2 Cape Haze Marine Laboratory

In 1954, Anne and William H. Vanderbilt (W.H.V. 1901–1981) asked a young marine biologist, Dr. Eugenie Clark, to give a lecture at an Englewood school. The Vanderbilts took along their 14-year-old son, who had a keen interest in fish, which he kept in several aquariums. According to Dr. Clark, "The school was packed and the speech was successful enough for the Vanderbilts to offer to fund a laboratory for me nearby with no strings attached."

Those who have read Jack Alexander's *Rotonda* know that William and his half brother Alfred were grandsons of Cornelius Vanderbilt, who left an estate in excess of $100 million at his death. Beginning in 1951, the brothers started buying land in the Cape Haze/Rotonda area, and by 1958, they owned a total of 35,033 acres. The tall stand of Australian Pines that separates Placida Harbour from Cape Haze represents one of the southern boundaries of the 2-V Ranch, as their property was known.

Six months after giving her lecture, a 33-year-old Eugenie Clark returned to Placida to open the Cape Haze Marine Laboratory, a 12-by-20 foot wooden building on skids, with a sink and shelves for specimens. Alfred Vanderbilt, who had a house nearby, lent the lab his boat, a 21-foot Chris Craft, called *Dancer*. The boat was named after Alfred's famous horse, *Native Dancer*. Even though the folklore says that this lab was located on Placida Harbour property, it wasn't. However, it was just over the fence from building #29 on the spot now occupied by a yellow house. This location has been authenticated by Dr. Clark herself and by others who frequented the laboratory. (Whether the lab was on our property or not is not critical, because its presence later brought William Mote to the scene and then Peder Wallenberg. As they say, *the rest is history*.)

William and Anne Vanderbilt introduced Eugenie (or Genie, as she is known to her friends and associates) to a local fisherman by the name of Beryl Chadwick. Chadwick's knowledge of the local waters was legendary, and he assisted Dr. Clark in locating and catching the species she wanted to study. Dr. Clark told us that she collected every type of fish that existed in Lemon Bay. Fishermen would bring unusual fish to her and were disappointed if they found that she already had such a specimen.

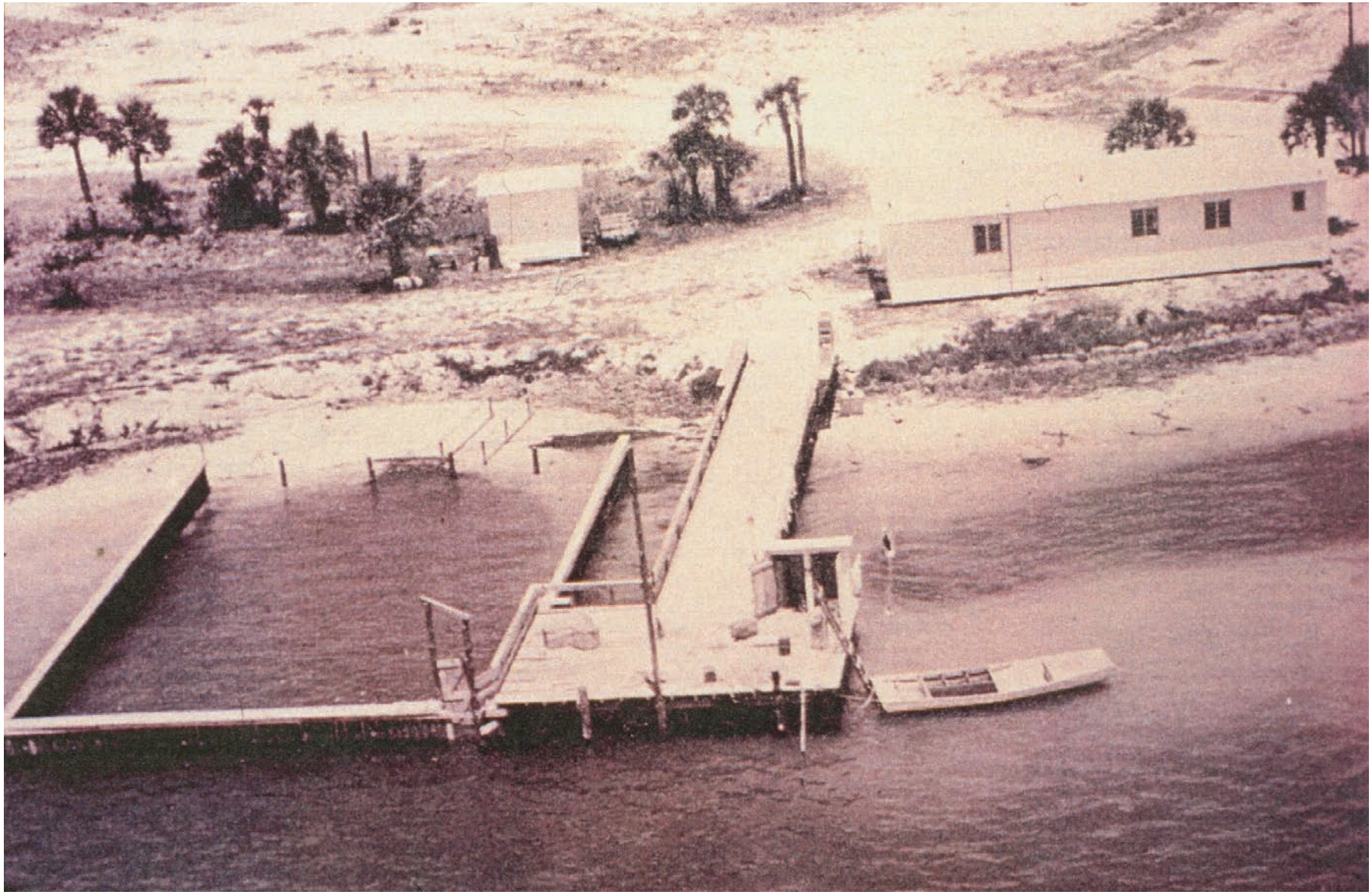
When Beryl and Dr. Clark observed fishermen pulling up their nets, they would go over to them in a boat and collect the fish that the fishermen didn't want. They soon had a wide variety of species to study and conduct research.

Mary Kay Chadwick Krantz, Beryl's daughter, gave me some wonderful recollections of the Vanderbilts, her father, and Dr. Clark. She said that the Vanderbilts were "the kindest people … down to earth with no pretenses … always insisting that people call them by their first names. The Placida area was poor, with people like myself owning only a single pair of shoes. Anne Vanderbilt saw to it that children had at least two pair of shoes." Mary Kay told me how her father would return home from grouper fishing in the Gulf and would come in at night through Stump Pass by listening to the waves. His equipment was a compass and the stars—no lights. "He never went aground because that was considered a mortal sin." She added, "Dr. Clark loved my dad, and he loved her. Dr. Clark is a fantastic person."

The day after opening the lab in January 1955, Dr. Clark got a call from Dr. John Heller, Director of the New England Institute for Medical Research. Heller was looking for a large shark so that the liver could be removed to assist his research on cancer and cholesterol formation. Beryl reportedly said, "I've been a shark fisherman for 15 years," and proceeded to put together a special line for catching one. Using 300 feet of extremely heavy line, he attached 16 shorter lines, each ending in steel chain and a large hook. Then he anchored the rig two miles offshore in the Gulf and baited each hook with a mullet. The next morning, with Dr. Clark, Dr. Heller, and his wife in attendance, Beryl inspected the line and captured two sharks weighing a total of 700 pounds. One was a dusky shark 11 feet long; the other seven feet. Needless to say, Dr. Clark was surprised and excited about what had happened. However, Beryl looked at Dr. Clark and said, "What did you expect? A goldfish?" One could say that this stellar performance gave an early indication of the fame that Dr. Clark and her staff would go on to achieve.

Dr. Heller was so excited about the potential contribution that the Cape Haze Marine Lab could make to his research that he asked whether a pen could be constructed to keep the sharks alive. (Live sharks were much more valuable for his cancer research.) Beryl Chadwick, with financial help from Bill Vanderbilt, supervised the construction of a 40-by-70 foot wooden stockaded pen extending from the shore in front of the lab out into Gasparilla Sound. This fact contradicts the folklore that says that Dr. Clark kept sharks in cages in Placida's inner harbor. Photographs show that our harbor was yet to be dug at that point. However, after Dr. Clark moved the lab to Siesta Key and Bill Mote dug our harbor, sharks may have been kept in the inner harbor.

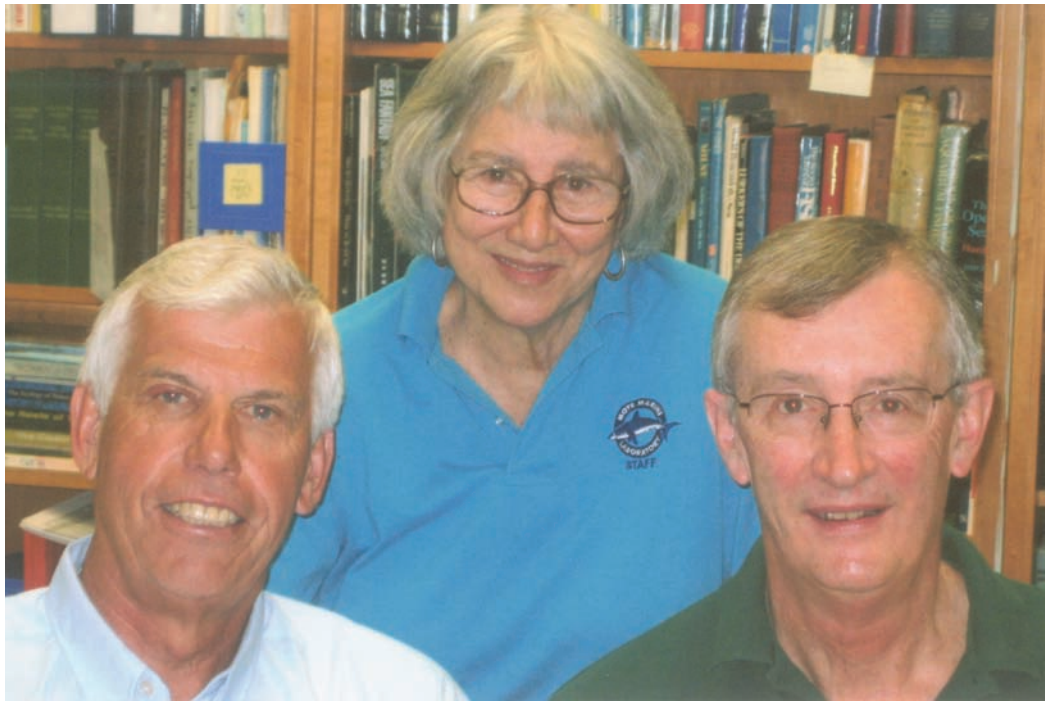
Let us pause for a moment to get to know this remarkable scientist a little better. Born in 1922, she celebrated her 85th birthday at the time of this writing. From a WGCU Earth Edition special on Dr.



Cape Haze Marine Lab with shark pen. (Courtesy of Mote Marine)

Clark, we discovered that she learned to skin animals when she was young. By boiling the animal, she could study the skeleton. One day she boiled a rat. Her grandmother came home early, said "that smells good," but ended up screaming when she took the rat out of the pot and discovered what it was. "There will be no more dead animals in my house!" she exclaimed.

Dr. Clark in her office at Mote Marine with Wayne Winkelman and the author.



According to material published by Mote Marine,

"Dr. Eugenie Clark is an ichthyologist with a special interest in sharks and tropical sand fishes. She was born and raised in New York City, where at age 9, she had her first experience fish-watching at the old New York Aquarium at Battery Park that started a life-long love of studying and diving with fishes.

"Dr. Clark graduated from Hunter College and completed a Ph.D. in 1950 from New York University. She is the recipient of three honorary Doctor of Science degrees, numerous awards, and has authored three books and more than 170 scientific and popular articles."

Dr. Clark has four children, all of whom are skilled divers, writers, and photographers and have assisted with her research. She is very proud of her grandson, Eli, who photographed whale sharks at the age of five and sold the photos to *National Geographic Magazine*. He has the distinction of being the youngest person to publish in that magazine.

Dr. Clark has discovered six different species of fish and has had four others named for her. She also discovered a species of grouper that can fertilize its own eggs. Instead of needing to put a male and female in the tank to propagate, one needed only to put in one.

I asked Dr. Clark whether she knew Jacques Cousteau, and she replied that she did and that he came to Placida twice. She wanted him to see the much larger quarters that were being built on Siesta

Key. Cousteau served on Dr. Clark's International Advisory Board and selected her to star in a one-hour program on sharks that was seen by millions as part of his television series. Dr. Clark told us that she was the first woman to live on his research vessel, *Calypso*.

Kumar Mahadevan, President of Mote Marine Laboratory, notes that "Dr. Clark was the first female scientist to stand toe to toe with her male counterparts. She directly caused so many women to go into marine science."

Let us return to Placida to recount a few happenings from the beginning of the lab in January 1955, to when it moved to Siesta Key in 1960. Shortly after opening the lab, Dr. Clark got in touch with the Bass family of Englewood. John Bass IV told me that his grandfather operated a marine biology business out of a very unusual building. You may recall reading in the local papers when this building was recently moved from a site near Gottfried Creek in Englewood to Cedar Point Environmental Park across from Lemon Bay High School. The building is called the C*ookie House* because slices of wood were inserted in the cement before it dried. The Bass Lab closed down shortly after the death of the founder in 1938. However, when Dr. Clark opened her laboratory, the Bass family generously gave her access to any reference books and lab equipment that would help her get started. As she told us, they said, "Take whatever you need."

Jacques Cousteau and Dr. Clark. (Courtesy of Mote Marine)

I asked John Bass IV how he would characterize Dr. Clark. He said, "She is warm, hard working, caring, a real go-getter, and hasn't slowed down at 85. She has gotten a lot of women interested in science." Incidentally, John Bass IV is a close personal friend of Dr. Clark's and continues to join her on her many dives all over the world.

Dr. Clark with Kay von Schmidt. In 1965 they authored the paper "Sharks of the Central Gulf Coast of Florida." (Courtesy of Mote Marine)

Some of Dr. Clark's research with sharks was revolutionary. She was interviewed by Manny Puig, who has the nickname "The Sharkman." This represents an interesting interview, available on his website, because she was called "The Sharklady." In answer to the question "Do you have any favorite sharks?", Dr. Clark responded, "One favorite is the lemon sharks we kept in captivity in the 1950's at the Cape Haze Marine Laboratory and trained to push a target and ring a bell for their food and then discriminate between correct and incorrect targets, a feat they could remember for months after not being presented with a target. They taught me that sharks are not stupid creatures; they can learn, operate an instrument, and retain their memory of right and wrong selections for a long time." She told us that "Sharks are among the brightest fish, recognizing that such intelligence is hard to measure."

Sharks have the amazing ability to resist both disease and cancer. This finding causes researchers to continue to study whether that cancer resistance can be transferred to humans.

Dr. Clark discovered that red tide causes sharks to stop eating. When her sharks refused to eat, she found minute quantities of red tide present in the water samples. She calls sharks, "the best red tide indicators." (Her red tide research began while her lab was in Placida.) When we asked her whether Mote Marine was the leading authority on red tide, she said "Yes."

By the late 1950's, a combination of factors made it necessary to find a new location for the lab. The number of visitors constantly increased, at times overwhelming the tiny research station in Placida. The path of the new Intracoastal Waterway came very close to the shark pens. And finally, the Clark family had moved to Sarasota so that her husband's growing orthopedic practice could be close to Sarasota Memorial Hospital. According to Dr. Clark's book *The Lady and the Sharks*, "The National Science Foundation awarded us a grant to cover half the cost of the new buildings, docks, and shark pens; and the Vanderbilts, in addition to all their regular support, gave the rest of the necessary funds for the modern new buildings of the Cape Haze Marine Lab which moved to Siesta Key in the winter of 1960." After the lab moved, local fishermen used the shark pen as a temporary holding area when they caught a shark.

A later chapter describes the renaming of the lab to Mote Marine and its move to its present location on City Island, Sarasota.

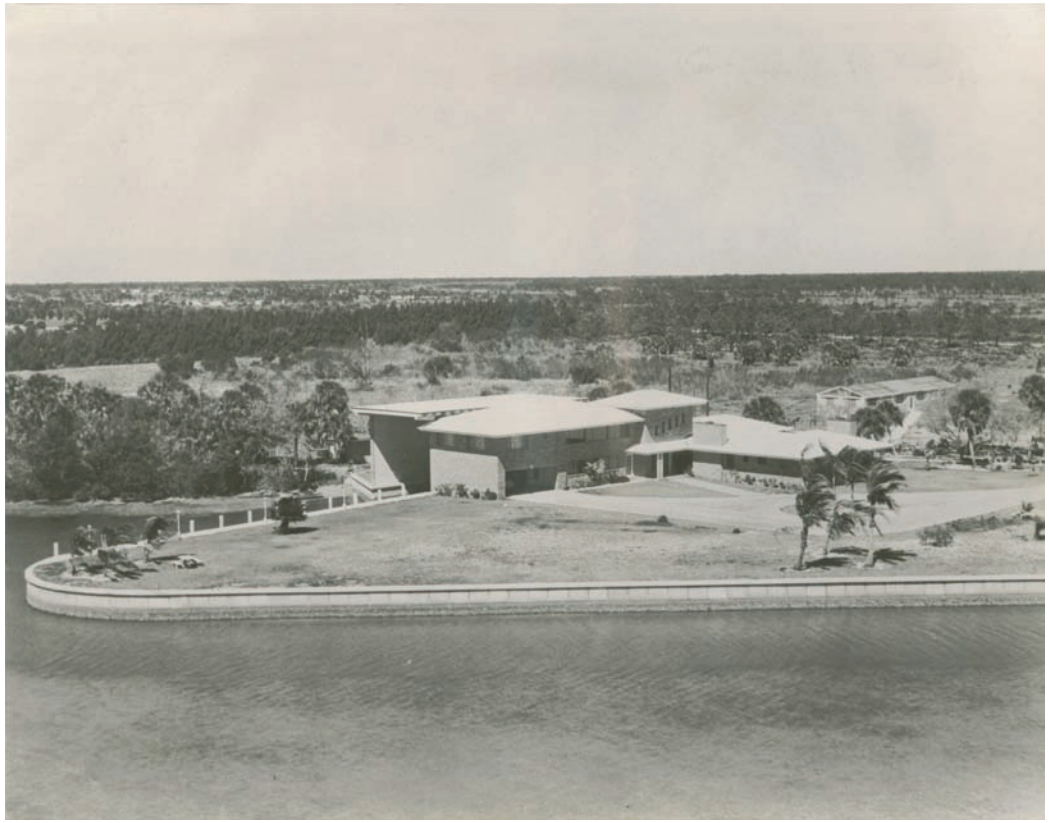
3 Louis Geraci: "The Banana King"

The first draft of this section apologized for the paucity of information about Louis Geraci. However, a long telephone conversation with Peter Geraci, the nephew of Louis, plus subsequent conversations with Jan Busby, provided a wealth of new and highly accurate information. Jan Bloom, who worked for Wallenberg Development, calls Louis *"The Banana King"* because his business was importing bananas. Contrary to folklore, Louis was an *independent* banana importer, not a United Fruit executive. In fact, United Fruit served as a major competitor.

The Geraci family came from Sicily and engaged in the wholesale fruit and vegetable business out of Tampa. We were told that Louis' father started out selling bananas on Tampa street corners. The family owned banana farms in Costa Rica and Honduras, which they ultimately sold. The farms weren't large enough to compete with giants such as United Fruit. Using the sale proceeds, Louis bought a large tract of land in the Tampa area on which he raised cattle.

At the time that Dr. Clark was operating her research station adjacent to our property, Geraci tried to buy land from the Vanderbilts to build a large boathouse and personal residence. If successful, this would have placed this building along the water in Cape Haze. He also looked into buying the northern end of Boca Grande from Sunset Realty, but that didn't work out either. Geraci was an expert fisherman and well liked by locals. He was a close friend of Sam Whidden (Whidden's Marina, Boca Grande). So, it is quite understandable that he ultimately bought his land from Gus Cole. The time was 1957–58. (The Placida Cole family dates back to 1908, making them one of this area's first families. Gus's grandson, Buck Cole, lives less than a half mile from the Placida Harbour Club and sells blue crabs out of his home. You may have seen extensive coverage on this man in the April 23, 2006 *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*.)

Louis Geraci built what is now our main clubhouse, starting construction in 1958. He lived on his boat, *The Explorer*, anchored in the basin adjacent to where our flag flies now. Some reports have stated that *The Explorer* was about 60 feet long, but its true length was 39 feet. Constructed of teak—hull, deck



The Geraci residence and boathouse. Note the orchid house to the right and the almost total lack of development of the surrounding area. The boat harbor was yet to be dug.

and throughout—the Wheeler Sport Fisherman had classic lines. Geraci evidently was a skilled captain, because he could negotiate the shallow waters of Gasparilla Sound even before the Intracoastal Waterway was constructed. Peter told me that he came in from the south before the Intracoastal, but not from the north through Cape Haze.

Geraci built in a highly unusual way. According to Peter, "The blueprint was in his head and a glass of scotch and water handy at his side as he sat in a chair and gave instructions while the house was built one section at a time." He would have the workmen "tear it out and start over if he wasn't satisfied."

According to Jan Busby, the granddaughter of Gus Cole, Louis Geraci was a visionary who created a unique style of building. It was "not like anything else … built in sections." Compared to the present clubhouse, our dining room was his boathouse; the kitchen was the kitchen; the Harbour Room, just off the kitchen, was the Geraci dining room; the library was the library; coming in the main entrance (the atrium was added later) placed one in the Geraci living room; the room to the left of the living room with fireplace and French doors was their master bedroom.

Upstairs, the bar area was similar to the present; however, the room contained the pool table at the far end. The ceiling of the bar was highly unusual. Embedded in the ceiling were some 150 small lights which, when illuminated, resembled the stars and constellations of the evening sky. Instead of being

built of cypress, the bar was constructed of teakwood. What is now the bridge room were two bedrooms, and the *his and hers* bathrooms were one large bathroom. (The poolroom came later when the boathouse became our dining room.) Under the bridge room was an open carport. The large swimming pool was added many years later.

Jan Busby, who remains a good friend of the Geraci family to this day, has many wonderful, intimate recollections of what is now our main clubhouse:

- Geraci planned a pool, but didn't live long enough to see it built.
- The house had an intercom system and a dumbwaiter from the kitchen area to the bar. Louis enjoyed music, and from a cabinet located near the bottom of the curving staircase, he was able to play music in every room on a continuous basis. His favorite song: "Moon River."
- The bar had a grill. (Geraci enjoyed cooking and was good at it.) Behind the bar, where we now have cypress sliding doors, the doors were yellow, blue and red blown glass with lights behind.
- Window frames throughout the house were a gold-colored metal, as was the railing along the curved stairway to the bar.
- Tiles brought from Italy accented both downstairs fireplaces. All the bathrooms were completely covered in small Italian tiles, each with a different design and color scheme. The only bathroom remaining in this style is the one off the Directors Room. That room served as a bedroom for Mrs. Geraci's son, Jimmy. Louis ordered a lot more tiles than needed for his various projects so that he could build a spectacular pool house once the pool was finished.
- Workmen doing tile work were brought in from Miami.
- The bathroom off the bar area contained small tiles in a gold tone. Gold-plated fish were used as faucets and handles.
- The soft coral-tone brick, used to construct the exterior of the house, was trucked to Placida from Georgia.
- After the first section of the house was built, the family moved from living on their boat to the maid's quarters (next to the carport) while the rest of the house was built.
- The original driveway entered the property substantially south of the present entrance. During construction of the condominiums, this served as the truck entrance. A fence covers the opening now.
- Geraci's land ended a few feet beyond the north wall of our dining room. The land from there to the Australian pines was owned by Gus Cole and later sold to Bill Mote.
- Jan Busby's introduction to the Motes came when they called, saying that they had a leak in the

ceiling of the dining room. (The Geraci heirs told the Motes that Jan knew the house better than anyone. "Call her if you have a problem.") Jan described the Motes as "being very nice people." Jan also had "high regard" for Betty Mote Rose and Bill and Betty's mother.

Geraci loved orchids and built a house to grow them located on the right as you entered the property. Containing a reported 10,000 orchids, it was a brick building with screens on the top to let in the sun. The orchid house is visible in the grouping of historical photographs in the Harbour Room of the clubhouse. You also will notice that the harbor did not exist when the photo was taken.

Unfortunately, Geraci did not live in his remarkable new house very long. He developed melanoma, which was treated at the Mayo Clinic. Returning home through Tampa, visiting his sister, he died of a heart attack in February 1963. Louis had recently been divorced and his two marriages had produced no offspring. Thus, his primary heirs were his brother, Nick, and Nick's son Peter.

Geraci's land holdings were extensive, with the cattle ranch in the Tampa area, a large tract of hunting land north of Arcadia, plus the Placida property. To pay the considerable estate tax bill, the Placida property was put up for sale. An interested buyer was found in the person of Rose Mote, William Mote's sister. (Rose was likely representing her brother's interests in the transaction.) Rose offered $100,000. The Geraci heirs were taken back by the offer, knowing that construction costs totaled some $410,000. Rose insisted on getting the pool table and a collection of Italian cordial glasses that the heirs wanted to retain. Without those two conditions, Rose said the deal was off. She got the pool table, the cordial glass collection, and the house. So every time you play a game of pool, remember *The Banana King*.

4 William Mote: Benefactor of Marine Research

William R. Mote was born in Tampa in 1906, the son of a Tampa postmaster. In college, he met a man who became a lifelong friend and business partner, Theodore Bartels. Mote's experience was in the steamship business and Bartels knew railroads. (Mote had worked for United Fruit and the job landed him in New York.) Mote and Bartels founded Republic Carloading and Distributing Company in 1940 and popularized the *piggyback* concept. This idea minimized loading and unloading and made it practical and profitable for the first time to transport large trailers and containers on railroad flat cars across the United States. The Republic Carloading and Distributing Company was grossing $100 million a year when the partners sold it in 1960.

Bill Mote's business success put him on the cover of the May 1, 1951 issue of *Forbes*. It also allowed him to travel the world and pursue his passion for fishing. He could afford to belong to private fishing clubs where other members had names ending in duPont and Firestone. In Peru in 1957, he landed a 1,180-pound black marlin, which may have been a world record at the time.

An exhibit at Mote Marine tells how the paths of Bill Mote and Dr. Clark crossed. In the words of Dr. Clark, "Bill Mote came to the old lab and said he admired the work we were doing. He loved the sea. He said he wanted to have a marine lab like mine, but he didn't want to be in competition. So I said, 'Why don't you take this … the funding is getting hard.' And he said, 'I can get you the funding.' And he just stepped in and helped support the lab."

When Dr. Clark mentions that "the funding was getting hard," she meant that the Vanderbilts had closed up their houses and moved up north. It is possible that they may have lost some interest, especially because Bill and Anne's son had decided not to go into marine research as they had hoped. The Vanderbilts continued to support the lab financially, but the distance factor made this more difficult than when they were present on the scene nearly every day.

Dr. Clark told us that Bill Mote loved to fish and told her, "I've been pulling fish out of the sea

Bill Mote and faithful companion outside what is now our main clubhouse. Note that brick has not been painted yet. (Courtesy of Mote Marine)

for years." Thus, in 1967, with Bill Mote providing strong financial backing, the Cape Haze Marine Laboratory was re-named the Mote Marine Laboratory. (The move to its present location in Sarasota on City Island did not occur until 1978.) Bill's sister, Betty Mote Rose, joined Bill in providing substantial financial support to the lab. She had been an executive with Republic Carloading.

During the period in which the lab was located on Siesta Key, Dr. Clark held many Board of Trustee meetings in our clubhouse, which was then the private residence of the Mote family. She recalls how beautiful it was and spacious, "much larger than my tiny little lab."

William Mote received the Gold Medal of the International Oceanographic Foundation in 1967 for his dedication and support of marine research. A quote taken from an exhibit at Mote Marine sums up his commitment: "For countless ages, man has taken from the sea. Now is the time for us to give back to this precious source of all our planet's life."

A friend of Don Griffin (Harbour #2501), named Robert Glau, has lived in Cape Haze at the end of South Green Dolphin Drive for many years. If you drive down this road to where it dead-ends, his house is the large one with the orange tile roof. According to Glau, to the right of his house is a vacant lot where Alfred Vanderbilt's house stood. When the Vanderbilts moved north, they closed up the house, and termites caused so much damage that the house had to be torn down.

While doing research for this book, I discovered some interesting facts about Alfred Vanderbilt. His passion was horse racing, and his wealth allowed him to be the principal owner and President of Pimlico Racetrack in Baltimore and the President of Belmont Racetrack in New York. Alfred owned many famous racehorses in addition to *Native Dancer* and

arranged the 1938 match race between *Seabiscuit and War Admiral*.

Glau told me that he came over to our property once with the intent of making an offer to buy some of the land. He remembers talking to some workers who appeared to be conducting research on marine life. This and other accounts have caused Wayne and myself to investigate whether scientists conducted significant marine research on our premises after Dr. Clark moved the lab to Siesta Key. The answer is a resounding **YES.**

Two sources—Dr. Clark and Tim Dixon, the Mote family's caretaker—describe a joint research effort between Mote Marine and Cornell University. Dr. Perry Gilbert, a director of Mote, was a professor of Neurobiology and Behavior at Cornell. Several university professors came down to Placida to collaborate with Mote scientists and write papers such as *The Fishes of Charlotte Harbor*. We were told that the scientists lived in the Mote home (our clubhouse), but were later moved to Geraci's refurbished orchid house because "they were somewhat untidy."

Not all the Cornell professors were conducting marine research. Oliver H. Hewitt, a retired professor from the university, lived in this area. His specialty was ornithology and in 1976 he published "Fieldbook of Birds of the Florida Suncoast." The book can be found in the Elsie Quirk library autographed by Hewitt and Karl Karalus. Karalus was one of the top wildlife artists at the time. Another contributor to the book was George Blake Johnson, a photographer of Cape Haze. Tim Dixon remembers Hewitt as a frequent visitor to our property.

Another example of marine research conducted here is found in a Mote Marine newsletter dated December 1971. It tells of Stewart Springer joining Mote as the resident manager of the Placida Station. "His knowledge of the Charlotte Harbor area dated from 1935 when he headed the collecting and supply service of the Bass Biological Laboratory at Englewood. His research on the classification, taxonomy and life histories of sharks, skates and rays dates from his early work with the shark fishing industry when sharks were hunted and processed





for the Vitamin A content of their livers. (A picture shows William and Anne Vanderbilt visiting the Placida Station.)

In March 2000, Bill Mote visited the town of Placida as the guest of Captain Marian Schneider, owner of Grande Tours. He was 93, blind, and confined to a wheelchair because his legs had been amputated. He lived only a few months longer. However, he had lived a life filled with business success, adventure and an enormous amount of public good. His sister, Betty, died at the age of 81. Her love for this property was so great that she had her ashes scattered off the seawall to the north of the house, according to Tim Dixon.

Today, Mote Marine Laboratory specializes in the study of aquaculture, sharks, red tide, coral reefs, nautical archeology and pollution. The lab boasts more than 240 staff members, including 40 who have earned a Ph.D., 400,000 annual visitors, 10,000 members and 1,400 volunteers. One member of the Mote staff, Dr. J. "Coz" Cozzi, a nautical archeologist, is conducting a survey of Charlotte Harbor Shipwrecks. Interestingly, Coz is married to Dr. Clark's oldest daughter, Hera.

Bill Mote and Dr. Clark holding the jaw of a shark. (Courtesy of Mote Marine)