other scholars have made similar claims, even extending their studies to other regions, such as the United States.<sup>33</sup> One historian who studied the pearl fisheries in the circum-Caribbean cautions us to juxtapose the greater mobility of the enslaved mariners with their brutal and dangerous working conditions, which often led to death.<sup>34</sup> Beyond recovering these aspects of the region's maritime past, it is equally important to highlight how fishery can play a central role in the construction of maritime boundaries and the creation of international regulatory systems to control an ecologically mobile resource. This has been shown deftly in the case of the salmon industry in North America's Pacific Northwest and in the case of yellow croaker fishery in the South China Sea.<sup>35</sup> Fishery management scholars might appreciate conservationists' efforts to incorporate turtlemen into processes of resource management, which did not translate into the continuation of harvesting turtles, whether farmed or caught in the wild. Due to modern modes of extraction and technology, turtling proved an unsustainable industry.

## A Note on Sources and Methods

Researching the transnational geographies of Caymanian turtlemen in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries required plying international waters in search of written sources rather than sea turtles. Drawn to “entangled histories” that document the ways in which people, ideas, and commodities circulated across the wider Atlantic world, *The Last Turtlemen* offers another example of how the lived geographies and experiences of Atlantic world denizens frequently ignored and crossed imperial or national borders, which affected their political allegiances, social identities, and legal conditions.<sup>36</sup> Tracing turtlemen’s paths across multiple sites led to a clearer understanding about these under-researched historical actors. Tremendous insight into the lives of these maritime harvesters came from the Oral History Programme (formerly the Memory Bank) at the Cayman Islands National Archive, from which this book draws on over fifty transcribed interviews sharing memories of turtle fishing, maritime disputes, and Caymanian travels away from home on turtling voyages. These oral history interviews captured the perspectives of crew members and captains of turtle voyages as well as those of shopkeepers and middlemen involved in the trade more generally. The interviews occurred as early as the 1970s, but most took place in the 1990s and 2000s with septuagenarians and octogenarians. Thus, many offer firsthand accounts of the last years of turtle harvesting in the greater Caribbean.

Along with the oral history interviews, this book relies on a rich body of diplomatic correspondence on turtle fishing disputes between the governments of Great Britain and Nicaragua, Costa Rica, or Colombia. To be sure, British sources are plentiful. They include correspondence among the Foreign Office, the Colonial Office, and the commissioner at Grand Cayman. They also include government notices passed onto Caymanian residents and annual reports prepared for the governor of Jamaica (the Cayman Islands were a dependency of Jamaica until 1959). And yet the book does not rely on British sources alone; it pairs them with diplomatic correspondence from Nicaraguan, Costa Rican, and Colombian officials found in the national archives in San José (Costa Rica) and Bogotá (Colombia). Some diplomatic disputes, like the 1925 detention of Caymanian and British Honduran turtlemen, draws not only on the abundant written correspondence from local officials in San Andrés and Providencia Islands but also on British and Colombian officials in London and Bogotá. The Oral History Programme includes transcribed oral histories of two turtlemen detained in Colombia from 1925 to 1926, which draw a fuller picture of the incident.

Magazine and newspaper articles were also useful source material. The Jamaican newspaper the *Gleaner* frequently reported on the turtle trade. Circum-Caribbean publications—from Colombia's the *Searchlight* to Costa Rica's *Limón Weekly News*—included rare but insightful snippet articles and editorials. These Caribbean publications not only help delineate the mobility of turtle harvesting in the region but help explain its significance. U.S. newspaper articles supplement these Caribbean publications with recurring national stories highlighting the curiosity of turtle fishing or magazine features from *Life* and *National Geographic* meant to introduce their readerships to this unfamiliar topic.

Finally, the papers of the leading sea turtle conservationist and herpetologist Dr. Archie Carr at the University of Florida Smathers Libraries are a treasure trove. Carr's sea turtle research and advocacy come through his publications as well as his correspondence with international scientists, national governments, and the occasional turtle harvester. They are also found in newspaper clippings and fieldwork photographs. As a prolific writer and storyteller, his publications are lively and astute analyses of the sea turtles and the people who hunted and consumed them. Carr's thoughtful attention to turtlemen in these works keeps them at the forefront of his advocacy work on sea turtles.

### Navigating *The Last Turtlemen's* Story

*The Last Turtlemen* chronicles the decline of Caymanian turtle fishing from the last decades of the nineteenth century into the late twentieth century. It is divided into five chapters, which are organized thematically but overlap chronologically. Chapter 1 introduces the basic biology and behavior of sea turtles. It then briefly explores the relations between turtles and pre-Columbian and early modern Caribbean settlers. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the rise of turtle hunting in the Cayman Islands, where European settlers from neighboring islands such as Bermuda, Cuba, and Jamaica used the Caymans as a commons—an unrestricted place to exploit a variety of resources, such as mahogany, salt, timber, and turtles. By 1800, Caymanians witnessed the bust of the mahogany trade, widely dispersed deforestation, and the depletion of nearby and once bountiful turtle rookeries as ships stored with live turtles and tortoiseshell departed for the wider Atlantic world. The following chapters explore the turtlemen's work and life at sea, away from their island homes. Chapter 2 examines the way Caymanian turtlemen responded to the depletion of nearby turtle stocks and the limiting terrestrial ecosystem in the nineteenth century. I argue that those



involved in turtle hunting and harvesting developed innovative fishing techniques to respond to the changing aquatic ecosystem of the greater Caribbean in spite of the infrequent and poor pay given to its hardest laborers. Chapter 3 argues that the rise of long-distance turtle fishing facilitated the creation and recreation of a dynamic contact zone of ongoing transnational and cross-racial encounters among indigenous, white, and Afro-Caribbean inhabitants. The final chapters look at resistance to state efforts to regulate turtle fishing and the unmaking of a turtle commons throughout the Spanish-speaking Caribbean rimland. Chapter 4 argues that the creation and enforcement of a multinational legislation regime to regulate the turtle fishery in Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Colombia were driven largely by political rather than ecological motives. Finally, chapter 5 examines the roles that Archie Carr and the Caribbean Conservation Corporation played in instituting an international ban against sea turtle harvesting in the Atlantic, leading to the end of the turtle trade in the Caribbean.

THE HISTORICAL ROLE of sea turtles—and the human populations that hunted and consumed them in the Caribbean—played a fundamental role in the development of the edges, both figurative and physical, of the region. The expansion of exploration and peopling of the region was dependent on sea turtles. Early explorers fed on the fatty flesh of these marine reptiles to diversify their ship's provisions and to drive back malnourishment and disease all too common on New World voyages sojourning across the Atlantic Ocean and the Caribbean Sea. As travel accounts circulated of their voyages, other explorers also sought out sea turtles to fill their warehouses. Live sea turtles kept for weeks on the decks of ships without a need for food. As one scholar explained, turtles were “big, abundant, available, savory, sustaining, and remarkably tenacious of life.”<sup>37</sup> To keep their supplies intact, seamen—including buccaneers—carried indigenous harpooners on their ships to strike turtles and other palatable seafood. Seventeenth-century explorers and newcomers were not alone in their appreciation of sea turtles; archaeological excavations of turtle bones reveal a high consumption of the marine reptile among various indigenous peoples of the greater Caribbean.<sup>38</sup> They also careened ships at quiet, sandy islets, banks, or cays, where it was easiest to find them. This led them to new corners of the region, like the Caymans, the Bahamas, and the coastal communities of Central America, which were rich in neither minerals nor soil but abundant in sea turtles and other resources.

By the eighteenth century, sea turtles became commodities with the growing demand for both turtle meat and tortoiseshell in Europe and North

America. As seamen told stories of the succulent meat from green turtles and carried home decorative mirrors, combs, and snuffboxes made from the shell of the hawksbill turtle, restaurateurs began to list turtle soup on their menus, men's clubs raised funds to purchase live West Indian turtles, and the affluent sought to purchase tortoiseshell products from the Caribbean. To feed this demand, turtlemen hunted green and hawksbill turtles around the small bars, banks, and cays throughout the Caribbean. In these years, Caymanian turtlemen barely traveled beyond the shore. They hunted green turtles, which nested along the beaches, and bartered them for necessities with passing British ships, headed to England. Within less than a century, they had depleted the turtle population. From then forward, Caymanian turtle hunters boarded canoes first to nearby hunting grounds around cays south of Cuba and Jamaica and later toward Central America and the adjacent Caribbean islands to supply the market. By the end of the century, green turtle soup became a symbol of the affluent. Soon, recipes for mock turtle soup appeared in cookbooks, offering the masses an alternative way to enjoy and share in colonial consumption.<sup>39</sup>

Turtle hunting changed dramatically in the nineteenth century. The long-held seafaring tradition was under assault. Centuries of feeding the global demand for green and hawksbill turtles had depleted the formerly rich rookery grounds. The boom and bust cycles of the turtle bonanza circulated across the Caribbean: first in Bermuda, then in the Bahamas and the Florida Keys, and finally in the Cayman Islands. In each place, turtlemen confronted the challenge with different adaptive strategies. Some turned to new economic activities on land, cultivating a variety of crops, from cotton to pineapple. Others found different maritime work, such as wrecking and sponge fishing. Many turtlemen continued hunting turtles but had to travel farther away from their home communities. Of all the Caribbean communities with a history of sea turtle hunting, this process was best exemplified by the Caymanian men who dominated the region's turtle trade and who alone built the islands' economy on turtle hunting until the last quarter of the twentieth century. Witnessing depletions of turtles in nearby rookeries around their islands, Caymanian turtlemen plied the sea, traveling to Cuba, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Colombia. By the late nineteenth century, they confronted a rise in legislation designed to police formerly unrestricted fishing grounds.

The United States was one of the earliest states in the circum-Caribbean to design and enforce legislation that sought to prevent Bahamian fishing vessels access to the waters surrounding southwest Florida. Some scholars have pointed out that this led to an early wave of migration to the Florida Keys

by Bahamians affectionately called *conchs*.<sup>40</sup> Other governments seeking to restrict turtle hunting within their own territorial waters followed U.S. restrictions: Cuba in the 1870s, Nicaragua in the 1890s, Costa Rica in the 1910s, and Colombia in the 1920s. In each case, governments sought to nationalize territorial waters and marine resources in order to regulate the commercial use differently for citizens and noncitizens. From a regional perspective, international disputes over turtle hunting and harvesting reveal the ways these nations defended aquatic territorial claims and protected their marine resources as an important function of a modern government.

Due to the precipitous decline of sea turtles, increased fishing regulations, and rising global demands, competition grew between these deep turtle hunters, which resulted in greater incidences of violence and theft. Turtle hunting always had its dangers—most importantly, the sea. As fishing grounds grew more politicized, Caymanians began to report more violence, particularly from customs agents and other turtlemen. Nicaraguan and Colombian authorities manhandled and beat turtlemen, whom they accused of poaching turtles in their national waters. Theft was common. Caymanians complained of indigenous strikers raiding their turtle pens when they were away during the day. Some Caymanian turtlemen resorted to carrying pistols on their schooners. Out of these volatile clashes came state efforts to better regulate increasingly scarce turtle hunting grounds. Others, like the Cayman Brac islanders who hunted hawksbill turtles, simply gave up. In 1968, one visitor reported, “The hawksbill industry is about dead.”<sup>41</sup>

Given the paucity of sea turtles and the volatile interactions with state authorities, it is surprising that Caymanian turtlemen continued to pursue their prey. Yet economist Garrett Hardin disagreed that such a pursuit is out of the ordinary. In his polemical work *The Tragedy of the Commons*, Hardin argued that in a competition for scarce resources, individuals would destroy them in the absence of any regulation, insisting that individuals make rational decisions driven by their personal interests.<sup>42</sup> Yet as others have demonstrated, fishermen could invite the creation of regulation in an effort to protect a resource and their livelihood.<sup>43</sup> Turtle hunters pursued a variety of strategies to maintain access to this marine reptile. They demanded that British diplomats both negotiate an agreement with foreign governments to permit them access to hunting grounds and assist with what had been unsuccessful attempts to farm-raise sea turtles for export. By the mid-twentieth century, Caymanian turtlemen were presented with a dilemma: how to meet a growing demand for turtles in the face of greater fishing regulations and a dwindling sea turtle population.

## CHAPTER ONE

# Sages of the Sea

## *Turtles in the Greater Caribbean*

Orlando W. Roberts, an American small trader, plied his goods among the various indigenous peoples residing along the eastern edge of Central America from Cape Gracias a Dios southward to Punta Gorda between 1816 and 1824. Mosquitia, also called the Mosquito Shore or Mosquito Coast by English visitors, encompassed a territory with a diverse habitat of rainforest, mountainous terrain, and meandering estuaries that poured out to the Caribbean Sea. Its marine shelf extends seaward and includes offshore cays and banks such as nearby Pearl Cays and faraway Miskito Cays. Like English, Dutch, and Jamaican traders who arrived to the area before him, Roberts came to Mosquitia because he was attracted to a host of exotic tropical commodities. Having discovered how “the finest quality” of vanilla grew in abundance near the San Juan River, Roberts came to understand why Spanish traders so valued the commodity.<sup>1</sup> After procuring some five thousand pounds of the medicinal plant sarsaparilla, he imagined supplying the entire Jamaican market. Noticing how the Kuna on the San Blas Islands—Caribbean islands off the shore of Panama—dared not cut down coconut trees but rather harvested their nuts to make oil for dressing hair or illuminating lamps, the American trader considered a commerce in coconuts. Yet everywhere he sojourned along Mosquitia he found the finest turtles. As one of the earliest American small traders in the area, Roberts often competed with well-established Jamaican traders for as much tortoiseshell as he could carry back to U.S. markets from one of the world’s richest natural habitats for sea turtles.<sup>2</sup>

The few years he had spent in Mosquitia gave Roberts a knowledge of the basic habits of turtles. No aspect of turtle activity avoided his scrutiny. During the turtle fishing season in the months of June, July, August, and September, Roberts described how green turtles traveled “a great many leagues” to various offshore cays and nested along sandy beaches across Mosquitia, particularly Turtle Bogue—a wet lowland that forms a part of present-day northeastern Costa Rica.<sup>3</sup> Drawn to the region as foraging grounds, hawksbill and green turtles fed principally on thimbles, “or a small blubber fish,” and a “peculiar sort of grass growing at the bottom of the sea” found around

Mosquitia's offshore cays and banks. Since turtles had large lungs, Roberts surmised, it explained why they swam five to six fathoms (roughly thirty to thirty-six feet) underwater, frequently emerging "for the purpose of *blowing*," or breathing. Mating was particularly volatile, with male turtles "totally exhausted, worthless, and unfit for use as food."<sup>4</sup> Pregnant female turtles judiciously secured a spot before digging a hole two feet deep on the sandy beaches. After depositing some sixty to eighty eggs, they returned to sea, only to return some two weeks later to deposit additional turtle eggs. Within a month's time, turtle hatchlings emerged from their shells and "immediately made their way directly to the sea" if undeterred by human and nonhuman predators.

In the nineteenth century, most mature Caribbean turtles, such as green or hawksbill, were likely seized around rich, green vegetation in the warm shoal waters described in Roberts's description. Feeding their several hundred pounds with stalks of nutrient-rich seagrass (*Thalassia testudinum*, or turtle grass) buried underground, they had already successfully navigated the invariable dangers from human and nonhuman predators in transitioning from hatchling to adulthood. With natural wanderlust, green and hawksbill turtles circumnavigated the tropical and subtropical pelagic (or open sea) waters around the globe, sometimes entering the coastal zones — spaces between land and ocean — of numerous countries. Natal homing instincts eventually cut short their solitary existence. For some inexplicable reason, an urgent need to return to the beach of their birth called to them. Once there, green and hawksbill turtles gathered and mated underwater and ashore, across beaches around the Bay of Campeche, the Gulf of Honduras, or the twenty-four-mile continuous strip along the northern coast of Costa Rica. These frenetic, volatile unions were momentary encounters, with both male and female turtles eventually circling back into the sea to resume their peripatetic lives. Months later, only impregnated turtles revisited the shoreline to nest clutches of eggs and then return to the sea. These reproduction cycles continued every two to five years for two decades or more. Only apprehension or death ended these sojourns.

How the human predator — a turtler — treated the turtles after catching them depended on whether they were green or hawksbill turtles. Green turtles languished away on vessels, turned on their backs with their flippers tied together in the sweltering sun, with no food and sparse water for weeks or even months, until they ended up as a gourmet dish. Withholding food kept them tractable. Death came much more quickly for hawksbills, as turtlemen snuffed out their lives. They first cut and then seared away the

carapace from the turtle's body, careful not to damage the colorful scutes used to make decorative adornments. With the keratinous pieces in hand, the turtle hunter chopped the hawksbill's remains into pieces, leaving it to either adventurous locals or hungry marine animals like sharks. Either way, some portion of the turtles made it to a number of markets around the circum-Atlantic: Kingston, Key West, Philadelphia, New York, and London. Consumers in all these places anxiously awaited the arrival of turtle commodities to enjoy.

Although historical records from mariners and turtlemen offer the best accounts of historic sea turtle behavior and population sizes, these sources are still limited in scope. Since turtles came into view only during the hunt and at the moment of capture, human predators had little knowledge of how they spent their lives in the open sea, out of view of humans. Twentieth-century scientific studies, however, offer insight into the habits and migratory patterns of these elusive marine animals. By using these studies, we can draw conclusions about historic sea turtle behaviors based on evidence of current turtle population stocks.<sup>5</sup> The result is likely speculative but still useful in understanding the nature of turtle-human encounters. Understanding the biology and life cycles of sea turtles makes it clear how the marine animal fell prey to its most dangerous predator: turtlemen. Yet it is also important to highlight the variations between green and hawksbill turtles that led to different processes of commodification of turtles across the Caribbean, as these two turtle varieties both served niche luxury markets for centuries. The pursuit of green and hawksbill turtles became a distinctive feature of coastal and island communities in the southwestern Caribbean, particularly the Cayman Islands, Providencia Island, and the Miskitu settlements along the eastern edge of Nicaragua. Invisible for too long in historical scholarship, this chapter argues that turtles played a pivotal role in shaping these small island and coastal societies as much as sugar or banana commodities did in other parts of the Caribbean.

## Basic Sea Turtle Biology

As one of the oldest living animal species, sea turtles have roamed the world's oceans for one hundred million years, outliving other prehistoric animals, such as dinosaurs.<sup>6</sup> While scientists do not have a complete picture of the evolutionary history of marine reptiles, turtle bones discovered in Europe, Africa, and Asia offer persuasive evidence that ancestral turtles thrived in the Triassic of the Mesozoic some 250 million years ago.<sup>7</sup> Their closest ancestor



is *Desmatochelys padillai*, a primitive late Cretaceous reptile some 120 million years old.<sup>8</sup> Over this remarkable span of time, sea turtles have managed to maintain an unchanging body shape, with variations only to size and some adaptations due to surviving in different habitats. Drawing on an array of sources from paleontological, archaeological, and even historical written accounts, scientists estimate that early sea turtle populations were in the hundreds of millions up until the modern era.<sup>9</sup>

Taxonomists classify contemporary turtles, tortoises, and terrapins to the reptilian genus *Testudines*. They all share common features, such as toothlessness, a retractable head, and a bony shell grafted to their ribs in a protective cover called a carapace. Carapaces come in different forms; some are flat, while others are dome shaped. While tortoises are terrestrial bound and do not swim, terrapins thrive in rivers or in brackish water between land and sea. Unlike other reptilians, turtles live all or part of their lives in water. With the exception of their amphibious orientation, turtles share the same characteristics as other reptiles. They have scales called scutes. Although turtles are strong swimmers, they have lungs and must come up from under the water to breathe. Turtles are cold blooded, and they warm their bodies in the world's oceans and seas along the equatorial band. However, they often take a break to lay eggs on land.

Long-range migration is a distinctive trait of sea turtles. Regardless of the species, turtles are circumglobal, meaning they do not spend their entire life cycle in the waters of a single country. Most swim hundreds of miles away from their natal nesting sites; others, thousands of miles away. This behavior apparently begins at birth. Within an hour of popping out from their shells, turtle hatchlings crawl across the sand en masse, then pursue separate paths as they head directly into the water. Since their mothers abandoned them at birth, these orphaned offspring amazingly follow visual cues from the waves to guide them into the open sea. A sea turtle conservationist once described this incredible feat. Turtles “have simply got to go fast and straight toward the ocean even though they can't see it, never saw it before, and know of its existence only as a set of signals to react to instinctively.”<sup>10</sup> When these clues fail, Earth's magnetic field serves as a compass to orient them into the sea. In the absence of light, turtles rely on wave motions to orient them in dark or deep underwater environments. Biologists theorize that the magnetic crystals in turtles' brains synchronize information from the magnetic fields to help them navigate in pelagic waters.<sup>11</sup>

For decades, scientists wondered what happened to hatchlings as they swam out into the deep ocean, as humans around the world rarely encoun-

tered juvenile turtles. Beginning in the 1940s, biologists made headway on answering this question. Scientists placed tags on sea turtles and asked people who found them to report the whereabouts of the marine animal to researchers.<sup>12</sup> Due to those tagging programs, we now know that turtles spend years, likely a decade or more, swimming in Earth's waters, discovering feeding sites far away from natal beaches. With good underwater eyesight and an internal magnetic compass, turtles embark on a marine adventure without a clear itinerary and make frequent stops to bask briefly in the sun along isolated rugged banks in between feeding.

Sea turtle foraging plays an essential role in maintaining the health of marine ecosystems. While green turtles spend their adulthood as sole herbivores, other turtle species are omnivores, with a plant and animal diet. As they swim across shallow and deep ocean waters, turtles feed in coral reefs, around mangrove forests, and on seagrass beds, all habitats rich in nutrients. Reefs attract a host of algae, marine animals, and invertebrates, such as coral polyps, plankton, sponges, and jellyfish. Turtles voraciously feed on algae and sponges, which helps to preserve the health of the coral reef system.<sup>13</sup> Sponges help to recycle coral waste, but they can also break down coral reef systems if they grow too numerous. As turtles graze on algae, some of it becomes stuck to their shells, which attracts fish to feed on the algae and thus clean the turtles. Mangrove forests also attract turtles. They chomp on the salty underwater forests as well as small aquatic animals, such as crustaceans and invertebrates, mostly in the Pacific and the Indian Oceans, with a fewer number in the Caribbean Sea. Seagrass beds also draw turtles to this ecosystem. Located in shallow or brackish water, these plants and flowers create vascular roots to absorb nutrients, making it an ideal habitat for a number of marine animals. Turtles cut down the tops of the stalks, letting more light reach the floor of the underwater forest system and allowing oxygen to circulate. The greater Caribbean as a marine ecosystem enjoys an abundance of such coral reefs, mangroves, and seagrass beds, which attract a high number of diverse animals, including sea turtles.<sup>14</sup>

Caribbean turtle species include the loggerhead, the green, the leatherback (*Dermochelys coriacea*), the hawksbill, the olive ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea*), and the Kemp's ridley (*Lepidochelys kempii*). With the exception of the two ridley species, which nest largely in the Guianas and the Mexican Yucatán Peninsula, the nesting sites of turtle species are widely dispersed across the Caribbean.<sup>15</sup> Given these contemporary preferred locations, few early-modern accounts even mention the olive or the Kemp's ridley. English buccaneer and naturalist William Dampier offered an extensive description of



sea turtles in his *A New Voyage Round the World*. In this seventeenth-century account, Dampier chronicled how turtles resided mostly along channels thick with seagrass and identified four principle sea turtle species: trunk (now called leatherback), loggerhead, hawksbill, and green.<sup>16</sup> Unlike loggerheads and leatherbacks, hawksbill and green turtles became widely consumed for a variety of purposes and later transformed into global commodities that linked the Caribbean to the wider world.

## The Hawksbill Turtle

Called *carey* in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, the hawksbill gained its name for its birdlike beak.<sup>17</sup> Using their strong jaws to clamp down and munch on a host of invertebrates and underwater forest systems exclusively in tropical shallow waters, hawksbills are omnivores. Caribbean hawksbills display a distinctive behavior: they show a strong preference for eating sponges lodged to hard coral. Easy to misidentify as plants, sponges are marine animals (*Porifera*) stuck to the floor of fresh- and saltwater systems. While swimming in the crystalline shoal waters surrounding coral reefs, hawksbills can easily poke their snouts into small crevices and chomp on the toxic sponges, which also have deathly sharp glass-like spicules. One study found Caribbean hawksbills' stomachs to contain nothing but sponges.<sup>18</sup> This dietary preference for sponges is unusual for any animal species. Some scientists attribute this food selectivity to be reflective not of the abundance of sponges but of a strong preference for them, even in the absence of their availability.<sup>19</sup> Due to the high level of toxins ingested from sponges, however, most human populations do not consume hawksbills as an animal protein.<sup>20</sup> One exception consisted of turtlemen and their families in southwestern Caribbean communities on Cayman Brac and Providencia (Colombia) Islands, later to be joined by other Caribbean populations, which reportedly ate the species from the nineteenth century onward. Cayman Brac islanders supposedly prepared a stew with the meat of juvenile hawksbills.<sup>21</sup> Human consumption of hawksbills may reflect the likely decline of the species that consumed less toxic sponges, making it more palatable for human consumption.<sup>22</sup>

The spawning cycle of hawksbills in the Caribbean occurs at specific times. From the months of June to November, with intense activity in July and August, the pregnant hawksbill almost runs, quickly alternating her flippers, across nocturnal sandy beaches along the shores of Mosquitia (Nicaragua), Yucatán (Mexico), and the arc of eastern islands called the Lesser Antilles.

After identifying a safe place, covered by trees and vegetation, a hawksbill deposits and buries her clutch of 130 or more eggs into an underground chamber. These sexually mature female hawksbill turtles make haste to return to the sea before returning in two or so weeks to nest more eggs in different chambers on the same beach. They repeat the reproduction cycle two, three, or even four additional times in a year. Some biologists opine that the speediness of hawksbill mobility onshore may have been a recent adaptation: they learned to move quickly in order to avoid capture from various predators.<sup>23</sup> While female hawksbills may avert seizure and likely death, each spawning leaves their offspring alone and vulnerable. Their survival is always at risk, as nonhuman predators—from dogs to jaguars—emerge from tropical rainforests to dig up tasty eggs.<sup>24</sup> Rapacious human predators are even deadlier. Sometimes gangs of turtle egg collectors simultaneously grab hawksbill mothers; the turtle eggs serve as subsistence, whereas the adult hawksbill holds immense value.<sup>25</sup>

Hawksbills were arguably the most marketable of all extant sea turtles. Desired for their translucent marbled scutes, with streaks of reddish black, golden yellow, brown, and black across the oval-shaped carapace, this unusual palette of thirteen colorful scales separates it from other turtle species. Due to their keratinous nature, scutes were durable and pliable. These characteristics, combined with the colors, long attracted human predators to the hawksbill's carapace. Given the misnomer "tortoiseshell," artisans transformed the colorful pliable material into furniture, jewelry, and other decorative items for thousands of years. The ancient Greco-Roman world harvested scutes to make instruments, such as the chelys and the lute, but also used them as inlaid veneer in furniture and as other decorative adornments. They were not alone, as the first-century account *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* described the sale of tortoiseshell in various ports of the Indian Ocean.<sup>26</sup>

European desire for tortoiseshell remained insatiable. By the seventeenth century, European merchants once again trafficked in tortoiseshell. Dutch traders in Asia and the Caribbean harvested hawksbill turtles for tortoiseshell in the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea. Eighteenth-century private traders in the Dutch Antilles occasionally exported hawksbill to the Netherlands, with one historian estimating that Dutch hunters harvested one hundred or so hawksbills annually between 1738 and 1790. In Amsterdam, a host of Dutch artisans, from comb makers to knife makers, manufactured rare products from tortoiseshell. While tortoiseshell was a minor Dutch West Indian commodity, the Dutch East India Company (or VOC) supplied the

flexible raw material to Asian buyers.<sup>27</sup> In France, the Sun King (Louis XIV) contracted royal cabinetmaker André-Charles Boulle to make two hundred pieces, which included several pieces of tortoiseshell inlaid furniture for the Palace of Versailles. The cabinetmaker perfected a marquetry technique in which he inlaid tortoiseshell onto wooden furniture with brass and pewter engravings.<sup>28</sup> By the eighteenth century, French artisans abandoned tortoiseshell to design “painting in wood,” in which contrasting natural colors made geometric shapes. Imported woods, whether brazilwood or mahogany, were less expensive than tortoiseshell.<sup>29</sup> In England, affluent consumers enjoyed luxury products such as tortoiseshell-engraved cases and combs, manufactured in Jamaica from hawksbills harvested in the Cayman Islands. These exotic decorative items became symbols of social status, as so few people could afford to travel abroad or acquire such luxuries.<sup>30</sup>

The early modern era saw an increased consumption of hawksbill worldwide. Beyond Europe in Pacific waters, Chinese and Dutch traders jockeyed to supply tortoiseshell to Asian buyers. Chinese traders imported tortoiseshell from the Southeast Asian waters of the Philippines and Thailand, and largely from the arc of eastern Indonesian islands since the Song dynasty in the tenth century. Chinese consumers preferred the colorful scutes of the hawksbill, which they paid large sums to acquire and manufacture into ceramics, boxes, and furniture.<sup>31</sup> By the seventeenth century, European traders like the Dutch East India Company sought to obtain tortoiseshell in exchange for Indian and Japanese goods, a market that local Indonesian rulers and resident Chinese traders in Java had long dominated. Although VOC merchants never fully controlled the tortoiseshell market in Indonesia, Dutch traders did partially meet the demands of the Japanese elite for tortoiseshell (also known as *bekko*).<sup>32</sup> The tremendous competition for hawksbills from buyers in the region and the intense yet diffuse process of procurement likely helped to decimate the resident hawksbill populations in the Pacific Ocean. A similar process occurred in the Caribbean, as accounts of sizable hawksbill populations likely spurred on massive harvesting of tortoiseshell to supply European markets with this exotic marine commodity.

## The Green Turtle

The green turtle is the most known of all the turtles in the Caribbean, gracefully lumbering in coastal waters with its flippers, almost too small in comparison to the size of its body. Human and nonhuman predators catch

glimpses of them around shallow waters or scurrying across sandy beaches preparing chamber nests for their offspring, which they deposit in two-week intervals for a month or more. Unlike the hawksbill, adult green Caribbean turtles forage exclusively on seagrass beds and underwater mangroves. This vegetarian diet is an unusual feature among turtle species and particular to the Caribbean variety. In Pacific waters, mature green turtles are omnivores, often consuming invertebrates such as mollusk and jellyfish.<sup>33</sup>

Larger than the hawksbill in size, mature green turtles can weigh anywhere from two hundred to six hundred or more pounds, and typically measure between three and four feet in length. With a small nonretractable but proportional head and short flippers, green turtles have a wide, smooth carapace that comes in a variety of colors, from olive green to reddish brown or even black. They swim in tropical and subtropical waters around the globe. Complete understanding of the life cycle of most sea turtles remains elusive, but the green turtle is the exception. Recent studies suggest that they migrate lengthy distances, likely moving from rookery to rookery between the southwestern Indian Ocean and the South Atlantic, depending on the age cohort.<sup>34</sup> While green turtles migrate occasionally to nesting or sleeping grounds as a group, they spend the bulk of their lives alone, foraging in areas usually abundant with underwater marine forests. This ecosystem nurtures the juvenile turtles to thrive on plants and small aquatic animals as they become mature adult herbivores.

The meat of the green turtle was the most desired of all the turtle species. With an exclusively vegetarian diet in its adulthood, green turtle meat and the gelatinous light yellow cartilage over the lower shell, called calipee, became a delicious addition to the plate of any diner. The color of its fat gave the green turtle its name. Under the Tang dynasty in China, the affluent feasted on turtle and calipee soup. Menus of banquets and parties for Chinese officials and the elite listed them as dishes.<sup>35</sup> As one early modern Caribbean chronicler noted, green turtle was “the sweetest of all the kinds.”<sup>36</sup> In addition to the delicious flavor of the turtle meat and its fatty cartilage, some diners believed it held medicinal or restorative healing powers. English naval officer Commodore Anston credited turtle consumption as preventing his crew from succumbing to scurvy.<sup>37</sup> Others had their doubts on the curative powers of turtle consumption. While making trips to the American colonies, Spanish sailors may have begrudgingly eaten turtle. Some people even believed turtle consumption led to leprosy.<sup>38</sup> Across South and Southeast Asia, however, many held a more gingerly attitude toward consumption of turtles. Malaysians in the state of Sarawak revered turtles and avoided



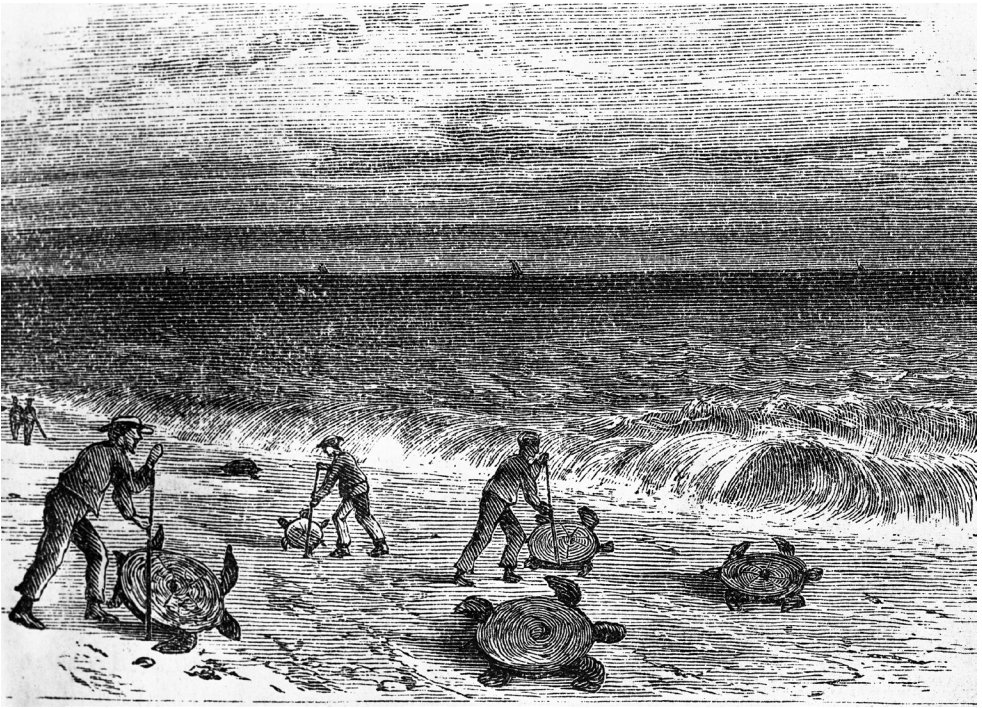


FIGURE 1.1 Turtle turning on the beach. This drawing was produced in 1871. It depicts turtlers using a peg—a prism-shaped pointed steel peg fitted to a socket in the end of a stout pole—to turn hawksbill turtles over. Courtesy of State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory.

eating or killing them, whereas sumptuous parties of the Indian elite often included turtle dishes.<sup>39</sup>

Green turtles are easy prey, and their desirability reflects the ease with which human predators captured and learned to consume them. Turtlemen and sailors quickly spotted them in crystalline shallow waters as they gathered to feed around coral reefs and mangrove forests. Other times, crew members of ships passing through to replenish their freshwater tanks would discover hundreds of turtles basking on some island in the ocean. Drawing on the strength of a few sailors or officers, these men flipped the turtles on their backs and dragged them onto vessels making transoceanic voyages (see figure 1.1). Unbeknownst to the crew, basking held an important biological function. The sun's warmth regulated the temperature of green turtles' bodies and possibly affected the health and sex of their eggs. More often than not, coastal and island residents simply waited for impregnated green turtles to come ashore to nest their eggs. They would then grab them and

their eggs for tasty meals and eventually for export. With a basic biological understanding of green turtles, hunters, sailors, and turtlemen were eventually catching them at staggering rates.

### Turtles and European Expansion in the Greater Caribbean

The Caribbean once abounded with sea turtles. It is quite possible that at one time, sixty-six to seventy-eight million adult green turtles and over one million hawksbills called this region home.<sup>40</sup> Within a semi-enclosed circle, these turtles rode on the Caribbean Current that transfers warm water from the equatorial band of the Atlantic system northward to the Gulf of Mexico via the Yucatán Current and circulates a whirl of water southward toward Central America and northern South America along the counterclockwise Colombia-Panama gyre. This current moves across a mixture of shallow and deep waters such as the Cayman Trench, where a narrow passage between Jamaica and the Cayman Islands plunges more than seven thousand meters below sea level. Elsewhere, coral reefs hug the edge of most small islands. The Caribbean enjoys two extensive reefs: a large barrier reef in Belize and a smaller one north of the Colombian Island of Providencia. Due to their isolation from the Pacific Ocean, Caribbean coral reefs enjoy tremendous biodiversity, usually surrounded by seagrass meadows and mangrove forests. The plants and forests form a symbiotic and important part of coral reef systems, as they attract a multitude of fish, invertebrates, and marine animals such as turtles.

Sea turtles played a significant role in the development of pre-Columbian indigenous populations in the Caribbean. These populations thoroughly appreciated the culinary, decorative, and symbolic aspects of turtles. Some pre-Columbian populations kept shells for decoration or used them at burial grounds.<sup>41</sup> Others painted turtle motifs on ceramic pottery. These images reflected the symbolic importance different societies gave to turtles. During the Classic period (250–900 C.E.), the Maya civilization nestled on the Yucatán Peninsula depicted turtles on religious and administrative buildings as well as in codices. Even one of the Mayan deities, known as Pauahtun (or God N), is frequently depicted emerging out of a turtle carapace.<sup>42</sup>

More commonly, turtle became a part of the pre-Columbian diet. No part of the turtle was wasted. Across the greater Caribbean, they ate turtle meat, eggs, and calipee. In Turks and Caicos, archaeologists excavated a site called Coralie on the northern part of Grand Turk. Beyond fish and iguanas, turtle bones were the most abundant faunal remains found at the site. Dating from

750 C.E., Lucayans—an Arawak-speaking people—hunted and then processed a staggering five thousand pounds of green turtle. They even used the turtle carapaces as plates to cook dishes of turtle, iguana, and fish. Moreover, the oldest turtle remains are the most abundant, suggesting that the Lucayans stamped out much of the breeding adult green turtle populations within two centuries, then turned to hunting juvenile turtles and other animals.<sup>43</sup> This example urges us to question assumptions about idolized pre-Columbian use of marine resources as well as baseline estimates of turtle populations.<sup>44</sup>

Although turtle populations declined in places like Grand Turk before the arrival of Christopher Columbus, European explorers found turtles to be a ubiquitous part of the flora and fauna of the Caribbean. Columbus and his crew frequently chronicled the astonishing number of turtles in the region. During his second voyage in 1494, priest and chronicler Andrés Bernaldez noted how Columbus and his crew encountered a multitude of sea turtles around Cuban offshore islands later named Jardín de la Reina (Queen's Garden). While they had observed turtles throughout their explorations, around these islands they saw "very many more of them, for the sea was all thick with them, and they were of the very largest, so numerous that it seemed as though ships would run aground on them and were as if bathing in them."<sup>45</sup> By his fourth voyage, Columbus's son Ferdinand described a similar scene. As the crew approached a shoreline, swarms of turtles on land and sea appeared to them like little rocks. The Italian explorer named the pair of islands Las Tortugas (the Turtles), though this name would lose favor to the Caymans.<sup>46</sup> Despite its new name, hawksbill and green turtles flocked to nest their eggs on the sandy shore and forage around its coral reefs. Like the indigenous populations they encountered, the ubiquity of turtles made them an easy prey for European predators.

European explorers learned to appreciate turtles as an essential provision along dangerous and lengthy transatlantic voyages. Juan Ponce de León, the veteran Spanish conqueror and former crewmate of Columbus, learned such a lesson. In 1513, after skirmishes with local indigenous populations while identifying the future location of the Spanish settlement at St. Augustine, Ponce de León and his three-vessel fleet sailed along the Floridian peninsula toward the Caribbean Sea. Upon reaching the southwestern corner of the peninsula, the Spanish conqueror and his crew ran across a group of scattered islands. Seeking to replenish their food supply, Ponce de León and his crew came ashore and captured 170 green turtles in one evening, then carried the live turtles onto their vessels as part of the ship's provisions.<sup>47</sup> The

astonishing number of sea turtles nesting along the beach inspired Ponce de León to name these islands Las Tortugas. Later renamed the Dry Tortugas, these Florida islands were not the same “Las Tortugas” that Columbus had found ten years earlier.<sup>48</sup> European newcomers to the Caribbean learned quickly that turtles were awash throughout the region.

The fatty flesh of green turtles was an attractive addition to the limited provisions onboard an early-modern ship. Typically, captains outfitted their vessels with provisions that did not easily spoil. Stores included ingredients to make biscuits (or crackers) and some form of salted pork, fish, or meat. Some mariners also added smoked or pickled fish to their provisions. Fresh produce, fish, and meat, however, were luxuries quickly consumed. Part of the reason is that they lacked a system to preserve them, like refrigeration. The other reason is that many vessels did not have an oven, and those ships that did have an oven cooked food only once per day in order to lessen the risk of fire. In the case of green turtles, they could be stored onboard in a pen with water and without food for a long duration. Their abundant meat provided a tremendous amount of fresh or salted meat for a diet-starved crew.<sup>49</sup> By the seventeenth century, French, Dutch, and British mariners made frequent visits to one or more of the Cayman Islands during the turtle-nesting season. They captured, butchered, and salted sea turtles to bring back with them on their voyages across the Caribbean and, more likely, onward to Europe.<sup>50</sup>

Pirates seemed to also enjoy turtle meat. Crisscrossing the Caribbean, these outlaws of the sea acquired a taste for green turtles as a victual. Composed of a multinational polyglot of failed planters, petty criminals, runaway slaves, and former servants, pirates established safe havens from which to launch their attacks on passing ships. Initially, the offshore island of Tortuga, located north of present-day Haiti, attracted a pirate society in its heyday of the 1650s. Other pirate communities emerged on Hispaniola and, more famously, on Port Royal in the aftermath of the English conquest of Jamaica. Until the 1692 earthquake, Port Royal was Jamaica’s principal port. Although it was a small military camp during the Cromwellian conquest of Jamaica in 1655, it quickly grew to a sizable population of 6,500 residents. Port Royal was home to merchants, mariners, and artisans, but it also attracted privateers—a circumstance that explains the port’s reputation for debauchery and sinful gluttony.<sup>51</sup>

Between their raids on Spanish convoys and coastal settlements, these “masterless” French, Dutch, and English men and occasional women established havens to replenish their water supply, restock their ship’s provisions,



and careen their vessels.<sup>52</sup> Remote islands with thick hardwood forests surrounded by deep seas filled with succulent seafood (like turtles) provided not only a safe shelter but also good eating for these sea rovers. Seventeenth-century pirate historian John Esquemeling explained the importance of traveling along these maritime routes to restock ship provisions. On the pirate's vessel, his band of sea robbers preferred the Cuban southern cays located some fifty miles south of Cuba. "Here they careen[ed] their vessels, and in the meanwhile some of them go to hunt, others to cruize [*sic*] upon the seas in canoes, seeking their fortune. Many times they take the poor fishermen of tortoises, and, carrying them to their habitations, they make them work so long as the Pirates are pleased," he noted.<sup>53</sup>

### Indigenous Turtlemen and Systems of Knowledge Production

European explorers and pirates found green turtle to be such an essential component of a mariner's victuals that they often drew on the expertise of indigenous turtle hunters. Reliance on indigenous turtlemen likely dates back to Columbus and his voyages, as chroniclers noted how the crew observed new techniques for fishing and hunting animals. While passing by Cuba, the Columbus expedition witnessed indigenous mariners using a fishing line that had a sucking fish called a remora at its end to catch turtles. The remora, which essentially served as bait, could supposedly fasten itself to other fish, turtles, and even sharks, though some have questioned the credulity of such accounts.<sup>54</sup> By the seventeenth century, Europeans were clearly drawing on the maritime knowledge of indigenous peoples to hunt turtles. The most celebrated indigenous turtlemen were the Miskitu, an Afro-Amerindian population living along the Caribbean coast of present-day Honduras and Nicaragua. In 1681, William Dampier arrived to Cape Gracias a Dios. He described the inhabitants as a small "nation or family" of some strong men who have extraordinary eyesight and agility. "Their chiefest [*sic*] employment in their own country is to strike fish, turtle, or manatee," noted the English pirate.<sup>55</sup> The Miskitu considered green turtles to be clean meat and, thus, highly valued. They organized their social and spatial activities around the seasonal availability of this marine reptile.

The Miskitu (also called Moskito or Mosquito) gained prominence and maintained political autonomy through their extensive cultural interactions and commerce with Europeans. With their newly acquired languages and sea experiences, the Miskitu developed a cosmopolitan worldview. Given their extensive trade with Europeans — from Dutch to English — often in tortoise-

shell or sarsaparilla in exchange for arms, the Miskitu became one of the fiercest indigenous kingdoms along the Caribbean coast of Central America.<sup>56</sup> They pushed back rivals from the interior and turned their seasonal turtle hunting trips south, toward Costa Rica and Panama, into slave raids.<sup>57</sup> The Miskitu sold captured indigenous peoples to European traders, who sent them off to plantations on the larger Caribbean islands. The intertwined turtle hunting and slave raiding expeditions made a dramatic impact on Costa Rican indigenous communities, who retreated to areas under Spanish authority. Historian Alejandra Boza Villareal explains that indigenous communities not only abandoned their homes along the Caribbean coast but also resettled to formerly depopulated regions in the central valley and southern Pacific coast, sometimes under Franciscan missionaries.<sup>58</sup> The Miskitu prowess as indigenous turtlemen put them in a position to enjoy political autonomy during much of the long period of European colonial rule in Central America.

The Miskitu's political autonomy benefited from the formation of commercial relationships with non-Hispanic European settlers who were often rivals to Spanish ambitions in the region. In 1630, Bermudians formed the Providence Island Company, resulting in one hundred Puritans settling on the lush mountainous island of Providencia, situated a hundred miles from Mosquitia. This island belonged to an archipelago where Miskitu turtlemen regularly hunted for sea turtles. Within three years, Governor Philip Bell sent one of his company's servants, Lewis Morris, to stay at Mosquitia with the goal of establishing a turtling station. There, the Providence Island Company sought to procure more tortoiseshell from Miskitu turtlemen for export. Several years after his time living with the Miskitu, Morris's presence remained at Miskito Cays, as one of the banks was named in his honor.<sup>59</sup> During its ten-year tenure, the company's settlers sustained successful commerce and friendly relations with the Miskitu. Although the Spanish captured the island and destroyed the company's settlement, other Englishmen followed the Providence Island Company's trade in tortoiseshell and turtle with the Miskitu.

European pirates, sailors, and settlers so valued the Miskitu turtling acumen that they thought it mandatory to bring them on their voyages to guarantee a permanent supply of turtle meat. Often one green turtle could easily feed an entire crew or more for days. The Miskitu strikers impressed European and non-European counterparts with their harpooning skills. Dutch buccaneer John Esquemeling explained as follows: "The Indians often go to sea with the rovers [buccaneers], and many spend three or four years away

without visiting their homeland, so among them are men who can speak very good English and French—just as there are many buccaneers who speak the Indian language well. These Indians are a great asset to the rovers, as they are very good harpoonists, extremely skillful in spearing turtles. . . . In fact, an Indian is capable of keeping a whole ship's company of 100 men supplied with food."<sup>60</sup>

His English contemporary William Dampier also relied on the Miskito harpooners: "They are esteemed by all Privateers; for one or two of them in a Ship, will maintain 100 men: So that when we careen our Ships, we choose commonly Places where there is plenty of Turtle or Manatee for the *Moskito* men to strike."<sup>61</sup> By the eighteenth century, freedman Olaudah Equiano traveled to Mosquitia and observed the sporadic but steady English-dominated turtle trade. He spoke of an English trader named John Baker, master of the sloop *Indian Queen*, who "had been a long time along the shore trading for turtle shells and silver, and had a good quantity of each of them on board."<sup>62</sup> By the nineteenth century, even American traders plied the Caribbean littoral of Central America in search of high quantities of tortoiseshell.<sup>63</sup>

## Emergent Turtle Markets

The pursuit of sea turtles—green and hawksbill—developed into two separate yet interrelated fisheries. While observing the industry in the Bahamas, naturalist Mark Catesby noted the consumption of green turtle as a Caribbean staple: "The green turtle is that which all the maritime inhabitants in *America* that live between the *Tropicks*, subsist much upon."<sup>64</sup> Initially, live green turtles fed marauding mariners seeking to claim both unmarked and marked territories from non-European and European rivals. Eventually, slave and free, nonwhite and white, enjoyed this vernacular culinary item throughout the greater Caribbean. Scottish traveler Janet Schaw boasted about dining on fresh turtle while visiting a plantation in Antigua: "You get nothing but old ones there [England]. . . . Here [Antigua] they are young, tender, and fresh from the water where they feed as delicately, and are as great Epicures, as those that feed on them."<sup>65</sup> Despite her talk about cuisine, slaveholders also fed turtle to slaves. During a visit to Montego Bay, Lady Maria Nugent attended a Christmas celebration with the custos, or local magistrate, of Montego. Joined by whites, creoles, and enslaved peoples, Nugent recounted a crowd of creoles and slaves ready to eat "turtle soup, pepper-pot, and callipash and callipee [gelatinous cartilage]."<sup>66</sup> The green turtle's ubiq-

uitous appearance in mariner chronicles and travel accounts hid its role in helping to create an interisland settlement process and economy.

Jamaican sellers often sold green turtle at market in Port Royal. Usually taken from the waters surrounding either Cuba's southern cays or the Cayman Islands, turtlemen then transported them to Jamaica.<sup>67</sup> "They carry them alive to Jamaica, where the turtles have wires made with stakes in the sea, to preserve them alive; and the market is every day plentifully with turtle, it being the common food there, chiefly for the ordinary sort of people," explained the English pirate.<sup>68</sup> Green turtle was not destined for the luxury market. As Mary Draper has shown, the Caymanian turtle fishery became an essential node within the Jamaican colonial economy, which depended on food provisions from the maritime hinterlands to support the growing urban population of Port Royal in the late seventeenth century. In addition to Port Royal's colorful marauding residents, Jamaican planters also visited the port to look over storehouses and cargo shipments. The result: an incredibly dense urban population with a high demand for food. Much of the turtle hunted by Jamaican fishermen went to feeding the urban population.<sup>69</sup>

Port Royal residents not only feasted on green turtle meat; they also developed a cottage industry in tortoiseshell curios. While the origins are not entirely clear, sometime around the 1670s a couple of artisans in Port Royal steamed a hawksbill shell flat, shaped the malleable shell into combs or other shapes, and then deftly carved images of native flora. Since ancient Roman times, affluent Europeans had enjoyed tortoiseshell veneer, snuffboxes, and jewelry. Jamaican sloops frequently traded in hawksbill turtles. During the seventeenth century, the slowness of the turtles and the sheer abundance of them near shoal waters made hawksbill fishery a profitable trade. One chronicler "knew a man in Jamaica that made eight pounds sterling of the shell of these hawksbill turtle, which he got in one season, and in one small bay, not half a mile long."<sup>70</sup> With Port Royal as the primary Jamaican port and the epicenter of the turtle trade, local manufactures sold tortoiseshell combs and other luxury items to an eager English consumer class to carry home exotic keepsakes.<sup>71</sup> Although the fortunes of Port Royal tortoiseshell comb makers fell with the Jamaican port's decline in the aftermath of the 1692 earthquake, consumer demand for tortoiseshell did not wane.

Widespread consumption of turtle across the Caribbean eventually made its way to markets in Great Britain, Europe, and the United States. Ship captains welcomed the bountiful amounts of meat from live turtles sitting on vessels' decks as they crossed the Atlantic Ocean, and their tales of their

voyages clearly raised interest among the cosmopolitan elite. During the eighteenth century, British traders shipped live green turtles from Caribbean ports to markets across the British Atlantic: London, Philadelphia, New York. Purchasers prepared turtles and then served them in private homes, men's clubs, and upscale restaurants. In 1728, a local newspaper reported that the royal family dined on turtles. In the 1750s, turtle gained a popular following after Richard Walter's widely circulated account of Baron George Anson's voyage to the Caribbean. In his account and subsequent versions, Anson reportedly exalted the qualities and benefits of eating sea turtles. In 1753, *Gentleman's Magazine* announced that the King's Arm Tavern on Exchange Alley served a five-hundred-pound turtle in honor of the East India Company's captain Robert Clive in London.<sup>72</sup> The following year, Anson bestowed green turtles on the members of the Royal Society and White's Chocolate House.<sup>73</sup> By the end of the eighteenth century, turtle soup became a requisite dish at Lord Mayor's Banquets and a status marker for British elite at home and abroad. Unable to afford turtle meat, the popular classes searched for mock turtle soup recipes.<sup>74</sup>

### Caribbean Turtling Communities

Although indigenous turtlemen continued to pursue turtles as their ancestors had done before the arrival of the Europeans, nonindigenous turtle harvesters soon emerged from coastal communities and small islands located near grazing and nesting grounds in the Caribbean Sea. Living on the edges of the Spanish and English empires, these settlers purposefully sought to live in interstitial zones running from the Yucatán Peninsula of Mexico to the littoral strip facing the Gulf of Honduras and the adjacent isles and cays along the Mosquitia. During the eighteenth century, retired pirates, runaway slaves, freedpeople, and Europeans seeking to build English and Scottish colonies lived alongside indigenous and Afro-indigenous communities. These "sinew populations" have drawn increasing scholarly attention, as their mobility into the frontier reminds us of the world that existed outside the Caribbean sugar complex.<sup>75</sup> Some found work timber cutting, and others started fruit plantations. Most enjoyed the abundance of fresh turtle and turtle eggs with a growing sense of its importance as a local commodity. In addition to Mosquitia, turtle hunting or turtling (turtle fishing) developed as a key segment of the economic activity of several island communities.

Bermudians may have been the first to make turtle hunting a serious economic activity. During the seventeenth century, Bermudian Puritans of the

Providence Island Company initially settled on Providencia to cultivate agricultural products in the southwestern Caribbean. The second largest island in an archipelago that includes San Andrés (then called Henrietta) and Santa Catalina. Providencia has rich forest, fresh water, and arable rugged land that attracted Bermudian entrepreneurs. Settled in 1630, its initial one hundred settlers sought to transform the lush green mountainous terrain of Providencia into a privateering base, whereas Puritan investors envisioned San Andrés as suitable for a tobacco or cotton plantation. Internal factionalism and labor problems with both indentured servants and enslaved Africans ultimately disrupted the company's long-term plans. Surveying the surroundings of the islands led the settlers to an extensive barrier reef, just north of Providencia Island, where hawksbill turtles regularly fed. Before the Spanish drove them out in 1640, these Bermudian Puritans embarked on a mutually beneficial turtle trade with the Miskitu.<sup>76</sup> Soon thereafter, Spanish garrisons repatriated remnant settlers to New England, while others may have relocated to different parts of the British Caribbean, such as Jamaica, Grand Cayman, and the Bay Islands, carrying with them knowledge of how to catch and trade in turtle meat and turtle shell.<sup>77</sup> Despite the removal of the Puritans, English-speaking newcomers, initially from Jamaica and later from other parts of the Leeward Antilles, settled on these islands, and turtle hunting continued to be an important part of the cultural life of the archipelago.

Bermudian mariners also traveled to Belize and the Mosquito Coast, informal English settlements along the Caribbean coast of present-day Honduras and Nicaragua. They regularly stopped at the Cayman Islands to careen their vessels and replenish their ships' provisions. Although these Bermudian visitors came to settle, trade, or harvest timber in the forest commons—areas not formally under land tenure or imperial authority—they also pursued secondary and tertiary economic activities, such as turtle harvesting. Given that they had already extirpated green turtles in Bermuda in spite of legislation to impede the decimation of turtle populations, these traders recognized entrepreneurial opportunities. The Cayman Islands were the principal nesting ground for green and hawksbill turtles and became a required stopover for all Bermudian traders across their shipping routes. By 1684, they were regularly harvesting green turtles to sell at home and in Caribbean markets that fell between Bermudian mariners' seasonal trips to rake salt in Turks and Caicos and to fell timber along the Mosquito Coast.<sup>78</sup> Not only did it integrate them into cis-Atlantic commerce, with Bermuda at one leg and Central America at the other, but Bermudian visits were instrumental



in the development of a permanent settlement at the Cayman Islands.<sup>79</sup> However, they were not the first to discover or harvest turtles there.

Of all the locales in the Caribbean Sea, no other place is linked so closely to the presence of turtles and turtle fishing as the Cayman Islands. Visitors appreciated the “infinite numbers” of green and hawksbill turtles nesting among the three islands: Grand Cayman, Cayman Brac, and Little Cayman.<sup>80</sup> Grand Cayman is the largest, at twenty-four miles long. The smaller islands—Cayman Brac and Little Cayman—are seventy-five miles northwest of Grand Cayman and five miles apart from each other. Cayman Brac is twelve miles long, and Little Cayman is ten miles long. The deep sea surrounds all three islands, with coral reefs encircling most of Little Cayman. The island chain was one of nine major historic sea turtle nesting sites in the greater Caribbean. Iguanas, caimans, and many types of birds called these islands home, too.

Despite the diverse fauna on the Cayman Islands, the Spanish did not settle there. The islands were uninhabited. Pre-Columbian indigenous mariners likely visited the islands to harvest sea turtles and other aquatic animal life or even flora. Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the islands remained the home of wayward masterless men and women and itinerant mariners seeking to refuel their provisions with turtle. En route to England after his successful invasion of the Spanish port city of Cartagena in 1585, privateer Sir Francis Drake stopped at the islands to gather some of the huge turtles. He described the victuals as “very good meate.”<sup>81</sup> On his 1592 expedition, English privateer William King described the true advantages of supplying victuals at Grand Cayman Island. He wrote, “We found no people, but a good river of fresh water; and their turned up threescore tortoises [sixty turtles]; and of them we tooke our choice, to wit, fifteen of the females, which are the best and fullest of eggs, whereof two served an hundred men a day.”<sup>82</sup> British historian Edward Long explained that neither the Spanish nor the English vessels exclusively visited the islands, which “became much frequented by rovers of different nations, and chiefly the French, for the sake of their turtle.”<sup>83</sup> The Dutch and the French, in particular, exploited turtles on a seasonal basis.<sup>84</sup>

The fresh supply of turtle sustained initial English interest in the Cayman Islands. In 1655, green turtle fed Cromwellian troops participating in the English invasion of Spanish Jamaica. According to Long, Admiral Sir William Penn received information that there was a small settlement of French inhabitants on one of the Cayman Islands. His hungry troops landed their vessels to seize them and eagerly acquire any of their cargoes. They arrived too

late, as the French had already gone. The crew managed, however, to take some turtles, which they salted and carried to Penn. From then forward, Long and others explain how English officers regularly caught turtles to resupply victuals on their voyages.<sup>85</sup> By 1662, the English governor of Jamaica, Thomas Windsor, officially claimed the Cayman Islands.<sup>86</sup>

Despite this claim, however, mariners or pirates at the Cayman Islands frequently met fierce and violent resistance to British claims by Spanish royal authorities. In October 1684, Spanish warships captured ten Bermudian sloops hunting sea turtles. The Spanish captain threatened to kill the crew if he ever caught any vessel taking turtles from there. News of the event reached Jamaica, where the governor dispatched the HMS *Bonita* to rescue the men who were left after the Spanish plundered their cargo.<sup>87</sup> The fierceness of the Spanish captain's words and actions may have been in response to an incident that had occurred four months earlier. That past June, a respected transatlantic sea captain named Bannister stole *The Golden Fleece*, a ship outfitted with between thirty and forty guns, and recruited a hundred or so men to serve as his crew. His goal was to become a pirate. During their six-month reign, Bannister and his rogue crew robbed a Spanish vessel and captured two members of its crew. The British 540-ton *Ruby* eventually found and detained them at the Cayman Islands, where they stopped to take turtles and gather wood.<sup>88</sup>

While sea turtles initially drew the attention of the English to the Cayman Islands, British royal officials took a slow interest in settling the islands.<sup>89</sup> With its limestone bluffs and swampy terrain encircled by coral reefs, much of the topography of the Cayman Islands benefited the nesting of sea turtles but not monoculture cultivation. As a result, early New World populations were temporary. After the signing of the Treaty of Utrecht ended war among the European powers of Spain, France, and Great Britain in 1713, the islands drew the attention of pirates seeking a quiet haven to resupply their food storage, careen their ships, and restore their spirits. Edward Teach (or Thatch), better known as Blackbeard, anchored at Grand Cayman, reportedly taking a turtle hunter in 1717. Other pirates found their way to the Cayman Islands, too. Thomas Anstis fed on turtle and remained in the Cayman Islands for nine months, nearly avoiding capture from two British men-of-war ships on the hunt for him and his crew.<sup>90</sup>

The occupation of the Cayman Islands by masterless men and women under loose political oversight from the governor of Jamaica eventually led to formal settlement. Between 1734 and 1742, the Jamaican government oversaw a formal process to grant land to solicitors from the Bahamas,



Bermuda, and Jamaica. The first royal land grants in Grand Cayman were issued to David and Mary Campbell and John Middleton on September 7, 1734. The grants were quite generous, even if land boundaries were not entirely precise. The Campbells and Middleton received three thousand acres of land, with an annual rent of seventy-five shillings. Given the lawless history of the islands and the arrival of enslaved peoples, David Campbell and John Middleton agreed to serve the crown in order to protect it from mutiny or uprising. One historian credits the interest in populating the Cayman Islands to the renewed tensions between Spain and Britain during the War of Jenkins' Ear in 1742. Seeking to fortify and protect the dependency, Jamaican authorities issued several one-thousand-acre royal land grants to Samuel Spofforth, William Foster, Murray Crymble, and Mary Bodden.<sup>91</sup> With the exception of Foster and Bodden, whose surnames survive until today, it is highly probable that Spofforth and Crymble never settled these lands, making room for other Bermudian newcomers, including the Conyers, the Jenours, the Rivers, and the Tatems.<sup>92</sup>

These new settlers instructed enslaved people to cut mahogany rather than capture turtles. Thus, the Cayman Islands became an early site of timber harvesting. In 1734, Jamaican merchants William Foster and Bernard Battersby entered into an agreement with Grand Cayman resident John Bodden to have him oversee their eight male slaves cutting timber in exchange for a quarter of the profits. (Slaves bore the initials of their owner on their left shoulder.) The initial profits were promising. Foster and Battersby arranged to have a sloop regularly transport the felled mahogany to Jamaica and on to England. Within two years, they had sent twenty additional slaves to strengthen their start-up enterprise, yet in the face of the rising costs of labor and dwindling mahogany spots, their partnership ended.<sup>93</sup> Settlers also cultivated sugarcane and sea-island cotton, which led to the importation of an increasing number of enslaved peoples. However, the boom-and-bust cycles of cotton was brief; by 1830, few even cultivated it.<sup>94</sup>

Left mostly to their own devices, the pioneering settlers lived with little interference or guidance from British authorities in neighboring Jamaica. Describing the population at Grand Cayman in the 1770s, Edward Long portrayed it as an independent yet quaint frontier. With turtle crawls, or pens, dotting the northeast side of the island, 160 white men, women, and children—the “descendants of English buccaneers”—ignored a 1741 law stating that “no person shall destroy any turtle eggs upon any island or quays belonging to Jamaica.”<sup>95</sup> They chose to follow “a chief or governor of their

own choosing and regulations of their own framing” rather than look to the governor of Jamaica.<sup>96</sup> With such a small population to govern, the British historian idolized their living circumstances. “Their poverty and smallness of numbers secure them effectually from those animosities that disturb the peace of larger societies,” he wrote.<sup>97</sup> According to Long, without a formal political system, they were devoting fertile lands to corn and sugarcane or raising pigs and poultry. The days of felling mahogany trees were long gone. “Their principal occupation is the turtle fishery; in which article they carry to Port Royal, and supply some to such homeward-bound merchant ships . . . the Bermuda sloops have a pretty regular intercourse with them [Cayman Islands],” he explained.<sup>98</sup> Like other “marginal colonies” such as Anguilla, Barbuda, and Belize (or British Honduras), the Cayman Islands did not become a large exporter of an agro-export commodity run on the plantation system.<sup>99</sup>

Despite this unusual pattern, the Caymanian economy did rely on the labor of enslaved peoples. In the 1834 slave register, Caymanian slaveholders listed 985 slaves and assigned them each an occupation in order to obtain compensation for their loss of property. Only 5 percent of the total registered slaves on Grand Cayman worked as an inferior mariner, which meant either a turtler or a wreck salvager. Most continued to harvest agricultural products or cut timber. As in Bermuda, enslaved people may have performed services in all three areas. Christopher Williams suggests that these enslaved mariners played a critical role in harvesting sea-born commodities to market for their masters, since former slaveholders valued their labor. In 1835, Captain Packard oversaw the West India deployment in Cayman during the apprenticeship period and noted numerous times former slave owners’ negotiated pay with former slaves. “Those employed in catching turtles offered in my presence to give the negroes half of the profits of the venture, instead of one third which have hitherto given to the negroes who worked [as slaves] in the boats.”<sup>100</sup> Custos John Drayton noted it was a considerable shift from former years, when “slaves had what their Masters chose to give them; some one quarter, some one third of what White hired hands had.”<sup>101</sup> Former slaveholders’ decision to share a greater portion of the profits from the turtle hunt reflects the importance of this economic activity. Yet many emancipated Caymanians found few opportunities on the island and, like their counterparts across the Caribbean, moved elsewhere for a new beginning. Wherever they migrated, they exploited sea turtles for local consumption or export.

## Conclusion

Throughout his seven years in Mosquitia and the southwestern Caribbean, Orlando Roberts noted the presence of turtles and turtlemen. During one of his frequent voyages on the brig *Clara* to trade at the San Blas Islands, Roberts declared, “No river or coast in the world can produce a greater quantity of excellent fish, fine turtle; and the quantity seems inexhaustible.”<sup>102</sup> He made a similar evaluation of the abundance of green turtle at Miskito Cays, where it was possible to procure “at all seasons, inexhaustible supplies of the finest green turtle.”<sup>103</sup> Everywhere he sojourned within the region he encountered turtlemen engaged in hunting and harvesting turtle. Roberts noted how Provision Island, an eight-mile-long island northeast of Panama, attracted fishermen from as far as San Andrés and the Corn Islands to barter tortoiseshell and other goods with traders on an annual basis. Farther north at Turtle Bogue, he detailed how Miskitu hunters slaughtered hundreds of turtles to obtain oil and eggs, which they dried and preserved for their return trip to their home in Mosquitia.<sup>104</sup> In the interior of Nicaragua, Roberts even picked through a German trader’s stash of mostly “light, cloudy, and indifferent quality” of tortoiseshell.<sup>105</sup> The ubiquity of turtles and the ease of understanding their life cycles encouraged the continual harvesting of turtles for local and, increasingly, global consumption.

Yet Roberts ceased his commerce in the region likely a decade or more before others spotted the frequent trips of Caymanian sloops in pursuit of turtles in the region. Driven by the scarcity of local sources of green and hawksbill turtles on the Cayman Islands, turtlemen traveled great distances from home to follow and capture their prey. By 1800, nine vessels of twenty-to thirty-ton weights plied the waters around the Cuban southern cays in search of green turtles. Nearly three decades later, a smaller fleet of Grand Caymanian sloops headed to the Miskito Cays.<sup>106</sup> Cayman Brac turtlemen followed an alternate path southward toward Providencia in search of the hawksbill. Unbeknownst to Roberts, Caymanians had exhausted the “infinite” supply of local turtles, having hunted, consumed, and sold turtle for the past two centuries. The transition to long-distance hunting began a new phase in the consumption of turtles, which would ultimately define the turtle fisheries.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Out to Sea

#### *Labor and the Caymanian Turtle Fishery, 1880s–1950s*

Down in dear old Cayman, where the soft winds blow, out upon the ironshore, though, mosquitoes bite me night and day. Cayman girls are sweet of yore, how my heart is yearning to be there once more just to hear the boys' gay song. Breezy Castle mangoes call me back to the place where I was born.

—“A Turtler's Song”

In 1939, a sunburnt, heavysset pipe smoker conversed with a passerby about the size of live green turtles corralled at the Thompson Enterprises dock in Key West. Amazed to see such large sea creatures, the man called the turtles “big fellows.” Yet these green turtles were still young, as he explained: “In the deep sea turtle trade we call those young'uns ‘chickens.’ Don't get to be turtles until they weigh over a hundred and twenty-five pounds. Why, they're just babies.” The knowledgeable man was Captain Allie O. Ebanks, a veteran turtleman and captain of a turtling schooner. Captain Allie, as he was called, sensed a deeper interest from the onlooker in the turtle trade and gave him an impromptu tour of the schooner. Afterward, the master casually extended an invitation to the man to join the crew on their turtle hunt in Nicaraguan waters. The sea captain warned, however, that it would be a difficult voyage. “We'll be sailing into dangerous waters, the sea'll try to spit us out, and the wind'll hurl us back. The food's the same seven days a week and we won't be back for two months,” he said.<sup>1</sup> Despite his honest assessment of the voyage, the passerby eagerly accepted this invitation to experience the lives of turtlemen.

Freelance photojournalist David Douglas Duncan, later known for his spectacular visual coverage of the Second World War, was the passerby who documented the experience in “Capturing Giant Turtles in the Caribbean” in a 1943 issue of *National Geographic*. The article featured master Allie O. Ebanks and his nine-member crew on the motorized 120-ton schooner *A. Maitland Adams*, which was hunting green turtles in the offshore bars and cays alongside Nicaragua in the Caribbean Sea (see figure 2.1). Although Heber James Arch and Sons built the *Adams* at their Grand Cayman shipyard,

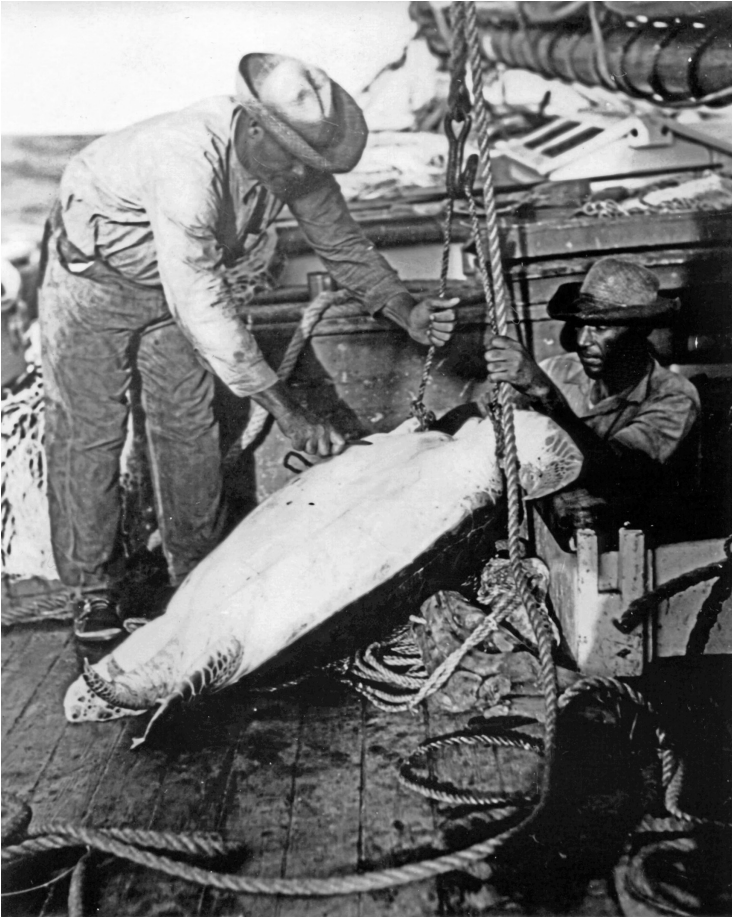


FIGURE 2.1 Sea turtles for Thompson Enterprises aboard the *A. Maitland Adams* with Captain Allie O. Ebanks. Courtesy of Monroe Public Library and the Key West Art and Historical Society.

Thompson Enterprises in Key West commissioned and named it after the company's founding partner, Aurelius Maitland Adams.<sup>2</sup> The owner, Norberg Thompson, contracted Captain Allie to capture and carry as many live green turtles as he could from Nicaragua to the Thompson Enterprises docks in Key West.

Through words and photographs, Duncan swept readers into the unfamiliar world of turtling. He recounted the daring four-hundred-mile sojourn from Key West toward Cuba, southward to the headquarters of the turtling grounds—the Miskito Cays—which lie thirty miles northwest of the maritime boundary between Nicaragua and Honduras in the Caribbean Sea.

At Mosquito Cay, “a tiny, palm-crested island, scarcely more than a mangrove swamp,” six schooners of the Caymanian turtle fleet based their turtle-hunting operations. When the *Adams* moored there, Duncan recalled how turtlemen from other vessels came aboard to help them refill their water tanks and exchange news from home and the United States as well as update them on the turtling conditions.<sup>3</sup>

Turtlemen relied on equipment to trap their prey. Traveling as far as forty to fifty miles from Mosquito Cay, captains prepared their crews to set the nets. It was the duty of the captain and his two mates to spot “submerged rocks or coral heads . . . lying forty feet below the surface, but visible to the men on the cross arm” raised fifty feet high. When that was accomplished, the captain called “fire away!” At the order, one of the crew members heaved a thirty-pound stone into the water to serve as a weight, with a sixty-foot line attached. Then, the other crew member placed floating corkwood to serve as markers for the submerged rock, while the schooners sought shelter by the reef. Each evening, three crew members set out on a catboat to draw in the nets in search of their prey.<sup>4</sup>

Knowing sea turtles could not breathe underwater like fish, turtlemen waited for them to rise to the surface for air and thus become ensnarled in the nets. Knowledge of turtle habits, however, did not guarantee a plentiful hunt. “Of the thirty nets set by each boat, a catch of five turtles per dugout was considered good luck,” noted Duncan. A number of dangers often impaired a hunt. This included fleeing turtles, shark attacks, and powerful currents towing away a catch. Whatever the turtlemen captured eventually got brought aboard the schooner, and Captain Allie would carve the initials of the vessel into the carapace of the turtles. These markings ensured that each schooner was properly credited for its catch at market in Key West. Afterward, the captured turtles were turned on their backs and drenched with water before being moved to kraals (or water pens) enclosed with “bamboo poles sunk in about five feet of water,” until departure for Florida.<sup>5</sup>

After observing Captain Allie and the other turtlemen, Duncan viewed the turtle trade as “a fascinating modern romance of the sea.” He portrayed it as almost timeless in its continuity. “From grandfather, to father, to son, only the men and the vessels change. After 150 years the method of fishing remains much the same, and turtles, seemingly, are just as numerous,” he noted. Yet were Duncan’s impressions correct? Had little changed for turtle hunters and the turtle trade, other than the participating people and vessels? Despite the photojournalist’s romanticized depiction of turtlemen’s brave equanimity in the face of tremendous challenges, a great deal had changed.



Drawing on newspaper articles, travel accounts, official correspondence, and published oral histories, this chapter reveals how Caymanian turtlemen experienced significant changes to the hunt and the turtle industry between the years 1880 and 1950. By the nineteenth century, Caymanians had depleted local and nearby turtle grounds, which forced them to travel long distances in search of their prey. Long-distance turtle hunts required tremendous capital, as investors owned the vessels outfitted to carry turtlemen out to sea for weeks and months at a time. Only a small number of Caymanians had the funds to finance such voyages, which transferred profits from the turtle hunters to the vessel owners. With few prospects for an agro-export economy in the Cayman Islands, seamen increasingly accepted haphazard work hunting and harvesting green and hawksbill turtles. They received inconsistent low pay from a share system designed to maximize the earnings of the investors. With the turtle market shifting from England to the United States after 1900, turtlemen experienced a boom-and-bust cycle, as the First World War disrupted traditional trading networks and then the Global Depression nearly ended trade. By the end of the Second World War, however, Caymanian turtlemen briefly enjoyed a period of growth in the American market as they struggled to supply turtles in a changing global market. This chapter argues that Caymanian turtle hunting matured because of the adoption of new technologies and capital investment into the industry, which turned itinerant turtlemen into an industry with an expansive global reach.

## The Turtle Fleet

By the twentieth century, a small handful of the Caymanian economic elite had sufficient capital to sponsor turtling expeditions. Given the poor quality of the land, landowners were too insolvent to finance a turtling voyage. While vessel owners often came out of West Bay in Grand Cayman, the largest financiers came from the capital. In Georgetown, prominent men such as Dr. Roy McTaggart, Conwell Watler, and H. O. Merren outfitted turtle hunting voyages.<sup>6</sup> McTaggart was known locally as Dr. Roy, and he was Grand Cayman's first and only dentist for a time. In addition to his practice, Dr. Roy and his brother Dr. Malcolm (Mallie) were involved in several economic enterprises. In 1917, the brother McTaggarts purchased the firm F.N. Lambert & Co., which was involved in the shipping and turtle trade. Dr. Roy also owned a grocery store.<sup>7</sup> He eventually founded and managed the first local newspaper, the *Cayman Weekly*. In 1918, East End resident Conwell

Watler opened a store in Georgetown, and by 1929, he had commissioned shipwright Heber James Arch to build the *Goldfield*, one of his turtling schooners.<sup>8</sup> In doing so, Watler joined Dr. Roy in securing greater profits from the turtle trade.

H. O. Merren had opened his Georgetown store twelve years earlier and quickly expanded his commercial interests across the island, often buying out smaller shopkeepers. By midcentury, H. O. Merren & Co. was one of the largest merchants in Grand Cayman. In the *Saturday Evening Post*, John Maloney noted that the Merrens were one of the six or so leading families in Grand Cayman: “Members of the Merren family, descendants of a shipwrecked British seaman are typical of this dominant group. The present patriarch of the clan, H.O. Merren and his eleven sons and daughters control imports, exports, wholesale and retail merchandising and, through members scattered among the religious denominations, even the church organizations.” Cayman Brac turtleman Minnel Hill recalled how he even harvested and brought turtle to the Merren store. As he later recalled, “Them days, I believe, he was the only one who had a store here then that could handle that kind of business.”<sup>9</sup> Shopkeepers like the Kirkconnells and Hurlstons played a similar role in the turtle trade on Cayman Brac.<sup>10</sup>

Any successful turtling expedition depended on a seaworthy vessel. Caymanian turtlemen preferred schooners and sometimes sloops as their ideal watercrafts. Schooners were sailing vessels with fore and aft sails and two or more masts, while sloops had one mast with square sails. Most turtlemen traveled with a forty- or fifty-ton schooner or a sloop of equivalent size. Schooners and sloops were expensive in spite of Caymanian shipbuilders’ reliance on local hardwoods. It could take between eight to ten months for just one vessel to be completed, sometimes years if funds and time were scarce. Leopold Jarvis recalled how his shipwright father, Daniel Jarvis, took six years to finish the sloop *Testico*, which had six other owners.<sup>11</sup> As a result, turtling vessels were relatively costly to make and expensive to sell. In 1944, a researcher calculated that a schooner cost between £800 and £1,200 before the two world wars and estimated that repairs ran at £30 annually.<sup>12</sup> These costs were too steep for the average turtler, which meant that most never owned schooners or sloops.

To maximize profits, vessel owners increased the capacity of schooners. In 1905, for example, four new vessels were built with an aggregate tonnage of 126, with the single largest schooner at 51 tons. A year later, eight vessels were built with an aggregate tonnage of 728, including the largest-ever-constructed turtling schooner: the *Clara Scott*, weighing in at 260 tons.<sup>13</sup>



The growth in tonnage suggests that a few changes were underway in the turtle industry. With formerly robust rookeries and turtle nesting grounds depleted, turtle hunters were driven farther out in the deep sea to fish over an extended period in order to attain a high catch. In the 1840s, British visitor Thomas Young noted how Grand Caymanian schooners spent seven to ten weeks harvesting turtle along the Caribbean waters of Central America, particularly the Miskito Cays some forty to fifty miles away from Cape Gracias a Dios.<sup>14</sup> The Cayman Islands law agent F. N. Lambert conducted a report in 1907 on the turtle fishery for Commissioner S. S. Hirst. In the report, he noted that the decline in sea turtles had led to lengthier trips of ten to fourteen weeks. The turtlemen agreed with his assessment. As one hunter remarked, green turtles were “getting scarcer and more shy than formerly.”<sup>15</sup>

Despite the scarcity, demand for turtle continued to grow in England and the United States, where it was marketed as an entrée in such dishes as turtle soup and steak flanks, or as an ingredient in medicinal products. Beginning in the 1870s, savvy entrepreneurs responded to the demand and sought to accelerate turtle consumption. Liverpool merchant Thomas Kerrison Bellis began importing green turtles from the Caribbean in 1874 and, within a decade, was dominating the turtle trade in England, which he maintained until 1912. Known as “the Turtle King,” Bellis was particularly innovative and created a series of turtle products, ranging from oil to sundried turtle meat, which he claimed in advertisements as being healthy to the British public.<sup>16</sup>

Bellis was not alone. In Jamaica, the Kingston Turtle Factory produced turtle oil and other turtle products, including powdered turtle tablets to use for making soup. Its owners held an emporium on Harbor Street in Kingston.<sup>17</sup> By the turn of the twentieth century, the turtle trade had captured the interest of Americans. Writing a letter from Jamaica, T. P. Porter called on American entrepreneurs increasingly interested in Caribbean commerce to participate in this “hidden industry.” He insisted, “It would be a distinct loss, at once to the national pocket and palate were the turtle industry overlooked.”<sup>18</sup> Porter was too late in his calls for American involvement in the turtle trade, as green turtle canneries had existed since 1857 in Florida and Texas, where fishermen hunted green turtles in the Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico.<sup>19</sup>

The growth in turtling was spurred because there were few alternative forms of livelihood available to Caymanian men. For example, in the eighteenth century, settlers were lured to the island to fell mahogany, which eventually led to widespread deforestation. Like other “marginal colonies” of the British empire, Caymanians benefited from a brief cotton boom in the

TABLE 2.1 Green turtle catches, 1901–1905

<i>Year</i>	<i>Average number of vessels in the fleet</i>	<i>Number of turtle catches</i>	<i>Average number of turtles per vessel</i>
1901	16	2,914	198
1902	21	4,054	193
1903	20	2,272	108
1904	15	1,576	105
1905	21	3,419	162

early nineteenth century. After the bust, they devoted themselves to turtling and diversified agriculture, both for local consumption and to sell products to passing ships. While both woodcutting and cotton planting continued into the nineteenth century, it was only a small part of the archipelago's economy. Given the poor quality of land in places like Grand Cayman, islanders did not pursue large-scale farming. Visiting British medical officer Marshall Howard Saville noted that in Grand Cayman, "a good deal of land remains in a state of nature with dense scrub, while the more open parts show an abundant outcrop of rocks and stones."<sup>20</sup> While the state of the land was undesirable, British officials considered the real problem the lack of interest in agricultural production from Caymanians. "The entire absence of any initiative or enterprise on the part of the inhabitants, who seem in most cases to be quite content with their lot and show no disposition or desire to ameliorate their conditions in life," reported the governor in Jamaica.<sup>21</sup> In contrast, on Cayman Brac and Little Cayman, residents mostly cultivated coconut trees until the early twentieth century. But after bud-rot disease and a series of hurricanes destroyed the coconut groves, Caymanian men were driven to hunt sea turtles.<sup>22</sup>

These internal and external changes led to more schooners and sloops plying the open sea in search of turtles throughout the twentieth century. Between 1901 and 1905, the turtle fleet fluctuated between fifteen and twenty vessels (see table 2.1). Seven years later, British colonial officials reported a fleet of thirty-three vessels, with two-thirds devoted to hunting green turtles and one-third to hunting hawksbill turtles. During the interwar years, the turtle fleet included between twelve and seventeen schooners with crews of ten to twelve men.<sup>23</sup> Caribbean historian Michael Craton estimated that 450 men found employment in turtling, or about 12 percent of the general population.<sup>24</sup> The fluctuations in the fleet reflect macrolevel changes. Turtle consumption declined temporarily during the Depression, as Caribbean

turtle was certainly a costly luxury for many British and American diners. With less demand for turtles, Caymanian seamen began to seek employment elsewhere, migrating overseas to work in agriculture, shipping, and even the oil fields of Venezuela. As a result, the turtle schooner fleet was reduced to its early twentieth-century size.<sup>25</sup>

### The Caymanian Catboat

Transformations in the turtle fleet—in terms of the size and number of schooners—also led to changes with other components of the enterprise. Whether schooner or sloop, each turtling vessel carried eight to ten small canoes, from which turtlemen set out to draw their nets in the deep sea or leap out to grab turtles around banks, cays, and reefs. Drawing inspiration from the indigenous watercrafts of the greater Caribbean, Caymanians invariably used several Central American boats, including the pitpan (or dug-out) as well as the dory. Larger than the deep-water-worthy dory, the pitpan was a smaller and faster flat-bottom canoe, which could be propelled by sails or oars. In 1841, British traveler John Lloyd Stevens rode on a Belizean pitpan “about forty feet long, and six wide in the centre, running to a point at both ends, and made of the trunk of a mahogany tree.” He insisted, “European ingenuity has not contrived of a better” vessel to travel in the tributaries leading to the Caribbean Sea.<sup>26</sup> Miskitu harpooners of sea turtles frequently used it. By the twentieth century, Caymanians recalled how turtlemen felled wood from Mosquito Cay to carve a boat out of “one log or trunk of tree.”<sup>27</sup> However, the vessel’s model did undergo modifications.

Maritime archaeologist Roger Smith illustrated how Caymanians invented the catboat. In 1904, shipwright Daniel Jervis built the *Tara* to accommodate hunters of the hawksbill turtles—the preferred prey among Cayman Brac turtlemen. Brackers had been known to traverse shallow waters in canoes stalking hawksbills, which they then snatched out of the water. For generations, they used the pitpan. Over time, however, Bracker turtlemen found the pitpan, at twenty-two feet long and six feet wide, too big to easily maneuver in pursuit of the marine reptile. Jervis’s modification of the pitpan led to a shorter and wider vessel—fourteen feet long and three feet, eight inches wide—that used oars and was painted in a sea blue, to camouflage itself within the water. The *Tara* became a prototype for the catboat, which became popular with fishermen across the Cayman Islands and beyond.<sup>28</sup>

Vessel owners were also responsible for outfitting their vessels with the appropriate equipment and gear to hunt turtles. Harsh winds and hurricanes

often damaged the vessels. Owners provided the captain with supplies to stitch the canvas of a torn sail or scrape off barnacles from a vessel. While the crew made repairs or improvements to the schooner or sloop, owners focused on supplying them with the most important equipment to capture sea turtles: nets. Green turtle hunters relied on nets to catch sea turtles, and it was common for a vessel to carry between forty and fifty nets, though some turtling vessels carried only thirty.<sup>29</sup> Nets were typically made from cotton or thatch rope. Caymanian women provided thatch, a plaited thin strip of silver palm thatch, which was used as a form of currency to barter for manufactured store goods and food staples.<sup>30</sup> Other supplies included cables, oars, and material to make buoys.

### The Turtle Hunt

The success or failure of a turtling voyage rested on the vessel owner's selection of a captain. Sponsors of turtle hunts always sought to contract a levelheaded and seasoned sea captain. They preferred veteran turtlemen who had successfully weathered dangerous storms, scouted healthy turtle grounds, commanded crew, and, most importantly, readily returned to life at sea. In exchange for bringing in a bountiful catch, vessel owners agreed to share a portion of the sale with the captain. The captain's job was to identify and hire a reliable and hardworking crew. Typically, ten to twelve men boarded a turtling schooner, though it was possible to have fewer on a sloop. In addition to the captain, there was a mate (or even two mates), a cook, and several sailors. Most captains earned their rank through sea experience. Before 1900, few were paper captains, or licensed navigational experts who worked with a sextant, chronometer, or charts.<sup>31</sup> In addition to experienced seamen, captains often hired youth and inexperienced men to pull turtles from the sea as part of the crew.

This was the case for Henry M. Bodden, who joined his father on a turtling voyage in 1921 at the age of thirteen. Bodden's introduction into turtling may have been inevitable, but the circumstances were happenstance. Two days before Captain Jim Jim set sail in pursuit of green turtles, one of the crew simply quit. The captain asked Bodden's father, who had already been hired as one of the sailors on the voyage, whether his son could handle an oar on a catboat. Before his father could respond, Bodden, who was with his father at the time, interjected and affirmed his skill at handling an oar. With that response, the captain had a small oar made for him. Bodden then joined a long line of career seamen. Most turtlemen came into this work as

teenagers, following their fathers and grandfathers, and spent nearly all their adult lives at sea.<sup>32</sup> Yet the work that awaited Bodden and others like him was risky. It brought few financial rewards but offered adventure, fraternal camaraderie, and concrete sea work experience.

Tales of Caymanian turtlemen have long attracted public attention. Before the *National Geographic* feature, officials, travelers, and visitors had circulated accounts of these admirable hunters and their peculiar activity of turtle fishing. Some highlighted turtle fishing, while others portrayed Caymanian turtlemen as heroes of the sea, noting the perils they faced in search of their prey. These accounts also traveled across the British empire to aspiring turtle hunters in the Pacific eager to learn more about the industry. In 1907, H. J. Lake of Brisbane wrote to the governor of Jamaica to query how best to communicate with Caymanian turtlemen who caught hawksbill turtles, which were also found in the Torres Strait. According to Lake, Australian methods were “crude and primitive, mostly a slow method of catchment by running down with a sailing craft on the weather edge of a reef and then spearing the chased reptile — or else turning over inferior varieties at the right time on the same banks.”<sup>33</sup> Given the attention placed on Caymanian turtlemen, this Australian turtle hunter hoped to discover the special technique or equipment that could explain their success. In truth, Caymanian turtlemen earned their reputation through a staunch commitment to the hunt, which required learning about their prey’s habits and adopting the strategies and equipment needed to capture them.

Sea turtles were captured on either shore or sea. Impregnated females searched for sandy beaches to lay their eggs, safe from storm tides and roaming predators, whether human or nonhuman. Visiting the Dry Tortugas in 1832, naturalist John James Audubon described the female’s deliberative process of depositing eggs: “She advances slowly towards the beach, crawls over it, her head raised to the full stretch of her neck, and when she has reached a place fitted for her purpose she gazes all round in silence.”<sup>34</sup> With the use of her flippers, the expectant mother bored down at least eighteen inches to create a nesting chamber for one hundred or more eggs. After completing the task, the female turtle quickly returned to the sea, with the fate of her offspring unclear. Predators waited to dig up the eggs or eat the hatchlings.<sup>35</sup>

Shore captures were frequent, and predators actively looked to take female turtles or collect the eggs for consumption. Caymanian Valma Hew recalled how she and her family shore hunted for sea turtles on Serrana Cay, a part of the Colombian archipelago of San Andrés, Providencia, and Santa

Catalina in the 1930s and 1940s. In shifts, Hew and the others cautiously stalked the beach, careful not to alert the turtle. After the turtle began to dig the hole, Hew ran to flip it over. She called it an “easy process.” Others did not agree. Reportedly, a group of sailors off Tampico Bay in Mexico had a herculean task of capturing a “nearly 300 pound” impregnated green turtle. “Six men seized her . . . but their united efforts only had the effect of slightly retarding her progress, and she would have easily escaped, had it not been another party came to their assistance and, they managed to turn her upon her back.” Despite their hard work, nobody complained. The large green turtle contained 347 eggs, which “furnished food for the whole crew.”<sup>36</sup> For most Caymanian turtlemen, however, the hunt meant deep-sea fishing and ranging out at the cays.

Turtle hunting was divided into two seasons: an early period from January to March or even April, and a later period from July to September. As noted earlier, Grand Cayman turtlemen pursued only the green turtle—the largest marine reptile species and reportedly the tastiest—and sent their seamen to entrap as many turtles as they could find. Once a turtling schooner departed its home port, the captain steered it to traditionally rich fishing grounds. Although Cuba was geographically close, turtling there was off-limits, as Cuban authorities had denied Caymanians permission to hunt turtles since 1871.<sup>37</sup> This did not stop some Caymanian turtle hunters, however. As turtler Malcolm Carl Bush explained, “We used to go to Cuba and steal the turtle first, but they caught so many Caymanians and put them in jail.”<sup>38</sup> To avoid legal wrangling with Cuban authorities, they traveled farther distances in search of their prey. This led them to travel some 350 miles to the offshore bars, banks, and cays of Nicaragua and Honduras, invariably called “Miskito,” “Mosquito,” or “Mosquitta” Cays, by Grand Caymanians, and these remained the principal turtling grounds. The seven oldest turtlemen testified to British authorities in 1904 that they had hunted sea turtles in the Miskito Cays for forty years, and even more for some. Fifty-year-old John Wilmot Bodden declared, “I went out on a turtle schooner with my father who was also a turtle fisherman from the time I was five years old.” This included frequent visits to Old Mohegan—one of the cays frequented among the Miskito Cays.<sup>39</sup> Generations of Caymanian turtlemen believed that the area produced the tastiest green turtles because they munched on the “special” eelgrass.<sup>40</sup>

Within three to four days in good weather, a turtling schooner would arrive and select a fishing spot near one of the bars or banks in the sea. Dead Man Bar, Mahegan, Man-o-War, Morris Dennis, and Walpatarus did not



appear on most navigational maps—a fact that caused considerable trouble, as passing vessels would often wreck upon their reefs. This was certainly the case with Roncador Bank, seven miles long and one mile wide. “What makes it so dangerous to mariners is the fact that its highest point is only seven feet above the sea level, and on a calm night when there is no surf a vessel could slide her keel upon the shoal before the lookouts could give warning of danger,” seamen reported.<sup>41</sup> Yet the turtling captains knew them well. Varion Ebanks, a long-time turtler, recalled, “No, no, no chart, just . . . just by knowing . . . different place . . . everything had a name. I see no more than the bottom.”<sup>42</sup> These locales were essential for two reasons. The surrounding waters were shallow and often attractive spots for sea turtles to feed and later roost in the evening to avoid becoming prey for sharks. The cays also contained small amounts of potable water, where sailors could refill their water tanks. After slowly moving the schooner across the water, the captain and his mates carefully searched for grazing turtles. Once they identified an area, the turtlemen marked their fishing grounds with a “kellick,” described as a rock or floating piece of wood.<sup>43</sup>

While indigenous hunters in the Americas either speared or used sucking fish as bait to lure sea turtles, Caymanian green turtle hunters ensnared their prey in nets.<sup>44</sup> Before dawn, the captain anchored the schooner and asked the cook to store the food and water. The cook always remained on the vessel to protect supplies from theft and provide overall security to the vessel. The captain, his first and second mates, and the crew took catboats out to the marked fishing grounds to set the nets. Grand Caymanian turtlemen used a thirty- to thirty-three-thread coiled rope of cotton or thatch palm with a ten inch mesh called the swinging net. Ernest Thompson conducted a study of the Caymanian fisheries and offered a succinct description of the equipment: “The head rope is buoyed with diamond shaped pieces of wood except at the ends where wooden ‘decoys’ in the rough shape of a turtle are placed. When set, the net is anchored at one end and the other is allowed to drift free with the current.”<sup>45</sup> Turtlemen also used a long net of some thirty fathoms long and eight fathoms deep, which was anchored on both ends and stationary.<sup>46</sup> Each schooner or sloop carried between forty to fifty nets.

From Monday to Saturday, turtlemen plied the waters to pull their nets (see figure 2.2). To prevent an empty net, Caymanian turtlemen quickly returned to draw the nets before dawn. “Sometimes you go out all day without any. But we never used to get so discouraged, you know, ’cause we used to move from spot to spot. . . . Go to this spot and don’t find anything much there, you leave and go somewhere else like that. We used to move around





FIGURE 2.2 Turtlemen pulling a turtle onto a catboat. Courtesy of Monroe Public Library and the Key West Art and Historical Society.

a lot,” one turtlemen recalled.<sup>47</sup> It was common to have a turtle escape through its own cleverness or the sea current. During moonlit evenings, for instance, sea turtles saw the nets and avoided capture. Occasionally, sharks discovered the tangled turtles, leaving nothing but blood and shredded nets in the water.

It was equally disappointing to trap turtles of lesser value. “So you might say, it’s not no turtle here, because all was Loggerheads,” noted one turtler.<sup>48</sup> Loggerheads held little commercial value and were even despised by some hunters who found their nets occasionally filled with the worthless catch. Loggerheads neither tasted as sweet as green turtles nor had a shell as desirable as the hawksbill’s. As the narrator eloquently explains in Ernest Hemingway’s classic *The Old Man and the Sea*, retired turtler Santiago “loved the green turtles and the hawk-bills with their elegance and speed and their great value and had a friendly contempt for the huge, stupid loggerheads, yellow

in the armour-plating, strange in their love-making, and happily eating of Portuguese men-of-war with their eyes shut.”<sup>49</sup> Some turtlemen resorted to beating the loggerhead to keep them away. Given these challenges, green turtle harvesters considered finding two to four turtles per day a good catch. The length of their voyage depended on how quickly they could capture turtles without running out of food and water.<sup>50</sup>

Turtling sea captains regularly agreed to take on independent contractors called rangers, who agreed to contribute one-third of their catch to the vessel owner. As many as twelve rangers brought their own catboats to hunt turtle in the lees of reefs and the shoals of cays. Captains dropped off rangers to an uninhabited bank or cay along with catboats and nets, where they stayed for three to six months catching turtles, fish, and nurse sharks, as well as collecting booby eggs. Turtling schooners passed by the area on their return trip home to take the rangers’ catch to market. During their stay, these rangers lived in isolation. One turtler described it as “the middle of the sea.” These small patches of sand, land, or mangroves around banks, cays, and reefs became their short-term home. By the 1930s, however, some vessel owners had outfitted their schooners and sloops with radios and given handsets to rangers.<sup>51</sup> Otherwise, ranging had changed little in the past century. To make it viable, rangers built shelters of thatch-roofed huts to share among themselves. They furnished beds out of plaid printed bags stuffed with dry plantain leaves. In preparation for their stay, rangers brought one-by-twelve-foot wooden boards to make floors. These huts were built as high as eight feet above the water, as one turtler illustrated: “The tide used to come up pretty high, you know, and they used to make it strong.”<sup>52</sup> While it took a full day to make these temporary homes, these shelter huts lasted between four and five years. Caymanian turtlemen were not the only ones to enjoy these huts. Turtle hunters from the greater Caribbean as well as shipwrecked passengers made use of them, too. Although the origins of ranging are unclear, the oldest accounts date from the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>53</sup>

After drawing their nets, turtlemen had to store captured green turtles in fifteen-square-foot water pens until the captain returned to collect them and deliver them to market. Immediately after capture, turtlemen placed them onboard and initialed the name of either the vessel or the ranger on the animal. They then used a hot steel rod with a wooden handle to tie the turtle’s fins together across the animal’s back to prevent it from slapping them. From there, they would be stowed at the bottom of the schooner or sloop until the next Saturday, when the entire crew steered the vessel toward

a cay to kraal the animals. Upon arrival, the turtles were released into water pens and free to swim around until the vessel's departure to its home port. Before 1900, turtlemen usually kraaled the turtles twice: at the cay and at port. They delivered live green turtles to a purchaser in Grand Cayman or even Jamaica, who would carry the live animals on to England or the United States. After 1900, more ship owners had secured advanced contracts from buyers in the United States and often delivered the green turtles directly to American ports, such as Key West. In doing so, they kept more of their profits, as fewer turtles died during the voyage.<sup>54</sup>

Unlike their counterparts on Grand Cayman, Cayman Brac turtlemen hunted the hawksbill. Desired for their beautiful black and yellow scutes, which make up the bony plate on their carapace, hawksbills were captured and immediately slaughtered by turtlemen in order to procure this material, often inaccurately called tortoiseshell.<sup>55</sup> "We had it very hard when I was a boy coming up in Cayman Brac," recalled Henry Watson. "We had God with us to help us. Our backbone was catching hawksbills at 400 miles south from here."<sup>56</sup> As Watson noted, Brackers traveled far distances to hunt the hawksbill, from Cuba to Jamaica, but the largest and most significant turtling grounds were the cays of Roncador, Serrana, and Serranilla, which form a part of the Colombian archipelago of San Andrés and Providencia. Reachable in two to three days, Cayman Brac turtlemen called these three cays and several other smaller bars and banks the "Southern Reef."<sup>57</sup> With their catboats and nets, they undertook the arduous task of capturing hawksbills for their tortoiseshell.

While the Brackers used netting to capture the hawksbill turtles, they stalked rather than ensnared their prey. Unlike the Central American Miskitu hunters, who harpooned or "jumped the turtle," Cayman Brac turtlemen traveled in pairs on a catboat with a single net.<sup>58</sup> The "puller" operated the oars of the catboat and navigated the vessel in and around the banks and reefs. His partner, the "trapper," used a glass-bottom box, or water glass, to track his prey underneath the water. At the moment of capture, the trapper dropped a conically shaped net with an iron ring base of five to seven feet in diameter—known as the "trap net"—into the water. "Well, the pleasure was . . . when you go out there and you're looking for turtles, you see a turtle come up, float on the water, and then you go to him . . . and you slacken that net down there, right over him. Don't be there long, because he begin to move . . . and he gets himself tangled into that net."<sup>59</sup> Some hawksbill hunters preferred to use the swinging net with an anchor, which allowed for

catching three to four turtles at a time.<sup>60</sup> In addition to hawksbill, Cayman Brac hunters collected bird and turtle eggs and captured nurse sharks for their hides.<sup>61</sup>

Since the value of the hawksbill rested in its shell, Brackers quickly turned their attention to butchering the animal. While the harvesting of tortoise-shell often required skillful use of a knife, turtler Septimore Scott noted some preference for a slower, alternative method. "You could dig a hole in the earth and bury the whole of the back. . . . And then, within say a week, eight to nine days, you could go and pick that up and that shell would drop right."<sup>62</sup> This process was called scaling. Most turtlemen, however, preferred to simply slice the shell from the hawksbill. The technique was widely used among hawksbill turtlemen from the Colombian island of Old Providence to the Caribbean coast of Central America. American small trader Orlando Roberts witnessed it in his time among the Kuna of Panama in the early nineteenth century: "They collect a quantity of dry grass, or leaves, and then setting the stuff on fire, the heat causes the shell on the back to separate at the joints. A large knife is then insinuated horizontally, and the pieces are gradually lifted from the back, care being taken, not to injure the shell by two [*sic*] much heat."<sup>63</sup> The Miskitu of eastern Nicaragua deshelled hawksbills this way, too. They then released the hawksbill, which returned to the ocean, temporarily or permanently disfigured but alive. They immediately consumed some of the meat and often dried the remainder to bring home to their families at the end of the voyage.<sup>64</sup> Some viewed this as cruel. A Caymanian commissioner criticized the Miskitu for such a practice and boasted how "our fishermen kill these turtles humanely."<sup>65</sup> His concern for the treatment of sea turtles veiled his unease about the threat of Miskitu turtlemen to the industry.

Beyond being arduous and adventurous, life at sea encouraged a fraternal camaraderie among the turtlemen. During the evening hours, the turtlemen ate dinner, sang songs, told yarns, played dominoes, and even made wooden sailboats to pass the time. Unlike other seamen, turtlemen considered the food decent, and few complained about the steady diet of coffee, corn bread, rice, fish, and turtle meat. One ranger fondly recalled his days with other rangers as an idyllic fraternity: "That's right, there wasn't no rowing and stuff like that, everybody was like brothers."<sup>66</sup> The work involved with turtling in many ways required that all seamen be actively involved in difficult labor, which downplayed the hierarchy of shipboard life. Saturdays were particularly hectic. Turtlemen drew kraaled turtles, collected wood, collected water, delivered provisions, and visited rangers at the cays. On

Sundays, they relaxed and prepared for the upcoming work. Others observed Christian religious services, which included reading their Bible and singing songs to celebrate special holidays, like Christmas.<sup>67</sup> However, ranging was not for everyone. Hudson Taylor Anderson recalled his ranging days as a period of isolation, which only ended when he took work directly on the boat. He most enjoyed the brief hours or even days spent at port in Nicaragua, when the captain berthed to purchase a fishing permit or pay duties on collected turtle. There, Anderson and other turtlemen sought the town's entertainment.<sup>68</sup>

Interactions with passing ships and Central American indigenous turtle hunters sometimes interrupted the loneliness and exhaustion of the daily routine. As Ernesto Bassi has recently reminded us, some of the indigenous peoples belonged to maritime empires, like the Miskitu of Nicaragua and the Kuna of Panama.<sup>69</sup> Most of the Caymanian encounters with the Miskitu focused on bartering. The turtlemen swapped fish and turtle meat in exchange for plantains, coconuts, sweet potatoes, and cassava.<sup>70</sup> These sporadic interactions likely led to a transfer of maritime knowledge, such as hunting methods. Some turtlemen recalled selling old nets to Miskitu hunters and teaching them how to use the nets to capture green turtles. "Some of them used to work along with the Caymanians, too, and they'd catch on how to make the net and catch the turtle," remembered one turtler.<sup>71</sup> There were times, however, when Caymanian turtlemen distrusted indigenous visitors at the cays and worried about theft from their turtle kraals.<sup>72</sup>

Despite these moments of relaxation or recreation, many turtlemen missed time-honored traditions and special occasions with their families. Henry Boddan remembered spending an uneventful Christmas as a teenager with his father out on a cay. "It was just like any other day," he recalled.<sup>73</sup> While he may have missed the social activities at home in Grand Cayman, others lost loved ones in their absence. Dora Everetta Conolly explained how her father returned home from the Mosquito Cay to the news of his wife's death during childbirth. "He never came home 'til some weeks after she died," Conolly recalled.<sup>74</sup> Few wives of turtlemen sought to bridge the conjugal divide and join their husbands at sea. Most wives carried on their duties of managing family life during the long bouts of absence from their spouses and prayed for their safe return home.<sup>75</sup>

Turtlemen faced a dangerous and uncertain climatic environment. The unexpected emergence of wind swells or dark clouds spelled disaster for a turtling voyage. Captains and their crew frantically applied quick thinking to avoid a tragic outcome. Historians have recently given more attention to



the role of hurricanes and human agency in shaping the colonial and post-colonial societies of the greater Caribbean.<sup>76</sup> Studying a series of hurricanes that ravaged the British West Indies in the 1780s and Cuba in the 1840s, we learn how these catastrophic events killed residents, destroyed economies, and disrupted societies. Yet these works have also shown the resiliency of communities and governments and their ability to respond to the disasters and to devise innovative adaptations to thwart future disasters. The turtlemen out at sea and their families onshore were no different.

In January 1909, the *Caymanian* newspaper reported a harrowing rescue of turtlemen on four Grand Cayman schooners. On August 6, 1908, the *Dido*, the *Lily*, and the *Leah* departed Grand Cayman for the turtling grounds at King Cay and Man-of-War Cay, which form part of the Miskito Cays. A fourth schooner, the *Annie Wood*, traveled toward the southern reef and was ultimately lost around the Colombian island of San Andrés. The crews of the *Dido*, the *Lily*, and the *Leah* enjoyed good weather until early January of the next year, when a northwestern wind grew stronger, forcing the crews to seek refuge at King Cay. For two days the turtlemen stayed in the open air, without shelter, and had little water to drink or food to eat. They even witnessed the sinking of one of their schooners, as the cables split and ran into the reef. "She was visible for about two minutes and after that she was never seen again," recollected a crewmember.<sup>77</sup> Then, a hurricane barreled down, engulfing them from noon to midnight.

The *Caymanian* touted the bravery and quick thinking of these turtlemen: "But like brave mariners they stood their ground. There was no excitement among them even at the most trying hour. . . . So the idea struck them that their ropes would be of use to them; and each man securely lashed himself to a tree."<sup>78</sup> In taking such actions, the crews managed to wait out the storm. After the hurricane passed, the turtlemen of the four schooners set out on catboats for water and provisions, as well as to seek help at Rio Grande on the Honduran coast. Their risk was rewarded. The schooner *Lark* picked up the men, and eventually the gasoline-powered *Albertina* safely delivered them to the British vice consul in Bluefields, Nicaragua. The destitute survivors eventually returned home to Grand Cayman after further travel to Puerto Limón (Costa Rica) and Kingston (Jamaica). A relieved family and community welcomed them, while all the men involved in the turtling operation sustained tremendous financial loss.<sup>79</sup>

During bad weather, turtlemen consistently sheltered on cays and actively looked for ways to seek help. Herbert Tibbets recalled that his father and



Capt. Theophilus Ritch found a clever way to weather a passing storm at Serrana Cay. The turtlemen took two big barrels and dug them deep into the sand. The men then jumped into them, correctly assuming that doing so would secure them to the land.<sup>80</sup> In November 1912, twenty-eight turtlemen of the sloop *Fred Lowrie* sought shelter for eleven days at a cay on Serranilla Bank before a passing schooner found them and carried them home. A month after their rescue, Miskitu fishermen found a water cask on the shore, which contained a note. The master of the *Fred Lowrie*, Capt. Edwin Walton, had sent an urgent call for help. "Whoever finds this letter, try to come to our assistance for God's sake. I have been ashore here since the 13th instant with very little food and on a very small allowance, eating birds or anything else that we can obtain. If this message is picked up too far to reach us in a vessel, if there is a cable or wireless communication at hand please send a message," he wrote.<sup>81</sup> Fortunately, Walton and the other men did not have to wait a month to be rescued.

Despite this miraculous survival tale, many turtlemen succumbed to the dangers of the sea. In 1932, a hurricane swept over Cayman Brac, obliterating much of the tiny island and killing over a hundred of its residents seeking shelter onshore. Even turtlemen hunting turtles at sea were not safe from harm. Capt. Nelson Jackson and twenty-six turtlemen of the Cayman Brac schooner *Carmena* were all lost at the offshore Jamaican Pedro Bank. The crews of *Fernwood* and *Melpomene* were also lost at sea. In total, the 1932 storm killed forty Cayman Brac turtlemen.<sup>82</sup> Nearly a decade later, the eye of the storm struck again. On September 27, 1941, a hurricane swept through the Miskito Cays, where a turtle fleet of several schooners and about one hundred men had staged their turtle hunting operations. Eddie Lou Dixon and several other crew members of the fifty-ton schooner *Majestic* grew increasingly worried about the weather as the captain steered northward to their home port in Grand Cayman. As the storm grew stronger, the master, Steadman Bodden, admitted there was little to do but stay aboard the vessel and weather the storm. Dixon and eighteen others refused. They took two catboats and headed for a cay, where they nestled themselves amid a mangrove. When the storm cleared, they no longer saw the *Majestic* anchored at sea. A day later, Capt. McNeil Conolly on the schooner *Rembro* picked them up as he searched for the *Majestic*. These nineteen men were eventually transferred to the *Lydia E. Wilson* as it returned to Grand Cayman with forty-eight survivors (it had lost five rangers). In all, torrential rain and wind swells claimed the lives of twenty-eight turtlemen. In addition to the five rangers

of the *Lydia E. Wilson*, the schooner *Majestic* had five crew members, including the captain and a five-year-old, and eighteen rangers (and £2,000 in green turtle and shark skins) all lost at sea.<sup>83</sup>

## Settle the Voyage

When turtlemen managed to collect sufficient numbers of sea turtles, the captain prepared them for their return home to “settle the voyage.”<sup>84</sup> Sufficient numbers fluctuated over the years. In the early decades of the twentieth century, a good catch was 150 or so on a typical voyage. It is more likely, however, that a typical voyage carried fifty to seventy turtles, given the capacity of the schooner and the number of seamen on the crew.<sup>85</sup> Turtling schooners increasingly hunted other marine animals to increase the total value of their cargo. With that task complete, the captain steered the crew and cargo to their home port, where the vessel owner arranged for the cargo to be sold at market. By the late twentieth century, the turtle trade had undergone significant changes. First, the market shifted from England to the United States, where Floridians replaced Londoners as the principal purchasers of live green turtles. Next, the decision to deliver live turtles directly to the purchaser’s port helped to reduce mortality rates, which recovered previously lost net profits. Finally, the share system continued to enrich successful vessel owners, turtle exporters, and shipbuilders at the expense of turtle hunters, who barely eked out a livelihood from the dangerous occupation.

By the twentieth century, Grand Caymanian turtlemen sold live turtles to an agent with whom the vessel owner negotiated the price per adult turtle, which were sent directly to the foreign market.<sup>86</sup> H. O. Merren was an agent who shipped turtles to England via Jamaica and the United States. Paul Hurlston explained how he sold turtles to Merren: “But those days they had to live after you bring them here [Grand Cayman], and they had to live 48 hours too, before they pay. If they died within 48 hours you didn’t get paid for that one.”<sup>87</sup> To fetch the highest rate for each turtle, turtlemen once again kraaled the sea turtles at Great Sound, where they fed on “turtle grass,” which gave them a healthier appearance at market.<sup>88</sup> The market value fluctuated, but it was between seven and nine cents per pound in Key West and likely less in other American markets.<sup>89</sup> By 1900, however, Caymanian vessel owners and ship captains increasingly served as middlemen for foreign buyers mostly from the United States. It was now the turtlemen’s responsibility to ensure safe delivery of the turtles to the purchaser’s port. A Jamaican governor explained the process: “It is custom now to sell turtle on the fishing

ground from whence they are taken (principally to Key West, U.S.A.) by boats run by the purchaser.”<sup>90</sup> They also bought green turtles from other schooners and rangers. Rangers now saw better pay, as they were paid on the spot and did not risk losing shares due to mortality of the turtles. While it was a better deal for most turtlemen, it hurt local revenue, as fewer turtles were brought back to the Cayman Islands.

Bracker turtlemen sold piles of tortoiseshell to agents, too. Ellen Elizabeth Yap recalled Taylor Foster, an agent for an unknown English company. “He would buy it from the people who got out turtling and he ships in cartons, you know boxes, and in the little crocus sacks and have it packed good and send it to England,” she recalled. Foster served as a consistent source of income, which was otherwise difficult for men on small islands to earn. “I would never forgot sometimes you would see over a dozen of the men would go up, ‘I’m going to Mr. Taylor to sell my shell tomorrow,’” she recalled.<sup>91</sup> Until the world wars and the introduction of plastics, tortoiseshell consistently held its high value on the international market. It was shipped from Jamaica to European markets from Amsterdam to London or as far away as Japan.

By 1900, American purchasers increasingly absorbed the largest share of the Caymanian hunted green turtle, and within a few years it dominated the market. Affluent diners had long consumed turtle soup and turtle steak at high-end, fashionable restaurants or men’s clubs. In the annual report on the colony, the Jamaican governor stated that 1913 passed with “no scarcity of buyers of turtle.”<sup>92</sup> During the interwar years, soup manufacturers sold canned turtle products to a wider American market. Key West was the principal market for Caymanian caught green turtle, since turtlemen earned “two-fifths the price it realises a week or ten days later in New York and other northern cities of America.”<sup>93</sup> Yet consumers in northeastern cities enjoyed turtle products, too. In 1938, *Life* published a story about Moore & Co., the largest turtle cannery in the United States. The cannery reportedly received biweekly delivery of Caribbean green turtles, of which only 30 percent of their meat was used.<sup>94</sup> While few Caymanian turtlemen recalled New York as a market for their turtles, the majority of them remembered Thompson Enterprises and its turtle cannery in Key West.

Thompson Enterprises was a leading Key West company involved in seafood processing as well as several other industries. Its founder, John N. Norberg, a Swedish immigrant, settled in the area sometime after the United States annexed Florida in 1821. By the 1840s, Norberg had become a U.S. citizen, adopted the surname Thompson, and found tremendous success as a

dry-goods merchant. By the turn of the twentieth century, his grandsons Norberg and Karl Thompson appeared to be enjoying unparalleled success in Key West, with Thompson Enterprises owning nearly all the businesses along Key West Bight. Thompson Enterprises had various holdings, which included trucking, hardware stores, ice making, sponge fishing, and cigar box making. In 1910, Norberg Thompson added A. Granaday Turtle Cannery to the family business. During the 1930s, Thompson Enterprises was the country's third largest employer, followed by the Work Progress Administration and the U.S. Navy.<sup>95</sup>

Thompson Enterprises managed to secure a regular supply of fresh green turtles by establishing contracts with Grand Caymanians. Through local agents, Thompson arranged with the ship captain of his vessel a predetermined sum for every captured adult turtle weighing 120 pounds or more, which was to be delivered to his dock in Key West. Capt. Allie Ebanks and later David Cheslie Parsons served as masters to his schooner *Adams*, taking crew down to the familiar hunting grounds around the offshore banks and cays of Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica. Since Thompson had a kraal outside his Key West Bight dock, Caymanian turtlemen no longer needed to return to their home port to store the animals in preparation for market.<sup>96</sup> A former employee remembered how Thompson hired day laborers to assist in hauling the sea turtles from the *Adams* and down into the five water pens (see figure 2.3). "We had two men that would cut the spancel, put a rope around their flipper, and lower them down the pen so they didn't hit other turtles and damage them. . . . It really was just falling down the chutes."<sup>97</sup> Given the capacity to hold several thousand green turtles, some remained as long as a year before they headed to the cannery. Thompson also filled orders and sent green turtles to Heinz and Moore & Co., which bought an entire year's supply at one time.<sup>98</sup> An unknown number of green turtles simply escaped from the pens and avoided their tragic fate. Upon successful delivery, Thompson paid the captain, who then "settled the voyage" with their accompanying crew.

Like American whalers in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, turtlemen earned a share of the vessel's earnings rather than wages. Before dispensing the shares to all involved in the voyage, vessel owners had to deduct from the gross earnings the costs of fishing permits or duties, which Nicaraguan authorities increasingly exacted on Caymanian turtle hunters in the late nineteenth century. Although specific arrangements varied slightly, most schooner owners first recouped their initial investment in vessel repairs and supplies like nets or rope by taking one-half of the vessel's earnings. The



FIGURE 2.3 Sea turtles stored on the *Adams*, the Caymanian schooner captained by Allie O. Ebanks. Courtesy of Monroe Public Library and the Key West Art and Historical Society.

mates and master of the schooner each received an additional half to one share for their leadership role on the voyage, which was typically paid out of the vessel owner's portion. The other half of the voyage's earnings went to incurred up-front costs generated by the turtlemen in preparation for the voyage, and the remainder was allocated to their individual share. Since vessel owners required turtlemen to pay for the cost of food on the voyage, local retail owners typically permitted them to buy items on credit, with the expectation that they would be reimbursed at the end of the voyage. After deducting any owed balances to the shopkeepers, the crew received their share of the earnings.<sup>99</sup> Studying the condition of the turtle fishery, Ernest F. Thompson concluded in 1944, "Green turtle fishing, yielding £1 per week for extremely dangerous and arduous work, and for only a portion of the year, could scarcely be called a satisfactory method of livelihood."<sup>100</sup> In the end, the amount of their share depended on a number of factors, including the success of the voyage; the honesty of the vessel owners, sea captains, and shopkeepers; and the thriftiness and resourcefulness of their families at home.

Despite the hard work of turtlemen, some turtle voyages resulted in meager or no earnings. Capt. Paul Hurlston told a powerful story of how Shearer



Bodden informed his crew that they had not earned anything after the voyage. “And it was one time it happened that what was remained could not be [shared] between seven men. So he [Shearer Bodden] told my father to get the matches, seeing that everybody smoked, get the box of matches and share it up. . . . The few pennies couldn’t be divided into seven. So he got the matches and opened the box and shared it, divided it.” Given that he could not equally disperse the share to all men, Bodden chose not to dispense monies to any of the turtlemen. As Hurlston noted, “he was a miserable, but he was an honest man.”<sup>101</sup> A similar situation was brought to the attention of British authorities in Cuba. In 1903, the governor of Jamaica received correspondence from the British consul Lionel Carden in Havana about a formal complaint by E. W. Tathem and G. Ebanks about poor treatment from the master of the schooner *Contest*. Captain Morton made a verbal agreement with Tathem, Ebanks, and the other members of the crew to share the remaining profit with them “in lieu of wages.” In the end, profits were not earned, and the vessel owner gave Tathem, Ebanks, and the other men shore work at Batabano.<sup>102</sup>

Untrustworthy vessel owners and store owners at times prevented turtlemen from bringing home their full earnings. There were incidents when sea captains refused to disperse shares to their crew. In *A Gathering of Old Men*, Caymanian author J. A. Roy Bodden narrated such a tale. Upon settling the voyage, turtler Oliver discovered from the vessel owner Cleophas Connor that the voyage broke even and that the crew would not receive a share. To assuage his guilt, the captain gave the turtler a small sum of money out of pity for his circumstances and asked him not to tell the other turtlemen. Immediately thereafter Oliver broke the trust of the vessel owner and bragged to two crew members of his monetary gift. Observing the situation of the turtlemen, a drunken landlubber lampooned the turtlemen for their gullibility. “It means oonah is all a bunch of nincompoops to mek that ol t’ief of Cleophas Connor send oonah Miskiti Cay to risk oonah lives so he can steal oonah blind. . . . Dat’s why me, I een’t goin no Miskiti Cay. . . . The day you see me go . . . is the day rooster cut teet’,” declared Cray Cray.<sup>103</sup> While turtlers like Oliver viewed Cray Cray as a fool for his laziness, Cray Cray thought them bigger fools for working weeks and months without pay. Greedy store owners tried to recoup turtlemen’s earnings by giving them a wrong account of their expenses. As one turtler explained, “What used to happen, the store keeper that actually fits you out, would be the one who you handle your share from, right? The money would be delivered to him.” If tur-



tlemen found that the shopkeepers did not give them an accurate bill of expenses, they often chose to work with someone else on the next voyage.<sup>104</sup>

Finally, turtlemen's families could also minimize the sum of their share. Turtlemen could be gone for weeks and months at a time, and during those absences, it was customary for their families to buy their staple items at the same shop that kept the turtlemen's accounts. Ariel Forbes née Watson recalled, "The Merrens, they used to say, 'Well, you take this now and go downstairs and buy up your groceries and . . . you know, they intended getting some of it [the earnings] back'." Like other Caymanian women, Watson's resourceful mother found a way to financially support the family during her father's turtling voyages. "The straw rope was going at the time, and my mother would make straw rope, and we could always buy food with that."<sup>105</sup> While some mothers, wives, and daughters bartered with thatch rope in exchange for store goods, others simply credited store items against the turtlemen's expected earnings.<sup>106</sup> As a result, turtlemen too often returned home with absolutely nothing to show for their hard work.

## Conclusion

By 1950, Caymanian turtlemen had witnessed significant changes. The shift to long-distance turtle hunting led them to new turtling grounds in the Caribbean waters of Central America and the adjacent banks and cays of the southern reef. The decision to follow their prey into lengthier distances led to structural changes. Substantial capital was needed to outfit the vessel, nets, and catboats to carry turtlemen out to sea. A few of the prominent local storekeepers underwrote these voyages, absorbing greater financial risks and overall profits. Turtlemen earned little for the arduous work completed in dangerous conditions. Moreover, the demand for turtle rebounded after the Second World War. Turtle soup was no longer a meal enjoyed only by American presidents or London aldermen. Canning factories marketed turtle as a wholesome delicacy to middle-income American consumers. Most customers were only marginally aware that this fragile market relied on a steady supply of fresh green turtles to the United States, which Caymanian turtlemen risked everything to provide.

## CHAPTER THREE

### A Contact Zone

#### *Mobility, Commerce, and Kinship in the Western Caribbean, 1850s–1940s*

##### *Rice and Beans*

We agreed in Grand Cayman for twenty in gold  
But when we got Cuba we found we was sold.  
Rice and beans, beans and rice,  
We got in it once but it'll never be twice.  
Dan Hunter, Dan Hunter, you perfect old rogue  
You carried us to Cuba to work on the road.  
Rice and beans, rice and beans,  
We worked and we worked but 'twas all in vain.  
Says Osmond to Beamon, "Let's handle our sacks  
And away up to Limones to work with a pick-axe."  
Rice and beans, beans and rice, we got in it once  
but it'll never be twice.  
We came in a hurry, we came with a rush  
And the best of our food was that Cuban wild bush.  
Rice and beans, beans and rice,  
We got in it once but it'll never be twice.  
—Traditional Caymanian folk song

The Caribbean Sea, its terrestrial edges, and its submerged islands served as a dynamic, robust contact zone where Caymanians crossed imperial and national borders to create a regional maritime culture. In the immediate aftermath of emancipation, Caymanians—both black and white—traveled to seek out better opportunities. Many of these places had been peripheral territories formerly contested by Spanish and British imperial officials but newly incorporated into the fledgling nations of Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Colombia. Their inhabitants had settled in these far-flung and interstitial spaces out of the grasp of a colonial state. By the end of the nineteenth century, tiny islands like Roatán and San Andrés were increasingly being integrated into a wider global economic system that ex-

ported a variety of agricultural commodities, from bananas to coconut, to the world market. Caymanian turtlemen understood this regional economic system.

As long-distance turtle fishermen, Caymanians encountered other parts of the British empire and the hispanophone Caribbean, if only briefly. Port visits, refueling stops, or quick trips to pick up cargo from the coast extended the reach of Caymanians and put them in contact with new places, which allowed them to become better incorporated into the wider global economy. Sea turtles once formed a niche node in the broader economic exchanges between foreign investors shipping out goods, from sarsaparilla to turtleshell to sugarcane. When economic circumstances deteriorated due to the decline in global demand for turtle products and natural disasters such as hurricanes, Caymanians fled their homes in search of better economic opportunities.

In many ways, Caymanian émigrés were unsurprisingly similar to other Caribbean migrants who departed their homes for parts abroad. The bulk pursued jobs wherever employers offered good wages, which was sometimes on agricultural plantations or on infrastructure projects like the Panama Canal. But much of that rich history is known exclusively through these two venues; less is known about the itinerant and disjointed movement of maritime Caribbean people who pursued better opportunities equally through the United Fruit Company in Bocas del Toro and as part-time farmers and fishermen on the Corn Islands. The unstructured streams of peripatetic workers who traveled to these locales, building their own social and communication networks as well as geographical frames of knowledge, are more diffused and difficult for historians to recover and yet offer a fuller understanding of the Caribbean experience.<sup>1</sup>

In this chapter, I introduce the locales that formed part of the turtlemen's mobile and transnational world. The chapter explores the interconnectedness between the Cayman Islands and various circum-Caribbean communities—such as the Bay Islands (Honduras), Cahuita and Tortuguero (Costa Rica), the Corn Islands (Nicaragua), the Isle of Pines/Isla de Juventud (Cuba), and San Andrés and Providencia Islands (Colombia)—through ethnographical accounts, missionary reports, oral history accounts, and newspaper reports. The folk song “Rice and Beans” (provided in the epigraph), are examined to uncover the varied experiences of Caymanian sojourners during this period. In doing so, the chapter focuses on the way the seafaring culture of Caymanians led to temporary and permanent migration, the formation of transnational as well as transcultural families, and the

transmittal of maritime and cultural knowledge among turtlemen of multiple nationalities. Thus, I argue that the Caymanian seafaring culture, particularly turtle fishing, facilitated the creation and recreation of a dynamic contact zone of ongoing transnational and occasional cross-racial encounters among indigenous, white, and Afro-Caribbean inhabitants.

### Post-emancipation Migrations

By the middle of the nineteenth century, freedpeople around the greater Caribbean were on the move. After failing to negotiate fair employment terms with former slave owners, many of the emancipated population looked elsewhere for work. Some flocked to urban areas and found employment in retail shops, artisan trade, or maritime work. In places like Jamaica, a peasantry of a few small landowners developed when freedpeople settled on empty land and formed free villages. In frontier and newer British colonies, like Trinidad and British Guyana, labor shortages and bountiful amounts of undeveloped land ignited desperate calls for action. To address the scarcity of workers, British colonial officials and plantation owners recruited indentured workers from the Madeira Islands to India to fill the gap. The introduction of immigrant labor coupled with increasingly restrictive legislation to limit Afro-Caribbean autonomy, cap their aspirations, and maintain a low wage workforce pushed many to view migration as the most effective strategy to combat these labor conditions. By the late nineteenth century, movement became the conduit to a better life and greater autonomy.

The reordering of Caymanian society and economy during post-emancipation explains early Caymanian migrations. The Abolition Act of 1833 dramatically changed the fortunes of former slaveholders and enslaved peoples. Although slaves made up 65 percent of the population outnumbering free people at emancipation, the cotton economy had collapsed decades earlier. Most worked on the provision grounds of slaveholders, while others performed a variety of tasks, including maritime labor. Some scholars argue that due to the fallen plantation economy, the Cayman Islands were not an example of a slave society.<sup>2</sup> Regardless of whether loss of sugar or cotton profits were at stake, some Caymanian slave owners sought out a new life in maritime frontiers like the Bay Islands, a sparsely populated archipelago whose sovereignty was contested by England and Honduras until the latter possessed it in 1859.<sup>3</sup>

The Bay Islands were not unknown to Caymanians. Like other maritime frontiers in the region, the archipelago held little financial value to Spanish imperial agents after they raided its human and natural resources in the

sixteenth century. By the next century, the Bay Islands gained some attention from English buccaneers, who used the remoteness of the archipelago to launch attacks against Spanish coastal ports like Trujillo. Although the Spanish pushed the buccaneers from the islands in the early eighteenth century, English-speaking settlers eventually returned to reoccupy the Bay Islands. The British government found the islands strategically valuable and occasionally permitted the Royal Navy to anchor there to acquire provisions. By the 1740s, Port Royal on Roatán had a sizable population of some one thousand settlers, which the Spanish ultimately drove out thirty years later.<sup>4</sup>

During the Anglo-Spanish imperial conflicts of the eighteenth century, England relinquished all claims to the Atlantic coastline, apart from the mahogany-rich Bay of Honduras (later British Honduras). This led to the evacuation of a dozen or so informal English settlements on the Mosquito Shore—which spanned a 550-mile coastline from Cape Gracias a Dios in Honduras to San Juan del Norte in Nicaragua—as part of an Anglo-Spanish treaty in 1786. The removal of these roughly twenty-five hundred settlers began a year later, with the bulk of them relocating to Belize and the remainder to Jamaica and Grand Cayman. Reportedly, some three hundred evacuees made their new home in the Cayman Islands.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, Belize and the Cayman Islands both supplied the mahogany markets, as British harvesters extracted the highly desirable hardwood.<sup>6</sup> Through these historical and commercial linkages, it is clear that the Bay Islands had long been a part of the geographical frame of Caymanians.

Within a decade of British emancipation, Caymanian freedpeople joined their former slaveholders, whom they now outnumbered across the island chain. A mid-nineteenth-century visitor aptly described the pattern of Caymanian migration to the Bay Islands: “They [the slave owners] emigrated and sought their fortunes on the unpopulated shores of Roatán. The slaves who had obtained their freedom, but could not procure labour in a small island, like Grand Cayman, hearing of the success of their former masters, followed in their footsteps.”<sup>7</sup> By “success,” he meant access to land. Emancipated Caymanians and their descendants made a home near their white counterparts. Thomas Young, a British resident traveling in the area, described a picturesque community of white and black Grand Caymanian residents on Roatán: “Their neat white houses have an interesting appearance, contrasting strongly with the inhabitants on the [Coxen] Kay, which are dingy affairs indeed.” He even noted black Caymanians building their own church.<sup>8</sup>

A racially integrated community of black and white Caymanian émigrés proved short lived. Initially, early Caymanian émigrés to the Bay Islands, like

Joseph Cooper and his brother, likely occupied any land that they pleased, and the few residing families did not object to it.<sup>9</sup> By 1844, all that had changed. With nearly seven hundred Caymanians residing in the Bay Islands, many of whom were former slaves, land disputes increasingly erupted, leading to the need for land regulation. Local landowners organized and held a general meeting, at which they agreed to keep all that they currently possessed. They permitted each landowner to claim 300 yards to the back and 150 yards to the front of their properties. Given the limited presence of the Honduran state on the Bay Islands, these landowners—mostly of Caymanian and foreign origin—largely managed the islands with limited interference from national authorities. Since this legislation coincided with a surge in the number of Caymanian freedpeople on the island, its objective, as Davidson noted, may have been to minimize access to fertile land to formerly enslaved new arrivals.<sup>10</sup> For their livelihood, the Caymanian property-owning emigrants initially relied on fishing—including turtle fishing, until they exhausted the hunting grounds—and later transitioned to coconut production.

### The Regional Economy and Migratory Sphere of the Western Caribbean

As some Caymanians resettled in the Bay Islands, others found employment in a growing U.S.-dominated regional economy along the Caribbean rimland of Central America and the western Caribbean. As U.S. entrepreneurs expanded their commercial interest in the region and invaded areas formerly controlled by the British, their demand for workers triggered intense migration. Initially, itinerant American merchants traded in a variety of niche goods—including tortoiseshell and sarsaparilla—along the Caribbean coast of Central America during the final years of the Spanish American wars of independence.<sup>11</sup> Commercial interest increased in the aftermath of the Mexican-American War of 1847. American investors expanded into infrastructure projects—including railways and interoceanic canals—and agriculture, particularly the sugar and banana industries. These projects demanded and attracted a tremendous labor force, which Caribbean migrants eventually met.

While nearly thirty thousand migrants worked on railroads in Panama and Costa Rica and other infrastructure projects, others extracted mineral resources or harvested agricultural products. Nicaragua also drew attention from U.S. entrepreneurs. In the 1850s, shipping magnate Cornelius Vanderbilt planned to build an interoceanic canal to reduce travel time to the west-



ern coast of the United States. While political turmoil in Nicaragua and the United States ultimately thwarted his efforts, American entrepreneurs continued to pour into the country. Investors recruited workers for their banana plantations and gold mines. For those Caymanians dissatisfied with earnings from turtle hunting or a seafaring life, such work on the coast was an opportune alternative. Grand Caymanian Willy Wood, born in 1891, recalled, "Many of our people went to Nicaragua in the gold mine time."<sup>12</sup> Some of them worked for the American-owned Neptune Gold Mining Company, where, as Hudson Taylor Anderson recalled, "Around the mines you do most anything."<sup>13</sup>

At the turn of the twentieth century, Cayman Brac islander Charles Ebanks took his wife, Lucy Puchy, and their children to the coast. Rumors of good-paying jobs lured him and his family first to Prinzapolka and then to Puerto Cabezas in Nicaragua. Ebanks fortunately found work on one of the numerous banana plantations dotting the Atlantic coast before he earned and saved enough money to settle his family on a plot of land at Little Corn Island, part of an offshore archipelago in the Caribbean Sea. While Charles largely concentrated on subsistence farming, his eldest son eventually worked as a turtler. "He used to go over to King Cay and up to Miskito Cays. Most of his time he used to spend over there. He fished turtle," recalled his daughter Lucy Ebanks Brock.<sup>14</sup> After purchasing a Caymanian catboat, Lucy's father ranged out at the nearby cays, often selling his catch or provisions to the great Caymanian turtleman Capt. Allie Ebanks in the 1940s.

Charles Ebanks and his family are examples of what one historian describes as "a transnational migratory sphere created by hundreds of thousands of men and women who moved between the islands and rimlands of the greater Caribbean at the turn of the twentieth century."<sup>15</sup> Drawn to migrate to the western Caribbean by reports of better wages, Ebanks joined tens of thousands of islanders—from Jamaica to Barbados—who were employees of mostly foreign-owned plantations. Some Caymanians recalled how their fathers spent six months harvesting coconut on leased lands for the United Fruit Company on Swan Islands, a disputed territory between the governments of Honduras and the United States. During the 1920s and 1930s, the Boston-based agricultural conglomerate contracted waged workers to harvest and cull coconuts by the thousands. Grand Caymanians Ariel Forbes and Harris Bush explained how their fathers worked there for six months out of the year. Forbes recalled, "I think it was like, go for a while, come back, and he would go sometimes on a turtle trip, out to the cays, and things like that."<sup>16</sup> At Swan Island, their fathers worked on coconut plantations. Bush

explained the work: “You pick the coconuts up when they drop out the tree. . . . Pick ’em up, then back ’em to a certain place and pile ’em up. Sometimes it would be 3,000 and 4,000 coconuts in a pile.”<sup>17</sup> Afterward, the workers husked the coconuts and stored the fruit in sewn sacks until they were loaded onto a ship. Forbes was unclear about how much her father and other United Fruit Company coconut harvesters earned, but one thing was certain: turtlemen shared profits with the entire crew, whereas “whatever they made on . . . the Swan Island trip was *theirs*.”<sup>18</sup>

Caymanians also found employment in Cuba. Many worked for Americans on the often-forgotten Isle of Pines (now known as Isla de Juventud), which is located some forty miles southwest of the larger island. In the aftermath of the Spanish-American War, Americans sought to develop tourism and fruit plantations through the tacit approval of new Cuban authorities. During those years, they recruited workers from the United States and the Caribbean, receiving sizable migrant populations from Jamaica and the Cayman Islands. Grand Caymanians were already quite familiar with the Isle of Pines; many of them settled temporarily on the southern cays, where they launched their illicit turtle-hunting trips.<sup>19</sup> With American entrepreneurs flocking to develop orange, grapefruit, and sugar plantations, as well as hotels and restaurants, Caymanian men and women sought employment.<sup>20</sup> American dominance on the Isle of Pines continued until the Cuban Revolution of 1959.

U.S. economic dominance was not limited to the underutilized Isle of Pines but extended across the larger island and was focused mainly on the sugar industry. Until the First World War, American entrepreneurs poured tremendous financial resources into the sugar trade and enjoyed substantial profits on their investment. In the first decades of the twentieth century, global demand for sugar skyrocketed, particularly in the United States. This growing market required a robust, rural workforce, which was made up of Caribbean laborers. Roughly 600,000 Caribbean migrants—from Haiti to Curaçao—came to work on sugar plantations, on railway projects, or in other ancillary positions. Many had passed through Central America and worked on the Panama Canal project before seeking greater employment opportunities in Cuba. Others traveled shorter distances.<sup>21</sup>

Rumors of good pay in Cuba circulated among Cayman Brac islanders, who eventually sojourned there. Minnell Hill recalled how his father, Walter Henry Hill, used to harvest sugar in Cuba. “He used to migrate to Cuba where he used to work in the cane fields over there. And periodically, he used to come back to the islands and recruit men for the company that he used to

work for,” he explained.<sup>22</sup> Like their counterparts from other parts of the Caribbean, American economic penetration provided employment opportunities outside seafaring. William Vanfield Dacres’s grandmother migrated there for work and ultimately died there at the age of ninety-two. Through an examination of the oral histories, one common factor explains Caymanian motivation to migrate to Cuba: “Well, you see, them days, Cuba was open up and it was a better living there.”<sup>23</sup> While better wages may have been earned on fruit plantations or in the tourism industry, Cuba did not always live up to the hype. As the folk song “Rice and Beans” attests, life in Cuba may not have been as good as recruiters and other islanders had promised. Therefore, many Caymanian sojourners preferred to build new lives in one of the maritime frontiers as opposed to a company town, where too often hard work met with heavy supervision and low wages.

### Turtlemen Mobility

Turtling expeditions expanded the geographical awareness of fishermen who occasionally emigrated to live closer to their fishing grounds or resettled to new locales that they had come to know during their hunting voyages. During turtle hunts to the southern reef, Cayman Brac islanders routinely docked at Providencia Island to refuel their water tanks, sell turtle meat, or exchange or purchase goods. Their long-distance turtling journeys led Brackers to regularly meet up with turtlemen from San Andrés and Providencia islands, while ranging at the cays and banks, and to visit the islands. Some looked forward to the visit. “Going out to Southern Reef, we used to carry at least one dress suit. The reason for that is, you know where we fished there, not very far from Providence. . . . Oh, them Providence people would treat you good,” explained one turtler.<sup>24</sup> Marley Rankine, while sharing similar memories of his visits to Providencia Island, recalled, “Oh, they use t’ treat you good. They was glad to see you come. ’Cause those people love turtle meat. Oh, Lord, if you carry 50 live turtle there you were not coming out with neither one,” he explained.<sup>25</sup> Florrie Dixon’s father was a turtler in the southern reef during the last decades of the nineteenth century, who frequently visited San Andrés and often stopped there to purchase shoes and other goods for his family. Although the islands formed a part of Colombia, the population spoke English, and many of the residents had kinship ties to Jamaica and even Grand Cayman.<sup>26</sup>

Like the Bay Islands, San Andrés and Providencia served as another important node in the wider region. Thus, commercial visits from Caymanian

seamen occasionally led them and others from home to migrate temporarily or permanently to these islands. That had been the case for the husband of Dora Everetta Connolly. Although born in the East End district of Grand Cayman, he spent much of his youth living on San Andrés, until the age of fourteen. “Them boats used to come from San Andrés to here, and he came home from San Andrés.”<sup>27</sup> Some never returned and began anew elsewhere. Providencia islander Barrington Watler traced his own ancestry to the Cayman Islands. He explained, “My father [was] born here, but my grandfather came from Cayman, he came [to] Providence as a young man and he died here at the age of 110, his name was Bill Freeman Watler.”<sup>28</sup> Men like Bill Freeman Watler found it easier to make a living out of fishing, farming, and sailing on Providencia than in the Cayman Islands.

As the political and commercial center of the archipelago, San Andrés attracted Caymanians seeking to settle and make a home on the islands. During the early twentieth century, some visiting Caymanian seamen began courting local women with an eye toward starting families. The peripatetic lives of Caribbean men disturbed some, like the pastor of San Andrés Island’s First Baptist Church, who required foreign seamen marrying members of his church to bring two witnesses to testify to the bachelorhood of the grooms.<sup>29</sup> Despite these institutional constraints, it was quite natural for turtlemen to migrate and establish new lives within the communities of the turtle commons.

After people began settling into the community, their kin soon followed. In the 1940s, Ruth McLaughlin accompanied her sister, who was migrating there. She recalled learning Spanish at the local school. “Well, we had relatives over there and, I think, the entire family was thinking about moving there and I was like a tick onto Marguerite, so my mother told her, ‘Well, okay, if you going you take Ruth with you.’”<sup>30</sup> Sexagenarian Waide Excell Watler had three sisters born on San Andrés. He explained the impulse behind Caymanian migration: “In those days, you know, Grand Cayman was on the tough side of life, so the people went foreign seeking a livelihood. Like they went to Cuba and they went to Nicaragua. They went to San Andrés and Colombia, different places, Honduras. . . . They used to refer to it as going ‘on the coast.’”<sup>31</sup> Freda Pearson Mitchell explained how her Jamaican grandfather Malcolm refused to “settle down” with her grandmother Lillah, which prompted her to find work in San Andrés, leaving her daughter with her own mother in Grand Cayman. Mitchell explained that her mother did not see Lillah “again until she was sixteen . . . from six to sixteen. ‘Cause she [Lillah] went over there and work[ed] and had other children.” Mitchell’s grand-

mother remained in San Andrés, occasionally sending her gifts and making sporadic visits to Grand Cayman.<sup>32</sup>

Since mostly Cayman Brac islanders hunted hawksbill turtles along the southern reef, some of them developed ancillary entrepreneurial ventures, like phosphate collection. Small numbers of islanders stayed for rotating periods or year round on the twenty-mile-long Serrana Cay. They collected booby bird droppings, which were later sent to Jamaica and on to the international markets as fertilizer. While much of the guano supply came from the Peruvian Chincha Islands, there were smaller deposits of guano-rich cays and islets in the western Caribbean, too.<sup>33</sup> Beginning in 1856, the U.S. Congress, desperate to find cheap sources of guano to expand American agricultural development, encouraged Americans to claim and exploit these phosphorus-rich locales. Serrana Cay briefly attracted American guano harvesters, who eventually left it to other harvesters seeking to prosper from the trade.

Valma Hew recalled her visits to see her parents, who harvested phosphate on Serrana Cay for her grandfather, Capt. Theophilus Ritch. “You see, each year, mid-summer or holidays, my grandfather would take me to the cays because my mother and stepfather worked on those Serrana Big Cays year-round. They caught all the turtles, all the fish that went into Jamaica. . . . My grandfather . . . you know, transport[ed] it from Serrana Big Cays to Jamaica for sale. That was his job.” Valma did not make these seasonal visits alone. Her grandfather brought between twenty and thirty young island boys to help them collect bird eggs. “Well, he would not leave the cay until the ship was loaded, well-loaded, with eggs . . . and after the eggs were all clear, he had several trips from Serranas to Jamaica, 10 to 12 trips, loaded with bird eggs, then he would go back on the turtles and the fish.”<sup>34</sup> For phosphate harvesters, their working conditions and earnings mirrored those of the rangers on turtling voyages. They built similar sturdy yet temporary wooden structures to shelter themselves. “These men was what you call ‘on shares.’ They’d get so much a ton for what they get and then the old man [Captain Ritch] would load it on the schooner and go there and sell it. Everybody was working for themselves, nobody was on wages, see,” explained William Theophilus Ritch.<sup>35</sup>

Caymanian turtlemen also resettled on the neighboring Corn Islands. While it is unclear from the oral histories to know the specific motive for migration, it is most likely that Caymanians sought to improve their economic prospects. During the late nineteenth century, turtler John Barnard brought his wife, Lucy Bodden, and their twelve-year-old son, Halford, to the Corn

Islands, where he ferried turtle on his catboat to sell in the Cayman Islands. In later years, Halford also hunted turtle, but he combined it with collecting bird eggs on cays in the southern reef and cultivating banana, cassava, coconut, and plantain on his farm.<sup>36</sup> Other Caymanians joined the Barnards in the Corn Islands. Some farmed kitchen plots; others harvested coconut or made and sold copra (coconut oil). But most Caymanians and their descendants continued to fish turtle. Although her Caymanian maternal grandfather was a baker, Corn Islander Dolores Brock Terry explained how all his sons were fishermen: “My uncles used to fish turtle and all them things. People from Cayman used to go to the cays and buy turtle. Stop off to the island and to buy provisions — them in Caymans had hardly provisions.”<sup>37</sup>

Like other Caribbean locales, the Cayman Islands were not immune to natural disasters that destroyed homes and devastated farms. In early August 1903, a horrendous tropical storm blasted across Martinique, Jamaica, and the Cayman Islands. Captain Hunter on the schooner *Gov. Blake* survived the hurricane and later reported how the fierce storm swept the Cayman Islands with winds climbing to ninety-five miles per hour. In its wake, Grand Cayman was devastated, with leveled trees, hundreds of unroofed homes, seven of the eight churches destroyed, twenty-three vessels foundered at the harbor, and over twenty fatalities.<sup>38</sup> The 1903 hurricane left an indelible imprint on those who experienced it. In “Hurricane Story, 1903,” Jamaican poet Olive Senior writes how the narrator’s grandparents used common local maritime knowledge to combat the storm. In the poem, the narrator’s family survives, along with their guinea fowl and rooster.<sup>39</sup> Like Senior’s resilient grandparents, many probably stayed to confront a frequent series of hurricanes. The tiny island of Cayman Brac suffered two such hurricanes in one season. On August 13, 1914, an hour-long blustery hurricane devastated the entire island, resulting in only one fatality but leaving only 1 of the 260 homes intact. A month later, on September 25, another hurricane hit the island. “The sea swept to a distance inland never experienced within the memory of the oldest living inhabitants, since the year of 1846, completely destroying all ground provisions and much pasture land, and damaging the public roads.”<sup>40</sup> Double or triple hurricanes easily triggered some on the islands to muster up the funds and the resolve to leave their homes and start life anew elsewhere. This was the case for the parents of Thomas Adrian Welcome Watler and his uncle and aunt, who left Grand Cayman for brighter pastures in the aftermath of the hurricane. They initially considered settling at Providencia or San Andrés but ultimately decided on Corn Island, where they built a successful business in coastal trade.<sup>41</sup> Caymanian turtlemen were not



alone in migrating elsewhere but part of a broader movement of turtle migrations.

The southern and northern parts of the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica were the sites of these migrations over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. An early example of this migration occurred along the Caribbean littoral adjacent to the Talamanca Mountains. In 1828, Bocas del Toro (Panama) native William Smith—better known as “Old Smith”—was one of the earliest to permanently settle, along with his wife and children, on a beach area known as Cahuita, along the Caribbean southern lowlands of Costa Rica. Others soon followed. In 1903, a thirty-one-year-old turtle named David Alejandro Kayasso came to the area with his uncle and cousin. “My people from Nicaragua come here and strike them [turtles] every year, March right until September. They go home, boats loaded. Turtle meat from the green turtle, turtle oil, and hawksbill shell,” he explained.<sup>42</sup> Like his relatives, Kayasso intended only to make the annual fishing trip, but he became attracted to one or more of the lovely young women in the area and decided to settle there. After making frequent turtling trips to Costa Rica, San Andrés turtle and sea captain Walwin Martínez relocated to Turtle Bogue (Tortuguero) and later brought his adult children in the 1920s.<sup>43</sup> During those years, hundreds of sea turtles nested on coastal and island beaches, which drew turtlemen like Martínez to start a new life with their families in these turtle-rich hunting grounds.

### Coastal Trade in the Southwestern Caribbean

During the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries, Caymanian sojourners linked their home islands to host islands throughout the western Caribbean not only through kin and kith abroad but through a robust coastal trade. Sometimes green and hawksbill harvesters stopped at the Bay Islands or the Corn Islands to refill water tanks, buy turtles from local turtlemen, or sell turtle meat in exchange for staple goods not easy to acquire on the Cayman Islands. At Utila, Helen Hortense Banks recalled how Grand Caymanian schooners came to sell turtle and then “load up with plantains and coconuts.” Coconut groves were extensive across the Bay Islands. “We had plenty of coconuts; that’s what we lived off of, the coconuts,” explained Banks.<sup>44</sup> The coconut trade attracted Caymanian ship owners, who sent their schooners to purchase coconuts from local harvesters and then ship and sell them to markets in the United States and Great Britain. Emily T. Phillips recalled how Cayman Brac master mariner Capt. Dillon Kirkconnell was called the

“coconut king” of the Bay Islands because he loaded and sold thousands of coconuts on his schooner *Allocate* from Bonacca. Captain Kirkconnell served as an agent for a U.S.-based company.<sup>45</sup>

Due to their reputation as exceptional mariners, several Caymanians shipped goods between various islands of the maritime frontier and mainland Central and South American ports in the interwar years. The fruit trade was particularly strong, as it brought opportunities to earn income for harvesters on the tiny offshore islands in the western Caribbean. Hudson Taylor Anderson worked as a ship’s mechanic with his uncle at Schooner Cay, near the mouth of the Escondido River, where Anderson occasionally helped his uncle ply freight up and down the Caribbean coast, with routine routes between Bluefields and Puerto Cabezas in Nicaragua or irregular trips to Puerto Limón in Costa Rica.<sup>46</sup> Malcolm Carl Bush shipped coconuts on the schooner *Diamond* between Corn Island and the port of Colón in Panama for an American company, most likely the Franklin Baker Company, which dominated the regional coconut trade. The owner of the schooner secured this contract due to his Caymanian roots. Bush explained, “This Ella Hurltston’s brother’s wife, Dickie Jackson, he was the agent for the company, the coconut company, I forget what it was named. He was the agent there for them, that’s how he got rich.”<sup>47</sup>

Other Caymanian seafarers frequently ran trips out of San Andrés. James Earlie Whittaker did as the crew’s cook on the trading schooner *Rewards*, which was owned by Grand Caymanian merchant Albert Panton. “First trip we had we went from St. Andrews (San Andrés), and we took a load of cows and hogs from St. Andres [*sic*] and carried them down to Colon. And then we come back and we used to run coconuts from St. Andres to Barranquilla and Port of Columbia [Venezuela].”<sup>48</sup> Lee Jervis served on the crew of the schooner *Acme*, also working on the trading route out of San Andrés. “You carry coconuts from San Andrés Island, and then you come to Providence and you top off with orange. . . . Providence got plenty orange. And then you [go] to Cartagena, Colombia, and sell the coconuts, and that was the trade.”<sup>49</sup> San Andrés islander Durham Rankin also plied goods, first between San Andrés and Cartagena on his Caymanian grandfather’s boat, then later among the ports of Cartagena, Colón, and Limón on his father’s boat.<sup>50</sup>

Like turtle fishing, the coastal shipping trade paid workers on a share system, which was never a lucrative business for crew members. Thus, it is not surprising to learn of stories in which captains of these trading vessels cheated their crew, which resulted in low earnings for the trip. James Earlier Whittaker recalled such a situation. “The Captain robbed our eyes out of our

head,” he reminisced. During one voyage, the mate attempted to kill the captain after picking up the account book from the captain’s open trunk and learning how little the captain was paying the crew. It was not only that the captain was receiving better pay but that he had charged the crew for expenses like laundry, which were covered under the contract. The mate, William Jackson, shared the news with Whittaker. “He say, ‘Cook, if he comes to this galley this evening, I am licking him dead and throwing him overboard!’” Capt. Elecio Howard avoided a violent death because he suspected that something was awry and refused to engage with Jackson that evening. The trip concluded with Whittaker, Jackson, and the other crew members receiving a “few dollars,” and Howard buying the schooner from the owner, Albert Panton.<sup>51</sup>

An interwar slump in the turtle trade led some Caymanian seamen to use their navigation skills and knowledge of Caribbean peripheries to smuggle liquor to eager U.S. buyers seeking to avoid the American dry laws. With schooners no longer able to find a robust market for their green and hawksbill turtles, some Caymanians plied their vessels with rum and whiskey and made their way to American ports. While some undoubtedly carried liquor from Cuba, others took a lesser-known route: Central America. “People used to run, smuggle booze into different places, like Belize, ’round the States in those days,” recalled William Vanfield Dacres.<sup>52</sup> Sea captain Keith Tibbets remembered how his family briefly relocated to Belize when he was only a teenager. His maternal uncle was a bootlegger, with three or so schooners plying liquor between Belize and the United States. Tibbets and his father worked as carpenters on the dry dock. “Well, it was a demand for shipwrights repairing these bootleggers’ [ships] ’cause the common would be 125 schooners in Belize harbor at that time, running liquor from there to the States,” explained the sea captain. Since they lived on a small cay six miles from the mainland, it became difficult to school the younger children in Tibbets’s family. Only six months after their arrival, his parents repacked and returned to Cayman Brac, where the younger children could attend school.<sup>53</sup>

Belize was such an important node in the southern stream of the bootlegging operation to the United States, some feared how the colony might survive without the illegal trade. In 1934, English novelist Aldous Huxley wrote, “When prohibition is abolished, the last of its [Belize’s] profitable enterprises — the export of alcohol by rum-runners, who use Belize as a base of operations — will have gone the way of its commerce in logwood, mahogany, and chicle.”<sup>54</sup> For Caymanian smugglers, however, they simply tried to avoid capture while reaping the economic benefits from rum-running. Due

to the political power of the affluent in the United States, many were never arrested. “See you had a lot of boats from America, those rich people. And they used to go where you call, on those yachts out for pleasuring [pleasure sailing]. And the government wouldn’t allow you to search them,” explained Ashley Godfrey.<sup>55</sup> After delivering crates of liquor to American contractors, Caymanian vessels quickly returned home. In the end, bootlegging became another short-term solution to a long-term problem: a demand for sustainable employment.

### A Shared Regional System of Maritime Knowledge

The circulation of Caymanian turtlemen and their itinerant seafaring family and neighbors to the Caribbean lowlands of Central America and the adjacent islands placed them in the center of a vibrant system of social networks, cultural exchanges, and the sharing of local maritime knowledge. Social bounds crossed and often disregarded national boundaries as Caymanians integrated into the wider regional community. Even if their migrations were brief and fleeting, they continued to have a profound impact on many of the locales in which they visited and lived. Their knowledge of these locales allowed them to benefit from newfound opportunities and to share as well as learn from members of their new community. In their quest for better employment or greater livelihood opportunities, they also partook in a regionally extensive but interconnected transnational maritime community.

During natural disasters like hurricanes, Caymanians in need supported one another. On October 15, 1908, a hurricane lasting thirty-six hours hit San Andrés. Emerging from the storm, islanders found one hundred homes completely leveled to the ground and 70 percent of its coconut trees destroyed. Like other maritime frontiers in the western Caribbean, coconut production proved an important agricultural commodity. With near total destruction of the coconut groves, valued at two hundred thousand Colombian gold pesos, the bulk of San Andrés islanders faced a terrifying fate. As the local prefect explained, “This tree, rightly regarded as the king of all vegetables, occupied the full attention of the inhabitants, for the sustenance of small industries and for the export of a relatively large quantity [of coconut].”<sup>56</sup> Within a month, newspaper reports solicited financial aid for the welfare of the inhabitants from the Caymanian community.<sup>57</sup>

These calls reached the shores of Grand Cayman Island. In 1909, the editor of the *Caymanian*, W. M. Cochran, informed his readers that the governor of Jamaica had called on Rev. R. C. Young to encourage his parishioners

to donate funds to support San Andrés islanders, who had been devastated by a hurricane the year before. Although the population of San Andrés spoke English, it was not a British but a Colombian territory and therefore out of the purview of Jamaican authorities. Yet the governor had made the request. Cochran reminded Caymanians of the devastating hurricane of 1903, which had destroyed many homes and caused the loss of vessels. San Andrés islanders “race[d] to their rescue and spontaneously and generously sent a ship load of foodstuffs, etc. for the relief of the sufferers,” he noted. Cochran called on all “to show our gratitude in a practical form, and show the people of San Andreas [*sic*] that their former liberality had not been forgotten.” His poignant reminder of their own suffering during the 1903 hurricane led to several donations by the release of the next issue.<sup>58</sup>

Not all were as generous and understanding as the San Andrés islanders to the plight of the Caymanians in the aftermath of the 1903 hurricane. In the *Limón Weekly News*, Reverend Martin—a Grand Caymanian—pointed to Caymanians’ religious impropriety as the cause of such devastation. An audience member later narrated portions of the reverend’s sermon on the matter: “It was the Almighty, because Caymanians, who for 30 years had had no such storm in their lands had . . . got bold, reckless, and careless of God to the extent of thinking they could do without his power.”<sup>59</sup> While the editor dutifully chastised the pastor for such remarks in the newspaper, the reporting on the hurricane reflects the extensive social networks between the far-flung Cayman Islands and Puerto Limón, a periphery increasingly interconnected with the wider global economy.

Social networks often formed when religious officials traveled around the region, either to support fledgling congregations or to expand home churches as missionaries. Given the nature of Caymanian seafaring culture, they took part in a variety of Christian denominations. The Seventh Day Adventists thrived in the maritime frontiers of the western Caribbean. In 1898, American Frank J. Hutchins and his wife, Cora, started the first Adventist missions on the Bay Islands and in Central America. Plying the sea on their schooner the *Herald*, they shared the message of their faith. Within a year of service, Hutchins asked to leave Bonacca in the Bay Islands and successfully proselytized small numbers of islanders on San Andrés and, later, Providencia. Adventism quickly became a faith that transcended nation and empire. In 1910, recent convert Rudolph T. Newball clandestinely married Elma McLaughlin, the daughter of a Grand Caymanian Presbyterian pastor visiting Providencia for a revival. Fearful of losing the love of his life, Newball and McLaughlin secretly married, and soon Elma converted to Adventism.<sup>60</sup>

Despite the controversy over her marriage, McLaughlin's conversion opened the door for her to evangelize others when visiting Grand Cayman. Around 1894, sea captain Gilbert McLaughlin became exposed to Adventist teachings in the Bay Islands. Upon his return home, he donated land for a church and played an active role in proselytization.<sup>61</sup>

Beyond the intertwined social and religious connections, Caymanian mobility also facilitated the spread of their methods of turtle fishing. While early adoption of turtling techniques likely came from New World settlers' interactions with indigenous populations in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, techniques varied. A widely used technique was harpoon striking. In the western Caribbean, the skillful Miskitu turtlemen captured the admiration of many early chroniclers of the Caribbean. During his time in Mosquitia, Orlando Roberts beautifully described Miskitu strikers at work: "The Indians, when near enough to strike the turtle, raises the spear above his shoulder, and throws it in such a manner, that it takes a circular direction in the air, and lights with its point downwards, on the back of the animal, penetrating through the shell, and the point becoming detached from the handle, remains firmly fastened in the creature's body."<sup>62</sup>

This same fishing technique of striking was found not only among the Miskitu of Central America but also in the Afro-Caribbean communities of Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and the Caribbean islands of Colombia. In the 1970s, Paula Palmer interviewed residents of Cahuita, Old Harbor (Puerto Viejo), and neighboring communities on their turtling traditions. Samuel Hansell explained how they used *apoo*, a very hard wood, to make harpoons to strike turtles.<sup>63</sup> A decade later, north of these communities, anthropologist Harry Lefever documented the use of harpoons in and around Turtle Bogue (Tortuguero). Emilio Brown of Barra del Colorado explained how he waited to strike turtles during the mating season, when the marine reptiles were most vulnerable.<sup>64</sup> Both locales had received substantial and extended contact with Miskitu turtlers, who regularly went on southern turtling expeditions in the months of March to September.<sup>65</sup> Over the centuries, other turtlemen seeking green flesh in the coastal waters likely observed and later adopted the technique of striking.

Turtlemen in the Colombian islands of Providencia and the then province of Panama used nets. Bocas del Toro residents used a net called a buckhorn. Carlos Reid explained how they attached to the buckhorn two buoys, "one standing and the other cut out in the shape of a Hawks Bill, burnt in fire, then chipped so that small patches of white are left here and there . . . to lure the males into the net, thinking it to be another animal."<sup>66</sup> Providencia boat



builder Espedito Watler described how he and his brother Murdock used a trap net during turtle hunting trips in surrounding waters: “We go to sea and when we look we see a hawksbill blow on the water . . . and I take my water glass and look and he pulling . . . and shove the net over board and go down and trap the hawksbill.”<sup>67</sup> In the case of Watler, they not only used the same net but also adopted the water glass previously used exclusively by Caymanian turtlemen.

While some have suggested that Providencia turtlemen likely learned about turtle fishing from the Miskitu of Central America, their methods most closely match those of the Caymanians. Eyewitness accounts of Miskitu turtlemen from the seventeenth century through the early twentieth century consistently describe their use of harpoons as the principle method to catch sea turtles.<sup>68</sup> Henry Bodden recalled, “See they used to come out . . . they never had nets, they used to strike the turtle.”<sup>69</sup> During these contact moments, Caymanian turtlemen exchanged with them turtle meat and old nets for ivory nuts, plantains, coconuts, sweet potatoes, and cassava. Varion Ebanks explained, “People would give ’em old nets and then they would catch turtle that way, but they knew [because] some of them used to work along with Caymanians, too, and they’d catch on to how to make the net and catch turtle.”<sup>70</sup> The presence of nets and the practice of luring sea turtles into them confirms a shared local knowledge of turtle fishing methods.

The informal and formal interactions between Caymanians and other populations in the Caribbean facilitated a sharing of maritime knowledge.<sup>71</sup> Caymanians’ innovative equipment, such as the catboat, attracted others, who soon adopted it for their own turtling voyages. Through ethnographic interviews, Colombian anthropologist Ana Isabel Márquez Pérez directly traces the lineage of contemporary fishing vernaculars found on Providencia Island to Caymanian turtlemen, who transmitted maritime equipment to them. Octogenarian seaman Jonathan Archbold recalled, “My father had a small canoe in which we used to fish. At that time, we did not use catboats. We bought those canoes in Nicaragua, in Cartagena [Colombia] that the Indians used to make.” The switch to Caymanian catboats happened gradually but made a tremendous impact on the maritime traditions of Providencia islanders. “The catboats that came to Providencia are from Cayman. . . . My father used to tell me how he bought one of them from the Caymanians who used to come to the cays to hunt turtle and came here and we traded turtle for rum, sugarcane honey and other things like that, and they brought their catboats and the people [Providencia islanders] asked for them and they returned bringing them to sell,” explained Alban McLean.<sup>72</sup>

During the first half of the twentieth century, Caymanian shipbuilders and schooner owners frequently sold sailing and motored vessels to buyers in these maritime communities. Traders and fishermen on San Andrés and Providencia regularly purchased Caymanian-built schooners and catboats because shipbuilding was an underdeveloped industry on their islands, with few exceptions. On San Andrés, sea captain Palmerston Coulson was the only known shipbuilder on the island. As a home builder, he had gained some notoriety for his construction of storage facilities for American traders involved in the coconut trade. In 1928, Coulson finished a fifty-ton schooner, the *Persistence*, which ferried passengers and cargo across the western Caribbean. While Coulson built an occasional small boat, islanders largely contracted him to build homes. Shipbuilding never took hold on San Andrés, as the islanders preferred to cultivate and export fruit.<sup>73</sup>

Seafaring islanders continued to purchase sloops, schooners, and catboats from Caymanians, particularly in the 1940s and 1950s. For example, the *Cimboco* was built in 1927 and eventually became the first locally owned motored vessel in Grand Cayman. In 1958, a Providencia islander, Victor Ray Howard, purchased it to carry passengers and cargo between the island and the coastal ports of Cartagena and Puerto Limón. He changed the vessel's name, christening it in honor of his wife, Victoria.<sup>74</sup> In 1930, renowned Caymanian shipwrights the Arch brothers constructed the turtling schooner the *Goldfield*. Capt. Charles Farrington regularly took it to hunt hawksbill and green turtles in the Miskito Cays before selling his catch in Key West. By the 1950s, it had been sold to Providencia islanders Alejandro and James Rankin.<sup>75</sup> The transferal of the *Goldfield* coincides with a deep decline in the number of Caymanians involved in the turtle industry but also the rise of the fishery industries in such peripheral places.

By the middle of the century, Providencia islanders began to experiment with the Caymanian catboat. Like Cayman Brac shipwrights who had modified the Central American canoe to better suit their needs to fish for turtle in the deep sea, Providencia islanders redesigned the catboat to address their fishing needs. Mister Pat of Lazy Hill reconfigured the Caymanian catboat with boat-building skills he picked up during his time working as a carpenter in the Panamanian port of Colón. As Bocas del Toro resident Carlos Reid noted, Panamanian fishermen still plied the waters on Central American cedar or "sandbox" (*cautivo*) canoes.<sup>76</sup> With fewer Providencia islanders hunting turtles, turning instead to lobsters and other seafood, Mister Pat and others made practical changes. First, the Providencia catboat was narrower. Second, it no longer relied on local timber. Providencia catboat builders

imported all their raw materials and often relied on durable but synthetic boat material. Finally, the Providencia islanders followed the trend of Caymanian turtlemen, who had turned their sail to motor-powered vessels.<sup>77</sup> These changes resulted in a speedier Providencia catboat.

Caymanian and Providencia islanders alike celebrated catboats with annual regattas. In 1935, Caymanian commissioner Allen Wolsey Cardinall celebrated King George V's Silver Jubilee by modernizing the islands and introducing them to the wider world. With the goal of promoting the islands as a tourist destination, the commissioner inaugurated the first catboat regatta, held between the shark and turtling seasons in January. The event attracted watercrafts from all over the world and introduced the unknown islands to the wider world. During the regatta, Caymanian boat owners sanded, painted, and spiffed up their vessels to compete in a race around the islands. Sometimes they made modifications, such as shortening the keel to increase speed. The regatta also served to boast their skills as master seamen.<sup>78</sup> Providencia islanders also implemented their own catboat races. While the origins of these races are not clear, it is likely that they began in the post-1950s, when local boat builders redesigned the Caymanian catboat to suit their needs. The races grew in popularity among Providencia islanders as a pivotal social event to bring together the entire community, with seamen displaying their masculine virility through their navigation skills, and onlookers gambling on the outcome of the race.

## Conclusion

By shifting our scale of examination to the migration of Caymanians to the lesser known and yet integrated locales within the global economy, such as Providencia, it becomes easier to identify the development of social networks, commercial exchanges, and a wider maritime culture that transcended empire or nation. Caymanians carried and introduced their maritime traditions as others who had contact with them adopted and modified them. For a time, Caymanians were part of a fragile transnational world interlinked through a shared history of migration and maritime cultural traditions. In the first half of the twentieth century, however, Spanish-speaking governments increasingly sought to restrain these movements and viewed the easy-going mobility of Caymanian turtlemen as threats to national interests.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Limits at Sea

#### *State Claims, Territorial Consolidation, and Boundary Disputes, 1880s–1950s*

In March 1959, Colombian authorities detained seventeen Cayman Brac turtles aboard the vessel *M. V. Nordzee* near an outlying cay that forms part of the Archipelago of San Andrés, Providencia, and Santa Catalina in the western Caribbean. Reportedly, a Providencia Island sea captain named Ellecio Hawkins had spotted the men, whom he claimed were pirates who had taken “full possession of Serrana Cay.” His account triggered swift action. According to reports later given to the governor of Jamaica, Colombian officials sent a warship to investigate the cay, and the Colombian coast guard brought the Caymanian turtles to San Andrés “to have things straightened out.”<sup>1</sup> Colombian and British diplomats negotiated for a few weeks before the Colombian minister of foreign affairs directed the authorities at San Andrés to release them.<sup>2</sup>

The detention and subsequent release of Cayman Brac turtle fishers was not an isolated incident. Maritime disputes over the fishery throughout the circum-Caribbean were increasing in frequency and causing much tension, not least because the once abundant nesting area of the Cayman Islands had lost a good deal of its turtle population by 1800. As a result, Caymanian turtles were traveling farther distances in search of green meat and tortoiseshell along the turtles’ migratory circuits. A series of legislation followed, with the goal to nationalize waters, delimit boundaries, and protect endangered marine resources. As Colombia had in 1959, the governments of Costa Rica, Cuba, and Nicaragua attempted to make and defend claims of territorial sovereignty over contested maritime Caribbean spaces by restricting or limiting access to foreign fishermen. Some officials argued that they had the right to police the seas and secure maritime borders for national defense. Other authorities sought to regulate the turtle fishery to extract maximum financial benefit. And some governments even claimed a need to regulate the turtle fishery in an effort to prevent the depopulation of sea turtles in the Caribbean. Mostly, they sought to regulate the turtle fishery to secure political authority over liminal spaces and over nationals whose loyalty they had not yet gained.

Caymanian turtlemen doggedly resisted governments' attempts to restrict their access to the waters where their ancestors had once captured turtles. As for them, laws limiting entry into a transnational turtle fishing commons combined with the increasing scarcity of the turtles posed a severe threat to their livelihood. In response, Caymanian turtlemen claimed that they had the right to access foreign fishing grounds as they had traditionally used the commons. These sorts of claims were most effective in areas where state presence had long been absent and where British authorities chose to use their political influence to push back against restrictive legislation. Ultimately, Caymanian hunters faced restrictions, which made turtle fishing an increasingly difficult economic activity to pursue.

In this chapter, I examine disputes over the turtle fishery across several circum-Caribbean locales: the southern cays of Cuba, the Miskito Cays of Nicaragua, and the Colombian archipelago of San Andrés, Providencia, and Santa Catalina. These conflicts over Caymanian access to turtle fishing grounds in national waters reveal the messy multilateral process of maritime boundary making, in which contestations among multiple national and imperial state actors as well as foreign and local turtlemen helped to consolidate a once porous but contested space in the circum-Caribbean. Moreover, in multiple countries, legislation to regulate the turtle fishery eventually led to the closing of the turtle commons, which had been a robust transnational maritime zone.

### Cuba's Southern Cays

The turtle population decline around the Cayman Islands in the early 1800s led turtlemen to travel to nearby Cuba. By the late nineteenth century, Cuban authorities did not welcome their presence in nearby waters. In 1868, Carlos Manuel de Céspedes's call to resist Spanish rule pitted planters, cattlemen, free people of color, and enslaved people in a war against imperial Spain. It also revealed Spanish rule's vulnerability in defending its island colony from outside threats. To prevent weapons from falling into the hands of patriot rebels, in 1871 the Spanish captain general decisively prohibited British subjects from the Bahamas, the Caymans, Jamaica, and the Leeward Islands from turtle fishing and engaging in other maritime activities within Cuban waters.<sup>3</sup> Spanish authorities, however, had previously shown concern over foreign turtlemen in the outer cays, which reopened debates about territorial sovereignty. Caymanians had long traveled to the Cuban southern cays to participate in salvaging wrecks and to fish turtle. The Spanish viewed them as sea robbers.

This reputation of Caymanians as thieves of the sea did occasionally turn violent. Eighteenth-century Irish naturalist Sir Hans Sloane noted that turtlemen at Cuba's southern cays "had been robb'd by a *Perigua*, sent by the Governor of Havana; they were stript, and the Spaniards talk'd of putting them all into one Sloop, and burning them into the air."<sup>4</sup> As such incidents suggest, Spanish authorities tended to respond violently to challenges to their sovereignty over these cays. According to Sloane, a treaty actually gave England possession of the turtle fishery in Cuba and in the Caymans, a dispute that likely fueled Spain's violence against turtlemen. In 1841, an English missionary at Grand Cayman reported to his superiors in London that residents had formed a militia in 1787 and 1788 to defend against attacks from Spaniards in Cuba who "appear to entertain feelings of animosity and revenge, which they take every opportunity to execute."<sup>5</sup> These attacks included the murder of Caymanians, the burning of vessels, and detention and arrest of crews fishing off Cuban cays. A century later, the widespread civil war permitted Spanish officials to take charge of a maritime space that had previously eluded them. They did so through limiting turtlemen—particularly Bahamians and Caymanians—from fishing in and near Cuban waters.

William Eden and Company, a Jamaican turtle retailer, informed British authorities of an unlawful seizure and detention of his vessel and crew in 1870. According to the retailer, the sloop *Star* left Grand Cayman for the south side of Cuba on August 8, acquiring nine turtles and forty pounds of tortoiseshell inside a month. As it prepared to return to the Caymans, poor weather forced the crew to take shelter on a Cuban cay. While there, a "Spanish gunboat" took them and their vessel to Cienfuegos. The Spanish authorities detained the crew and vessel in Cuba for forty days, during which time a hurricane seriously damaged the ship. One of the turtlers contracted smallpox during the detention and died after fourteen days in quarantine in Grand Cayman.<sup>6</sup> While the British consul at Havana, Alex G. Dunslop, found the crew of the *Star* not guilty of any crime, he cautioned the retailer not to continue to send its boats to Cuba: "Whilst Cuba is in such a disturbed state (which I fear, likely to continue for some time), you caution all the Cayman boats and sloops from approaching too near the Cuban shores and reefs—unless when necessity obliges them to do so."<sup>7</sup>

In 1872, however, British West Indian turtlemen requested access to the Cuban turtle fishery by petition to the colonial secretary.<sup>8</sup> They called the Spanish government's action of barring them both "unjust" and "arbitrary." When the British authorities in the Colonial and Foreign Offices did noth-



ing, local British officials noted the economic impact to British colonial subjects of closing the fishery. For example, in an 1879 report, the commodore of HMS *Griffon* called it a “great loss” to the islands’ inhabitants. With the 1878 conclusion of the Ten Years’ War, turtlers hoped to get Spanish authorities to reopen the turtle fishery.<sup>9</sup> The British lieutenant governor of Jamaica concurred on the urgency of the situation, saying that Grand Cayman turtlemen were losing £1,200 annually in revenue, a significant sum for a small island population. Michael Hicks Beach, the colonial secretary, acknowledged the problem in an 1879 dispatch but said he was powerless to remedy it.<sup>10</sup> Ten years later, the governor of the Bahamas urged British authorities to negotiate with Spain over the Cuban turtle fishery, but the Colonial Office refused, citing Beach’s 1879 reply as the closing of the subject.<sup>11</sup>

British subjects ignited a renewed campaign to reopen the Cuban turtle fishery, but to no avail. In 1893, Custos Edmund Parsons forwarded a petition from twenty-nine islanders on Grand Cayman asking that the British government enter talks with Spanish authorities to reestablish their access to the turtle fishery.<sup>12</sup> Citing income loss from the closed turtle fishery, Henry C. Bodden and twenty-eight islanders self-described as the “ship owners, shipwrights, captains, mariners, and merchants of this Island” asked for assistance in restoring previously lost rights to fish in Cuban waters.<sup>13</sup> The governor of Jamaica advocated that the British government move to support them, but Henry Drummond Wolff, the British ambassador to Madrid, concluded that it was impossible, citing Spanish resistance toward reopening the fishery.<sup>14</sup> He warned that Cubans wanted to keep Caymanians out but also would have preferred to increase their own exclusive rights in the region.<sup>15</sup> With that, Caymanian turtlemen set their sights on new turtle fishing grounds to exploit.

### Trouble at the Miskito Cays

By the late nineteenth century, the arrival of American investment in the fledgling banana industry changed Managua officials’ perspective toward the Caribbean lowlands from benign neglect to active interest. This mini-boom attracted the eyes of the modernizing Nicaraguan elite, seeking to benefit financially from the culturally and physically separated Mosquitia. Much of the consolidation of Nicaraguan authority over the terrestrial and maritime Mosquitia occurred in the last decades of the nineteenth century. As Caymanian turtlemen, driven by the depletion of turtle rookeries closer to home, regularly made lengthy journeys to the Miskito Cays in search of green

turtles, Nicaraguan authorities found political and economic reasons for creating and enforcing legislation to assert authority over maritime territories in the adjacent Caribbean waters. In the following pages, I focus on turtle fishery disputes during the final years of the nineteenth century and into the first quarter of the twentieth century. This period is when Nicaraguan officials robustly defended their claims not only to the terrestrial but also to the maritime Mosquitia, an autonomous indigenous and Afro-indigenous kingdom that extended across the Caribbean coasts of the modern-day countries of Honduras and Nicaragua.

Mosquitia had long been at the center of territorial struggles, and the one involving the turtle fishery was no different. Some fifty years after gaining independence from Spain in 1821, Nicaragua was not a fully consolidated nation-state, with a semiautonomous region along the Caribbean coast under the tutelage of Britain. The Tawira and Sambo branches of the Miskitu kingdoms dominated Mosquitia and were one of a handful of indigenous peoples to remain independent during the era of European colonization.<sup>16</sup> As explained in chapter 1, the Miskitu as maritime Indians were cosmopolitan and used their commercial contact with Europeans to defend themselves against rivals. This kept the Miskitu from falling under submission to any European power—Spanish or British.<sup>17</sup> The Miskitu enjoyed commercial exchanges with French, Dutch, British, and eventually American traders. The English, however, retained a particularly strong relationship with various Sambo and Tawira Miskitu rulers, which led to an informal cultural and political influence over the region. This relationship equally alarmed Nicaraguan officials and Spanish imperial agents.

Nicaraguan extension of authority over the Mosquitia was fragile and had occurred only a few decades earlier. In 1860, the British signed the Anglo-Nicaraguan Treaty, also known as the Treaty of Managua, ending their protectorate over Mosquitia and recognizing Nicaraguan sovereignty over the entire eastern portion of the region. However, the Miskitu maintained some political autonomy and their territory was considered a reserve, extending from Cape Gracias a Dios in the north to Bluefields in the south.<sup>18</sup> The Nicaraguan government was even obliged to pay the Miskitu an annual stipend of support. Notwithstanding this jurisdictional realignment, Managua officials made little practical changes. In 1863, Nicaragua's first official map failed to include the Mosquitia.<sup>19</sup>

By the 1890s, Managua officials had gained a foothold in Mosquitia with the creation of state infrastructure. In 1887, they created military posts and opened a post office in Bluefields.<sup>20</sup> In 1893, the newly inaugurated liberal

president José Santos Zelaya appointed Carlos Lacayo and Roberto Cabezas as commissioner and regional intendant, respectively. The president assigned them administrative and military responsibilities over Mosquitia, which led to deep concerns from Mosquitia authorities over the subsequent arrival of two hundred Nicaraguan soldiers. By February 1894, Cabezas had occupied Bluefields, issued martial law, and dismissed the local government. Due to Nicaraguan anger and intimidation toward the Creole political elite, the Mosquitia chief Robert Henry Clarence and his council agreed to a “re-incorporation” of Mosquitia; soon thereafter, the last Mosquitia king departed for his exile in Jamaica.<sup>21</sup> Nicaraguan authority was finally consolidated over the Caribbean coastal region.

The incorporation of terrestrial Mosquitia in 1894 led Nicaraguan authorities to assert state power over maritime Mosquitia through a series of disputes over turtle fishery at the Miskito Cays. Since the 1840s, Caymanian turtlemen had traveled to the area to supply markets in British Honduras and Jamaica with the “finest green turtle.”<sup>22</sup> While the Cuban turtle hunting grounds were closer, Caymanians faced both dwindling numbers of green turtles and expensive as well as dangerous barriers to the turtle fishery there. By the 1870s, Caymanians had harvested most of the green turtle at the Miskito Cays (see map 4.1). With little competition other than artisanal Miskito strikers from the coast, Caymanian turtlemen hunted with minimal outside disturbance. Nicaraguan authorities were aware of the turtle fishery, as they issued legislation to regulate it. An 1869 ordinance of Cape Gracias a Dios required all turtlemen to pay a ten-dollar permit fee. The legislation also sanctioned a levy of thirty dollars to any poacher unlawfully fishing.<sup>23</sup> Within a decade, Caymanian turtlemen were confronting increased regulation of the turtle fishery.

One of the early disputes between Caymanian turtlemen and Nicaraguan authorities occurred in 1883. That spring, E. W. Jennett, the sea captain of the schooner *Mary Ellen*, filed a complaint against the commandant at Cape Gracias a Dios to British authorities. He claimed that armed Nicaraguan patrollers had come aboard his schooner while he was fishing turtle at Mosquito Cay (part of the Miskito Cays). One of the officials introduced himself as the commandant of Cape Gracias a Dios. The commandant demanded that Jennett pay thirty dollars to permit him to keep the turtle he had fished and kraaled. Jennett refused to comply. He claimed to have already paid eighty dollars for the privilege and saw no reason to pay an additional fee. Jennett complained of “ill-treatment,” as the interaction became violent, leading to the capsizing of his vessel.<sup>24</sup> After three years of diplomatic wrangling over



MAP 4.1 Greater Caribbean turtle commons. Map by Bill Nelson; original base map by Christian Medina Fandiño.

the incident, the Nicaraguan government settled Jennett's claim, agreeing with his assessment of the commandant's arbitrary and abusive behavior. The foreign minister of Nicaragua informed his British counterpart that the commandant had been removed from his position at Gracias a Dios and faced some unspecified legal charges. To resolve the matter, the Nicaraguan government compensated Jennett in the sum of £300, which was half of the original claim in damages.<sup>25</sup>

Some Caymanians saw Jennett's settlement as a successful challenge to Nicaraguan claims of sovereignty over the turtle fishery at the Miskito Cays. As the principal fishing grounds for Caymanian turtlemen, local officials and others involved in the turtle trade took it as an opportunity to secure Caymanian access to the fishery. In 1885, the local administrator, Custos J. C. Panton, asked the British colonial secretary whether Mosquito Cay, one of the islets belonging to the Miskito Cays and the place where Caymanian turtlemen kraaled their catches, was under Nicaragua's jurisdiction.<sup>26</sup> Colonial Secretary Walker admitted that the information from the British Royal Navy on the subject had not produced "positive information" on the matter.<sup>27</sup> Aware of the islands' dependency on the turtle trade and the increasing restrictions on access to the turtle fishery, whether in Nicaragua or Cuba, Panton welcomed the opportunity to help his constituents and the local treasury.

British officials' uncertainty over the sovereignty of Mosquito Cay emboldened Caymanian turtlemen to challenge Nicaraguan claims over these rich turtle fishing grounds. Sea captain William Acourt Bodden questioned whether Caymanians needed to pay for a fishing license at all, as the 1869 Nicaraguan ordinance of Gracias a Dios had decreed. The old-time turtler argued that Caymanians had originally settled and developed Mosquito Cay for commerce. For a century, he argued, Caymanians had enjoyed "the most perfect immunity in the use of the kay for obtaining water and building the turtle crawls adjacent."<sup>28</sup> Bodden grappled with the concept of territorial sovereignty not as a process of treaties over jurisprudence but in terms of the occupation and use of territorial space. The veteran turtler aptly suggested that Caymanians further the imperial quests of Great Britain, as he credited Wade Bennett Watler for hoisting the British flag over Mosquito Cay in the 1870s. Watler earned a living there exporting coconuts and selling water to turtlemen stopping to kraal turtles at Mosquito Cay. Moreover, Caymanians never saw Nicaraguan officials at the cay and rarely saw Miskito Indians from Mosquitia. According to Bodden, tranquility reigned until the Jennett incident.<sup>29</sup> His reference to the hoisting of the British flag by Watler implied that

this territory still belonged to Great Britain; Bodden urged British authorities to take immediate action in the face of Nicaraguan interlopers.

Despite efforts to persuade British authorities of Caymanians' legitimate claims to the turtle fishery at the Miskito Cays, disputes between Caymanian turtlemen and Nicaraguan officials dramatically increased in the years after Jennett received compensation from the Nicaraguan authorities. These conflicts often turned violent, and newspapers and diplomatic correspondence reported severe injuries and even deaths of turtlemen. As early as 1888, a veteran turtler William A. Bodden complained to other turtlemen of the potential violence when dealing with abusive Nicaraguan officials. He wrote, "We know for a fact that the Nicaraguan Comandante stationed at Cape Gracias a Dios, has equipped a schooner with armed men, and two brass pieces of artillery." The sea captain surmised that the Nicaraguan authorities meant to extort funds in fishing license fees and that they would address refusal violently.<sup>30</sup>

Consolidation of Nicaraguan authority over Mosquitia acerbated tensions between the Nicaraguan state and Caymanian turtlemen. In March 1897, Caymanian turtlers, addressing fishermen and retailers involved in the turtle trade, complained that Managua officials had placed armed guards at Mosquito Cay to impose a fifty-cent gold duty on every turtle they caught.<sup>31</sup> In September of the same year, turtlemen W. J. Bodden, U. Jackson, E. Alley, and A. A. Thompson claimed that Nicaraguan officials had wrongfully seized their vessels and arrested them, brutalizing them in jail. All acknowledged that they had been hunting turtle at the Miskito Cays when armed Nicaraguan authorities approached and boarded their schooners and demanded the duty. Bodden and Jackson admitted that they had failed to procure fishing permits, which would allow them to capture turtle at the cays.<sup>32</sup>

After the turtlemen promised to pay the fifty-cent gold duty per turtle, armed officials directed them to sail to the Rio Grande (Grand River), where Commandant Carlos Solez demanded a \$5,000 fine for their release. Solez agreed to release Captain Alley to either secure funds or find assistance in Bluefields; he held Bodden, Jackson, and Thompson—as well as their crews—until Alley returned with the money. The men and their crews later condemned the conditions of their imprisonment as inhumane, citing the death of a cook in prison as evidence. The British consul in Bluefields eventually arranged for the men to be released, and they agreed to pay a duty of fifty-eight cents per turtle.<sup>33</sup> After returning to the Cayman Islands, they immediately wrote a claim against the Nicaraguan government to the governor of Jamaica, demanding the equivalent of \$5,000 in sterling pound for



compensation to cover damages and suffering. The secretary of state for the colonies, Joseph Chamberlain, dismissed these demands, but he did ask the governor of Jamaica to obtain an explanation for the Nicaraguan officials' conduct and for information about licensing requirements for the Miskito Cays.<sup>34</sup> Sir Audley Gosling, the British minister at Guatemala, reported "scanty information" regarding Nicaraguan regulation of the turtle fishery. The detention of the four ship captains clearly showed that Nicaraguan authority over terrestrial and maritime Mosquitia had strengthened, and Managua had fortified a state presence in the maritime zone. Gosling commented that the Nicaraguan government viewed British fishing vessels "with extreme jealousy."<sup>35</sup>

In 1903, Nicaraguan president José Santos Zelaya promoted the idea of leasing the turtle fishery to Caymanians as a means to maximize state profits, reflecting his assumption of control of the marine resource.<sup>36</sup> In the same year, his administration enacted Decree 20, which outlined the specific regulations for turtle and sponge fisheries. The goal was to enrich the fiscal coffers. The legislation required each member of a turtle fleet to register for an individual permit, which would last for fifteen days. The cost was two pesos in gold per day. Permits were only renewable prior to expiration. Turtlemen were to pay fifty cents gold for every exported turtle. The ministry of treasury also required that turtle hunters register their vessels once a year in person before a customs agent and pay two pesos in gold for boats of five tons or less and four pesos for boats of higher tonnage. Finally, unlicensed turtlemen caught fishing without a permit could be fined between twenty and one hundred pesos in gold and lose their right to fish.<sup>37</sup>

Zelaya's fishery legislation had a different reception in the Cayman Islands. Turtlemen quickly launched a series of complaints to British authorities regarding the onerous new requirements and exorbitant permit fees. Caymanian commissioner Frederick Shedden Sanguinetti clearly agreed. He considered Decree 20 a disastrous act that was ruinous to the inhabitants of Grand Cayman, who were "almost wholly dependent on the Turtle Industry." He explained that the fees could easily wipe out profits.<sup>38</sup> One Jamaican merchant involved in the turtle trade warned that the fees would drive Nicaraguan turtle prices prohibitively high, and therefore he would purchase Cuban turtle.<sup>39</sup>

Caymanian turtlemen responded to this legislation by looking to hunt turtle in neighboring Costa Rica. On their behalf, British authorities sought an exclusive right to fish in Costa Rican waters. Turtlemen have long known the sandy coastal beaches of Turtle Bogue (Tortuguero) in the northern

Caribbean lowlands for their abundant green turtles and eggs. Whereas the fishing grounds of Cuba and Nicaragua were on the high seas, fishing at Turtle Bogue meant looking for and capturing female turtles who sought to lay their eggs on land. Given the enormous pressure placed on British authorities to find a resolution to the turtle fishery disputes in Cuba and Nicaragua, Caymanian authorities turned their sights to securing new fishing grounds, alerting the British government to this new direction.

In 1901, Sanguinetti asked the Foreign Office to assist in securing a strip of land for the exclusive use of Caymanian turtle fishing, knowing that the Costa Rican government frequently leased out strips of coastal land for short-term uses as a way to raise funds for economic modernization. Within a year, an official reply explained that Costa Rican authorities offered yearly leases and that the strip in question was being auctioned for £29. Commissioner Sanguinetti quickly responded that islanders in the turtle fishery could offer £50 per annum for a minimum of a five-year lease and an agreement that Costa Rican authorities would help to protect the turtle species by enforcing a closed season, or a period when hunting of sea turtles was not permitted.<sup>40</sup> Without some state protection of the marine animal, the turtle fishery there would be unsustainable.

Caymanian turtlemen had long expressed disapproval about Costa Rican authorities' failure to protect turtles in their waters. In 1890, Colonel Sadler relayed a report that turtlers had sent to the governor of Jamaica regarding the "indiscriminate slaughter of turtles" at Tortuguero. According to fishermen, the renters of the coastal strip "destroy all the turtle coming on the beach to deposit their eggs & in this way it is alleged that thousands of turtle are destroyed in a single season & it is feared their extermination in the Caribbean Sea."<sup>41</sup> Ricardo Jimenez, the Costa Rican minister of foreign affairs, disputed the reports, saying that renters killed turtles only after the deposit of the eggs. He said that "launches & islanders from the islands of San Andrés and Providence & from other parts of the aforesaid coast" were the real problem and believed that renewed government vigilance would address the issue.<sup>42</sup>

Caymanian enthusiasm for a turtle fishery at Tortuguero remained unfulfilled, as efforts to secure a lease there stalled for unknown reasons. It is clear that British authorities learned where and how to obtain leases through auctions. British consul Cox expressed confidence that the Costa Rican government would take actions to conserve the turtle population, saying that national authorities would likely enact legislation to expand bans on the exportation of oysters to protect turtles from people without a permit, such as

those that would be extended to the Caymanian turtlemen. While this sort of legislation could harm the municipality's treasury, it would make the lease of the area more valuable to turtlers.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, British authorities in Guatemala or even the Foreign Office in London likely abandoned the idea of leasing in Costa Rica. Costa Rica's government easily earned as much as 917 colones per year for the section between Tortuguero and Parismina.<sup>44</sup> With the loss of a turtle fishery at Tortuguero, Caymanian turtlemen again waited for a positive resolution at the Miskito Cays.

In 1903, Commissioner Frederick Shedden Sanguinetti urged British authorities to take action to improve Caymanian access to the turtle fishing grounds around the Miskito Cays by inducing Managua to lower its fees.<sup>45</sup> A confidential dispatch from the outgoing secretary of state for the colonies to the Foreign Office called on the British minister at Guatemala to seek a modification to Decree 20. British officials hoped to resolve disputes with Nicaragua over the turtle fishery by offering to lease Mosquito Cay and pay a duty on exported turtles. Meanwhile, Caymanians followed the advice of British authorities, returning to fish out in the Miskito Cays, where borders were hard to determine given the submerged banks and high waters. That instruction proved to further destabilize the Caymanian turtle fishery at Miskito Cays.

In March 1904, armed Nicaraguan authorities from Cape Gracias set out to find and detain suspected turtle poachers at Miskito Cays. Initially, the governor of Cape Gracias approached the schooner *Franklin* as it left Mosquito Cay to move toward a new fishing ground. The captain of the schooner permitted the governor to board his vessel but allegedly refused to take his turtle catches from the kraal and bring them aboard the schooner.<sup>46</sup> Without any means to compel the turtlemen to comply, the governor returned to Cape Gracias and sent Commandant Casimiro González and twenty-four armed soldiers out to the turtling grounds. They boarded several British schooners at Old Mohegan (or Muerto Cay), demanding that captains and crew give them the ships' papers as well as remove turtles from the water pens and place them onto the schooners. When the turtlemen scoffed at their demands or simply refused to comply, Nicaraguan authorities threatened them. This was the case of the *Franklin*, a Caymanian schooner, which experienced violence at the hands of the Nicaraguan commandant. John George Merrin, a native of Grand Cayman, served as interpreter on the vessel. He recounted the brutal treatment the turtlemen received at the hands of the Nicaraguan authorities. When one of the crew refused to put the turtles onboard the vessel, Gonzalez reportedly shouted in Spanish, "I will give them

lead.”<sup>47</sup> Several other crew members accused the Nicaraguan authorities of pointing pistols and manhandling them.<sup>48</sup>

The worst allegation came from Joseph T. Mason, master of the sloop the *Martel Mason*. He claimed that a group of armed Nicaraguan soldiers with rifles and pistols came aboard his sloop, brutally attacked him, and later imprisoned him. In addition to shoving a rifle through his pants, they threw him in their canoe and dragged him aboard their sloop. Mason described his treatment there: “They put me on deck tied both my arms and feet with rope, tied on the rudder head and laid me on the deck.” Mason claimed he remained in that position for three hours. Then, the armed soldiers placed him “in a sitting posture putting my arms over my knees placing a gun between my arms and legs forming a toggle and placed me face to the sun where they kept me for about three hours.” The soldiers reportedly refused to give him water to drink. The interpreter gave Mason a message from the governor: “[He] said I must drink my piss and if I wanted anything to eat to eat my shit.” Mason received neither food nor water for the next twenty-four hours.<sup>49</sup>

Caymanian turtlemen departed the hunting ground, along with their turtle catches, on one of the five schooners. Some Nicaraguan soldiers remained at Mosquito Cay to guard the other four vessels. At the port of Cape Gracias, authorities accused and then convicted them “of *clandestine fishing*.” Authorities charged them with neither procuring permits to hunt sea turtles in Nicaraguan waters nor declaring their catches at port, which violated the Fishery Law of 1903. More importantly, Nicaraguan officials argued that the Caymanian turtlemen had defrauded the government of revenue generated from their hunting of marine resources in national waters. As a result, the court exacted payment for fishing permits and tariffs on caught turtle as well as prison terms for the captains; of the crew, the government demanded only fees for the fishing permits.<sup>50</sup>

News of the incident quickly reached Grand Cayman. Commissioner Sanguinetti managed to alert the colonial secretary of the seizure and treatment of the Caymanian turtle hunters by Nicaraguan authorities. The detention of the men and loss of their income occurred at a terrible time. “I feel constrained to add that matters were bad enough with the people of this Island as a consequence of the cyclones of August last, but the seizure of the vessels and consequent loss of the larger portion of the season’s turtle catch has brought very many families face to face with actual want,” admitted the commissioner.<sup>51</sup> The concerns regarding “brutal treatment” of British subjects at the hands of foreign authorities sufficiently alarmed British officials to trigger the colonial secretary to send out a gunboat to investigate.<sup>52</sup>

Accompanied by his Spanish interpreter, Mr. T. P. Thompson, Capt. Herbert Lyon of the HMS *Retribution*—a part of the West Indies squadron—arrived at Cape Gracias. There, he reviewed evidence collected against the captains and crew of the five Caymanian schooners and met with Commandant González. He even studied the chart where Nicaraguan authorities indicated the seizure of the British vessels. Afterward, Lyon concluded, “the Nicaraguans had been guilty of a gross act of piracy.”<sup>53</sup> According to the chart provided by the Nicaraguan authorities, the spot where the Caymanians had been hunting turtle was three miles beyond the Mosquito Cay. Thus, Lyon reasoned that the Caymanians had not violated Nicaraguan territorial sovereignty. The British naval captain argued that the Caymanian turtlemen had respected the three-mile territorial limit, whereby territorial sovereignty extended only three miles from terrestrial possessions. It was an international policy widely accepted as part of the freedom of the seas principle. In his assessment, the Nicaraguans had grossly overstepped and violated this policy. Lyon passed along his position to Minister Edward Thornton, who then demanded the turtle hunters’ immediate release and revocation of all penalties and fees.<sup>54</sup>

Violation of freedom of the seas concerned British officials, who had long subscribed to this principle. Since the 1609 publication of *Mare Liberum* (*The Free Sea*), several European nations followed Dutch jurist Hugo Grotius’s argument that the sea was free and open to all. Coastal empires or nations, he conceded, had only limited jurisdiction over the littoral and nearby maritime space as a means of defense. While this line of argumentation was used to defend Dutch interest in the Indian Ocean, his position gained a following.<sup>55</sup> By the nineteenth century, the principle was widely adopted, and the British were its largest champions. The de facto policy had helped them to justify British expansion and domination over maritime trade. With this incident, Nicaraguan authorities challenged this common principle—the freedom of the seas—and threatened to ruin “an honest, respectable, sober, hardworking class of men and British Subjects.”<sup>56</sup> They were also challenging the entire British maritime enterprise in the Caribbean.

Nicaraguan authorities refused to retract from their position with regard to maritime territorial limits in the Caribbean. In a letter to British consul Edward Thornton, Minister of Foreign Affairs Adolfo Altamirano explained how Article 593 of the Civil Code permitted the Nicaraguan state to extend jurisdiction not one but four marine leagues (or three to twelve nautical miles) from the country’s shores. The objective was clear. It allowed the government of Nicaragua to “watch over the coasts, insure her fiscal income,

and guarantee the integrity of her territory.” Moreover, Altamirano insisted that the state had a right to regulate fishery and navigation of those waters. “The Authorities charged with the vigilance of the coast are invested with the necessary powers to capture and punish those who infringe [upon] the laws.”<sup>57</sup> In no uncertain terms, Nicaraguans had demanded that the British subjects respect not only their territorial claims over this maritime space but also their right to earn an income from it. Caymanian turtle hunters, however, rebuked Nicaraguan claims of territorial sovereignty over the Caribbean waters surrounding the Miskito Cays.

To preserve access to the rich turtle grounds, Caymanian turtlemen insisted that these banks and cays had not belonged to Nicaragua. In fact, they had informally claimed these spots of land as British territories, since they alone claimed to have occupied, developed, and harvested resources from and near them. Again, they employed the same strategy as Caymanian turtlemen had done in the 1880s. Veteran turtle hunters claimed decades-long experiences out at the Miskito Cays. Octogenarian “master mariner” Daniel Feurtado had hunted turtle in the area since 1855. Sexagenarian John Jennett recalled how he had traveled out there since he was “a waiting child.” He regularly visited Morrison Cay to “split wood at local water and to fry up oil. It is a sandy split in the ground and a wash at high water.” A few other turtlemen in their fifties, including Robert W. Bodden, John Aaron Conolly, and William Bodden, claimed to have seen neither a Nicaraguan flag nor a single person—with the exception of Miskito Indians—out at the cays. On this latter point, it is unclear whether Caymanians understood that the Mosquito Kingdom had lost its autonomy and become a part of Nicaragua in 1860.<sup>58</sup> Regardless of whether they actually believed that Nicaraguan authorities neither held nor enforced territorial sovereignty over the Miskito Cays, Caymanian turtlemen simply refused to recognize it. Beginning in the 1880s, Nicaraguan officials had made their presence known at the Miskito Cays, demanding payment for hunting and harvesting of sea turtles in national waters—a policy that Caymanians reluctantly and sporadically obeyed.<sup>59</sup>

Unlike Nicaraguan officials, the British government held disparate views on how to resolve the turtle fishery dispute. At the local level, Caymanian authorities—the islands’ commissioner and even the governor of Jamaica—were extremely sympathetic to the turtlemen. “I hope to convince your advisers that the Cayman Islanders possessed at least equal rights with the Mosquito Indians, who are now recognized since 1860 as Nicaraguan subjects, to all fishery in dispute. Nicaragua derives its claims through these



Indians and can have no greater rights than they possessed,” insisted the governor.<sup>60</sup> Undergirding this sympathy for the Caymanian turtlemen were James Swettenham’s racial chauvinism and his legitimate concern about the fiscal health of the dependency. With a small population of six thousand or so inhabitants “mostly of pure white descent,” Caymanians had no industry other than turtle fishing. Ravaged by the 1903 hurricane, which had wiped out a sizable portion of the turtle fleet and destroyed nearly all the coconut trees, Caymanians were entirely dependent on the turtle trade. According to Governor Swettenham, “Their poverty at present is so great that they cannot afford to induce a medical man to take up business there[,] and their debt to Jamaica is still unliquidated.”<sup>61</sup>

While some British officials, including the governor of Jamaica, proved receptive toward Caymanian claims, their counterparts in Central America did not share their commitment to making them a priority in Britain’s foreign relations with Nicaragua. Herbert Harrison, the chargé d’affaires at Managua understood the untenable situation of Caymanian turtlemen but encouraged a more cautious path. “The question is not at all confined to the Cayman Islanders,” he noted, “but affects every British subject resident in Nicaragua. The ill-feeling caused by the constant question between England and Nicaragua has made it almost difficult for British subjects to live here, to the great advantages of other foreigners.” Harrison suggested that the British government “do away with these sources of friction,” as it would “be a real practical advantage to all our fellow countrymen in Nicaragua.”<sup>62</sup> With the growing presence of American businesses in the region, Harrison worried that the turtle dispute served to weaken further the British foothold in Nicaragua.

Despite the internal tensions among different sectors of the government, British authorities did engage in protracted negotiations over the turtle fishery at the Miskito Cays.<sup>63</sup> Meanwhile, Caymanian turtlemen continued to hunt and pen green turtles at Mosquito Cay, hoping to escape detection from the Nicaraguan authorities. Sometimes the turtlemen captured their prey without incident; other times armed Nicaraguan customs agents demanded they pay duties. In 1907, five of the twenty-four turtle schooner captains submitted affidavits to the Caymanian commissioner about their being forced to pay duties twice. After obtaining their permit and paying a fifty-cent duty per turtle, an armed Nicaraguan agent acting on behalf of the governor of Cape Gracias a Dios forced them to pay an additional dollar per turtle. Caymanian turtlemen like Capt. William Bodden insisted that Nicaraguans were

not entitled to collect duty on turtles caught in the high seas.<sup>64</sup> Concerned about discrepancies over duty payments, British officials insisted that the money be returned and queried the collection of different duties.<sup>65</sup>

At the core of the dispute was the question of whether Caymanian turtlemen captured sea turtles in Nicaraguan waters or the high seas. Sir Lionel Carden, the British ambassador to Central America, summarized the three central issues. First, Nicaragua's maritime boundaries were firmly settled. Second, it was nearly impossible to determine whether a vessel carried sea turtles captured in high seas or territorial waters for the purpose of exacting duties. Third, kraaling sea turtles or seeking refuge at sandy bars at Miskito Cays constituted payment to Nicaragua.<sup>66</sup> Nicaraguans essentially sought payment for not only sea turtles caught in territorial waters but also for the right to pen them on Nicaraguan soil, even if that is just a barely visible spot of sand in the middle of the Caribbean.

Caymanian turtlemen and British officials alike had to wait patiently for a resolution to the turtle fishery dispute at Miskito Cays. More pressing national and regional events disrupted domestic affairs in Nicaragua, turning attention away from this maritime spat. President Zelaya's program to unite all of Nicaragua—terrestrial and maritime—did not stop at its national borders; he set his sights on the unification of Central America. Although Nicaraguan troops invaded Honduras and ousted conservative caudillo President Manuel Bonilla in 1907, these actions did not cement Zelaya's dream of a united Central America but threatened the United States' interest in the region. With its construction of an interoceanic canal in Panama, the United States sought to limit competition from other foreign countries. Zelaya courted other states to help him achieve his liberal model of economic development. This proved to alienate him from segments of the Nicaraguan population, who eventually rebelled against him in 1909. Two years later, the United States sent marines to occupy and restore order in Nicaragua.

The U.S. occupation of Nicaragua affected negotiations between Nicaragua and Great Britain over the turtle fishery dispute at Miskito Cays. Although the American intervention was focused largely on preventing foreign nations from partnering with Nicaragua to build an interoceanic canal to compete with the Panama Canal, U.S. foreign policy makers also sought to fortify the economic interest of American citizens and stabilize Nicaragua's fiscal situation. The 1912 occupation occurred at a moment when British and Nicaraguan diplomatic officials had finally agreed on terms to resolve the turtle fishery dispute. The agreement proposed that Caymanian vessels obtain a permit or license of \$2.50 gold from a Nicaraguan authority before hunt-

ing turtle in territorial waters. Caymanian turtlemen also had to declare and pay a duty of fifty cents gold per turtle penned at a nearby cay. After a Nicaraguan authority received payment, he would provide the turtle schooner captains with a certificate, and they had twenty-four hours to return to the Cayman Islands. If a turtle schooner departed without paying the duty, the captain would be fined \$2.50 gold per turtle at the port in Georgetown.<sup>67</sup> However, George Weitzel, the U.S. minister in Managua, found the agreement unacceptable, “delayed the signing temporarily, and hope[d] to prevent it ultimately.”<sup>68</sup> Following the beginning of occupation in 1912, America indirectly ruled over Nicaragua through the puppet government of Adolfo Díaz, who agreed to protect U.S. financial and security interests. American banks even collected customs duties after acquiring Zelaya’s debts and paying European creditors, with the objective of ensuring Nicaragua’s repayment to U.S. creditors.<sup>69</sup>

Weitzel felt that the agreement violated Article 2 of a pending loan convention between the United States and Nicaragua that intended to have U.S. creditors take on the country’s debt but also directly control its custom-houses. The loan convention explicitly forbade Nicaragua from making any changes to its collection of taxes. Since the agreement intended to reduce the duty on turtles, it potentially upset the convention. Moreover, the American minister privately shared to the U.S. secretary of state the real motive for the Nicaraguan government finally accepting such an agreement. President Adolfo Díaz wanted to put “an end to the frequent conflicts between Nicaraguan authorities and British fishermen as a result of which, during a former administration, British fishing vessels were sometimes seized thereby giving rise to indemnity claims.”<sup>70</sup> British ambassador Lionel Carden insinuated that Nicaragua should either sign a treaty to ensure that “these annoyances were stopped” or promptly settle these claims.<sup>71</sup> Otherwise, the British government had no recourse but to send a British warship, as it had once done at Corinto in 1895.<sup>72</sup>

Despite American concerns over the proposal, Great Britain and Nicaragua agreed to its terms, allowing Caymanians’ access to the turtle fishery at Miskito Cays in 1916. The Regulation of the Turtle Fishing Industry in the Territorial Waters of Nicaragua as Regards Fishing Vessels Belonging to the Cayman Islands Treaty was ratified a year later. As in the 1912 proposal, Caymanian turtlemen agreed to pay a permit fee of \$2.50 in gold to hunt turtles in Nicaraguan territorial waters. They also paid a duty of \$0.50 cents gold per turtle penned on one of the neighboring cays. Violators were considered smugglers and faced criminal charges. The agreement was in effect for

twenty years unless one or both parties engaged in negotiations to renew it.<sup>73</sup> With that legislation, Nicaragua affirmed its sovereignty over maritime Mosquitia, and Caymanian turtlemen again availed themselves of the rich turtle grounds at Miskito Cays, wondering all the while whether the agreement was sustainable.

### Smugglers on the Southern Reef

The turtle fleet departing from Cayman Brac took between two and three days, depending on the wind, to arrive at a group of banks and reefs called the southern reef. Brackers first arrived at Rosalind, then Addison, then Serranilla, Serrana, and Quitasueño banks. The final location was Roncador Bank.<sup>74</sup> Many mariners feared the latter place, as it had been the source of numerous shipwrecks, including the 1865 wreck of a Pacific steamship with nine hundred passengers, the 1891 wreck of the steamship *Aguan*, and finally the infamous 1894 wreck of USS *Kearsarge*.<sup>75</sup> As discussed in chapter 2, the surrounding waters were known for an abundance of turtles, particularly hawksbill turtles, which Brackers hunted to harvest tortoiseshell for a number of decorative items. Traditionally, Cayman Brac turtlemen spent eight to ten weeks out fishing turtle, catching twenty-five or more per day with little state interference.<sup>76</sup> They expected to continue to do so in the twentieth century, but Colombian authorities began to make greater efforts to police the outer banks, cays, and reefs after 1910.

On January 1, 1913, the islands of San Andrés and Providencia inaugurated the archipelago's new administrative status as a national intendency.<sup>77</sup> Writing in the islands' newspaper the *Searchlight*, editor Francisco A. Newball reported that islanders saw the intendency as "full of promise and hopes for the future." They looked to "demonstrate to the outside world that in this remote corner of Colombian soil exists a people that, while being aloof from party struggles, only aspires to its aggrandizement through the pacific means that God has conceded to man to labor for his own welfare."<sup>78</sup> After almost twenty-five years of being governed by the Department of Bolívar, the islanders hoped the new government would be just and defend both the territory and their rights as Colombian citizens.

From its capital, the colonial port city of Cartagena, the Department of Bolívar had administered the archipelago as a small province since 1886. A few officials governed the population of three thousand English-speaking, largely African-descended, Protestant inhabitants. Their distinctive linguistic and cultural characteristics reflected their origins as descendants of the

second wave of settlers, a disparate mix of retired Anglo-Dutch buccaneers, Jamaican landowners, and enslaved Africans. While the archipelago had been part of Colombia since the 1820s, visitors and officials alike described it and its inhabitants as outside the nation. Moreover, islanders maintained strong commercial and cultural links to other English-speaking locales in the Caribbean, as well as the United States. These differences partly explain a failed attempt to join the secession of Panama in 1903, which led Colombian national authorities in Bogotá to pay greater attention to the archipelago in subsequent years.<sup>79</sup>

Before the creation of the intendancy, San Andrés and Providencia islanders frequently complained about the state of local governance. They accused the Bolívar officials of caring little for the welfare of the archipelago and focusing only on enriching themselves. These complaints finally reached the president's office. With the goal of addressing these concerns, President Carlos E. Restrepo appointed Santiago Guerrero to carry out a census of the archipelago and collect information from islanders regarding their concerns. Guerrero was likely chosen because he had served as port chief at San Andrés in 1909; at this time, few Bogotá officials had ever traveled to the distant islands. In addition to the census, Restrepo asked Guerrero to do a thorough investigation of the archipelago's political, economic, and social conditions.<sup>80</sup>

One of the most pressing issues for San Andrés and Providencia islanders were disputes over the turtle fishery. Islanders sought Colombia's support in disputes with other countries over turtle hunting as well as better protection over cays from foreign fishermen in national waters who disrespected Colombian sovereignty. Guerrero met with more than twenty notable islanders, including merchants and religious figures, among whom were two pastors of the Baptist churches on both islands. Concerning foreign fishermen in Colombian waters, islanders told Guerrero of the countless memorandums they had recently sent to the governor of Bolívar in Cartagena about English vessels from the Cayman Islands and Belize unlawfully fishing in Colombian waters.<sup>81</sup> Through correspondence, the governor of Bolívar instructed the ministry of foreign affairs to remind the British government that their subjects must first travel to Providencia Island to obtain a fishing permit and pay an export duty on turtle caught in Colombian waters. Cayman Brac turtlemen complained to British authorities about these requirements, but British inquiries to the Colombian minister of foreign affairs produced no easing of requirements.<sup>82</sup>

The intendancy also found it difficult to regulate and enforce legislation on the turtle fishery. In 1913, newly appointed intendant Gonzalo Pérez

warned W. L. Ryan, the Cayman Brac captain of the *W. E. Hurlston*, to warn Caymanian turtlemen to seek permits before fishing in Colombian waters in an open letter published in the *Searchlight*. He criticized their failure to do so in the past, saying they had acted “in opposition with the universal principles that govern the rights of property.”<sup>83</sup> Moreover, Pérez cautioned the Caymanian captain that the government would punish turtlemen who violated Colombian law. To make good on his promise to enforce better Colombian jurisdiction over the cays, the intendant requested a gasoline-powered vessel to survey and protect the outer cays.<sup>84</sup>

Despite severe warnings, Caymanians continued to hunt turtle without a permit. Subsequent intendants repeatedly urged national authorities in Bogotá to take bold action in defense of Colombian sovereignty. In 1914, Intendant Antonio José Sanchez explained that the intendancy continued to ask for the necessary support to protect the archipelago and exploit valuable resources mostly in the hands of foreigners—that is, British subjects.<sup>85</sup> His successor, interim intendant and native islander Francis A. Newball, informed the minister of government about unlawful fishing by Caymanian fishermen of guano and turtle. He pointed out that the turtlemen “allege they have perfect right to pursue this industry at these cays with consent of the British government.”<sup>86</sup> Caymanian challenges to Colombian sovereignty over these cays concerned the interim intendant. Newball urged the minister of foreign affairs to place a boat out there to guard the cays permanently. He even contended that a resolution might be found through diplomatic efforts.<sup>87</sup> In response, the ministry of foreign affairs instructed its consuls in England and the Netherlands to inform fishermen about the consequences of unlawful fishing in Colombian territorial waters.<sup>88</sup>

Intendancy officials were not the only individuals who considered illegal fishing in Colombian waters a concern. The unchecked entrance of foreign fishermen at the cays also concerned islanders. Some, like Simon A. Howard, editor of the *Searchlight*, suggested that disputes over turtle fishing raised serious concerns about Colombian sovereignty over the cays. He noted that British subjects of the greater Caribbean fish with impunity in Colombian waters all year long: “British subjects who make the cays, banks, and reefs within our territorial jurisdiction their permanent fishing ground the entire year, almost to the exclusion of our people *dare not* go to Pedro Cays adjacent thereto, and fish without a special permission.”<sup>89</sup> The reference to Pedro Cays signaled Howard’s knowledge of the Morant and Pedro Cays Fishery Act of 1907, which required all turtlemen to obtain a written license to harvest eggs or turtles from the Jamaican outer cays. Violators would be fined



\$400 and might be arrested in Kingston.<sup>90</sup> In making this parallel, his statement suggests not only that the Colombian government was losing potential revenue on license fees but also that British regulations of turtle fishery were more effective. Howard urged the central government to take action in adopting “such necessary measures as will give us the privileges and protection we are entitled to, and at the same time, exercise practical effective jurisdiction over our maritime territory so as to demonstrate unequivocally our sovereignty.”<sup>91</sup> If not, he predicted, Great Britain’s dispute with Colombian officials over the turtle fishery would rival the one it had with Nicaragua. The editorial spoke to a larger issue, too. Howard deemed the Colombian government’s ineffective defense of the cays and enforcement of regulations over the turtle fishery a disadvantage to Colombian fishermen.

Cleveland H. Hawkins, retailer and member of the Providencia Municipal Council, spoke on the same issue. Calling attention to the complaints of the majority of Providencia islanders regarding illegal turtle fishing, Hawkins explained in a letter to Intendant Carlos M. Hernández the impact it had on Colombia: “From time immemorial, our sovereignty over these cays (Serrana, Serranilla, Roncador, Bajo Nuevo, Quitasueno, Albuquerque, and Courtown) and the adjacent reefs have been recognized and sometimes disputed by governments seeking to obtain it.”<sup>92</sup> That was the case with the turtle fishery. Hawkins also emphasized the impact it had on Colombian fishermen. He explained how Caymanian turtlemen used modern techniques that almost exhausted hawksbill turtle populations. Unable to compete with the Cayman Brac turtle fleet, Providencia artisanal fishermen traveled to Panamanian waters, where San Blas Indians refused to grant them permits to hunt turtle.

It is clear from the abundance of correspondence among the ministry of government, ministry of foreign relations, and the national intendancy that they took the issue of Colombian sovereignty over the cays and disputes over turtle fishing seriously. This was largely due to the effective campaign that island fishermen and mariners launched to their local and national officials. As a result, the Colombian government issued Decree 95 of August 27, 1924, to regulate the fisheries. The law demanded that both nationals and foreigners obtain a permit to fish in Colombian waters. Colombians were to pay fifty cents per tonnage of ship at port registration and one peso for each auxiliary boat attached to the vessel. Foreign fishermen paid double the fees associated with the permit. Moreover, Decree 95 claimed the right to consider “vessels fishing in the territorial seas of the archipelago without permission . . . as smugglers.”<sup>93</sup>

The commissioner of the Cayman Islands, H. H. Hutchings, acknowledged that Brackers who sought to exploit hawksbill turtles had continually disregarded Colombian sovereignty over these cays. Although they tried to fish turtle in the open high seas three miles away from land, Hutchings admitted that the Colombian regulations over the turtle fishery “have been gradually more and more disregarded and, that especially near those islands which are uninhabited, fishermen have actively pursued the hawksbill turtle within the three mile limit.” However, his customs agent at Cayman Brac pointed out that the turtlemen had little choice. Hutchings recounted in a letter the agent’s explanation: “Commissioner, the fishermen have been forced of late into these small poaching operations: it is either that or starve. There is no employment for themselves and their vessels other than fishing in these waters and they are at their wits’ end.”<sup>94</sup> The turtle industry consumed the entire economy of the small islands. Moreover, their forefathers had fished turtle in these waters without restriction, so it was difficult to tell them they were now breaking the law.

By 1925, Colombian officials had lost their patience with Caymanian turtlemen. On September 1, Providencia islanders on the sloop *Bird* returned from a fishing trip out at the cays with forty-two hawksbill turtles, which produced thirty-nine pounds of tortoiseshell. The captain and crew informed the Colombian coast guard that they had found four British vessels fishing turtle at Quitasueño, and they recognized two of them as the sloop *Testico* and the schooner *Bluefields*. Both owners were Caymanians and had long fished turtle in the area. Charles Newball explained, “These same boats and others from the English islands of Grand Cayman and Cayman Brac are always accustomed to fish in all the Colombian waters and he has seen them on many occasions.” One of the more “notorious” turtlemen was captain of the schooner *Edison Bros*, who regularly fished at “Sill-Cay” and whom Providencia islanders had warned on several occasions to be ready to be arrested if caught fishing in national waters. The captain claimed that the Caymanian turtlemen “fished over there because it has no owner.”<sup>95</sup> Colombian fishermen apparently complained that turtle poachers made it difficult for Colombian turtlemen, who paid for the right to fish. Coast-guard chief Benjamín Baena quickly dispatched a telegram to Intendant Proto Vicente Fonseca on the issue.<sup>96</sup>

Immediately, the intendant sent a telegram to the ministry of foreign relations for help with the situation, alluding to the absolute lack of respect these fishermen had for Colombian territorial authority.<sup>97</sup> In May 1925, the crew of the Caymanian schooner *Edison Bros* failed to obtain a permit to fish

turtle and purposefully defrauded revenue collectors at Providencia Island of a shipment of 360 hawksbill turtles valued at five thousand pesos. When officials tried to apprehend the turtlemen, they fled, making a mockery of Colombian authority.<sup>98</sup> According to the foreign minister, British West Indian fishermen were well versed on turtle fishery regulations because the governor of Jamaica had dutifully notified them of Colombian laws.<sup>99</sup> Given their recalcitrance, Fonseca asked the minister of government to increase the number of coast-guard agents to ten and establish a permanent station out at the cays. His rapid cablegrams denoted a sense of urgency, saying state coffers lost four to five thousand pesos annually because of the failure to regulate the turtle fishery.<sup>100</sup> He seemed unwilling to allow this to happen again.

Quick to take action, Fonseca sent a telegram to the minister of government, informing him of the arrival of a gasoline-powered boat from Colón, Panama. The intendant learned that the North American confectionary retailer Franklin Baker Company's ship was en route to pick up coconuts at San Andrés Island. Fonseca contracted the SS *Eker* to carry fifty policemen to Quitasueño Bank. After enduring fifty years of blatant disregard of and impertinence to the archipelago's authority, he would no longer tolerate this defiance.<sup>101</sup> On September 29, 1925, Colombian coast-guard agents at San Andrés captured some thirty fishermen. Oral history accounts of this incident offer details on the capture and detention of two British vessels.

According to these accounts, upon arrival to Quitasueño, Colombian agents found thirty or so men who claimed to have used the bank as shelter while they waited out bad weather from the night before. After learning that these men held no license to harvest turtle in Colombian waters, the agents arrested the crew of two of the three sailing vessels nestled along the reef. The sloop *Testico* had a crew of thirteen men, all from the island of Cayman Brac, while the schooner *Edison Bros* carried eighteen men, two Caymanians, and sixteen British Hondurans. (A joint Caymanian–British Honduran fishing expedition was probably not unusual, since many Caymanians had family on the Bay Islands, some of whom settled there soon after British emancipation in 1834.)<sup>102</sup>

According to Henry B. Watson, a sailor on the *Testico* and the only crew member to survive to leave his oral account of the incident, Colombian officials would have captured the third schooner, but a sea captain named Bernard Bryan from Cayman Brac managed to take the *Expedito* and sneak away undetected by the Colombian coast-guard agents. Caymanian oral history explained Captain Bryan's escape to Watson, saying that rather than

sailing north directly home to Cayman Brac—a direction the Colombian coast guard would have surely taken to follow them—Bryan slowly sailed south until he was certain it was safe to head home. Watson recalled that based on Minnell Hill's observation, "The Colombians them, they thought he had gone north from there; they went steaming out north and went on some distance and couldn't find them nowhere so they turned back."<sup>103</sup> The *Expeditor* successfully avoided detention.

Colombian officials formally charged the thirty-one men that remained after the escape of the *Expeditor* with turtle poaching in Colombian waters and placed them in jail on San Andrés Island.<sup>104</sup> Intendant Fonseca noted that the crew of the schooner *Edison Bros* had mocked the Colombian coast guard's attempt to enforce regulations over turtle fishing out at the cays, suggesting that this had created animosity toward Caymanian turtle fishermen, who had laughed at Colombian sovereignty over these islands.<sup>105</sup> He referenced the earlier incident on several occasions when writing about smugglers or turtlemen in his correspondence with the ministries of government and foreign relations.

News of the turtlemen's arrest prompted diplomatic action on the part of the British government. While Captain Bryan and his crew would have certainly informed families and friends of the capture of the turtlers and seizure of their vessels at Quitasueño, the actions of another Caymanian sea captain led British authorities to investigate the incident. A sea captain named Edwin Walton learned of the detention of the Caymanian and British Honduran turtle fishermen during his stop en route from Colón, Panama, home to Cayman Brac. Outraged at the detention of the men, Walton sent cables to the colonial secretary of Jamaica and the British minister of foreign affairs at Bogotá.<sup>106</sup> He soon set sail to Jamaica to seek public sympathy in an editorial published in the leading newspaper, the *Gleaner*.

The self-proclaimed "Master Mariner" asked the Jamaican newspaper to publish statements regarding the incident. According to these anonymous statements, perhaps from arrested crew members, Colombian authorities seized the vessels and placed the crews of the sloop and schooner "in a miserable hot part of the ship—a most unfit place to incarcerate British subjects." The testimonies also claimed that an Englishman, Mr. Grundy, the wireless operator at San Andrés, had joined the Colombian coast guard and sought to intervene on their behalf, saying he might be serving as an interpreter. Another testimony stated, "They were not treated as civilised British subjects at all, but were regarded more as pirates, being taken in their wet clothes; they were not even given a chance to change for five days." The statements

depicted a bleak picture of the turtlemen's detention as "armed soldiers guarded them all the while—even after they were put in custody at San Andrés." Walton portrayed his actions as heroic. He explained how he had informed the intendant of the abuse of the turtlemen on the steamship, which led to better treatment of the prisoners. Then Walton cabled the colonial secretary of Jamaica and the British minister of foreign relations at Bogotá about the arrests.<sup>107</sup>

In the editorial's concluding remarks, Walton dismissed the charges against the turtlemen. He insisted that the turtlemen had not violated Colombian law. First, he cited custom. "For the past 75 to 80 years the turtle fishermen of the Cayman Islands have been accustomed to visit those waters around the Cays and Reefs that lie between Jamaica and Quitasueño, and this privilege has never been questioned until very recently when the Colombian government has tried to stop them," explained the sea captain. Second, he claimed that the turtlemen had not willfully visited the uninhabited cays; rather, bad weather had forced them to seek sources of drinking water. Third, Quitasueño Bank is nearly forty miles from the nearest inhabited land, and the fishermen had never thought of it as belonging to Colombia. Finally, he accused Colombia of protecting only its own turtlemen on Providencia Island: "There seems to exist a jealousy on the part of Colombian fishermen, and it is they who are urging their Government on to take drastic measures." Walton said he hoped that the British government would soon resolve the issue with Colombian authorities.<sup>108</sup>

British authorities in the Cayman Islands, Jamaica, Colombia, and England took an active interest in the charges against the thirty-one fishermen. Initially, the British minister at Bogotá dispatched a British consul in neighboring Colón in Panama to visit the turtlemen and offer state assistance. Rumors had circulated about the treatment of the fishermen and behavior toward them on the part of the national intendency officials. On December 19, 1925, Consul E. A. De Comeau arrived to investigate these rumors and find legal counsel for the men. Twenty-four of the men were confined in a wooden prison built especially for them and had no complaint regarding treatment. Watson described the building of the prison, saying that a Caymanian "brought lumber to San Andrés to build somewhere to put us in. . . . I mean they build a place, too. . . . Now, *that* could hold you! You had plenty of room, and it had an upstairs. . . . [They] built it over the sea." Seven others were gravely ill and kept on the second floor of a market house building, separated from the others. There was one case of syphilis, one of asthma, and five cases of malaria. All were under medical care. De Comeau

noted that Colombian authorities had treated the men humanely and that their only complaints had to do with the seizure of the vessels and their initial treatment during detention.<sup>109</sup>

De Comeau inquired whether the fishermen could be released on bail until the court made a decision. Eighteen fishermen won their release on December 23, 1925, after finding three witnesses to guarantee them. The thirteen others from British Honduras had fewer contacts on San Andrés Island and required the British consul to serve as one of their guarantors. By Christmas Eve, they were given their liberty until the circuit judge made a decision in January. Although some of the fishermen eventually found employment as shipwrights, others requested permission to fish close to the shore and readily accepted the daily five-dollar allowance the British government would provide them. De Comeau left \$930 with Capt. Henry Bradley, an American coconut exporter and longtime respected resident of San Andrés Island, to pay for expenses associated with the fishermen.<sup>110</sup>

British diplomatic intervention, however, could not make the Colombian legal process faster or less bewildering. The circuit judge dismissed the case against the fishermen in January 1926. The prosecutor appealed, and the case was sent to the superior tribunal in Cartagena.<sup>111</sup> British minister William J. Sullivan urged Colombian authorities to act quickly.<sup>112</sup> Eduardo Restrepo Saez, the Colombian minister of foreign affairs, responded to British calls for an expedient resolution by reminding them that Caymanian turtlemen were not warranted more privileges than a Colombian national. "If, in treating of citizens of a foreign country, one were to omit the requirements imposed by the law, it would place such persons in a privileged situation which Colombian citizens do not enjoy," explained the minister.<sup>113</sup>

From the perspective of British authorities, the seizure and detention of the Caymanian and Belizean fishermen seemed less about their violation of Colombian territorial sovereignty. British consul De Comeau returned to his post in Colón and subsequently sent a detailed confidential memorandum outlining the true motives for the seizure of the British vessels. Petty local politics and jealousies over Caymanian dominance over the turtle fishery, ineptitude over maritime protocol, and concerns over international disputes surrounding the archipelago led to the arrest and detention of the British fishermen. De Comeau explained how the newly appointed intendant Proto Vicente Fonseca eagerly pursued the arrest of Caymanian turtle fishermen not only to defend Colombian sovereignty but also to gain favor with the local population of San Andrés and Providencia. As a former employee of the post office, Fonseca had served as interim intendant until the president



made a permanent appointment. Given that Fonseca probably “had never seen the sea before being despatched to the Island [of San Andrés],” the British consul doubted his outrage over the violation of Colombian sovereignty. On the contrary, De Comeau thought it was likely that prominent islanders involved in the turtle industry, such as Cleveland H. Hawkins, pressured local authorities to take strong action against foreign fishermen. “This man is interested in the turtle fishery, and is largely responsible for the jealousy of Cayman Islanders. He is also able to influence a strong body of public opinion, and so when he called upon the intendante to take measures against the vessels fishing at Quitasueño, the intendante hastened to satisfy him,” reported De Comeau.<sup>114</sup> Given that a former intendant was forced to resign from his position in the face of an intensely violent island opposition, it is likely that Fonseca sought to appease constituents like Hawkins.<sup>115</sup>

The British consul also reported that Colombian authorities and San Andrés and Providencia islanders were sensitive to foreign interlopers. Over the past three decades, the Colombian government had been engaged in highly charged territorial disputes with Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Panama, and the United States over the archipelago. As a result, the banks, cays, and reefs around San Andrés and Providencia became increasingly fortified with military and police. De Comeau noted that sixty-eight police officers defended the territory of a population of no more than thirty-five hundred residents to stave off a “hostile landing.” Thus, the use of thirty-eight police officers to apprehend the Caymanian vessels reflected more Colombian concerns about their right to claim the archipelago than violation of turtle fishing legislation.<sup>116</sup>

However, the arrest and detention of the *Testico* and *Edison Bros* crew had escalated the situation between turtlemen and Colombian authorities. While awaiting an outcome on the pending cases in Cartagena, the British chargé d'affaires informed the colonial secretary that the Caymanian schooner *Expeditor*, which, according to Henry Watson, had eluded capture with the *Testico* and the *Edison Bros*, was unlawfully fishing at Quitasueño. Sometime in early January 1926, Colombian authorities informed the British consul in Bogotá that the schooner *Expeditor* had been found fishing turtle near the reef. Despite attempts by Colombian authorities to apprehend the master and crew, the turtlemen resisted, claiming to be armed. News of the incident provoked Sullivan to issue a stern warning to all Caymanian turtlemen “that fishing on this bank without permission from the Columbian [sic] Authorities is prohibited, and if any trespassers should come into conflict with the Columbian Authorities it will not be possible for the Government of Jamaica to do anything to assist them.”<sup>117</sup>

Despite British efforts to reduce further conflicts over the turtle fishery, Caymanian turtlemen continued to defy these warnings. Later that spring, two Providencia islanders—Benjamín and Juan G. Howard—saw a *cayuco* (canoe) around Quitasueño. Thinking that it belonged to the Colombian coast guard and eager to hear news from home, the crew of the schooner *La Isleña* approached the canoe. The fishermen soon learned that the catboat belonged to the schooner *Expedito*, as the captain, Gustave Jervis, invited them onboard. Although the schooner captain kindly received them, both men reportedly saw that the captain and members of his crew were armed with weapons, including “rifles, revolvers and shotguns.” Juan G. Howard recalled Jervis saying that he was willing to exert violence on any Colombian authority who attempted to seize his vessel. Captain Jervis reportedly told Howard that “he had been prepared not to let himself be so easily captured by Colombian authorities as his brother William S. Jervis, the captain of the schooner *Testico*.” Juan and Benjamín also reported that a Jamaican crew member of the *Expedito*, named Lendice, offered to drown them in the water. Nevertheless, Jervis refused, explaining to his sailor that neither man was responsible for the seizure and detention of the *Testico*. Gustave Jervis, however, sent a message with the fishermen. The *Expedito* captain warned that Capt. Cleveland H. Hawkins, James Rankins, and Robinson Rankins could not “ever set foot on [Grand] Cayman or Cayman Brac.”<sup>118</sup> His threat toward Hawkins and the others supports the British consul’s confidential memorandum noting that intense rivalries between Cayman Brac and Providencia turtlemen was at the center of the dispute. Juan and Benjamín Howard immediately reported their encounter with the *Expedito* upon their return to Providencia.

Cayman Brac turtlemen denied reports of their resistance and offered an alternative account of the incident. Master of the *Expedito* Gustave Jervis claimed to have spent a day at the reef outfitting the vessel for small repairs. When approached by a Colombian fishing vessel also at Quitasueño, Jervis invited them to board the vessel. The crew welcomed warmly their guests. However, the Jamaican cook on board took exception to the visitors and “told some of the Colombians that had he been captain of ‘Expedito’ they would not have been so received, or some such similar expression.”<sup>119</sup> The collector of revenue at Cayman Brac noted that Jervis and the owner of the schooner, Wesley Boddin, was “here generally known as quiet and peaceable persons, in my opinion, such as would not act in any presumptuous manner, or instruct such a procedure.” Despite discrepancies in reporting the recent conflict over fishing in the southern reef, the collector of revenue

posted Colombian warnings all over Cayman Brac about fishing in Colombian waters.<sup>120</sup>

The increasing contentiousness over the Colombian turtle fishery prompted British authorities to review international law. The governor of Jamaica warned that situations such as those involving the schooner *Expeditor* might supply Colombian patrollers with a pretext to fire on British vessels.<sup>121</sup> British officials began to question Colombian sovereignty over the cays. Consistent pressure from Caymanian fishermen and possibly local authorities may have prompted this questioning. Reportedly, Caymanian turtlemen blamed fishermen from San Andrés and Providencia for these recent troubles, as was shared in a communication between officials in the Cayman Islands. "It is the opinion among local fishermen that the cause of the Colombian objection now is based on mere jealousy of their own fishermen, who, not liking to see other fishermen on the banks, urge their government to use all means possible to keep them away, wrote the collector of revenue at Cayman Brac."<sup>122</sup> Given that the United States claimed Roncador, Serranilla, and Quitasueño as territories as part of the Guano Islands Act, British authorities were more reluctant to accept Colombian sovereignty over these cays and thus fortified their position of Colombian authorities unlawfully seizing British vessels.<sup>123</sup>

After ten months detention on San Andrés Island, Caymanian and British Honduran turtlemen were finally set free on June 7, 1926. The supreme tribunal dismissed all charges against the turtlemen, noting that no crime had been committed. The judges argued that Decree 95 of 1924 was simply an executive order that Colombia did not have the power to legislate.<sup>124</sup> Cayman Brac and British Honduras turtlemen welcomed the news and began to seek a way to return home. In the aftermath of the *Testico* and *Edison Bros* case, the Colombian ministry of foreign relations secretly agreed to award a payment to the thirty-one fishermen. In correspondence between the colonial secretary and Commissioner H. H. Hutchings, the Jamaican official explained, "The Colombian Government, while admitting no liability for the claim, is prepared to pay a sum of £2000 in consideration of a friendly settlement."<sup>125</sup> According to the British minister to Colombia, it was unlikely that the turtlemen would obtain a higher settlement sum if they waited for a prolonged discussion and vote in congress. Ten thousand British sterling pounds was the final sum.<sup>126</sup> In the end, the British government recouped the bulk of the settlement funds as repayment for the salary they had paid the turtlemen during their detention.<sup>127</sup> Some of the turtlemen, such as Capt. William Jervis, master of the *Testico*, pushed British authorities to seek

higher compensation for the loss of vessels and stored goods. Since the Jamaican newspaper the *Gleaner* listed the reparation amount sent to the governor of Jamaica from the Colombian ministry of foreign affairs, Jervis claimed he had been underpaid.<sup>128</sup> Others, like Capt. Edwin Walton, were recognized publicly for their efforts to assist the British subjects in San Andrés. In a public ceremony, the Cayman Islands commissioner presented Walton with a brass-plated royal arms encrusted chronometer. The engraving noted the British government's "appreciation of valuable services rendered him to the British fishermen."<sup>129</sup>

Despite the restitution awarded to the Caymanian turtlemen, maritime disputes over the turtle fishery continued between the Colombian and British governments. The British government refused to admit that Quitasueño was a Colombian territory, since through "its physical characteristics—those of a submerged reef—it forms a part of the open sea." They insisted on the right of British turtlemen to hunt in the southern reef, claiming that the Crown extended "every protection" to them. British authorities warned the turtlemen of local authorities obstructing their freedom of the seas.<sup>130</sup> Caymanian queries as to the jurisdiction over cays in the southern reef continued to dominate much of the turtle fishery dispute. In 1936, Capt. Callan Ritch asked British authorities whether Serrana was a British territory. The colonial secretary answered definitively and negatively but promised to protect British subjects' rights in overseas territories. By 1959, British authorities had returned to the opinion that there was "little doubt that Colombia has claimed sovereignty to the cays and islands in the San Andres peninsula and has exercised acts of control there for many years."<sup>131</sup> No longer disputing Colombian sovereignty over the entire archipelago of San Andrés and Providencia, the colonial secretary urged Cayman Brac turtlemen to obtain licenses from the Colombian government in order to avoid further disputes at the cays.

## Conclusion

This chapter has described conflicts over turtle fishery by Caymanian turtlemen. While they had fished turtle undisturbed by policing and regulating imperial or national states for generations, decreasing populations of sea turtles in nearby rookeries forced Caymanian turtlemen to travel farther away and confront modernizing circum-Caribbean states' attempts to legislate and enforce restrictions on the turtle fishery. In defense of their livelihood, turtlemen on Grand Cayman and Cayman Brac challenged attempts

to restrict or nationalize the sea and marine resources. In doing so, they threatened national claims of territorial sovereignty over maritime spaces, which multiple states contested. Turtlemen's claims of property ownership or defense of the commons worked in the short run, especially when British authorities intervened to protect their ancestral fishing traditions. In the end, however, Caymanian turtlemen had to accept a variety of regulations on the turtle fisheries of Cuba, Nicaragua, and Colombia.

## CHAPTER FIVE

# Save the Turtles

### *The Rise of Sea Turtle Conservationism, 1940s–1970s*

Until a decade ago the flow of events in the exploitation of Western Caribbean green turtles was this: Costa Rica produced the turtles; Nicaragua fed them, boats from the Cayman Islands caught them; and the English and Americans ate them. Now the Nicaraguans, understandably anxious to harvest their own marine assets, have phased out the Cayman captains. Meantime, the small American markets of other days have grown to tremendous size, and much of Western Europe is eating turtles, too.

—ARCHIE CARR

For eight weeks in late 1963, Wright Langley, a northerner photographer, likely documented Capt. Allie O. Ebanks's last turtle hunt. Always an affable host, Captain Allie permitted the photography student to accompany him and his crew on the schooner *Adams* to take photos of Caymanian seamen at work. Captain Allie was no stranger to outside interest in the turtle fishery. Twenty years earlier, he had invited a *National Geographic* freelance photojournalist to come along on a similar voyage. As with David Douglas Duncan, Captain Allie carried Langley on the well-traveled circuit from the Key West dockyard to the port at Georgetown and onward to the Nicaraguan turtle hunting grounds. But much had changed in the intervening twenty years. The West Bay sea captain frequently had difficulty staffing his crew with skilled, hardworking, and reliable men. In recent years, Captain Allie hired more independent turtlemen as rangers to support his undermanned aging crew of only three men. He lamented, "Most of my crew is getting along in years and there don't seem to be any young men on Grand Cayman interested in learning turtling. I think I'll quit the sea and retire."<sup>1</sup> He was not alone. The two other remaining turtle schooner captains shared his predicament. Although twenty years younger, Capt. Osbert Ebanks of the schooner *Antares* also spoke of retirement: "This may well be my last trip to the Miskito Cay. I just can't round up a crew anymore."<sup>2</sup> Captain Joe of the schooner *Lydia Wilson* also complained about crew scarcity, and yet his problem was more acute. The *Wilson* was the only schooner of the turtle fleet that



had not transitioned from a sailing to an engine-powered vessel. “I have to do all the repairs and most of the navigating,” explained Captain Joe.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, the turtle schooner captains increasingly captured smaller numbers of turtles at the Miskito Cays. Astute about conditions in the turtle fishery, Captain Allie warned Langley not to think too much about the one hundred turtles that the turtlemen caught within two days. “Don’t let this give you the wrong impression. We’ll have days when we only catch six or seven.”<sup>4</sup> Within a week’s time, the *Adams* crew had captured only seven turtles among three catboats. Captain Allie planned “to fish the banks off Cape Gracias and make up for this poor day’s catch.”<sup>5</sup> Captain Osbert also had difficulty catching turtles. He considered it a sign to entirely give up turtling.<sup>6</sup> Captain Allie, however, refused to assign this pattern a more ominous meaning: overharvesting of green turtles.

Sidestepping the issue of depletion of turtle stocks, he chalked it up to timing. “We usually make our best catches before the mating season, January through April, but we come out all year round since not all of the turtles leave Miskito Cays for Costa Rica at once.”<sup>7</sup> Their infrequent hunts, however, were unlikely to deplete green turtle stocks in Nicaraguan waters, as they had done around the Cayman Islands and Cuba. Captain Allie noted how Caymanian turtlemen “don’t come regularly.” To him, it was likely due to a shift in green turtle migration. “You remember one day we didn’t have such a good catch? Just a year ago when we fished there we made a large catch. The turtles look for greener pastures and when they find them they move their homes nearer to their food supply.”<sup>8</sup> In sum, Caymanian turtlemen simply needed to better follow and not save the turtles. As it had done for so many years, the *Adams* delivered its live turtle cargo at Thompson’s yard in Key West.

The story of the rise of an international movement to protect sea turtles during the postwar period is the focus of this chapter. I begin with an explanation of how the economic changes brought on by the Second World War led the Caymanian government to envision and develop an alternative economy for its subjects when the turtle industry showed signs of distress. The closing of its principal markets in Europe and the United States as well as stricter regulations for turtle hunters in foreign waters forced Caymanian turtlemen to find other forms of employment. These dual processes tremendously reduced the turtle schooner fleet. By the middle of the twentieth century, the turtle industry was no longer the principal economic activity in the Cayman Islands, and Caymanian turtlemen were no longer the principal turtle hunters in the greater Caribbean. From there, I chart the development of oceanography and marine science in the years during and after the

Second World War in the United States and Europe. I explore how technological advancements like scuba diving and underwater photography attracted great attention to the ocean and the marine world not just by scientists but by the general population. This newfound awareness of ocean ecosystems shaped the nascent marine environmentalism of the first wave of turtle scientists, including Archie Carr.

Finally, I conclude with Carr's sea turtle research in Costa Rica and, more broadly, the greater Caribbean. Using the local knowledge of Caymanian sea captains and Caribbean turtlemen, Carr designed and implemented a turtle tagging program in collaboration with local communities, foreign governments, and international scientists that all responded to his calls for drastic measures to save the turtles. By 1975, Carr's efforts had paid off. The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora placed green and hawksbill turtle products on the endangered species lists.<sup>9</sup> Thereby putting a ban on the trade and effectively upending multiple generations of a pan-Caribbean maritime vernacular culture.

### Caymanian Postwar Transformations

The Second World War affected even the smallest corners of the British empire, as Caymanians were drawn into the conflict. The war spared not a single part of the globe. In 1940, Great Britain directly or indirectly controlled a quarter of the world's population. British authorities recruited widely across the empire and dominions. While not as large as Indian, Australian, or Canadian forces, British West Indians also contributed to the war, serving as airmen, soldiers, and seamen. Historian Daniel Owen Spence explains how loyal and eager Caymanians were to support the war effort. Before recruitment arrived at the Cayman Islands, there were already "large numbers of [Caymanian] people of all classes of the community anxious to serve their KING and COUNTRY in the present crisis' stepped forward."<sup>10</sup> With a population of 6,500 across all three islands, 1,201 Caymanian men volunteered to serve either in the British Merchant Navy or the Trinidad Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. The Caymanian reputation for seafaring endeared them to the British Admiralty, which sent them across the globe to patrol ocean waters and carry raw materials, supplies, and ammunition throughout the empire. When the war ended, Caymanian veterans developed a professional identity as sailors and became competitive for higher wage employment on international commercial fleets.

The war also irrevocably disrupted the Caymanian turtle economy. By 1941, German and Italian naval warfare suspended Allied supply lines as German U-boats and Italian submarines attacked passerby ships. No vessel was safe. Schooners and sloops plying goods or ferrying passengers along the Caribbean coast of Central America in the well-known haunts of the turtlemen—such as Bluefields, Puerto Limón, San Andrés Island, and Colón—often became the victims of this global conflict.<sup>11</sup> Caymanian turtlemen kept their schooners docked at home. It was not safe to hunt turtles in the Miskito Cays or to send them onward across the Atlantic Ocean. The Second World War effectively halted the European turtle trade.

After the war, Caymanian leadership plotted ways to diversify the local economy. While the annual government reports of 1955 and 1956 indicated a strong green turtle market, continual prospects depended on access to turtle hunting grounds in foreign waters. As was discussed in chapter 4, Caymanian turtlemen faced tremendous challenges from neighboring governments that questioned their right to fish in national territorial waters. By 1959, Caymanians fished turtle with a temporary license until Great Britain and Nicaragua signed another treaty to lease turtle grounds for another twenty years. Cayman Brac turtlemen also faced similar challenges with Colombian authorities, but the true threat to their livelihoods was the introduction and extensive use of plastics. “Competition from plastics has already made hawksbill fishing wholly unremunerative as an independent pursuit, and the restricted supplies of shell which come on the market from the few hawksbill turtle caught in the process of fishing for green turtle,” explained a Caymanian official.<sup>12</sup> In the 1950s and 1960s, British officials and foreign visitors alike decried the nearly moribund hawksbill turtle market.<sup>13</sup> To respond to these shifts in the markets, some turtlemen turned to hunting sharks for a growing sharkskin leather market in the United States.<sup>14</sup>

Caymanian authorities’ attempts to encourage agricultural production on the islands failed terribly. In 1950, the Colonial Development and Welfare Agency initiated a scheme to jump-start agricultural production. Due to a lack of finances, however, the program was largely delayed until 1956, when American investors arrived with earthmoving equipment to prepare the hard and rocky soil. As a result, Caymanians continued to import nearly all their fresh vegetables from Florida, which they purchased at high prices. Caymanian officials held the promise of animal husbandry as a new industry on the islands. “Many islanders of the older generation who have retired from the sea take a particular pride in their cattle and pastures. The cattle industry is

believed to have possibilities, if abandoned and overgrown pastures could be mechanically cleared and good pasturage restored.”<sup>15</sup> Whether agriculture or animal husbandry was to ignite a new period in the Caymanian economy depended on the availability of an able workforce.

Like their Caribbean counterparts, Caymanians also emigrated near and far in search of better opportunities. But unlike the Caymanian migrations and settlements discussed in chapter 3, postwar migration was driven by a rising demand for skilled seamen. In the face of diminishing catches of turtles, fluctuating markets, and expensive fishing licenses, experienced seamen increasingly found work on oil tankers or large cargo ships. “Their remittances continue to enrich their families on the island. The basis of the Dependency’s economy remains the export of the seamen, whose remittances to the Cayman Islands at the end of 1956 amounted to a figure in the region of one and half million United States dollars a year,” noted Caymanian officials.<sup>16</sup> With little employment opportunities to keep them on the island, Caymanian authorities acknowledged that emigration would remain an impediment to the local economy: “The great disadvantage to the Dependency in this somewhat specialised manner of earning a living is that the islands lose many of their best and many of their skilled men, and are progressively losing that invaluable element in any community—those men of wider experience, wider ability and wider vision.”<sup>17</sup>

Some Caymanian officials held more hope in the fledgling tourism industry transforming the local economy. While the intrepid traveler or occasional British official sojourned to the Cayman Islands before the interwar years, there was little to no tourist infrastructure. There were no hotels or restaurants to house or feed visitors—guests stayed in the homes of prominent locals and enjoyed their hospitality. During the 1930s, Caymanian commissioner Sir Allan Wolsey Cardinall paved the way for tourism with various improvement projects, including wireless communication, public roads, and an annual regatta race to attract visitors from all over the world.<sup>18</sup> The departure of Cardinall on the eve of the war slowed the pace of tourism development. By the 1950s, air service allowed investors to open several beach resorts and hotels in Grand Cayman for visitors seeking to enjoy a “splendid unbroken sweep of the West Beach.”<sup>19</sup> Even the smaller Cayman Brac sought to benefit from a tourism economy. As noted in the annual report, “The existence of the new air service encouraged a far-sighted local shipowner to open a small modern guest house, which he almost immediately began to double in size: the Buccaneer’s Inn now has accommodation for 24 guests and has opened up to tourists this distinctively clean, tidy and well-ordered island,

which, with Little Cayman, has great attractions for the game fishermen.”<sup>20</sup> As was seen after the opening of the Panama Canal, tourists—Americans, British, and Europeans—flocked to enjoy the tropical warmth of the exotic Caribbean locales. Caymanian authorities wondered whether tourism would finally generate some much-needed revenue, while Caymanian merchants sought to benefit from these postwar economic changes.

By the middle of the twentieth century, Caymanians underwent tremendous transformations, which uprooted aspects of their traditional economic and social lives. While Caymanian men still earned a living as seamen, most no longer spent months on schooners chasing green and hawksbill turtles in foreign waters. Some found work in the burgeoning tourism industry. Others traveled abroad and found employment on railroads, ports, or cargo ships, earning higher wages than they or their forefathers had seen on turtle schooners. “Most of the young men back home would rather work on oil tankers and freighters—the pay’s better and the work’s not as hard as turtling,” noted Captain Allie. Wives, sisters, and mothers no longer twisted rope to supplement a turtler’s earnings.<sup>21</sup> For Caymanians, changes were ongoing, yet there were still turtlemen who continued to depart Georgetown, plying the sea in search of green turtles. Despite the work’s challenges, these Caymanian turtlemen remained committed to a multigenerational maritime heritage. “It’s a hard dollar we earn but it’s a living you can be proud of,” noted one turtler.<sup>22</sup>

### The Making of a Sea Turtle Scientist

In his 1954 keynote address titled “The Passing of the Fleet,” Archie Carr astonished his audience at the general meeting of the American Institute of Biological Sciences. In a room filled with researchers, legislators, and philanthropists, Carr made a dire prediction: “Today, the Atlantic green turtle can no longer be reckoned as a major asset. And worse, I believe that if it is not effectively protected it may soon be extirpated as a breeding resident of American waters.”<sup>23</sup> Carr’s foreboding prediction contrasted with his narration of how the green turtle had provided vital sustenance not only to pre-Columbian indigenous peoples but also to European explorers as well as Atlantic newcomers who fed on its meat and whose turtle hunting facilitated colonization of the Caribbean. Due to their size, speed, and easy availability, the sixteenth-century “fleets of breeding green turtles” that nested on and around the shores of the Cayman Islands had been exterminated within a couple of centuries. It was no longer one of the largest turtle rookeries to

exist on the globe. That fleet of green turtles had been drastically reduced, forcing Caymanian turtlemen to follow their prey across the greater Caribbean. Despite the threat that these hunters posed to green turtles at sea, Carr claimed that the real danger lay elsewhere. “What it [turtle] cannot stand is being deprived of the benefits of reproduction,” he concluded.<sup>24</sup>

By the middle of the twentieth century, Archie Carr knew what was responsible for the steep decline of Atlantic green turtles. The female reproduction cycle had grown increasingly vulnerable. Since the Second World War, several factors contributed to the turtles’ steady decimation. In addition to water pollution, the disappearance of wild beaches due to the growth of tourism development and port infrastructure projects disrupted traditional nesting grounds. Human population growth led more people to hunt green turtles for local consumption or to sell for export as commercial vessels responded to a renewed demand for turtle products in postwar international markets. Regardless of the individual factor, the results were the same. Fewer impregnated green turtles came ashore or were able to avoid capture to safely nest their eggs in the sand. To save these turtles, Carr insisted that scientists must obtain greater knowledge about sea turtles’ migratory patterns in order to develop an effective conservation program.

In many respects, Carr was the best scientist to pursue such an agenda. As a herpetologist, he had spent more than a decade observing, describing, and constructing taxonomies on amphibians and reptiles, including sea turtles. Although trained as a zoologist at the University of Florida in the 1930s, Carr’s preparation, as historian Frederick Rowe Davis explains, “emphasized hypothesis testing over theoretical approaches, field natural history over laboratory hypothesis and above all regional subjects.”<sup>25</sup> Thus, his preparation was more suitable to natural history, which often lacked experimental and laboratory-based approaches to scientific research. While his initial work was on Floridian frogs, Carr eventually shifted to a host of other subjects including marine turtles. Given the mobility of sea turtles, particularly in the waters of Spanish-speaking circum-Caribbean states, Carr was equipped to work with his foreign counterparts as he spoke fluent Spanish. Moreover, he had tremendous international fieldwork experiences with a research stint in Mexico and four years as an instructor at Escuela Agrícola Panamericana in Honduras, a school established by the United Fruit Company president Samuel Zemurray.<sup>26</sup>

In his 1953 publication *High Jungles and Low*, Carr lionized his years in Honduras. His time in Central America had planted the initial seeds of interest in sea turtle nesting in the circum-Caribbean. Divided into two parts,



with one part of the book focused on the land and the other on the people, Carr tantalized readers with his detailed accounts of trees, plants, and animals, found from the cloud forests in the highlands to the lowland jungles. The American herpetologist displayed not only a fondness for nature but also a keen awareness of how humans have used that nature. In fact, his Honduran experiences strengthened his interest not only in sea turtles but in the lives of the turtle hunters as well.

Carr was struck by the difficult lives these turtlemen led, which he observed firsthand. During one field trip, Carr enlisted a local named Titeo to assist him with his investigation of sea turtles in the Gulf of Fonseca, a bay in the Pacific Ocean shared by Honduras, El Salvador, and Nicaragua. After twelve hours of bus and boat transportation, Carr and Titeo finally arrived at Isla Ratones, where they found a camp of turtle egg collectors known as *hueveros*. Titeo informed Carr that these men camped in a small rancho on the beach were “*contrabandistas*,” since they smuggled themselves from El Salvador to Honduras to collect hawksbill eggs. Referencing one of the *hueveros*, Titeo explained how hawksbill turtles did not come to nest at El Tigre Island in El Salvador. “Orozco paddles over here in his *cayuca* and stays there months out of the year and digs eggs. And this is Honduras,” replied the indignant guide. Given their tenuous claim to collect hawksbill eggs, Titeo confidently informed them to steer clear of Carr, who had no intention of collecting eggs and only sought to study the hawksbills’ behaviors.<sup>27</sup>

While the interaction gave Carr a glimpse into the biology of hawksbill turtles—from their eggs not spoiling at room temperature to their sensitivity to light during nesting periods—he also questioned the sustainability of egg collecting for *hueveros* who worked only three to four months out of the year. Moreover, the mobility of sea turtles continued to challenge their human predators, who were forced to cross state boundaries in search of their prey. These insights, later intertwined, significantly informed his research, which investigated not only sea turtles and their migratory patterns but also the populations that consumed them.

During his tenure at Escuela Agrícola Panamericana, Carr learned of new sites for his research. Student Guillermo “Billy” Cruz encouraged Carr to pursue his turtle research in Cruz’s native country of Costa Rica at a nesting site in Tortuguero, located in northwestern Costa Rica, toward the Nicaraguan border and along the Caribbean Sea.<sup>28</sup> Tortuguero, also known as Turtle Bogue to Caymanian turtlemen and other English speakers from neighboring Caribbean islands, was a remote village situated on an elongated island that faced the Caribbean Sea on one end and the mouth of the Tortuguero



FIGURE 5.1 Tortuguero village. Courtesy of Sea Turtle Conservancy.

River on the other (see figure 5.1). It is roughly fifty miles north of Puerto Limón. Its population largely consisted of foreigners from Nicaragua and other anglophone islands in the Caribbean. “There wasn’t a town like now. Because nothing was there. Them that live along the beach got their little ranch and they catch turtle and . . . and plant yucca and make the coconut farm there,” recalled a San Andrés islander who visited Tortuguero in his youth during the 1920s.<sup>29</sup> The village’s principle attraction was its beach, which had long drawn a glut of sea turtles digging holes in the sand to make nesting chambers for their eggs. It was indeed an ideal location to study sea turtle behavior and migratory patterns.

Intrigued by Cruz’s and others’ tales of Tortuguero, Carr turned his attention toward a transnational investigation of sea turtle rookeries in the

circum-Caribbean. In the wake of his return from Honduras, in 1952 and 1953 Carr and a small research team visited turtle grounds in places such as the Mexican Yucatán, Costa Rica, Colombia, and Tobago. As he had done during his research trips in Mexico and Honduras, Carr collected early data from local informants. He spoke to turtlemen and fishery officials where they lived, in order to draw on their local knowledge.

By the mid-twentieth century, a handful of retired turtlemen were scattered across Grand Cayman. They were mostly septuagenarians and octogenarians who enjoyed sharing sea stories of their past adventures plying the Caribbean waters in search of green turtles. In 1952, an inquisitive and confident American herpetologist proved a captivating audience. Having repeatedly heard of the prodigious talents of Caymanian turtlemen, Carr sought out their eyewitness accounts of the migratory behaviors of sea turtles. Unlike other biologists, he valued local knowledge from nonscientists and considered turtlemen “specialists in an exacting fishery.” They knew “things no zoologist knows because it is the only way they can succeed in their calling.”<sup>30</sup>

Retired turtle schooner captains like Teddy Bodden and Gene Thompson interweaved amusing accounts of “the fleet when the old men were boys and after while captains; about good ships and bad ones; about good years and bad years, and old storms that made no choice between good ships and bad and left the women crying on the iron shore.”<sup>31</sup> In between their amusing stories, Carr also learned a bit about the migratory behaviors of green turtles. According to the schooner captains, green turtles had great homing instincts. All of the schooner captains told stories of green turtles traveling lengthy distances away from their grazing grounds. Archie Carr was quite fascinated with one story from Captain Bush.

Charles Bush was an experienced turtler who owned his own vessel. Out at Mosquito Cay thirty years earlier (likely in 1924), Bush captured an “unusually large male green turtle that attracted attention both because of its size and because all four flippers had been notched by the bites of small sharks or other fish.”<sup>32</sup> As was customary, Bush branded it with his initials, and the turtle was shipped immediately to Key West with the rest of the catch. That October, a hurricane swept near the Florida Keys not long after Bush had deposited his live turtle catch at Thompson Enterprises. The following season, Bush and his crew were again hunting turtles at Mosquito Cay. One late evening, he spied through his water glass the same large male green turtle with its “scalloped flippers.” The Caymanian schooner captain was shocked. Bush thought, “The old boy should by now have been soup but he wasn’t.”<sup>33</sup> He set out to recapture him. Within three hours, the veteran

turtler had caught the green turtle, with “the brand put on him five months before clearly visible on his belly.”<sup>34</sup> The turtle’s fate remained the same. “I sent him back to Key West with the next load [and] Old Thompson bought him all over again. . . . You didn’t often get the best of old Thompson,” Bush fondly recalled.<sup>35</sup>

Although Archie Carr enjoyed Charlie Bush’s insightful green turtle homing story, he had heard similar tales. In addition to Charlie Bush, another turtler Capt. Teddy Bodden “recalled several instances of turtles escaping from the Mosquito Cay crawl and swimming the twenty to thirty miles back to their home rocks.”<sup>36</sup> Unlike the retired turtlemen who recounted stories of turtle hunting in their heyday some three or more decades earlier, Carr wanted to hear accounts from turtlers still involved in the trade. The American scientist found no better informant than Capt. Allie Ebanks. As master of the schooner *Adams*, Captain Allie was one of only a handful of Caymanian turtlemen still plying the sea in pursuit of sea turtles to supply the U.S. demand in the 1950s. Just a few years before Carr and his crew visited Grand Cayman in the mid-1950s, Captain Allie had captured 725 turtles in one twelve-week season, a large catch for turtlemen still involved in the trade. Carr met him at the end of the turtle hunting season.<sup>37</sup>

Like other schooner captains, Allie Ebanks narrated tales of turtle homing instincts. Carr was particularly impressed by a tale of how Captain Allie and his crew hunted turtle in Mexican waters during a poor season in the Miskito Cays. They captured some large turtles, which they carried to the Key West market. Again, a storm passed over the Florida Keys before the turtles were taken from the pen to be butchered and canned. That next season, Captain Allie recaptured one of them in his nets at Mosquito Cay. He, too, verified it from the brand on the turtle.<sup>38</sup> These Caymanian accounts of long-distance turtle homing journeys astonished Carr and became scientific fodder for his subsequent sea turtle research and advocacy.

Some of the local knowledge of sea turtles and the people who consumed them were eventually shared with the public in his 1956 account of his whimsical Caribbean travels, *The Windward Road*. While only three of the book’s eight chapters focus exclusively on the behavior and ecology of sea turtles, the remaining chapters investigate the culture and lives of turtle hunters. In these chapters that serve as vignettes—short stories disconnected from one another—Carr narrated his adventures. He described living in communities where people easily dined on delicious meals of turtle, shark, or *tepescuinte*, a rodent-like animal. He recaptured his amusement with the gutsy sea stories of retired Caymanian turtlemen. He also beguiled his readers with

colorful though stereotypical characterizations of the local populations. For example, he portrayed the Costa Rican widow Ybarra as a pioneer woman: fiercely independent, carefree, and fearless. Carr had been taken aback by her shooting an ocelot with a .22-caliber pistol with the goal of selling its skin in the local market.<sup>39</sup> From his interactions with the local populations, Carr subtly reminded his readers that sea turtles played a vital role in the sustenance of these remote communities.

Following the practices of naturalists, Archie Carr learned new methods of studying sea turtles through close observation and by drawing on local systems of knowledge. In Costa Rica, he was taught to distinguish among green, hawksbill, and leatherback turtles by paying close attention to the type and spread of the track marks in the sand. Carr noted how one hawksbill laid 135 eggs during one nesting period. In Panama, the American herpetologist was surprised to discover that green turtles may occasionally nest along a Panamanian shoreline, since Chiriquí beach was exclusively a hawksbill rookery. In both places and beyond, Carr noted how turtles were an important animal protein to local diets. From Tobago to Panama and all the places in between, locals shared with Carr their joy for turtle eggs—all ate green but some, like the Cayman, San Andrés, and Providencia islanders—preferred hawksbill. As his young Trinidad guide sheepishly acknowledged, “I have a great relish for these eggs.”<sup>40</sup> In Tortuguero, Carr dined on turtle and dolphin in calipee and coconut stewed milk. In Colón, he savored turtle combined with traditional Caribbean breadfruit, yams, and plantains.<sup>41</sup>

Through this intimate and often amusing research trek across the remote corners of the Caribbean, Archie Carr saw the effects of the boom-and-bust cycles of the international turtle trade on the livelihoods of these communities. In Colón, the herpetologist was introduced to Mr. Robinson, a *contratista*, who leased the northern beaches from Bocas to Sixaola along the Panamanian–Costa Rican border. Like Costa Rica, the Panamanian government considered the shoreline a public national resource. Through legislation surrounding the *milla marítima*, individuals or companies leased coastal strips of land for private use. Although the creation and use of plastics had driven down demand for tortoiseshell, Robinson was hopeful. In the previous years, he had upwards of fifteen *veladores*—turtle turners—who captured hawksbills along the beach and shared the profits with Robinson. With the plummeting price of tortoiseshell, few devoted their energies to such a devastating trade—few, that is, besides Robinson, who hoarded tortoiseshell and stashed it piled high in his storage shed. Costa Ricans called men like Robinson *careyeros* or persons who harvested the tortoiseshell called





FIGURE 5.2 *Careyeros* removing the hawksbill shell. Courtesy of Sea Turtle Conservancy.

*carey* (see figure 5.2). He was an optimist. Robinson believed that consumers would return to tortoiseshell, realizing that plastic was an inferior imitation.<sup>42</sup>

Other factors threatened the livelihood of the turtle hunters, such as the depletion of turtle populations. Although Caymanian turtlemen transported hundreds of sea turtles across the sea to feed a growing market in the United States, they were not the sole turtle hunters. Carr expressed great concern over the intricate local system of capturing impregnated green turtles digging nesting chambers onshore. He called it a “deadly system.” In Puerto Limón, the *contratista*, or beach leaseholder, hired a supervisor to employ



*veladores* at each mile across the beach. The job was simple. From June to September, they waited for impregnated green turtles to come ashore to build a nest, then flipped them over by the pairs until a launch came to ship them off to markets in Key West, Tampa, and Colón. The *contratista* paid the *veladores* for each captured green turtle and profited from the remaining sum.<sup>43</sup> The green turtle nesting site at Tortuguero had not yet been destroyed due to a set of complications.

The *velador* system was extensive. Sea turtles benefited greatly from the system's inherent problems as well as apathetic *veladores* who failed to fully devote their time to turtle hunting. They often pursued other tasks, as the income from turtling was irregular. Like their equivalents at sea, *veladores* had to station themselves at the beach, building a makeshift home or rancho and procuring their own food. Too often they watched green turtles go to waste on beaches because launches failed to arrive before the turtles died from heat exposure.

Also, too many *veladores* led to stiff competition. George Pansi recounted his time turning turtles at Tortuguero beach in the 1940s and 1950s to American ethnographer Harry Lefever, explaining how the launch made frequent trips back and forth, delivering turtles from Tortuguero to Limón. Starting from one end and loading turtles along one or two miles, the launch returned to Limón for a few days to kraal the turtles. By the time the launch had returned, the *veladores* in the middle section of the beach had "to let go a lot of turtle, because when the turtle have three, four days, he used to get the eye swelled up and red. So you had to let it go. So in that way we couldn't make no money," recalled the veteran turtler.<sup>44</sup> While pay was inconsistent or even paltry, other *veladores*, like Ferdinand Bryan, appreciated how interwoven the turtle trade was with the local economy. "We didn't have to fuss to say we don't have sugar, we don't have flour, we don't have beans now, we don't have rice now. Because we just go to the commissary and get it; they give you. And when the season finish, what you ship they draw up what you take and anything leave they pay you. If nothing leave, the next year they deduct it," Bryan explained.<sup>45</sup>

From the 1940s to the 1970s, Tortuguero was a company town. During those three decades, foreign and Costa Rican entrepreneurs attempted to make their fortunes cultivating bananas and extracting timber from the tropical rainforest sheltering Tortuguero. Although not as sizable or prominent as the United Fruit Company in Puerto Limón, the Atlantic Trading Company experienced some success with its banana plantations and sawmill. Arriving in 1944, San José agro-merchant Teodoro Quirós initially placed his lumber

company in a property leased from Sibella Martínez. Within a few years, Sibella had helped him purchase thirty hectares from her brother in exchange for Quirós finding employment for her three sons and sending his employees to dine at her cantina. From there, Quirós's Atlantic Trading Company recruited nearly two hundred men to work on the banana farms, cutting timber or building and operating the sawmill. Quirós, in turn, compensated them with housing, electricity, and a commissary, but little in wages. Despite his respect for Quirós, Archie Carr reluctantly acknowledged that businesses like the Atlantic Trading Company were "a terrible mixed blessing." Although the company extended employment to a community with few ways to earn wages, the failure of these businesses devastated a vulnerable Tortuguero.<sup>46</sup>

These complications—from the irregularity of launches to inconsistent income—had limited the impact of Tortuguero *veladores*. "Any hint of stability in the export market—any increase in channels to the New York luxury trade, one big venture making frozen turtle known to inland consumers, or even any improvement in British currency relations—and the launch will come on schedule in spite of the squalls," noted Carr.<sup>47</sup> More importantly, Carr predicted that the turtle trade could easily resume with a renewed intensity.

From his travels throughout the greater Caribbean, Carr formed two hypotheses regarding the state of green turtles. First, the twenty-four-mile strip of black sandy beach at Tortuguero was likely the largest rookery for the Atlantic green turtle. Carr conjectured that its black color attracted not only green turtles but also hawksbill and trunkbacks to this remote shore. While his initial skepticism disregarded the accounts of Caymanian schooner captains who insisted that the green turtles they hunted in the Miskitos Cays came from Tortuguero, Carr's observations and conversations with other turtle hunters in Caribbean Central America continued to support this conclusion. Second, the renewed demand for green turtles in local and international markets threatened the vitality of the green turtle rookery at Tortuguero. While the hawksbill trade had largely vanished, other sea turtles, like the leatherback, were never held in much esteem and were safe from market forces. The green turtle was solely in the gravest danger in the Atlantic Ocean system.

After the publication of *The Windward Road*, Carr designed and implemented a tagging program in Costa Rica.<sup>48</sup> His objective was to study the long-distance migratory patterns of Atlantic green turtles. Privately, Carr sought to confirm the widely shared Caribbean wisdom about the signifi-

cance of the Tortuguero rookery. “The Bogue is simply the only place there is. . . . Everywhere except at Tortuguero, the nesting is so spotty and intermittent that no worthwhile tagging can be done, and hatchlings and eggs for restoration programs are not available in necessary numbers,” insisted the herpetologist.<sup>49</sup> With a small research team, Carr and his assistants waited at Tortuguero beach for female green turtles to arrive onshore to build nesting chambers for their eggs. The research team then tagged and released them into the sea. As Carr recovered turtle tags, his team recorded the location and date of turtle captures.

Archie Carr’s sea turtle research benefited immeasurably from the early support of the Costa Rican government. Carr obtained a concession to lease two of the contiguous twenty-four-mile shoreline at Tortuguero from the Atlantic Trading Company. At that time, Atlantic Trading’s owner, Teodoro Quirós — or Don Yoyo, as he was now known — served as the minister of agriculture under President José Figueres Ferrer, known for his social democratic and modernization efforts in Costa Rica. Due to Don Yoyo’s political position, Carr easily secured the lease, unfettered by commercial activities, as well as the lumber needed to build a *manaca* shack, to serve as a research camp adjacent to the two-mile beachfront.<sup>50</sup>

Later in his career, Carr understood that his conservation efforts had to be met by government action at the national and international levels, and he worked to collaborate where necessary with government agencies to carry out his conservation program. Yet in his early years, Carr depended on a small team that included only a research assistant and a handful of locals, whom he employed to assist in the tagging of the green turtles. In the program’s inaugural year (1955), Carr relied on friend and biologist Leonard Giovannoli to stay the first season at the research station. Local *veladores* supported their work at the beach and gave them tremendous insight on how to survive in the isolated tropical strip of paradise. By using the local knowledge of the Costa Rican turtlemen, Carr minimized their impact on his study. He was also providing some form of income.

The tagging program yielded some revelatory results in its first season. Despite a sparse set of tag returns, it was clear that green turtles traveled long distances, as far as three hundred miles from nesting sites. Again, Caymanian turtlemen played an essential role in obtaining this information. Capt. Allie O. Ebanks of the schooner *Adams* and Osbert Ebanks of the schooner *Antares* returned tags from captured green turtles found largely in the Miskito Cays, while a small subset came from Panamanian turtlemen in Colón.<sup>51</sup> Carr and Giovannoli had also confirmed what Costa Rican *veladores*

and other Caribbean turtlemen already knew about the frequency of nesting. Impregnated green turtles nested between three and five times during a season in intervals of about twelve days. Carr later acknowledged, "It is noteworthy that Caribbean fishermen had already learned both these things, somehow, without the help of a tagging program."<sup>52</sup>

Encouraged by these findings, Carr continued his tagging program at Tortuguero. After Giovannoli, the herpetologist relied on a steady stream of mostly American graduate students. Carr managed to find University of Florida graduate students like Larry Ogren and Harry Hirth, who worked at the Tortuguero research station for a few seasons. While the scientific knowledge and expertise of Ogren and Hirth were of considerable value to the tagging project, Carr continued to employ locals, who mutually benefited from the collaboration. Carr highly valued their local knowledge and strived to reconcile it with scientific methods, while the local employees had a new way to earn income. Writing to Carr, research assistant Larry Ogren noted how the lack of employment in the area was a boon for the research team. "Sibella [Martínez] was really going to Limon for sure, but she stayed only to cook for us! Nobody was at the mill and all the men are loafing again (for the past 5 months)."<sup>53</sup> To assist him in his interactions with the locals, Carr hired Leo Martínez to manage the local employees. Martínez was an astute choice. His father had settled in the area from the Colombian island of San Andrés in the 1920s, and they were one of the oldest families in the community.<sup>54</sup> More practically, Leo's sister Sibella was the best cook in Tortuguero. Village life was often challenging for his researchers, but at least they ate well at Sibella's makeshift restaurant.

After five seasons of the Tortuguero tagging program, Carr grew more confident about his initial findings. The research team had tagged 1,178 adult female green turtles between 1955 and 1959. During this period, they recovered thirty-five tags of captured turtles in international waters. Most of the tags, some two-thirds, came from Miskito Cays, from which Capt. Allie Ebanks regularly returned the tags to support Carr's efforts in recovering green turtle populations at the Tortuguero rookery. This further supported the initial hypothesis that the green turtles so often captured by Caymanian turtlemen came from a Tortuguero breeding colony. Carr and his research team continued to be amazed at the lengthy distances green turtles traveled from their nesting sites. Like the Caymanians who hunted them, green turtles moved extensively throughout the western Caribbean. The lengthiest distance was in the offshore Caribbean waters of Mexico's Quintana Roo, 793 miles from Tortuguero.<sup>55</sup>

These preliminary results reaffirmed Caribbean folklore about the navigational prodigiousness of green turtles but did not yet confirm or explain much about the animal's homing instincts. Since recoveries occurred at the moment of capture, Carr was unable to receive continual updates on the migratory routes. The tracking of the turtle's migration ceased with the capture. Neither Carr nor his research assistants ever witnessed a colony of green turtles at Tortuguero outside the breeding and nesting season. The green turtles that managed to find themselves outside the months of June to September likely passed through on or from the rich pasturage around the Miskito Cays, the herpetologist suspected. Carr presumed that green turtles had a natural homing capability, yet there was little evidence to discount the likelihood that ocean currents turned them into the sea's greatest wanderers. He also did not understand where turtle hatchlings spent their time after returning to sea.<sup>56</sup> Despite the team's promising results, Carr recognized that they still knew too little to design a scientifically sound conservation program to restore the Atlantic green turtle.

### Sea Turtle Conservationism

With *The Windward Road*, Carr's alarming depiction of the Atlantic green turtle in the greater Caribbean reached beyond the scientific community and stimulated an international sea turtle conservation movement. Through his fine storytelling skills he attracted a popular audience, developing an awareness and appreciation of the ocean and deep-sea exploration among his readers. The book was a best seller. Some readers had gleaned from Carr's portrayal of the plight of the Atlantic green turtle that it was an animal worthy of being saved—or at least one reader had taken that impression. Already an admirer of Carr's *High Jungles and Low*, the New York City publishing agent Joshua B. Powers found *The Windward Road* “engrossing, humorous and deadly serious.”<sup>57</sup> The book so enraptured his thinking that Powers talked about it with his colleagues at an Inter-American Press Association executive meeting in 1958. He then sent copies to twenty or so of his colleagues with a cheeky note officiating them as members of “the Brotherhood of the Green Turtle.”<sup>58</sup> Ironically, that group eventually transformed into the first sea turtle conservation organization in the world.

The goal of the Brotherhood of the Green Turtle was to save turtles. The group playfully summarized its aim as “restoring green turtles to their native waters, and insuring to Winston Churchill his nightly cup of turtle soup.”<sup>59</sup> The charter members were an influential group. Some were in the

publishing world, with access to foreign newspapers and governments throughout the Caribbean and Latin America, such as S. G. Fletcher, managing director of the Jamaican newspaper the *Daily Gleaner*. Others came from prominent families or were wealthy businessmen. The cofounder and principal financial benefactor was John H. Phipps, a Tallahassee radio mogul. Pharmaceutical magnate George W. Merck was also an early supporter of the group. Henry Clay Frick II, the grandson of the Pittsburgh steel titan, was a charter member. The Brotherhood of the Green Turtle also drew on the support and expertise of charter member Jim Oliver, director of the Smithsonian American Museum of Natural History.<sup>60</sup>

The interest and support of the Brotherhood of the Green Turtle in Archie Carr's sea turtle research was timely. By then, Powers was using his network to invite an eclectic inter-American group to work toward saving turtles and replenishing the transnational marketplace. He recalled the inaugural luncheon, at which the membership discussed the mission of the association. The Brotherhood of the Green Turtle transformed into the official nongovernmental organization the Caribbean Conservation Corporation (CCC) in 1959. The CCC took seriously Archie Carr's concern not only for the green turtle but also for the peoples in the Caribbean that relied so heavily on turtle as a critical part of their diet. They spoke about the economic conditions across Latin America in which small landowners held onto farms, and food production was insufficient to care for local populations. Even when trans-Atlantic efforts like the Anglo-American Caribbean Commission formed to focus on supplying the region with sufficient food, the CCC membership acknowledged that it resulted only in expensive conferences, where fisheries experts gave speeches, and no increases in food production. Thus, the CCC viewed green turtle conservation as part of a larger effort to improve the quality of life of the maritime communities associated with the turtle trade. Eventually, Powers reached out to Carr, who welcomed the group's desire to restore the population of Atlantic green turtles and subsequently served as CCC's technical director.<sup>61</sup>

The Caribbean Conservation Corporation initially pursued an environmental management style of conservation, in which the sea was a place to preserve for efficient hunting. "Everybody agreed that it was the sea that gave the most hope of producing more food," recalled Powers. Thus, the charter members sought to support Carr's efforts at preservation while replenishing turtle stocks to feed local and international markets without endangering the entire species. Although seemingly at odds with each other, these disparate ideas of replenishment and consumption were not an unusual approach to



marine conservancy. Others had shared a commitment to scientific management. The goal was to identify and apply scientifically sound policies to limit overharvesting and make hunting more efficient.<sup>62</sup>

In the early years, Carr even thought it was possible to pursue conservation in such a manner. Throughout his research in Costa Rica during the 1950s and 1960s, Carr never turned down an opportunity to dine on a succulent turtle dish. In *The Windward Road*, Carr diverged into a lengthy discussion of the preparation and taste of turtle dishes. In Puerto Limón, he first encountered baked turtle marinated in wine and cooked with tomatoes and Spanish onions. "It was like good venison, but not so dry."<sup>63</sup> Despite his growing commitment to sea turtle conservation, Carr continued to indulge in turtle delicacies. In *So Excellent a Fishe*, the herpetologist boasted of a meal Sibella Martínez, the Tortuguero cook, prepared for Carr and his research team. "There were stewed fins, which are my favorite turtle dish and likely to become the favorite of any man not offended by the gelatinous matrix in which the fins arrived; and there was also fricasseed turtle meat adroitly spiced," he recalled.<sup>64</sup> During the early years of his Costa Rican research, Carr easily reconciled his consumption of turtle meat as being a long-held tradition of the local populations along the Caribbean. Turtle was one of an exotic array of different animals that fed populations with few options to buy or raise domesticated animals for food. In sum, Carr distinguished the commodification of sea turtles and their exportation to global markets from the significance of turtle meat as food for Caribbean populations with finite resources and low incomes. In later years, this line of distinction became increasingly difficult for Carr to defend, as his scientific research revealed the extent of turtle population declines in the Caribbean.

The CCC helped extend Carr's research activities at Tortuguero. With the conservancy's financial resources and political influence, Carr launched a new component to his sea turtle program at Tortuguero in 1959. Operation Green Turtle was ambitious. Carr's research team intended to take eggs from the green turtle nests on the beach and transfer them to a hatchery at the research station. Later, they would nurse and distribute yearlings and two-year-old green turtles to various places across the greater Caribbean. The project's goal was clear: to restore stocks of the Atlantic green turtle. With this program, Carr would be pursuing more than just sea turtle research. Operation Green Turtle became Carr's first conservation program in collaboration with the CCC.

The project required numerous resources and governmental support. Through the intervention of the CCC, Joshua Powers and Billy Cruz leased

for Carr an additional three miles of the beach from the Costa Rican government, resulting in five out of twenty-two miles of the Tortuguero beach devoted to turtle science. Since beginning his research in Tortuguero, Carr had gained some key Costa Rican allies, who were supportive of his efforts to conserve sea turtles. In the early years of the tagging program, logwood merchant Don Yoyo served as minister of agriculture and livestock during the second term of José Figueres Ferrer. That early connection to Figueres and the ministry proved an invaluable collaboration for future conservation efforts. In fact, to further cement support for a future bid as president as well as to support the conservationism of his Swedish wife, Karen, Figueres and his family joined Archie Carr, Billy Cruz, and other members of the research team for a weekend at the Tortuguero research station in 1964. What they found and experienced on the beach further sealed their support for Carr's turtle research and conservation efforts. Late in the evening, they confronted the work of a turtle poacher, who had left mutilated corpses along the beach. It was a startling reality of the continual pressure placed on sea turtles.<sup>65</sup> In 1965, using their political contacts in San José, the CCC managed to once again renew its annual lease to use Tortuguero beach for turtle research and conservation efforts.<sup>66</sup>

Sea turtle research in Costa Rica received tremendous support from an unlikely source: the U.S. Navy, which had a long track record of funding scientific research. In 1923, Thomas Edison headed the newly inaugurated U.S. Naval Research Laboratory under then assistant secretary of the navy Franklin Delano Roosevelt, establishing the important link between technology and national security. While the initial collaborations between the U.S. Navy and civilian scientists began in the 1920s, it proliferated in the aftermath of the Second World War. Much of those navy-supported projects focused on either the creation or the improvement of naval technology. Some identified and developed better ways to extract marine resources. This led to the recruitment and financial support of domestic and international scientists. The navy also sponsored civilian oceanic and marine research. Scripps Institution of Oceanography in California and Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution in Massachusetts received generous funding to support a variety of projects directly and indirectly related to naval science. But the navy did not stop there. In 1946, the Office of Naval Research (ONR) was formed to serve as a direct pipeline between the U.S. military and civilian researchers.<sup>67</sup>

Operation Green Turtle benefited from significant financial and logistical support from the ONR. Since the postwar period, the ONR was one of

the leading institutions to finance scientific research in the growing field of oceanography. As historian Jacob Darwin Hamblin explains, the U.S. Navy “supported research in the ocean sciences without an aggressive concern for its applications.”<sup>68</sup> Sidney Galler, head of the biology branch of the ONR, met Carr at a conference in Cuba and asked him about the potential to learn more about navigation from the study of sea turtles.<sup>69</sup> Galler was likely impressed with Carr’s preliminary research on young sea turtles and migration. As William Cromie explained about the allure of the ONR project, “They [the turtles] can find their way from one remote spot to another without landmarks, sextants, chronometers, radar or college education. To find out how they do it, the Navy is trying to learn all it can about the routes and schedules of migrating turtles.”<sup>70</sup> Preliminary results of the Tortuguero tagging program suggested that light sensitivity over specific areas helped to orient sea turtles. Galler was willing to fund Carr’s research to learn whether new navigation techniques would be gained from his sea turtle research. By 1961, the ONR provided critical funds to support aerial reconnaissance.<sup>71</sup>

While Carr and his research team availed themselves of the Military Air Transport Service to visit turtle basking sites and survey feeding grounds in the Pacific Ocean, the ONR continued to support Carr’s innovative use of air technology. Arriving from the U.S. Naval Station at Roosevelt Roads in Puerto Rico, naval airmen on a large amphibious Grumman HU-16 Albatross helped Carr transport the hatchlings across the Caribbean. After nearly ten seasons of air support, the U.S. Navy had carried 18,500 green turtle hatchlings to over sixteen countries (see figure 5.3). The project had the lowest rate of mortality of any program of its kind. Always eager to see how the U.S. government could be a force for good in the region, Carr insisted that the navy’s role in Operation Green Turtle helped to counter the negative views toward the United States in the Caribbean. “In a dozen Caribbean cities the flights have brought out friendliness in folk whose views on the United States range from the mildly jaundiced to the very bitter. It is mostly cheerful people who show up at the airports and gather around each season’s *Albatross*,” acknowledged the herpetologist.<sup>72</sup> Carr concluded, “Good will is not turtle soup, but it is an asset all the same. The *Albatrosses* have planted more than the baby turtles they have brought.”<sup>73</sup> Whether Caribbean populations viewed the U.S. Navy’s role in turtle science and conservation as a gesture of goodwill is unconfirmed and probably unlikely, as the direct results of the program did not immediately translate into higher wages, improved infrastructure, or greater sources of food.

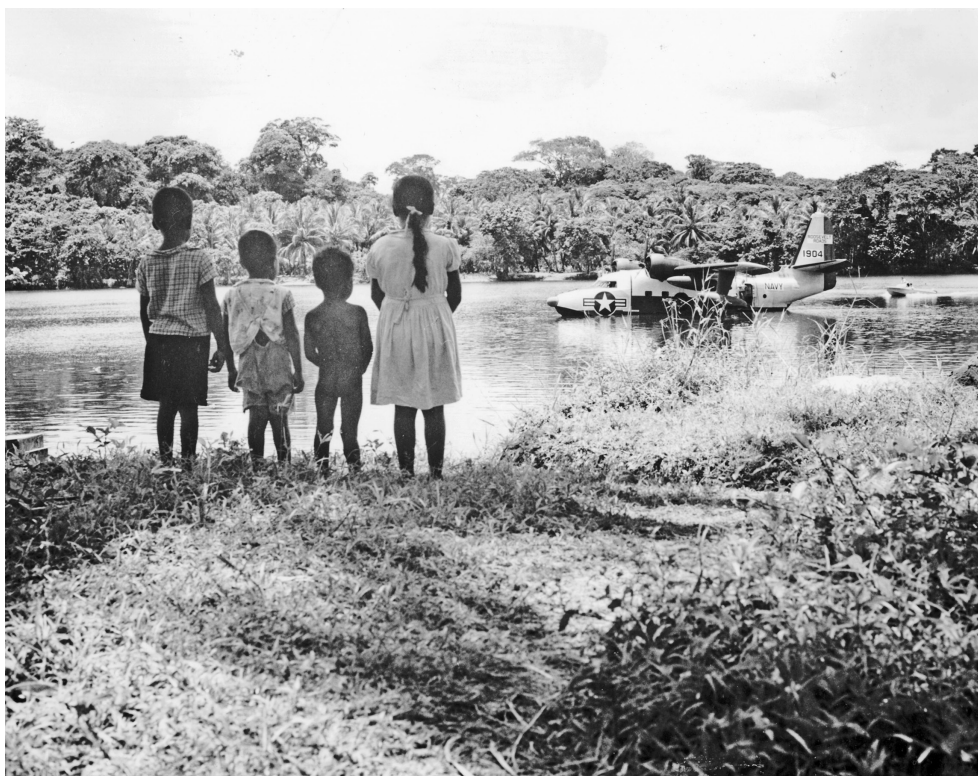


FIGURE 5.3 Navy Grumman at Tortuguero with child onlookers. Courtesy of Sea Turtle Conservancy.

Operation Green Turtle in Costa Rica concluded in the wake of the Vietnam War. With the war raging onward, Sidney Galler warned Carr not to request assistance with air travel any further. All logistical and human naval resources were undoubtedly being rerouted to the conflict in Southeast Asia. By 1969, no Grumman Albatrosses were delivering hatchlings around the Caribbean. The project, however, did continue for several years in Bermuda, where CCC board member Henry Clay Frick and his wife diligently worked to establish a breeding colony. While Carr and his research team were unsuccessful in rekindling breeding grounds anywhere in the Caribbean, Operation Green Turtle did much for sounding the alarm of the conditions of these marine reptiles. In his 1965 report to the Office of Naval Research, Carr noted a sea change in human attitudes toward them: “Concerns over the plight of marine turtles has risen markedly in areas in which it never existed before, and in some of these, the governments have initiated sea turtle projects of their own.” Fishery officials in Quintana Roo in the Mexican Yucatán

Peninsula and private citizens in Florida all started projects to conserve the dwindling local sea turtle populations.<sup>74</sup> Archie Carr was riding a wave of international sea turtle conservationism.

In the final chapter of *So Excellent a Fishe*, Carr noted that sea turtle conservationism was an international effort. Since sea turtles—green, hawksbill, loggerhead, or Kemp’s ridley—sojourned across the ocean’s waters indiscriminately and without care to national maritime boundaries, any project to conserve them required the assistance of multiple national governments. “They cannot be saved in any one place, or by controlling any one phase of the life cycle,” acknowledged Carr. His statement recognized the limitation of his own project—Operation Green Turtle—but more importantly his own wistful thinking that scientific management of turtle fishing was an appropriate way to preserve and allow the continual human exploitation of desirable food commodities like green turtles. Nearly twenty years of turtle science research finally offered a crushing conclusion. “The capacity of people to consume and their ability to destroy are growing beyond the tolerance of the small populations in which sea turtles live.” The growing human population, he insisted, was too much of a strain on the scarce sea turtle populations to even permit Caymanian turtlemen to pursue their multi-generational maritime labor tradition.<sup>75</sup>

The clearest and most effective solution to the loss of sea turtle populations worldwide was an international ban on turtle hunting in all its forms. It was an unpopular solution, Carr readily acknowledged. Governments were reluctant to cut off revenue and income to their workers. Turtle soup manufacturers surely would lobby against it. And to the turtle fishermen in the deep sea and onshore it “would bring real suffering.” A possible alternative was to raise green turtles in farms for domestic and international markets. Two experimental efforts were underway in Grand Cayman and the Bahamas, where *Thalassia* (seagrass) was in abundance, making for good turtle pasturage.<sup>76</sup> By 1967, the year of *So Excellent a Fishe’s* publication, it was too soon to say if the small-scale promise of farm-raised green turtles could meet worldwide demand.

In some ways, Carr was seeking a compromise. Human innovativeness had convinced Carr that a slump in the demand for sea turtle products—calipee, meat, tortoiseshell, leather—was unforeseeable. Since the publication of *The Windward Road*, new studies on sea turtle consumption worldwide and in the western Caribbean only confirmed what he had observed in the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica. Improved refrigeration, shipping, and cannery technologies had reignited turtle markets. While much



of the green turtles harvested in the western Caribbean likely ended up in Florida or New York, German manufacturers seeking turtle for their canned soup increasingly competed with well-established American manufacturers. Carr witnessed the opening of two turtle processing firms in Costa Rica and learned of similar freezer plants in Nicaragua. Although impoverished populations all around the Caribbean depended on turtle as a form of protein in their diets, and the international consumption of turtle products was growing, Carr was unconvinced that turtle farming proved a sustainable solution.<sup>77</sup>

The CCC's media connections heavily publicized Carr's sea turtle research in Costa Rica, the Caribbean, and beyond. Carr quickly became the most visible sea turtle conservationist in the world. His work was widely distributed, which garnered him an invitation to chair the Marine Sea Turtle Specialist Group of the newly formed International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in 1964. In that capacity, Carr worked with a group of scientists on identifying what specific sea turtle species should be placed on a red list and given an endangered classification rating. In *The Case of the Green Turtle*, Alison Rieser narrates a full description of that highly politicized process. In the end, the IUCN Marine Sea Turtle Specialist Group tacitly recommended to pursue international agreements to limit or ban turtle fishing and was interested in exploring scientifically based efforts to farm-raise green turtles.<sup>78</sup>

In addition to working at the international level with the IUCN, Carr diligently worked at the regional level. Due to CCC legal counsel Billy Cruz's adept working relations with the Costa Rican Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock over the years, Carr wielded tremendous influence and encouraged Costa Rican authorities to take bolder steps toward saving the sea turtle populations at Tortuguero. Some tentative discussions between Carr and the minister of agriculture and livestock included making Tortuguero into a national park, with the goal of protecting the bulk of the twenty-two-mile nesting beach area. In actuality, the park proposal became muted when Costa Rican authorities learned of a turtle processing plant opening in Nicaragua. As Minister Guillermo Yglesias explained, Costa Rica refused to disadvantage their nationals, many of whom earned income in the turtle trade, when other nations were unwilling to take similar conservation actions.<sup>79</sup> Undeterred by this bump in the plans of a Tortuguero sea turtle reserve park, Carr initiated a campaign. He assisted CCC in organizing a meeting between the fishery ministers of Costa Rica, Panama, and Nicaragua in San José. The initial results were promising. They agreed to ban turtle harvesting for three



years, during which time the fishery ministers would develop a regional plan to manage the green turtle populations. Carr was dispirited to hear that Nicaraguan authorities refused to ratify the agreement, and thus, Costa Rica and Panama pulled out as well.<sup>80</sup> Carr concluded that only the precipitous depletion of green turtles might finally provoke the international cooperation needed to save the turtles.

While regional governments dragged their feet, the international cooperation to save the turtles that Carr so desperately wanted came at a brisk pace. The IUCN Marine Sea Turtle Specialist Group no longer considered farm-raising of green turtles, such as at the Cayman Turtle Farm, a model to follow. Some scientists raised concerns about exempting the mariculture business from bans on wild-caught green turtles when their farm relied on tens of thousands of eggs from Tortuguero. Others found it disheartening that the owners of the Cayman Turtle Farm not only sought to fill contracts for turtle meat but also worked to expand the turtle market with new products like turtle oil. While the IUCN members were disappointed to hear that the regional agreement among Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and Panama fell through, they were heartened by a wave of actions to ban products on the endangered species list from entering at the state and national levels in the United States. By 1973, the United States became a signatory to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), and President Richard Nixon signed the Endangered Species Act. Green turtles made the list. Turtle hunting in the western Caribbean was soon to end.<sup>81</sup>

## Conclusion

Caymanian turtlemen felt the crushing end of the industry two years earlier. On March 23, 1971, the motorized *A. M. Adams* moored into the Key West wharf to deliver 135 live green turtles from the Miskito Cays. They soon learned that the governor of Florida had passed legislation banning entry of green turtles under forty-one inches in length. Only five of the 135 turtles met the regulation. The turtle hunt was a bust. The Caymanian crew of the *A. M. Adams* returned home empty-handed. Sea Farms turtle cannery closed, and twenty-seven employees lost their jobs. As the *Miami Herald* reported, the turtle boat was out of business.

By the middle of the twentieth century, Caymanian turtlemen faced challenges to the pursuit of turtle fishing in all directions. Not only did the Second World War recruit Caymanian seamen to fight, but amphibian threats

made deep-sea turtle hunting dangerous. Moreover, the war strained the financial resources of its formerly affluent consumers, and the industry was suspended. During and after the war, new Caymanian leadership envisioned and proposed new industries to stimulate economic growth and increase meager wages on the island. These efforts were welcomed and pursued alongside turtle hunting but with a reduced turtle fleet. Schooners plied onward as they struggled to supply turtle markets and to outcompete new suppliers.

Some turtlemen, like Capt. Allie Ebanks, looked to scientific management as the solution. He dutifully assisted Archie Carr in his turtle science research in the 1950s and 1960s. Ebanks regularly sent the herpetologist recovered tags and correspondence regarding the state of turtle fishing in the Miskito Cays. Carr appreciated Ebanks and the other Caymanian turtlemen; their sea stories of turtle hunting in the Caribbean served an important function to Carr's early research. Their stories about homing instincts, recaptures, and turtle grass all became enfolded in Carr's publications, in which he frequently extended them credit. And yet Carr's research concluded that the renewed and growing demand for sea turtle products was no longer sustainable. His work to save the turtles quickened the demise of Caymanian turtle hunting.

## Conclusion

### *Great Links of Chain*

In spring 1968, with his sea-worn eyes and swollen hands and feet, Raib Avers departed the wharf at Georgetown like he had done for over thirty years. As the master of the schooner *Lillias Eden*, Avers was one of the few remaining captains of the turtle fleet on route to the Miskito Cays. Long gone were days when hardworking and sober men eagerly joined him on the voyage. Now, his crew included an unsavory mix of undesirables. “In dis goddam lot I got two drunkards, one thief, and five idiots, dass what I got!”<sup>1</sup> To evoke a rise out of his light-skinned Caymanian crew, Avers singled out the sole black foreigner on the voyage. “I gone make a first-class turtler out dat fella, cause he willin. And he *smart*. (he laughs) Had to go all de way to Honduras to find a fella meets dat description in *dese* goddom days.”<sup>2</sup> Overlooking the racial undertones of Avers’s declaration, his inability to find seamen to hunt turtle reflected larger changes that undergirded the turtle fishery in the late twentieth century. Despite his misfit crew, Raib Avers swiftly moved toward Miskito Cays. He had no way of knowing the doomed nature of the voyage. The *Lillias Eden* crew confronted emptied fishing grounds, a pirate ambush, and turbulent weather, ultimately leading to the deaths of Avers and some members of his crew.

The tale of the *Lillias Eden* is an evocative allegory from American naturalist and author Peter Matthiessen. Drawing on research and his 1967 travel voyage on the *Lydia Wilson* with Capt. Cadie Ebanks, referenced in the introduction, the novelist sought to recapture the sensorial experience of a turtle hunt through his protagonist Raib Avers, an aging turtle schooner captain ruefully unaware of the fishing vernacular’s demise. Just as the conditions of sea turtles ignited Archie Carr, the turtlemen’s plight of encountering an increasingly dwindling population of turtles in an ever-changing political, social, and ecological landscape also spoke to the author. In his novel, Matthiessen delicately wrestled with his admiration of this intensely intimate fishing culture and the ways it transformed the modern sea through the depletion of sea turtles. The author considered *Far Tortuga* one of his greatest literary works.<sup>3</sup>

Literary portrayals of the last turtlemen are not the only remnants of this Caribbean maritime vernacular. The legacies of Caymanian turtle hunters

exist in inconspicuous ways. In these remaining pages, I discuss what is learned from a maritime perspective of the Caribbean and explore how a study of the Caymanian turtle fishery informs our understanding of contemporary boundary disputes. I also note the consequences of sea turtle conservationism in the western Caribbean. In so doing, I insist that undergirding stories about mariners on small islands in peripheral parts of the world have much to tell us about modern-day concerns related to border control systems, migration, and environmental conservation.

### A Maritime Caribbean Perspective

As I have shown, sea turtles and turtle fishing were not unfamiliar to the peoples—indigenous and nonindigenous—that made their homes on the big and small islands and coastal strips along and in the Caribbean Sea. And yet it is striking how often historians have overlooked the ubiquitous presence of the animal in the lives of Caribbean communities. Whether ravenous mariners eager to fill up their shipboard rations with fresh turtle meat or plantation owners lavishly dining on calipash in soup, sea turtles and the human consumption of them were part of the making of the early modern Caribbean. In fact, as I have argued, studying the maritime labor and commerce surrounding sea turtles allows us to combat the prevailing image of a Caribbean seen singularly through the lens of the agro-export economies, particularly sugar. By casting a wider lens, this book expands our understanding of the region beyond the terrestrial histories of plantation development and joins a growing number of studies reconsidering how Caribbean peoples engaged, developed, and lived in sea-oriented societies with fluid political affiliations.

Maritime historians of the North Atlantic have long called for further focused attention on waterscapes—oceans or seas—as an integral actor in the past. Some responded to this call with new studies on the better-known mariner—the sailor—as he (or she), too, crossed cultural, imperial, linguistic, and national boundaries.<sup>4</sup> This scholarship focuses on maritime labor and shipboard relations. These works acknowledge the liminal spaces in which mariners often moved, skirting neat imperial or even national affiliations and boundaries. *The Last Turtlemen* joins other scholarship that recognizes the unique vantage point that mariners, like sailors or seamen, offer in understanding the concrete and often messy ways in which people, ideas, and goods circulated around the globe. Or as one ship captain's advocate eloquently described, seafarers are “the great links of chain which unites nation to nation, ocean to ocean, continent to continent, and island to island.”<sup>5</sup>

Caymanians hunting and then selling live turtles and tortoiseshell served a similar function, linking far-flung places across empires (the United Kingdom) and nations (Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Colombia, the United States) via island chains. The mobility of sea turtles as well as the men who hunted them cemented this circuit.

*The Last Turtlemen* above all shows how a few hundred border crossers—Caymanian turtlemen—moved across formal and informal boundaries in the southwestern Caribbean. It draws heavily on a well-established body of scholarship invariably called transnational, entangled, or Atlantic histories. Its strength, however, is how it foregrounds the links between resource extraction and labor mobility along the fluid frontiers of the circum-Caribbean. I highlight how the territorial struggles of the nineteenth century did not end at the coast but extended into the sea. By following Caymanian turtlemen as they crisscrossed Caribbean waters, passing by barely visible bars, banks, and cays facing the Atlantic lowlands of Central America, these seemingly marginal historical actors reveal the day-to-day lived experiences of people moving through these messy boundaries. In doing so, *The Last Turtlemen* showcases how sea-oriented peoples claimed, configured, and contested the maritime space as a pivotal component of their Caribbean experience.

### Maritime Disputes in the Western Caribbean

In 2012, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague settled a century-long dispute between Nicaragua and Colombia over territorial and maritime boundaries in the western Caribbean. The dispute centered on a loose chain of banks and cays that included Quitasueño, Serrana, and Roncador, and the old hunting grounds Caymanian turtlemen called the southern reef. The Nicaraguan government refused to honor a 1928 Esguerra-Bárcenas Treaty, whereby former Managua political leaders relinquished territorial claims over these places to Colombia, arguing that the U.S. government pressured Nicaraguan officials to accept the treaty. At that time, the United States was eager to settle negotiations with Colombia over the Panama Canal reparations. Legal representatives for both countries used *uti possidetis juris*, a legal principle by which new nations inherited the territories and boundaries of former colonial powers, to stake claims to these insular territories. The ICJ ultimately found the evidence circumstantial and insufficient to support either country's claim to the chain of islets that formed part of the archipelago of San Andrés and Providencia.<sup>6</sup>

After hearing the case, the ICJ readjusted the maritime boundary between the two nations, resulting in Nicaragua gaining an additional two hundred nautical miles into the Caribbean Sea. The news devastated Colombia; President Juan Manuel Santos vowed to his constituents in a tweet, “Never again should we have to face what happened to us on November 19th,” referring to the day the ICJ announced its decision.<sup>7</sup> Beyond the political loss to Colombia, a group of equally disappointed and concerned artisanal fishermen on the inhabited islands of San Andrés and Providencia wondered how the new boundary would curtail their access to fishing grounds.<sup>8</sup> The 2012 ICJ decision was the latest chapter in a long saga of multiple states vying to control this maritime zone and marine harvesters seeking to have unfettered access to the Caribbean Sea.

As I show in chapter 4, San Andrés and Providencia were at the center of maritime disputes not only between Colombia and Nicaragua but extended to Great Britain and the United States in the first half of the twentieth century. The disputes centered on fishing, whether sea turtles or another marine resource, but the implications were much larger. Whatever nation controlled these small territories had the ability to benefit from international commerce, as the islands sat along a strategic shipping route to the Panama Canal. Today, Colombian and Nicaraguan officials envision control of these territories not to simply project power but to extract petroleum wealth hidden deep below the ocean floors. In the early decades of the twentieth century, there was considerable discussion of the islands as coaling stations. By 1919, President Woodrow Wilson unilaterally claimed Roncador Bank and placed a lighthouse to protect passerby ships to Panama. For some, this action undercut Colombian sovereignty over the chain of banks and cays around San Andrés and Providencia, causing Colombian authorities to respond to further challenges from other nations interested in accessing the surrounding waters or the uninhabited islets therein into the twenty-first century.

*The Last Turtlemen*, however, brings into focus the origins of this dispute and shows how turtle fishing was at the center of such territorial struggles. To prove this point, I demonstrate how the modernizing states delimited boundaries, nationalized territorial waters, and regulated water access to non-nationals, thus ceasing an era of the maritime commons in the western Caribbean. Like a large growing body of scholarship has shown, this was a messy and contentious process that included not only state actors but non-state actors like Caymanian turtle fishermen, who navigated increasingly choppy waters as they struggled to maintain access to formerly unregulated turtle grounds. In the end, I confirm and illustrate how Caymanian turtle-



men played a critical role in shaping the maritime boundaries of the western Caribbean.

### Sea Turtles Saved?

Many will likely wonder of the current fate of sea turtles. Although the International Union for Conservation of Nature continues to have green and hawksbill turtles on the endangered and critically endangered species list, sea turtle conservation in Tortuguero, at least, offers an optimistic prognosis. Since 1955, green turtle populations have shown a positive recovery trend at one of the two largest green turtle rookeries in the world. Data indicate an increased number of nests from mature adult female turtles and decreased mortality rates for juvenile and adult green turtles at Tortuguero.<sup>9</sup> Scientists credit Archie Carr's conservation work as well as the careful conservation management policies pursued in Costa Rica, which many hope will be adopted elsewhere. Some clearly see Carr's prediction becoming a reality: long-term conservation efforts reversing population declines and potentially leading to restoration of sea turtle populations.

Those trends, however, obscure the tremendous challenges sea turtles—green and hawksbills—must overcome to survive. Human and nonhuman actors continue to threaten the life cycles of these marine reptiles. Nonhuman predators as mundane as dogs or exotic as jaguars remind us of the fragility of turtles. At sea, turtles continue to be the by-kill of fishing trawlers. On land, several countries permit some local consumption of green turtles. A person can still enjoy green or hawksbill turtle eggs in some corners of the western Caribbean. Poachers continue to enjoy the flesh and eggs of green turtles, too. With limited employment options, locals still snatch and sell turtles and eggs during the nesting season. Some environmentalists note that this illicit trade in sea turtles intersects with narcotrafficking operations. With the strategic location of Costa Rica's Caribbean coast along well-established drug routes from Panama and Colombia, drug smugglers transit turtle eggs to sell abroad, frequently exchanging drugs for them. While some eggs leave for international markets, most remain in local markets in Costa Rica. An egg poacher, or *huevero*, can find as many as ninety eggs in one turtle nest chamber and typically scavenges several in a single night. Egg poachers can earn roughly one dollar per egg on the black market.<sup>10</sup>

Most recently, angry poachers have targeted sea turtle conservationists. In 2013, four armed masked men kidnapped five WIDECAST (Wider Caribbean Sea Turtle Conservation Network) volunteers patrolling the leatherback

nests at Moín beach near Puerto Limón. Four of the female conservationists managed to escape, while the lone male, Jairo Mora Sandoval, was eventually found dead. His death shocked Costa Ricans and international environmentalists. The U.S. embassy deemed his death “senseless,” and a United Nations representative sent condolences to Mora’s family. Others wondered about the larger implications of the international attention linked to Mora’s murder, since the activist was likely targeted for his outspoken criticism toward the government’s lack of support for sea turtle conservationism. Many questioned Costa Rica’s commitment to environmental causes, as little was done to enforce poaching laws or to protect volunteers patrolling the beaches with the presence of local police. Others worried how Mora’s death might tarnish Costa Rica’s environmentally friendly image and ecotourism economy. Shocked out of complacency, the Costa Rican Ministry of Environment promised to make reforms and provide greater support to sea turtle conservationism.<sup>11</sup> In 2016, three years after his death, Costa Rican authorities convicted and sentenced Mora’s murderers to seventy-four to ninety years in prison.<sup>12</sup>

The success of sea turtle conservationism is less clear in the Cayman Islands. Without a nesting population to restore, conservationist efforts became intricately linked to entrepreneurial ventures. The Cayman Turtle Farm was initially created to respond to efforts to protect the nearly decimated Atlantic turtle population by raising turtle hatchlings to eventually sell into worldwide markets. With the 1975 ban on the importation of sea turtle products into the United States, the farm nearly collapsed. Subsequent efforts to push back and advocate for the lifting of the ban was met with a fierce backlash from sea turtle scientists. In 1982, Caymanian legislator John McLean who served on the Executive Council of the Cayman Islands for Agriculture, Lands, and Natural Resources wrote an editorial in the *New York Times*. He insisted that sea turtle farming as done at the Cayman Turtle Farm was an “option of farming animals for profit as a way to prevent their extinction.”<sup>13</sup> McLean called on the U.S. government to lift the ban. Environmental scientists Archie Carr, David Ehrenfeld, George Balazs, and Wayne King swiftly penned a letter to the editor of the *New York Times* to rebut his claims. They insisted that sea turtle farming was not the answer to sea turtle population recovery. In fact, it was more “likely to be the last nail in the coffin of the green turtle,” since it would stimulate a demand for this luxury product, further enticing poachers to raid the sea for wild-caught turtles to fill the demand.<sup>14</sup> With no lifting of the ban on sea turtle products, the purpose of the Cayman Turtle Farm was retooled to raise turtle meat for local consumption

and to serve as a tourist site for international visitors interested in learning more about the conservationist icon and symbol of Caymanian heritage. The age of the last turtlemen has passed, as fewer Caymanians pursue maritime employment.

News of the successful conservation action toward green and hawksbill turtles in the western Caribbean is bittersweet. As I write these words, in 2019, people worldwide are trying to digest the alarming results of the United Nation's first comprehensive report on biodiversity. Led by 450 scientists, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) culled and examined fifteen thousand scientific studies and government reports to prepare this behemoth report of over one thousand pages. In it, they reveal how humans have caused the extinction of over a million species of plants and animals.<sup>15</sup> Beyond pollution of the land and waters, the report discusses the introduction of invasive species, the destruction of native plants and animals, and the overfishing of the world's oceans. The scientists' call to take action is fiercely urgent. People have responded to the call, from indigenous Americans to residents of small islands in the Pacific and Caribbean to a worldwide youth movement calling on their governments to create and enforce responsible environmental policies.

The UN report on loss of biodiversity likely did not surprise a cadre of scholars from geologists to historians. For nearly twenty years, they have been engaged in an increasingly raucous debate on whether humans currently live in the Holocene or a geological period some call the Anthropocene, which stresses the dominant role of humans in the transformation of the earth for the past ten thousand years.<sup>16</sup> Environmental historians and historians of science cognizant of such a discussion among geologists have entered into this scholarly discussion with the objective of providing clearer temporal preciseness on how and *when* human actions have accelerated loss of nature. Some have pointed to the introduction and growing use of fossil fuels during the industrial age of the eighteenth century, whereas others have boldly examined a multitude of ways that the rapid pace of human-caused biodiversity loss occurred after the Second World War in 1945. These scholars call it the Great Acceleration.<sup>17</sup> Situating *The Last Turtlemen* within this larger discussion, it offers a ground-level tale of human action—overconsumption and fishing of turtles—leading to the marine reptile's near extinction. While it is clearly another example of the accelerated pace of human-generated biodiversity loss, the temporal origins likely loom longer than seventy or eighty years. Unlike the startling UN report, this book offers a glimmer of hope. It recounts how successful management of turtle

fisheries requires support from multiple actors, from the consumers to the hunters to government actors who can work with fishery managers on effective policies to protect vulnerable marine resources. When coupled with strong enforcement, conservation education, and the introduction of alternative economic opportunities, management of vulnerable resources has a better chance of survival.

BEYOND THE TRAGICALLY intertwined fates of turtlemen and sea turtles lie poignant and larger stories of the turtle fishery's role in the peopling, laboring, and drawing of boundaries in the maritime Caribbean. In the preceding pages I have shown how the consumption of green turtle meat by early modern Caribbean explorers spurred on New World settlement as newcomers moved across the region and into far-flung edges of the sea. While most of those Caribbean island societies developed into plantation economies, others relied heavily on the surrounding waterscape as a source of livelihood. Sometimes considered marginal to larger trends in Caribbean economic and social development, the populations on small island chains like the Bahamas, the Bay Islands, the archipelago of San Andrés and Providencia, and the Cayman Islands drew from sources of nourishment and sustenance from the deep sea. As a peripheral node of an interconnected colonial web of trade, Caymanian early settlers opportunistically oriented themselves toward the sea to create distinctive fishing and work cultures outside the plantation complex of the greater Caribbean. The legacy of the turtlemen rests in the maritime boundaries that they helped to draw and the ecological transformation of the Caribbean, once home to millions of roaming green and hawksbill turtles still fighting for their survival in a changing modern world.

## Notes

### Introduction

1. Matthiessen, "To the Miskito Cay," *New Yorker*, October 28, 1967, 136.
2. Matthiessen, "To the Miskito Cay," 146.
3. Henry M. Bodden, interview by Arthurlyn Pedley, June 12, 1991, transcript, CINA-OHP.
4. Matthiessen, "To the Miskito Cay," 146.
5. Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade*, 185.
6. Scott, *Art of Not Being Governed*, 5.
7. Smith, *To Master the Boundless Sea*, 5–6.
8. Warsh, *American Baroque*, 4; Muscolino, *Fishing Wars*.
9. Recent overarching syntheses of the Caribbean continue to give sugar a central position in the region's history. See Higman, *Concise History*, 98–140; Knight, *Caribbean*, 74–82.
10. Higman, *Slave Populations*, 43.
11. Cromwell, "More Than Slaves and Sugar," 770–83; Shepherd, *Slavery without Sugar*.
12. Bassi, "Small Islands."
13. Blum, "The Prospect of Oceanic Studies"; Rozadowski, "Forum: Ocean's Depth"; Bolster, "Putting the Ocean in Atlantic History"; Bentley, Bridenthal, and Wigen, *Seascapes*; Klein and Mackenthum, *Sea Changes*; Cunliffe, *Facing the Ocean*.
14. Bassi, *Aqueous Territory*; Lipman, *Saltwater Frontier*.
15. Bassi, *Aqueous Territory*; Lipman, *Saltwater Frontier*.
16. Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*.
17. Candlin, *Last Caribbean Frontier*.
18. Block, *Ordinary Lives*.
19. Caro and Ortega, *Ciudades Portuarias*; Rupert, *Creolization and Contraband*; de la Fuente, *Havana and the Atlantic*.
20. Schwartz, *Sea of Storms*; Johnson, *Climate and Catastrophe*; Mulcahy, *Hurricanes and Society*; Pérez Jr., *Winds of Change*.
21. Warsh, *American Baroque*; Dawson, *Undercurrents of Power*; Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade*.
22. For two exceptions, see Cecelski, *Waterman's Song*; Bolster, *Black Jacks*. For a discussion of enslaved divers, see Dawson, *Undercurrents of Power*, 57–84; Warsh, *American Baroque*.
23. Long, *History of Jamaica*, 312.
24. Williams, "Did Slavery Really Matter," 167; Craton, *Founded upon the Seas*, 63; Higman, *Slave Populations*, 65.

25. Mintz, *Caribbean Transformations*, 146–56.
26. For book-length case studies, see Giovannetti, *Black British Migrants in Cuba*; Putnam, *Radical Moves*; Colby, *Business of Empire*; Chambers, *Race, Nation, and West Indian*; Putnam, *The Company They Kept*; Harpelle, *West Indians of Costa Rica*; Chomsky, *West Indian Workers*; Richardson, *Panama Money in Barbados*; Newton, *Silver Men*; Palmer, “What Happen.”
27. Rieser, *Case of the Green Turtle*; Davis, *Man Who Saved Sea Turtles*.
28. Arch, *Bringing Whales Ashore*; Shoemaker, *Native American Whalers*; Dorsey, *Whales and Nations*; Russell, *Roving Mariners*; Dolin, *Leviathan*; Norling, *Captain Ahab Had a Wife*.
29. Nietschmann, *Between Land and Water*; Parsons, *Green Turtle*.
30. Craton, *Founded upon the Seas*; Smith, *Maritime Heritage*; Nietschmann, *Between Land and Water*.
31. Rieser, *Case of the Green Turtle*; Martha Hodes, *Sea Captain’s Wife*.
32. Price, “Caribbean Fishing and Fishermen,” 1363–64.
33. Cecelski, *Waterman’s Song*; Bolster, *Black Jacks*.
34. Warsh, “Enslaved Pearl”; Warsh, “A Political Ecology.”
35. Wadewitz, *Nature of Borders*; Arnold, *Fishermen’s Frontier*; Muscolino, “The Yellow Croaker War”; Taylor, *Making Salmon*.
36. Bassi, “Beyond Compartmentalized Atlantics,” 704–16; Putnam, “Borderlands and Border Crossers,” 7–21; Gould, “Entangled Histories,” 764–68.
37. Carr, “Passing of the Fleet,” 17.
38. Giovas, “Pre-Columbian Amerindian,” 13–14.
39. Clarkson, *Soup*, 116.
40. Rieser, *Case of the Green Turtle*; Saunders and Craton, *Islanders in the Stream*, 143.
41. James J. Parsons to Archie F. Carr, September 21, 1968, Series 2, box 21, AFC-UFL.
42. Garrett Hardin, “Tragedy of the Commons,” 1243–48.
43. Ostrom, *Governing the Commons*.

## Chapter One

1. Roberts, *Narrative of Voyages*, 99.
2. Roberts, *Narrative of Voyages*, 58, 46, 93, 37.
3. Roberts, *Narrative of Voyages*, 93.
4. Roberts, *Narrative of Voyages*, 93.
5. For other studies with a similar approach, see Arch, *Bringing Whales Ashore*, 23–24; Soluri, “On Edge,” 245–46.
6. Lyson et al., “Boreymys.”
7. Bardet et al., “A Giant Chelonoid”; Buffetaut and Ingavat, “The Mesozoic Vertebrates.”
8. Cardena and Parham, “Oldest Known Marine.”
9. McClenachan, Jackson, and Newman, “Conservation Implications,” 291; Bjorndal and Jackson, “Roles of Sea Turtles”; Jackson, “Reefs since Columbus.”
10. Carr, *So Excellent a Fische*, 76.
11. Dingle, *Migration*, 151; Spotila, *Saving Sea Turtles*, 54–55; Spotila, *Sea Turtles*, 48.



12. Harrison, "The Edible Turtle"; Carr, "The Zoogeography"; Carr and Giovannoli, "The Ecology and Migrations."
13. Goatley, Hoey, and Bellwood, "The Role of Turtles."
14. Milosovich, Klein, Díaz, Hernández, Bigatti, et al., "Marine Biodiversity."
15. Dingle, *Migration*, 190.
16. Dampier, *New Voyage*, 96.
17. Dampier, *New Voyage*, 96.
18. Spotila, *Sea Turtles*, 113. León and Bjørndal, "Selective Feeding"; Meylan, "Spongivory in Hawksbill."
19. Rincón-Díaz et al., "Foraging Selectivity."
20. Dampier, *New Voyage*, 96. Sponge consuming hawksbills are poisonous. For a recent case of food poisoning, see Ventura et al., "Chelonitoxism Outbreak"; Pavlinet et al., "Mass Poisoning."
21. Carr, *Windward Road*, 149–50.
22. McClenachen, Jackson, and Newman, "Conservation Implications," 293.
23. Spotila, *Sea Turtles*, 118.
24. For a nineteenth-century depiction, see Roberts, *Narrative of Voyages*, 95. For a twentieth-century account, see Carr, *Windward Road*, 73–74, 194–95.
25. Smith, *Maritime Heritage*, 79.
26. *Periplus*, 28, 54, 84, 122.
27. Rijkelijkhuizen, "Tortoiseshell," 99–101.
28. Kopf, *Marquetry Odyssey*, 93–94; Dobie, *Furnishing the Eighteenth Century*, 18; Miller, *Furniture*, 55.
29. Dobie, *Furnishing the Eighteenth Century*, 18.
30. Johnson, "Combing the Roots," 331–33.
31. Sutherland, "A Sino-Indonesian," 179.
32. Chaiklin, "Imports and Autarky," 229.
33. Amorochó and Reina, "Feeding Ecology"; Seminoff, Resendez, and Nicholas, "Diet of East Pacific."
34. Putnam and Naro-Maciel, "Finding the 'Lost Years.'"
35. Benn, *China's Golden Age*, 121, 128.
36. Dampier, *New Voyage*, 98.
37. Walter, *Anson's Voyage*, 305–8.
38. Parsons, *Green Turtle*, 8.
39. Parsons, *Green Turtle*, 9–10.
40. McClenachen, Jackson, and Newman, "Conservation Implications," 291. Drawing on current geographic nesting data and historic export data across four historic periods and twenty locations in the Caribbean, their calculations are higher than previous estimates. For previous estimates of historic green and hawksbill turtles, see Bjørndal and Jackson, "Roles of Sea Turtles"; Jackson, *Reefs since Columbus*.
41. Blick, Creighton, and Murphy, "The Role and Nature of Sea Turtle," 159.
42. Vale and Veni, *Madrid Codex*, 167; Brennan, *Hidden Maya*, 93.
43. Keegan and Hofman, *Caribbean before Columbus*, 171–74.
44. For a robust discussion on shifting baseline syndrome, in which fishery experts fail to calculate the baseline of marine population before human exploitation, see Lutz,

Musick, and Wyneken, *Biology of Sea Turtles*, 260–61; Jackson, Alexander, and Snala, *Shifting Baselines*.

45. Quoted in Roberts, *Unnatural History*, 63.

46. Smith, *Maritime Heritage*, 26.

47. Fuson, *Juan Ponce de León*, 111.

48. “Dry” was added to the name to warn sailors that there was little fresh water available on the islands. Today, the islands form part of the Florida Keys.

49. Astley, *New Collection of Voyages*, 406; Parsons, *Green Turtle*, 11; Equiano, *Interesting Narrative*, 217, 324; Newson and Minchin, *From Capture to Sale*, 169–71.

50. Smith, *Maritime Heritage*, 58–60.

51. Brussart, *Jamaica in 1687*, 240.

52. Rogoziński, *Brief History*, 85–87.

53. Although the original account was published in Dutch, early modern historians do not know whether Exquemelin was Flemish, Dutch, or French. He is known also as Alexander Oliver and his surname has been published as Esquemeling, too. These names are likely aliases and Henrick Smeeks is likely his true name. See Esquemeling, *Buccaneers*, 60.

54. Eastman, “The Reversus,” 32.

55. Dampier, *New Voyage*, 17.

56. Bassi, *Aqueous Territory*, 86–88.

57. Offen, “Race and Place in Colonial Mosquitia,” 116.

58. Boza Villareal, *La Frontera indígena*, 45–49.

59. Ordahl Kupperman, *Providence Island*, 98–99.

60. Esquemeling, *Buccaneers*, 220.

61. Dampier, *New Voyage*, 11.

62. Equiano, *Interesting Narrative*, 325.

63. For accounts of petty tradesmen in tortoiseshell and other items in the western Caribbean, see Dunham, *Journal of Voyages*, 89, 108–9; Roberts, *Narrative of Voyages*, 90.

64. Catesby, *Natural History*, 38.

65. Schaw, *Journal of a Lady of Quality*, 95.

66. Nugent, *Lady Nugent’s Journal*, 121.

67. Long, *History of Jamaica*, 311.

68. Dampier, *New Voyage*, 98.

69. Draper, “Timbering and Turtling,” 785–98.

70. Dampier, *New Voyage*, 97.

71. Johnson, “Combing the Roots of Colonialism,” 331–33.

72. Urban, *Gentleman’s Magazine*, 489.

73. Mandelkern, “The Politics of the Turtle.”

74. Ching, “The Flow of Turtle Soup,” 82–83.

75. Cromwell, “More Than Slaves and Sugar”; Candlin and Pybus, *Enterprising Women*; Block, *Ordinary Lives*; Candlin, *Last Caribbean Frontier*.

76. Kupperman, *Providence Island*, 97–99, 167.

77. Dawson, “The Evacuation of Mosquito Shore,” 68.

78. Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade*, 234.

79. Historian David Armitage outlines the conceptual contours of Atlantic history, denoting differences among Atlantic, circum-Atlantic, and cis-Atlantic histories. A cis-Atlantic history focuses on subsections of the Atlantic world to highlight its distinctiveness or emphasize particular webs of connections. See Armitage and Braddick, *British Atlantic World*, 21. Recent scholars have pushed back a bit against studies that try to focus on transnational histories within single national or imperial frameworks. For that discussion, see Cañizares-Esguerra, “Hybrid Atlantics”; Gould, “Entangled Histories.”

80. de Rochefort, *History of the Caribby*, 134.
81. Frear Keeler, *Sir Francis Drake's*, 204.
82. Andrews, *English Privateering*, 214.
83. Long, *History of Jamaica*, 309.
84. Smith, *Maritime Heritage*, 59–60.
85. Long, *History of Jamaica*, 310. The master of Penn's flagship *Swiftsure* also annotated the visit to Cayman Islands and the importance of turtles. See Grant, *Herpetology*, 57.
86. Smith, *Maritime Heritage*, 63.
87. Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade*, 234.
88. Kurson, *Pirate Hunters*, 48–49.
89. Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade*, 235; Smith, *Maritime Heritage*, 57.
90. Williams, *History of the Cayman Islands*, 14–15.
91. Williams, *History of the Cayman Islands*, 18–19.
92. Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade*, 235; Williams, *History of the Cayman Islands*, 20.
93. Anderson, *Mahogany*, 95–96; Craton, *Founded upon the Seas*, 63; Williams, *History of the Cayman Islands*, 17.
94. Williams, “Did Slavery Really Matter,” 172–73; Craton, *Founded upon the Seas*, 69–70.
95. Long, *History of Jamaica*, 312.
96. Long, *History of Jamaica*, 312.
97. Long, *History of Jamaica*, 312.
98. Long, *History of Jamaica*, 313.
99. Higman, *Slave Populations*, 43.
100. Quote taken from C. A. Williams, “Did Slavery Really Matter,” 163.
101. Craton, *Founded upon the Seas*, 111.
102. Roberts, *Narrative of Voyages*, 46.
103. Roberts, *Narrative of Voyages*, 151.
104. Roberts, *Narrative of Voyages*, 80, 93.
105. Roberts, *Narrative of Voyages*, 223.
106. Smith, *Maritime Heritage*, 191; Williams, *History of the Cayman Islands*, 32.

## Chapter Two

1. Duncan, “Capturing Giant Turtles in the Caribbean,” 177.
2. Heber Elroy Arch Sr. worked on building this boat with his father, Heber James Arch, and brothers. Heber Elroy Arch Sr. was born on September 17, 1898. Heber

Elroy Arch Sr., interview by Anita Ebanks, April 1893, transcript, CINA-OHP. Other Caymanians remembered the schooner the *Adams*. See Harris Bush, interview by Heather McLaughlin, February 27, 2001, transcript, CINA-OHP; Varion Ebanks, interview by Heather McLaughlin, September 11, 2000, transcript, CINA-OHP; David Cheslie Parsons, interview by Heather McLaughlin, April 16, 1991, transcript, CINA-OHP.

3. Duncan, "Capturing Giant Turtles," 177.

4. Menaugh, "Hunting Sea Turtles for Soup," 8.

5. Duncan, "Capturing Giant Turtles," 182–84.

6. Vaquero, *Life and Adventure*, 41; Gwenneth Bodden, interview by Mary Woodward, September 25, 1989, transcript, CINA-OHP.

7. Gwenneth Bodden, interview by Mary Woodward, September 25, 1989, transcript, CINA-OHP. See Hon. Alden McLaughlin, remarks for National Hero Dr. Roy Edison McTaggart, January 25, 2016.

8. Carlyle McLaughlin, interview by Heather McLaughlin, January 14, 2000, transcript, CINA-OHP; Heber Elroy James Sr., interview by Anita Ebanks, April 1983, transcript, CINA-OHP; Varion Ebanks, interview by Heather McLaughlin, September 11, 2000, transcript, CINA-OHP.

9. Maloney, "The Islands Time Forgot." Daireen Merren was the granddaughter of H. O. Merren and his wife, Katie McCoy. Daireen Merren, interview by Heather McLaughlin, April 16, 1991, transcript, CINA-OHP; Minnel Hill, interview by Pamela Moffit, January 13, 1993, transcript, CINA-OHP; Capt. John Hurlston, interview by Heather McLaughlin, November 14, 1990, CINA-OHP.

10. Capt. Dillon Kirkconnell, interview by Heather McLaughlin, May 13, 1994, transcript, CINA-OHP; Hirst, *A Handbook of the Cayman Islands*, 73.

11. Smith, *Maritime Heritage*, 130; Leopold Jervis, interview by Heather McLaughlin, October 26, 1990, transcript, CINA-OHP.

12. Thompson, *Fisheries of Cayman*, 16.

13. *Colonial Report on the Cayman Islands, 1905–06*, 7.

14. Young, *Narrative of a Residence*, 17.

15. Smith, *Maritime Heritage*, 128; Lambert, "Notes on Turtling," 61.

16. "The Turtle King"; T. K. BELLIS."

17. "The Colonial and Indian Exhibition," 246.

18. Porter, "Wealth in Turtles," 5.

19. Stevenson, "Report on the Coast Fisheries of Texas," 412.

20. Vaquero, *Life and Adventure*, 41.

21. *Colonial Reports—Annual. No. 810*, 6.

22. Anderson, *Mahogany*, 95–96; Higman, *Slave Populations*, 64; *Colonial Reports—Annual. No. 810*, 5.

23. *Colonial Reports—Miscellaneous. No. 39*, 7; Thompson, *Fisheries of Cayman Islands*, 13.

24. Michael Craton, *Founded upon the Seas*, 220. The Caymanian population ranged between 5,253 and 5,583 in the 1920s. See *Colonial Reports—Annual. No. 1298*, 4.

25. Sigbert (Bert) Watler, interview by Heather McLaughlin, March 14, 2002, transcript, CINA-OHP; Hirst, *Handbook of the Cayman Islands*, 36; Billmyer, "The Cayman Islands," 35.

26. Stevens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America*, 20.
27. Ena Chisholm, interview by Mary Woodward, August 7, 1990, transcript, CINA-OHP; Leopold Jervis, interview by Martin Keeley, May 1, 1964, transcript, CINA-OHP.
28. Smith, *Maritime Heritage*, 123; Smith, "The Caymanian Catboat," 332. Caymanian catboats were also sold to turtlemen at the Colombian island of Providencia. To learn more, see Márquez-Pérez, "Catboats, Lanchs, and Canoes," 480–503.
29. Henry M. Bodden, interview by Arthurlyn Pedley, June 12, 1991, transcript, CINA-OHP.
30. Ariel Forbes née Watson, interview by Heather McLaughlin, June 28, 2001, transcript, CINA-OHP; Henry M. Bodden, interview by Arthurlyn Pedley, June 12, 1991, transcript, CINA-OHP.
31. George Walton, interview by Heather McLaughlin, May 5, 1998, transcript, CINA OHP. His grandfather Edwin Walton was one of the earliest licensed captains in the Cayman Islands.
32. Henry M. Bodden, interview by Arthurlyn Pedley, June 12, 1991, transcript, CINA OHP. Others started their turtling careers as teenagers. See Joseph Ren Bryan, interview by Heather McLaughlin, April 12, 2000, transcript, CINA-OHP; Arturo Bodden, interview by Heather McLaughlin, May 28, 1991, transcript, CINA-OHP; Harris Bush, interview by Heather McLaughlin, February 27, 2001, transcript, CINA OHP; Varion Ebanks, interview by Heather McLaughlin, September 11, 2000, CINA OHP; Valma Hew, interview by Liz Schofield, December 1, 1997, CINA-OHP; Marley K. Rankine, interview by Heather McLaughlin, April 19, 2000, CINA-OHP; Henry B. Watson, interview by Heather McLaughlin, February 26, 1992, CINA-OHP.
33. H. J. Lake to governor of Jamaica, Brisbane, Australia, June 19, 1907, Custos Correspondence 1907 XH/786/3, CINA.
34. Buchanan, *Life and Adventure*, 261.
35. Valma Hew, interview by Liz Schofield, December 1, 1997, transcript, CINA-OHP.
36. Moquin-Tandon, *World of the Sea*, 362. For other accounts, see Buchanan, *Life and Adventures*, 262.
37. Jamaica Government Notice, Colonial Secretary's Office, October 18, 1871, UKNA PRO, CO 137/458, folio 303.
38. For accounts of illegal fishing in Cuba, see Malcolm Carl Bush, interview by Heather McLaughlin, October 9, 1990, CINA-OHP; Ira V. Walton, interview by Mary Elizabeth Ebanks, July 17, 1991, CINA-OHP.
39. Declaration of William A. Bodden, May 2, 1904, UKNA-PRO, FO 56/67, folios 544–45; declaration of John Jennett, May 2, 1904, UKNA-PRO, FO 56/67, folio 546; declaration of William James Bodden, May 2, 1904, UKNA-PRO, FO 56/67, folio 547; declaration of Daniel Feurtado, May 2, 1904, UKNA-PRO, FO 56/67, folios 548–49; declaration of Robert W. Bodden, May 2, 1904, UKNA-PRO, FO 56/67, folios 550–51; declaration of John Aaron Conolly, May 4, 1904, UKNA-PRO, FO 56/67, folio 552; declaration of John Wilmot Bodden, June 5, 1904, UKNA-PRO, FO 56/67, folios 557–58.
40. Duncan, "Capturing Giant Turtles," 178.
41. "A Locality Mariners Detest." For other shipwreck reports in the area, see Porter, "Canoeing along Nicaragua; 'Twas a Cheerful Disaster."

42. Varion Ebanks, interview by Heather McLaughlin, September 11, 2000, transcript, CINA-OHP.
43. Varion Ebanks, interview by Heather McLaughlin, September 11, 2000, transcript, CINA-OHP.
44. Esquemeling, *Buccaneers*, 220; Dampier, *A New Voyage*, 11, 16, 41; Bell, *Tangweera*, 275; Roberts, *Narrative of Voyages*, 94–95.
45. Thompson, *Fisheries of Cayman Islands*, 14.
46. Smith, *Maritime Heritage*, 69.
47. Minnel Hill, interview by Pamela Moffit, January 13, 1993, transcript, CINA-OHP.
48. Varion Ebanks, interview by Heather McLaughlin, September 11, 2000, transcript, CINA-OHP.
49. Hemingway, *Old Man and the Sea*, 35–36.
50. Minnel Hill, interview by Pamela Moffit, January 13, 1993, transcript, CINA-OHP; Varion Ebanks, interview by Heather McLaughlin, September 11, 2000, transcript, CINA-OHP; Henry M. Bodden, interview by Arthurlyn Pedley, June 12, 1991, transcript, CINA-OHP.
51. Harris Bush, interview by Heather McLaughlin, February 27, 2001, transcript, CINA-OHP.
52. Marley K. Rankine, interview by Heather McLaughlin, April 19, 2000, transcript, CINA-OHP, April 19, 2000.
53. On turtlemen accounts of ranging's origins, see Henry M. Bodden, interview by Arthurlyn Pedley, June 12, 1991, transcript, CINA-OHP; Varion Ebanks, interview by Heather McLaughlin, September 11, 2000, transcript, CINA-OHP; declaration of John Aaron Conolly, May 4, 1904, UKNA-PRO, FO 56/67, folio 552; declaration of William Thomas Eden, June 5, 1904, UKNA-PRO, FO 56/67, folios 554–55; declaration of John Wilmot Bodden, June 5, 1904, UKNA-PRO, FO 56/67, folios 557–58; Young, *Narrative of a Residence*, 41.
54. Varion Ebanks, interview by Heather McLaughlin, September 11, 2000, transcript, CINA-OHP; Henry M. Bodden, interview by Arthurlyn Pedley, June 12, 1991, transcript, CINA-OHP.
55. In the eighteenth century, it was typically called “turtle shell”—a more accurate term since hawksbills are marine turtles.
56. Henry Watson, interview by Heather McLaughlin, February 26, 1992, transcript, CINA-OHP.
57. Joseph Ren Bryan, interview by Heather McLaughlin, April 12, 2000, transcript, CINA-OHP; Valma Hew, interview by Liz Schofield, December 1, 1997, transcript, CINA-OHP; Marley K. Rankine (Capt.), interview by Heather McLaughlin, April 19, 2000, transcript, CINA-OHP.
58. Young, *Narrative of a Residence*, 41.
59. Henry Watson, interview by Heather McLaughlin, February 26, 1992, transcript, CINA-OHP.
60. Harris Bush, interview by Heather McLaughlin, February 27, 2001, transcript, CINA-OHP.



61. William Theophilus Ritch, interview by Arthurlyn Pedley, February 26, 1992, transcript, CINA-OHP; Ira V. Walton, interview by Mary Elizabeth Ebanks, July 17, 1991, transcript, CINA-OHP.
62. Septimore Scott, interview by Leonard Bodden, May 22, 1995, transcript, CINA-OHP.
63. Roberts, *Narratives of Voyages*, 42.
64. Valma Hew, interview by Liz Scofield, December 1, 1997, CINA-OHP; Ellen Elizabeth Yap, interview by Arthurlyn Pedley, February 27, 1992, CINA-OHP.
65. *Colonial Reports—Miscellaneous*. No. 39, 7.
66. Henry M. Bodden, interview by Arthurlyn Pedley, June 12, 1991, transcript, CINA-OHP.
67. Arturo Bodden, interview by Heather McLaughlin, May 28, 1991, transcript, CINA-OHP; Urban Myles, interview by Liz Schofield, March 17, 1999, transcript, CINA-OHP; Varion Ebanks, interview by Heather McLaughlin, September 11, 2000, transcript, CINA-OHP.
68. Hudson Taylor Anderson, interview by Denise Rodríguez-Archie, March 26, 1991, transcript, CINA-OHP.
69. Bassi, *Aqueous Territory*, 85–113.
70. Harris Bush, interview by Heather McLaughlin, February 27, 2001, transcript, CINA-OHP; Urban Myles, interview by Liz Schofield, March 17, 1999, transcript, CINA-OHP.
71. Varion Ebanks, interview by Heather McLaughlin, September 11, 2000, transcript, CINA-OHP.
72. Herbert Lee Ebanks, interview by Arthurlyn Pedley, February 27, 1991, transcript, CINA-OHP; Capt. Paul Hurlston, interview by Heather McLaughlin, June 19, 1996, transcript, CINA-OHP.
73. Henry M. Bodden, interview by Arthurlyn Pedley, June 12, 1991, transcript, CINA-OHP.
74. Dora Everetta Conolly, interview by Heather McLaughlin, January 22, 1991, transcript, CINA-OHP.
75. Aarona Kohlman, interview by Heather McLaughlin, August 14, 1992, transcript, CINA-OHP.
76. See Schwartz, *Sea of Storms*; Johnson, *Climate and Catastrophe in Cuba*; Mulcahy, *Hurricanes and Society*; Pérez Jr., *Winds of Change*.
77. Cochran, "Ocean's Perils," 2.
78. Cochran, "Ocean's Perils," 2.
79. Cochran, "Ocean's Perils," 2.
80. Herbert Tibbets, interview by Tricia Bodden, April 7, 2004, transcript, CINA-OHP.
81. Smith, *Maritime Heritage*, 136.
82. Smith, *Maritime Heritage*, 47; Leopold Jervis, interview by Martin Keely, May 1, 1984, transcript, CINA-OHP.
83. Smith, *Maritime Heritage*, 137–38; Government Notice No. 103/41, Commissioner's Office, Georgetown, September 29, 1941; Government Notice No. 105/41,

Commissioner's Office, Georgetown, October 3, 1941; Government Notice No. 106/41, October 3, 1941; Government Notice No. 107/41, Georgetown, October 6, 1941. For literary portrayals of the *Majestic*, see Bodden, *Gathering of Old Men*, 56–75; Matthiesen, *Far Tortuga*.

84. Harris Bush, interview by Heather McLaughlin, February 27, 2001, transcript, CINA-OHP.

85. Thompson, *Fisheries of Cayman Islands*, 14; Varion Ebanks, interview by Heather McLaughlin, September 11, 2000, transcript, CINA-OHP.

86. Minnel Hill, interview by Pamela Moffit, January 13, 1993, transcript, CINA-OHP; Carlyle McLaughlin, interview by Heather McLaughlin, January 14, 2000, transcript, CINA-OHP.

87. Paul Hurlston, interview by Heather McLaughlin, June 19, 1996, transcript, CINA-OHP.

88. Thompson, *Fisheries of Cayman Islands*, 14.

89. *Colonial Reports—Annual*. No. 1702, 14.

90. *Colonial Reports—Annual*. No. 73, 6.

91. Ellen Elizabeth Yap, interview by Arthurlyn Pedley, February 27, 1992, transcript, CINA-OHP.

92. *Colonial Reports—Annual*. No. 810, 5.

93. *Colonial Reports—Annual*. No. 1431, 5.

94. "Some Giant Green Sea Turtles Get Canned," 60.

95. Knight, "Norberg Thompson," 10–12.

96. Heber Elroy Arch Sr., interview by Anita Ebanks, April 1983, transcript, CINA-OHP; Arturo Bodden, interview by Heather McLaughlin, May 28, 1991, transcript, CINA-OHP; Harris Bush, interview by Heather McLaughlin, February 27, 2001, CINA-OHP; Malcolm Carl Bush, interview by Heather McLaughlin, October 9, 1990, transcript, CINA-OHP; Hubert Lee Ebanks, interview by Arthurlyn Pedley, February 27, 1991, transcript, CINA-OHP; Varion Ebanks, interview by Heather McLaughlin, September 11, 2000, transcript, CINA-OHP; David Cheslie Parsons, interview by Heather McLaughlin, February 3, 1993, transcript, CINA-OHP.

97. Malcolm, "The Turtle Industry in Key West," 5.

98. Malcolm, "The Turtle Industry in Key West," 6.

99. Malcolm Carl Bush, interview by Heather McLaughlin, October 9, 1990, transcript, CINA-OHP; Varion Ebanks, interview by Heather McLaughlin, September 11, 2000, transcript CINA-OHP; John Hurlston, interview by Heather McLaughlin, November 14, 1990, transcript, CINA-OHP; Leopold Jervis, interview by Martin Keely, May 1, 1984, transcript, CINA-OHP; Septimore Scott, interview by Leonard Bodden, May 22, 1995, transcript, CINA-OHP.

100. Thompson, *Fisheries of Cayman Islands*, 15.

101. Paul Hurlston, interview by Heather McLaughlin, June 19, 1996, transcript, CINA-OHP.

102. British Minister Lionel Carden to Governor of Jamaica, May 18, 1903, Cuba, CINA, Custos Correspondence 1903 XH/782/1.

103. Bodden, *Gathering of Old Men*, 7.

104. Varion Ebanks, interview by Heather McLaughlin, September 11, 2000, transcript, CINA-OHP.

105. Ariel Forbes née Watson, interview by Heather McLaughlin, June 28, 2001, transcript, CINA-OHP.

106. Capt. Dillon Kirkconnell, interview by Heather McLaughlin, May 13, 1994, CINA-OHP.

### Chapter Three

1. Caribbean historians also note the scholarly lacuna on these messier migrations. See Putnam, "Borderlands and Border Crossers." To recover these itinerant and informal migrations, I followed the turtlemen and visited the archives as well as libraries in the locales in which they frequently visited. Due to local and foreign interest in preserving the history of the anglophone presence in these hispanophone territories, there is a small but valuable body of oral histories, local newspapers, and other written documents on the anglophone Afro-Caribbean populations of Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and the Colombian islands of San Andrés and Providencia. I draw on these sources for this chapter.

2. Craton, *Founded upon the Seas*, 65. Others have recently attacked this view. See Williams, "Did Slavery Really," 162–64.

3. Chambers, *Race, Nation, and West Indian*, 10.

4. Davidson, *Historical Geography*.

5. Dawson, "William Pitt's Settlement," 677, 703; Craton, *Founded upon the Seas*, 65–66.

6. Anderson, *Mahogany*, 95–96.

7. Davidson, *Historical Geography*, 76.

8. Young, *Narrative of a Residence*, 150.

9. Chambers, *Race, Nation, and West Indian*, 78.

10. Davidson, *Historical Geography*, 76, 78.

11. Roberts, *Narrative of Voyages*, 58.

12. William (or Willy) Wood, interview by Arthur Pedlyn, 1980, transcript, CINA-OHP, Grand Cayman.

13. Hudson Taylor Anderson, interview by Denise Rodriguez-Archie, March 26, 1991, transcript, CINA-OHP.

14. Marshall, "Islands to Islands."

15. Putnam, "Eventually Alien," 278.

16. Ariel Forbes née Watson, interview by Heather McLaughlin, June 28, 2001, transcript, CINA-OHP.

17. Harris Bush, interview by Heather McLaughlin, February 27, 2001, transcript, CINA-OHP, February 27, 2001.

18. Harris Bush, interview by Heather McLaughlin, February 27, 2001, transcript, CINA-OHP, February 27, 2001.

19. Neagle, *America's Forgotten Colony*, 8.

20. *Colonial Reports—Annual*. No. 1092, 3.

21. McLeod, "Undesirable Aliens," 599.

22. Minnell Hill, interview by Pamela Moffit, January 13, 1993, transcript, CINA-OHP.
23. William Vanfield Dacres, interview by Leonard Bodden, July 12, 1994, transcript, CINA-OHP.
24. Lee Jarvis, interview by Martin Keeley, May 1, 1984, transcript, CINA-OHP.
25. Capt. Marley K. Rankine, interview by Heather McLaughlin, April 19, 2000, transcript, CINA-OHP.
26. Florrie Dixon, interview by Heather McLaughlin, February 5, 1991, transcript, CINA-OHP.
27. Dora Everett Connolly, interview by Heather McLaughlin, January 22, 1991, transcript, CINA-OHP.
28. Barrington Watler, interview by Ana Isabel Márquez, December 2011, Providencia Islands, Colombia. It can be found in Márquez Perez, "Culturas migratorias," 217–18.
29. Crawford, "A Transnational World," 41.
30. Ruth McLaughlin, interview by Liz Scholefield, December 13, 1995, transcript, CINA-OHP.
31. Waide Excell Watler, interview by Heather McLaughlin, November 26, 1996, transcript, CINA-OHP.
32. Freda Pearson Mitchell, interview by Heather McLaughlin, February 23, 2001, transcript, CINA-OHP.
33. For a discussion of guano in the southwestern Caribbean, see Skaggs, *The Great Guano Rush*; Parsons, *San Andrés and Providencia*, 24–25. For a recent account of Peruvian guano harvesting within a global context, see Cushman, *Guano and the Opening of the Pacific*.
34. Valma Hew, interview by Liz Scholefield, December 1, 1997, transcript, CINA-OHP.
35. William Theophilus Ritch, interview by Arthurlyn Pedley, February 26, 1992, transcript, CINA-OHP.
36. Interview of Hazel Barnard Cothrell (b. 1912) appears in Marshall, "Islands to Islands."
37. Interview of Dolores Brock Terry (b. 1927) appears in Marshall, "Islands to Islands."
38. Garriott, "The West Indian," 365.
39. Senior, *Gardening*, 19–21.
40. *Colonial Reports — Annual*. No. 879, 4.
41. Interview of Bonnylyn Tucker Quinn de Welcome (b. 1924) appears in Marshall, "Islands to Islands."
42. Palmer, "What Happen," 35.
43. Lefever, *Turtle Bogue*, 68.
44. Helen Hortense Banks, interview by Heather McLaughlin, August 30, 1994, transcript, CINA-OHP.
45. Emily T. Phillips, interview by Heather McLaughlin, March 7, 1995, transcript, CINA-OHP.
46. Hudson Taylor Anderson, interview by Denise Rodriguez-Archie, March 26, 1991, transcript, CINA-OHP.

47. Malcolm Carl Bush, interview by Heather McLaughlin, October 9, 1990, transcript, CINA-OHP.
48. James Earlie Whittaker, interview by Heather McLaughlin, December 4, 1990, transcript, CINA-OHP.
49. Lee Jervis, interview by Martin Keeley, May 1, 1984, transcript, CINA-OHP.
50. Lefever, *Turtle Bogue*, 106.
51. James Earlie Whittaker, interview by Heather McLaughlin, December 4, 1990, transcript, CINA-OHP.
52. William Vanfield Dacres, interview by Leonard Bernard, July 12, 1994, transcript, CINA-OHP.
53. Capt. Keith Tibbets, interview by Heather McLaughlin, October 25, 1990, transcript, CINA-OHP.
54. Sutherland, *Making of Belize*, 144.
55. Ashley Godfrey, interview by Heather McLaughlin, December 5, 1990, transcript, CINA-OHP.
56. Maximiliano E. Vélez (prefect) to Secretary of Government, November 18, 1908, Archivo General de la Nación (hereafter cited as AGN), Fondo Ministerio de Gobierno, Sección Primera, legajo 611, folios 200–201.
57. Gerónimo Martínez (governor of Bolívar) to President Rafael Reyes, November 4, 1908, AGN, Fondo Ministerio de Gobierno, Sección Primera, legajo 611, folio 202; President Rafael Reyes to Gerónimo Martínez, November 6, 1908, AGN, Fondo Ministerio de Gobierno, Sección Primera, legajo 611, folio 203; Maximiliano Vélez to Secretary of Government, November 18, 1908, AGN, Fondo Ministerio de Gobierno, Sección Primera, legajo 611, folios 200–201.
58. Cochran, “The Hurricane in San Andreas”; Cochran, “Hurricane in San Andreas.”
59. Sandner, *Centroamérica*, 360. Original quote is in Spanish; translated by author.
60. Duffis, *Blessed Heritage*, 77–78.
61. Holland, *Prolades Encyclopedia*, 9.
62. Roberts, *Narrative of Voyages*, 94–95.
63. Palmer, “What Happen,” 36.
64. Lefever, *Turtle Bogue*, 135.
65. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Miskitu raided the Talamanca region of Costa Rica for hawksbill turtles and Indians. See Offen, “Race and Place in Colonial Mosquitia,” 114; Palmer, “What Happen,” 35.
66. Márquez Pérez, *Povos dos recifes*, 45; Reid and Moreno Heckadon, *Memorias de un criollo*, 128; Parsons, *Green Turtle and Man*, 32.
67. Barenton Espedito Watler Robinson, interview by Leon Sultan, July 14, 2011, Lazy Hill, Old Providence Island. The transcript of the interview was found on the Providence Island Oral History Project website.
68. Wilson, *Crab Antics*, 209; Esquemeling, *Buccaneers*, 220; Dampier, *New Voyage*, 11.
69. Henry M. Bodden, interview by Arthurlyn Pedley, June 12, 1991, transcript, CINA-OHP.
70. Andrew Bush, interview by Anita Ebanks, 1976, transcript, CINA-OHP; Varion Ebanks, interview by Heather McLaughlin, September 11, 2000, transcript, CINA-OHP.

71. Mariners, like turtlemen, occasionally took on indigenous young men as apprentices to join them at sea or back at home as domestic helpers. This was the case for Kuna Charly Robinson. Providencia islander Charles Julius Robinson took home Kuna Charly Robinson as an apprentice when he was just a child in the 1880s. The sea captain gave him an English name, schooled him, and eventually worked with him on his boat, traveling to several Caribbean and Atlantic seaports before returning to San Blas as a prominent bicultural mediator. See Howe, *A People Who Would Not Kneel*, 26. The practice of Kuna or Miskitu apprenticeship may not have been an uncommon practice. Some Caymanians spent some time with these indigenous communities. See Marshall Watler, interview by Peggy Leshikar-Denton, January 4, 1991, transcript, CINA-OHP.

72. Márquez Pérez, “Catboats, Lanchs, and Canoes,” 492.

73. Robinson, “La Goleta de Persistence”; Robinson, *Spirit of Persistence*, 5.

74. Robinson, *Relatos de navegantes*, 39.

75. Robinson, *Spirit of Persistence*, 14.

76. Reid and Heckadon, *Memorias*, 128.

77. Márquez Pérez, “Catboats, Lanchs, and Canoes.”

78. Williams, *History of the Cayman Islands*, 78–79.

## Chapter Four

1. Governor of Jamaica, letter to secretary of state for the colonies, Telegram No. 358, April 1, 1959, UKNA, CO 1031/2822.

2. Governor of Jamaica, letter to secretary of state for the colonies, Telegram No. 367, April 2, 1959, UKNA, CO 1031/2822.

3. William A. G. Young, Jamaica Government Notice, Colonial Secretary’s Office, October 18, 1871, UKNA, CO 137/458, folio 303. The colonial secretary asked that this notice be sent to the Bahamas, the Leeward Islands, and Jamaica, too. Colonial Secretary William A. G. Young, minute paper, November 29, 1871, UKNA, folio 279.

4. Sloane, *Voyage to the Islands*, 87.

5. Smith, *Maritime Heritage*, 67.

6. Petition of William Eden and Company, January 16, 1871, UKNA, CO 137/456, folios 286–88.

7. Alex G. Dunslop, letter to the custos of the Cayman Islands, November 9, 1870, UKNA, CO 137/456, folio 294.

8. Custos William Eden Sr., letter to colonial secretary, October 21, 1872, UKNA, CO 137/466, folio 134.

9. Report of the Commodore of Her Majesty’s Ship *Griffon*, January 9, 1879, UKNA, CO 137/489, folio 94.

10. Lieutenant-Governor Edward Newton, Despatch No. 241: Exclusion of Inhabitants of Cayman Islands from Fishing on coast of Cuba, September 6, 1879, UKNA, CO 137/491, folio 163.

11. Minute No. 133: Fishery by Cayman Islanders in Cuban Waters, May 8, 1893, UKNA, CO 137/555, folio 56.

12. Edmund Parsons, letter to colonial secretary, March 29, 1893, UKNA, CO 137/555, folios 60–61.



13. Henry C. Bodden and twenty-eight unlisted names, letter to Edmund Parsons, February 28, 1893, UKNA, CO 137/555, folio 62.

14. Sir Henry Arthur Blake, letter to Marquess of Ripon (colonial secretary), May 4, 1883, UKNA, CO 137/555, folio 59.

15. Antonio Mansa, letter to H. Drummond Wolff (translated in English), July 20, 1893, UKNA, CO 137/558, folio 171.

16. There has been scholarly attention to the origins of the Sambo Miskitu, described as the descendants of shipwrecked Africans who joined with the indigenous peoples of Mosquitia to form a rival kingdom in the late seventeenth century. See Williams, "Living between Empires"; Offen, "Creating Mosquitia"; Dawson, "William Pitt's Settlement."

17. Bassi, *Aqueous Territory*, 85–88.

18. Naylor, *Penny Ante Imperialism*, 187.

19. Offen, "Creating Mosquitia," 279.

20. Naylor, *Penny Ante Imperialism*, 204.

21. Naylor, *Penny Ante Imperialism*, 204–5.

22. Young, *Narrative of a Residence*, 17.

23. British minister John Webster, letter to colonial secretary, March 10, 1884, UKNA, FO 56/68, folio 184.

24. Clerk Vestry Cayman Islands, letter to colonial secretary office, May 7, 1883, UKNA, FO 56/68, folios 184–85.

25. Clerk Vestry Cayman Islands, letter to colonial secretary office, May 7, 1883, UKNA, FO 56/68, folios 184–85; British minister John Webster, letter to colonial secretary office, May 17, 1886, UKNA, FO 56/68, folio 186.

26. Custos J. C. Panton, letter to colonial secretary, November 14, 1885, UKNA, FO 56/68, folio 185.

27. Colonial Secretary Walker Minute, CINA, Central Registry, box 5, Fishing Rights British Subjects on Quito Sueño Bank, ref. 9837/85.

28. Declaration of William A. Bodden, March 24, 1886, UKNA, FO 56/68, folio 186.

29. Declaration of William A. Bodden, October 25, 1888, Grand Cayman, CINA, Central Registry, Confidential Papers Relating to Nicaraguan Turtle Fishery.

30. Declaration of William A. Bodden, October 25, 1888, Grand Cayman, CINA, Central Registry, Confidential Papers Relating to Nicaraguan Turtle Fishery.

31. Owners, Masters, and Seamen of the Cayman Islands, letter to commissioner of the Cayman Islands, May 19, 1897, UKNA, FO 56/68, folios 188–89.

32. Caymanian Custos Sanguinetti noted in this correspondence how he had previously forwarded to the governor of Jamaica declarations from A. A. Thompson, E. Alley, U. E. Jackson, and W. J. Bodden, which were given on October 28, 1897, October 30, 1897, and November 1, 1897. Colonial secretary, letter to Frederick Shedden Sanguinetti (Custos), April 25, 1904; CINA, Custos Correspondence 1904 XH/783/1.

33. Colonial secretary, letter to Frederick Shedden Sanguinetti, April 25, 1904; CINA, Custos Correspondence 1904 XH/783/1. This incident was covered in the U.S. press, see "Soldier under the Tarpaulin," 25.

34. Joseph Chamberlain, letter to Sir Henry A. Blake, January 11, 1898, UKNA, FO 56/68, folio 189.

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51. Commissioner of the Cayman Islands, letter to the colonial secretary, April 12, 1904, UKNA, FO 56/67, folio 227.
52. Newspaper accounts widely reported on the British cruiser. See "Great Britain and Nicaragua: Heavy Damages Demanded," *Press*, April 22, 1904; "British Cruiser May Bombard Bluefields," *Hawaiian Gazette*, April 22, 1904, 1; *Limón Weekly News*, May 7, 1904.
53. Capt. Herbert Lyon to governor of Jamaica, Despatch No. 196, April 27, 1904, UKNA, FO 56/67, folio 280.
54. Edward Thornton, June 1904, UKNA, FO 56/67, folio 424.
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56. Capt. Herbert Lyon to Admiral Archibald L. Douglas, May 29, 1904, UKNA, FO 56/67, folio 490.

57. Minister Adolfo Altamirano to Minister Edward Thornton, June 27, 1904, UKNA, FO 56/67, folios 520–23.
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60. James A. Swettenham, letter to Secretary Alfred Lyttleton, February 2, 1904, CINA, Confidential Papers Relating to Nicaraguan Turtle Fishery, vol. 2.
61. James A. Swettenham, letter to secretary of state for the colonies, December 21, 1905, CINA, Confidential Papers Relating to Nicaraguan Turtle Fishery, vol. 2.
62. Herbert Harrison, Managua, November 25, 1904, CINA, Confidential Papers Relating to Nicaraguan Turtle Fishery, vol. 2.
63. Secretary Alfred Lyttleton, letter to Sir James Alexander Swettenham, December 1, 1905, CINA, Confidential Papers Relating to Nicaraguan Turtle Fishery, vol. 2.
64. Jamaican governor reported this news to the secretary of state for the colonies. Sydney Olivier, letter to Victor Alexander Bruce (Earl of Elgin), June 24, 1907, CINA, Confidential Papers Relating to Nicaraguan Turtle Fishery, vol. 2.
65. Hugh Clarence Bourne, letter to William A. Bodden and Captain Thompson, June 15, 1907; Victor Alexander Bruce (Earl of Elgin), letter to Sydney Olivier, August 6, 1907, CINA, Confidential Papers Relating to Nicaraguan Turtle Fishery, vol. 2.
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67. Chamorro, “El viento asunto.”
68. George Weitzel, letter to U.S. secretary of state, Managua, May 7, 1912, NARA, RG 59, M634.
69. Langley, *Banana Wars*, 175–76. For a full discussion of U.S. Dollar Diplomacy activities in Nicaragua, see Gobat, *Confronting the American Dream*.
70. George Weitzel, letter to U.S. secretary of state, May 7, 1912, NARA, RG 59, M634.
71. In a confidential communication between U.S. minister George Weitzel and Nicaraguan president Adolfo Díaz, the president shared how Lionel Carden threaten to advocate for a British invasion of the country rather than swift treaty negotiations with the Foreign Office in London. See George Weitzel, letter to U.S. secretary of state, May 7, 1912. NARA, RG 59, M634.
72. After Nicaraguan authorities threw out a number of foreigners including British vice consul in Mosquitia, the British demanded indemnities and occupied the port of Corinto on the northwestern portion of Nicaragua’s Pacific coast. For more on this incident, see Sloan, “Anglo-American Relations,” 487.
73. Treaty Series, 1917, No. 8: Treaty between the United Kingdom and Nicaragua for the Regulation of the Turtle Fishing Industry in the Territorial Waters of Nicaragua as Regards Fishing Vessels Belonging to the Cayman Islanders.
74. Leopold Jarvis, interview by Martin Keeley, May 1, 1984, transcript, CINA-OHP; interview by Heather McLaughlin, October 26, 1990, transcript, CINA-OHP.
75. Under his pseudonym, Ephraim G. Squier offers a fictional account of a shipwrecked experience and tense interactions with Providencia turtlemen at Roncador

Cay; see Bard, *Waikna*, 39–55. Newspapers occasionally covered these disasters; see “’Twas a Cheerful Disaster”; “A Locality Mariners Detest,” 1.

76. Henry B. Watson, interview by Heather McLaughlin, February 26, 1992, transcript, CINA-OHP.

77. Law 52 of 1912 (October 26) turned the Archipelago of San Andrés into a national intendency. See Robinson, “Intendency.”

78. Newball, “The New Administration.”

79. Crawford, “Panama Fever.”

80. Santiago Guerrero, letter to minister of government, July 8, 1912, AGN, Fondo de Ministerio de Gobierno, Sección Primera, legajo 698, folios 363–401.

81. Governor José de la Vega, letter to minister of foreign relations, October 6, 1911, AGN, Fondo de Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Consulado de Colombia en Londres, transferencia 10, caja 2, carpeta 12, folio 65.

82. Francis Stronge, letter to Colombian minister Enrique Olaya Herrera, January 13, 1911, CINA, No. 22841/1909, Nicaraguan Turtle Fishery.

83. Gonzalo Pérez, letter to W. L. Ryan, *Searchlight*, San Andrés Island, April 2, 1913, 1.

84. Gonzalo Pérez, report, June 13, 1913, AGN, Fondo de Ministerio de Gobierno, Sección Primera, tomo 921, folio 92.

85. Antonio José Sanchez, letter to minister of foreign relations, April 7, 1914, AGN, Fondo de Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Sección Primera, Diplomática y Consular, Correspondencia con Gobernación de Intendencia Nacional de San Andrés y Providencia, transferencia 10, caja 71, carpeta 540, folio 46.

86. Francis A. Newball, letter to the minister of government, April 23, 1914, AGN, Fondo de Ministerio de Gobierno, Sección Primera, tomo 732, folio 474. Newball’s letter was forwarded to the Ministry of Foreign Relations.

87. Francisco José, letter to minister of foreign relations in Great Britain, February 14, 1914, AGN, Fondo de Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Consulado en Londres, Transferencia Segunda, caja 30, carpeta 8, folio 93.

88. *Informe del Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores*, 145.

89. Howard, “Problems of Our Archipelago.”

90. The Morant and Pedro Cays Fishery Act (April 27, 1907).

91. Howard, “Problems of Our Archipelago.”

92. Cleveland H. Hawkins, letter to Carlos M. Hernández, June 8, 1923, AGN, Fondo de Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Sección Primera, Consulado de Colombia en Londres, Transferencia Segunda, caja 30, carpeta 8, folio 116.

93. Decree 95 of August 27, 1924, AGN, Fondo de Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Sección Primera, Correspondencia con la Intendencia Nacional de San Andrés y Providencia, folios 197–98.

94. H. H. Hutchings, letter to the secretary of the colonies, August 20, 1924, CINA, Central Registry, pt. 2, ref. 79/37.

95. Summary Proceedings in the investigation of hawksbill theft by English ships in the Colombian cays as reported to the chief of the Coast Guard of San Andrés and Providencia, September 5, 1925, AGN, Fondo de Ministerio de Gobierno, Sección Primera, tomo 921, folios 195–209.

96. Benjamin Baena, cablegram to Proto Vicente Fonseca, September 3, 1925, AGN, Fondo de Ministerio de Gobierno, Sección Primera, tomo 921, folio 196.
97. Proto Vicente Fonseca, telegram to ministry of foreign relations, September 8, 1925, AGN, Fondo de Ministerio de Gobierno, Sección Primera, tomo 921, folio 141.
98. Jorge Luna Ospina, report, May 15, 1925, AGN, Fondo de Ministerio de Gobierno, Sección Primera, tomo 921, folio 15.
99. Ministry of foreign relations, letter to ministry of government, September 9, 1925, AGN, Fondo de Ministerio de Gobierno, Sección Primera, tomo 921, folio 142.
100. Proto Vicente Fonseca, letter to minister of government, September 7, 1925, AGN, Fondo de Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Sección Primera, Correspondencia con la Intendencia Nacional de San Andrés y Providencia, folio 118.
101. Proto Vicente Fonseca, letter to the minister of government, September 23, 1925, AGN, Fondo de Ministerio de Gobierno, Sección Primera, tomo 921, folio 178.
102. For Caymanian accounts of familial links to British Honduras, see Helen Hortense, interview by Heather McLaughlin, August 30, 1994; Dillon Kirkconnell, interview by Heather McLaughlin, May 13, 1994; Marley K. Rankine, interview by Heather McLaughlin, April 19, 2000; Waide Excell Watler, interview by Heather McLaughlin, November 25, 1996, transcript, CINA-OHP. For a discussion on Caymanian settlement on the Bay Islands, see Davidson, *Historical Geography*, 75–76.
103. Henry B. Watson, interview by Leonard Bodden, May 20, 1995; Minnell Hill, interview by Pamela Moffit, January 13, 1993, transcript, CINA-OHP.
104. Henry Watson, interview by Heather McLaughlin, February 26, 1992, transcript, CINA-OHP.
105. Proto Vicente Fonseca, radiotelegram to minister of government, September 26, 1925, AGN, Ministerio de Gobierno, Sección Primera, tomo 921, folio 161.
106. Customs agent, letter to H. H. Hutchings, October 5, 1925, CINA, Central Registry, pt. 2, ref. 79/37.
107. Walton, “Cayman Vessels Seized.”
108. Walton, “Cayman Vessels Seized.”
109. E. A. De Comeau, letter to William J. Sullivan, January 7, 1926, CINA, Central Registry, pt. 2, ref. 79/37; Henry B. Watson, interview by Leonard Bodden, May 20, 1995, transcript, CINA-OHP.
110. E. A. De Comeau, letter to William J. Sullivan, January 7, 1926, CINA, Central Registry, pt. 2, ref. 79/37. Survivor Henry B. Watson recalled the visit by the British consul. He also noted that they received money to pay for food and shelter, although his reports of the exact amount were inconsistent. Henry B. Watson, interview by Leonard Bodden, May 20, 1995, transcript, CINA-OHP.
111. Edwin Walton, letter to H. H. Hutchings, January 28, 1926, CINA, Central Registry, pt. 2, ref. 79/37.
112. William J. Sullivan, letter to Sir Austen Chamberlain, February 8, 1926, CINA, Central Registry, pt. 2, ref. 79/37.
113. Eduardo Restrepo Saez, letter to William J. Sullivan, February 9, 1926, CINA, Central Registry, pt. 2, ref. 79/37.
114. E. A. De Comeau, letter to William J. Sullivan, confidential memorandum, January 11, 1926, UKNA, FO 135/418, folios 15–18.

115. Colombian coastal newspapers published some articles on the administrative situation on the archipelago. On the ousting of Intendant Eugenio Garnica, see “El Abandono de las islas”; “Lo que pasaron en San Andrés”; “El caso de San Andrés.”

116. E. A. De Comeau, letter to William J. Sullivan, confidential memorandum, January 11, 1926, UKNA, FO 135/418, folios 15–18.

117. Colonial secretary, letter to commissioner of the Cayman Islands, January 8, 1926, CINA, Central Registry, pt. 2, ref. 79/37.

118. Señor Cabo del Resguardo Juan Archbold, “Diligencia de Benjamín Howard,” May 17, 1926; Jefe del Resguardo Pablo Emilio Ramírez, “Diligencia de Juan G. Howard,” May 24 1926, AGN, Sección Primera, Fondo de Ministerio de Gobierno, tomo 921, folios 137–38.

119. Collector of revenue, commissioner of the Cayman Islands, May 3, 1926, CINA, Central Registry, pt. 2, ref. 79/37.

120. Collector of revenue, commissioner of the Cayman Islands, May 3, 1926, CINA, Central Registry, pt. 2, ref. 79/37.

121. Governor of Jamaica, letter to chargé d'affaires, June 2, 1926, CINA, Central Registry, pt. 2, ref. 79/37.

122. Collector of revenue, letter to the commissioner of the Cayman Islands, February 11, 1926, CINA, Central Registry, pt. 2, ref. 79/37.

123. Other than the construction of a lighthouse on Roncador in 1919, the United States neither occupied nor settled any of the cays. The United States claimed it as one of several territories through the Guano Act of 1865.

124. Superior Tribunal of the Judicial District of Cartagena, June 6, 1926, CINA, Central Registry, pt. 2, ref. 79/37.

125. Colonial secretary, letter to the commissioner of the Cayman Islands, May 19, 1930, CINA, Central Registry, pt. 2, ref. 79/37.

126. Colonial secretary, letter to the commissioner of the Cayman Islands, October 3, 1930, CINA, Central Registry, pt. 2, ref. 79/37.

127. Colonial secretary, letter to the commissioner of the Cayman Islands, October 31, 1930, CINA, Central Registry, pt. 2, ref. 79/37.

128. W. S. Jervis, letter to collector of revenue of Cayman Brac, July 9, 1934; commissioner of the Cayman Islands, letter to W. S. Jervis, July 14, 1934, CINA, Central Registry, pt. 2, ref. 79/37.

129. Acting commissioner of the Cayman Islands, speech delivered at ceremony for Capt. Edwin Walton, August 18, 1930, CINA, Central Registry, pt. 2, ref. 79/37.

130. Acting commissioner of the Cayman Islands, speech delivered at ceremony for Capt. Edwin Walton, August 18, 1930, CINA, Central Registry, pt. 2, ref. 79/37.

131. Edmund Howard, letter to Hon. Chief Secretary, April 29, 1959, UKNA, CO 1031/2822: Confidential, West Indian Departments, 1957–59.

## Chapter Five

1. Langlely, “Capturing Green Turtles,” 43.
2. Langlely, “Capturing Green Turtles,” 95.



3. Langley, "Capturing Green Turtles," 101–2. During the Second World War, the U.S. Navy purchased the *Adams* and converted the vessel into a diesel engine but kept its sails and rigging.

4. Langley, "Capturing Green Turtles," 74.

5. Langley, "Capturing Green Turtles," 95.

6. Langley, "Capturing Green Turtles," 99.

7. Langley, "Capturing Green Turtles," 94.

8. Langley, "Capturing Green Turtles," 94.

9. "Green and Loggerhead Turtles Proposed for Foreign Endangered Species List," Department of Interior news release, Archie F. Carr Papers.

10. Spence, "'They Had the Sea,'" 105.

11. The western Caribbean was an active target for German submarine attacks. On June 23, 1942, Germans stopped the thirty-five-ton schooner *Resolute* on route to San Andrés Island. Only four of the ten crew members survived the attack. On July 2, 1942, a German U-boat torpedoed the United Fruit Company steamer *San Pablo*, docked at Puerto Limón in Costa Rica, killing twenty-four Costa Rican workers. The attack triggered a massive anti-German riot in San José the following day and forced the Costa Rican government to build a four-hundred-person internment camp for German prisoners. On July 21, 1942, German U-boaters sunk *Roamar*, a 110-ton schooner, off San Andrés Island. German submarines successfully destroyed a third Colombian schooner the following year. See Dyer, "The Story of Costa Rica's"; Molano, "En 1942 submarinos alemanes."

12. James J. Parsons to Archie Carr, September 21, 1968. Series 2: Correspondence, 1930–1987, box 21, Archie F. Carr, Jr. Papers.

13. *Cayman Islands (Dependency of Jamaica), Report for the Years 1955 and 1956*, 19;

14. *Cayman Islands (Dependency of Jamaica), Report for the Years 1955 and 1956*, 17–19.

15. *Cayman Islands (Dependency of Jamaica), Report for the Years 1955 and 1956*, 18.

16. *Cayman Islands (Dependency of Jamaica), Report for the Years 1955 and 1956*, 3.

17. *Cayman Islands (Dependency of Jamaica), Report for the Years 1955 and 1956*, 3.

18. Williams, *History of the Cayman Islands*, 76–77.

19. *Cayman Islands (Dependency of Jamaica), Report for the Years 1955 and 1956*, 5.

20. *Cayman Islands (Dependency of Jamaica), Report for the Years 1955 and 1956*, 5.

21. Langley, "Capturing Green Turtles," 123.

22. Langley, "Capturing Green Turtles," 123.

23. Carr, "The Passing of the Fleet," 17.

24. Carr, "Passing of the Fleet," 17.

25. Davis, *Man Who Saved Sea Turtles*, 20.

26. Davis, *Man Who Saved Sea Turtles*, 39–40, 63–66.

27. Carr, *High Jungles and Low*, 61.

28. Carr, *So Excellent a Fishe*, 6. Carr met Guillermo "Billy" Cruz in 1949 and kept in touch with him throughout the years, even before Cruz began working with Carr on his sea turtle research in Costa Rica. See Series 2: Correspondence, 1930–1987, box 17, Archie F. Carr, Jr. Papers.

29. Lefever, *Turtle Bogue*, 131.

30. Carr, *Windward Road*, 217.
31. Carr, *Windward Road*, 226.
32. Carr, "Passing of the Fleet," 18.
33. Carr, "Passing of the Fleet," 18.
34. Carr, "Passing of the Fleet," 18.
35. Carr, *Windward Road*, 213.
36. Carr, *Windward Road*, 226.
37. Carr, *Windward Road*, 229.
38. Carr, *Windward Road*, 230–31.
39. Carr, *Windward Road*, 66–68.
40. Carr, *Windward Road*, 116.
41. Carr, *Windward Road*, 66–67.
42. Carr, *Windward Road*, 139–40, 152.
43. Carr, *Windward Road*, 249–51.
44. Lefever, *Turtle Bogue*, 133.
45. Lefever, *Turtle Bogue*, 134.
46. Lefever, *Turtle Bogue*, 95–103.
47. Carr, *Windward Road*, 251.
48. He was not the first to execute such a program. In the 1930s, marine biologist Frank Moorehouse tagged turtles in Australia, while zoologist John Hendrickson adopted Moorehouse's use of tags for his turtle research in Malaya. See Rieser, *Case of the Green Turtle*, 54.
49. Carr, *So Excellent a Fishe*, 14.
50. Carr and Giovannoli, "The Ecology and Migrations of Sea Turtles," 1–3.
51. Carr and Giovannoli, "Results of Field Work in Costa Rica, 1955," 21–22.
52. Carr, *So Excellent a Fishe*, 30.
53. Ogren to Carr, letter, June 17, 1956, AFC-UFL.
54. Lefever, *Turtle Bogue*, 66–70.
55. Carr and Ogren, "The Ecology and Migrations of Sea Turtles," 12.
56. Carr and Ogren, "The Green Turtle in the Caribbean Sea," 11–12.
57. Powers and Carr, *Brotherhood of the Green Turtle*, 11.
58. Powers and Carr, *Brotherhood of the Green Turtle*, 11.
59. Powers and Carr, *Brotherhood of the Green Turtle*, 15.
60. Carr, *Windward Road*, xi, xv.
61. Powers and Carr, *Brotherhood of the Green Turtle*, 13.
62. American naturalist and hunter Roy Chapman Andrews called for U.S. government intervention in the Pacific whaling industry in Alaska. See Kroll, *America's Ocean Wilderness*, 19–21.
63. Carr, *Windward Road*, 159.
64. Carr, *So Excellent a Fishe*, 19.
65. Carr wrote about the weekend he spent with the Figueres family in Carr, *So Excellent a Fishe*, 210–11.
66. "Contrato," *La Nación*, May 4, 1965. The Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock leased beachfront to the Caribbean Conservation Corporation, which Billy Cruz signed on behalf of the CCC.

67. Hamblin, *Oceanographers and the Cold War*, 7–10.
68. Hamblin, *Oceanographers and the Cold War*, 12.
69. Carr, *So Excellent a Fishe*, 4–6.
70. Cromie, “Operation Green Turtle,” 63.
71. Davis, *Man Who Saved Sea Turtles*, 164–65.
72. Carr, *So Excellent a Fishe*, 23.
73. Carr, *So Excellent a Fishe*, 23.
74. Cromie, “Operation Green Turtle,” 60; Carr, *So Excellent a Fishe*, 222–26, 230–31.
75. Carr, *So Excellent a Fishe*, 229–30.
76. Carr, *So Excellent a Fishe*, 237–38.
77. Rieser, *Case of the Green Turtle*, 135–36.
78. Following the recommendations of Archie Carr, the Marine Sea Turtle Specialist Group set out a number of regulations. Rieser, *Case of the Green Turtle*, 132–35.
79. Rieser, *Case of the Green Turtle*, 148–49.
80. Rieser, *Case of the Green Turtle*, 149–50.
81. For a more detailed discussion of this process, see Rieser, *Case of the Green Turtle*, 183–98.

## Conclusion

1. Matthiessen, *Far Tortuga*, 31.
2. Matthiessen, *Far Tortuga*, 21.
3. Michod, “Living on the Edge of Life.”
4. For recent examples of such scholarship, see Bassi, *Aqueous Territory*; Perl-Rosenthal, *Citizen Sailors*.
5. Blum, “The Prospect of Oceanic Studies,” *PMLA* 125, no. 3 (May 2010), 4.
6. “Territorial and Maritime Dispute (Nicaragua v. Colombia),” unofficial press release no. 2012/33.
7. Rogers, “Borders.”
8. Randin, “Small-Scale Fishers,” 505–6.
9. Knorovsky, “In Costa Rica”; Bjorndal et al., “Twenty-Six Years.”
10. Wallace, “Costa Rican Murder.”
11. Wallace, “Costa Rican Murder.”
12. Fendt, “4 Convicted.”
13. John McLean, letter to *New York Times*, October 24, 1982, 342.
14. Archie Carr, David Ehrenfeld, George Balazs, and Wayne King, letter to the editor, *New York Times*, October 27, 1982. The *New York Times* did not publish the editorial. See Series 2. Correspondence, 1930–1987, box 20. Archie F. Carr, Jr. Papers.
15. IPBES, “Media Release: Nature’s Dangerous Decline.”
16. For a snippet of the debate, see Braje, “Evaluating the Anthropocene”; Finney and Edwards, “The ‘Anthropocene’ Epoch”; Crutzen and Stoermer, “The Anthropocene.”
17. Waters et al., “The Anthropocene”; Steffen, Crutzen, and McNeil, “The Anthropocene”; McNeil and Engelke, *Great Acceleration*.

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