

Grand Bahama
Commissioner's Report for 1911

VOTES
OF THE
HONOURABLE
LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF THE
BAHAMA ISLANDS.

SESSION COMMENCING ON
THE 4TH DAY OF DECEMBER, 1911
AND ENDING ON
THE 22ND DAY OF MAY, 1912.



NASSAU, NEW PROVIDENCE . .
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1912.

In my opinion a vessel of from 30 to 35 tons, drawing not more than six feet of water is sufficiently large enough to perform the service satisfactorily.

I think Postal facilities should be granted to Little Exuma, with location at the Ferry.

GENERAL REMARKS.

The District has been blessed with the absence of storms of any magnitude, and very equable weather has prevailed for the greater part of the year.

The attractions at Florida for the bone and sinew of our islands have drawn off nearly every able-bodied man, and females have also joined in the movement, some to labour with their husbands, while others seek a new home. At the close of the year the island is so denuded of men, as well by the sponging industry, as by the exodus to Florida, that it is difficult to secure men for service as District Constables.

Several sections of road improvement and repair have been carried out, principally in the western part of the Island.

A sharing society at Roker's Point was of great benefit to the people of the western settlement. The amount of deposits was £167 10s.

J. M. ARANHA.
Commissioner.

GRAND BAHAMA.

AGRICULTURE.

The entire male population of this District being Seamen or Spongers, makes Agriculture a

supplementary industry to sponging. Great improvements have been made, during the year, not only in the methods of cultivating the soil, but in the quantity of produce raised.

Ground produce, sufficient to supply the necessities of life to the women and children have been grown at most of the settlements, in consequence of which, there has not been one application for "Government" relief during the year, a thing almost unknown, in the annals of the history of this District. In addition to the above necessary vegetables, very fair crops of Grape-fruit, ground-nuts, arrow-root, onions, and sugar-canes &c have been raised in various parts of the District.

The Sisal industry has made no progress, some of the old fields are being allowed to grow up and only about 50% of the available leaves have been cleaned, this is due to the small prices paid in Nassau for the fibre.

Cattle farming has made no progress during the year, the stock and pastures are still degenerating and no attempt has been made to introduce new blood.

FISHERIES.

The Sponge fishery engages the attention of 99% of the male population. Although 1911 has not been a record year, either as to quantity of sponges gathered or prices obtained it has been a fairly satisfactory season. Very fair voyages have been made by the "shore spongers", as fine grass &c. have met with good demand in Nassau, throughout the year. I regret to have to report that sponge gets scarcer every year on this Bank, especially in the shallow water, owing to the fact

that the water is seldom muddy and the sponger gathers everything he sees, irrespective of size.

Rules 3 and 4 of the Marine Products Board are abortive and wasteful. While I recognize the fact that they were intended to protect the sponge beds, I know from practical experience that they have little or no effect. It may interest you to know what happens on the sponge bar:—

The sponger sees a sponge on the bottom, he has no means of ascertaining its size, until he gets it to the top of the water, as it may be long enough even if it is not 5 inches broad; he hooks it up; if it passes through his ring, he throws the sponge back into the water; if this sponge has a heavy root it sinks to the bottom and becomes an undersized worthless little roller; if it is light it drifts into the swashes and rots. In addition to this a good percentage of the wool and velvet sponges that appear large enough when green, prove to be too small after they have been washed; these are also thrown away. In this way the rules alluded to, cost this District more money than they save. The only way to conserve the products of this bank is to close the entire sponging grounds for a period of years or for a certain period in each year.

The gathering of Conch Shells at the East and West end of Grand Bahama has been fairly remunerative, during the past year, but the Conchs get scarcer yearly, especially at East end.

The returns from the Turtling fleet have been small, when compared with former years, owing to the weather and scarcity of Hawksbill Turtle. I am glad to see that the minimum size of Green Turtle has been raised to 15 inches; as 75% of the Green Turtle bought by local dealers during 1911, were under this size.

EDUCATION.

The Public School Teacher at 8 Mile Rock, has done good work this year, considering the material that he has to work with. A large proportion of his scholars can read, write and cipher, in a satisfactory manner, and have a fair knowledge of the extra subjects. This is the result of sheer hard work on the part of the master, as he receives very little encouragement or help from the scholars and their parents.

A little knowledge is being dispensed by the Grant-in-aid School at Water Cay, and the Church schools at West-end and Barnetts point; the rest of the island is in total darkness. Continued appeals are being made by the people of High-rock, Free-town and Sweeting Cay for Schools, but the Board of Education give them little or no encouragement.

PUBLIC HEALTH.

The public health and sanitary conditions of the District have been very good, there have been a few cases of diarrhoea and fever, but no epidemic diseases.

JUDICIAL.

There were 47 cases dealt with during the year principally breaches of the Police regulations and Education Act; one case of burglary was sent for trial at the Supreme Court.

PUBLIC WORKS.

Extensive improvements have been made to public roads throughout the District, especially at High-rock, Hunter and Eastern settlements.

The streets at the various settlements along the southern shore, are gradually merging into one continuous road.

Various improvements have been made to the Commissioner's Residence and out buildings, but there still remains much to be done. The old gaol walls and water closet have been pulled down, and have been replaced by substantial walls and a more commodious water closet.

GENERAL.

The condition of the people generally compares very favourably with former years. The returns from the sponging trade have been satisfactory, and the little produce fields have been very productive owing to the good season.

The emigration to Florida, continues to occupy the attention of the younger men; and a few of the young women. They still come home richer in money, manners and experience and to these are added in most cases, the refined viciousness of our American brethren.

The mail service with Nassau, can hardly be said to be satisfactory, the vessel employed is too small and the service is performed in a slovenly manner.

Thirteen aged and infirm persons, received a small supply of food during the year. Except for this, no government relief was given in this district.

W. G. B. STEVENSON,
Commissioner.

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