

Marion 'Joe' Carstairs

Whale Cay

After leaving behind powerboat racing aged 34, she came across an island in the Bahamas called Whale Cay. She was entranced by the island saying that 'This island has a particular liking for me.'

She transformed the island of 200 people, and built roads, a store, the lighthouse, fruit plantations, a church as well as a grand house for herself. It became less of a retreat and more like a state, with Kate Summerscale writing 'Those who worked with Joe joined in the fantasy that Whale Cay was a kingdom.'

On Whale Cay, Carstairs entertained movie stars, artists, directors and even the Duke and Duchess of Windsor. She also founded the "Coloured League of Youth" – A project to improve Bahamians' economic and social standing.

During the Second World War she led a bold mission to rescue the U.S. ship Potlach which had been torpedoed. She set off in a schooner at night, without lights, into U-Boat territory to rescue 47 American sailors close to death. When she put the sailors ashore at Nassau, and much to the surprise of these sailors, she was not a young man but in fact a woman of 42.

Carstairs moved around the world for the rest of her life, living in Miami, Naples and eventually Florida where she died in 1993 aged 93.

