

A BRIEF HISTORY OF TREASURE CAY

The part of the Abacos we know as Treasure Cay was the first part of the Abacos to be settled after the Lucayan Indians disappeared. Historically known as Sand Bank Cays, the land on which Treasure Cay was developed is a lovely stretch of sand that was at one time separated from the island of Abaco by an inlet connecting Sand Bank Creek and the Abaco Sea. The inlet, filled by a number of hurricanes and storms, has now connected the site by a narrow sandy strip to the main island. The Cay, about four miles long and one mile wide, is bounded by a perfect sandy beach on the Atlantic and by mangrove swamps and tidal flats on the opposite side.

Following the end of the American Revolution, many former American colonists from New York, Virginia, the Carolinas and Georgia, wishing to remain loyal to Britain migrated to the Bahamas. Six thousand loyalists fled to the Bahamas more than doubling its population. The first group of loyalists to land in Abaco was a group from New York sent by Sir Guy Carleton to settle the area. They arrived in September 1783 and established the town of Carleton near the western end of Treasure Cay Beach. Carleton instantly grew, augmented by the arrival of additional loyalists. However, dissension soon developed and disappointing agricultural and work assignment disputes led to in-fighting. A majority of the Carleton population moved 20 miles southeast where they founded Marsh Harbour. The settlement of Carleton died out after only a few years.

We now fast forward. Leonard Thompson, a World War II bomber pilot, had the dream and is credited with the initial development of Treasure Cay. He writes in his book, "I Wanted Wings"

"...I looked down on the beautiful beach at Sand Bank Cays as I flew over and it brought back boyhood memories and my dreams for a resort there. I would circle the area dreaming of the great potential for this pristine crescent beach."

Born in Hopetown and one of the pioneers of aviation in the Out Islands, he had many occasions to fly over the area. Leonard was interested in developing the area which was Crown Land. The Crown first leased the land to a Canadian, Major Bell. Following Major Bell's death, his family was not interested in continuing the lease. In 1956, Mr. Thompson's dream became possible. He obtained a five year conditional purchase lease from the Crown Agents with an additional five years if all conditions were met. The conditions included erecting five permanent buildings that would include a 40 room hotel. Other conditions included constructing a golf course, putting in roads, dredging and landscaping. All of this was quite a tall order in those days.

After two years of searching for investors by flying them in and out in a seaplane, he met and set up a partnership with Tom Stanley, an architect from Texas, and Dumas Milner, a self-made millionaire from Jackson, Mississippi. The partnership was called Dumas Milner (Bahamas) Ltd. The first thing they did was build a dock near Rock Point as well as a small bunk house with dining room and kitchen. During the construction period some of the staff lived on boats and eventually the company bought a large houseboat to accommodate even more workers and staff. Rock Point House was built a year later. It was a more spacious two story building designed to entertain guests and perspective buyers and was well looked after by Isabella Bootle.

In the meantime, land was cleared for the hotel near the beach. The 40 room hotel was begun along with five two-bedroom cottages near the proposed marina. By 1959 the Crown Lands Officer agreed that they had qualified under the terms of the agreement and they were able to purchase the leased acreage. By early

December 1961 the hotel was almost complete; January 1st was the opening date. However, just after midnight on December 19th a fire totally destroyed the hotel. A second hotel on the same site was started in 1962. This hotel, for those of us who remember when it was functioning, provided many memories:

- Coat and tie required, lobster/steak dinners, a full dining room,
- Taking a cool, refreshing dip in the swimming pool on the way up from the beach,
- The Friday night Manager's Cocktail Party where you could see everyone who was on the Island, drink all the Goombays you could manage and snack on conch fritters and small cocktail franks,
- Taking a trip up to the Crow's Nest on the second floor to find music and entertainment and your teenage kids who thought they had hit the big time.

And then there was the beach just in front of the hotel...pure coral powder sand...two miles in either direction...paradise!

If you had been here in the 1960's you would have seen a runway being constructed opposite Green Turtle Cay as well as a road from Sand Bank to the airport. Ocean front lots were subdivided and sold and six more houses were built, as well as a marina. With this growth, the resort community began to provide steady employment for many residents of Cooperstown and other nearby settlements. The hotel and marina both grew, more condos (Sand Dollar) and villas were built and the first food store opened. In 1964, the golf course was planned by Dick Wilson. The first nine holes were completed in 1965 and the remaining nine holes were completed in 1968.

Most maps at the time referred to the area as Sand Banks Cay. The developers felt that a more romantic name was needed. Because of the many stories of pirates and lost treasure in the area, the name Treasure Cay was agreed upon and the necessary steps to make it legal were carried out.

When the second hotel was completed in 1963, the manager of the hotel was Jerry Melzer, who previously worked in Nassau and the landscaper was Moxey Williams who was Mr. Thompson's gardener in Nassau. You might have been lucky enough to catch Colin Redfern who played jazz flavored interpretations of well known songs on the piano to the delight of hotel guests.

Eventually Mr. Stanley sold his shares to Mr. Thompson; Mr. Milner sold his interest to a syndicate headed by Deltec Banking Corporation. Mr. Thompson was retained as Managing Director. Later he sold 50% of his shares to Mr. McKinnon, owner of Drambuie Liqueurs, who built the first home on Windward Beach. Mr. Thompson later resigned from Treasure Cay, Ltd., a Deltec holding, after 10 years of realizing his dream.

Over the course of time Treasure Cay has been serviced by dedicated and pioneering doctors often under challenging conditions and with lack of equipment. In 1966 Dr. and Mrs. James (Hamish) Fraser arrived. This was the first time a doctor had been closer than Marsh Harbour or Green Turtle. He practiced medicine from his home on Flamingo Street prior to opening an office in the Shopping Center/Office Building. He served the community from 1966-1976. Dr. Cezary Cywinski, Dr. John Buckley, Dr. Donald Strath and Dr. David Rogers followed serving the community with their expertise.

The arrival of Owens-Illinois, a pulpwood timber operation, in the 1960's spurred more changes in Abaco and, as a result, in Treasure Cay. They employed thousands of people in the timber industry and built the first major highway on Great Abaco Island which linked the various communities for the first time and opened the area to the automotive age. There were only two licensed automobiles in Abaco in 1959; thirteen years later in 1972 there were over two thousand.

The Treasure Cay resort complex continued to grow spurred on by the influx of second home buyers and tourism. Haitian immigrant workers, hard working Bahamians along with the outboard speedboat and big crawfish catches, which aided the fishing industry, changed this small island forever during the 1960's.

Moving into the 1970's you could go to the Library and take out a book (1971), although it was behind a fabric curtain in the Long House. The Library has come a long way because of all the dedicated volunteers through the years who have unselfishly given of their time and energies. In 1972 you could mail a letter at the Post Office in the new shopping strip, go to the grocery store, deposit a check at Barclay's Bank and even get your hair cut by Ruby Love at the Looking Glass Beauty Parlor. The opening of the golf clubhouse and driving range in 1971 gave Treasure Cay a new dining destination and if you owned a boat you could join the Sand Bank Yacht Club in 1972. Seven "Dormy House Club Villas" were finished near the golf course and the "Madeira Park" homes were built. With all this construction, a new fresh water supply system was needed and installed and in 1978 an ambulance was purchased for The Medical Clinic by Treasure Cay Ltd.

In 1973 it was possible to get your teeth checked at the Dental Clinic that opened next to the Post Office. This endeavor was spearheaded by Dr. James Robinson and manned by volunteer dentists from various communities in the States. It has since closed.

Development continued and new condominiums, villas and time shares were built. Mariner's Cove, Atlantis, Royal Palm, Sand Dollar, Silver Sands (Banyan Beach) and the Villas: Ocean, Beach and Garden are some that come to mind. The increase in population and cars meant that speed bumps and a roundabout were necessary to slow traffic. In 1972 Father Don Smith held the first Anglican services at the Crow's Nest. Thanks to the fundraising efforts of Father Santosh Murray, St. Simon's Anglican Church had its own building dedicated in the 1990's. The Catholic Church diagonally across from "Madeira Park" was completed and the first service was held on Easter 1973. The Treasure Cay Community Centre which includes the library and church was built with over \$80,000 raised by the residents. You could have attended the dedication and the first non-denominational Sunday church service held on December 29, 1974. The new Government School opened with 4 teachers and 84 students. The Spinnaker Restaurant opened, the Marina was enlarged and in 1977 the American-Canadian Line's M.V. New Shorham docked with sixty-four passengers, the first cruise ship to call at Treasure Cay.

Things were very lively on July 10, 1973, which marked the Bahamas independence from Great Britain. The Treasure Cay school children sang the new National Anthem as the British flag was lowered and the Bahamian flag was raised. Berkley Evans, then Island Manager, was the speaker at the ceremony.

In the 1980's fishing was abundant with bone fishing becoming an important activity on the Island. Treasure Cay was becoming a tourist destination thanks to our fine weather and lovely surroundings. Second

homeowners were beginning to discover our secret. The new airport, the first major air strip built in the Out Islands by the Bahamian Government, was completed and real estate sales boomed to over \$2 million in 1980.

In 1982, controlling stock in Treasure Cay Ltd. was sold to Mr. Ludwig Meister, a German Bahamian living in Nassau. His investments of large sums in the resort's development included the following: a new power house, an enlarged and improved Marina with the new "Topsy Sea Gull" bar and pool and the nearby Harbour House accommodations. A major addition to the marina area was a wide, lighted sidewalk built along the dock area in front of Mariner's Cove from Atlantis to the Spinnaker as well as the establishment of a Diving Center. In May of 1984 Mr. Meister hosted the "First Annual Billfish Tournament."

In February 1984 the Treasure Cay Health Care Committee, composed of women residents, was formed and initiated a successful series of fundraisers. They raised nearly \$9,000 and purchased the first piece of equipment, an EKG machine. Mr. Meister's architect drew up plans for a new clinic.

In 1988 Dr. Ronald Wilson and his wife, Jackie, arrived to the "newly renovated, fully equipped" medical center located in the Shopping Center. Dr. Wilson brought some medical equipment with him and the rest was purchased by the Treasure Cay Medical Committee with funds raised by the Treasure Cay Property Owners Association, which had been incorporated in 1979. The Corbett Medical Centre exists through the generosity of the late Frankie Corbett and donations from over ninety community residents. Dr. Jim Hull came in 2000 and worked in the Clinic until 2003. Dr. Wilson retired in 2005 and Dr. John Shedd joined the community. In 2008, a CT-Scan machine was installed thanks to the overwhelming generosity of Noel and Sylvia Lister, the leadership of the Medical Centre Board and donations from Treasure Cay residents. The new wing of the Medical Centre, the Lister Imaging Centre, was dedicated in 2010.

Although a commercial farm originated in 1977, it wasn't until the 1980's that it began producing in quantity. Located near the Airport, the farm shipped 300,000 bushels of produce to the U.S. in 1984 and on Friday afternoons you could purchase local produce at the Shopping Center. Farm labor included several hundred Haitians who built a settlement.

The road from Treasure Cay Road to Galleon Bay Road was paved in 1988 helping to improve transportation for those living on Windward Beach. Beautification occurred along the sides of the road from the Treasure Cay gate to the new airport thanks to the leadership and hard work of Dr. Elizabeth (Betty) Rockwell, a Treasure Cay homeowner; in all she planted a total of 42 varieties of trees and 15 different shrubs. The road was named in her honor in 1988.

The fun didn't stop here. Golf, tennis and fishing tournaments encouraged further tourism. Deep dredging was completed so large cruise ships could bring groups of tourists to our area. We were also able to enjoy pleasurable outings to Treasure Island, a new playground on the northern end of Guana Cay, with Captain Forty aboard the "Treasure Queen."

With all this activity, new accommodations were needed. In the early 1980's Royal Poinciana Condominiums broke ground with the first section being completed in 1986. During the next two decades the Treasure Houses and The Cottages were built.

Some of the things we take for granted had their roots 20 years ago in the 1990's. For instance,

- Telephones. In the early 1990's VHF was the only available communication. Everyone tuned into Channel 17 and we all knew who was invited out to dinner, who wasn't, what they were bringing as well as the state of their health and that of their families. Then we moved to a three telephone office in the Shopping Center where everyone had to scream to be heard and everyone really knew everyone else's business.
- The internet. It wasn't until 1996 that Sinclair Frederick provided wireless internet service to the Abaco Islands. Not only did he assist Batelco and start a message board, he helped all of us set up our internet and computer services. Without our "techno guru" none of us would be so well connected.
- Music at the Topsy Seagull and Thursday night Pizza Night with "Chris the Burner" who started entertaining us in 1989
- The tennis court with teaching pro Ivan Russell who has been helping us with our game for almost 30 years
- Emergency Services. The stated mission of the Treasure Cay Emergency Services in conjunction with Abaco Crash, Fire and Rescue, which was formed in 2007, is to provide a fire and rescue department, train a volunteer fire brigade and medical first responders and provide ambulance support. We are fortunate to have a Government licensed fire chief and first responder in Colin Albury. In addition, space is provided within the Station for an animal shelter.
- The Treasure Cay Art League. Founded in 2005, today it consists of 20 members who paint as a group every Tuesday and have an art show every other year to benefit the community
- Café La Florence. This history wouldn't be complete without acknowledging Florence Sawyer who generously provides space every morning for the men to gather for coffee and provides sticky buns and other baked goodies for the rest of us.

Just when we thought the building and development might slow down, along came the Bahama Beach Club. Construction began in 1995 and it opened in 2002. In 1999 Treasure Cay was hit hard by Hurricane Floyd but, always resourceful, repairs and renovations began immediately and after much work was completed, we agreed that Treasure Cay looked better than ever. In 2008 Pineapple Point Condominiums were built. Construction continues and who knows what the future history of Treasure Cay will bring. We hear we may even be able to purchase organically grown vegetables in the near future.

To all our dear readers of this history, we hope you will "cut us some slack." Gathering information for this project has been, like many things on this wonderful island, challenging. If we have overlooked something or someone, it was not intentional. If information has been treated with an "editorial approach," please understand. Like much news on this island, the information might have been transformed along the way.

We look forward to being part of the continuing history of Treasure Cay.

Caryl Actis-Grande and Ginny Shew

March 2011

Sources used include:

Brown, Marjorie W., "From Sand Banks to Treasure Cay" (1982)

Christmas, Rachel Jackson and Walter, "Fielding's The Bahamas" (Redondo Beach, California: Fielding Worldwide, Inc., 1974)

Dodge, Steve, "Abaco The History of an Out Island and its Cays" (Decatur, Illinois: White Sound Press, 1987)

Durrell, Zoe C., "The Innocent Island—Abaco in the Bahamas" (Durrell Publishing Company, 1972)

Thompson, Leonard M., "I Wanted Wings" (Decatur, Illinois: White Sound Press, 1995)