

Grand Bahama Commissioner's Report 1960

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THE ANNUAL REPORT
OF
THE DISTRICT OF Grand Bahama ISLAND
FOR
THE YEAR 1960
BY
COMMISSIONER S. R. DARVILLE

CHAPTER I.

GOVERNMENT AND ADMINISTRATION.

GOVERNMENT.

The District of Grand Bahama, which comprises and includes the main Island of Grand Bahama and the adjacent Cays, including Water Cay, Sweetings Cay and others, lies on the southern edge of the Little Bahama Bank, one hundred and forty miles West North West of New Providence and sixty miles East South East of West Palm Beach, Florida. The District was represented in The Honourable House of Assembly by the Honourable Charles W.F. Bethel, MH. A. M.E.C. until March of this year when Mr. Bethel was appointed to the Legislative Council. At a By-Election held in the District in March, Mr. Warren Lavarity was elected to fill this vacancy. This By-Election was the first to be held under the new Election Act.

Courts of Revision for the Registration of Voters, were held Quarterly, as required under the Act, in the four Divisions of this District. A new Register was compiled, (beginning in December, 1959) after the franchise was extended, by the new Act, to all males over twenty-one years of age. At the close of the year under review, there were 737 registered voters in the four Divisions of this District, that is, 49 in Division No.1, 152, in No. 2, 350 in Division No.3 and 186 in Division No.4.

ADMINISTRATION.

Administrative duties of the District were performed by this writer, assisted by the usual number of subordinate Officers

including two Clerks, Customs and Immigration Officers at West End and Freeport, members of the Nassau Constabulary also at West End and Freeport, and four Local Constables.

I might just say in this chapter, that the Administrative duties of this District have long past [sic] the ability of any one man to cope with and unless permanent and capable assistance is provided, many duties will have to go undone. This is a most unsatisfactory state of affairs and is not at all a pleasant situation for any Officer to face or put up with. As a result of this situation, and other matters which may be better left unwritten, the year 1960 has been my worst in the thirteen years that I have filled this post, and were it not for kind and fatherly advice and unstinted co-operation of certain Heads of Departments of Government, this year could have ended, for me, to put it mildly, most disappointingly. The overall success of Administration here, must be attributed to all concerned.

CHAPTER II.

POPULATION.

The estimated population of the District for the year 1960, is between 8,500 and 9,000. The following distribution is an estimated detailed distribution of this population among the various settlements, not including the U.S. personnel at the U.S.A.F. Base at Gold Rock Creek: -

West End	1560	Russell Town, Williams Town and Smith's Point	
			260
Dead Man's Reef	20	Free Town	130
Holmes Rock	360	High Rock	580
Sea Grape	450	Pelican Point and Rocky Creek	120
Eight-Mile-Rock	1340	McLean's Town	190
Pinder's Point	460	Sweetings Cay	290
Hunters & Lewis Yard	340	Water Cay	320
Marco (Freeport) City	1,560	Other Freeport Area	600

The Following is a Record of Births and Deaths in the District during this year:
There was a total of 195 Births; 97 Males and 98 Females.

Of the 195 Births, there were 6 still births. 49 of these births, or about one in every four, were illegitimate. There were 47 Deaths during the year; 21 males and 26 females; of these there were 17 children under one year, including 6 still births. Causes of Deaths were: Cardiovascular diseases; Cancer; Senility; General Debility; Child-birth; Brain Tumor; Gas Gangrain [sic], Addison Disease; Tetanus; Gastro-enteritis; Broncho-pneumonia; Premature and Accidents (2 Motor Vehicle and 1 Drowning)

Sixty-one persons were sent to Princess Margaret Hospital in Nassau, for treatments, 31 males and 30 females. These cases were Surgery, Gynecology, Maternity, Internal Diseases and Tonsillectomy. Only 2 of these cases were sent by chartered planes; all others were either sent by scheduled flights or by mail-boat. Fifteen of these patients died in Hospital.

CHAPTER III.

HEALTH AND SANITATION.

The general health condition of the people of this District has continued to remain very satisfactory. Most of the diseases encountered were successfully treated by the District Medical Officer, and to some extent, by the private medical officer at Freeport.

Public Wells, still mostly, the only source of water supply, were well kept and maintained during the year. The injections of the Salk's Polio Vaccine against Infantile paralysis, continued and there are now very few, if any, children who have not been immunised.

Nutritional deficiency, "malnutrition", while less in evidence, was successfully dealt with by the use of artificial vitamins. The importation of fresh fruits and vegetables is increasing more and more, and fresh milk is now much more available.

Incidents of infectious diseases have remained low and without any particular significance to the general health or to the economy of the Island.

Leprosy, reported in one person, – a woman, – in the District has been completely arrested and she is rehabilitated and performs the normal house-wife's work.

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Venereal Diseases have been well controlled. No Primary Syphilis was seen or any other Venereal disease, besides Gonorrhoea, which has increased considerably over previous years due to the influx of many workers from various parts of the Bahamas and elsewhere. There were 92 cases in 1960 as compared with 56 cases in 1959 and 57 cases in 1958.

Tuberculosis has been visibly declining for the past three years. There were no new cases in 1960, and fewer patients have remained under close observation and care of the District Medical Officer and the District Nurse. Two of these cases had to be sent back to the Hospital in Nassau, because the arrangement of them in their homes was impossible because of alcoholism and vagrancy, while a number of cases have been fully restored to health.

Hypertension and Cancer have been responsible for about 33% of all deaths on Grand Bahama during 1960. Of the total 47 deaths, Cardiovascular diseases have been responsible for 12 deaths and Cancer four of them. – An additional three persons from Grand Bahama have died of Cancer after being sent to Hospital in Nassau. – Deaths from this disease have been unusually high this year. In 1959 there were 3; in 1958 there were 2 and in 1957 only one person died of cancer here.

The most important Medico-social problem of this Island, and I suppose this is true in many other places as well, remains Alcoholism. Alcoholism is the source of unhappiness, broken homes, poverty, criminality and is an important factor leading to accidents and diseases. It is a far more serious problem than tuberculosis, malnutrition, or any other disease. Incredible indifference, a conspiracy of silence and a taciturn acceptance of existing conditions seem to prevail. Alcoholism in Grand Bahama is such a natural phenomenon that it appears to be no more perceived. It seems now to be just a part of the accepted pattern of life. As there are still no outlets for the needs of the body and the mind, – no clubs, no cinemas, no sports facilities, no Libraries of any worth and no reading rooms, – alcoholism remains the only way out of the monotony of the daily life. One of our most urgent needs is recreational centres in most, – if not all, – of the

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settlements of this Island, if we do not wish to see our youth spiritually and physically perishing. No one seems to think about it, let alone do anything about it. We seem to accept the evil of alcoholism as a compulsory or necessary one and we do not try to find a way out of it. No drugs are necessary. No fiery crusades with avalanches of words. What we need is better education, especially from a physical point of view, and some facilities to provide means for the proper and profitable use of the "off work" or spare time hours. Alcoholics should be helped not despised. It is not necessarily their fault that those of us who can, do not care, don't try to solve their problem nor to prevent it to any extent. It seems almost like our people are being gently but certainly pushed into the miserable state. I am not a teetotallar [sic], as I can write this way about alcoholism without being accused of fanaticism.

SANITATION.

Definite improvements in certain areas are being made in this direction, but much is still to be desired, especially in respect of the water supply system which dates back to the Garden of Eden.

CHAPTER IV.

HOUSING.

Again this year, it is pleasing to report that a considerable number of new homes and business-places have been built in every settlement in the District. While some of these new buildings are being constructed of wood most of them are of concrete block construction. The problem of over-crowding of large families in small houses is still with us and shall be, I'm afraid, for a long time yet.

Most of the homes now being built are all equipped with sewer and electrical facilities for modern living. They are all well built and of modern design

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CHAPTER V.

PRODUCTION.

FOREST.

Large areas of the vast pine forest covering most of the Island's surface, has been sold for various Commercial Developments, and forest products of all kinds have been discontinued.

MARINE.

The principal Marine Products are fish, conchs and crawfish. Sea-shells, Coral and Star-fish are also gathered and sold to markets in the United States.

Edible and sport fish, of numerous varieties and quantities, abound in the waters of this District. Thousands, yes, tens of thousands of visitors come, by every means of transportation, to join and share in the fun and frolic with the champions and fighters of the deep and the shallow flats.

All of the edible fish, is sold on the Local market where the demand is much greater than the supply in spite of the continued increase in the price. A number of samcks and small dinghy boats are continuously engaged in this fishing business.

The export of the Conch meat was prohibited for many years and now the Banks have been closed to the export of the shells. To some, this has been quite a blow, but this had to be done sooner or later in spite of the seemingly inexhaustible supply spread over the many miles of Banks, North and East of this Island. Like fish, the price of this food has increased considerably over the past two years and there is yet no shortage in the supply.

Open season for the Crawfish is from the 1st., January to the 15th., March and from the 1st., October to the 31st., December of each year. It has been found that the clause in the Rules of The Agricultural and Marine Products Board which permits the taking of a certain quantity of these fish for personal use, during the closed season, has been very much abused and thousands of the fish are caught and sold as a result. If this industry is to survive at all, a more rigid application of the Rule must be made with possibly the complete exemption of this clause.

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The 1959-1960 season, for these fish, was not at all a good one. Comparatively few fish were caught and much fewer exported. Most of the export of the fish was from the Eastern End of the Island by boats directly to the United States. Most of the fish caught in and around the West End area was sold to Hotels and Guest Houses at very good prices. This local sale of the product, however, has

considerably increased the number of under-sized fish caught and sold.

Turtles are found in fair quantities in the waters of this District, especially in the banks and in the creeks and inlets, where the Green Turtle is rather plentiful, although not very large ones. In the West End area, the Loggerhead is more plentiful but may be found in other areas as well. The Hawksbill is the least plentiful but may be found in all areas in seemingly limited quantities. The meat of these turtles find ready sale on the local market at fairly substantial prices.

Stone-Crabs, a delicacy of the crab family, are still found in apparently increasing numbers on the banks North and East of West End and on the Eastern end of the Island. The capturing or taking of these Crabs is prohibited by Law.

One sentence will suffice to comment on the agricultural situation of this District; – the people of this District are not agriculturally minded. Oh, a few small “farms” or “patches” are to be found here and there, but even these are disappearing as employment and developments spread through the Island. In areas like Water Cay, McLeans Town, Pelican Point, and Sweetings Cay, some people continue to do a little cultivation of some of the general food crops, but these are very limited; not enough to be of any real value.

Farming, on a commercial scale, was started in the Freeport area by Green Cove Farms Limited during this year, and was reportedly rather successful, that is, as far as production was concerned. The products were Tomatoes and Cucumbers, it is also reported, however, that the increased import duty on tomatoes in the United States made it prohibitive and worthless to export most of this crop. Small quantities of the crop were disposed of here, but most of it was either given away or allowed to rot.

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Stock has continued to be on the decrease I regret to say, no efforts are made to halt it or to improve or replenish the stock. Poultry raising, on the other hand has increased considerably, and is now run on a commercial basis. The output is not yet large enough to take care of the needs or demands of the whole Island but this, I feel, will come in due time, as other persons are now going into the same field.

CHAPTER VI.

COMMERCE.

Approximately 15,000 crawfish, small quantities of scalefish, sea-shells, sea-fans, star-fish, feathers and coral were exported to markets in the United States. The approximate value of this export was about £7,500.

Tomatoes and Cucumbers were exported by The Green Cove Farms Limited, out of Freeport, but the quantity and value are unavailable at this time. No forest products were exported this year.

Customs Duties collected on Imports at West End amounted to £153,391 – 5 – 9. A similar or larger amount was collected at Freeport, but although requested several months ago, I have been unable to ascertain this figure.

While a small amount of the foods and clothing, – and all of the liquor, – is imported from or through Nassau, most of the foods and clothing and all of the fresh meats, dairy products, fresh fruits and vegetables, except what is produced here, are imported from the United States, as well as practically all of the building material, with the exception of concrete blocks, which are manufactured locally in the Island. These commodities and material are brought both by sea and air transportation at West End and Freeport.

CHAPTER VII.

WAGES AND COST OF LIVING.

Government's basic wage for the common labourer is now

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£1. 12. 0. per day for men and £1. 4. 0. Per day for women, but still, in order to obtain labour in some places, it is necessary to up to 40/- and 30/- per day of eight hours. Private Companies and Contractors, operating in the District, pay considerably higher wages to their casual workers.

The following is the scale of wages which prevailed, generally, in the District during the year under review:

.....	3/6 to 6/ – per hour.
Common Labourers (men)	.....
Common Labourers (women)	..... 3/ – to 4/6 per hour.
Semi-skilled labourers	..... 5/ – to 7/6 per hour.
Carpenters & Masons	..... 8/ – to 17/ – per hour.
Plumbers & Electricians	..... 9/ – to 21/ – per hour.
Painters & Chauffeurs	..... 7/6 to 14/ – per Hour.
Domestic Workers	..... 2/6 to 5/– per hour.

Hours of work are generally from 7.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m. with one hour off for lunch, but this varies under certain circumstances.

Needless to say that prices, especially in certain areas, have again increased, and so increase the cost of living. Prices in the West End area have noticeably increased as compared with prices in other areas. A pound of butter, for instance, (New Zealand) is from 5/ – to 8/ – per pound, while in another area it is sold for 3/6 per pound. Eggs are sold at 5/6 per dozen in one area and in West End for 8/ – to 9/ – per dozen. The difference in the prices of a six ounce jar of instant coffee is almost unbelievable; in West End, it is 17/6 and in another area it is sold for 8/9 for the very same brand and make. I say then, without any exaggeration, that the cost of living in this District, and especially so in West End, exceeds any place I know of.

CHAPTER VIII.

EDUCATION AND WELFARE INSTITUTIONS.

In all the largest settlements of the District, schools are established and conducted under the supervision of the Board of Education. There are four Board Schools and six Grant-in-Aid

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These are located as follows: –

West End,	Board,	W. Butler & L.V. Smith.
Eight-Mile-Rock,	Board,	W. Ferguson.
Holmes Rock,	Board,	W. P. Parker.
McLean's Town,	Board,	T. Albury
Water Cay,	Grant-in-Aid,	M. Thomas.
High Rock,	Grant-in-Aid,	R.A. Wildgoose.
Pelican Point,	Grant-in-Aid,	L. Laing.
Free Town,	Grant-in-Aid,	C. McIntosh.
Sweetings Cay,	Grant-in-Aid,	N. Russell
Smith's Point,	Grant-in-Aid,	D. Smith.

Schools are conducted, as well, at Freeport City and Hunters. The schools at Freeport City are privately run; one by the Grand Bahama Port Authority, with an English Teacher, Mr. Brown, as Headmaster, nod is attended only by the children of white employees and residents of Freeport. The other school is, like the school in Hunters, is [sic] run by the Roman Catholic Church and is open to children of all races and Creed. Three or four Nuns or "Sisters" are in charge of each of these schools.

All of the schools are reported to have been conducted fairly satisfactorily and regularly during the year. Attendance, in most of them, was also satisfactory, but much is to be desired in this respect.

A new School and Teacher's Residence was started at High Rock, as well as at Lewis Yard and a Teacher's Cottage at Holmes. A Teacher's Cottage was completed at McLeans Town. It is hoped that before the end of 1961 we will see the completion of these buildings and staffed to meet the needs of these communities and thus alleviate the inconvenience and disadvantages of some our children.

WELFARE INSTITUTIONS.

Friendly and burial Societies, including a few Branches of several Secret Orders, are operating throughout the District, and comprise a total membership of several thousands of men and women. They are established in just about every settlement of the District in one form or another, for the primary purpose of aiding the sick and burying the dead of their members. Assistance is also rendered to the familiar

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of the deceased members whenever the needs warrant it. The funds of these Institutions are deposited, except in a very few cases of very small groups, in one of the local Banks or in the Post Office Savings Bank. Some f these accounts are quite substantial.

These Institutions are continuing to do a good job in the performance of their philanthropic duties, and many more widows and orphans are rendered assistance each year, and many a burden lifted from the shoulders of the bereaved of their members. These Organizations are all operated by an elected Committee of Management and most of them are registered with Government.

CHAPTER IX.

COMMUNICATION AND TRANSPORT.

MAIL SERVICE.

The regular weekly mail service was performed by the motor vessel Richard Campbell, and substitutes, during the year under review. Some complaints have been made about the services rendered by the vessel but it is the opinion of this writer that as satisfactory a service as may reasonably be expected, from such a vessel in a District of this size and population, has been rendered. Needless to say, however, needs and requirements of this District have long out-grown the capacity and type of service of such a vessel, both in passenger and freight accommodations.

Air-mail and air-freight services were reasonably maintained by aircraft of Bahamas Airways Limited, between Nassau – Freeport – West End – Bimini – Miami – West Palm Beach, which, again this year, have been extremely helpful and very much appreciated.

In addition to these services, a passenger and freight air-service was maintained by Mackey Airlines between Miami – Fort Lauderdale – West Palm Beach – West End – Freeport. These services transported thousands of tourists, visitors and residents to and from this District and has proven of invaluable assistance to all concerned. Apart from any other revenues that may have been derived from these services,

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the sum of £11,566. 15. 0. was collected for Departure Taxes during the year. Numerous vessels entered and cleared at the three Ports of Entry in the District during the year. A large number of these vessels brought cargoes of various kinds, a lesser number were in Ballast and a much larger percentage called at Freeport to load or unload fuel from or for the Bunkering Terminal there. Many sports fishermen and pleasure cruisers were also included; these, generally, entered and cleared at West End.

ROADS.

As far as funds would permit, all Public Roads in the District were maintained. The Grand Bahama Main Road, which has now been ex- [sic] for many miles beyond Hawksbill Creek, could not be satisfactorily maintained in all sections. The area between West End and Eight-Mile-Rock, however, was very satisfactorily maintained with the funds provided for this purpose. Considerable more funds are now necessary to properly maintain the many miles of Public Roads that have been built and are in daily use by all sections of the Island.

POST OFFICES.

There are five sub postoffices in the District, located at Eight-Mile-Rock, Freeport, High Rock, Sweetings Cay and Smith's Point. These sub-post offices, except for the one in Freeport, handle only mails and parcels. Each, of four of these sub-postmasters, holds an imprest of stamps from the District Postmaster at West End. The imprest held by the sub-postmaster is with the Postmaster of the Bahamas as is that of the District Postmaster at West End. The sub-post office at Freeport handles all transactions as are handled in the District Post Office at West End, including Money Orders and Post Office Savings Bank accounts. Traffic is most, if not all, of these post offices has continued to increase and in West End and Freeport, two to three Clerks are required to meet the increasing demands of the growing communities.

The following is a statement of the financial transactions of the District Post Office for the year (this does not include similar transactions at the Freeport sup-post office): –

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REVENUE.

Post Office Savings Bank Deposits	£4,646. 8. 0.
Sale of Telegraph & Domestic Money Orders	26,991. 10. 3.
Sale of U.K. & Jamaican Money Orders	.....	190. 14. 5.
Sale of U.S. & Canadian Money Orders	.....	2,939. 1. 4.
Sale of Postage Stamps	.....	4,475. 0. 0.
Parcel Post Duties collected	.....	1,382. 0. 9.
Short Paid Postage collected	.....	3. 16. 2.
Total Revenue		£40,628. 10.11.
	

EXPENDITURE.

Withdrawals Post Office Savings Bank	.....	£4,203. 2. 0.
Telegraph & Domestic Money Orders paid	.....	2,510.19. 5.
United States Money Orders paid	.....	139.15. 1.
British Postal Orders Paid	.....	9. 0. 0.
Total Expenditure	.....	£6,862.16. 6.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS.

There are three telegraph stations in this District, located at West End, Freeport and Sweetings

Cay. These are all reported to have operated satisfactorily during the year and somewhat better communication services are provided.

The Local Telephone System has also operated family satisfactorily, with minor [sic] repairs and upkeep, and has been of very valuable assistance and service to all within its reach,

The total Telegraph Revenue for the year, 1960, at West End only, was £2,286. 12. 10. and Overseas Telephone Revenue was £3,767. 17. 5. The Local Telephone Revenue for the year was £20. 2. 0. making a total, for West End, of £6,094. 14. 3.

CHAPTER X.

FINANCE.

The following is a detailed statement of Revenue and Expenditure in the District (not including the accounts of Revenue and Expenditure of the Collector of Revenue at Freeport) for the year, 1960.

[pages 14 through 23 are missing from the copy on file]

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.