

**The Cedar Key Historical Society Museum**  
**The First Docent**

Ruth Wagner

1899 - 1994

When the Cedar Key Historical Museum opened in 1979, Ruth became the first and only staff member. She was the heart and soul of the museum for 14 years.

An excerpt from an article written in the South Florida **Sun-Sentinal Oct. 12, 1986**

**OUR VANISHING SHORES FOR YEARS THE EFFORTS TO SAVE FLORIDA'S BEACHES HAVE RESULTED IN DESTRUCTION. NOW, THE BILL FOR FAILURE HAS COME DUE.**

**-South Florida Sun Sentinal Oct. 12, 1986 BY HENRY LEIFERMANN & MICHAEL CONNELLY**

ONLY ONE SPOT ALONG THIS vast, untouched coast qualifies as a developed beach resort -- Cedar Key. It is a sentinel stuck out on the Gulf waters alone and unprotected, as its residents discovered to their regret last September when Hurricane Elena damaged nearly every commercial establishment on the island. A year later, places like the Sea Breeze restaurant have yet to be rebuilt. Many homes remain damaged, too. Seawalls and revetments on some parts of the coast are still posted with signs that say "Unsafe Area."

Ruth Wagner, a resident for 36 years who was evacuated and later returned to find 16 inches of water in her home, has since put her wood-frame house on concrete blocks.

"I'm up on five blocks now," she says. "But I really don't know how much good it is going to do me if another hurricane comes this way. I hope I don't get washed away."

Aside from the structural damage Elena left on the island, Cedar Key also offers a glimpse at how a hurricane can change a coastline overnight. Many of the coastline roads were undermined during the storm or washed out. Wagner lost half of her back yard on the interior coast of the island. It took 35 loads of sand and dirt to replace it.

But the hurricane didn't only take, it gave back. On Cedar Key's north side, the storm built a sandbar so high that you could almost walk across the channel. Elena also put back what Hurricane Easy took in 1950 -- the year Ruth Wagner came to Cedar Key. In that storm an entire beach at the south end of the island disappeared. After Elena left the key in 1985, that beach was back.

"We have a beautiful beach there now," says Wagner, who is curator of the local historical society. "What Mother Nature gives, she can also take away -- and vice-versa."