

KNIGHTHOODS FOR GROVES AND HAYWARD

Twenty-five years ago, a splendid boom town called Freeport emerged from 150,000 acres of barren pine forest on Grand Bahama Island. Before this time, Grand Bahama had been largely unpopulated and there was very little economic activity there. What made Freeport so unique among Bahamian cities was that it was, at the time, far more modern than even the Bahamas capital, Nassau. In a word, Freeport was a **'planned'** metropolis with excellent housing, efficient utilities, industrial facilities, abundant employment opportunities and land development projects. Freeport was the dream city of American financier Wallace Groves. He envisioned Freeport as a large industrial and commercial centre of a quarter million people.

Through his company, The Grand Bahama Port Authority, Groves negotiated a 99-year lease with the Bahamas government. The lease was part of the Hawksbill Creek Agreement, which gave the Port Authority freedom from taxes for the duration of the agreement and wide-reaching governmental powers to administer the city. The Port could even bring in foreigners without the prior consent of the Bahamas government.

To create a wider appeal to investors and potential investors, Groves had to modify his blueprint for an industrialized city and place more emphasis on land development and tourism before Freeport began to show appreciable growth. Indicative of this switch of emphasis was the building of a casino in 1964. Once Freeport began to grow, however, its growth was so phenomenal that at one time it was called "the fastest growing city in the western hemisphere".

After the Progressive Liberal Party came to power in 1967, it found it necessary to bring Freeport into the mainstream of other Bahamian islands. Headed by Prime Minister Lynden O.

Pindling, the government made several critical abrogations in the Hawksbill Creek Agreement, particularly in areas dealing with customs and immigration procedures. Unfortunately, loss of privileges caused thousands of angry investors to make a quick and almost total exodus leaving behind the decline of a forgotten city.

After a number of false starts, Freeport is presently on the road to full recovery. Construction is up tremendously; investors, both foreign and locals, are flocking back and there is a resurgence of confidence among Freeport's 35,000 residents. This time around, with Freeport already in step with Bahamian life, the city is able to generate much needed economic contributions to the growth of the Bahamas through industry, tourism and employment for Bahamians.

For some background information, it is important to know that around the same time the government was bringing Freeport into the Bahamian mainstream, the Port Authority merged with Benguet Incorporated, a Phillipine-based mining company that traded on the New York Stock Exchange. In 1974, Benguet was forced to form Intercontinental Diversified to incorporate its Bahamian holdings. These interests, which had been neglected for years, were becoming the focal points of renewed capital investment appropriations.

Instrumental in the formation of a new 'Bahamianized' Freeport was Jack Hayward, C.B.E., the son of Groves' early English partner, Sir Charles Hayward. Groves sold all of his shares to the younger Hayward in 1978, then Hayward in turn sold most of his shares to the company. It was Hayward who recognised that the future of Freeport rest in establishing it as a truly Bahamian city instead of a separate city in the Bahamas as was being done previously. Baha-

mians were brought in as an intricate part of the corporate and private structure of the city and the Port began making huge capital investments in the area. These investments should total more than \$60 million over the next few years.

Hayward's move was toward more company investment and more Bahamian involvement in Freeport as the formula for success. And he continues to be a strong factor in the revitalization of Freeport by encouraging development and tourism.

Wallace Groves and Jack Hayward are net Bahamians, but they have made Freeport the Bahamas' Second City. Groves actively retired in the early 70s, but with the constructive-thinking Hayward in charge, Freeport can look forward to growth that may well surpass the boom days of the 60s. Two men of such vision as Groves and Hayward are worthy of all the superlatives than can be heaped on them. Because of them, Freeport has become a major contributor to the Bahamas Treasury and economic infrastructure of the nation. Nothing really short of the lasting honor of knighthoods would genuinely express the appreciation of the Bahamas to them for taking Freeport from the pine forest and making it the great city that it is today.

There are some who may disagree. But upon a closer look, there is none else in the country today who have even come close to accomplishing the development feats of these two men. Groves ideas built Freeport and Hayward's superb administration makes it work for the Bahamas. Just think of it. A modern, growing city out of pine forest. The more you think of it, the more fitting knighthoods for Groves and Hayward seem as a tribute to their abilities, contributions and faith in the Bahamas and the Bahamian way.