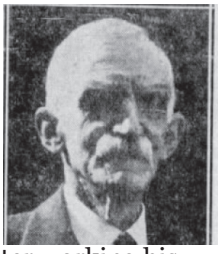
Captain Charles Butman Munson

Clan Daniel

From the U.S.S. Merrimac to Munson Island

by Lori Hahn



C.B. Munson, born in New Haven, Connecticut in 1852 on terra firma, would spend 47 years of his life on the water working his way to captain. He would sail clipper ships in Asian waters and steamships in the coastal waters of the United States. His story is one of adventure, but ultimately, his favorite spot was at home, with his family.

He didn't cut an imposing figure: He was average height and thin as a rail. It's hard to think of Charles living a life of seafaring daring-do, but he did.

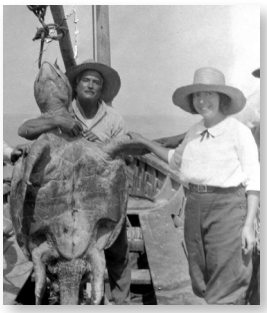
Along the way, he found the love of his life, Fanny Gilbert Taylor. Fanny was born in Nassau, Bermuda in 1857. Her father brought her family to the United States and started work as a crewman on a whaler. Once he had a few children, he worked on land as a carpenter. Fanny and Charles married in 1877 in Florida.

The couple settled in Miami during his ocean-going years and in later life settled in Jacksonville. They had one son, Charles Newton Munson, called "Newt" by those who knew him. Newt grew up at the shore as his father spent most of his days at sea. The family spent their time between Connecticut and Florida.

Captain Munson gained a reputation as an expert seaman who had served as shipping clerk, boatswain, quartermaster, lieutenant, second officer and first officer, until he ultimately became a captain who mastered every port between Shanghai and Virginia. He was also an expert of ports through Mexico and South America. His expertise was well-known, which is why he was urgently called by Admiral C. T. Sampson on the very day the Spanish-American war began in 1898 to pilot the Atlantic Fleet to Cuba. Battles ensued, and Munson would be shifted from ship to ship. Finally, on 1 Jun he was ordered aboard the Merrimac to captain with instruction to let the Admiral rest until 2 am on 2 Jun. At 3:30 am, the crew, save a band of seven volunteers, were removed from the Merrimac and left in the charge of Lt Hobson, who had instructions to block the harbor entrance with a sunken Merrimac. The skeleton crew of seven improvised torpedoes which were placed strategically on the Merrimac. Then, the Spanish fleet damaged the Merrimac's steering disallowing it to be put firmly in its blocking space at the harbor entrance. Then, only three of the ten torpedoes exploded, but a Spanish mine put a hole into the Merrimac and finally, the continued gunfired and torpedoes sunk the Merrimac in the wrong poistion. The ship was lost for naught, as the harbor was not blocked.

Though the ship was lost, the Spanish were defeated in Cuba a month later.

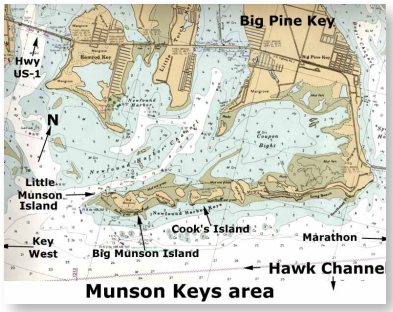
Captain Munson had many adventures over the course of his career. In old age, he retired to Jacksonville, where he died in 1933.



Newt & secretary Ruth Ellison with sea turtle

In 1923, Newt purchased four small islands in the Keys of Florida - Little Munson Island, Big Munson Island, Cook's Island, and Carrier Island. He barged a building down from Jacksonville to start his winter get-a-way on Little Munson. He sold one island to Capt. Percy Cook. He gave Big Munson Island to his secretary, Ruth Ellison. It's not known who Carrier Island was sold to.

On Newt's death, just a year after the death of his father, Ada did not go back to the island. She never cared for it. When she died, Little Munson went to Ruth Ellison as well. Ruth sold off Little Munson Island to a Chicago manufacturer in 1936 and then to another owner during the Truman administration. Its greatest claim to fame was being the site for locations shooting for the movie, "PT-109," which was based on former president John F. Kennedy's WWII experiences in the Pacific. The island would go through many owners, including drug kingpins and Homer Formby (of refinishing fame) until being sold to a resort club. It is now known as Little Palm Island.



Munson Keys area

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