

Grand Bahama Commissioner's Report 1963

DISTRICT OF WEST END, GRAND BAHAMA.
ANNUAL REPORT, 1963.

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THE ANNUAL REPORT
OF
THE DISTRICT OF GRAND BAHAMA ISLAND
(WEST END)
THE YEAR 1963.
BY
COMMISSIONER C.M. MACDONALD

CHAPTER I. GOVERNMENT AND ADMINISTRATION.

GOVERNMENT.

The District of Grand Bahama, which comprises and includes the main Island of Grand Bahama with the exception of the area covered by the Freeport District 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 Harold DeGregory, M. H. A., who took his seat as an Independent member in November 1962 when some 93% of an electorate of 2047 exercised their right to vote in the General Election.

The old District of Grand Bahama had finally become too cumbersome to be handled by one person and the necessity for division of the island into two magisterial districts was realized on the 1st of May, 1963 when the new District of Freeport was formed, this new district took on an area going east from Hawksbill Creek to the Missile Base at Gold Rock Creek.

ADMINISTRATION.

From August administrative duties of the District were performed by the writer, assisted by the usual number of subordinate Officers including two Clerks, Customs and Immigration Officers at West End, three members of the Nassau Constabulary also at West End, and four Local Constables at various parts of the island.

CHAPTER II.

POPULATION.

The population taken at the census at the end of 1963 showed the total population for the whole of Grand Bahama to be 8490. This was the recorded figure arrived at but I feel that this may fall short by some six or seven hundred because of the number of illegal immigrants, mainly from Haiti, who most obviously would take care not to be included.

There was a total of 289 Births; 167 Males and 122 Females. Of the 289 Births, there were 9 still births. Of these births, or about one in every four, were illegitimates. There were 39 Deaths during the year; 21 males and 19 females [sic]; of these there were 12 children under one year, including 9 still births.

Causes of Deaths were mainly those induced by hypertension and circulatory failures among the adults and the main causes among the children were gastroenteritis and respiratory complaints. There were several accidental deaths in both groups and four deaths were attributed to cancer.

78 persons were sent to Princess Margaret Hospital in Nassau for treatments, 32 males and 46 females. These cases were Surgery, Gynecology, Maternity and Internal Disease.

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CHAPTER III.

HEALTH AND SANITATION.

HEALTH.

There have been some dramatic alterations in the above category. The burden of the District Medical Officer has increased considerably and he has expressed his concern to me in connection with several changing facets of the health position.

Venereal diseases have increased by about five hundred per cent and more than 400 cases were treated in 1963. There 5 cases of primary syphilis and the balance was in respect of gonorrhoea. The position has been described by the Medical Officer as "serious but not dangerous".

Alcoholism is definitely the most serious social-medical problem and this is markedly on the rise. Four cases of delirium tremens were sent to Nassau during this year. This problem is far reaching and is causing a great deal of distress in the form of domestic unhappiness, broken homes and general poverty; the part it plays in the spread of disease, the rate of illegitimacy and the incidence of criminality is also very obvious. The problem which at one time would have caused much discussion on Grand Bahama is now an accepted part of the every day pattern and excites no comment. A factor which contributes largely to alcoholism and the ensuing poverty and hardship is, paradoxically, the economic prosperity of the area. Men and women who, formerly, could not indulge in any sort of excess are now in a position where they can afford this indulgence.

Illegitimacy is also a matter of normal acceptance in much of the community and where formerly this misfortune was much frowned on, very little stigma now attaches itself to the unwed mother on Grand Bahama. A great deal of the cause of this is unquestionably due to the excessive drinking now prevalent among

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young people and another factor is on account of the influx of new people from the more worldly areas of the colony.

Tuberculosis is being successfully held in check and only two new cases came to light in 1963. Both of these cases were imported, one from Bimini and one from Turks Island.

To counteract this rather grim side of the health picture it can be reported that there was a sharp drop in vitamin deficiency in that only one case was serious enough to evoke comment.

A successful programme of vaccination and immunisation was conducted as a preventative measure against diphtheria, polio, tetanus, whooping cough, and small pox and the usefulness of this was shown in the drop in incidence of these diseases.

Ante-natal care is accepted now largely as an integral part of child bearing with a corresponding drop in loss of life in these maternity cases and the production of healthier babies on the island.

A growing interest in family planning is now in evidence and this is in sharp contrast to the attitude of former years.

Leprosy is non-existent in the District.

SANITATION.

The water supply systems on the island are outmoded and inadequate. Spring water wells and roof-fed cisterns are the rule and toilet facilities have not increased to meet the requirements of the mushrooming population. An ever increasing danger of fecal contamination in drinking water is present with the ever present threat of disease.

Overcrowding to meet the press of the population explosion of the island also lends itself to the danger of diseases such as tuberculosis.

So far there has been no outbreak but the danger is increasing daily.

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The need for a sanitary inspector is great and in the larger Settlements particularly the problem of maintaining some standard of public health can only be met by the installation of this official.

CHAPTER IV. HOUSING.

Despite the number of new houses going up, the housing problem is critical. A number of jerry-built barracks blocks have been run up in the Eight Mile Rock area and exorbitant rents all over the island are the rule. The population influx is at a level where no amount of building can keep up with it. It is pleasing to report however that many of the new houses are well built edifices of concrete block construction and that more imaginative and ambitious designs are being used.

The Town Planning Act was extended to Grand Bahama towards the end of the year and this will go a long way towards the improvement of housing standards on the island.

CHAPTER V. PRODUCTION.

FOREST.

Large acreage 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 of visitors come by every means of transportation to take part in the sport of game fishing.

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All of the edible fish are sold to the local market where the demand is much greater than the supply in spite of the continued increase in the price. A number of smacks and 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 of March and from the 1st of October to the 31st of 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.

The 1962-1963 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.

Such is the local demand for all marine products that it is easier and more profitable for the fisherman to sell their [sic] catch to the hotels than it is to export it to the United States.

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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 is also 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.

The people of this District are not agriculturally minded and this industry has steadily decreased until it is no longer of consequence.

POULTRY-RAISING.

Poultry raising has increased considerably and there is a large poultry farm operating commercially near the Freeport area and two others in the West End area.

Such is the ever increasing local demand however that it will be a long time before local production can begin to cope with it.

CHAPTER VI.
COMMERCE.

Approximately 50,000 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 £6,000.

Customs Duties collected on imports at West End amounted to £330,839: 6: 3. This figure was made up by the following items

	£215,055: 7: 0
<u>DUTY</u>	
Emergency Tax.	77,354: 9: 5
Alcoholic Liquors.	6,673: 3: 2

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Inland Tax (Cigarettes).	£ 1,146:13:10	
Gasoline Tax	851: 6:10	
Stamp Tax	5,659: -: -	
Radio & T.V. Tax	345: -: -	
Storage Charges	18:10: -	
Departure Tax	29,319:14: -	
Export Duty	24:13: -	
Fines & forfeitures	50: -: -	
		<u>Total: £330,839: 6: 3.</u>

CHAPTER VII.
WAGES AND COST OF LIVING.

Wages on the island are quite out of proportion to the scale laid down by Government and this leaves me in a poor bargaining position when competing with private employers. Common labour and artisan rates of pay are largely determined by the exigencies of the moment.

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

	.....	6/- to 8/- per hour.
Common Labourers (men)	.....	6/- to 8/- per hour.
Common Labourers (women)	.....	4/- to 5/6 per hour
Semi-skilled labourers	.....	7/ 6 to 8/6 per hour
Carpenters & Masons	.....	14/- to 16/- per hour
Plumbers & Electricians	.....	15/- to 25/- per hour
Painters & Chauffeurs	.....	9/- to 16/- per hour
Domestic Workers	.....	3/6 to 6/- 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.

A small market which opened in West End at the end of 1962 has a steady influence on the price of consumable goods but prices there have now risen and prices like one dollar for a pound of butter are commonplace. This causes hardship on the elderly people who are living on a pension scale and the good graces of relatives.

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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. These are located as follows: -

	Board	L.V. Smith.
West End	Board	S. Gibbs.
Eight Mile Rock	Board	W. P. Parker.
Holmes Rock	Grant-in-Aid	M. Thomas.
Water Cay	Board	U. R. Patrick
McLeans Town	Grant-in-Aid	R. Dean
High Rock	Grant-in-Aid	L. Laing
Pelican Point	Grant-in-Aid	G. McIntosh
Free Town	Grant-in-Aid	N. Russell
Sweetings Cay	Grant-in-Aid	D. Smith
Smith's Point	Board	M. Archer
Lewis Yard		

All of these 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 completed 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.

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 thousand 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 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 of these accounts are quite substantial.

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CHAPTER IX.

COMMUNICATION AND TRANSPORT.

MAIL SERVICE.

The regular weekly mail service was performed by the motor vessel, Church Bay, and substitutes, during the year under review. This service is not good; cargoes are very often short shipped or damaged and the service, particularly to the Eastern End of the island is unreliable.

The air service supplied by Bahamas Airways Limited and Mackey Airlines has been very good. These services transported thousands of tourists and residents to and from this District and has contributed greatly to the stable economic situation existing on this Island. The sum of £29,319:14. -. was collected for Departure Taxes during the year; this represents an increase of 100% over last year. The number of vessels entering and clearing at the three Ports of Entry in this District has increased during the year.

ROADS.

The Grand Bahama main road is a source of constant worry to me. The original road construction was poor and the surface is constantly breaking. The phenomenally heavy rains experienced last year washed out several sections of the road and weakened other parts of the surface. Repair work was successfully carried out and the road kept in fair shape for the remainder of the year. The proposal to reconstruct this road and widen it is momentarily under discussion. The ever increasing flow of traffic on Grand Bahama makes this project of the highest importance.

The new back road at West End is now open and traffic congestion is very much relieved as a result.

Licensing of vehicles of all types was carried out daily throughout 1963 and a total of 525 vehicles were registered.

Revenue collected from various sources during the year was set out hereunder:

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REVENUE COLLECTED.
in 1963.

Motor Vehicles	£7,670: 6: 5
1. Drivers	697:10: -
2. Provisional Drivers	61: 6: -
3. Public Service Vehicles	59: 2: 6
4. Public Service Vehicle Drivers	34:10: -
5. Miscellaneous	
(duplicates, Franchises, Etc,)	£ 223: 5: 1
	£8,745:19: 0

POST OFFICES.

There are four Sub-Post Offices in the District, located at Eight-Mile-Rock, High Rock, Sweetings Cay and Smith's Point. The Sub-Post Offices, handle only mails and parcels. Each of the Sub-Postmasters holds an imprest of stamps from the District Postmaster of West End. Money Orders, Post Office Savings Bank accounts and all post office transactions are handled at West [End] and such is the increase in load that it will shortly be necessary to increase the staff and, if possible, seek new premises.

The following is a statement of the financial transactions of the District Post Office for the year.
REVENUE.

Post Office Savings Bank Deposits	£3,638: 8. 9.
Sale of Telegraph Money Orders	33,499. 4. 4.
Domestic Money Orders	2,935: 1: 1
Sale of U.S. & Canadian Money Orders	1,188: 6: 1
Sale of Postage Stamps	3,325:15: -
Parcel Post Duties collected	1,861: 3: 9
Short Paid Postage collected	3: 8: 6.
P. O. Box Rentals	66: -: -
Total Revenue	£46,490: 7: 6

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EXPENDITURE.

Withdrawals Post Office Savings Bank	£3,106:15. 8.
Telegraph & Domestic Money Orders Paid	1,490:19:2
U. S. Money Orders paid	82:15. 3
British Postal Orders Paid	4: 5. -.
Total Expenditure	£4,684.15. 1.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS.

This service is poor. The station at West End is grossly overloaded and the equipment is quite inadequate for the demand. Inability to reach Nassau for the United States is the rule every evening and in static conditions. The loss of revenue is considerable and the inconvenience to the local members of the public and to visitors at the hotel can only be conjectured.

The stations at Sweetings Cay and Water Cay handled small traffic demands adequately but the Water Cay station was off the air on several occasions.

Telegraph and Telephone revenue for 1963 was £10,125:14:11. This is approximately 50% of what I feel the revenue would be with a properly equipped station.

- CHAPTER X -
PUBLIC WORKS.

The Recurrent rates for upkeep of West End and the Grand Bahama Main Road proved to be quite inadequate and, in each case, were overspent.

Little non-recurrent work was performed and nothing of note was achieved.

- CHAPTER XI -
JUSTICE, POLICE AND PRISONS.

Generally speaking, peace and good order were reasonably maintained throughout the District during the Year. There were no major

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disturbances but there is a noted upsurge in the crime rate. Crimes of violence are on the increase and, as can be expected, are traffic offences. [] cases were heard, including [] sent to the Supreme Court. The following shows the number and nature of the various offences dealt with and how they were disposed of: Reported and heard were:

	2	Unlawful Possession. -	1
Indecent assault. -		Wounding. -	11
Assault. -	41	Language. -	35
Firearms. -	6	Disorderly Behaviour. -	16
Shopbreaking. -	5	Threats. -	1
Falsification. -	1	Drunk (Incap)	10
Larceny. -	14	Drunk (Disorderly)	5
Escape. -	2	Causing damage. -	2
Causing Harm. -	5	Immig. Act. -	27
Carrying Arms. -	7	Resisting. -	11
Missiles. -	4	Other Police Cases. -	22
Traffic. -	124		

182 were fined, or given alternate prison terms, 76 imprisoned, 68 cautioned, 12 dismissed, 9 bound over, and 5 sent to the Supreme Court,.

126 civil cases were heard during the year. No cases were dealt with or disposed of by the Justice of the Peace.

5 Inquests were held during the year.

2 wreck inquiries were held during the year.

POLICE.

Three members on the Nassau Constabulary were stationed at West End and it is planned to increase this force in 1964. There are two first grade and [two] second grade local Constables in the District. The former stationed at West End and Eight Mile Rock, and the latter at Pelican Point and High Rock. Under the leadership of the Deputy Superintendent stationed at Freeport, the police have rendered a very fine and efficient service during the year. A special mention should be made of the District Constables who receive no salary but give invaluable assistance to the regular police in the maintenance of peace and good order.

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The following men have been appointed as District Constables for the Year 1963, in the settlements under which their names appear:

<u>West End</u>	<u>Water Cay</u>	<u>Hanna Hill</u>	<u>Sea Grape.</u>
Clifford Davis	Walter Hield	Urial Smith	Arthur Martin
Bernard Hanna	Locksley Hield	Percy Barr	Robert Bain
Alexander Rolle	Bernice Rolle		Alfred Jones
George Forbes	-	<u>Braudie Point</u>	-
Granville Garvey Sr.	<u>High Rock</u>	Elmere Stuart.	<u>Holmes Rock</u>
Ivan Russell	Isaac Smith	Arnold Martin	John Rolle, Sr.
Wilbert Roberts	Henry Smith	Harris Russell	Horatio Stuart
Charles Grant	Willis Kemp	-	Derissie Rolle
John M. Kaplan	Lennard Kemp	<u>Eight-Mile-Rock</u>	
-		Albert Rolle	<u>McLeans Town</u>
<u>Sweetings Cay</u>	<u>Pelican Point</u>	Alfred Johnson	Bertram Davis
Peter Feaster	Walter Laing	Willard Martin	Henry Carey, Jr.
Wellington Boven			William Pinder
Alton Cooper		-	

PRISONS.

The three-cell prison at West End is in good condition from a security point of view, but the cells are extremely small and in any event, is now totally inadequate to cope with the alarming increase in the number of convicted prisoners.

At present all prisoners have to be transported from all over the Island to West End which is at one extremity of the Island. The unfortunate situation that exists is that due to the lack of accommodations, the Magistrate cannot sentence the persons to prison, although they may well deserve imprisonment.

There are two-cell-lockups at Eight-Mile Rock and Freeport but these are used only for overnight purposes. During the year [] persons were committed to the West End prison.

The most important piece of legislation as far as Grand Bahama was concerned in 1963 was the extension of the Town Planning Act to the Island. The need for control by the Government has long been obvious

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in this field.

– CHAPTER XIII. –
TAXATION.

There is still no direct form of taxation here, except for Departure Tax levied on passengers from the Colony. I would suggest to the Government that serious consideration should be given to introducing the Real Property Tax Act which could be used to very good purpose for maintenance of the roads and upkeep of the settlements. A thought worthy of consideration would be to make the new main road, if it becomes a reality, a toll road whose revenue would go towards its maintenance.

– CHAPTER XIV –
MISCELLANEOUS

PAUPERS

Pauper rations were issued by Government via Relieving Officer of the Princess Margaret Hospital. The rations consisted of grits, flour, sugar and canned milk. The rations were distributed to approximately 58 paupers throughout the District.

RELIGION

The majority of the Island's population are Baptists which accounts for approximately 50% of the people. The Anglican Church accounts for about 30%; Roman Catholics, Methodists, Brethren, Church of God, Seventh-Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses and a few other unidentified religions make up the remaining 20%.

COMMISSIONER'S VISITS

As I took over the Administration of the District for the last 2 months of the year I was able to make one circuit of the District only before the end of 1963.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Prosperity is very evident in this District. The commercial

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and industrial development of Freeport have boomed and this prosperity has reflected itself on the District. The Jack Tar Hotel's programme of expansion has continued and all of the available labour from West End to Eight Mile Rock has been absorbed.

The marina and hotel proper have expanded with the consequent result of employing more local people. This hotel can take more than 600 and is rated as the most successful in the Caribbean.

Motor vehicles pour steadily in to the island and this has been an all around effect on the increases of licenses, accidents, police work, court cases and road wear and tear. A new highway

on the island is a must and to offset the cost, the Nassau rates for vehicles and drivers could be imposed. The revenue from this District and Freeport more than justifies the initial expenditure on this much needed improvement. As previously mentioned, if made a toll road, this road would soon pay for itself with the levy on the heavy traffic passing over it.

It must be stressed here in closing that the present government building at West End is a disgrace and should be replaced or rehabilitated at the earliest opportunity.

[C. M. MacDonald]
Commissioner,
District of West End.

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.