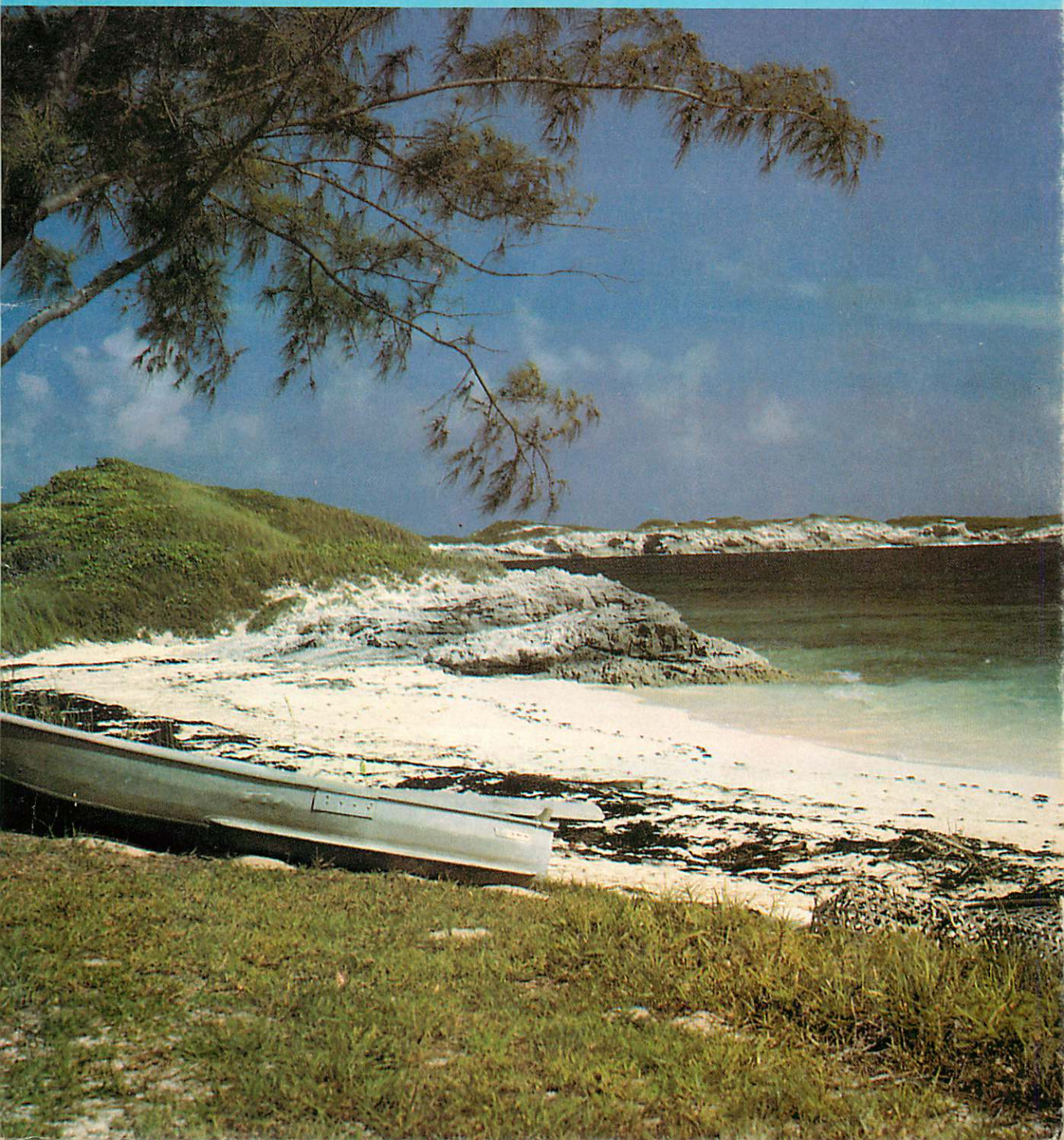


THE OUTERMOST ISLAND

An Oral History of San Salvador
The Bahamas

by
Virginia White
Illustrations by
David White



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Introduction

San Salvador lies 370 miles east south east of Miami and is the eastern-most island of the Bahamas. This out-island, only twelve miles long and five miles wide, is composed of limestone bedrock of ancient coral reefs and windblown dunes, and is fringed by coral reefs and deep ocean waters. Several large inland lakes interconnect with each other, and with the ocean by subterranean channels. Freshwater supplies are scanty. Rain from squalls and the occasional tropical storm sinks into the substrate, or collects as freshwater lenses on the surface of lakes or in clay soil pockets. Good farming soil is also scarce. The island was once covered with mahogany trees, but they were harvested by the Loyalist plantation owners and sold to ship building companies in the early nineteenth century. The exposed soil either blew into the ocean or into the many cracks and fissures of the limestone bedrock to form, in some instances, the deeper soil pockets called "banana holes".

Consequently the settlements on the island have developed around its perimeter, close to the reefs and fishing and to the better soil and freshwater locations. The largest community, the United Estates settlement, expanded on the eastern side of the island, and the next largest, the Cockburn Town settlement, developed on the western side. The low hills of the interior of the island are uninhabited, their hostile environment of tangled scrub and cactus offer few advantages to a farmer who must be self sufficient.

It is believed that the population on the island descended from two main sources: the Loyalists' slaves left as free men after emancipation by the British in 1833, and West African tribesmen freed from human cargo ships bound for the U.S. and the Caribbean. Most of today's fluctuating population of between 500 and 900 were born there, but a few have come from other Bahamian islands, the U.S. and Canada.

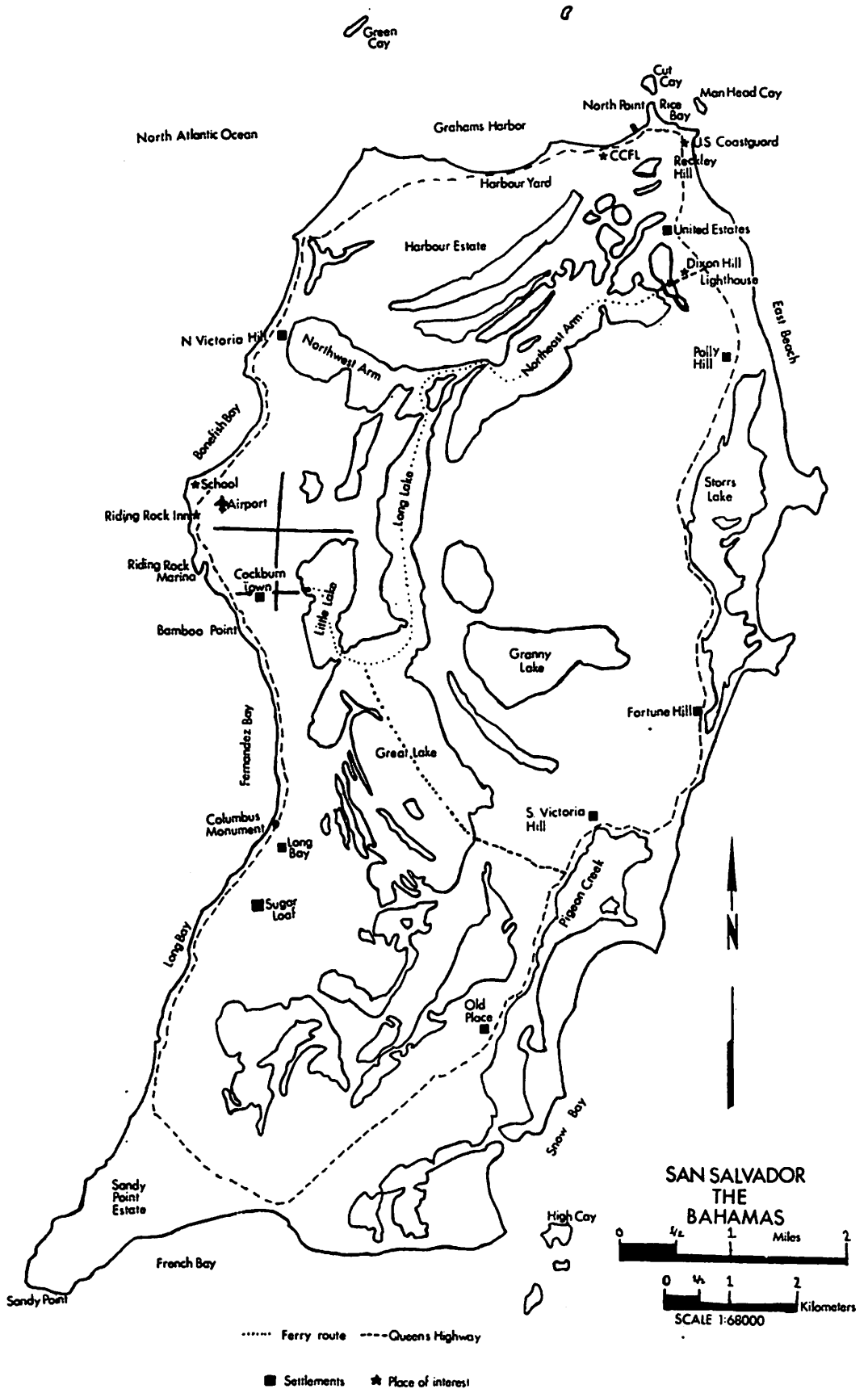
The island's resources are few. From the 1940's to the 1960's the U.K. and the U.S. exploited its strategic position on the edge of the Atlantic Ocean for defense purposes, but today, in 1985, the island's natural resources are used as an outdoor laboratory to study geology, biology, and archeology. The college professors and students from academic institutions in the U.S. and Canada stay at the College Center of the Finger Lakes (CCFL) Bahamian Field Station. The magnificent coral reefs, with their teeming diverse marine life, attract divers, and the historical significance of San Salvador as Christopher Columbus' first landfall in the New World attracts tourists.

Preface

My initial interest in this project stemmed from my curiosity about the lifestyle of the natives of San Salvador and how it had changed throughout the twentieth century. Dr. Donald Gerace, the Director of the Bahamian Field Station on San Salvador, had been concerned for some time that no records had been kept of these lifestyle changes. In January 1984, he encouraged me to document an oral history of the people of San Salvador and suggested that I begin by interviewing the oldest man on the island, Horatio Lightfoot, who was 102 years old at that time. It took until January 1985 before I actually met Mr. Lightfoot, but in the interim period I talked with members of his family and other natives who had spent most of their lives on San Salvador. Their stories paint pictures of life on the island prior to the installation of American military bases, of life during the American tenure, and of life since Independence from the British in 1973. Wherever possible, I have used their conversations to illustrate the changes and only have supplemented from reference sources to give background information.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Donald Gerace and his wife, Kathy, for their ideas for this project, and for the logistical and financial support from the Bahamian Field Station. I thank my husband, Brian, for first taking me to San Salvador on a geological field trip, and later for his encouragement and understanding. I thank my daughter, Kathy, for her help with referencing and word processing, and my son, Dave, for his illustrations. I also thank Dr. Robert R. Smith from the Department of Biology, Hartwick College, Oneonta, New York, for his identification of the many plants used as bush medicines. Lastly, I thank the people of San Salvador for their knowledge of the island and their willingness to share it.





CHAPTER 1

Evelyn Wring, Susalee Anderson, and Blossom Lightfoot, Three Lightfoot Women

It is my first day on the job, January 8th 1984. Dr. Gerace offers to chauffeur me to the home of Horatio Lightfoot in the settlement of United Estates or U.E. as it is commonly called. Turning right on leaving the CCFL campus, we drive along the Queen's Highway to the Coastguard Station sitting high on the brow of the hill overlooking the splendor of Grahams Harbour and Rice Bay. We follow the road sharply right down the eastern side of the island. As we leave the visual sphere of the CCFL Field Station and its American influence, we cross an invisible line into the world of the Bahamian. Small wooden houses and storage sheds cluster in open rocky soil clearings in the scrubby bush. Shutter windows are propped fully open to catch every available breeze in this shallow sheltered val-

ley. Older, more traditional limestone houses sit higher on the hillsides where steady ocean winds blow. Here they are freer from the insects and heat, but more exposed to the fury of the tropical storms and hurricanes that cross the island in the late summer. The corn stalks hang brown, withered by the drought brought on by a lower than average rainfall this winter. Few crops are irrigated as water has to be carried from the nearest well, sometimes as far away as a mile. Dr. Gerace slows down his Brazilian made V.W. van to skirt the large potholes in the deteriorating road surface and lumbers on through the settlement. Suddenly he skids the van to a stop and leans over the wheel. When the dust settles and we can see, he points uphill on the right to a whitewashed church that looks out

over the community. "Mr. Lightfoot lives in that white house with blue doors across from St. John's Baptist Church," he tells me. I jump down from the left side of the van and climb up the narrow rutted lane to the church yard. The view from the top of the ridge is spectacular.

The northeastern section of the island spreads out before me. Houses dot the inland landscape away from the ocean's stormy reach and hug the winding road through the settlement. Both the St. John's Baptist church and the Holy Cross Catholic church with its leaning spire, occupy prominent positions on this ridge, yet both are dwarfed by the Dixon Hill Lighthouse, as it juts upwards like a rocket poised for launch at Cape Canaveral. From here the Atlantic Ocean extends several thousand miles to Europe, a route first recorded by Christopher Columbus in 1492. This eastern shore, with its sweeping coastline of sandy bays and low headlands of stabilised dunes, is believed to be the first land sighted by Columbus in the New World.

The morning service at St. John's Baptist church has finished. Women and children spill into the church yard and quickly disappear along hidden pathways to their homes for Sunday lunch, the festive meal of the week. Blossom Lightfoot, just twenty-four years old, wanders gracefully across the ridgetop to meet me. Her brown, silky dress clings to her slender body and glistens in the sunlight. She tells me that her grandfather, Horatio Lightfoot, is sick and cannot talk to me today and suggests that I talk to his step sister, Evelyn Wring, instead. She leads the way down the hill towards a slightly larger house, with an overhanging roof, that is set back from the road. Several small children skip around us singing the songs that they learned in Sunday school. Their favorite seems to be "Jesus loves me". Mrs. Wring, a stately lady, welcomes me into her living room and assures me that she still remembers what it was like to live on San Salvador many years ago. Born in June 1899, she has lived most of her life on

the island, although she lived for a few years in Nassau where she was married, and a few more in Miami where five of her nine children were born. She returned to the island to care for her ailing mother, a common Bahamian tradition. Her last four children were born on San Salvador. Susalee Anderson, her youngest daughter, joins us, to make three generations of Lightfoot women together. Mrs. Wring remembers how her brother, Horatio Lightfoot, took care of the family during the 1908 hurricane when he was twenty-eight years old and she was nine.

E. Wring "I was small then. The storm starts on Friday, all day Friday, all day Saturday. We used to live up on the hill. But my mother and brother knew the danger. My father was dead. My brother said, 'You better get these children ready, this roof coming off.' Sometimes the wind lift the roof off into the sky and come down again. Mama wasn't feeling too well. My brother told the children to hold hands. It was just as he said, as we came out of the house, the roof fell."

VW "Where did you go?"

E. Wring "Everything was down, the Baptist church (St. John's) was down. My brother said, 'We can't stay in the wilderness.' He said, 'Come,' and started walking. The wind was blowing so strong. But he was so strong, he tried to take care of us. We went to Uncle Sandy's, my mother's brother, but his house was down too."

VW "Were there any houses left?"

E. Wring "One leave in the north and one leave down here. All the tree houses were down. You notice that little house on the beach in Grahams Harbour. (The one near to the public dock that is now used as a storage shed.) That leaves for Reckley's people. They had to shelter in that. That was the only house left. The wind blow that night, then all day, and all night. Uncle Sandy had a big kitchen. My brother lift up the roof and Mamma and the children crawl underneath. We stayed there until the wind stopped blowing."

VW "Did the sea come up here?"

E. Wring "Every morning we had water in the drums and it was salt water. Salt water came over the land. Sometimes when the wind blew, the water would lift over the top of the hill. The well became salt water. After a couple of weeks the spring became fresh (again)."

VW "Did you build the houses again?"

E. Wring "Yes, the Government had to help you know. They sent materials and food as all the food was destroyed."

VW "Where did you get drinking water?"

E. Wring "We had to drink the water, it was hard. That was till water. Till means it was a spring but they couldn't use it."

VW "When was this house built?"

E. Wring "Three storms ago. This house is pure lime and sand, no cement."

VW "When you were young did many women go to Nassau to work?"

E. Wring "Yes, sometimes they carried on to England or different places."

VW "What kind of work did the women do?"

E. Wring "I was a housemaid and a cook. I was Mrs. Kilbride's maid. Her husband came from England and was the Bishop of the Cathedral. I used to work in the Mission House and lived with them for three years. They treat me very nice. I got married from them."

VW "Did you get married in a church?"

E. Wring "Yes, in the Zion Baptist Church in Nassau. The Bishop was the Reverend Rule. We had a car, a horse and a carriage. (I wore) a long white dress and a veil. I had to go first in a double team, with two white horses side by side all dressed up, that carried the bride to church. He (the groom) was behind in the next double team. The other cars were behind with all the others."

"After the wedding, he (Mr. Kilbride) sing a beautiful song for me. He sing it on a fife."

Mrs. Wring sang this song, her clear voice still melodic and strong at eighty-four years of age.

"There is beauty all around
When there's love at home.
Time goes softly, sweetly by
When there's love at home.
Peace and plenty here abide
Smiling sweet on every side.
Time goes softly, sweetly by
While there's love at home.
Love at home, love at home.
Time goes softly, sweetly by
When there's love at home."

"That's what my bossman sing for me. I remember that day."

VW "How old were you when you had your first child?"

E. Wring "I can't remember."

VW "Did anyone attend you in childbirth?"

E. Wring "We had a midwife, any cases they could handle. My mother was a nurse, you know. She handled Susalee."

VW "When you were sick did the nurses take care of you then?"

E. Wring "We seldom got sick and had to go to a doctor. The nurses were so smart, they were old time people. They were wise."

VW "What kind of medicines did they give you?"

E. Wring "They had mostly bush medicines. I had a fall last year and the trained nurse (one who was trained in a hospital) gave me some pills, but it didn't do much good. Then Susalee got that horsebush [1], and every morning she fixed it for me [2] and I got rid of the pain."

VW "Did you learn to use these medicines from your mother?"

E. Wring "Yes."

VW "What other medicines do you use?"

E. Wring "If you have a fever, you use gualavine [3]. You drink the hot tea with sour lime and salt."

Blossom reminds her great aunt about brasileto [4], a legume tree. She tells me that the plant is steeped in cold water overnight, and the red liquid drunk with cream to give you rich blood when you are rundown and tired. A similar tea is made from the bark of the Madeira tree [5].

Susalee adds, "Then for the children when they has worms, you use Jerusalem plant [6]. The hot tea kills the worms in the intestines of small children. They take it for nine days."

E. Wring "Then there's Bay gerina [7] (or Bay Geranium), the vine that runs along the beach. You boil it, steep it and drink it. That's good for a cold or poor appetite."

VW "Did you use plants like this when you lived in Miami?"

E. Wring "I couldn't find them there."

VW "Did you come back here to live because you could find the bush medicines?"

E. Wring "My mother lived here and I came back to stay with her until she died."

VW "Do you travel to other parts of the island?"

E. Wring "I have travelled this island round and round in walking. It takes a smart walker a day to get around. Cockburn Town is twelve miles from here. You get up in the morning early, by 9 o'clock be there in Cockburn Town. We had to go there for shopping, any grocery. I can't walk it now, I have to have transportation to carry me. I walk to church, I walk in the field."

VW "Do you keep a garden?"

E. Wring "It's so far from here, she'll (Susalee) show you, and she'll show you the green corn."

Susalee and I say goodbye to her mother and walk a quarter mile along the road before turning left over the causeway between two brackish ponds where decaying algal mats emit the rotten egg smell of hydrogen sulfide gas. We drop down over the rise to a lush garden plot. Full heads of cabbage, firm tomatoes ripening in the sun, and pigeon pea vines sprawl out in separate rows. They are almost ready to be picked. The green corn bears little resemblance to the plump yellow ears of the American market. The kernels pack tight against the cob, dry and withered. Because the peas and corn can be dried and stored for long periods of time, they have been the staple foods for many generations. As such, they are called grain rather than vegetables. We sit on the edge of the well, a circular stone structure. Cool air blows up from the shaft dug into a lens of freshwater that sits on clay soil. This oasis provides water for the community at large. Women and children tote large buckets on their heads to fetch their daily supplies.

Susalee regrets that she left school so soon.

VW "How old were you when you left school?"

S. Anderson "At that time, we used to go as far as the eighth grade. There's nothing else on the island unless you go away to Nassau, and then you go to higher school there. My father was dead and I didn't have anyone to put me through High School. When I was fourteen, I left home and went to Hollywood (Florida) to live with my sister. I lived there for three years. I heard that my mother was sick so I came home to see her. I told her that if I could find something to do, you know, find a job, I would be able to stay with her."

VW "Did you find a job?"

S. Anderson "Yes, I worked at the Riding Rock Inn (as) a cook until it closed last year (1983)."

The owners neglected to pay their electricity bill to the Bahamas Electricity Company. When the electric power was shut off they were forced to close.

Susalee looks closer to thirty than her forty years. Her high cheekbones and large eyes retain a beauty more commonly seen in much younger Bahamian women. She attributes her youthfulness to a clean and simple lifestyle. Her three children live with her on the island, but her husband lives and works in Nassau. This arrangement often provides the only way that a San Salvadorian family can receive a regular paycheck. Susalee's conflict between taking care of her mother and being with her husband is difficult to resolve. She tells me,

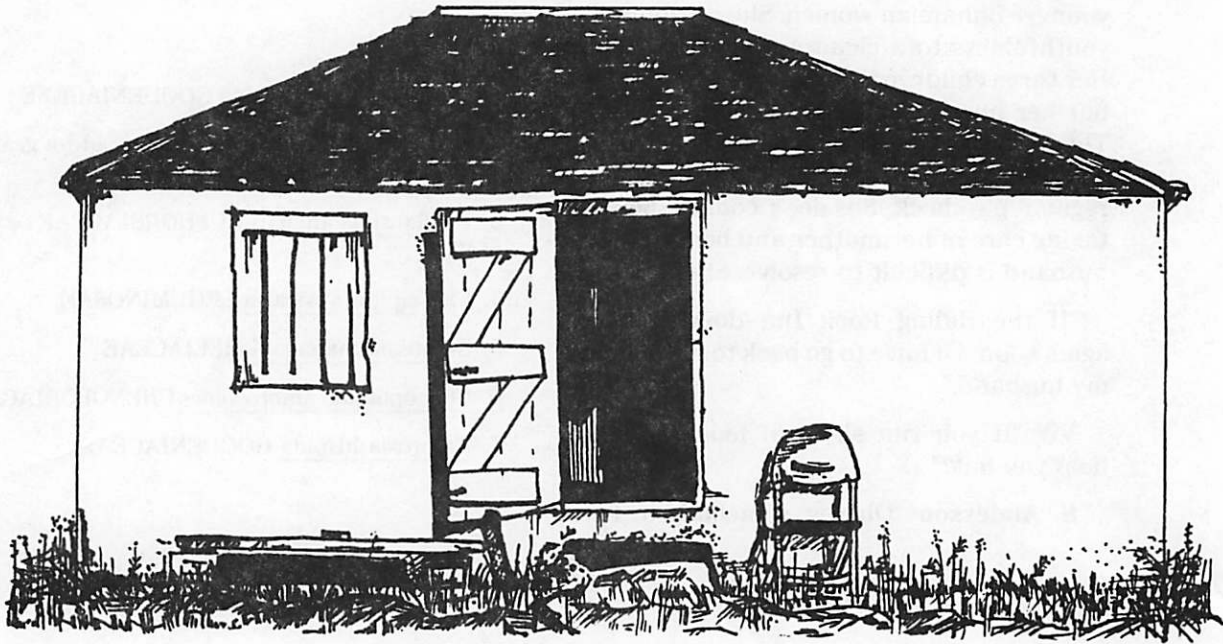
"If the Riding Rock Inn doesn't reopen again soon, I'll have to go back to Nassau with my husband."

VW "If you run short of food do people help you out?"

S. Anderson "Oh yes, somebody in need,

everybody come and help each other. I could get something to do in Nassau, you know, but I don't want to leave the old lady."

-
1. Gundlachia corymbosa GOODENIACEAE
 2. Recipe: Boil the leaves in water, add a grain of salt to the tea and drink.
 3. Phyllanthus amarus EUPHORBIACEAE or Gale of Wind
 4. Caesalpinia vesicaria LEGUMINOSAE
 5. Swietenia mahagoni MELIACEAE
 6. Chenopodium ambrosoides CHENOPODIACEAE
 7. Ambrosia hispida GOODENIACEAE



HORATIO LIGHTFOOT'S HOUSE

CHAPTER 2

Horatio Lightfoot

On this day, January 2nd, 1985, Horatio Lightfoot who was born August 1st, 1881, leans back in his rocking chair and reflects over 103 years of life, an incredible extension of the three score and ten years that an average person might expect to live. Now frail and brittle, his skin lies taut across his skull showing a prominent knob on the back of his head. This was the result of the only time in his life that he was hit by another man, a world class fighter, somewhere in Panama. His eyes are swollen and an opaque brown, he says that his sight is failing now. Only his voice, booming at times when he talks of his strength, or chuckling as he recalls past adventures, gives me a glimpse of the strong moral and physical personality, Horatio Lightfoot in his prime. The Iron Man they called him.

VW "Have you lived on the island all of your life?"

H. Lightfoot "No, I used to travel about. I used to go sponging, go to sea, I was a seaman. After I gave up the sea I took the land trail. I've been all over the world. I used to work in the States, on the railroad, and in Panama, Mexico, San Juan... After I stopped being a seaman, I worked farm on San Salvador and I lived right here."

VW "Where did you go sponging?"

H. Lightfoot "You leave from Nassau and you sail down west north west and you get to the Mud, Andros Island, for sponge. And you got a two pronged hook with which to catch your sponge. When you've got a boatload you go to Gold Cay. You wash your sponges and

put it on the Cay. You pay a man on the Cay to watch your sponges while you go to hook some more. You can't go on the Cay at night, only the man who minds the sponges can go, and he got a gun. Every Saturday evening all the boats go to Gold Cay, about 100, all two masted schooners. All go there to a place called the 'Kraal' to throw all the sponges in there. When you get enough sponges to put down below, and your vessel full, then you come into Nassau to sell your sponges. They pack them up and send them to New York."

VW "How did they pay you for the sponges? Did they weigh them?"

H. Lightfoot "No, they count them. You got to lay them right alongside each other. Sometimes they would be ten feet length and they cost about ten pounds (sterling). The next one about six or seven pounds. Then you sum them up, and they pay the captain the money. Then everybody collect their money, and you sign again to go on the mother gang. We went sponging every day except Sunday."

The Spinging Industry [1], p.216-222

The sponge fisherman contracted to the owner to collect sponges every day of the week except Sundays. They worked as part of a crew of eight to twelve men for six to eight weeks. The sponge vessel was a two masted schooner or rigged sloop between five and twenty tons that was built especially for this type of fishing. It was constructed of native madeira wood and yellow pine with a deep cargo hold for the sponges and a small cabin for the men to sleep in.

The men located the best quality sponges by scanning the sea floor through a piece of glass and detached the sponge from the coral on which it was growing with a pair of long-handled oyster-like tongs. The sponges were spread out onto the deck in the strong sunlight so that the organic animal matter would decay and expose the interior sponge framework. The intense odor of the rotting sponges produced the characteristic smell of a sponge

boat. Once a week the crew dumped its load into a "kraal" where the circulating water removed the final organic residues and left the clean sponge. A "kraal" was a fenced-in shallow water pen usually built in a small bay. At the end of the six week tour, the clean sponges were packed in the hold of the schooner and taken to the sponge market in Nassau. Here they were separated according to quality and size, and auctioned in bundles. Most of them were transported to the New York sponge market for distribution to many parts of the western world.

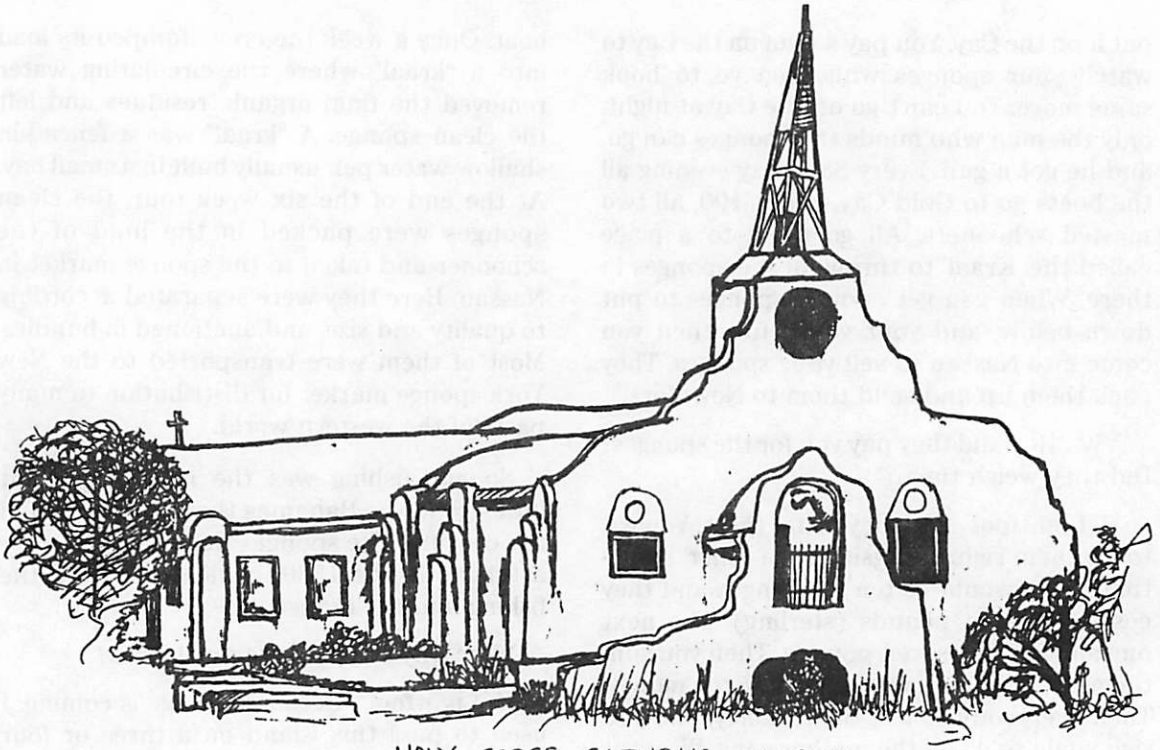
Sponge fishing was the most important industry in the Bahamas through the turn of the century. The sponges were devastated by a fungus in the 1930's which destroyed the fishing and the industry.

VW "Why did you give up the sea?"

H. Lightfoot "Because old age is coming. I used to pass this island on a three or four masted schooner going north to New York, then back down south all the time. Sometimes I have to go along the yardarm to close the topsail 'cos a storm is coming. If the ship rolled, all those on the yardarm would fall in the water. You had to ride the yardarm good enough to top it, and to watch the wind and billows coming, and to hold tight so that we don't wash off. Many times somebody shout 'man overboard' and you can't turn back. Too much sea. After I find my strength failed, when your knees give in, and your hands give in, and I couldn't jump, you have to give up the sea and take land work."

VW "Why did they call you the Iron Man?"

H. Lightfoot "When the Catholic church, the Holy Cross, was building, Fr. Arnold said that he wanted a limekiln built and they pointed to me. You need fifty people to build a large kiln about twenty feet around. You had a truck with men lined up cutting the cotton wood and chopping it up. I take three men with me to lay the kiln. They couldn't bring the wood fast enough. I keep on saying 'Come on Father, give me something to do. I idle and



HOLY CROSS CATHOLIC CHURCH

got nothing to do.' Fr. Arnold said, 'Good God, what kind of man is this. I run the truck until I'm tired and the truck break down. You must be an Iron Man.' I didn't know nothing about tired. You couldn't beat me, no way in the world. Everybody stayed away from me. I was used to working in the States, on the railroad. I used to work like eight or nine men, just me, one. I take a spike, lay a rail, and spike it up. All day and never tired. But sometimes it very hot, so hot that the steel draws heat and you see some of the men fall. The heat overpower them. When they fall we got to carry them into the shade and give them a drink of water. We called that the 'Bear'. I never had the 'Bear'. I was a single man then and six feet five inches tall. Now I am stooped down. I've gotten old and now I walk with two sticks. But once ago I could jump over the moon. I hear people talk about they tired, tired. I asked my mother what does tired feel. I didn't know. My mother said 'Ah son, when you'se like me you will feel what tired is.' It is today. I can't do nothing now. After I find my strength failed, I'd better sit on the land and farm."

VW "What did you grow on your farm?"

H. Lightfoot "Corn, beans, potato, okra, watermelon, muskmelon, yam, sour, oranges, every sort of thing you plant, then it come into a farm. We raise creature, horses, goats, sheep, pigs, cows. Have pasture and we tied them outside with a rope, close, so they can't interfere with your farm. In the evening, you bring them in and give them water and put them in the pen. In the morning, you take them out and tie them up again. We got milk from the cows, take the cream and make butter."

VW "Did you go fishing?"

H. Lightfoot "Yes, my father had a boat then called 'The Millie'. He had a sister named Millie. I was a great sculler. We used to go turtling. When you see a Hawksbill, you drop a net with an iron ring down on him, and he get tangled up, and you bring it into the boat. Turtle meat is the sweetest thing you ever eat."

VW "What kind of fish did you catch?"

H. Lightfoot "Jewfish, a great big fish. His head is as broad as that table (about two to three feet across). Some are six to seven feet long and weigh 500 to 600 pound. You get a big hook and a line as big as your finger. You hook on the bait, either a blackfish called cooney, or turbot, and throw it down. When you hook that fish, two men got to hold the line. You can't pull him in until he's dead. Sometimes you make the line fast and he pull the boat until he drowns himself. Then he raised to the top of the water and you can pull him in. Then you clean him up. All meat, no bone and tastes good."

VW "Which smaller fish did you catch?"

H. Lightfoot "Grouper, barracuda, turbot, tang, chub."

VW "Isn't barracuda poisonous?"

H. Lightfoot "Not in those days. No poison. Now so many big ship have brass nails on the bottom. Moss grows on the brass and the barracuda eat the moss. Now you can't eat barracuda."

VW "Have you ever been sick?"

H. Lightfoot "Never get sick in all my travelling days. Colds sometimes. We got some bush called horsebush [2]. We drink that. Or we take the bark off the gumbo limbo tree [3]

and make tea from that. When you drink it, it's red like blood. It knocks out the pain right away. You can stop drinking coffee and cocoa. When you drink this it keeps you strong."

His great great grandchildren bring me a paper bag full of a rough reddish bark that had been freshly sliced from a tree. Mr. Lightfoot tells me to make some tea from it and judge for myself. The cooks at the CCFL made this tea for me and their own special brew as well [4].

Horatio Lightfoot died in the spring of 1985, 103 years of age (1881-1985).

1. James H. Stark, *Stark's History and Guide to the Bahamas*, Norwood, Mass: Plimpton Press, 1891.

2. Gundlachia corymbosa, GOODENIACEAE

3. Bursera simaruba, BURSERACEAE

4. Recipe: Steep the following plants in boiling water, strain and drink plain or with a little sugar and milk as desired.

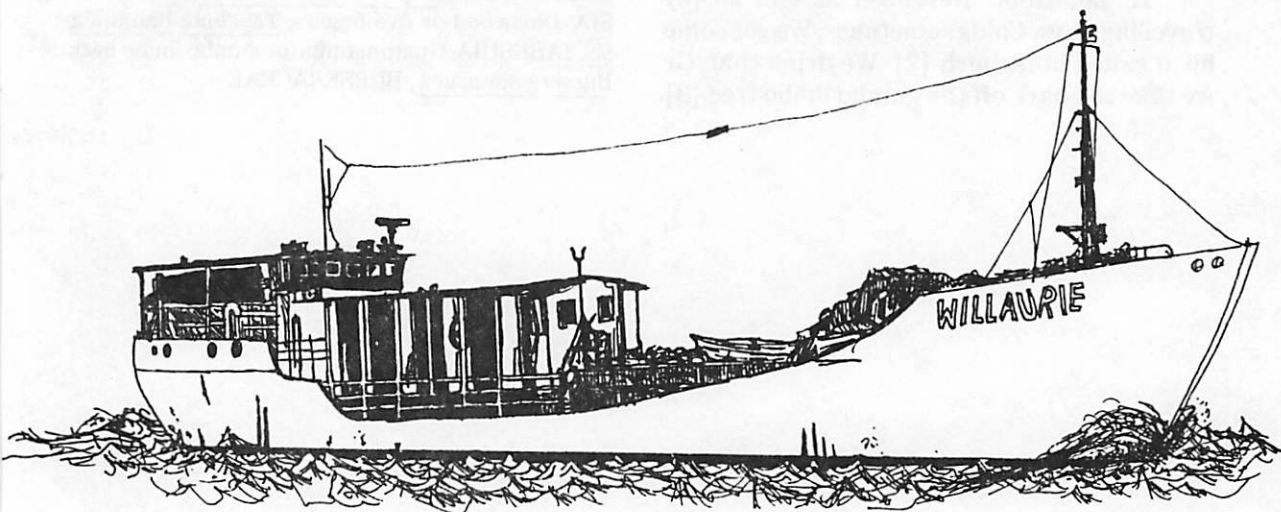
Strong back, Bourreria ovata, BORAGINACEAE, Three finger, Thouinia discolor, SAPINDACEAE, Guawawa vine, Rhynchosia reticulata, RHYNCHOSIA, Oldswood or five fingers, Tabebuia bahamensis, TABEBUIA, Guammamine or gumbo limbo bark, Bursera simaruea, BURSERACEAE

CHAPTER 3

Cockburn Town

The sky darkens as heavy thunderheads cloud the sun. The waters of Bonefish Bay change from unbelievable aqua hues to a milky green as the waves churn up the underlying coral sands. A steady swell builds as the wind freshens from the west. Rain showers seem imminent. This stretch of the Queen's Highway, sturdily built by the U.S. Navy, winds its way along the north and western shores of the island from the CCFL station — the old U.S. Navy base — to Cockburn Town. As we drive south, panoramas of pristine beaches that surpass any picture postcard unfold around every bend. Waves stretch and roll, then hang momentarily, before crashing onto the beachrock slabs. Millions of tiny droplets mist upward after each collision. Overhead, the dark plumage of a Magnificent Frigate bird glistens first with purple, and then with green, as it balances its long pointed wings and deeply forked tail against the strengthening wind. With a quick flick, it turns and sails effortlessly out of view.

A narrow road leads left to the airport and another leads right to the Central High School (the old Pan American base). Just ahead, the road zigzags before running straight into Cockburn Town. The Bahamasair plane from Nassau, scheduled to land twice a week, and the CCFL charter planes flying in from Fort Lauderdale, use the few extra feet of the road as an extension of the runway. On the days that the Nassau plane comes in, many of the islanders gather at the tiny terminal to join in the festive welcomes and goodbyes to family, friends, and visitors. Just ahead on the right, set back from the road behind tall elegant palm trees, lies the Riding Rock Inn, a hotel-diving school complex. The vivid colors of bougainvillea sprawling along the walls between the cottages contrast against the blue sky and sea and help to create a romantic mood for pleasure seeking tourists. But clumps of grass are growing in the cracks in the surface of the tennis courts and the doors of the clubhouse are barred tight. The Inn is closed



until new owners can be found that can offer an exciting vacation to tourists and divers for a manageable cost. A little farther down the road, the manmade marina, dug from the bedrock to connect the ocean to a protected harbor, still offers shelter to any boat that can navigate the shallow entrance channel. The deeper draft mailboat, the Will Laurie, brings in heavy merchandise and frozen goods from Nassau every two weeks, but this unloads at the Cockburn Town dock.

Soon we pass the municipal offices or City Hall on the left. Out back, a thin steel antenna soars skywards, pegged upright by thick steel cables hammered into the ground. A powerful transmitter emits a signal strong enough to reach the larger world by relay to Nassau. At this time, there is only a partially functional intra island telephone service supplemented by a few privately owned radio transmitter receivers. The Bahamian Government has plans for the Japanese company of Betal to install a telephone service throughout the island by 1985. When this is complete, each resident should be able to dial anywhere in the world.

In front, a low yet wide hedge of native shrubs clipped British style, separates the dusty parking lot from bureaucracy. Two massive doors carved in oak lend a colonial elegance to the front of the building. The stately columns supporting the overhanging roof add to the illusion of grandeur. There are many offices inside, including the post office, police station, court house, telecommunications office, and the Chief Commissioner's office, each with different opening hours.

The clean-looking building next door is the clinic, the domain of the district nurse. She takes care of the minor medical problems of the island residents. Patients who are seriously ill and need emergency care are flown to the hospital in Nassau at the first opportunity. In line from the crest of the hill to the center of Cockburn Town stands the one man jail, the freshly whitewashed Catholic church, and the Commissioner's residence. The latter is an

American-style ranchhouse complete with a green tiled roof and a dish antenna to pull in satellite TV programs. My ride ends here.

From the intersection flanked by the library on the left, and the Ocean View Club and Iris Fernander's gift shop on the right, the main street of Cockburn Town slopes gently uphill towards the Harlem Square Club, a well stocked bar that is open most of the day and night. Across the road, canopied windows shade Jake Jones' grocery store. Inside, open shelves display essential staples, such as flour, sugar, cereals, pasta, rice, and nuts, and a small selection of canned fruit juice. Fresh fruit or vegetables are sold only in season. A group of young teenagers stand in front of the store reading the list of movies available for VCR rental. They laugh and scream as they talk about their favorite movie stars. Farther on, the road narrows through a rock cut, and winds down to a long concrete dock that still extends out into Little Lake. This is one of the largest lakes occupying the center of the island. Before the Queens' Highway was built, sail boats carried both lighthouse supplies and passengers from here to the other side of the island. The lakes are connected by small passages cut between them. Now, only the occasional sport fisherman or hunter accesses the interior of the island by these brownish, sulfur smelling, inland waterways.

Many flowering bushes and trees fill the fenced gardens along the side streets of Cockburn Town. A magnificent red leaved poinsettia tree covers the side of Jake's store, a far cry from the smaller table topped plant that graces our table at Christmas time. Sour orange, sugar apple, and sapodilla trees provide fruit in season, and coconut trees bear all year round. Returning to the Ocean View Club, I continue my walk southwest along the Queen's Highway, past the old public cemetery. The grass is shorn and charred after the annual cleanup, and the headstones can be seen clearly. Some date from 1886. Just around the corner, the Catholic cemetery holds fewer gravestones. Here a tall white

cross stands as a memorial to the first Catholic Mass ever given on the island by Father Chrysostom in 1897. The open vista of Fernandez Bay is before me. The surf rolls onto the beachrock and sand bringing in another supply of shells. I am tempted to walk along the high tide edge to collect some,

but walking towards me, is the man I came to meet, Sam Edgecombe, on his way home from his farm. With a large smile on his face, he stops, and firmly grips my hand. I turn around and walk home with him so that we can talk for awhile.

CHAPTER 4

Sam Edgecombe

Now seventy-six years old, Sam Edgecombe is still in good shape, although bent a little from the countless hours of hard physical work spent caring for the gardens of the Riding Rock Inn and his own family farm. He recognises many native plants along the roadside that can be used medicinally. He points out an aloe plant and tells me...

"It's good medicine. You slice it and swallow the white inside."

VW "What do you take it for?"

S. Edgecombe "For a cold, anything like that. It keeps your inside clean (acts as a laxative)."

VW "I thought that you used it for insect bites."

S. Edgecombe "Yes, I introduced the tourists at Riding Rock to that, and they found it very good. You rub it on. It's (also) good for sand fleas and for sunburn."

Now that the Inn is closed, Sam only tends his farm, growing vegetables and grain to feed his family. We reach an old almond tree, a meeting place with its well worn seats shaded by a canopy of leaves. He leans on his gnarled cane and suggests that we sit for a while on the stone wall overlooking the ocean. The waves curl along the old marina and pluck away pieces of rotting wood to dash along the sea wall. Debris of all kinds litter the intertidal zone from plastic bottles and soda cans to colored rope, wooden buoys, and multicolored shells. Sam mentions that winter storms are

mild compared to the tropical storms and hurricanes that track over this island between August and November. He recalls that in 1926 there were two such hurricanes that battered the island and caused great damage to shipping.

S. Edgecombe "We had a disaster at that time. There was a mail boat coming in from Nassau. They reported it was at Eleuthera at Powell's Point (a settlement there). They noticed that the boat was anchored into the shore. But after the first heavy rain storm passed, it blow away from the anchor. No-one survived from that ship, all went down.

"That same year, 1926, (there was) another storm in September. It did so many damage. At that time we had a big ship went aground on that rock on the outside of White Cay. The ship was from New Zealand (and) was going down to the south with heavy cargo. A lot of sailing sloops from the family islands came to the island to go to the wreck to get some clothes, dry goods stuff. When they leave the ship that afternoon, the hurricane came down that same night, and all of them were lost."

VW "Is there only one lighthouse?"

S. Edgecombe "That light (the Dixon Hill Lighthouse) guard the whole island rock for ship. When you pick up that light you know you are approaching the island. We have two men up there."

He points to a hurricane lamp perched on top of a step ladder.

"I take care of this one. This is a kerosene lamp here. I light that every night, and every ship coming in supposed to pick this light up, coming direct into the harbor (Cockburn Harbor light)."

VW "How long would it take you to walk from here to the lighthouse by land?"

S. Edgcombe "From Cockburn Town to the lighthouse station it may take about two hours, and you be lucky to make it in that."

VW "Have there ever been boats on the lakes?"

S. Edgcombe "Oh yes, I was a crewman. I had a boat of my own and my brother had a boat. In those days we do our farm across the lake, and then we have to use boat to get across to the farm. There was no transportation by road at that time so we used to have to transfer people to United Estates and the Creek (Pigeon Creek) by boat if they don't want to take the walk. The mail boat came in to Cockburn Town from Nassau every two weeks with the material for the light station, such as grocery and kerosene oil. We had to stock it up in this house here (a small storage house close to the old Cockburn Town quay). We had to convey the things to the lake with a wheelbarrow, a mile or a little more by road. The light station had a boat about thirty feet length. We had to put that (the supplies) in the boat and sail it up to the next dock. We tote that (the supplies) on our head up the hill to the light station and stock it up there. Sometimes (it takes) two or three days on a stretch, every two weeks. The light station is very important."

VW "How far was it to walk to Pigeon Creek?"

S. Edgcombe "Oh that's a long distance. When you get over to the next side (of the lake), there is a jetty there by the dock to put the things on. A man have to put it on his head and walk about two to three miles before they reached their home. Very tough, sometimes there were 100 pound bags of flour."

VW "Did you go to school?"

S. Edgcombe "Yes, we had a little primary school here in the settlement. I learned to read and to write. I think it was around twelve or thirteen that I leave and had to go to work in the farm."

VW "Did many people go to Nassau to work?"

S. Edgcombe "Oh yes, lots of boys and girls go to Nassau and some went to Florida state to work. I had two sisters and a brother who went. They were the eldest. Altogether there were six children. I was the last one."

VW "Did you see your life as being different from your Mam and Dad?"

S. Edgcombe "Yes, much different. What happened in those days, it wasn't as easy as now, the only job you had was on the farm and go fishing. But now, you could get a job, have a nice home with the cold storage. Now most of the people have the running water in this settlement, flush bathroom and all that."

Cockburn Town has had running water and electricity for many years, an inheritance from the American missile tracking station built here in the 1950's.

VW "How did you collect your water years ago?"

S. Edgcombe "We drill a well. With your bucket you draw water from the well. In the later days after they have shingle roof, you put your barrel alongside and you catch your rain water."

VW "What came before shingle roofs?"

S. Edgcombe "All the homes had thatch, with those big leaves from top trees. We cut that and put it in a press, and about a week or two after that you get up on the roof, and you thatch with that. (It) don't leak at all. Nice and cool. At times, when it worn out, you have to replace it."

VW "What's men's work?"

S. Edgecombe "Their work is to go fishing and work the farm. In those days they have the machete, and you go in and chop the bush down. You don't have no bulldozer to push anything down. You have to use man's friend, the machete, for clearing the ground. You let that stuff dry, then you burn it. Then when it rained, you sowed your seed in the ground."

VW "For how many years could you use that piece of soil?"

S. Edgecombe "Two to three years. The first and second years (were) very good. Sometimes the third year the ground get kinda weak. You go to another spot to cultivate. You plant it (pigeon peas) in January and harvest it in December. The corn crop is planted in August and September and harvest the green corn in December. We grow watermelons anytime of the year. When you have the rain, especially in the summertime, (we) always have a good crop."

VW "Did you keep animals?"

S. Edgecombe "In the past we used to raise a lot, chicken, goats and pigs. Very few people bother with it now. Most of them order chickens from Nassau."

VW "Where did you go fishing?"

S. Edgecombe "We go up to Green Cay. We get a lot of conch and grouper fish, turbot and barracuda."

VW "How long did it take you to sail to Nassau?"

S. Edgecombe "Going in to Nassau, if you had a fair wind, it would take you two days direct, and three to four days if you stopped at Cat Island. Coming back, if you have a head wind, you have to beat a course. Sometime it would take you eight to ten days."

VW "Why did you go to Nassau?"

S. Edgecombe "Sometime, if you have relatives in Nassau you go visit them. Sometime, you go shopping for material for clothing. You are able to go around to different shop to get your foodstuff. Some stores may have it much cheaper than the next one."

A rain squall raced in towards us pelting the sea with heavy spots. We sheltered under the almond tree until the torrential rain that soaked everything in its path moved on inland. The asphalt steamed as the emerging sun sucked up the moisture into the air. We left our shelter and drifted towards Sam Edgecombe's home several blocks away. We passed a small church on the way.

VW "Do you go to church?"

S. Edgecombe "Yes, the Episcopal, from the time I born. In fact I'm in charge of the church. I conduct the service. We don't have a priest now. We have a visiting priest from Nassau who comes once a month or so."

VW "Do many people go to church here?"

S. Edgecombe "Yes, but the women more. You can more rely on the women than the men."

We reach a one story frame house with two rocking chairs on the front porch. Sam's wife, a quiet and dignified woman, rises from one of the chairs to welcome me. She and a sharp featured wiry man, a visiting cousin, were shelling pigeon peas into a shallow thatch-plait bowl. Sam invites me to join him in his living room, and we sit comfortably in chairs across from each other. Colorful rugs brighten the floor, and framed photographs of family stand in tiers on a nearby table. The most prominent photograph shows the wedding of their daughter. A breeze blows between the open doors and cools us.

VW "Did you know Horatio Lightfoot, the Iron Man?"

S. Edgecombe "All his days, he's a hard-working man. And why he's so strong. He hardly buy frozen meat, everything he eat is from the farm. He used to go to the U.S. to work there. He was one of the men on the mail boat for a long time when it was a sailing ship. He was a big man with strength too. He hit you down and out. Had to think what you say. You didn't mess around with him."

VW "What did the men do for recreation before the clubs came?"

S. Edgcombe "They stayed here in their home. If they want any drink they import it from Nassau."

VW "What else did you do?"

S. Edgcombe "Smoke, some cigars."

VW "Did they grow tobacco here?"

S. Edgcombe "We have some of what you call the wild bacco. Something like the leaf tobacco. When they hard up and can't get none (cigars and cigarettes) from Nassau, they used to dry it and smoke that."

VW "Was there a celebration when you got married?"

S. Edgcombe "In those days you got married and came home. Guests and friends come to the home for refreshment, and after that you go to dancing until you ready to go to bed. Some people be up all night dancing."

VW "What kind of music did you play?"

S. Edgcombe "Drum and concertina, guitar, Sam's friend, (the) organ."

VW "Was it rhythmic music like you play today?"

S. Edgcombe "No, it was different."

VW "Does anybody still play it?"

S. Edgcombe "Yes, there's a man who plays, James Rolle, up the Creek, there wouldn't be anybody else."

After the next rain shower stops I return to the almond tree to await a ride back to the CCFL. The sea calms down. Several hundred yards from shore, the azure color changes to dark purple blue marking the zone where the corals grow down a wall into the deep. The crew of a recent submersible dive recorded a depth in excess of 2,500 feet, and noticed that the submarine cable link that was used by the U.S. Military to relay data to Patrick Air Force Base in Florida during the late 1950's and 1960's, is still snaking down the coral wall to the ocean floor.

CHAPTER 5

The Dixon Hill Lighthouse



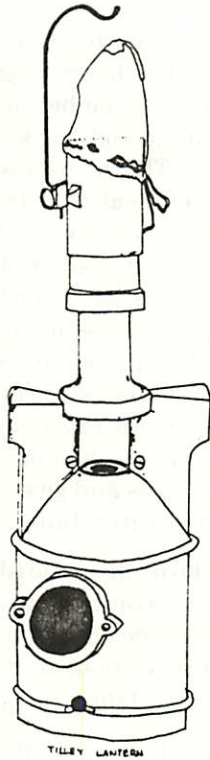
Rising high on the eastern ridge of the island in the settlement of the United States, the Dixon Hill Lighthouse beams its double flash every ten seconds across the island in a nineteen mile radius. The seventy-two foot tower gives the light an additional elevation to 235 feet above sea level so that it can be seen from every part of the island.

Built in 1887 by the British Government, it was one of nine similar lighthouses constructed throughout the Bahama islands to help shipping navigate these waters. The insurance company, Lloyds of London, complained that too many of the ships that they insured were being wrecked unnecessarily. To take advantage of the British law of "salvaging", the natives would place lights along the shoreline of the island to cause ships to ground on the coral reefs. As soon as the ship was abandoned by the captain and the crew, it was classed as a wreck, and could be legitimately plundered.

The lighthouse was manufactured in Birmingham, England, and shipped in pieces to the island. The cast iron structure was welded together at the site and lined with two foot thick brick walls. The extremely fragile mantle of the Tilley light is similar to that found in a Coleman lantern. The light is fuelled by kerosene, hand pumped to eighty pound pressure, and the mantle is preheated for seven minutes before being lit for operation. The light floats on a bed of mercury that is rotated once every ten seconds by the power generated by falling weights. The arc prisms surrounding the mantle move with the rotating bed, and direct the light through two circular holes to create the double flash. Every two hours, either Edmund Walkes or Jeffery Forbes, the current caretakers, crank the weights back to the top so that they can fall again. There is an emergency crank for backup should the cable break and an emergency gage to ensure that one rotation takes exactly ten seconds and the double flash is on time.

All the moving parts of the light station must be kept scrupulously clean. The two men spend four hours each day cleaning and polishing the glass prisms and maintaining the mantle. The light attracts many insects which burn up in the heat of the flame. They fall into the mercury and spin out to the housing where they form a crusty layer that slows down the rotation of the light. When the light moves too slowly due to insect drag, the mercury is removed so that the housing can be dismantled, cleaned, and given a fresh coat of shellac. Occasionally the mercury also has to be cleaned before being returned to the bed.

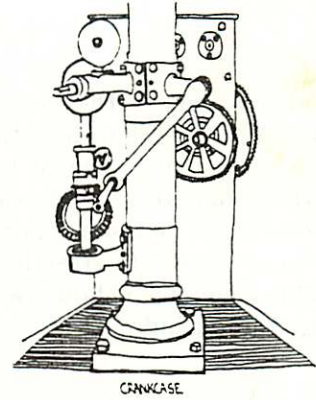
During the day, heavy white curtains are drawn around the outside windows to protect the mantle from the sun. The sun's rays, focused by the prisms, can concentrate



enough heat at the point of contact to start a fire. The hot air that builds up dissipates through the ventilation holes in the outside walls.

Originally all the lighthouses were operated manually, but recently the lights on Castle Island, Great Isaac, Bird Rock, Cay Lobos and Sturup Cay have been automated. The rest, San Salvador, Inagua, Hopetown, and Hole in the Wall, still need two men to operate them through the night.

More recently, a solar powered, helicopter beacon, constructed by the Carlson Company, has been installed on the top of the Dixon Hill Lighthouse. It emits a powerful signal that can be picked up by the Navy helicopter patrol in the area. Similar beacons can be found on Cat Island and Exuma.



One evening in July 1984, just before dusk, Edmund Walkes gave me a guided tour of the lighthouse. As I climbed the ever narrowing vertical steps, I felt part of the two hour ritual of the lighting of the lamp and the winding of the turning mechanism. I watched the small lamp preheat before it hissed into full flame. The turntable began to rotate slowly, and the flickering light was gathered and pulsed out into the darkening sky. I climbed outside onto the catwalk. The island spread out before me like a relief map. I could trace a route that the boats had followed across the inland lakes from Cockburn Town to the lighthouse, and even locate the ruined dock at Duck Quay, the final destination. Down below me, a path had been cut around the hillside to Lighthouse Cave, one of the few known cave networks on the island with stalagmites and stalactites. The level of water in the interconnecting passages rises and falls with the tide on a two hour time lag. The narrower, drier passages are covered with bat guano and are frequently warm and humid. The islanders shun the darkness of the caves even in times of severe hurricanes. The sun had set behind a bank of dark clouds as I wound my way down the staircase to ground level and along the pathway to the road. It was comforting to look back at the lighthouse and see the strong beam — a double flash every ten seconds — radiating out to sea.

CHAPTER 6

Mabel Williams

As I drove even farther south along the eastern side of the island past the Dixon Hill Lighthouse and the home of the Reverend Davies, the road deteriorated to a state where there were more potholes than solid road. Mabel Williams lived one stretch farther down this road in a small blue house with two large green shuttered windows that overlooked the eastern shore.

Mabel led me through her front door into her bedroom. It was spotlessly clean and colorfully decorated with bright rugs and a patchwork quilt on the bed. Adjacent to this room lay a small kitchen and storage area. Born sixty years ago in 1923, Mabel grew up in the United Estates settlement and had two children before she went to Nassau at the age of twenty four to work as a maid. After many years, she returned to San Salvador to regain her health, and has worked as a maid at the CCFL since it opened in 1971. Both she and her mother raised children as single parents. She remembers vividly her mother's tougher struggle to survive at a time when the role of men and women followed a traditional pattern. The men farmed and fished and the women cooked, cleaned house, and raised children. Women who did not have a husband faced many hardships and at times had to eat whatever they could find in the bush to avoid starvation.

VW "How old were you when times were very hard?"

M. Williams "We have hard times in every year right from September to November when the food begins to come in a little bit. If you have a little crop and a large family, and your crop ran out, you don't have no food. You don't have no money, no job, very seldom you has job. So my mother used to work with people who has a little food just to give us something to eat and we could go to school. And when the times get hard and everybody is

kind of low, she used to go over the ridge by the sea and get the heart of the top. We call them baytop [1], a member of the palm family. She'd take a machete or knife and cut the tree way down. The heart down in there is white and you can eat it. It taste good to us. We little children hungry, we be in the road just looking to see what their Momma coming. So when she comes with her basket, she get the pot and put it on the fire and she boil that top. Everyone has their pan. She put two or three in your pan and two or three in the next one, like that. It's not much substance there, but it keep you alive. Then in the evening she cook a little soft grits and give it to us. Nothing else but salt and water. But it tastes good."

Regular employment on the island has always been limited and women have had to exploit the natural resources of the island to barter for basic supplies of flour and sugar and the occasional piece of fabric or bar of soap.

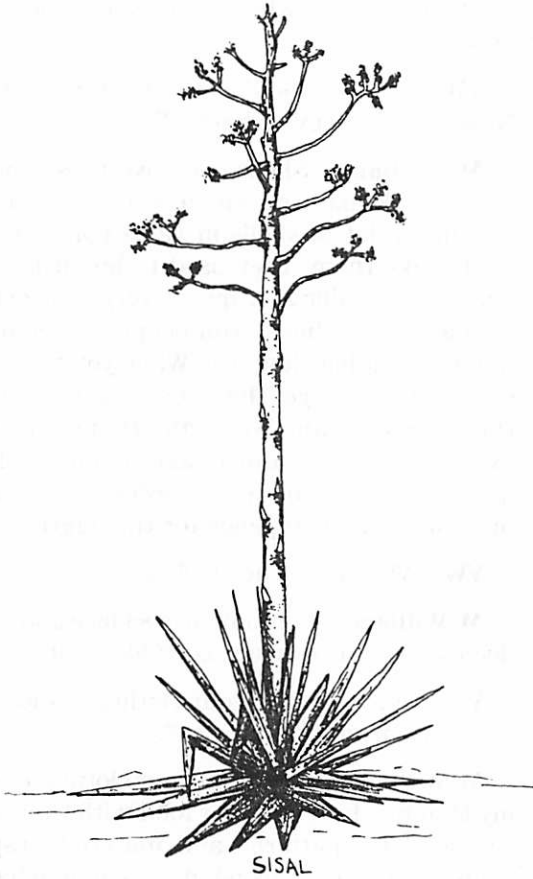
VW "How did your mother earn any money?"

M. Williams "My mother tell me the most what sells used to be sisal [2]. Her Momma used to tie sisal in order to make money. They plant a whole field of sisal."

VW "How do you get the sisal fibers from the tree?"

M. Williams "You cut the leaves off the tree. It has a butt to the place where you cut it, it is very very thick. You saw it with a knife and split that very very fine into pieces. Then you mat the sisal (tie it up). You take about three pieces and tie that, then another three piece on the top and tie that until it get broad. She (Momma) say put the sisal out to wilt (get hard). It has a lot of juice in it so you let some of that sap dry a little. Sometimes you only put three mats in a bundle. You carry it to the pond and soak it."

VW "In fresh water?"



M. Williams "No, this is salt water. She say she leave it there for three weeks. As it gets soft you can slip all the hull off, and you can see the real sisal, all the strands. It come out a hank and she tied it. When it dried, you have to bale it, that means tie it up in a big snug, a big bundle, very very tight. She send it to Nassau on the mailboat. We don't have at that time a mailboat like what we have today. The government had a big boat called the Alice Ada that used to go to every island in the Bahama. That took so long, sometimes months. The men on this island, Buddy, Erskine and Eddie Arnett, one connected family, each one of them had a boat, a scunner (schooner) with three masts. If you don't catch one boat, you'd catch the other. Sisal is the only thing you could get money for, and that's how we get something to eat, like a little sugar or flour. There was no jobs."

VW "How did they pay you for the sisal?"

M. Williams "Sometimes the price is low, sometimes thruppence [3] a pound."

VW "How many pounds of sisal would you need to buy 100 pounds of flour?"

M. Williams "In those days, thruppence gives you a pound of flour. Sometimes it comes to 150 pound (weight) for one bale of sisal, so you see that adds up."

VW "How much was a pound of sugar?"

M. Williams "Sugar was the same thing. But we could have brown sugar for one pence a pound."

VW "What else did you buy?"

M. Williams "Penny bar of blue soap, or octagon soap for tuppence for washing clothes. You bathe with the same soap."

The Sisal Industry [4]

Ambrose Shea, Governor of the Bahamas in 1880, realised the need to establish an industry that could employ the blacks and offer them a way to make a living. He spent many hours and a great deal of energy cultivating the sisal plant (or century plant) as a cash crop. The sisal fibers could be manufactured into rope. This cactus type plant grows well in the poor soils of the Bahamas and lives for twelve to fifteen years. Once growing, it can self seed and continue the crop. Governor Shea personally solicited monies from capitalists in England and Newfoundland to invest in this new industry. The Government sold land to the blacks at low cost to help them to start a business. The sisal fiber could be extracted by crushing the leaves through a roller and washing away the pulp. The rope made by twisting sisal fibers retained its strength even in salt water so making it suitable for marine use. The money realized from the sale of the land was used to subsidize a line of mail boats to run between the islands, and to pay for an underwater cable line to speed up communications between Nassau and the outside world.

The mail boat collected the sisal and transported it to Nassau where it was made into rope. The sisal industry declined when the Phillipines produced a better rope for a lower price.

VW "What else could you send to Nassau for money?"

M. Williams "The only thing was the bark of the sweetwood tree [5]."

VW "Where do you find this tree?"

M. Williams "You have to go back of the high land. You chop it and take the branches off, tie them in a big bundle and bring them home. You get a big log of wood and pound them until the bark come off and leave the empty stick. Momma used to do it at night. We had the fire. We have some wood that we call torch and that torch gives a lot of blaze, a big light that helps you see. Momma put the fire in a big tin in the middle of the yard. All of the children would help her beat the bark off. In the daytime, we have school and in the night-time, we could help her. She didn't have a husband that she could depend on. We were small, she got to provide for us. Just as others go out and try to get money, she goes out too and she tries for herself, so we had to help her. You put it (the bark) out in the sun and let it wilt a bit — let some of the water dry out of it. Then you pack it up and send it to Nassau to the agent."

VW "What did they use it for?"

M. Williams "They used it for medicine."

VW "How much did the agent pay you for it?"

M. Williams "The sweetwood bark brings more than the sisal. You get one shilling (twelve pence) a pound."

VW "Do the trees die when you remove the bark?"

M. Williams "You don't take the root so they springs back from the root. But they take so long to grow you find another plantation. They used to take a boat from Duck Quay and

go through the lake back of the lighthouse to another location where the sweetwood tree grows."

VW "What else did your mother send to Nassau for money or barter?"

M. Williams "Shells, we have those shells (that) look like rice, small, very small. Rice Bay had a lot of shells in years gone by, we could rake them. They used to buy it by the quart, two shillings a quart, very expensive. We had some (shells), you people call it snail, but we call it bleeding teet. When you take 'em off the rock and get the animals out of them, they come clean. We scald them all out, extremely easy. It don't take much to fill a quart with those because they're big. You get one shilling and sixpence for the quart."

VW "What were the shells used for?"

M. Williams "For making necklace and (to) decorate purse, baskets, stuff like that."

VW "Did you make your clothes or did you buy those from Nassau also?"

M. Williams "You made your clothes. When my Mommy don't send for food with the sisal, she send for patterns and materials, especially the hard cloths what we call gingham. She would make our dresses out of them. We use flour bags to help make the dress. Suppose a piece of gingham or blue chamery (Momma used to call it zephyr) isn't sufficient to make one whole dress, and you wanted two. You split the flour bag and the patterned cloth you bought from Nassau. If you cut the skirt part out of the gingham and the body part out of the flour bag, then the sleeve is cut of the gingham and the sleeve trims and the collar out of the flour bag."

VW "Did you have shoes?"

M. Williams "Shoes! Oh, no, my darling, we goes to school barefeet. When you get to school, your two feet are as white as the snow with the dirt because the street we have is like a track road at that time. You take a piece of a branch of a tree and you brush the dirt off

your feet and go in school. The only people who have tennis shoe on their feet is the school teacher or the lightkeeper's children. They had a job and their children different from us. They had better things than us. The first time I had a tennis shoe on my feet, Momma get that for me for going to church, not school. I was so happy, so proud of the tennis shoe. When church out, I take the shoes off my feet and I walk home barefeet. I wanted them to last long."

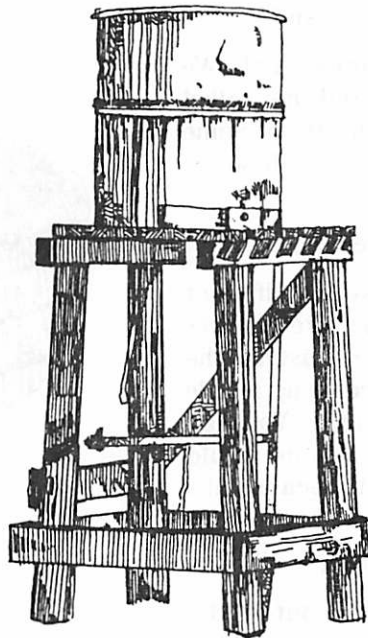
VW "How did you wash your clothes in those days?"

M. Williams "We have the pond right over here. When it rained that pond was full of water. Sometimes it touch way up to your neck. Everybody goes there Saturday morning, that's washing day. They pile up a rock, some stones on each other, real real high. They put a flat rock on the top. They takes their clothes and they scrub it on the rock. She (Momma) never had a washboard. Sometimes she carried a little soap to rub certain

spots on the clothes. When you get a bar of soap you have to go tinchy with that soap. You are only supposed to touch certain spots, like the collar, or your dress neck, or under the arm of a shirt, or the tail, or wherever you see a spot. She uses some bush that we call willet wood bush. She cut a branch and she rubs it on the rockplace and lets it suds just like a soap. She puts some on the clothes and rub like that. She wash it in the water and she rinses it out and I want you to believe, it (comes) white and clean. Sometimes she wash with the lignum vitae tree. That can clean your clothes like a soap too. When she bring her clothes home, she hang them on a bush or a tree. She don't have no line in the yard. She let them dry, then pick them in. It didn't seem hard or strange to anybody because everybody was doing the same thing."

VW "How do you wash your clothes today?"

M. Williams "We have two wash tubs, a scrubbing board, detergent, bleach, and everything. We don't have no hot water, only cold



RAINBARREL

water (from the rain barrel). You wash in the large tub and you bleach in the small tub. (Then) you rinse the clothes out and hang it on the line to dry."

VW "Did you go to school for long?"

M. Williams "In those days, the teachers weren't too particular of children going to school, so we go whenever the parents sent us. We goes to school when we's eight years, then at thirteen years you're out of school."

VW "What did you do then?"

M. Williams "You don't have anything to do, you just stay around the house. We make baskets and weave plait. We goes in the swamp, we get the top out of the trees, the high top trees, the same trees they used to put on the roofs. You take the heart of that, open it in the sun and let it dry. You strip the string and start weaving. (You) weave the plait with the straw and then you stitch it. You make your own hat. Everybody goes to church in a straw hat what they make themselves. You buy a ball of ribbon and make your bow and dress it with that."

VW "Were the hat styles the same?"

M. Williams "You make your own style. We have a plait called a 'fishgill' and one called 'lace' and another one called 'insertion'. Some of the top are soft and some are stiff so we have all different types."

VW "What else do you make with straw?"

M. Williams "We make baskets in different types. My mother taught me to make a basket called a 'catacoo' [6]. You make it just like the shape of a boat and you let it come up a little high. Then you put on the cover. You can carry all your stuff in it and no-one would know what's in your basket because it's covered."

VW "Did you use the same top?"

M. Williams "No, not the top out of the swamp, the one on the ridge, the one we call baytop. You get the heart out of them and put

six of those hearts (fan shaped) together and tie them to dry. If you don't do that they will roll up. Now this is for a field basket to go on the farm, this is not fancy. Then Momma always have a big sifter which she made out of plait like this. She make it round but very broad and she turn it up a little around the edges. Then you shake it (the ground up corn) through into a fanner."

A fanner is a large shallow bowl constructed from wrapped straw sewn in concentric circles. Sabal palm [7] leaves are dried to flatten the edges. One leaf section is wrapped around a length of dried stem of sea oats [8], a grass-like plant growing along the seashore, to make a working length of wrapped straw that is then curled and sewn to the required size and curvature. Continuing a flat circle produces a mat. The more open weave bowls are designed from plaited straw. Three dried sabal palm leaves are plaited together to make a working length. These also can be sewn together to make bowls of different sieve sizes.



A FANNER

Long lengths of four, nine, eleven, fifteen, or twenty-three strips plaited together can be sewn into mats, wall coverings, bowls, or baskets. The four width plait is called "agin" and produces a more angular weave than the other flatter varieties. If the strip is made narrower, the pattern becomes more delicate. The intricate designs of very fine plait are usually found in the women's hats.

VW "How did you store your vegetables so that you had food from September through November?"

M. Williams "We never grow vegetables, we never had seeds, onion or nothing like that. We grow corn, bean, pigeon peas, potato, things like that."

VW "And you don't need seeds to grow those?"

M. Williams "You see what happens. If you have beans and you plant them, you don't need any more seeds because you save your seeds from one year to the other."

VW "How do you save peas to eat in September?"

M. Williams "You get your pigeon peas from the farm. Now if you wanted to eat grain, you only pick enough to use right then. Most people let the peas dry. Then you put them in a rice bag and pound it with a stick, we call it a bruiser. You hit it until all the peas are out of the pod. You throw the empty shells away and secure your peas in a drum."

VW "What kind of a drum?"

M. Williams "A kerosene drum or any galvanized drum. Anything you can seal. You have to clean it real good. You scald it out with hot water and put it on the fire. Let the oil come out because it would taste in the peas. You secure the peas from the bugs."

VW "Which bugs?"

M. Williams "The peabugs are different from the cornbugs. We call them weevil."

VW "Did you secure the corn the same

way?"

M. Williams "Yes, when the corn is dry, you take off all that shuck. You have to comb the corn until all the seeds come off that cob."

VW "What do you do with dried peas and corn?"

M. Williams "You have your mill. You put your corn in the hopper and turn the handle. The flour comes when the grits come. Throw the bran away, the bran is no good. The flour make your cornbread and the grits is what you cook. When you finished grinding you have to sift."

VW "What do you eat with the corn bread?"

M. Williams "Boiled fish or stewed fish grouper, turbot, grunts and muttonfish and conch too."

VW "Do you eat fish now?"

M. Williams "When I could get it. But you hardly can get it now because people in these days don't fish. When I was a child every man has a boat. They goes out every weekend. You, who don't have any husband or have no-one to fish for you, you can go on the beach when the boat is coming in. You help them pull the boat in to the ridge and they give you fish, and conch too. You don't have to buy."

VW "What did you do when either you or your children were sick?"

M. Williams "We didn't have a trained nurse and we didn't have a doctor so we used bush medicine. If you knows a remedy for a certain sickness you used that. Suppose you have a fever now and you don't have no means of getting the doctor. Your fever is very very high. Get your chamberlie (urine) in a basin. You put some alcohol in, then put some sour (a squeeze of lime or lemon) and some vinegar. You swab, wash the person down with it. You get a piece of lard and grease them down with that. You lay them in the bed and you tuck them in with two or three blankets and let them sweat. You cover the head and face and tuck them right in. When

you see the clothes wet, they sweat that fever right out. It could take fifteen to twenty minutes, sometimes half an hour, just as long as you wanted. When their clothes are wet, you swab them with alcohol. You change the clothes and they lay down and you cover them up with a blanket. You give them a hot cup of gaelevine (gale-of-wind). It's bitter now, it's sour lime in it, but it's good for fever. The next couple of minutes you cool down. If the fever comes back again, it doesn't come as hot as the first time. You do that three or four times until the fever is gone."

VW "Do you suffer mostly from colds and flu?"

M. Williams "Yes, although if anybody had a different sickness we don't know what they die from."

VW "Did some people live to be very old?"

M. Williams "Old, old, I know a lot of old people. They don't die, they're different from us. There was Thomas Jones from Fortune Hill, my Momma called him Old Tom. He had a son living right near him, his name was Solomon Jones. The distance was far to walk so my Momma used to carry me, a little girl, for company. He was so old they had to sun him in the daytime to warm him so that he could feel good at night. He had bedsores from laying on the bed so long. He was over 100 years old. The oldest woman I knew that lived that long was Minty Marshall and she lived on Polly Hill. I remember her right now. She was bent up and used a walking stick. She used to smoke a pipe, sometimes she put almond leaf in it, sometimes potato leaf, and when she can get it, a little piece of bacco."

VW "Have you lived through a hurricane on this island?"

M. Williams "Oh yes, in 1941. I remember it because I was eight months pregnant with my first child at the time. We was in the kitchen making chocolate tea and Johnny cake (hot chocolate and English scones). We didn't notice that the storm were coming. When we finished making it, Momma said to

me, 'Come have some bread in the house.' When we started to go, I say, 'Momma, I can't go in the wind, shall we go back on the inside?' She said, 'Lord, the storm look like it's coming, this hafta be a gale 'cos we never had wind like this.' The roof was just lifting, going up and coming back down. That makes me so frightened. I say, 'Oh Lord, Oh Momma, let's get outa here, because this thing coming down on our heads.'

"Momma said, 'Let's get all the stuff packed.' We put the dishes in a box and put it under the bed. We get all of our clothes in a trunk and put the trunk under the bed. So if the house fall and the rocks fall on the inside, we can easily dig it out. The rain is coming down very very heavy. Momma says, 'Let's try to batten.' So she batten up all the windows and the doors. She leave the south window. The wind was to the north part and on the south was the lee part of the house.

"We got out through that window. We had our hairs tied with cloth and we got down low on our knees. We had to creep. It's so dark, you couldn't see your hands before you, you couldn't see each other. You have to just call and feel. We go to Mrs. Nairn, she has an upstairs house. We think it was strong, stronger than ours. These people has a big pasture and they run cows and they has a gate right by the road. The gate was on the ground and so we got to crawl over that gate to find the road. The only'st thing you could see was when the lightning flash.

"We met Minty Jones and her family there in the house. We met Elmore Nairn. He came from Reckley Hill to secure his mother and the rest of his sisters and his brother. He batted every window and every door. When we listen, we hear upstairs Rhrr...the walls upstairs fall down. I never holler so since I born. I was too scared and everybody holler-ing. I said, 'Oh Momma, we all going to die in here.'

"Everybody go to the west door, a half door. It was battened. So now four or five push and

push. My brother got out and he gone and nobody know where he was. And then William, that's one of Mrs. Nairn's sons, the last little one, he get out and he gone. Everybody was gone in a different direction. And now we come out and Momma hold my hand. She said, 'I hear my Pa saying when storm, you must go under the lee of a hill. Better to weather the storm on the outside than on the inside.' We creep until we get under the bluff of the hill. We didn't feel too much of a breeze. My Lord, some rain was stinging, just like the sun. You have nothing on your head 'cos the wind beat off the cloth (with) which you have tied your hair. Everyone was sitting down crunched up under the tree. The rain was beating on you, the wind was blowing on you, and you get chilly and cold. We saw one lightning flash. It split the sky from the north strictly down to the south. You can see everything in the sky. And honey, I was so scared, and around you was just like a fire lighting up. Oh Lord, I wouldn't want to be in that again."

VW "But you all survived?"

M. Williams "Yes, we all survived. When we come home, the wall was cracked, but nothing (had happened) to the house. Some of the leafs blow off and dirt blow down on the inside, but it didn't fall. Some of the clothes was wet. The hurricane was in November and I had my baby in December."

Mabel leaned back in the chair quite exhausted as if she had relived the fears of the hurricane. I thanked her for her afternoon of remembering and drove back to the CCFL campus, past Reckley Hill, the home of Elmore Nairn, another older resident of the island.

1. Sabal palmetto PALMACEAE
2. Agave rigida sisilana AGAVE
3. Three pence. 240 pence = one pound sterling.
4. James H. Stark, *Stark's History and Guide to the Bahamas*, Norwood, Mass: Plimpton Press, 1891, p. 211-214
5. Croton eluteria EUPHORBIACEAE
6. From Twi, A West African language, a field basket, in John A. Holm and Alison Watt Shilling, *Dictionary of Bahamian English*, Cold Spring, New York: Lexix Publishing, 1982.
7. Sabal palmetto PALMACEAE
8. Uniola paniculata UNIOLA

CHAPTER 7

Elmore Alexander Nairn

Elmore Alexander Nairn has been one of the best storytellers on the island and is often sought out for information on the island's history. He lives in Reckley Hill, as did his parents and grandparents before him. His house, a ranch house on stilts, leans into the hill. The yard is barren, every vestige of vegetation has been nibbled away by goats. There are goats everywhere, in every shape, color and size, bleating and rubbing themselves against posts and tree trunks. I pass by one goat delivering twins behind an old stack of car tires. She steadily licks each one clean, a massaging process that strengthens the muscles in their legs and helps them to take their first few tottering steps. Elmore shouts a welcome from the doorway and invites me to come on up. He wipes his hands on a cotton towel and apologises for his domesticity. His wife of many years died recently and he now cares for himself. I stand inside the door for several minutes until my eyes adjust from the glare of the brilliant sunshine to the relative darkness of his living room. I step around a goat that is nuzzling its nose into my leg and sit down on a fabric covered sofa. Photographs of all shapes and sizes cover the walls and the table. He points to one of his wife and boasts that she weighed at least 250 pounds, and to many photographs of his five children. When he reminisces about his youngest daughter Miranda, his voice softens and becomes emotional. Then blue eyes twinkling, Elmore yells at the goat to leave the room and chases him through the doorway. I asked him about his blue eyes, a rarity in black folk.

E. Nairn "What happened is this . . .

"In the whaling days, when they used to catch whales to get the whale oil, this Nairn, from Nairns Town in Scotland, was on this boat that came to Long Island. He met my grandmother (father's mother), fell in love

with her, and deserted the ship. He had the blue eyes. My sister and I have the same color eyes, but some of the family have dark eyes. My mother was a descendent of the Arawak Indians. Her father was John Reckley and his father was named Reckley. He (the great-grandfather) and all his boys built a house on the hill where the Coast Guard Station sits and named it Reckley's Hill. I was born there on June 15th, 1911 when it was my grandfather's property. The best part of his land is where the museum is, they call it Polaris now. My grandfather had six children and each one had equal rights, so the land was split into six pieces."

VW "Did you go to school?"

E. Nairn "I go to school from the age of five and stayed in school until I was nineteen. I was one of the smart crew, one of the pupil-teachers. I just teach the school kids the alphabet and arithmetic. In those days we had pounds, shillings, and pence. We never got dollars and cents until after Independence in 1973."

VW "Did you have a farm?"

E. Nairn "In those days for employment on the island you farm, you fish, you raise some creatures."

VW "Did you go fishing much?"

E. Nairn "We used to go fishing on Monday mornings, on the reefs. In the evening, as we came into Grahams Harbour with a boatload of fish and conch, the people would be on the dock. Everybody get something for the kids. Each boat carry three men, two to fish and one to cook. We fish with a line, but we dive for conch ten to fifteen feet. We didn't have fins or goggles or things like that. The fellow take off all his clothes and dive naked. When he get a boat load, we bring it in to the beach.

The cook would chop out the conch and clean it, then scorch it down, beat it, and hang it up on the line to cure without salt. You can keep it in the barn indefinitely. We split the bluefish and then we corn them (slice the fish with the skin on)."

VW "How long can you keep salted fish?"

E. Nairn "For weeks, it is a staple. When you want to use it, you put it in a container, put water, and soak it. The salt comes out and then it is fresh."

VW "Do you still fish?"

E. Nairn "Yes, I have three boats, one in Grahams Harbour, one near here, and one in the yard. The boats are aluminum. Wooden boats make you work too hard. They are heavy and costs money for you to keep. You have to build a house to keep them. The salt cracks the putty and loosens them up so they leak bad. But the aluminum boat, you haul them up on the beach and leave them there for twelve months of the year."

VW "Do you have a motor?"

E. Nairn "I do, but it isn't working."

VW "So you row?"

E. Nairn "Yes I scull, and the next man go fishing. We just had some turbot, about forty-nine. I have a deep freeze and I keep it stocked all the time. Riding Rock, when it's in operation, buy all the fish I have."

VW "Did you have hard times years ago?"

E. Nairn "In October, November, and December, times used to be pretty hard. No food, and people were unable to buy groceries because there was no grocery store on the island. The captain of the mail boat used to sell a supply of groceries to the different islands as he run the mail boat. You could get 100 pound sack of flour for eight shillings. Things were far cheaper than it is today."

VW "Was it hard to earn eight shillings?"

E. Nairn "Well with me it wasn't hard as I



had a lot of sheep, cows, stuff like that. Every weekend I would kill a sheep. I gave my wife a quarter and sell the rest."

VW "Did you buy sugar too?"

E. Nairn "We had two types of brown sugar, the coarse grained dry kind and the other was wet and much finer. They make it from the sugar cane in Nassau. But we can take the cane and knock the eyes off it and beat it with a piece of wood. You boil it and make tea (a sugary drink). The cane has sap in it. You can also make a cane syrup."

VW "Does sugar cane grow here?"

E. Nairn "We grow it extensively."

VW "Did you get sugar crystals from it in the old days?"

E. Nairn "I don't know how to make it myself."

VW "Did anyone make their own alcoholic drinks?"

E. Nairn "No, they only drink it when they can get it. One fellow, Eddie Arnett, and his brother used to go to Jamaica (by boat) and bring it in in barrels, rum, gin and whisky. That was good strong rum. When you opened the barrel, you could smell the rum in the room. It was all colored rum. My grandfolks, they take a mouthful of water, put the bottle to their head, then take a mouthful (of rum). Then they take a little bit more water behind it, so that the rum is in the middle of the water, so there isn't a chance for the fuel to get up in your brain and junk you in a hurry."

VW "What did people do for recreation before you had the clubs and the radio?"

E. Nairn "We danced. We have a dance called a quadrille. According to the size of the room, you can take about twenty-four people. I will dance with you, and your partner will dance with my partner. You pass through and through just like you're marching up and down. You keep your partner and you spin. We have a guitar, an old saw that you scrape

with a knife, an accordion or concertina, and a drum made from sheepskin. They called the band 'rake and scrape.'"

VW "How do you make a sheepskin drum?"

E. Nairn "You take the sheepskin and soak it in lye (caustic soda or sodium hydroxide). You peel all the hair off of it and use the skin. Sometimes you take a hook and put it on the bucket and pull and pull. Put in a tack, turn it around until it is perfectly taut. You heat it on the fire. It makes a wonderful sound."

VW "Where did you dance?"

E. Nairn "We dance in the big house up by the lighthouse yard. That's where we enjoyed ourselves during the holidays Christmas Day, New Year, Easter Monday, Empire Day, August Monday. But since the Bahamas got their Independence we don't keep Empire day, the Queen's birthday, on May 24th anymore."

VW "Can you remember much about the hurricane in 1941?"

E. Nairn "1940 you mean. It was terrible. See that house up on the hill. I was living there with my wife and baby boy. They were afraid to stay in the house so we went into the cellar. All the people in this area came up and slept on the ground. We didn't hear the wind and didn't see nothing. When the hurricane was over, there wasn't one house left in the settlement by the Coast Guard Station. Six to eight houses fell."

VW "Did you build that house?"

E. Nairn "My Daddy did, but he died in 1928 and I finished it off. I built another one that did blow down and I had to build it again. That one withstood a hurricane (in 1956)."

VW "What do you do if a house catches fire?"

E. Nairn "Pour water on if you can find enough water. We have no running water in the houses. We have wells and we draw it up in a bucket. I keep my bucket full all the time.

We have a fire hearth for the stove and you keep the wood for the fire on this. We have a separate room for the kitchen, but it's still close to the house."

VW "Did you help to build the Pan American base?"

E. Nairn "I worked with Pan American for fifteen years as a maintenance man. Before they was situated on the island they sent contractors down here. They had tents. They put the framework up, boarded one side and covered it with a canvas. That's where the people stayed while they were putting up the

building down by the runway. They put in water pipes and a catchment basin."

VW "What do you build now?"

E. Nairn "I build my own fish traps. I was working on one this morning. I plait wire. I can make nine of them from a roll of wire. I buy the wire from Nassau for \$75 and sell them for \$30 (each)."

A car pulls up outside. His daughter Miranda brings his lunch. I promise to return later and walk briskly back to the Field Station for lunch. I'm suddenly very hungry.

CHAPTER 8

Reverend Davies

My appointment with the Reverend Davies was at 10 a.m. on Monday morning, give or take an hour, Bahamian time. He lives three miles down the road at the southern end of United Estates, in a small framed house close to the road. Since it was a very hot day in July and the trade winds had stopped blowing, I decided to ride a bike instead of walking. I pedalled past St. John's Baptist church, past the Holy Cross Catholic church and the lighthouse compound, and even past the Zion Baptist church. I skidded and fell at least twice into the sandy shoulder of the road and I was thankful to arrive unhurt. The Reverend Davies welcomed me into his home. As I cooled off in the shade of his porch, the phrase, "Only mad dogs and Englishmen go out in the noonday sun," flitted through my mind as I brushed off the dust from my skirt and sneakers.

Yesterday, at the Sunday morning service, I had listened to the Rev. Davies as he preached from the pulpit. He suggested that I thank God for all of my privileges and help my neighbor as best as I could. We sang many hymns together in rhythm with the beat of the tambourines. Today, he described how his church had developed on the island and his contribution to it.

VW "Do you remember much about your childhood?"

Rev. Davies "I was born in the settlement behind St. John's church. I went to school around five and on to fourteen (years). We had a man teacher. We used to have English, arithmetic, geography, and other things. My father passed (on) in 1926 and I was the eldest (of seven children) to my mother. I went to Nassau to do plumbing, and jobs on roads, and building jobs. Then I came home and married Jana Arnett in 1936. Her father was Anthony (Buddy) Arnett."

VW "When you were young how did women cook?"

Rev. Davies "In those days we used to be cooking on one of those firepots. They were breakable. You set it on the stones, three to four inches high, and you put wood under it. You made a fire and cooked on the fire. Cook anything on it until we had an oil stove and then gas."

VW "What kinds of food did you farm and store?"

Rev. Davies "Dried corn, green beans, potatoes, sweet potatoes... and we raised chickens, goats, pigs, and cows. I had 100

head of sheep.”

VW “So you weren’t hungry?”

Rev. Davies “No, but some peoples were, especially towards the ending of the year around October and November. But no one died from hungry. They would come by and ask for grits or bread or something. We would just give it to them. We just help one another.”

VW “How do you build a house?”

Rev. Davies “You build the inside first, then put the walls on the outside, then stones and cement on the outside.”

VW “Do you make the cement?”

Rev. Davies “No, now you buy it. (Years ago) they used to make the lime from rocks. They cut down a lot of wood and lay it round and round in a circle with a piece of wood in the center. (They) put stones on top and they light that inside the circle. The stones melt to a white powder. Put water in it and sand and make lime. They make concrete out of the lime.”

Limestone, or calcium carbonate rock, decomposes to quicklime, or calcium oxide, and carbon dioxide gas when it is heated strongly. Water slakes the quicklime to slaked lime, or calcium hydroxide. The production of lime for building purposes has been carried out in limestone regions in other parts of the world for centuries.

VW “When was this Zion Baptist church started?”

Rev. Davies “Around 1908. I was born in 1916 and dedicated in that church. Alexander Mitchell begins the church. He was the preacher and John Marshall the deacon. [Mitchell was followed first by his son-in-law, Lewis Butler, and then by his son Emmanuel, in carrying on the leadership of this church.] I was called to the Ministry in 1943 and went to the Zion Baptist church in Nassau to be ordained by the Reverend Talbot Sands in 1948. I came back to take this church over. There were four more churches in the branch,

one in Old Place, one in Fortune Hill which is now abandoned, one at Long Bay, and one way down by Pigeon Creek. I have a mission to go to all the Zion churches.”

VW “Is the other Baptist church up the road also a Zion Baptist church?”

Rev. Davies “No, it is St. John’s. (There is) no difference in the order of services. After the Church was erected in Nassau, people came to build the same branch over here. The Reverend Julius Saulman was the first pastor of St. John’s Baptist church beyond 1908, in the last century. The second pastor, Joshua Storr, was there for over fifty years. He passed and his young brother took over. He goes to all the St. John’s churches, one in this settlement, one in Victoria Hill, one in Cockburn Town, and one in Sugar Loaf. He has more churches to see than I have.

“This church over here, the old place that I am now looking over, was rebuilt many times. There have been two additions that I have put on to the church.”

VW “Why did you make the church building bigger?”

Rev. Davies “The church fell in hurricane Betsy in 1965. The roof came off and part of the walls. We had to build a wooden building nearby to worship in until we had that church built back. We changed the tin roofing to asphalt shingle which is stronger and will take a while to come off. We added a number of feet to one side of the church. And not too long a distance in the past, we put a piece on the east side, (with) an office and a room where we could have an anniversary.”

VW “How many members do you have?”

Rev. Davies “About forty. A lot of the old people died. Because there is no work, they (the younger people) leave the island and take up residence in Nassau and Freeport and so there is less members in the Church than in the past. That happened all around here.”

Religion and Education in the Nineteenth Century

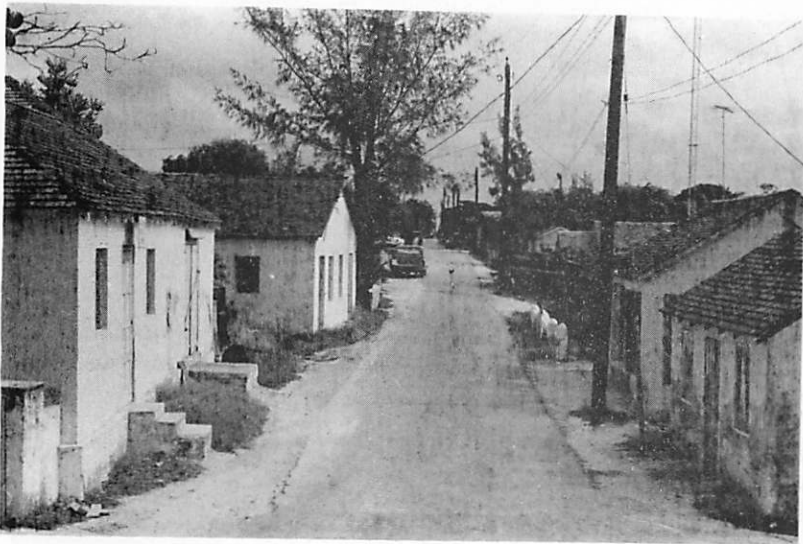
Although the British Parliament passed the Abolition of the Slave Act in 1833, it was 1838 before the affairs of the colony of the Bahamas were those of free men [1]. The white colonists could no longer control the black population by slavery, so they embraced a policy of segregation that would restrict their former slaves to their own social, educational, and religious environments. It was left to the religious leaders, especially of the Baptist and Methodist faiths, to address the problems of educating the blacks. They began by building churches especially for them.

In 1833, the Reverend J. Burton began the African Episcopal Methodist Chapel or Zion's chapel, and built Fox Hills, the first chapel building, in 1835. He established a faith on San Salvador (then Watling's Island) [2], and arranged for a missionary, funded by sympathetic religious groups in England, to be sent to establish and maintain a school on the island. By 1859, a new system of founding schools — a Grant in Aid program — paid for public schools on many of the out-islands. A school inspector was appointed to tour the schools and to write an annual report on their progress and conditions. But many parents did not appreciate the value of schooling and only sent one third to one half of their children for instruction. By 1889, it became mandatory for all children between six and twelve years of age to attend school, and by 1897 the age limit was raised to fourteen years [3]. Although many of the islands were isolated from the outside world of intellectual activity, the rudiments of a good education became available to all of the islanders.

1. George Burbank Shattuck, ed., *The Bahamas Islands*, The Geographical Society of Baltimore, 1905, p. 528.

2. James H. Stark, *Stark's History and Guide to the Bahamas*, Norwood, Mass: Plimpton Press, 1891, p. 239-240.

3. *Op.cit.* p. 581.



Main St, Cockburn Town.



Library, Cockburn Town.



*Jake's grocery store,
Cockburn Town.*

*Harlem Square Club,
Cockburn Town.*



Riding Rock.

Beach at Riding Rock.





Window of town jail, Cockburn Town.

*Jail, Holy Saviour Catholic church,
Cockburn Town.*



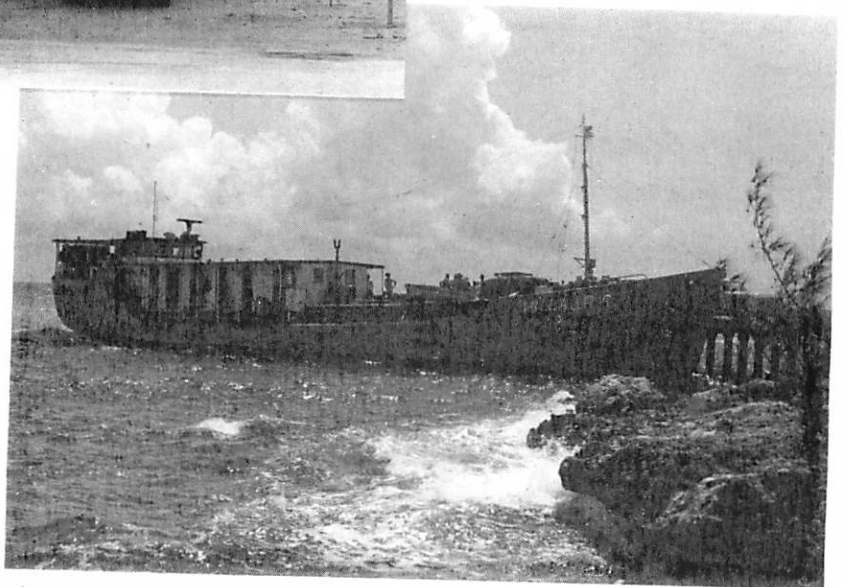
Palm tree, Cockburn Town center.

Harbor light, Cockburn Town center.



*Almond tree, Cockburn
Town center.*

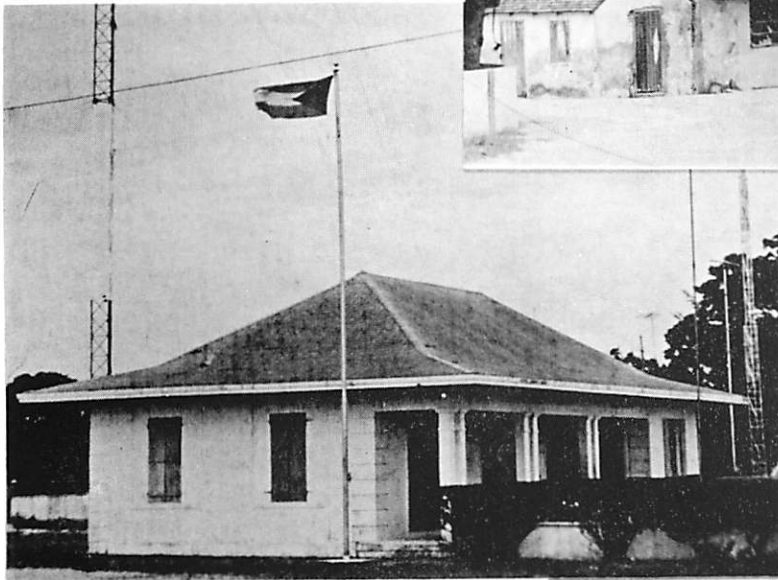
Mailboat, Willaurie.





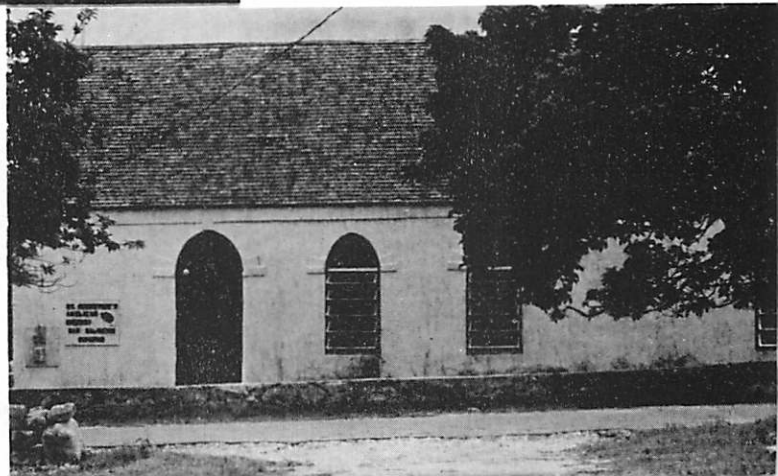
Unloading the Willaurie.

Ocean View Club, Cockburn Town.



Town Hall, Cockburn Town.

Episcopal church, Cockburn Town.





Gravestones, Cockburn Town cemetery.

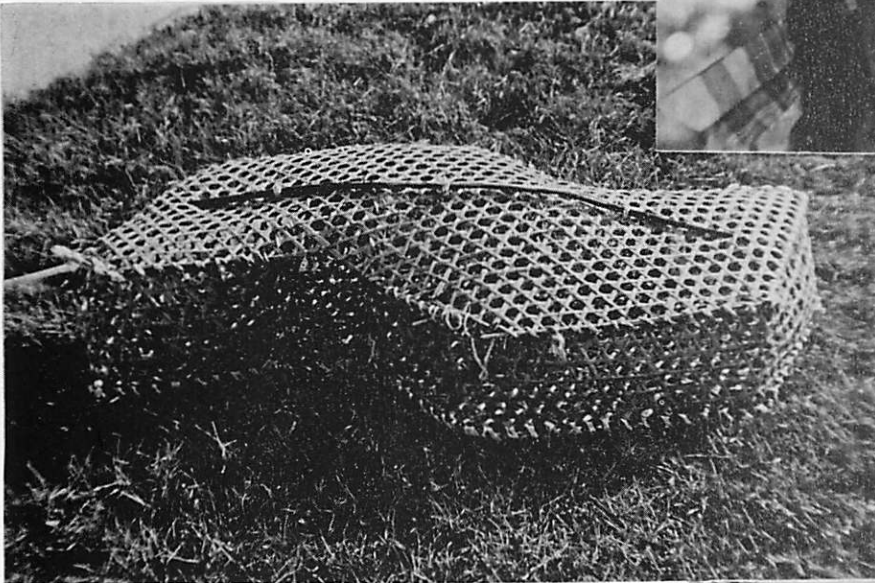


Columbus Monument, Fernandez Bay.

Bas relief, Holy Saviour church, Cockburn Town.



Mrs. Arnett wearing an insertion design straw hat.



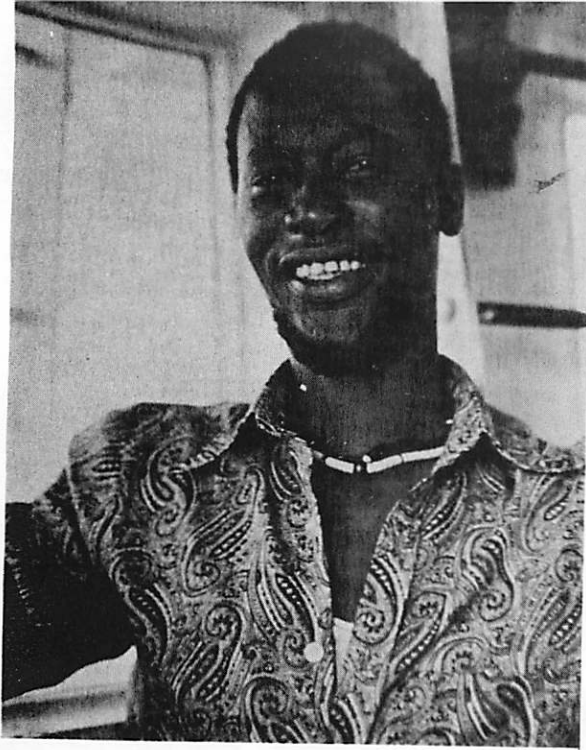
Fish trap.



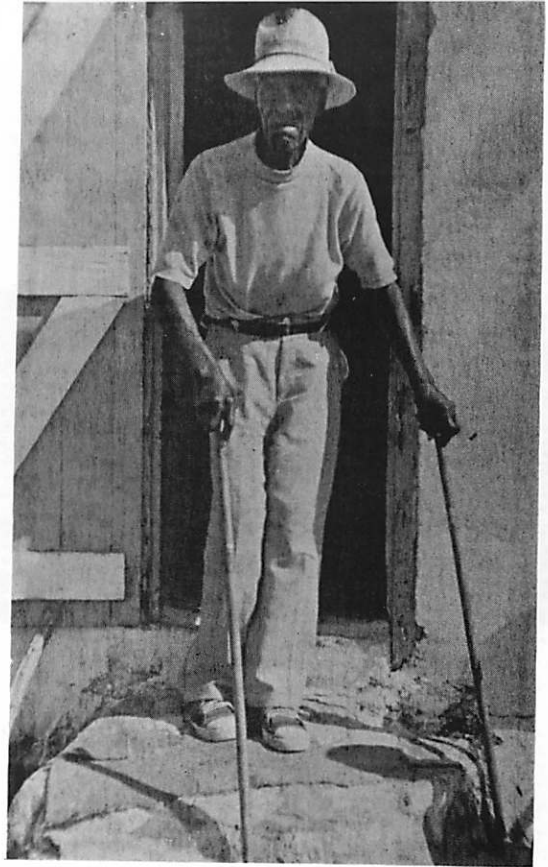
Man's straw hat.

Blossom Lightfoot, Evelyn Wring, Susalee Anderson.





Edmund Walkes.



Horatio Lightfoot.



Dixon Hill Lighthouse.

Lightkeeper's house.





*Horatio Lightfoot's house,
United Estates.*



St. John's Baptist church, United Estates.



Zion Baptist church, United Estates.



*United Estates.
Wooden house*





Wash day.

Mabel Williams.



Sam Edgecombe.



Elmore Nairn.



Sisal.

CHAPTER 9

Jake Jones

On one of my visits to Cockburn Town, I met Jake Jones, a thin gangly, seventy-three year old, who is still limber enough to be mistaken for a much younger man. He was renovating a shed behind his house on Main Street, not far from his grocery store and clubhouse. A younger man was helping him. Dust filled the air as he chiselled out the rotten wood from the understructure and pulled bent and rusty nails from an overhead beam. I coughed. The smell reminded me of damp basements. Jake led me from the noise and dirt to the comfort of overstuffed chairs in his cool dark living room. He perched on the edge of his seat, spread his fingertips together before flexing his fingers, and cleared his throat a few times.

VW "Were you born here on the island?"

J. Jones "Yes, in 1911. I was born on the other side of the island in Fortune Hill. When I was eighteen months old, my mum brought me to a lady over here (in Cockburn Town). There were two of us and my mum couldn't keep the two. We were twins, identical."

VW "So you grew up in Cockburn Town and he in Fortune Hill?"

J. Jones "Yes, then he leave the settlement and went to Nassau. I think that he's a painter. I see him every two or three or five years."

VW "Could you have gone to Nassau to school?"

J. Jones "No, I don't think so. In those days things were tough on the island and my parents at that time could not have afforded to send me."

VW "So you had to work?"

J. Jones "Farming. (We grew) potatoes, peas, corn, okra, cassava. I had my own farm."

VW "Did you keep animals?"

J. Jones "I had over 200 cows until the year of Betsy, the hurricane (1965). They escaped through the fence."

An unknown number of wild cows roam the island. When the fresh water lakes dry up in the summer, they are attracted to the catchment area pools to drink. Rope nooses are laid on the ground along pathways as traps. When the cow steps into the noose, it tightens around her leg and prevents her from escaping. The cow is shot, skinned, and quartered on the spot. The pieces are strapped to poles and carried to a waiting vehicle which transports them to Jake's deepfreeze. The islanders believe that Jake still owns the cows and has a right to keep or sell the meat.

VW "So you continued the family tradition of farming?"

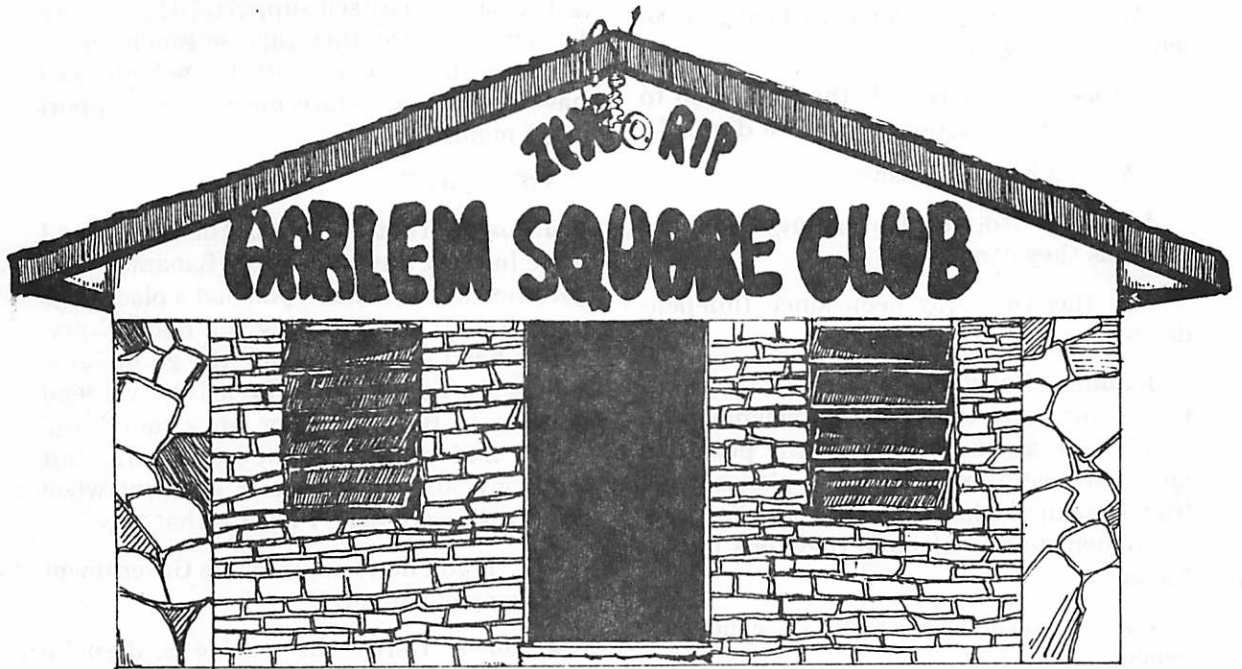
J. Jones "I did a lot of farming at that time, but then I opened a grocery store. It was the only store here at that particular time. Then I opened a club, the Harlem Square Club."

VW "Did you think the island needed some entertainment?"

J. Jones "Well you see before, we had some small bars. What dey does is to order the liquor strong, perhaps 100 proof or 150 proof in a gallon bottle. They mixed that with rain-water and sell it back to the people. Sometimes they mix it bad. After I open my club, I didn't mix mine. I bought (the liquor) in cases of small bottles and I sell it as reasonable as I can and kept the business. We had a dance floor and a juke box."

VW "Did you have any live music?"

J. Jones "A 'rake and scrape' band. We



play accordion, guitar and things like that. We dance the waltz, the quadrille."

VW "A quadrille is an old English country dance?"

J. Jones "Right, you could take any amount, fifty people if you want to."

VW "Do the older people still like to dance?"

J. Jones "Oh, yes, but we don't have it. The older people don't bother with that no more. Those that go to the bars, especially the men, go to get a drink. They don't dance, it's just for the younger folks."

VW "What did you do for recreation when you were a young man?"

J. Jones "We had dances."

VW "Did you play dominoes then?"

J. Jones "No, we got domino lately. We used to play checkers and cards. I still play cards now."

VW "Which days did you celebrate?"

J. Jones "Empire Day, Easter and some other holidays in between. Not only that, some fellow getting married has to be danced to. We dance for three to four days before that."

VW "How old were you when you got married?"

J. Jones "Thirty."

VW "Do you have any children?"

J. Jones "Do you have a computer?"

VW "How many wives do you have?"

J. Jones "You need a computer for that too."

VW "Are you married now?"

J. Jones "My wife's away. She had to go to Miami. She has eye trouble and may not see. She had an operation, but it wasn't successful. She has cataracts on her eyes."

VW "Are there any common health problems on San Salvador?"

J. Jones "If you're sick, they send you to Nassau to the hospital. You need a doctor."

VW "Can it be expensive?"

J. Jones "No, the Government help as much as they can."

VW "Has this only been since Independence?"

J. Jones "No, when I was young they used to do the same thing. I can remember we didn't have any base here for the planes to land. On several occasions, sea planes came from Nassau and landed on the lake. You took the patient to the lake and they took him to Nassau."

VW "Are you doing any better since Independence?"

J. Jones "I've got more strain. In days gone by I didn't have to pay to licence my car. I

didn't have to pay self support. (If) you work for someone else, they take so much out of your pay, but I don't work for nobody, so I have to pay the Government self support every month."

VW "Taxes?"

J. Jones "That's what it is. I'm worse than I been. In those days (when the Bahamas were governed by the British) you had a place to go to get things straight. Now you don't. Everybody's head is in one camp. If I go to John, John will send me over to Dick. Dick will send me over to Harry and I'm going round and round and round and never reach... But that's my story. Things were different when the British were here. I liked it that way."

VW "If you don't support the Government who can you support?"

J. Jones "Listen, the trouble is, if you're not with the Government that means you become the Opposition. And that's a bad position to be in here."

CHAPTER 10

Randy Williams

Randolph Williams or Randy as he is usually called by his friends did not feel the need to leave San Salvador until he was twenty-three years old in 1941. His memories of the difficult 1920's and '30's remind him of a happy family oriented farming life where it was important to do every job well, no matter how hard or menial. He believes that Independence will be good for San Salvador in the long run and that more natives would be self sufficient if they returned to the time honored ways of farming and fishing. One Sunday after the 11:00 a.m. mass at the Holy Saviour Catholic church in Cockburn Town, we sat under the nearby almond tree and talked about his life on the island. He remembered when the first wireless communications station was set up just close by next to the old jail on the hill.

R. Williams "It was in 1926. A twister or cyclone came up and overturned the mail boat and some of the people got lost. There wasn't any way to communicate to Nassau at that time so they had to take a little boat, about twelve feet in length, and cross to the nearest island which was Rum Cay and contact the people there. They had a bit bigger boat, so they went into Nassau to carry the report. From then on during the same year, they set up a wireless communication between here and Nassau. I was a small boy at the time. I watched them dig a well about eight to nine feet deep until they reached water. They filled it up with copper wire. They set up two poles about 100 to 125 feet tall with wires running from these poles to the transmitter. We used to have to charge up the battery, the kind that had the insulator on the inside."

VW "When was this system improved?"

R. Williams "The nearest thing I can think of is in the 1950's when they had this tracking station down here. They were trying to get man into space, to the moon, at the time."

VW "What were they tracking?"

R. Williams "They shoot these missiles up, and having these radar and tracking, they would pick it up in Grand Bahama. From Grand Bahama, it (the missile) came close to Eleuthera. They have a station there. It would cross San Sal and then up to Mayaguana and Grand Turk and all the way down the range. They got to improve the tracking so well they didn't need this station any more. They took ships with the same equipment that they had on the island and put the ship wherever they wanted. It was called 'The Guided Missile Range Division'. Everybody who wasn't in school was employed there and everybody was happy."

VW "What did you do?"

R. Williams "I used to work with fire security. I stayed with them 'til after the Americans turned everything over to the Bahamian Government."

VW "What has happened to the island since the Americans left?"

R. Williams "Much has deteriorated from what it used to be and is still falling lower."

VW "Has it been different since the Bahamas has been Independent?"

R. Williams "It is much better because now the colored people has the privilege and the opportunity that they didn't have in the past. Then there wasn't much money in circulation for them to send their children off to school to get a higher education that they can hold, to get top job. Now they are helped by the Government."

VW "How does the Government help in other ways?"

R. Williams "The Government is encouraging us to raise our own cattle and to boost farming and fishing like they used to be. It helped you to have your own independence if you didn't have to wait until the ship brought things in here. You raised your own. But the younger people doesn't care too much about farming. They call it dirty work. You can have clean work in an office but if you doesn't have someone to work for the food, you and your pencil will perish."

VW "You left the island as a young man?"

R. Williams "Yes, first I used to work on Paradise Island. At that time they used to call it Hog Island. I used to take the tourists to the beach over there in a glass bottomed boat. I were working, cleaning the golf course, cutting grass, and landscaping. Then in 1943, I joined the Farmer's Association and went to the U.S. I took my wife with me until we had kids. In season, I was moving from one state to another. I go to Idaho to pick potato, to Montana for sugarbeets. In North Carolina and Virginia I picked tobacco and in Maryland, apples and peaches. I got tired of traveling and settled in Homestead, the district where they have all the fruits, just thirty miles south of Miami. I did that until 1958 when I come home and settle down."

VW "What do you do now?"

R. Williams "I take care of yards down at the Sandy Point district. Some of the people (from the U.S. or Canada) visit at Thanksgiving and Christmas time and others stay during the summer. I also take care of the churchyard and the building."

CHAPTER 11

Clifton Storr (Jimbo)

Jimbo pulled up a plastic chair and joined me as I watched the sun set from the veranda outside my room at the CCFL. The sky flamed in orange and gold silhouetting the casuarina trees on the edge of the campus grounds. It was one of the many spectacular sunsets that I have seen here. Jimbo, or more formally Clifton Storr, holds a reputation of being one of the best mechanics on the island. Friendly and hardworking, he is at forty years of age, one of the few natives who have managed to make a living without leaving the island.

VW "What type of work did you find when you finished school at eighteen?"

C. Storr "My first job was with a surveying team, (with) one Leslie Peters, staking off properties. I used to carry the instruments. The Surveyor would give us a marker where to put the pillars in and we had to make them out of cement. Then in December 1962, I got a job on the Pan American base in the Cockburn Town area, by the airport. I worked as a roads and grounds crew for about a year. We dig ditches for cables. After that I used to do painting, radar towers and water tanks. After that I worked with the welder welding metals. We used a torch machine with acetylene and oxygen. Then I went into the garage, what we call the motor pool. We maintain all the vehicles, grease 'em, paint 'em, do overhauls to the engines."

VW "Did somebody teach you how to fix engines or did you just pick it up on the job?"

C. Storr "(I) just picked it up and just went on reading books and doing the practical thing. They had U.S. mechanics there as well from stateside."

VW "Did you learn your skills from them?"

C. Storr "Of course, and I learned to drive."

VW "How long did you work there?"

C. Storr "Until the base was phased out in 1969. They turned over everything to the Bahamian Government, including the power stations."

VW "Did that leave you without a job?"

C. Storr "No, I went into the power station. I was an operator there. We run the generators twenty-four hours and each guy will be on eight hours watch. We have four natives working there. We have to take recordings every hour to check the performance of the engine. (We have five engines.) If something goes wrong with the engine that's on the line, we take that engine off and replace it with a standby engine."

VW "Did you work at the U.S. Navy base also?" (The buildings are now occupied by the CCFL Bahamian Field Station.)

C. Storr "The only time I came here to this base was to become familiar with this power station. I was in charge of both power stations. We've closed (this one) out now. We have underground cables part of the way and overhead lines to connect this base to the other base."

VW "Which parts of the island have electricity?"

C. Storr "It only goes as far as the CCFL. We don't have electricity in United Estates. We have electricity in Cockburn Town, Long Bay, Sugar Loaf, and Sandy Point. That's as far as it goes."

VW "Are there any other generators?"

C. Storr "We have one portable generator at Old Place, near Pigeon Creek, one at Short Stop, and one at Palm Tree."

VW "How would a man learn the skills of an electrician or a plumber?"

C. Storr "It would be better to go to school in Nassau to the College of the Bahamas. Or you could do correspondence. I went to school in Miami, just one of those six day courses on Detroit diesel engine. My instructor was a woman, but she knew her stuff."

VW "Have women ever wanted to work in maintenance, plumbing or carpentry?"

C. Storr "No, except that just recently at the power station, we employed a girl as an auxiliary plant attendant. So that's one for the history of the island."

VW "Are any women interested in auto mechanics?"

C. Storr "Yes. I taught minor auto mechanics at the Central School for about six weeks. I had six ladies in the class. All of them did very well."

VW "Could they get a job with these skills?"

C. Storr "No, it wouldn't be enough."

VW "Are any of them doing any more mechanics?"

C. Storr "No, not at this stage. They had several other classes going on, cookery, sewing..."

VW "Are you training any people right now?"

C. Storr "Yes, a few boys comes around part-time when they gets out of school. They want to train how to be a mechanic. If they want to go on, they'll have to go to Nassau to get a higher grade of education."

VW "Would you have liked that opportunity when you were younger?"

C. Storr "Yes, but my parents didn't have the means. Opportunities got better right after they brought that Central School in here." (The school occupies the former Pan American base.)

CHAPTER 12

Leo St. Jones

It is quiet across the campus of the Central High school (the old Pan American base). The students take a January vacation. The grounds, sparsely dotted with trees, are tidy and the sports field shows signs of heavy use. Without the students the buildings seem lifeless. My gaze focuses on the shattered glass and sagging doors and the worn thin paint on the walls and window trim that cry out for repair. A Quonset hut stands derelict on the far side of the field. What was it used for by the Americans? What has it been used for since? What are the priorities for such a school on an island where eighty percent of the population is under twenty, and youth employment is nonexistent? I talked to Leo St. Jones (forty-eight years old), the maintenance supervisor of these buildings for the past seventeen years.

VW "How old were you when you got your first job?"

L. St. Jones "About in the 20's. There waan't no work on the island. For my first job, I worked for MacDonal'd Construction Company working on the buildings for the Pan American base, pouring concrete, building lumbers, steel. Then when the U.S. Naval building were put down I were employed there. I were the maintenance supervisor. I were responsible for all the employees that were handyman all over the island. They build walls, they clean the yard, make the garbage run, dig holes — many times we got to dig holes, and dig ditches. Then I leave the yard and worked in the kitchens. I were cooking, I were baking, I were making salads, you name it. I made 'em all."

VW "Who taught you to cook?"

L. St. Jones "My old lady, my Mummy. The only thing that I didn't do in the kitchen was

to make up the menu. Then I left there and went away to a job where I were making a lot more money. I went on the lighthouse working for the light station in Cuba. I was on a little island about twelve miles from the mainland of Cuba that was about one mile long and about 400 feet round in the center. I spent eighteen weeks to Cuba. It was a bit lonely for me, I was on my own and I didn't see a boat until the boat come back to take me back. I had no problems, I had a lot of food and water. I had to wind that light up every hour and a half. It gives four beams like every five seconds. Then I spent fourteen weeks at Hole in the Wall, another manual light station, then twelve weeks at Great Isaac, and eight weeks at Bird Rock, and then I come home and I worked up here at this lighthouse for about two years. Now I work for the Bahamian Government at the Central High School. I were in charge to make sure that the rooms were clean, the linens were clean, the yard kept clean, and that everything is OK. I were responsible for 317 students and twenty-nine lecturers."

VW "How old are children when they leave this school?"

L. St. Jones "Before this PLP (Progressive Liberal Party) Government take over you have to leave school at eighteen, but now children can continue in school as long as they want to stay. In today's world, you must have GCE's (General Certificate of Education) and BJC's (Bahamaian Junior Certificate) to get a job. This just start after we become Independent, since the PLP Government take over. We found that too many people got very tough jobs and don't have the qualification."

VW "Do they have to continue their schooling in Nassau?"

L. St. Jones "When the San Salvador Teachers College were in San Salvador, the students graduated from this college right here and they can pick any job that they want to. But now they have to go to Nassau to maintain those degree."

The Bahamas Teachers College occupied these buildings from 1969 until 1978 when the main branch in Nassau expanded and consolidated both colleges into one institution at a central Bahamian location. The Central High School began in 1978 upgrading youth education from eighth to twelve grades.

VW "Do older people go back to school?"

L. St. Jones "Yes, you could be fifty and you can go back to school."

VW "What about women, can they learn to become an electrician or a plumber?"

L. St. Jones "There is a chance for everybody. It simply depends on the qualification that the woman has. But I wouldn't want to see a woman get into a very tough job. I think that the heavy work should be for the men. I would prefer that the women work in the office being a secretary, or working in a bank. I wouldn't want to see a woman mixing concrete."

VW "Is life better now than when you were young?"

L. St. Jones "Oh yes, things were very very bad. In my young days, we had nothing to eat. We didn't have stores and we didn't have clothes like we have today. A lot of people couldn't buy bread or sugar. Things were real hard."

VW "So how did you live?"

L. St. Jones "We went to the farm, raise our corn, sow peas, potatoes and bananas. . . We raised animals and if the people want a sheep, they go kill it, cook it and eat it. People could go in the pasture and milk their cows. I still farm. I think the food is healthier than the meat that has been stocked up in the freezers for a year or more. And today we are drinking so many powdered milk. People used to live longer. We had an old lady who just died about three years ago, she was 115 years old and she have never lose her sight. Then there is Horatio Lightfoot who is 102, he's the oldest man on the island now. He don't eat

frozen foods, only food from his farm.”

VW “Was there a nurse on the island when you were young?”

L. St. Jones “We didn’t know too much about going to the doctors. The old folks go in the bushes and use the medicine from the bush. They know exactly what kind of bush to boil to give you. They didn’t know anything about pills and all. Once you get the right bush you take it and chew that bush. Even if

you has to throw up you will feel better.”

VW “Has the nurse at the clinic made a difference to the island?”

L. St. Jones “Yes, the fact is that people get into going to the nurse and going to the doctor. As soon as they got a headache they go to get some pills. They take them and the headache gone. If I have the flu, I would go in the sea and take a dip. Within a week that flu gone. I don’t take no pills.”

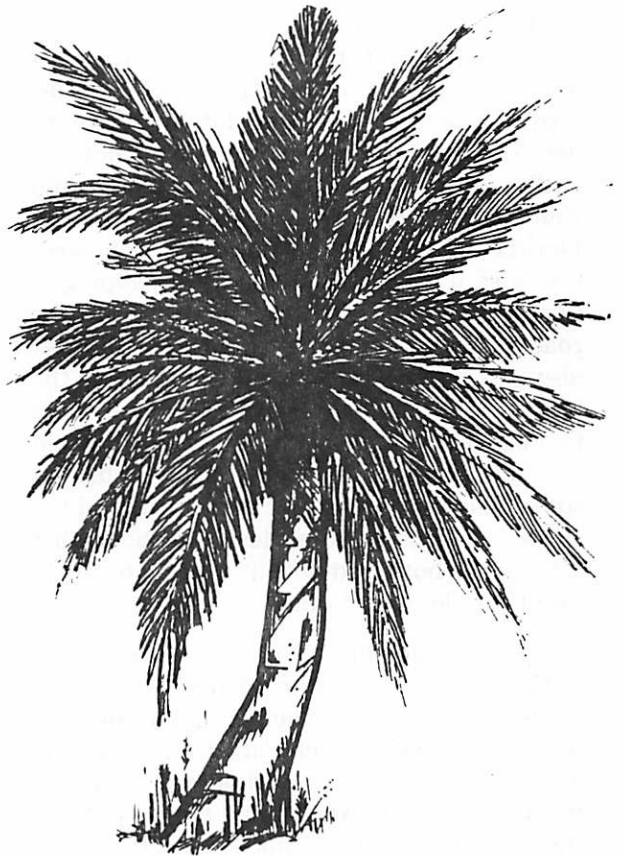
CHAPTER 13

Ednald Thompson

I duck under an arch of flowering vines and step out onto the beachfront yard of the last cottage in the row. Ednald Thompson, once the manager of the Riding Rock Inn and now the caretaker until the Inn reopens under new owners, lives here. The view is incredible. Palm trees interspersed with the occasional casuarina tree frame the beach in either direction. Blue-green waters and soft coral sands lie just feet away from the front door. The American-style cottage complete with modern kitchen and bathroom contrasts starkly with a Bahamian-style house where the kitchen is in a separate building and water is fetched from a well. Each cottage can accommodate four people, usually divers, who come to explore the coral reefs with their many species of fish and other marine fauna. Where the shallow waters plunge into the depths of the ocean, different corals grow down the underwater cliffs providing a deeper water habitat for larger fish such as groupers, barracuda, or hammerhead sharks.

VW “When was Riding Rock built?”

E. Thompson “About 1959. It was built by the retired U.S. Navy Inspector, Eugene Carter. The (American) Air Force were going to be down here either six or nine months of the year. He (Eugene Carter) realized that they would probably want to bring their wives down, but there was no place for them to stay.



He first built these cottages, (but) before he was through, all the reservations were sold out. So he built those two motels and then the night club there. The club was for everybody, the highlight of the island. He used to call it 'Carter Enterprises of San Salvador.'

"Then he sold it to MacDonald Construction Corporation, out of Atlanta, Georgia. They was building the Air Force base at that time. They came in 1957-1958. They built the airport, the barracks, the GE building, which was sort of a school, and a place for equipment that was secret. They had it fenced and guarded. We also constructed the building Command-Destruct and a FPS16 building down on the beach.

"Then Dr. Pedro Rowe bought the Riding Rock. He had something to do with engineering the tunnel in Cuba. He had a lot of money and got out of Cuba in time (before Fidel Castro took over). He had lots of plans (to develop Riding Rock further) but nothing really happened. Then he got tired of it and went to Peru. He sold it to a company called Florida Investments Corporation. They were the ones who did all the land developing in the Sandy Point area, such as putting in the roads and surveying the lots for houses. They also put in the marina and expanded the buildings (of Riding Rock) and made them two bedrooms instead of one. Then they sold it to a group of people from St. Petersburg for some oil company, I think it was Ashland Oil, as part of some package deal. But they didn't want to be bothered with it, so just took the profit and let it run down."

VW "How do you fit into this story?"

E. Thompson "I started out for Eugene Carter as a mechanic's helper. Later I became an engineer with diesel. Carter had to generate his own power at that time, and I was put in charge of the power plant. I helped to build the clubhouse and the motels, and to dig the marina. Each company as they change kept me on. I moved up to (chief) mechanic with MacDonald Construction Corporation. When Florida Investment Corporation took it over, I

became the Assistant Manager. Then I moved from the hotel and worked as Project Manager in the (Sandy Point) development area. Then Joe Stalein's group in the FIC split and bought a development on Andros (island). They offered me a better deal (to manage the new development) for four years. Diving became famous and they (the original group for FIC) made me a better deal to come back to San Salvador and become the General Manager of the entire operation (at Riding Rock), including the diving. When it (the diving) got a little big, they set up a separate operation from the hotel. I stayed in charge of the hotel."

The hotel-dive complex closed at the end of 1983. The operators — the group representing Ashland Oil and associates — neglected to pay their electricity bill so the Bahamian Electric Corporation, the owners of the electric power plant, refused to supply electricity until they cleared their debts. The complex closed. The employees lost jobs that could not be replaced on the island, and many of them were forced to move to Nassau or Freeport to earn a living. Negotiations for another diving company to buy the property are supposedly underway, but the Bahamian Government advises that the hotel and restaurant, the dive operation, and the underwater photography school, all be owned and managed by the same company.

VW "What's happening down on Sandy Point now?"

E. Thompson "I don't know, Columbus Landings Ltd. (a subsidiary of the FIC), a U.S. company, owns it."

VW "Would you like to see that area develop?"

E. Thompson "Yes, 'cos that would mean a better economy."

VW "When were the Navy base and Coast Guard station built?"

E. Thompson "The Navy base was built about the same time as the Air Force base. The Coast Guard station was built later on. It

was a Loran station with equipment to signal to ships and airplanes so that they can navigate. When they (the U.S. Coast Guard) had a new system that could send out a much stronger signal, they no longer needed this station, and they closed it down (1981)."

VW "Did the Navy build the road from the CCFL to the United Estates?"

E. Thompson "Definitely not. The Government built that much later, and it didn't last as long. It's pretty rough down by Pigeon Creek."

VW "Have you ever been unemployed?"

E. Thompson "No, I never have."

VW "How did you get your job skills?"

E. Thompson "From books. I took correspondence courses by ICS (International Correspondence School), a mechanical course and an electrical course on refrigeration."

VW "How would a young man get these skills nowadays?"

E. Thompson "If you want a real good job, you have to have a certificate. Anything you want to be they have the proper school in Nassau. Some people still go away to the U.S. or Canada because they have better facilities there for the practical work. If you've taken up refrigeration, they would have refrigerators that they could take down and put back so that you could really understand what they're teaching you. Then most people don't ever come back. Most of them stay in Nassau or Freeport or even in the States. It isn't that easy to get a job in the U.S. You really have to have someone to sponsor you, and then you can only stay for three months."

VW "Did more men leave the island than women?"

E. Thompson "Men would go off at a much earlier age, maybe fifteen or sixteen. The women would go later, probably around eighteen to twenty. A greater part of the people left the island. They never returned because there's nothing for them to do. One would wonder what in the world 800 people do on an island with the economy being the hotel and Dr. Gerace's operation (CCFL). But when you think that maybe sixty percent of the population is younger children and we had an employment rate of sixty-six employees (for the Riding Rock Inn), it was almost the population of the island, except for the old folks."

VW "How do you feel about independence from the British?"

E. Thompson "I think the guys have made pretty good progress, and I think that they've done a good job of keeping the country under control. But to be honest about it, we're not quite ready for it because we don't have anything to go on our own with. The biggest industry is tourists. It's sad about this place because the island is very historical. There's a lot of things that can be done here, but it's gonna take a lot of money."

CHAPTER 14

The U.S. Military Interest in San Salvador

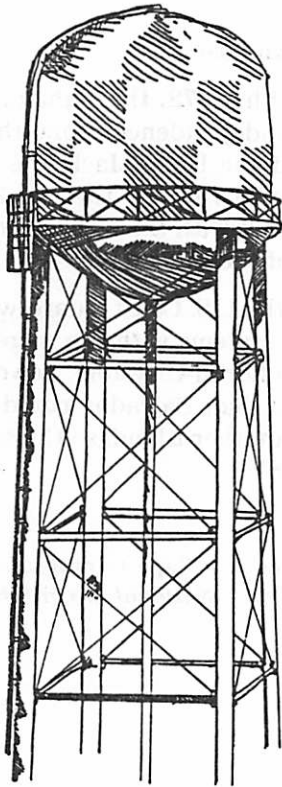
Starting in 1958, the U.S. Air Force tested both long range intercontinental missiles and rockets over South Atlantic waters. The rockets were being designed to carry satellites into orbit as part of the program to send a man to the moon. An Atlas missile was blasted 200 miles high from its launch pad at Cape Canaveral, Florida, to arc along a 6,000 mile flight path taking it over the Bahamas, the West Indies and Antigua, to Ascension Island. Here, it lost its momentum and seared its way back through the atmosphere to land in the ocean. The missile's thirty minute flight was tracked by a complex electronic system that could plot the course of the missile and predict its impact point up to 6,000 miles away. The network interfaced radar with photographic monitoring, switching from one to the other as the missile crossed the stations at speeds of up to 15,000 m.p.h. Along this unique flyway thirteen stations were built: the launching station at Cape Canaveral; another at Jupiter Inlet in southern Florida; four in the Bahamas, on Grand Bahama island, Eleuthera, San Salvador, and Mayaguana; and one on each of the following islands, Grand Turk, Dominican Republic, Mayaguez in Puerto Rico, Antigua, St Lucia, Fernando de Noronha, and Ascension Island. All of the islands chosen had affiliation to the U.S., the U.K., or Brazil. The large expanse of water between Antigua and Fernando de Noronha, and the waters beyond Ascension Island, were monitored by ships and aircraft equipped with the latest electronic tracking equipment.

The contract to build the Air Force Base on San Salvador was awarded to the MacDonald Construction Company in 1956. The tracking station was built on the western side of the island, just north of the settlement of Cockburn Town. An airstrip was constructed to handle the air traffic associated with the missile program, a diesel driven power station

was built to generate electricity, and a concrete catchment area was laid out next to the airstrip to funnel rainwater into an underground holding tank. The base communicated with the control center at Patrick Air Force base through a submarine cable network that connected all of the tracking stations in the program. The contract to manage and maintain the technological aspects of the operation was awarded to the Pan American company and Radio Corporation of America.

The islanders were offered many jobs during the construction of the base, mostly involving heavy manual labor. They learned to build roads and to pour the concrete structures for the buildings. Some of the local men were trained to help with the electrical and plumbing work, and others were trained to maintain the fleet of trucks and cars on the base. The women were employed to cook and clean for the American personnel. They learned to use vacuum cleaners, automatic washing machines, and sewing machines. The "highly secret" or scientific work was done by American technicians trained in the U.S. They found themselves isolated on an island with one small town, no roads, and a social life centered around the nightly movie shown on the base. The men were encouraged to continue their schooling, and both Pan American and RCA helped all of their employees follow correspondence courses to avoid boredom. In the early days, Pan American discouraged visits from family and friends in the U.S. as there were no hotels, medical services, or schools to accommodate their needs. Servicemen fared better on Grand Bahama Island and Eleuthera where luxury hotels and exclusive golf clubs had been developed earlier by wealthy Americans.

Following the construction of the missile tracking station, the U.S. Navy Construction Battalion (Seabee's) built a base on the north-



WATER TOWER CCFL

eastern corner of the island at Grahams Harbour. The Navy monitored the movements of Soviet submarines throughout Atlantic and Caribbean waters using underwater listening devices placed in the deep waters just outside the coral reefs. Here, they could pick up signals that had travelled uninterrupted for thousands of miles through the Atlantic Ocean. The base was built to provide all the comforts of home for several hundred men. The engineers built a catchment area on a neighboring hillside so that the rainwater would flow down over the curved hard top into the underground reservoir. The drinking water was purified by chemical treatment to reduce the occurrence of tropical infections among the men. Much of the food and liquor for the Navy base was flown in daily from the U.S., as agriculturally the island could barely support its own population. To encourage sporting competition, a diamond was bull-

dozed into the scrubby and rocky soil behind the base for weekend baseball games.

One of the Navy inspectors, Eugene Carter, recognized a need for rest and relaxation facilities on the island. He retired from the Navy and built a luxury hotel and clubhouse, the Riding Rock Inn, in a beautiful area close to the airport. He encouraged the service men to bring in their families and girlfriends to relax on the beaches and swim in clear warm waters. The clubhouse with its open bar, restaurant, limbo dances, and "rake and scrape" bands, became very popular for both visitors and residents of the island. By this time, both military complexes needed to employ many islanders to maintain them on a year round basis. Everyone who wanted employment could find it. Times were good and the islanders improved their standard of living.

Several years later the U.S. Coast Guard built a Loran-A navigational station at Rice Bay. Any ship or airplane equipped with a Loran-A system could locate its position relative to the strong signal emitted by the station. Few of the local islanders could afford such navigational aids, so they continued to navigate by the double flash of the Dixon Hill Lighthouse.

By 1968, the U.S. Space program had sent men to the moon, and the tracking station was phased out. The U.S. Navy developed the technology to monitor alien submarines from suitably equipped military ships, and the Navy base was closed. The departure of the military left two well constructed complexes vacant and many adults unemployed. Up until this time, children on the island were only educated to the eighth grade. To encourage both teenagers and adults to seek more education, a Central High School to educate to grade twelve was opened in the Navy complex, and a Teacher's Training College was opened in the Air Force base. Children over fourteen years of age were bussed to school for courses during the day, and adults were offered additional courses at night.

Meanwhile, a consortium of universities and colleges in the Finger Lake region of the United States developed a Scientific Research Station (CCFL) under the direction of Dr. Donald T. Gerace. The Field Station shared part of the Navy base complex with the Central High School from 1971 to 1978. The catchment area collected a steady supply of fresh water for both establishments. Buildings were converted into laboratories, lecture rooms, and dormitories to offer accommodations for faculty and students. Courses were taught in geology, marine science, botany, zoology, and archeology. The Field Station created some jobs, mostly in the areas of catering, and building and vehicle maintenance. When the Teachers Training College centralized in Nassau, the Central High School transferred into their former quarters in the old

Pan American base.

On July 9th, 1973, the Bahamian people took their independence from the British. They burned the Union Jack, the symbol of British Colonial rule for the last 325 years, and replaced it with the black, gold, and turquoise flag of the Bahamas.

By 1978, the U.S. Coast Guard was replacing Loran-A systems with the more powerful signal of the Loran-C system. Fewer stations were needed. San Salvador could be monitored from another island, so the station was closed in 1981.

1. Allan Fisher Jr., "Cape Canaveral's 6000 mile Shooting Gallery," *National Geographic*, (1959), p. 421-471.

CHAPTER 15

Iris Fernander

Iris Fernander owns the gift shop behind the Ocean View Club in the center of Cockburn Town. She sells women's and children's clothes, postcards, tee shirts, sweat jackets, and the usual bric-a-brac souvenirs associated with tourism everywhere. Behind her quiet elegance, I found a competent business woman who was frustrated by the lack of progress on the island.

VW "Were you born on San Salvador?"

I. Fernander "Right here in Cockburn Town. I attended primary school and started travelling when I was about thirteen or fourteen. I attended cosmetology school for a few months in Florida, but I don't practise anymore."

VW "When did you start your gift shop business?"

I. Fernander "Twenty-five years ago. I'm much older than you think. But now things are getting bad on San Salvador, I've been thinking of quitting and going to another

island like Bimini or Exuma. Lots of my relatives and friends want me to come over. But my mother is still alive and she lives here, and I want to be as close as possible to her. If it hadn't been for her, I would have gone a long time ago. It just depends on what 1985 brings forth. If there's a lot of improvement I'll stay."

VW "What would be an improvement?"

I. Fernander "Tourism needs to get started. Once we can get a hotel or some development here, the natives could find employment. But they (any developer or investor) have to get a clear title to the land before they could do anything. There's no clear title to any property except those owned by the Government and the Catholic mission. Everything else is tied up in Columbus Landings."

Columbus Landings is a development corporation (a subsidiary of Florida Investments Corporation) that bought many acres of land in the late 1950's in the southern section of the island at Sandy Point. Their plan was to

create a subdivision to attract the average American to invest in a winter home in the sun with low running costs and no taxes. They built the interconnecting roads and marked out hundreds of house lots in several sections around a golf course and a club house. Many of the lots were sold to American investors sight unseen, but only a few houses were ever built. Following Independence in 1973, the Bahamian Government taxed foreign owned real estate and eliminated one of the principal attractions for U.S. investors. The FIC ceased development of the Sandy Point Estate, and invested elsewhere the substantial profits realized on the land sale. This left the pioneer residents to fend for themselves. The subsequent closing of the Riding Rock Inn, another of the FIC's earlier investments, has exposed a legal tangle that must be resolved before any properties can be sold.

VW "How different was Cockburn Town when the American bases were here?"

I. Fernander "There was more money in circulation to begin with. We had people from every island when they first started building,

We just couldn't find enough housing for the people who came in to work, carpenters, masons... Most of them brought their families with them. Everybody was able to make a couple of dollars, even the school kids. When I came out of school, I could always do some straw work. It was a whole lot better than it is now."

VW "Was there a sudden change when the bases closed down?"

I. Fernander "No, it was a short break for maybe a year or so, then the College of the Bahamas came here for eight to ten years."

VW "Why did the College close?"

I. Fernander "It was too expensive for the Government. They had two colleges, one in Nassau and one here. They extended the one there, and carried all the kids from the one here back there. Then they transferred the Central High School from the Navy base down here, and the CCFL took over all of the Navy base."

CHAPTER 16

Miranda Nairn

Late one warm July evening, Miranda and I sat on the stone wall outside her Snack Shack on the CCFL campus and talked about the conflicts of caring for a family and trying to earn a living. She grew up on San Salvador as the second youngest in a family of five children. Her mother's prime role in life was to raise her family and to take care of her husband. Her father, Elmore Nairn, supported this family by working as a farmer and fisherman and in many capacities as an employee of the Pan American company. Miranda left school at fifteen to work as a cashier and later as a maid, but her passion is to cook, and her dream is to own a fish restaurant of her own. Now at age thirty, she has three children aged eight to twelve, no desire to be married, and little opportunity to develop her skills on this

island beyond operating the night-time snack-bar that she has recently introduced to cater to the ever-hungry student population. She cooks mouth-watering pizza, conch fritters in hot sauce, and many delicious Bahamian fish dishes that use saltwater fish such as grouper, trigger fish, and bar jack.

VW "When you left school did you need to leave the island to find a job?"

M. Nairn "I worked for a year as a cashier in Jake Jones' food shop. Then I went to Nassau when I was sixteen because I was pregnant. I had a miscarriage and didn't work for awhile. I went to spend some time with my brother who was working the lighthouse at Abaco. I came home and worked with my sister as a maid at Polaris, taking care of the

guys who were fixing the roads at Sandy Point. Then I got pregnant again and stopped working until 1973, when I worked at the Coast Guard Station as a maid. After my second child, I went to Freeport and worked as a waitress at a coffee shop and at my cousin's restaurant. I came home and found out that I was pregnant again. This time I was home for about three years before I got a job at the Riding Rock Inn. I worked as a bartender until it closed last December (1983)."

VW "Did you take your children with you to Freeport?"

M. Nairn "No, I left them with my Mom and my two sisters. The children always stayed on the island. But my mother died recently of cancer. That was the worst day of my life. Now I can't rely on Daddy to take care of the children 'cos he's not that type of man. My mother was always homely. She never went out, or drank, or smoke, or anything like that. Daddy worked all the time, at the Pan American base. She had sixteen children, but only five lived. Some died in childbirth and one brother died just before his second birthday. My aunt had twenty-two children and kept seven. The midwives in those days didn't know anything like the doctors know today. She (my aunt) said that with one of her babies, the waterbag didn't burst, and it was born with the baby. They only had to split the bag to let the water out, and the child would have lived, but they didn't know what to do, and the baby drowned. Now, most women go to the hospital in Nassau."

VW "Will you go to Nassau to find a job?"

M. Nairn "No, my children don't like Nassau. They are not used to keeping on the side of the road and they might just forget and that's it. Some crazy drivers killed two school children earlier this year. Daddy don't want to go and I don't want to leave him. He is old now and he's always been a good father. In Nassau, people put their parents in an old folks home when they can't take care of themselves. I won't do that. I don't care how much they can't do. I would do my very best to help

them. That's why it is so hard when they die. You feel it so tough because we live so close all the time."

VW "Do you like to cook?"

M. Nairn "Yes, I love cooking, and working in the field. I love cutting bush, weeding, reaping the corn, the peas, beans, potatoes, okras, peppers, tomatoes, and cucumbers. My friend in Cleveland, Ohio, wants me to go and start a Bahamian fish restaurant there. I visited her for two weeks last August. If it happens, I'd like to be allowed to take some saltwater fish with me. Only freshwater fish they have there. They don't know what groupers are. And I'd need some small fish to make stew fish and steam fish."

VW "If you were living there, how would you get the fish?"

M. Nairn "Same way that I do now. If I am successful in the business, I can always come down to the Bahamas to pick up fish and go back. I know someone who takes fish to Atlanta. They don't charge duty on fish."

VW "How do you make those dishes?"

M. Nairn "For stew fish, you brown flour with onions, then add tomato paste to make a gravy. For boil fish, you boil it in water with a large potato and salt pork or bacon. Then steam fish, you fry the fish first before you make the gravy with tomato paste, flour, onion, and water. You serve them with beans and rice or peas and rice. I couldn't believe my eyes when I went to the vegetable market in Ohio. The prices were so cheap. Only ten cents a pound for potatoes. Here they are sixty cents and sometimes ninety cents a pound. Food is so cheap in America."

VW "Would you take your children with you?"

M. Nairn "I'd love for them to go, but on the first trip I'd like to go and get myself together. But I can't leave them anymore and Daddy would just die if I have to leave him now."

VW "Are other women thinking along similar lines?"

M. Nairn "They have already left."

VW "Where did they go?"

M. Nairn "To Nassau and Freeport, nobody to the U.S."

VW "But you have a good business here from December to July. Can you keep it going next year?"

M. Nairn "Yes, I can."

VW "How do you get the fish and the conch?"

M. Nairn "My father and my brother go

fishing for me. Then I have friends who will give me some. We are going fishing tomorrow, out on the Cay. The guys will fish from the boat and they will drop us off on the Cay. We are going for wilks. They are something like snails, but are big. You can make a salad out of it with lime and onions. When the tide is low, you can just walk the water and catch them as far as the anchor line. You can pick up conchs too."

VW "Do you think that the island could support another hotel and a restaurant?"

M. Nairn "You know, if they open another hotel here, you'd be surprised how many people from this island would come back home. We like to live here very much."

CHAPTER 17

Maurice Brennan and Anderson Johnson

Maurice, born in 1967, and Andy, born in 1968, have only known life on San Salvador since the American bases closed down. Andy expects to finish school in the next year or so and Maurice graduated last month (June 1984). Although they have had a better education than their fathers, they also will need to leave the island to find work.

VW "How do you get to school every day?"

Maurice "The school bus comes up every morning around 8:25 a.m. and it take us. Our school (in Cockburn Town) is about ten miles away from the bus stop in United Estates. School gets in at 9:00 a.m. and gets out at 3:00 p.m. They take you home when school is out."

VW "Are there any activities after school?"

Maurice "After school, you can play volleyball or basketball or tennis on the court. Then you have to get your own ride."

Andy "There are night classes after school to help you with BJC and GCE exams. I used to go, but I can't get transportation."

VW "What classes do you take?"

Andy "Biology, health sciences, art, technical drawing, woodwork, social study, physical education, and religious education."

VW "What do you learn in religious education?"

Maurice "Everything about the Bible. The Bible has different books, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. You learn really about the things you shouldn't do, things you should look up to."

VW "Do many people leave school at fifteen or sixteen or do they stay until they are eighteen?"

Maurice "A lot of boys leave when they are in the tenth grade, around fifteen, and the girls usually stick until they graduate."

VW "Out of a class of thirty, how many might go to Nassau to the College of the Bahamas?"

Maurice "I'd say about ten go to become teachers of math and English."

VW "Does anyone go to do science or engineering?"

Maurice "You can do science, but you have to go someplace else to learn engineering."

Andy "They have trade schools for that in Nassau. You can learn the trades of mechanic, plumbing, engineering, mason, carpentry, and many more."

VW "Do you have any idea what you may want to do?"

Maurice "I'll probably go to college, I'm not sure yet. My father want me in Nassau now. He does watch repairing and technician. He learned the trade in New York from a friend for a little money."

Andy "I want to take up a trade in boat engineering. When you go to learn a trade you don't pay anything. If you go to College you pay, if you go to Trade School you don't. The College and the Trade School are two different things."

Maurice "Mostly it is the girls who take part in the College of the Bahamas. The type of jobs that the women are looking for, like working in a post office or in a bank, need more education. Most of the men can make a living without having an education, like working on a dump truck, fishing, farming, or working on a trench."

VW "So although your education is better you still expect to go to Nassau to find a job?"

Maurice "Every time I go to Nassau there's lots of jobs. There's also a lot of people. Ugh! I like living in cities, but here in San Salvador we can sleep with our house door and windows open. You can't do that in Nassau. Never, never. It's very hot in the summertime, but nobody would ever trust enough to do that. There's a lot of crime. The house that I stays in in Nassau, there is insurance and crime prevention."

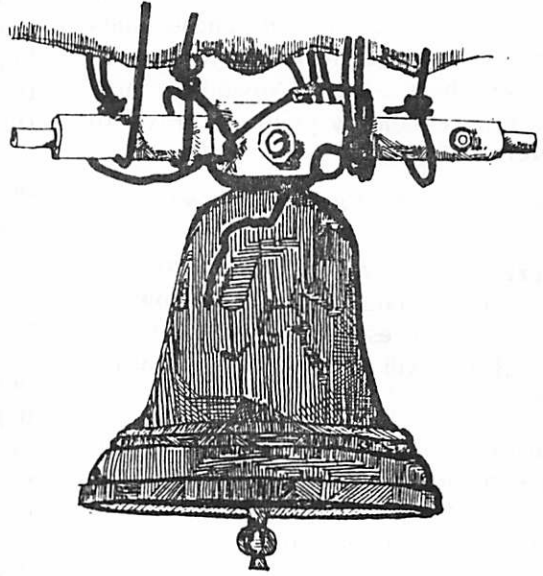
Andy "I have many relatives in the U.S., in Florida, and in California. I could stay with them."

CHAPTER 18

Father Herman

Overhead, the bell peals insistently as I join the increasing stream of people climbing the steps of the Holy Saviour Catholic church in Cockburn Town for the 11:00 a.m. Mass. I step from the warm winter sunshine into the cool interior and sit down on the nearest polished bench seat. Few spaces remain, most have already been filled by the local women and children. Many of the women wear dresses that they designed and made especially to wear to Mass. Many are ruffled and tiered in beautiful silks and organdies. It is December 30th, 1984. The Christmas festivities continue into the New Year. The trade wind howls through the belfry and blows through the open doors to cool the interior of the church. Father Herman Wind, O.S.B. (Order of Saint Benedict), in full ecclesiastical dress, approaches the altar from the rear of the church. A large gold cross decorates the front of his flowing white robes. He begins the ritual of the Mass. The women in the choir lead us in singing the first Christmas hymn. Throughout the Mass, Fr. Herman tells us stories to illustrate the Catholic faith, in particular, how we must work hard on earth today if we want to receive rewards in heaven tomorrow. At the end of the service we shake hands and wish each other peace and happiness in the coming year.

Curious about the role of the Catholic Church on San Salvador, I visited Fr. Herman the next day. He welcomes me as I climb the fire stairs to his apartment high over Cockburn Town Harbor. He is a tall man who stoops slightly, as if he is always bending his head under low doorways. Vinyl covered sofas occupy the center of a large open room that is divided into spaces: the library, the office, the kitchen, and the living area. A C.B.-type radio splutters in one corner and provides a running commentary on the whereabouts of the



Harley and Charley, the substitute mail boat. The concern is that it may not make it one more time. It is already two months overdue, and supplies of fresh meat and dairy products on the island are running low. Some residents wait for heavy goods such as a new refrigerator or a load of lumber. The club owners hope for a shipment of liquor for the New Year's celebrations.

Fr. Herman shows me his apartment and the restoration work that he has done since he has been here. We sit down and he answers my many questions about his missionary life in the Bahamas. His voice lilts gently. He was born in Minnesota and educated as a Benedictine priest at St. John's Abbey there. He came to the Bahamas in 1945, and to the Outer islands in 1947. Over the years, he has learned to be a jack-of-all-trades, at times, a builder, carpenter, plumber, or electrician, at others, a mechanic, and often in necessity, a puller of teeth. He spent many years at the missions at Long Island, Cat Island, and

Andros Island, before coming to San Salvador in 1979. He tells me that in the early days when there were few missions, he had to care for as many as four islands under one mission. This was a difficult and hazardous job as the only way that he could travel between the islands was by the mail boat. These boats were unreliable and often sank in the storms that crossed these islands. Nowadays most islands are accessible by plane, so travel to each mission is easier.

VW "When did the Catholic Church begin on San Salvador?"

Fr. Herman "Well, much of the history of the Catholic Church has been written down in this book, 'Upon These Rocks' by Colman J. Barry, O.S.B. You will find the story of Father Chrysostom in here."

This history did make very interesting reading. I have included extracts that refer to the development of the Catholic Church on San Salvador in a separate section.

VW "I noticed yesterday that most of the people in the congregation were women. Where are the men of the island?"

Fr. Herman "The men are off to different islands, primarily Nassau and Grand Bahama, working. Since the hotel closed down thirteen months ago, there's absolutely no work here except farming, and the young people won't farm. Now that the Government has a High School on the island, we keep the children four years longer, otherwise we lost the boys at thirteen or fourteen years of age."

VW "Do any of them come back?"

Fr. Herman "No, the young people send subsidy to parents or support for their families."

VW "Are the women more religious than the men?"

Fr. Herman "Yes, very few of the men who are on the island go to church, but those that go are very good. The boys seem to think that once you're a man, your job is to work and to

take care of the family. The women and the children are the ones that go to church."

VW "Does religion help the women to cope with their hard life?"

Fr. Herman "Yes, and no. I think that many of the Bahamians are emotional. Singing is part of their culture and in many cases they reckon that that is religion. But whether there is a deep conviction there, I say that in some cases it is, but in others it is emotionalism."

VW "How big is your parish?"

Fr. Herman "With people travelling back and forth I don't even know. I probably get about seventy people in church on a Sunday depending on the time of year. The normal population of the island is about 700 with maybe around 500 in the summertime when school is out and the kids go off with their parents on trips. But right now, with most people in Nassau for Christmas, it is probably down to 250."

VW "Is San Salvador similar to the other Bahamian islands?"

Fr. Herman "Every island is different. San Salvador and Long Island probably have the highest educational standards."

VW "Has that been since the Bahamas became Independent?"

Fr. Herman "Yes, there are more schools now, maybe too many. Once you educate the children, they want work, and you only can have a certain amount of clerks and secretaries, so you have a problem. Now the Government is trying to stress fishing and farming, but the people don't want to go back to that. Some islands can do well, but this island gets very little rain, and the mail boat service is so poor that any creatures you raise to sell in Nassau, goats, sheep, and so on, would die before they got there."

VW "Could you use ships with deep freeze?"

Fr. Herman "The regular mail boat, the

Will Laurie, was thawed out every time it came in here. All the frozen goods were dripping. The meat should be thrown away, but instead, people go and refreeze it. The mail boat is a private boat leased to the Government. The fellow gets about \$1,000 a trip to come out here with the mail and bring freight. They charge for the freight, but the price is subsidized by the government. If the regular boat can't come, we get a substitute mail. But we hear on the radio that a boat is substituting for the Will Laurie at 8 a.m. in the morning and it leaves at 1 p.m. By the time the fellows in charge of the freight in the warehouses hear about it, the boat has gone already. I've had things in the warehouse for six weeks because of this and I try to think ahead. I bring in my fresh meat supply on the plane when I come back from Nassau which I visit usually once a month. I have a charge account in most places and they bill me at the end of the month."

VW "How would you manage if you couldn't go to Nassau frequently?"

Fr. Herman "Well, you could write a letter to the wholesale houses, but most of these people have to pay cash ahead of time because they don't have bank accounts. A person selling potatoes, for example, doesn't have the cash to buy a second bag of potatoes until he has sold the first one, and then it takes two to three weeks to come. So he frequently doesn't

have potatoes to sell. Through the years, I've done a lot of purchasing for the people and they reimburse me. I used to have extra nails, screws, hinges, and things that I needed in my work, and I'd often have files and machetes, mason jars and rings, things that they needed, for sale at cost price. But I haven't been building in recent years, and the only thing that I keep now are car patches."

VW "Do you have any ideas for improving the economy of the island?"

Fr. Herman "For a faraway island like this one, I think you'll have to start some industry, at least a hotel. Since there is absolutely nothing out here, you could start almost anywhere. If you could get the ships passing by to stop in, the people could do a lot of straw work, or someone could teach them pottery, sewing or knitting. But no-one has pushed anything. Many of the men in the House of Representatives own land all over the Bahamas. For example, men who own land on Abaco will push Abaco to the limit because they want to sell their land and property. But they don't own land on San Salvador, and we share our only representative with Rum Cay and North Long Island."

VW "So you lack the political strength to get started?"

Fr. Herman "Yes."

CHAPTER 19

History of the Catholic Church in San Salvador

The first push for an active Catholic church in the Bahamas came in 1885 from Catholic laymen living in Nassau. Surgeon-Major F. G. Ayde-Curran and his wife, Lady Georgiana Ayde-Curran, personally requested Archbishop Michael A. Corrigan of the New York diocese to send a permanent priest to Nassau to care for their spiritual needs instead of a transient priest who came only to spend time in the sun in the wintertime. Lady Georgiana promised to donate a large sum of money towards the construction of a church, if someone could be found. Taking advantage of the offer, Archbishop Corrigan quickly sent the Rev. C. G. O'Keefe to organize the building of St. Francis Xavier church, an assignment that was to take him four years. [1]

It was not so easy to find a religious order within the Catholic church that would take on the challenge of pioneering the religion across a group of widely scattered islands. At first in 1889, Archbishop Corrigan could persuade only Mother Seton's Sisters of Charity from the Hudson-New York area to send a group of sisters to set up the first Catholic school for the poor. They played an enormous role in educating and improving the standard of living of the black Bahamian. [2]

Eventually, Archbishop Corrigan appointed Abbot Alexis Edelbrock, O.S.B. to supervise the New York diocese with the understanding that he and the Order of St. Benedict would be responsible for the Bahamas mission. Abbot Alexis managed to attract an old friend, Fr. Chrysostom Schreiner, the Vice President of St. John's Abbey in Minnesota, to leave Abbot Bernard Locnikar, O.S.B. and join him in New York as his Assistant. Shortly afterwards, Abbot Alexis sent Fr. Chrysostom to Nassau to evaluate the problems of bringing the Catholic church to the islands.

The two Abbots differed in temperament and the way they interpreted their roles as leaders within the Catholic church. Abbot Alexis strongly favored the missionary role while Abbot Bernard believed that a community should request the Catholic church to come to a new area and be prepared to support it financially [3]. Although Fr. Chrysostom was Abbot Alexis' Assistant, he reported his first impressions to Fr. Bernard, the financial manager. He praised the climate, the luscious fruits and vegetables available even in winter, and the beautiful landscape. He also noted that the Governor of the Bahamas, Sir Ambrose Shea, was a devout Catholic and that maybe with his help, the community could support the Catholic faith. But the longer Fr. Chrysostom stayed, the less sure he became that the task was feasible. St. John's Abbey did not want to carry the financial burden of supporting the mission, and the converts were black and too poor to be able to do so themselves. The Anglican church dominated Nassau and was subsidized by the British Colonial Government and by the white affluent residents. The chances of converting this section of society to actively support the Catholic church were low. The Anglicans feared a Roman invasion. Fr. Chrysostom realized that the only way that they would convert people to the Catholic faith would be by educating the children in the schools [4].

Fr. Chrysostom wrote that the only exciting event to look forward to was the 400th anniversary of Columbus' landing in the New World on October 11th, 1892. He decided to visit the out-islands of his missionary field and to include a visit to two of the more historically important sites, San Salvador (later Cat Island) and Watling's Island (later San Salvador). He chartered a schooner, the Rebecca, and set sail with two other priests

and a doctor on March 29th, 1892. Fr. Chrysostom, now thirty-two years old, had written many literary and historical accounts of Christopher Columbus' journeys and believed that the island known as San Salvador was not the first landfall at all and that Watling's Island was a better choice [5]. He sailed around both islands and proved that the cliffs described in Columbus' logbook could only belong to Watling's Island.

On the return journey to Nassau, the Rebecca struck some rocks close to Conception Island and foundered. After a frightening and difficult night clinging to the mast of a ship that threatened to break up at any moment in the heavy seas, Fr. Chrysostom made a vow that if God should spare his life he would take on this impossible missionary work and begin an Order of St. Benedict in Nassau. Daybreak brought calmer seas and the crew and priests managed to scull a small dingy to the neighboring island. They survived for three days on crabs and water until they were rescued by a passing ship and taken to Nassau [6].

Believing that God had answered his prayers, he kept his vow and Fr. Chrysostom became the first Fr. Superior of the Bahamas. He began the long and arduous task of introducing the Catholic faith to the Bahamians.

At first, Abbot Bernard only sent him priests that were suffering from tuberculosis. He hoped that even though they couldn't cope with the cold of the Minnesotan winters, they may be stronger in a milder climate. But the hot summers proved just as stressful. Some left, and some died, leaving Fr. Chrysostom to struggle on alone. He continued to request more priests to develop missions, and more Sisters of Charity to teach in the schools and to provide medical help. Abbot Bernard eventually sent Father Gabriel Roerig, a German-born priest, who arrived in 1894 [7]. He was the first priest with any practical skills who came to help Fr. Chrysostom. His speciality was building churches and designing the inte-

riors. Fr. Chrysostom sent him immediately to the nearest island, Andros Island, to build a church and to establish the second mission of the islands. Fr. Gabriel remained responsible for that parish for the next fifty-six years, a missionary record [8]. In 1897, after a visit to his mother in Germany, Fr. Gabriel brought back his younger brother, Joseph, to study for the priesthood at St. John's Abbey. Joseph later became Fr. Leander and began the first mission on San Salvador [9].

Fr. Chrysostom's next goal was to develop San Salvador. He had many discussions with Governor Shea on the potential of the Agave rigida sisilana plant from which sisal rope was made. Governor Shea had high hopes for large-scale production of sisal in the Bahamas. A group of English investors opened a hemp plantation on San Salvador. It flourished through the turn of the century until it lost business to its Philippine competitors who produced a better quality sisal rope [10].

About the same time, during a visit to Nassau in 1899, Fr. Chrysostom tried to persuade Bishop Farley of the New York diocese to support the building of a research center on San Salvador where scholars could study the journeys of Christopher Columbus [11]. He also wanted money to buy a farm on the island where he could practice farming on poor and limited soils. He believed that coconut trees could grow well enough in the soils trapped in limestone pockets to provide a cash crop. He also believed that if sheep and cattle were allowed to graze over a larger area as in the American West, the grass might maintain a hold even in dry seasons and enable the farmer to keep his animals alive for more than one year [12]. But first, the Catholic church pointed out, he would have to set up a mission and a school as the primary Catholic base.

When Bishop Farley returned to New York, he arranged for Fr. Chrysostom to request funding from the local branch of the Knights of Columbus, a national Catholic laymen's

fraternal association. They liked his ideas and gave him \$5,000 a year for five years to develop them. With some of the money, he bought the United Estates property in 1909 and began farming and raising horses. This settlement became the first Catholic parish on the island [13]. In 1912, Fr. Chrysostom sent Anita Smith, a sensible and devoted colored woman who had been trained at the Catholic school in Nassau, to begin a school. Forty-six pupils, some as old as eighteen, wanted to learn to read and write [14]. Some of the islanders resented her connection to the Catholic faith. One time, when the mail boat was late and supplies were low, the local grocery store owner raised the price of goods to three or four times their usual cost. Objecting to his exploitation of the poor, Anita Smith reduced his profit by selling her own supplies at cost price. The angry store owner defamed her character to try to reduce her influence. This type of incident occurred frequently in new missions [15].

In 1918, Fr. Chrysostom bought an old plantation estate called Harbour Estates from an elderly Catholic bachelor for \$1,300 and a promise to care for him until he died. He acquired 2,640 acres of the best pasture land on the island, twenty-five roofless buildings, nine cattle, one bull, and forty sheep and hogs. The fact that the land was worth a great deal more than the sum that Fr. Chrysostom had paid for it, persuaded Abbot Peter, Abbot Bernard's successor, to accept the title to the land for the Benedictines. But it was not until 1920, just before his death, that Abbot Peter agreed to financially support the mission [16]. Fr. Leander Roerig arrived in the New Year of 1921 to find no Catholics left among the 500 people living on the island. He began his life's work as a missionary by setting up his first mission at the Harbour Estates [17]. He re-roofed the old mansion to house the church and the school, but lived himself in an old thatched slave hut. He gave Mass and Benediction every Sunday at the mission, then rode on horseback to a settlement ten miles to the

south to give another. He also met informally with interested people in their homes or out on the public road. School began every day at 9 a.m. with Holy Mass. Many of the children walked four to six miles from the settlements of North Victoria Hill and United Estates to learn to read and write [18].

Fr. Leander employed about 100 or 200 men [19] to clear scrubland for pastures for cattle and other animals, and to erect fences and rebuild stone walls around them. He paid the men \$1.00 a day and kept a small store at the mission called the Harbour Yard where they could buy food, clothing, and tools. The store became a social meeting place for many families. As soon as the mission on San Salvador was established, Fr. Chrysostom retired from his role of Father Superior of the Bahamas to care for the small but growing community of Catholics in the Riding Rock settlement of the island. In his spare time he continued to study the Columbus journals and to work on a manuscript [20]. But the farm at Harbour Estates could not make a profit and Fr. Leander was told by the Abbot at St. John's Abbey to get rid of the cattle. This was a difficult assignment as the mail boat could only take five cows at a time, and only came but once a month. If the winds were unfavorable, the journey to Nassau took too long and the cattle died, so increasing the farm's losses [21].

Fr. Chrysostom, always dreaming and planning for the future, wrote to his niece on December 10th, 1925 [22]...

"I am here at Watlings, while Fr. Gabriel is finishing the mission house at Riding Rock, my future home, 7 miles away from Fr. Leander's station. The building is now under roof and is being plastered by Fr. Gabriel. It is quite an imposing stone building, 31 by 41 ft. On the ground floor will be the chapel, a small office, the dining room and a sacristy. The 2nd floor will have a large living room and library and 3 bedrooms, and an airy attic

can be turned into 3 or 4 bedrooms. The grounds in front of the building run down to the beach on which Columbus first landed. A road is now being completed connecting all the settlements of the island, and I am getting a motor truck and will fix it up as a chapel car in which Fr. Leander can regularly give services in all the settlements and with catechists reach all the people. This of course will eventually lead to having a missionary nurse to conduct clinics at the different settlements. A wireless station will be erected by the Government at Riding Rock within a few months, and we will probably have the settlements linked up with telephone within the next two years."

In 1926, Fr. Chrysostom began a new school at Riding Rock under the Grant-in-Aid program and personally supervised the children's education [23]. Then suddenly, two years later, in January 1928, he died in his sleep. He was sixty-nine years old. The Bahamian custom of burying the body on the day of death made it impossible to bring in an undertaker from Nassau to preserve the body as befitting his status. Fr. Chrysostom had asked to be buried on the hillside overlooking Grahams Harbour where Christopher Columbus had landed [24]. But this was a difficult request as a grave could not be dug out of coral rock in one day. To solve this problem, Fr. Leander removed some of the loose stones from a grave belonging to a Mr. Burton Williams, the former plantation owner of the Harbour Estates property, and buried Fr. Chrysostom on top [25].

After his death, few of Fr. Chrysostom's dreams materialized. Only the mission at Riding Rock survived, cared for by Fr. Leander until 1931, and then by Fr. Denis Parnell O.S.B. until 1935 [26]. Fr. Denis was an energetic and dedicated priest who taught the islanders many skills, including carpentry, masonry, plumbing, and how to work with leather in making shoes and saddles [27]. He

built the cemetery at Bamboo Point next door to the public cemetery, and not far from the Riding Rock mission. He erected a cross there to mark the place where the first Mass was celebrated by Fr. Chrysostom in 1894 [28].

It took several years to find a permanent replacement for Fr. Chrysostom as Fr. Superior of the Bahamas. Fr. Bernard Kevenhoerster, O.S.B., was the final and excellent choice, a man who encouraged the growth of missions and schools throughout all of the islands [29]. In 1938, even though there was not a resident priest on the island, Fr. Bernard persuaded Fr. Arnold Mondloch, O.S.B., the resident priest on Long Island and the architect, Albert Lothian, to build a church in the United Estates settlement [30]. Many people loved, feared, and respected Fr. Arnold for his rough and ready ways, and helped him build the Holy Cross church [31]. Joe Albury, the catechist, took care of any marriage and funeral services and Fr. Cornelius Osendorf, O.S.B., of the Long Island mission was invited to preside over the more important occasions [32]. It was not until the 450th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' landing on San Salvador in 1942, when Fr. Nicholas Kremer, O.S.B., visited the island, liked it, and decided to stay on (he did not leave until 1951), that San Salvador had a resident priest once more [33].

In 1941, Britain and the United States signed an agreement whereby the United States could establish military bases on the Bahamas on a ninety-nine year lease. A new agreement in 1950 allowed the U.S. to construct stations throughout the Bahamas for its guided missile program [34]. One of these stations was established on San Salvador in the mid 1950's. Fr. Gall Fell, O.S.B., the resident priest at the time recalls the day that construction began [35].

"There was not much of a road and no landing field for planes at that time. The strange looking air machine was standing in mid-air right over the rectory. It was the first helicopter that I had ever

seen. This was the beginning of the end of San Salvador's quiet days. Not long after that helicopter made its appearance, military ships came and unloaded men and materials. Temporary camps, first for the USAF and USN and later also for the Coast Guard, were established: docks were constructed; huge earth-moving machinery levelled a landing strip for planes; and navy ships came to make maps of the ocean bottom of the Bahamas and beyond.

"One day, the commander of the Air base came to the rectory asking me to be their chaplain. My new assignment carried me to Eleuthera, Grand Bahama, Mayaguana, and Turks as far as the Caicos Islands, where similar bases or just cable huts were established. Transportation was mostly by military plane, aboard warships or helicopters. The latter were used for transportation from large vessels to the islands."

Fr. Nicholas returned to San Salvador in 1956 to relieve Fr. Gall for his new military duties and describes the changes that he finds on the island [36].

"I have what we call Sunday school — the kids call it instruction — on Mondays and Tuesdays because when the bases started there was so much activity on Sunday afternoon. They play softball, and there is quite a crowd around here with the bases — the tracking station, the Airforce, and also the General Electric plant in another section. There must have been about 300 people at the base, along with the Seabees".

During the heyday of the bases throughout the 1950's and 1960's the Catholic church served both the Bahamians and the U.S. personnel. Since that time, available work has diminished on San Salvador and the population is eroding steadily as both men and women, young and old, have to leave the island to survive.

1. Barry, Colman J. O.S.B., *Upon These Rocks*, Collegeville, Minnesota, St. John's Abbey Press, 1973, p. 72-73.
2. *ibid.*, p. 89.
3. *ibid.*, p. 110-111.
4. *ibid.*, p. 113-119.
5. *ibid.*, p. 122.
6. *ibid.*, p. 120-121.
7. *ibid.*, p. 123-124.
8. *ibid.*, p. 181.
9. *ibid.*, p. 192.
10. *ibid.*, p. 185.
11. *ibid.*, p. 197.
12. *ibid.*, p. 259.
13. *ibid.*, p. 198.
14. *ibid.*, p. 350.
15. *ibid.*, p. 233.
16. *ibid.*, p. 257-259.
17. *ibid.*, p. 310.
18. *ibid.*, p. 307-308.
19. *ibid.*, p. 295.
20. *ibid.*, p. 268.
21. *ibid.*, p. 350.
22. *ibid.*, p. 274.
23. *ibid.*, p. 266.
24. *ibid.*, p. 275.
25. Personal communication from Fr. Hermann Wind, O.S.B.
26. *Op.cit.*, p. 306.
27. *ibid.*, p. 352.
28. *ibid.*, p. 350.
29. *ibid.*, p. 341.
30. *ibid.*, p. 353.
31. *ibid.*, p. 306.
32. *ibid.*, p. 336.
33. *ibid.*, p. 353.
34. *ibid.*, p. 255.
35. *ibid.*, p. 475.
36. *ibid.*, p. 353.

APPENDIX

Bush Medicine Remedies

Colds and Flu

Make a tea by boiling the leaves in water. Drink tea.

(For loss of appetite and high fever)

- | | | |
|---|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Gale of Wind
<u>Phyllanthus amarus</u>
EUPHORBIACEAE | Add sour lime and salt. | Eloise Lightfoot
Elmore Nairn |
| 2. Bay Geranium
<u>Ambrosia hispida</u>
GOODENIACEAE | — | Blossom Lightfoot
Elmore Nairn |
| 3. Sweetwood Bark
<u>Croton eluteria</u>
EUPHORBIACEAE | Steep the whole branch. | Sam Edgecombe |

(For coughs from colds and raising phlegm from the chest)

- | | | |
|---|----------------------|------------------|
| 1. Horse Bush
<u>Gundlachia corymbosa</u>
GOODENIACEAE | Add a grain of salt. | Evelyn Wring |
| 2. Blueflower
<u>Stachytarpheta jamaicensis</u>
VERBENACEAE | — | Susalee Anderson |
| 3. Salve Bush
<u>Solanum erianthum</u>
SOLANACEAE | — | Evelyn Wring |

Lack of Iron

(Run down and tired)

Steep in COLD water overnight. Drink liquid.

- | | | |
|--|---------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Brasiletto
<u>Caesalpinia vesicaria</u>
LEGUMINOSAE | Add cream to "blood" tea. | Blossom Lightfoot |
| 2. Madeira Bark
<u>Swietenia mahagoni</u>
MELIACEAE | — | Susalee Anderson |

Rheumatism or Back Pain

Steep the bark in boiling water and drink the tea.

- | | | |
|-------------------------|---|-------------------|
| 1. Gumbo Limbo | — | Horatio Lightfoot |
| <u>Bursera simaruba</u> | | |
| <u>BURSERACEAE</u> | | |

Constipation

- | | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------|
| 1. Aloes | Peel skin, eat slices. | Elmore Nairn |
| <u>Aloe barbadensis</u> | | Sam Edgecombe |
| <u>LILIACEAE</u> | | |
| 2. Catnip | Boil leaves in water and | Elmore Nairn |
| <u>Salvia serotina</u> | pour over lard. Drink liquid. | |
| <u>LABIATAE</u> | | |

Menstrual Pain

Boil leaves in water. Drink liquid for pain.

- | | | |
|-------------------------|---|------------------|
| 1. Goat Weed | — | Eloise Lightfoot |
| <u>Capraria biflora</u> | | |
| <u>SCROPHULARIACEAE</u> | | |

Childbirth

Make a tea fresh each morning by boiling the leaves in water. Drink for nine mornings. Good for contracting the uterus and relieving the pain after delivery.

- | | | |
|------------------------|---|------------------|
| 1. Granny Bush | — | Eloise Lightfoot |
| <u>Croton discolor</u> | | |
| <u>EUPHORBIACEAE</u> | | |

Worms in Children

Boil the leaves in water. The tea kills the worms in the intestines of small children.

1. Jerusalem Plant
Chenopodium ambrosiodes — Susalee Anderson
Eloise Lightfoot
CHENOPODIACEAE
2. Catnip
Salvia serotina — Eloise Lightfoot
LABIATAE

Gripe in Babies

Make a tea by boiling the seeds in water. Drink tea.

1. Dill Seed
Anethum graveolens — Eloise Lightfoot
UMBELLIFERAE

Sunburn and Insect Bites

1. Aloe
Aloe barbadensis Slice and rub cut edge on Sam Edgecombe
LILIACEAE skin.

Epilogue

During the twentieth century, San Salvador has crept from a simple agricultural and fishing economy towards an economy based on the needs of the scientists and tourists who visit the island. Whereas during the 1950's and 1960's the location of the island on the periphery of the Atlantic Ocean was the prime reason that it was chosen to accommodate the scientific studies of the American space program and the American Navy, this very isolation away from the main air traffic and sea lanes now prevents it from developing a strong tourist industry similar to other Bahamian islands'. The standard of education for the young people on the island is higher than the average for the Bahamas, but the lack of worthwhile employment sends a steady stream of young men and women to Nassau and Freeport with little opportunity to return to their native island. Drug trafficking in the Bahamas is growing rapidly as cocaine and marijuana from Central and South American countries flow through the islands en route to illegal entry ports in the United States and Canada. Many Bahamians prefer to earn their living in a honest way by working a steady job, but the lure of easy money for relatively little danger in moving drugs along the Americas chain is a strong temptation. This is not now a poverty-stricken country where the black inhabitant is restricted and suppressed by landowners and politicians. It is a country where the opportunity to improve oneself does exist and is being taken more and more frequently by the inhabitants. San Salvador at this time, July 1985, lags behind most of the other out-islands in its ability to retain the core of its population. The impact of installing a telephone service that will both connect the communities on the island and connect San Salvador to the world at large should be felt by the end of this year. Hopefully, it will be the catalyst to encourage either Bahamian or American investment in the reopening of the Riding Rock Inn or to begin a totally new venture. Either way, the people of San Salvador are waiting for the next wave of interest in their historic island.

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