

*Grand Bahama*  
*Commissioner's Report for 1914*

VOTES  
OF THE  
HONOURABLE  
LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL  
OF THE  
BAHAMA ISLANDS.

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SESSION COMMENCING ON  
THE 8TH DAY OF FEBRUARY, 1915  
AND ENDING ON  
THE 31ST DAY OF MAY, 1915.



NASSAU, NEW PROVIDENCE.

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1915,

ly land is not very easy to procure. The poor settlers' plots on Stocking Island are all now practically taken up. So with a few exceptions the people have only their yard lots to fall back on. This state of affairs is not satisfactory for advancement.

During the earlier part of the year the Governor of the Colony negotiated for the purchase of a 230 acre tract of land, to be resold to the peasants in 10 acre lots, to be paid for £1 down, and four yearly instalments of £1. No trouble was experienced in securing the first instalments which were readily paid up, but before the deeds could be satisfactorily executed, the people, owing to the hard times, were obliged to withdraw their instalments. This incident is mentioned to show how easy it would be for the peasants to be placed on their own little holdings, in normal financial conditions.

A suggestion for the advancement and progress of agriculture in this district would be for the Board of Agriculture to give prizes for the best cultivations and is coupled with the one of free distribution of seed and plants.

#### GENERAL.

The savings of the people, through the medium of two sharing Societies, amounted to £340.

It is estimated that at least £1,500 was earned in Florida.

STANLEY V. S. ALBURY,  
Commissioner.

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#### GRAND BAHAMA.

The district was enlarged on 1st April by the addition of Moore's Island with its adjacent cays,

Sandy Point and Cross Harbour, which till then had been in the district of Cherokee Sound, Abaco.

#### FINANCIAL.

The direct revenue, made up of a general liquor license, King's fines, and Justice's fees, amounted to £10 13s. 3d., being a decrease of £4 14s. 2d. on the previous year's. All importations were made through Nassau.

The expenditure by the local Board of Public Works was £164. Other expenditure, compared with that of 1913, was £52 19s. 7d. against £30 9s. 0d.

#### POSTAL STATISTICS.

|                                  |      |
|----------------------------------|------|
| Letters, ordinary, despatched .. | 1274 |
| „ registered, „ ...              | 144  |
| „ ordinary, received .....       | 1941 |
| „ registered, „ .....            | 314  |

|                                 |         |
|---------------------------------|---------|
| Stamps sold .....               | £5 15 2 |
| Customs duties on parcels ..... | 6 8 8   |
| Money Orders .....              | 31 0 0  |

There is only one postal station—that at 8 Mile Rock. At several of the more distant out-lying settlements I have been approached on the subject of their being granted postal facilities.

At present all above-mentioned mail matter is sent and received respectively by residents in the vicinity of the Post Office, i.e., within a radius of about 15 miles, but I strongly believe that the simple reason for that is that people living further away find it too great a hardship to trudge such a distance to post a letter or in the hope of getting one.

All mail matter for the out-lying settlements was taken around on my last 3 tours and was very

much appreciated and gratefully received, and I firmly believe that if post offices were established at Golden Grove, West End, Moore's Island and Sandy Point they would prove paying investments, or, at least, sufficient business would be transacted to justify their existence.

The Mail Boat is still the *Hazel Dell* of 28 tons burthen. The irregularity in not stopping at her scheduled ports of call, to which attention was drawn in my report for the previous year, apparently ceased upon the master being required to furnish evidence of such calls in the shape of the dates of arrival and departure noted on his way-bill by a certain reliable resident at each port.

The sanitary accommodation has been improved and the service generally has smartened up. What is needed chiefly is some system in handling the cargo, as goods for Eight Mile Rock are frequently carried on to West End by mistake.

#### TRADE, AGRICULTURE AND INDUSTRIES.

##### IMPORTS (VIA NASSAU).

Groceries, alcoholics, medicines, dry-goods, hardware, crockery, lumber &c.

##### EXPORTS (VIA NASSAU).

Sponge, dogwood bark, conch-shells, (over 100,000) grape fruit, (over 60,000) onions, (over 3,000 lbs.) sisal, cane syrup, (about 2000 gallons from Moore's Island and smaller quantities from the central settlements of Grand Bahama) and cattle (about 25).

#### AGRICULTURE.

With the exception of Water Cay, where the fertility of the soil, or the climatic conditions or both,

seem to defy failure, the summer crops of the whole district were practically nil, owing to the prolonged drought, the average monthly rainfall for the first 8 months of the year being only  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches.

Towards the end of the year farming began to pick up, fairly large crops of guinea-corn, bennie, ground-nuts, &c., being taken in, in the eastern settlements, but in the western the excessive rains caused a great deal of the ground produce to rot in the fields and southerly gales withered up all the peas, beans, &c., even the hardy bushes looking as if fire had passed over them.

The majority of the people are diligent and have extended their cultivations, but the soil is so shallow especially in the neighbourhood of Eight Mile Rock, that even moderate rain makes it sippy and submerges it, and then after a few days of sunshine it becomes all parched up.

Rats generally and wild hogs in addition at Sandy Point and Cross Harbour, caused much loss to the farmers; the assistance of the Board of Agriculture was sought to obtain a certain virus—"Liverpool"—which, the manufacturers claim, causes a highly contagious mummifying disease to spread among these rodents, resulting finally in their extermination. The farmers would be glad to purchase this stuff if the Board could supply it reasonably cheap. The Secretary informed me that the Board "is out of Danysz virus and will not be having any more just now." It is claimed that "Liverpool" virus is absolutely harmless to all creatures except rats and mice and I trust the Board will be able to supply us with it, if after a fair trial it does not prove to be a fakement.

There has been a slight increase in the sisal cultivations.

## SPONGE.

The sponge beds of the district, which were closed on 1st October 1913, were reopened on 1st July 1914. Singularly contradictory statements are made by local spongers as to the effects of the closure, some saying that sponges are in much greater, while others declare they are in much less, profusion than before it, and opinions seem very evenly divided. Perhaps it is worthy of mention that while returning from Water Cay in the latter part of October, the Commissioner, being almost becalmed, witnessed some sponging in close along the swash, from where although not the regular sponging ground (it being I was told, comparatively barren), several hundred sponges were obtained in a few hours by 2 of the crew, one in each boat, working abreast of the vessel. These sponges were all rather small, but the master of the vessel informed me that out in the deep water large ones were even more plentiful. However the industry soon got into its wonted swing, but when the war broke out, it was paralysed by it till December, when prices rose suddenly to ante bellum heights; unfortunately boisterous weather has allowed but little to be done since.

## SHIPPING (INTERINSULAR.)

| Cleared. |     | Entered. |      |
|----------|-----|----------|------|
| Tons.    | Men | Tons.    | Men. |
| 1278     | 722 | 1498     | 828  |

(These figures represent only a very small fraction.)

## THERMOMETER (In Shade).

|                        |    |
|------------------------|----|
| Highest ever . . . . . | 98 |
| „ 8 a. m. . . . .      | 89 |
| Lowest ever . . . . .  | 46 |
| „ 8 a.m. . . . .       | 58 |



## EDUCATION.

As mentioned in my last report the district is very badly off for schools there being only 4; one Board at Eight Mile Rock with a general annual average attendance of about 150 and one Church of England at each of the settlements of Sandy Point (Abaco) Smith's Point and West End, each having an average of about 25.

The Board school has made fair progress during the year under a capable teacher, who informs me that the hard times had very little effect on the attendance, the low average for the year, viz: 138, being due chiefly to rainy weather.

Praiseworthy efforts in agriculture were made with the seeds supplied by the Board, but the school yard is so exposed to the blighting southerly winds and sea-spray that it was not a success. Another trial I understand is intended to be made in a more propitious season of the new year.

The great difficulty in the establishment of schools in other parts of the district by the Board of Education is, I believe, that the population is so scattered that the number of children of school-age living sufficiently near any place that might be chosen for a school centre, would be too small to warrant the Board's granting a large enough sum to obtain an efficient teacher.

If the Board of Education could establish large institutions similar to the public schools in England where the pupils would be kept for terms of several months the problem of how to educate such children as I have referred to in the preceding paragraph would be solved.

At such an institution the scholars might be given practical lessons in agriculture, carpentering,

sewing, &c., before and after the regular school hours, which would help to maintain it and themselves.

#### VITAL STATISTICS.

By the enlargement of the district mentioned above the population was increased by about 350.

|                           |      |
|---------------------------|------|
| Population at last Census | 2170 |
| Deaths during the year    | 76   |
| Births     "     "     "  | 70   |

#### PUBLIC HEALTH.

The district generally has been healthy. There was an epidemic of fever and diarrhoea at West End causing a few deaths. Very strangely and unfortunately the West Enders did not apply to the Commissioner for remedies, although a stock has always been kept on hand, but dosed themselves with bush medicines.

What makes it so difficult for the great majority of the people to recover from illness is that almost invariably they keep the greater part of their houses shut up in the day and everywhere at night. I have done my best to impress upon them the fact that air once breathed becomes poisonous. In some instances my advice has been acted upon with regard to ventilation during the day, but at night the fear of "night draft" and ghosts is too strongly ingrained to be overcome so easily and, with a great many, I am afraid, is ineradicable.

Besides one or two other remedies a complete set of those mentioned in the Chief Medical Officer's pamphlet of "Instructions" has been kept on hand and I feel sure some of them have been instrumental in saving a few lives.



Healing the sick now forms a very important, large and interesting part of my work.

#### PUBLIC WORKS.

Besides the usual cleaning and weeding of roads the one connecting the front road at Headquarters with the Hawks Bill Creek landing place in the interior (which although one of the most important roads in the district, was remarkably characterised by one continuous succession of large slippery rocks with intervening waterholding depressions) has been improved by the construction of a causeway from end to end, ensuring a smooth, safe, comfortable dry-shod walk.

The high sections of the causeway adjoining and supporting the bridge across Hawks Bill Creek have been metamorphosed. The dangerous, rotten woodwork which often had to be repaired has been removed and thoroughly substantial masonwork, which will last practically for all eternity, has taken its place.

The pyramidal pile of unsightly stones in the front part of the inner grounds of the residency has been entirely removed and used to build up a wall and to make a very useful and artistic causeway leading from the Residency out to the street on the east where previously was only an abominably rugged sort of a pathway and where water settled after slight rains. This last work was paid for in relief provisions.

#### EMIGRATION AND IMMIGRATION.

Very few have returned but an unusually large number have gone away. This is due to the breakdown of the sponge industry. The emigrants have been generous in their remittances to those dependent on them left behind.

## GENERAL REMARKS.

The year under review has certainly been a record one for hard times: the long drought rendered abortive almost all agricultural effort and just when there was practically nothing to be got out of the fields the war broke out, giving a knock-out blow to the sponge industry. In these circumstances relief provisions from the government were obtained which, together with sundry wild roots found in the local forest, kept the people from actual starvation.

I regret very much to have to say that the outlook for the first half of the new year for many is as bad and in some cases worse than ever, on account of their produce having been ruined by inclement weather in the last part of the year. However we have all started the new year with increased energy and fresh zeal.

F. A. C. DUNCOMBE,  
Commissioner.

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HARBOUR ISLAND.

## FINANCIAL.

The direct revenue amounted to £254 as compared with £274 in 1913, a decrease of £20.

All importations were made *via* Nassau where customs duties were paid.

Local expenditure was £1168 as against £854 in 1913; an increase of £314, due principally to larger grants for public works.