

## The Eysters, a Family with a Passion

By Mary Ann Sturken, LMKA member

Imagine sharing your home with tens of thousands of historical documents, photos and artifacts of the Florida Keys, and trying to get a museum started, all at the age of 91! This is the dream of Irving Eyster, his wife Jeane, 88, and their family. Irving and Jeane live oceanside on Lower Matecumbe Key. Irving is the president of the Matecumbe Historical Trust Corp., a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to the education, history and preservation of the Florida Keys.

The Eysters have lived on Lower Matecumbe since 1952 and have raised their three children here. They feel very fortunate to have their grown children and grandchildren here in the place which they consider to be Paradise.

The day in late April that my husband and I visited the Eysters, their daughter Barbara Edgar was at their home and she filmed our interview. Barbara shared her firsthand experiences of growing up on Lower Matecumbe with the ocean as her playground. She said she loved living on the ocean and learned a great deal about birds, fish, aquatic animals, and other wildlife during her childhood.

Irving and Jeane met and married in Indiana. They were both pilots and came to Miami in January, 1947, to attend an air show. At that time they traveled to Key West for the first time, and liked it so much they decided to move there. They lived there for a few years and then Irving thought it became too crowded, so they searched the Keys looking for a new place to live and settled on Lower Matecumbe because of its beaches and beauty. At first they bought a trailer and moved it onto their property while their home was being built. In addition to their home, they had eight motel rooms constructed near their house, which they rented out. Two of those rooms sank during one of the major hurricanes of the 1960 s. Ultimately, they ended up making three apartments, which they continue to rent. When they built their home, the Eysters were the eighth house on Lower Matecumbe. They have a beautiful view of the ocean and enjoy magnificent sunrises.

Irving Eyster has been an archaeologist and historian in the Florida Keys for more than 60 years. He taught archaeology at Florida International University and the University of Miami. He also taught anthropology at Miami-Dade Community College. He is the author of several books, his most recent is [Dr. Jeremiah Reade Explores Florida 1882-1883](#), which was published in 2007.

Irving was greatly influenced by his grandfather, Dr. Jeremiah Reade, a country doctor, and he credits his grandfather with instilling a love of history in him at a young age. The book contains many old, interesting photos of Florida. The introduction to the book is written by Irving; the remainder is devoted to the writings of his grandfather as he visited Florida from 1882-1883. At that time, little was known about Florida and many people were curious about the state. During his travels, Dr. Reade developed a wonderful affection for Florida. He loved the climate, the vegetation, and opportunities that abounded for people willing to take a chance. Dr. Reade's important writings offer a very descriptive look into a Florida of the past with facts that will intrigue you. These writings appeared in a column in the Indianapolis Times newspaper back in 1882-83.

For many years, Jeane has been the typist of her husband's writings. She originally typed the writings of Dr. Reade using a typewriter and later she retyped them using a computer. She is no longer able to type, so their daughter Barbara has taken over that job.

Irving Eyster and his family hope that their passion for building a museum will come to fruition in the very near future. They want to share the history of the Keys with others, and what better way than to have the artifacts and memorabilia exhibited in a museum for all to see?



If you're interested in learning more about the Irving Eyster Museum of Florida Keys History, please visit the website at: [www.MatecumbeHistoricalTrust.com](http://www.MatecumbeHistoricalTrust.com), or you can call the Eysters at 305-664-9504.