

Grand Bahama Commissioner's Report 1926

Commissioner's Office
Eight Mile Rock
Grand Bahama
28th January 1927

Sir

I have the honour to forward here with my annual report from my District for the year ended 31st December 1926; also the return of Criminal Statistics together with the return of other information for the Bahamas Blue Book.

I have the honour to be
Your Obedient Servant
R.N. Thompson
Commissioner

The Honourable
the acting Colonial Secretary
Nassau, N. P. /

I. Grand Bahama. Financial.

Revenue:— Revenue derived from King's Fines, Justices Fees, Liquor Licenses, Remittances from the Collector of Revenue West End, and other sources, amounted to £1497..7..11.

Remittances from the Treasury amounted to £1123..3..0, making a total of £2620..10..11.

Expenditures:— Salaries of Police, Travelling expenses, Criminal expenses, Remittances to the Treasury, etc. amounted to £2571..4..5.

Health.

From January to July, the health of the district was good, but in August a number of dysentery cases were reported which soon increased considerably. A quantity of suitable medicines were quickly despatched by the C.M.O. from Nassau which afforded great relief.

Two American Red Cross doctors arrived here in October with medical supplies, and visited (nearly) all settlements from Sweeting's Cay to West End.

They treated 659 persons of whom 122 were dysentery cases.

The general health of the District became quite normal by the end of November, and has remained good ever since. /

II. Sanitation.

Many settlement lots have been cleaned up and improved; but the wells in general have not a sufficiently high curbing to prevent pollution from surface drainage from nearby garbage piles or toilets.

Vital Statistics.

Population at last census (1921) 1695.
 Births during the year 39.
 Deaths during the year 25.

Meteorological.

Barometer. The usual range was 30.33. Highest reading at 8 a.m. 30.43; lowest 29.60. Temperature. Highest in the shade 8 a.m. 90 in August; lowest 49 in January.
 Rainfall. Total for the year 10.21 inches. No. of days, 82.

Trade.

The chief imports were Liquors, foodstuffs, building material, clothing etc. from Nassau; and Lumber from Norman's Castle. One foreign vessel from Charleston, landed a quantity of machinery. The chief exports were sponge, sisal and fruit.

Shipping.

Coastwise.

	Vessels	Tons	Men
Inwards	236	3965	1271
Outward	290	4790	1824
Foreign.			
Inwards	346	1895	863
Outward	226	1523	503 /

III. Postal.

Head of Revenue	Eight Mile Rock	West End	Total
Sales of Stamps	£13..10..3½	£111..10..10	£124..11..1 ½
Postage	1 .. 6	7..11.. 6	7..13.. 0
Money Orders issued	21..10..10		21..10..10
Customs duty on parcels	25..11 ..4	14..10.. 6	40.. 1..10
	60.. 3..11½	133..12..10	193..16..19½

Registered letters received 108. Despatched 221.

Mail Service

In the early months of the year numerous complaints about the unsatisfactory performance of the mail service were coming in, many of which were entirely justifiable; but dating from August, a marked improvement has been noticeable : the captain and crew are ever so much more kind and courteous, and considerably more of the cargo space is available for the carrying of food supplies. The Emerald is a clean and comfortable schooner, though somewhat small for the service, and apart from the delays owing to circumstances over which the crew has no control, her sailings have been taken up in stricter accordance with the schedule.

Thomas Wilchcombe who is the captain of the Emerald was a fellow passenger on the boat that brought me to this island and was given command when caught in bad weather in mid ocean. During the July hurricane we happened to be fellow passengers again /

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(on the Emerald this time) and on this as on the former occasion he exhibited the qualities of A-1 seamanship.

The passage between here and Nassau is over a long stretch of rough ocean with ever-varying moods of weather, and when head winds, calms, or bad weather prevails, passengers experience much hardship.

In February the mail was caught in bad weather near West End on the return trip. The wind jumped ahead just as she reached S.W. point and being unable to beat around the point was forced to send back along the rough 8 Mile Rock shore; heavily laden with freight and passengers and narrowly escape foundering.

A fortnightly service has been established making more frequent intercourse with Nassau an agreeable possibility and acting as an emolient to the former aggrieved condition of the inhabitants.

In view of these changes it might seem ungrateful on the part of the inhabitants to even hint already, a desire for its still further improvement but the close relation of such narrow escapes to speed; the serious loss of time occasioned by unfavorable weather on trips to Nassau, to say nothing of the growing importance of the island seem to make it imperative that in the near future a craft with auxiliary power take the place of the one now dependent /

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on sails only, as a crowing measure in the process of securing the highest efficiency of service.

Education.

There are two Board schools and nine Grant-in-Aid schools in the District. With one or two exceptions, the schools have been regularly conducted and made a good showing at the annual Examination.

Eight Mile Rock school was opened during the year 198 days. Highest monthly average [in November] 153. Lowest monthly average 138 in December. Average yearly attendance 138. NO. on register in December 182.

Crime.

114 offences were reported in which 120 persons were summoned or apprehended. These were disposed of as follows: discharged for want of evidence or dismissed on the merits 30; fined 65; imprisoned 4; whipped 1; bound over 11; cautioned 6; committed for trial at the Sessions 3. Apart from 1 case of wounding and the 3 cases committed for trial at Supreme Court there was no serious crime. Most of the cases dealt with were trivial police cases. While there is little propensity towards the commission of the graver order of crime there is all too strong a tendency against keeping the Law to the letter as well as to oppose public men and measures as such. /

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Public Works.

Besides the usual weeding and cleaning of roads and streets, burial grounds, etc., several miles of new road have been opened up in the eastern part of the District. The road from Eight Mile Rock to West End has been greatly improved.

Friendly Societies.

There are four Burial Societies with a total of 281 members. These Societies are very helpful in aiding the sick and burying the dead.

Fisheries.

There was very little activity among the sponging fleet during the earlier months of the year as the prices were low; but in December the spongers did well. Large cargoes were taken to market which realized good prices.

A Fair quantity of turtle shells was sold during the year, at satisfactory prices.

Nearly all the sponging vessels at Moore's Island were destroyed by the last hurricane.

Agriculture.

A fair quantity of onions, cabbages and other vegetables were grown, most of which were readily disposed of locally. A good crop of guinea corn has been /

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harvested, but except at Water Cay, Indian corn has not been much in evidence. The acreage of general field crops has been considerably increased during the year yet there remains a lot to be done before this island can compare favourably with others from an agricultural stand point.

There is plenty of good rich land which can be used to advantage; still the bulk of the people are content to cultivate their little garden patches near the coast which are nearly always destroyed by the salt spray. They have failed to learn the lesson that experience has taught them and make their fields further inland. The cultivation of larger fields for general produce has been stressed.

The farmers at Water Cay have grown [proportionately] much more general produce than those on the mainland and have partially supplied the demand for Indian corn.

At the West End, Mr. Horatio Wilchcombe has started farming on an extensive scale, putting in about 30 acres for general produce as an experiment. This will undoubtedly serve as a stimulus to others.

Pineapples. – about 3 acres were cultivated. Mr. William Russell's field at Peterson Cay yielded a fine crop of fruit which found a ready market locally. There is plenty of rich land to be found here suitable to the cultivation of pineapples, and it is a great pity that some of the "younger heads" will not go in for its cultivation. /

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General Remarks.

Except at Moore's Island and Sandy Point where many vessels and houses were destroyed, the people have almost entirely recovered from the effects of the hurricanes, and conditions are nearly normal again.

Several large and dangerous forest fires have occurred between Eight Mile Rock and High Rock and the destruction of a quantity of good timber has been the result. Careful enquiries have been made but no clue to the offenders has been developed. Among the visitors to our island were Mr. Fredenburgh, Mr. George Sissons, Mr. Donald Douglas, Dr. Leidig, Dr. A.B. Wilbur, Dr. W.R.Redden, members of the American Red Cross, Mr. Gus Jordahn, and Colonel Brinkman, representative of the Grand Bahama Mercantile and Development Co., and also of the East Palm Beach Land and Development Co.

They all seemed pleased with the climate, scenery and other lovely features in which this island abounds.

Very little has been done as yet by any of the development companies, but it is hoped that the dream of greater prosperity in which they have caused the people to indulge in soon may come true.

R.H. Thompson
Commissioner

The Honourable,
The Colonial Secretary,
Nassau, N.P.

Transcribed from the original by James Baker as a reference so that these past "snapshots" of the Island's economic and social history are available