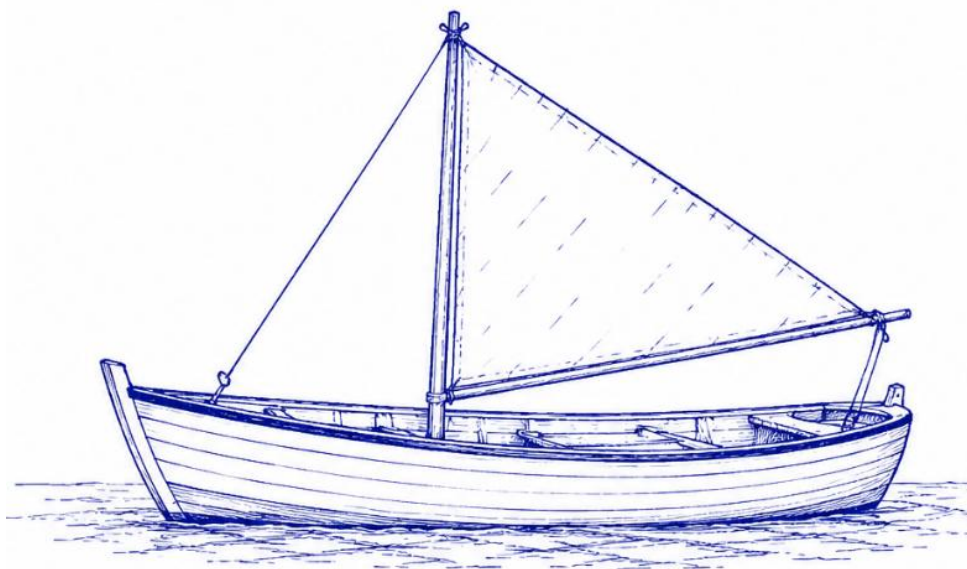


Culture and Heritage Resource Packet

Captain Carley Ebanks

Key Stage 2 | Ages 7-10

Source: ***Turtles and Schooner of the Cayman Islands***
Sponsored by the **Cayman Maritime Heritage Foundation**
Pages 54-57



Growing Up by the Sea

Carley Elton Ebanks was born in Boatswain's Bay, Grand Cayman, on 17 March 1919. His father, Laten Ebanks, was known as Ducksy, and his mother was Delsey.

When Carley was growing up, many Caymanian men earned their living from the sea. There were few other opportunities, so men often went turtling, shark fishing and sailing. Carley began going fishing with his father when he was very young. His father built his first boat in 1927 and named it *Better Than Beholding*.

Becoming a Young Captain

When Carley was about 15 years old, he went on a *rangin'* trip with his father to the Miskito Cays. They caught turtles and sharks.

As he grew older, Carley travelled with different crews and learned more about life at sea. By the age of 17, he was captain of his first catboat. The boat belonged to Willie Farrington, who owned several boats and schooners.

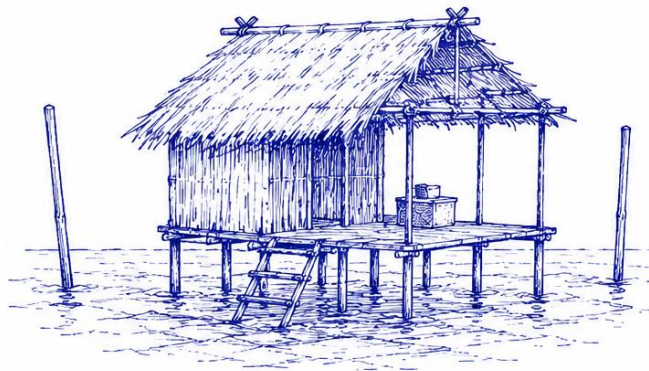
Carley's first catboat was called *Leumas*, which was the name Samuel spelled backwards, after the man who built her. She was a Caymanian catboat built on Grand Cayman. These boats were strong and designed to carry heavy loads of turtles and sharks while still sailing safely through rough seas.

Preparing for a Fishing Trip

A great deal of work was needed before a fishing trip could begin. The fishermen had to prepare and repair their nets and collect extra line in case a net was damaged or lost.

Different nets were used for catching turtles and sharks. Turtle nets had larger openings, while shark nets had smaller ones. The nets were held in place with ropes, corks, buoys and heavy stones called kellicks, which acted as anchors.

The fishermen also had to take food, fresh water and other supplies. Once they reached a cay, they built huts from sticks and thatch. They needed a safe place to sleep and live while they were away from home.



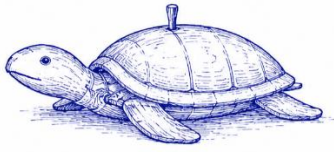
Travelling to the Cays

The fishermen travelled to the Miskito Cays and other small islands on large sailing vessels called schooners. These schooners carried the catboats, their crews and all their supplies.

Some vessels could carry many catboats. When they arrived at the cays, the crew quickly unloaded the boats, food, water and equipment.

Carley remembered that life on the small cays could be lonely. There were many birds and sand flies, so fishermen sometimes built their huts over the water to avoid the insects.

Finding the Turtles



Finding turtles required skill and experience. Fishermen looked for special places called *setts*, where turtles were known to sleep.

Older captains often discovered these places at night. While sailing quietly, they could hear turtles coming to the surface to breathe. The fishermen would mark the location and return the next day to set their nets.

Many of these turtle *setts* were given names and marked on charts so that experienced captains could find them again.

Carley remembered one trip when he saw many turtles but caught only a few. He decided to listen for them on a calm night. His crew followed the sound of the turtles breathing and set their nets. This time, they caught many more.

Catching Sharks and Turtles

Shark fishing and turtle fishing were done differently. Shark nets were often placed in shallow water, where nurse sharks could be found. The nets were held down with weights and anchored with kellicks.

Turtle fishing depended on finding the places where turtles slept and carefully placing the nets around these areas.

The fishermen used their sails to travel long distances. When they were close to the nets, they often lowered the sails and used oars or sculls to move quietly.

Keeping the Turtles

After turtles were caught, they were taken back to the cay and placed in a *kraal*, which was like a fenced enclosure in the sea.

The *kraal* allowed the fishermen to keep the turtles alive until they were ready to be taken to the schooner and carried away. Each turtle was marked so the fishermen could identify it.

The *kraals* were an important part of the fishing camps because trips could last for many weeks.

Trading with the Miskito People

People from the northeast coast of Nicaragua often travelled to the cays in large canoes. They traded with the Caymanian fishermen.

The fishermen could exchange goods such as flour, cornmeal and sugar. In return, they received useful items, including Bob Wood, a very light wood that could be used for buoys, and special wood for the masts of catboats.

These journeys could be long. Some of the Miskito people travelled many miles across the sea in their canoes.

A Dangerous Life at Sea

Life at sea could be extremely dangerous. Fishermen depended on the wind and weather, and storms could appear suddenly.

In 1952, Carley and his crew were caught in a terrible nor'wester near the cays. The wind became extremely strong, and the sea was rough and dangerous. With only a small amount of sail, they somehow managed to return safely to the cay.

Carley remembered this storm for the rest of his life. It made him realize how strong and seaworthy Caymanian catboats could be.

During that same period, other men were lost at sea. Carley also remembered the loss of the *Majestic*, which disappeared during a hurricane with 28 people aboard. The tragedy was so upsetting that, for many years, Caymanian fishermen avoided fishing at the cay where some survivors had reached safety.

Bringing the Catch Home

At the end of a trip, the turtles and other catches were loaded onto the schooners. If there was not enough room below deck, turtles were sometimes carried on deck or even in the catboats.

The journey home depended on the wind. If the winds were favourable, the trip could be fairly quick. However, if the vessel became becalmed, with little or no wind, the journey could take much longer and be uncomfortable.

Carley's Life and Legacy

Captain Carley Ebanks spent much of his life connected to the sea. From fishing with his father as a young boy to becoming a catboat captain, he learned the skills needed to survive and work on the waters of the Caribbean.

His memories tell us about an important time in Caymanian history, when catboats, schooners, turtling and fishing were a major part of life. They also remind us of the courage, knowledge and determination of the Caymanian seamen who travelled far from home and depended on their boats, their skills and one another to survive.

Activities for Further Learning

Focus: Art, design and historical imagination

Learning outcome: Students explore how boats are designed for particular environments and purposes. They will identify features of Caymanian catboats and explain how these helped fishermen travel, carry heavy loads and remain safe at sea.

Students will design and draw their own Caymanian catboat, using information from the handout about the shape, strength and uses of these boats. They should include features that would help the boat travel through rough seas and carry fishing equipment or a catch.

Activity 1:

1. Review the description of Carley's first catboat, Leumas, and discuss why Caymanian catboats needed to be strong and seaworthy.
2. Ask students to identify details from the handout, such as:
 - Catboats were built in Grand Cayman.
 - They carried heavy loads of turtles and sharks.
 - They were used with schooners during fishing trips.
 - Fishermen used sails, oars and sculls to move them.
3. Students draw and label their own catboat.
4. They should add at least three features that would make the boat useful for a fishing trip.
5. Students write two or three sentences explaining how their design would help a fisherman.

Activity 2: Preparing for a Fishing Trip

Focus: Problem-solving, teamwork and historical understanding

Learning outcome: Students understand the planning, equipment and cooperation needed for a successful fishing trip. They will identify how fishermen prepared for different conditions and explain why each item was important.

Students will work in small groups to plan a fishing trip to the Miskito Cays. They must decide what equipment, supplies and knowledge the crew would need before leaving Grand Cayman.

1. Divide students into small groups and explain that they are preparing a schooner and catboats for a fishing trip.
2. Give each group a list of possible items, including:
 - Food
 - Fresh water
 - Fishing nets

- Extra line
- Ropes
- Corks and buoys
- Kellicks
- Oars or sculls
- Building materials for huts
- Cooking equipment
- Toys or unnecessary objects

3. Students sort the items into three categories:

- Essential
- Useful but not essential
- Not needed

4. Each group must explain its choices using evidence from the handout.

5. Ask students to create a simple preparation checklist for the captain and crew.

6. Discuss why teamwork and careful preparation were important when fishermen travelled far from home for many weeks.

Activity 3: Listening for Turtles

Focus: Observation, communication and historical problem-solving

Learning outcome: Students explore how Caymanian fishermen used observation, listening and experience to locate turtles. They will understand that knowledge of the natural environment was an important part of working and surviving at sea.

Students will recreate the problem faced by Carley when he saw many turtles but caught only a few. They will use listening, observation and teamwork to develop a plan for finding a turtle sett and placing nets carefully.

1. Read the section about finding turtles, focusing on how experienced captains listened for turtles surfacing to breathe.
2. Explain the meaning of a sett—a place where turtles were known to sleep.
3. In groups, students create a simple map of an imaginary cay. They should include:
 - The shoreline
 - Shallow water
 - A possible turtle sett
 - The fishing camp
 - The schooner
4. One student acts as the captain, while others act as crew members. The captain gives instructions about where to travel and where to place the nets.
5. Students discuss why fishermen needed to move quietly, lower the sails and use oars or sculls near the nets.

6. Each group writes a short explanation of how listening, observation and experience helped Carley and his crew become more successful.
7. Finish with a discussion about the importance of respecting the sea and understanding animal behaviour when working in the marine environment.

Bibliography

Cayman Heritage Maritime Foundation. A History of Turtles and Schooners of the Cayman Islands.

Further Reading

Leshikar-Denton, Margaret E. Cayman's 1794: Wreck of the Ten Sail.

Soto, Suzy. Extraordinary Adventure, Bob, Soto Scuba Pioneer.