

# Grand Bahama Island

The book *Grand Bahama* by P.J.H. Barratt is a very interesting and comprehensive work dealing with the island of Grand Bahama and particularly with the boom town of Freeport/Lucaya, the second city of the Bahamas. Mr. Barratt is a town planner in charge of the development of the community and he writes with first hand knowledge of the island of Grand Bahama and of the start and growth of Freeport/Lucaya.

The history of the Bahamas is gone into in some depth to give the reader a solid back ground in the varied and colorful history of the islands of the Bahamas. Starting out with Christopher Columbus and his landing on San Salvador in 1492, working through the gentle Indian population of the Lucayans who were later wiped out by the Spanish, to the gun-and-rum running days right up to the present day Bahamas.

Having lived and worked in the Bahamas for over eleven years Mr. Barratt writes with a feeling for the people and flavor of the islands and his book shows that he spent a great deal of time researching his material and putting the publication together. He goes into detail about every phase of the island of Grand Bahama from geology and climate to settlement and government. He tells of the first commercial venture on Grand Bahama, which was the Grand Bahama Mercantile and Development Company which failed in 1926 due to the Florida land crash of the same year. The book goes on to tell of other imaginative but ill-fated ventures right up to the planning and building of Freeport which, after a slow start, became an over-night success. Barratt writes

of Wallace Groves, the founder of Freeport-Lucaya, and his first venture in the Bahamas, the take over of the ailing Abaco Lumber Company which by genius and hardwork he turned into a profitable business. Mr. Groves' first contact with Grand Bahama was through his lumber company which had timbering rights on the island. Mr. Barratt recounts Sir Billy Butlin's valiant attempt to establish a holiday camp on the island. This was the first attempt to try to bring tourists to the island which has a superb location a mere 60 miles away from the mainland of the United States.

The book takes the reader and gives them an indepth look at what makes Freeport tick - from Freeport's initially slow beginning to its becoming one of the most magnificent playgrounds of the world. It tells how barren, pine covered land was turned into a model residential community with beautiful golf, sailing and swimming facilities.

The author shows what made Freeport possible, how private enterprise working with government co-operation gave rise to Freeport and put Grand Bahama on the world scene. Freeport was an experiment of great significance. It raised many questions during its building, such as the importance of private sector investment, balancing the social mix of the population and the delicate matter of political relations between a "private enterprise town" and a parent government.

After Freeport's initial accomplishment of over-night success there was a slump which coincided with the change of government 1967. There were also investigations into gambling



**P.J.H. Barratt**

in Freeport and publications in the United States had a field day when this information was released. They printed stories most of which were largely unsubstantiated conjecture on the part of the writers but damage was done. Next, the book tells of the selling of the Port Authority by Mr. Groves to Benguet Consolidated Company and its subsequent reorganization.

The new government wanted more governmental control over Freeport. Previously the Port Authority had quasi-governmental power in Freeport and the new government stated their intent to bring Freeport back into the domain of the Bahamas government. The book handles this transition of power from the Port Authority to the Bahamian government very well.

He shows their unique speech patterns and the colorful names of the settlements they live in. He recounts amusing little anecdotes about the people and the island showing their good side as well as their bad. The book is well written and makes for interesting reading for Bahamians as well as Non-Bahamians. It deals with every spect of Grand Bahama, past and present, and makes some conjecture of the future of Freeport/Lucaya and Grand Bahama island as a whole apt certainly in this the 20th anniversary year of the signing of the Hawksbill Creek Agreement.