



# Historical Overview of The Royal Victoria Site Nassau, Bahamas

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## Summary

The Royal Victoria Hotel opened in August 1861 and served as the first hotel on New Providence at the time. It was a government-built hotel that was leased to various operators. The purpose of the hotel was to provide accommodations for those seeking a warmer climate for health and wellness, and also for the island to be able to benefit economically from the increase in travel and trade ushered by improved transportation by ship.

The Royal Victoria Hotel was situated on an elevated lot, bounded by present-day Shirley Street, East Hill Street, Parliament Street and East Street. The hotel was a limestone building, four stories high. It contained 121 double and single bedrooms, with lofty ceilings and could accommodate 200 guests. The hotel had views of the city of Nassau and a large portion of the island, and the harbor.

The buildings on the property included the main hotel building, an unidentified building that contained a hair-dressing saloon, a billiard room, and bar, and auxiliary buildings including an engine house. The Royal Victoria property contained a garden that was well known for its wide variety of tropical plants. In later years, a swimming pool, outdoor bar, and luxury apartments were added, with private lanais. A stockbroker's office was also added in the nearby garden.

The hotel ceased operation in 1971. A portion of the building was damaged in 1991 by fire and later demolished. The Bahamas Ministry of Health now occupies a section of the hotel that survived. Today, most of the grounds serve as a parking lot.

## Earlier Buildings

Prior to the Royal Victoria Hotel, King's College School occupied the location on Parliament Street. It was also the residence of Mr. Timothy Darling.<sup>1</sup> In 1835, Governor William Colebrooke recommended the establishment of King's College School in Nassau in connection with King's College located in London. He emphasised its importance in numerous correspondences to England, writing that "any delay in the measures for establishing a school at Nassau under the King's College in London would be attended with great disappointment to the community."<sup>2</sup>

The School Education Society resolved that King's College School would be a preparatory school for the instruction of boys, previous to their entering King's College. The school would be founded on the principle of shares, at the time limited to 100 at the value of £10 per share. Each shareholder would have the privilege of nominating one scholar to the institution per share he may own. The society further resolved that the school be conducted under the management of 12 directors, who would be elected by a majority of the shareholders; that the school be conducted under the superintendence of one Head and one Assistant Master, whose appointment would be left to the Governors and Council of King's College, London; that there be half-yearly examinations of scholars; that there be an examination committee of five directors annually elected; and that three trustees and a treasurer be elected.<sup>3</sup> The general age of admission would be six years.

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Mosley, "Nassau's Oldest Hotel," *Nassau Magazine*, Vol. XII, no.3 (Mid-Season 1960): 49. Originally published in 1954.

<sup>2</sup> Letter from Governor Colebrooke to Baron Glenelg, December 14, 1835 (CO 23/94: 442).

<sup>3</sup> "Proceedings of the School Education Society," *The Bahamas Argus* (Nassau), July 25, 1835.

King's College School would be founded on "the soundest principles of religion and morality; and comprise the Greek, Latin, French and English languages; Elementary, Mathematics, Writing, and Arithmetic, History and Geography, ancient and modern; General Literature, Elocution and Composition."<sup>4</sup> The society further established that a library would be formed at the school and for the convenience of inhabitants of the out islands and many residents of New Providence, the Head Assistant Master would be allowed to take a certain number of students as resident boarders in his house during the school time.

In 1836, an annual salary was granted by the House of Assembly for two masters for King's College School. The first at the rate of £350 and the second at the rate of £250, with a sum of £50 each to defray the cost of travel to The Bahamas.<sup>5</sup>

The King's College School was officially opened in Nassau on Tuesday, October 10, 1837 with approximately 16 students.<sup>6</sup> The master of the school was Mr. Bridgman. The institution provided advanced instruction for both white and black inhabitants who were able to afford it. Its building was located at the corner of East Hill Street and Parliament Street and stood at three stories high. The school emphasised liberal arts and sciences. With the establishment of the school, it was hoped that many of those who were exclusively engaged in the hazardous employment of wrecking on the banks, would be induced and enabled to extend their enterprise elsewhere<sup>7</sup>.

## Royal Victoria Construction

The Royal Victoria Hotel was built between 1860 and 1861. It was prominently situated on a ridge approximately 90 feet above sea level on the island of New Providence. The hotel was bordered to the north by Shirley Street, south by East Hill Street, west by Parliament Street and east by East Street. It faced north, overlooking public buildings, including the Nassau Public Library and the Nassau harbour. The Royal Victoria Hotel, also known as the Royal Vic., was opened in August 1861. It was the island's first and only hotel at the time of its opening.

The impetus for the construction of the Royal Victoria Hotel came from the foresight of Edwin Charles Mosely. Mosley, originally from London, England and founder of the Nassau Guardian, advocated for the creation of a hotel to accommodate invalids and other tourists traveling by steamship from New York. He encouraged this as he felt this would increase trade and commerce and boost the island's economy. He wrote that "at least five hundred invalids would spend the summer here and the pecuniary advantages would benefit the whole community".<sup>8</sup> By 1845, he had called a public meeting to advocate and generate more interest.

A precursor to the construction of the Royal Victoria Hotel was the establishment of Nassau on a reliable transportation route. In 1851, the House of Assembly passed an Act offering £1000 to any person or company able to provide a steamship service between the United States, Cuba and Nassau. It was not until 1859 that Samuel Cunard began a monthly mail connection between Nassau

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Letter from Governor Colebrooke to Baron Glenelg, May 14, 1836 (CO 23/96: 482).

<sup>6</sup> *Royal Gazette* (Nassau, Wednesday October 11, 1837).

<sup>7</sup> *Bahamas House of Assembly Votes* (Nassau, 1835-36), 319.

<sup>8</sup> C. Seighbert Russell, *Nassau's Historic Buildings* (Nassau), 24.

and New York. The paddle steamer, S.S. Corsica, began the service in November 1859 and was later replaced by the Karnak.<sup>9</sup>

An Act for Securing the Creation of an Hotel on the Island of New Providence was passed on May 11, 1859. The property was purchased from Timothy Darling.<sup>10</sup> The tender by Timothy Darling, a Canadian businessman and American Consul, was accepted at £2,500. The final cost of constructing the hotel would come to approximately £25,000. The construction of the hotel was managed by a board of commissioners, which included the Governor, the Bishop, Mr. E. C. Moseley, Mr. H. E. Kemp, Mr. G. D. Harris and Mr. R. E. Rigby. The hotel would be open seasonally from November to May.<sup>11</sup>

## The Building

The Royal Victoria Hotel was accessible from three sides – Shirley Street, Parliament Street and East Hill Street. The elevation afforded exposure to the prevailing winds. The structure was built of limestone and the original frontage was 200 feet and four stories. The east end was rounded off resembling the stern of a paddle-wheeler. Verandas were ten feet wide and wrapped around upper floors providing 900 feet of walking space (this would later be enlarged). There was a projecting story from the centre of the building, opposite the main parlour. The story was topped by a large, open piazza. The pillars supporting the first piazza were originally built of white or spruce pine scantling, recased with white pine boards. In 1868, Civil Engineer, J. B. Burnside, recommended these be replaced with hardwood pillars of the same dimensions or by round stone pillars, 15 inches at the base tapering to 12 inches at the top<sup>12</sup>. By 1869, funding was provided from the Queen's Fines to the Board of Public Works for the renewal of the lower portions of nearly all the pillars supporting the piazzas and portico. The hotel was painted yellow with white trim.

An octagonal cupola glazed all around provided a view of housetops and the sea. There was a portecochere in the front of the building. Above it was the Gentlemen's Parlour, while the Ladies Parlour was at the eastern end. The woodwork of both interior and exterior was composed of white pine.<sup>13</sup>

A large airy court under the building's central projection had eight large, high archways and formed the hotel's main entrance. In this area, a bazaar was held every morning. The original King's College School, which was three-stories, was incorporated in the hotel as a western wing connected to the main building by a covered bridge.<sup>14</sup>

The Royal Victoria Hotel contained 121 double and single bedrooms, with lofty ceilings and could accommodate 200 guests.<sup>15</sup> Bedrooms were large and well ventilated, with high ceilings and windows

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<sup>9</sup> Henry S. Villard, *Royal Victoria Hotel* (Nassau, 1976), 11.

<sup>10</sup> Russell, *Nassau's Historic Buildings*, 24.

<sup>11</sup> "Royal Victoria Hotel (Nassau, Bahamas), and Nassau and Savannah Mail Steamship Line." *Nassau, N.P. Bahamas: with illustrations from Photographs*, (1876), 7.

<sup>12</sup> Votes of the Honorable House of Assembly of The Bahama Islands (1868), 101.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. (1865), Appendix, 37.

<sup>14</sup> Mosley, "Nassau's Oldest Hotel," 2.

<sup>15</sup> E.B.A. Taylor, "FOR SALE," *New York Daily Herald*, December 19, 1877. Auction Advertisement authored September 25, 1877.

reaching the floor. The rooms on the first, second and third stories had French casements that opened to the piazza, and each door and window had a fan-light.<sup>16</sup>

The dining room was located on the ground floor. It faced a porch on the east end and was able to seat 150 people.<sup>17</sup> There was also a restaurant on the ground floor. In a building described as “off to one side” was a hair-dressing salon, a billiard room and a bar, colloquially known as “The Tank”.<sup>18</sup> Rainwater tanks were installed with a capacity of 300,000 gallons. Out buildings were located at the southwest corner of the Royal Victoria Hotel.<sup>19</sup> The limited freshwater bathrooms were situated at the end of a long bridge that stretched to East Hill Street on the southern side. Saltwater baths were available in the bathing-rooms or private apartments.<sup>20</sup>

In 1862, a report to the House of Assembly by the commissioners of the Royal Victoria Hotel stated that the hotel’s cess pools and water closets were not functioning adequately and were in desperate need of repair. It was recommended by the Board of Health that two privies be erected immediately and a proper system of covered drainage be constructed leading to the Nassau harbour or elsewhere capable of carrying off the sewerage that was accumulating and affecting the air quality at the hotel and surrounding neighbourhood.<sup>21</sup> Two options were proposed by the Chief Engineer, Thomas Harvey: the construction of an egg-shaped sewer from the hotel premises along East Street to the sea or the construction of a tiled drain from the hotel premises along East Street to the sea. The first option of an egg-shaped sewer system was chosen; however, it would be brought down Parliament Street rather than East Street.

In the 1864 Annual Report of the Commissioners of the Royal Victoria Hotel, the commissioners describe improving sanitation at the premises. A sewerage system was installed and the lessee, Mr. John Howell, erected a steam hydraulic engine to supply water to the system. The sewer is described as:

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...carried from the rear of the hotel grounds through them to Shirley Street and down Parliament Street and across the Public Wharf to the sea, to low water level. It is egg shaped, one foot wide at the bottom, two feet six inches at the spring of the arch, and four feet from the crown of the arch to the bottom. It is arched with brick throughout, and cased with stone and brick, where it is not cut through solid rock, and cemented in the interior up to the arch, the whole length, and has an inclination of 0.15 inch to the foot of Shirley Street to the sea. Man holes and traps are provided at intervals, to allow facile entrance if required for the purpose of removing obstructions, if any should occur.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> “Royal Victoria Hotel (Nassau, Bahamas), and Nassau and Savannah Mail Steamship Line”, 3.

<sup>17</sup> Turtle, fish and fruit were typical breakfast items.

<sup>18</sup> Villard, *Royal Victoria Hotel*, 12

<sup>19</sup> Prodders and Smith to George O. Johnson, *Notes of the Honorable House of Assembly of The Bahama Islands* (1865), 182.

<sup>20</sup> “Royal Victoria Hotel (Nassau, Bahamas), and Nassau and Savannah Mail Steamship Line”, 4.

<sup>21</sup> “Report of Select Committees on Works required at Royal Victoria,” *Notes of the Honorable House of Assembly of The Bahama Islands* (1862), 142-144.

<sup>22</sup> “Annual Report of the Commissioners of the Royal Victoria Hotel,” *Notes of the Honorable House of Assembly of The Bahama Islands* (1864), 148.

Prior to accepting the contract for the building of the sewer, the commissioners stipulated for and received a guarantee from the lessee that he should provide an adequate supply of water to flush it. The lease holder, Mr. Howell, therefore erected a steam engine and forcing pump at the lowest part of the hotel premises that would carry water to the upper grounds by iron pipes. The system was capable of transmitting several thousand gallons in two hours.

By 1865, the remaining necessary work was completed to put the hotel in proper sanitary condition, including repair of the kitchen plumbing to rectify a defective soil pipe. The commission reviewed the sanitary state of the hotel this year as “extremely good.” The only exception would be that the floor of the new privies were too flat and broad to allow the soil to be effectively washed away, which the commissioners were seeking funds to remedy.

Votes of the House of Assembly for the year 1865 contain specifications for construction of a proposed brick building on the lower part of the hotel grounds, at the corner of Parliament and Shirley Streets. This building may have been a laundry room to be situated near the engine house so that it may have a direct supply of water and connection with the sewer. Though it is unclear from the record whether the proposal was accepted, and the building constructed, the specifications were as follows:

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Stone walls are to be built five feet high from the level of Shirley Street and levelled all round for brick work. The brick walls are to be started on the five feet of the stone work and carried to the under side of the roof beams with 12 inch piers and one thickness of brick between, the whole to be neatly topped out with a dental cornice of brick.

The window and door frames are to have hard wood heads and sills and white pine stiles and all windows to be furnished with wire screen of fine mesh, and door frames with batten doors in two leaves each furnished with proper bolts and locks.

The first floor is to be of stout inch rough boards, the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of inch tongue and grooved boards, and the roof with inch boards for tinning, - all to be laid upon 3 x 6 inch joist of pine or spruce placed not more than 16 inches apart. A strong native pine girder 4 x 8 inches supported every nine feet with 6 x 6 pine posts is to be put up through each story to support the floor joist, which are to be tied every fourth beam with through timber or strapped with iron anchors.

The whole of the inner surface and brickwork and underside of floors and joist are to be washed two coat lime wash.

The roof is to be covered in the best manner with two crop charcoal tin and painted two coats. Two tin leaders 3 inches diameter are to be furnished to convey water from roof.

All the window and door frames and wire screens are to be painted two coats zinc paint.

Prisoners will be furnished to do the excavating, but the contractor will be required to remove all earth and rubbish from the premises.<sup>23</sup>

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Also, in the Votes of the House of Assembly for the year 1865, is a proposal for alterations and additions to the out-building at the south-west corner of the Royal Victoria Hotel premises. Specifications were as follows:

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Build up the stone walls of the present corner building to the level of those of the adjoining building, and raise the roof of same and connect the two roofs: take out all the division stone walls except to kitchen. Put in white pine floor joist for the second story of corner building, and floor the same with tongued and grooved Norway pine boards, put entire new windows to the 2<sup>nd</sup> story, through the front and whenever required. Build up the present large door-way on Parliament Street. Level and repair the ground floors of corner building. Put in board partitions to the 2<sup>nd</sup> story where required, with doors, locks &c. Put up tin gutters and leaders to the new roof, color the whole outside surface of stone work. Paint all the wood work usually painted and white wash the interior surface of the stone walls throughout for the sum of Three hundred and fifteen pounds, (£315).<sup>24</sup>

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## The Gardens

The Royal Victoria's "world famous" tropical garden featured 200 varieties of exotic plants, shrubs and trees. They included bougainvillea, Cereus, Malaya's fish tail palm, Spanish bayonet, South Sea Island's breadfruit tree, sapodilla of Yucatan, royal and coconut palms. The focal point was a huge silk cotton tree. A bandstand was constructed in the branches of the tree with steps leading up its trunk.<sup>25</sup>

## The Guests

The Royal Victoria Hotel hosted a wide variety of individuals over the course of its life. Its guests included those involved in the American Civil War, persons seeking to recover health and strength from illness, rumrunners during the American prohibition period and general travellers seeking exotic experiences.

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<sup>23</sup> *Votes of the Honorable House of Assembly of The Bahama Islands* (1865), 183-184.

<sup>24</sup> Prodgers and Smith to George O. Johnson, *Votes of the Honorable House of Assembly of The Bahama Islands* (1865), 182-183.

<sup>25</sup> Villard, 1976, p. 14.



During the American Civil War (1861-1865), the hotel welcomed sea captains, those buying and selling cotton, dealers of munitions, Confederate agents, soldiers, diplomats, war correspondents, among others.<sup>26</sup>

In response to those seeking health, the Royal Victoria Hotel served as a sanatorium. In a report to the British Government on the Colonial Section at the Vienna Exhibition in 1873, Governor William Robinson wrote:

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Nassau however, has become, for many years past, a winter's resort for those seeking to escape from the rigors of a Northern to a milder Southern clime. Many eminent American Physicians strongly recommend such of their patients as may be suffering from or threatened with pulmonary disease to proceed to Nassau for the winter, in consequence of the mildness and equability of the temperature. With a view to attract such a class of visitors, a very commodious hotel, built on the American plan, was erected at the expense of the Government. The lessees of the hotel, Americans, are bound to conduct it like a first-class New York hotel. Ample and good accommodation has therefore been provided.<sup>27</sup>

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During the American prohibition (1920-1933), the hotel welcomed those in search of the forbidden beverages. During World War II, the Royal Victoria Hotel accommodated Allied survivors. The Royal Victoria Hotel Annex was commandeered by Wallis Simpson, Duchess of Windsor, for this purpose and referred to as a 1<sup>st</sup> Aid Station and Emergency Quarters.<sup>28</sup>

During the 1890s, the Royal Victoria entertained prominent guests including Austen and Neville Chamberlain, sons of the Right Honourable Joseph Chamberlain. Neville went on to become Prime Minister of the United Kingdom.

The hotel was a popular accommodation for winter visitors from the United States, British North America and Europe. Many of the travellers would make use of the Nassau Public Library, which was a short walking distance from the Royal Victoria Hotel.<sup>29</sup>

## Entertainment/Culture

The Royal Victoria Hotel was a hub for cultural exchange and entertainment. At the entrance of the hotel, a bazaar was held every morning. At the bazaar, local vendors sold baskets, seashells, sponges, flowers, fruits and other native produce. Boatmen and carriage drivers offered their services of sailing, fishing and tours to guests, and young boys scrambled for pennies and ten and twenty-dollar gold pieces, also known as eagle coins. Donkey races also amused guests in the afternoons.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>27</sup> "Royal Victoria Hotel (Nassau, Bahamas), and Nassau and Savannah Mail Steamship Line", 5.

<sup>28</sup> Wiberg, E. 2016. *U-Boats in The Bahamas*.

<sup>29</sup> V. C. F. Ballance, "A new look at old books: The collection of Nassau Public Library in the mid-19th century", *The International Journal of Bahamian Studies*, no. 19 (2013): 4.

<sup>30</sup> Mosley, "Nassau's Oldest Hotel," 49.

Entertainment was free and included Blind Blake (Blake Higgs) performing goombay and calypso music. Musicians would walk the streets and gardens with their instruments, guitar, violin, mouth organ, bass viol, playing and singing for coins.

Memorable social gatherings at the Royal Victoria include Washington's Birthday Ball which would take place annually on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February and banquets of the St. Andrew's Society. Other memorable functions included dinners in honour of the late Viscount Burnham, Sir Winston Churchill and other visiting members of parliament.

## Management

The Royal Victoria Hotel was first leased by the Government to Mr. John S. Howell of New York. The rental for two years amounted to eight hundred and fifty-four pounds three shillings and four-pence (£854 3 4). The duties refunded to the lessee on furniture for the hotel amounted to six hundred and fifty-five pounds five shillings and eleven pence (£655 5 11). The actual amount paid for rent was one hundred and ninety-eight pounds seventeen shillings and five pence (£198 17 5). Of Mr. Howell's management, the 1864 report of the commissioners of the Royal Victoria Hotel states:

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The Commissioners regret that they are unable to report favourably of the management of the Hotel by the Lessee, or of the objects contemplated in its erection having been fulfilled – A failure attributable doubtless to the Civil War, prevailing in the United States, which has caused a large influx of strangers, attracted to Nassau by the facilities in affords of carrying on a trade with the Southern States, who have filled the Hotel to the extrusion of invalids for whose accommodation it was built.

Complaints have been made by the boarders on several occasions of the manner in which the Hotel is conducted, complaints on their investigation by the Commissioners found in the majority of instances to be well founded, but as the Lessee professed a desire on all such occasions to improve the management as far as he could, and from time to time he did so in some respects, but it is very doubtful if at any time the management was such as to entitle the Hotel to the designation of "First Class."

During the past month a large portion of the boarders signed a document containing a general charge of bad management illustrated by specific examples similar to those repeatedly alleged on former occasions of complaint, under such circumstances the Commissioners considered it to be their duty to take the advice of the Law Officer of the Crown as to whether the defective management of the Hotel as set forth in the allegations of the boarders did constitute an infraction of the Lessee's agreement and in case his opinion should be in the affirmative, he

was instructed to commence legal proceedings against him-which the Attorney General has already done.<sup>31</sup>

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Mr. Howell asked permission of the Board to transfer management of the hotel to Mr. George O. Johnson, to which the Board of Commissioners agreed. The lease was transferred to Mr. Johnson in May 1864. Mr. Johnson would be assisted in management by Mr. James Carrol, a well-known and experienced hotel keeper in the United States. By 1865, all necessary sanitary improvements had been made to the hotel. In their March 1865 annual report, the commissioners write that they are “convinced that in every respect the Royal Victoria Hotel is not inferior to the first class Hotels in the United States. The new Lessee has made a great many repairs, alterations, improvements and additions to the Hotel.”<sup>32</sup>

During Mr. Johnson’s management of the Royal Victoria, he repaired the roof over the gentleman’s parlour, which had been leaking extensively, the roof of the main building, and the roof around the cupola. He built a covered passageway from the kitchen to the dining room to protect the servants from the rain. He constructed a building in one corner of the backyard for a servant eating room, enclosed a vacant place to be used as a coal shed, and added a private entrance to the house for ladies as guests complained about not having one. He also erected a stairway connecting the two buildings and filled the space between the water tank and the new hotel building which provided space for a storeroom and two sleeping rooms for chambermaids. Johnson also added a bakehouse to the kitchen.

In 1865, wartime profiteers departed, and the hotel was offered for sale. Visitors were few and as a result, in the 1867 season, the hotel was leased free of rent. The commissioners advertised for tenders for the rental of the hotel in New York, Boston and Nassau, but did not obtain any applications. Meanwhile the hotel was falling into further disrepair and the commissioners feared having the hotel closed during the 1868 season. Instead of closing the hotel, the commissioners permitted Messrs. Tunnel and Loinaz to occupy the hotel rent free for the reception of guests. In their 1869 report, the commissioners expressed:

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The depressed state of trade in the Bahamas renders it important to foster every means of stimulating and increasing our local resources, and no means are more plainly indicated or more likely to be effective, than affording every inducement and facility to invalids to make our island their winter residence. To this end, to things are essential – the existence of a good Hotel, and more frequent and efficient Steam Communication with the neighbouring continent than we now possess.

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<sup>31</sup> Annual Report of the Commissioners of the Royal Victoria Hotel”, *Votes of the Honorable House of Assembly of The Bahama Islands* (1864), 150-151.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, (1865), 180.

Doubtless the Hotel has cost the Colony a large sum of money, but there can be as little doubt entertained that since its erection, it has indirectly repaid the Colony for all the expenses of its building and repairs.

With this conviction, the Commissioners deprecate the conversion of the Hotel to any other purpose than that for which it was built, and are of opinion that it should be continued in its present use, even if it can only be rented on condition of the tenant keeping it in good and proper repair.<sup>33</sup>

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In 1870, the lease holders of the Royal Victoria Hotel were two Americans, Messrs. Lewis Cleveland and Newell.<sup>34</sup> They were given a conditional rental of five hundred dollars (\$500) for the season. This would be paid if the lessees made profit during the season. If no profit were made, they were to have the hotel free of rent. It was expected that no profit would be made as the number of visitors had been small, but the commissioners were confident that at least no loss would be sustained. In January 1870, Messrs. Cleveland and Newell applied for an extended lease. They proposed to take a lease of ten years with the privilege of 10 years extension given certain terms.<sup>35</sup> The 20-year lease was granted.

In April 1872, the Royal Victoria was reported to be in good repair. The lessees are said to have expended nearly fifteen hundred pounds on the hotel and premises over the previous two years.<sup>36</sup> The 1871-1872 season saw an influx of visitors, greater than any previous season. Unfortunately, Mr. Cleveland died in the fire and wreck of the S.S. Missouri ship in October 1872 off the coast of Abaco. As a result, the hotel was not more than one third occupied during the 1872-1873 season.

Following the death of Mr. Cleveland, Mr. Felter was appointed manager of the Royal Victoria and is reported to have conducted the hotel to the satisfaction of the guests. In 1873, the Royal Victoria saw 500 winter visitors. Between 1874 and 1876, Mr. T.J. Porter became the proprietor.

In 1877, the Royal Victoria Hotel was put up for auction by the government. The advertisement for sale by public auction dated September 25, 1877 read:

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FOR SALE — AT NASSAU, NEW PROVIDENCE, BAHAMAS,

by public auction (unless and advantageous offer is in the meantime made), on Monday, February 11, 1878, at noon, on the premises, in accordance with an act of the Bahamas Legislature, all the Lands, Buildings and Appurtenances known as the ROYAL VICTORIA HOTEL, erected in 1861 by the Bahamas government at a cost of £20,000. The building is unequalled by any structure of the kind in the West Indies and will be sold subject to an existing lease which expires in 1880 and on condition that the premises shall be used by the purchaser for the keeping and

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., (1869), 27

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., (1870), 91.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., (1872), 59.

maintaining a hotel from the 1st day of November in and every year until 31st May in each succeeding year at least, and for no other purpose during any other period aforesaid or during any other period of the year.<sup>37</sup>

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The lease was acquired by James Maxwell Morton of Sinclair House in New York in 1881. The term of the lease was five years beginning May 1, 1881. The yearly rent was 416 pounds, 13 shillings and 4 pence to be paid on April 2 of each year.<sup>38</sup> The hotel was to be open from the first week in December until the last week of April of each year.

In 1884, a select committee appointed to consider Acts related to the sale of the hotel submitted a report and recommended the following:

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They think that a special effort should be made to effect a sale of the property before the expiration of the present lease, say sometime in the month of February, 1886. The lease will expire on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May of the same year. To induce a sale of the premises, they will introduce a Bill authorizing the Board of Public Works to sell the property on liberal terms, viz., allowing the purchaser to pay one-half of the amount which it realizes on the due exemption of the deeds of transfer, and the remaining moiety at the expiration of five years, securing the Government in the meantime by a mortgage on the property and keeping it insured against fire.

The committee would recommend this Bill to the favorable consideration of the House in the hope that its adoption may be the means of accomplishing that desirable object, the sale of the Hotel property.<sup>39</sup>

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## Curry House

Curry House located on Shirley Street, is a three-storey building opened in 1890 as a private hotel by Mr. Robert Henry Curry of the firm R. H. Curry & Company Limited, a shipping company. Curry House would later be acquired by operators of the Royal Victoria.<sup>40</sup> R. H. Curry was a prominent merchant who had one son, also named Robert Curry. R. H. Curry served on the Development Board and is listed in their reports for the years 1921, 1922, 1923 and 1927.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>E.B.A. Taylor, "FOR SALE," *New York Daily Herald*, December 19, 1877.

<sup>38</sup> Public Records Office. Lease 1881.

<sup>39</sup> Report of Select Committee to Consider Acts relating to the sale of Hotel", *Votes of the Honorable House of Assembly of The Bahama Islands* (1884), 178.

<sup>40</sup> Russell, *Nassau's Historic Buildings*, 26.

<sup>41</sup> In June 1920, R.H. Curry asked the development board if it were possible to use shark skins to manufacture shoes and other materials. The Board succeeded in interesting the Ocean Leather Company, which subsequently established a branch at Nassau. In the same year, he participated in an interview with the American Consul that resulted in the authorities eliminating the passport requirement for travelling between the Colony and the United States. In late 1920, he was successful in providing a first class regular and frequent mail, passenger and freight steamship service with New York.

R. H. Curry, Sr. died on September 3, 1946 of “pernicious anaemia” at the age of 82 years.<sup>42</sup> His obituary in the Nassau Daily Tribune September 4, 1946 reads:

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Death yesterday removed a man who, for over half a century, played a leading role in shaping the destiny of this Colony. In the political, social and commercial Bahamian world, Mr. Robert Henry Curry, elder son of the late W. H. Curry, held an undisputed place at the very [?] of life here.

It was not a case of working his way to the top. It was a case of starting at the top and building on secure foundations laid by his father – a superstructure that has played a most important part in the colony’s principal activities.

After Mr. Curry graduated from Upper Canada College he spent some years in business in the U.S. where he gathered the knowledge and practical experience which broadened his outlook and prepared him to keep on the crest of the steadily rising wave in the land of his birth. He was still a young man when he came home to join his father’s business which opened under the name of W. H. Curry & Sons on the same site on which the greatly improved offices of R. H. Curry and Co. now stand.

W. H. Curry & Sons were then engaged in the sponging business and in fostering other Bahamian enterprises of the period.

He saw the possibilities of the tourist business and built Curry House on Shirley St. which he later sold to H. M. Flagler and it was incorporated in the Royal Victoria Hotel property. He became the agent for the Florida East Coast Hotel Co. interests and from that time onward the Curry firm has represented the leading American, Canadian and British Steamship Companies calling at this port.

Consul for Norway for many years, he was appointed a knight of the Order of St. Olaf by the King of Sweden.

He was active in real estate enterprises and handled some of the largest transactions in the island.

He also represented some of the most important British insurance companies, including Lloyds Marine Underwriters.

In 1900 Mr. Curry was elected to represent Andros Island in the House of Assembly. He continued to represent this district in the Assembly until 1942

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<sup>42</sup> The Record of Deaths during the three months ending September 13, 1946 lists Mr. Curry’s age as 82. However, the Daily Tribune Sept. 3, 1946 lists Mr. Curry’s age as 83.

when he retired from public life. He was at that time junior only to the late Mr. Speaker Johnson whose unique length of service made him “father” of all “fathers” of the House. He served on many Boards and was a leading figure in the political world.

Up to his death Mr. Curry kept his outlook wide and his visions broad by travel. He was probably the most widely travelled man in the Colony.<sup>43</sup>

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J.M. Morton managed the Royal Victoria Hotel with his son, S.S. Morton, until it was sold to Henry M. Flagler in 1898. The 1898 Hotel and Steam Ship Service Act provided government support for hotel construction and a subsidized steamship service. In the same year, Henry M. Flagler, developer of South Florida and owner of East Coast Railway, purchased the Royal Victoria for £10,000. He agreed to integrate Nassau into his extensive system of hotels and railways in Florida. Flagler enlarged and renovated the Royal Victoria Hotel with electricity. It was lighted with electricity for the first time on January 18, 1899. It is believed that he added the fourth floor above the former King’s College School section, making the appearance of the roof continuous from east to west.<sup>44</sup>

After Flagler, Frank C. Munson, President of Munson Steamship Lines, took possession of house and garden and improved both.<sup>45</sup> After Mr. Munson’s death, his widow, Cora Mallory Munson, sold the property in 1949 to Royal Little, an American businessman and investor. The property underwent a million-dollar refurbishment. A swimming pool and outdoor bar were built. Air conditioning was implemented, a series of luxury apartments added, with private lanais overlooking the pool and terrace, a Cafe Royale, where one could dine indoor or outdoor and a Blockade Runner’s Bar. A stockbroker’s office was added in the nearby garden.

## Decline of the Royal Victoria Hotel

The Royal Victoria Hotel declined as a result of competition from the Hotel Colonial, the end of the World War II, changes in the tourism industry and traveller values, and operational challenges. When the Hotel Colonial opened in 1900 it was no competition as the Royal Victoria attracted higher-end clientele and events such as elite private functions and government parties, such as fetes in honour of Queen Victoria’s consort, Prince Albert; dinners of the select St. Andrews Society; and dinners to honour visiting members of Parliament, including Winston Churchill. It was not until the Hotel Colonial burned in 1922 and was replaced, that it posed competition.

In 1950, Nassau was declared a year-round resort by Chairman of the Development Board and first Minister of Tourism, Sir Stafford Sands. His goal was to attract one million visitors a year. Some believe that the campaign attracted tourists of different values from the past, and that the traditional travellers’ values changed from families seeking a winter retreat to the budget-conscious tourist.

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<sup>43</sup> “A Leading Bahamian Passes: Death Removes Robert Henry Curry To Another Scene,” *The Nassau Daily Tribune* (Nassau, N.P.), September 4, 1946.

<sup>44</sup> Ronald G. Lightbourn, *Reminiscing II* (2005), 55.

<sup>45</sup> The steamship line operated between 1899 and 1937. It operated from New York to Latin American and The Bahamas.

On March 3, 1958, unidentified individuals threw sticks of dynamite from a moving car onto the Royal Victoria premises, blowing a hole in the dining room.<sup>46</sup> This attack was one of many incidents on New Providence directed at the government and hotel owners in protest of racial and political injustice leading up to Majority Rule in The Bahamas. The Royal Victoria Hotel had accommodated approximately 100 British troops from Jamaica who had been called in by the governor to reinforce the police in quelling the General Strike that took place on January 13 of the same year.

The hotel ceased operation in 1971. In 1972, the hotel was re-purchased by the Bahamas Government. A portion of the building was damaged in 1991 by fire and later demolished. The Bahamas Ministry of Health now occupies a section of the hotel that was saved. Curry House serves as the location of the Ministry of Health's National Reference Laboratory. Today, most of the Royal Victoria grounds serve as a parking lot.

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<sup>46</sup> "Nassau Hotel is Dynamited," *Fort Lauderdale News* (Fort Lauderdale, FL), March 3, 1958.



## Images

### Curry House



View of the north side of Curry House from Shirley Street (2020).



View of the northeast corner of Curry House from Shirley Street (2020).

The Royal Victoria Hotel

**WINTER RESORT.**



**ROYAL VICTORIA HOTEL, } T. J. PORTER,  
Nassau, N. P., Bahamas. } Proprietor.**

Steamers will leave Savannah, Ga., every ten days, and make the trip in less than two days. First-class steamers will also sail from New York.

The temperature of Nassau last winter did not vary but 4° from 72°, making it the most delightful climate in the world. Persons desiring to escape the rigors of a Northern Winter can obtain Circular containing full information by addressing:

**JAMES LIDGERWOOD & CO., 758 Broadway, N. Y.**

A newspaper advertisement for the Royal Victoria Hotel, circa 1875.

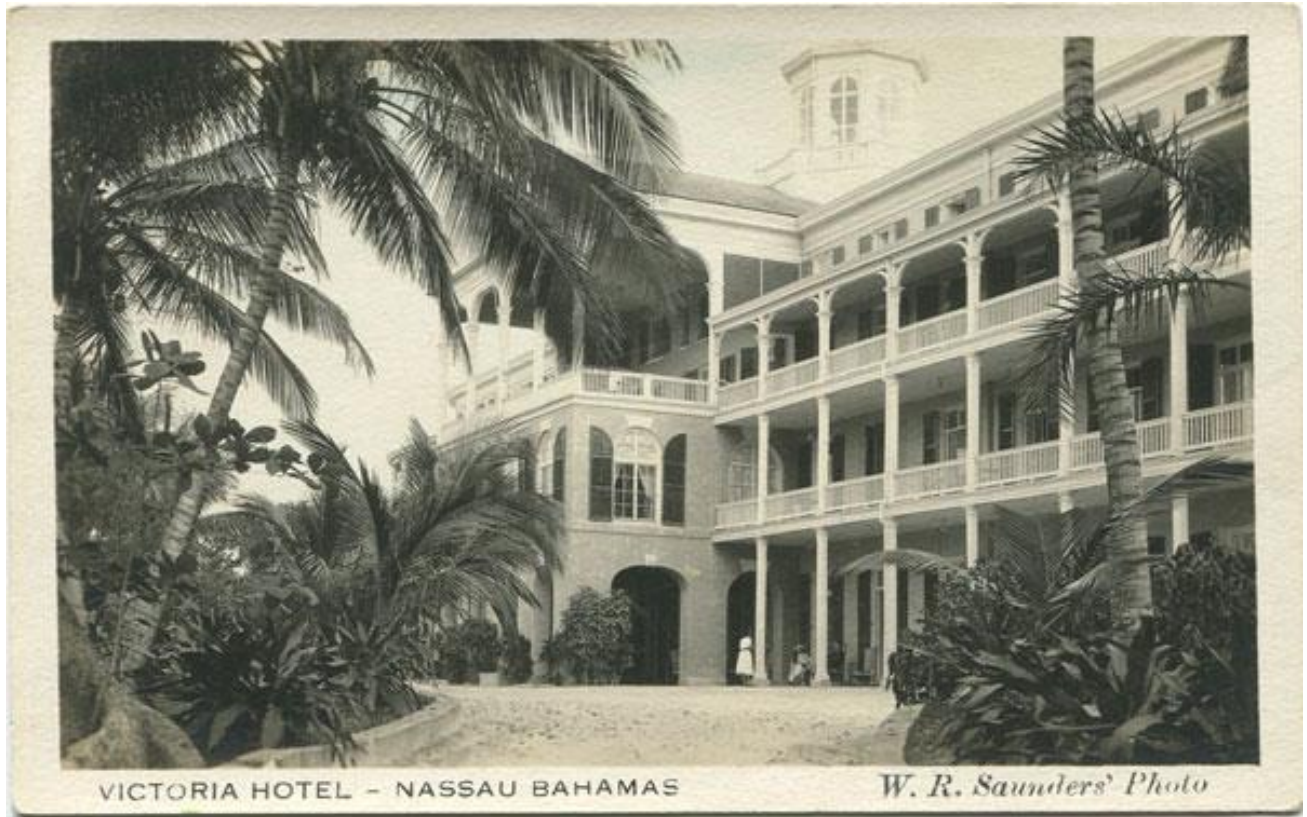


THE ROYAL VICTORIA HOTEL, NASSAU, NEW PROVIDENCE—Nassau, upon the island of New Providence, is the capital of the Bahama group. It is a colony of Great Britain. The home Government built many years ago the substantial Royal Victoria Hotel as a sanitarium. It is beautifully located upon the rising ground behind the white and red houses of the town, which are embowered in a wealth of tropical foliage. From its piazzas a far-reaching view embraces the harbor, Hog Island opposite, and the surf which beats upon the coral reefs beyond. Fort Fincastle and Fort Charlotte are near by, and the fine roads, excursions by water to the sea-gardens and coral reefs, are greatly enjoyed by the large number of Americans who resort to this lovely "Isle of Summer" each winter.

Royal Victoria Hotel, 1892. Print of photo by Charles H. Adams.



Grounds of the Royal Victoria Hotel, 1895. Photo by William Henry Jackson.



Royal Victoria circa 1920. Photo by W.R. Saunders.



Photo by J.F. Coonley showing the old King's College School building at the right, which was incorporated into the Royal Victoria Hotel. It is joined to the main building by a covered bridge.

## Environs

The following provides information on the properties in the immediate area of the Royal Victoria Hotel site. They include the Rodney E. Bain building, Taj Mahal, Jacaranda House, the Nassau Public Library and Museum, Magna Carta Court, Zion Baptist Church, the General Post Office building, the Bahamas Mortgage Corporation building (former Ministry of Foreign Affairs building and former East Hill Club), and the Ansbacher building. Information on the guard house next to the Nassau Public Library could not be located.

### Rodney E. Bain Building



View of Rodney E. Bain building from Shirley Street (2020).

The Rodney E. Bain building is a four-story building located at the corner of Shirley Street and Parliament Street, at the southwestern quadrant. The structure was built in 1990 and named after Rodney E. Bain, a prominent Bahamian educator originally from Mastic Point, Andros, who died in October 1980. It is believed that this was formerly the E. D. Sassoon building, however the documentary record is not clear.

The building housed the Registrar General's Office until December 2005 when staff were evacuated due to water and sewerage leaking from ceiling pipes. The Rodney E. Bain building was officially closed in January 2006.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Alesha Cadet, "Rodney Bain building set for renovations." *Tribune* (Nassau) March 13, 2010, 5.

## Taj Mahal (former Green Shutters)



Taj Mahal building (2021).

The Taj Mahal building, formerly Green Shutters, is located at 48 Parliament Street. It was constructed during the 1860s. It was believed to have been built by ship builders. The earliest record of the property is a transaction transferring the property from Thomas William Henry Dillet to Bruce Lockhart Burnside in April 1865.<sup>48</sup>

On March 27, 1865, Bruce Lockhart Burnside transferred the property to the Honorable John Pinder who passed it on to William John Pinder. W. J. Pinder and his mother, the former Miss Byrd Ollen, resided at the 48 Parliament Street. W. J. Pinder purchased the property immediately north of the Green Shutters property and occupied it with his wife Miss Elizabeth Starr Brice. After Pinder's mother died, the Green Shutters property was rented to Miss "Priss" Pratt, a seamstress, for one shilling and six pence yearly.

In the 1920s, after W. J. Pinder's death, the property was passed to his daughter, Virginia Ann (Mrs. Frank Berry). She purchased a strip of land to the south of the property from her neighbor, Mrs.

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<sup>48</sup>C. Seighbert Russell, *Nassau's Historic Buildings*, 94.



Gertude Maud Miller, with the purpose of “straightening the property.”<sup>49</sup> At the same time, she renovated the property.

Mrs. Berry sold the Green Shutters property in 1947 to Moir and Mary Ogilvy-Spence. In 1962, the property was sold to Mr. and Mrs. Charles Bennett Warry. The Warrys established it as a popular restaurant and pub called Ben Warry’s during the 1960s-1970s. In the 1970s, the property was purchased by Shirley Oakes-Butler and leased to the operators of Green Shutters, a restaurant and pub. In 1999, Michael Fowler and Sophie Wong restored the property.<sup>50</sup> Green Shutters closed in the early 2000s.

The property is currently owned by Mr. Peter Pawar, who operates the establishment as Taj Mahal, an authentic Indian restaurant. He purchased the building through Morely Realty and opened the Taj Mahal in 2006. According to Mr. Pawar, the front door is the original door from the former prison at the now Nassau Public Library.



Taj Mahal building (2021).

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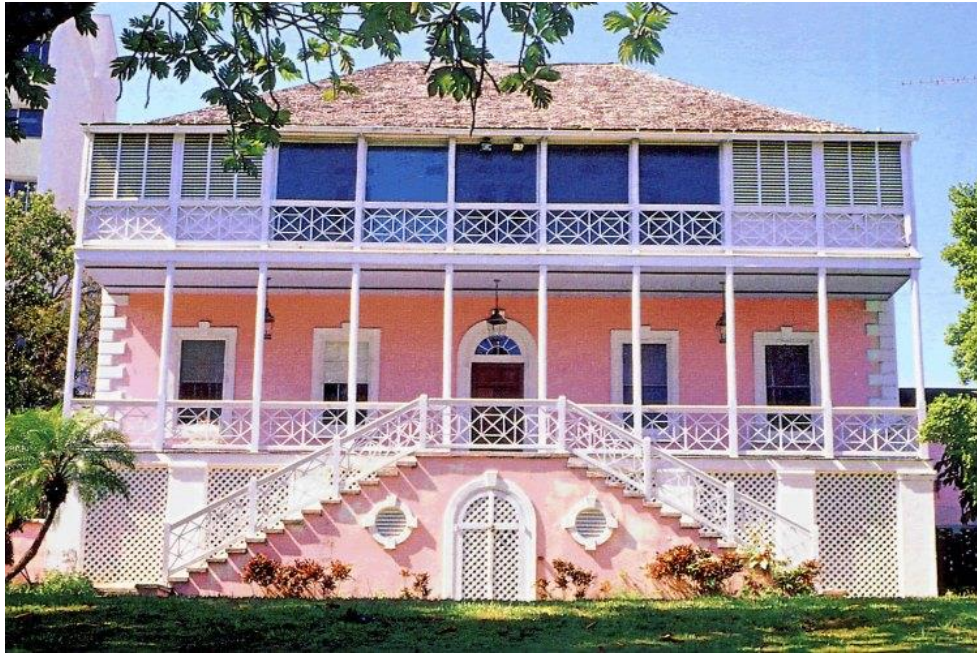
<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Gail Saunders and Linda M. Huber, *Nassau’s Historic Landmarks*, 51.



Taj Mahal building (2021).

## Jacaranda House



Jacaranda House (jacarandahousenassau.com, 2011)

Jacaranda is the name given to the house located at the northwest corner of Parliament and East Hill Streets. It is bounded by Charlotte Street to the west. The home was constructed in the 1840s as Anderson House and was home to Chief Justice Sir George Anderson. Anderson purchased ballast stones from the Nassau docks for its construction. The house has since been enlarged and remodeled.

Ownership of the house was passed from the Anderson family to the Williams family, to the Miller family around 1900. Ownership returned to the Anderson family in 1944 when it was purchased by Sidney Farrington, who was the great nephew of Sir George Anderson. Captain Vyvian Drury, who came to The Bahamas as an aid-de-camp to the Duke of Windsor during World War II, later purchased the house and began renovations. The renovations included replacing the old kitchens with a dining room and new wing.<sup>51</sup>

In 1949, the house was purchased by Lady Eunice Oakes, widow of the late Sir Harry Oakes. Ownership then passed to her daughter, Shirley Oakes Butler in the 1960s, then in 1986 to Nancy Oakes von Hoyningen Huene, Shirley's elder sister. At this time the house was maintained by a housekeeper, Mme Legros, as Nancy never lived at the residence. After Nancy's death in 2005, the property passed to her daughter Patricia Oakes Leigh-Wood and niece Virginia Oakes McKinney. It is held by their holding company, Greshanda Properties Limited.

In 1965, the guest house and pool were added. The guest house was built to resemble the old kitchen and modelled after the kitchen house at the East Hill Club.

Names of the house have included Anderson House, Everton House, Jacaranda and "the old Miller place."

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<sup>51</sup> Moseley Moss, Valeria. *Reminiscing: Memories of Old Nassau*, 1999, 11.

## Nassau Public Library/Old Gaol



The Nassau Public Library and Museum (2020).

The Nassau Public Library and Museum is a three-story, stone octagonal building, painted pink, located on Shirley Street directly opposite the site of the Royal Victoria Hotel. The building was previously a prison constructed between 1797 and 1799 by Loyalist Joseph Eve. The octagonal design was believed to better withstand harsh weather and promote air flow. The first and second floors open into vaulted areas. The vaulted spaces, originally prison cells, now house books and serve as reading nooks. The third floor is encompassed by an open gallery. From the third-floor gallery, a bell was rung to call members of the House of Assembly to meetings.

The library was previously located in a reading room on the second floor of the Eastern Public Buildings on Rawson Square, in what is known today as the House of Assembly.<sup>52</sup> In 1847, the Nassau Library Act was passed, establishing the Bahama Public Library and Museum.<sup>53</sup> The library outgrew the reading room in the Eastern Public Buildings and was relocated across the square to the renovated old gaol in 1873.<sup>54</sup> An 1874 amendment to the Nassau Library Act changed the name to the Nassau Public Library, Reading Room and Museum.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ballance, “A new look at old books,” 32.

<sup>53</sup> The Statute Law of the Bahamas (1901), 73.

<sup>54</sup> Ballance, “A new look at old books,” 34.

<sup>55</sup> The Statute Law of the Bahamas (1901), 75.

## Zion Baptist Church Building



Zion Baptist Church building (2020).

Zion Baptist Church, located on East and Shirley Streets, was constructed in April 1835 by Baptist missionary Joseph Burton from London in association with the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS). Joseph Burton and his wife had arrived in Nassau on January 29, 1833. Burton wanted to build a church in the city as opposed to elsewhere on New Providence, “perhaps to attract whites”.<sup>56</sup> He therefore purchased the property at the corner of East and Shirley Streets on behalf of the Baptist Missionary Society on April 22, 1835 from Mr. Robert Bell, who owned a shop on the site. The chapel was built by Joseph Burton along with several dissident members of Bethel Baptist Church and British settlers of the colony. Zion Baptist Church was opened on August 28, 1835. The BMS considered members of Bethel Baptist Church and Zion Baptist Church to constitute one church and therefore referred to Zion as “the new chapel” and Bethel as “the old chapel.”

Between 1860 and 1865, Baptist missionary John Davey established a library at Zion and transformed Zion’s chapel from a barn-like structure to an attractive building with a columned portico at the front and remodeled the interior with galleries on three sides. The galleries held 300 people, making the total capacity 800. The church reopened on August 27, 1865.

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<sup>56</sup> Michael C. Symonette and Antonina Canzoneri, *Baptists in the Bahamas: An Historical Review* (Texas: Baptist Spanish Publishing House, 1977), 13.

The hurricane of October 1, 1866 destroyed the porticos on the front of Zion's chapel and the mission house was unroofed.<sup>57</sup> The outside of the chapel and boundary walls were renovated in 1903 by male members of the church. The building was damaged by hurricane again in 1929 and subsequently rebuilt under the leadership of Rev. Sands.

Rev. Sands' successor, Rev. Charles Smith, greatly expanded the church building.<sup>58</sup> On the west side, he added a new office and reception area. Above the new office and reception space was the addition of classrooms and a conference room. Zion had a basement which it had previously used to house visiting ministers, however, this use of the basement was made unnecessary after the construction of private rooms and bathrooms upstairs. A downstairs extension was built adjoining the existing schoolroom and included a kitchen, the office, reception, and male and female bathrooms. The schoolroom would also be used as a dining area. Also, on the west side, Rev. Smith added a tower and stairwell which connected to a new balcony. The "outside toilet" was replaced with indoor restroom facilities.

Further renovations under the leadership of Rev. Charles Smith included the building of porches at the northern and eastern entrances of the church, fully air-conditioning the building, the installation of a baptismal pool above the choir section and the installation of a personally designed large stained-glass mural on accordion-style sliding doors in the area of the pulpit. The baptismal pool has since been closed as it was determined to be more cost-effective to use local beaches for baptisms.

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>58</sup> C. Jacqueline Smith, *Charles C. Smith II: Life & Legacy*. (Nassau: I-EASE Publishack, 2016), 169.

## Magna Carta Court Building



View of south and eastern sides of Magna Carta building (2020).



View of Magna Carta building from Parliament Street (2020).



Rear view of Magna Carta Court building from Shirley Street showing the old outhouse building at the northwest corner (2020).

The building known as Magna Carta Court is located at the north west corner of Shirley and Parliament Streets. The building dates to the 1780s and is constructed of cut quarry stone and wood. It is outstanding as it is one of the few exposed-stone buildings in Nassau. The street facades are not decorated, the roof is a simple hip, and the windows have flat arches over them with hinged colonial-style shutters at their sides. The shutters are painted bright red and provide an artful contrast to the uncolored stone building. A wall of wood louvers is located at the rear of the building rather than the street side, in reverse to the typical arrangement.

In 1789, the property was granted to Robert Duncome, a Loyalist and merchant. The lot measured 102 feet at the north, 550 feet at the east, 539 feet on the west and was bounded by Shirley Street at the south.<sup>59</sup> On February 26, 1802, Robert Duncome sold the southern portion of the property to David Rogers, a cabinet maker for £460. The property is thereafter described as being part of lot number 57 – bounded on the south by Shirley Street 80 feet, on the east by Parliament Street 60 feet, on the north by James Wood 84 feet and on the west by Timothy Cox 60 feet.<sup>60</sup>

On November 7, 1802, David and his wife Elizabeth Rogers sold the property to Aaron Dixon for £1000.<sup>61</sup> Dixon had come to The Bahamas from Scotland and established a business on Shirley Street. Dixon died on December 3, 1809 and bequeathed the lot to Christ Church. In his will, he stipulated that the lot “with all the buildings thereon” be rented and that any profit after maintenance is paid be applied to the education of fatherless children. It is possible that one or more of the Magna Carta buildings were constructed in 1802 as the will of Aaron Dixon indicates that there were buildings on the property.

The property remained in the possession of the vestrymen of Christ church from 1809 to 1859, when a special act of the legislature was passed to permit the sale of the property by public auction.<sup>62</sup> Vestry of Christ Church auctioned the Magna Carta property at the Vendue House on March 12,

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<sup>59</sup> Crown Grant (Book A), 192. Also provided in notes by E. Dawson Roberts as the original crown grant can no longer be located at the Lands and Surveys office.

<sup>60</sup> “Lease and Release”, Registry of Records (Book M. 2), 271-276.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, (Book O. 2), 30-37.

<sup>62</sup> 22 Victoria Chapter 14.



1860 and it was sold to Sarah Elizabeth Sears Alday, who is described as a widow.<sup>63</sup> The purchase price was £592.<sup>64</sup> When Alday died intestate in 1885, the property went to her six daughters. In 1895, Alday's daughter, Maria, who was married to Ernest Kingsbury Moore but was then a widow, purchased the interest of her five sisters for £500.<sup>65</sup> Maria Moore operated a commercial bakery on the premises. The bakery shop was located on the ground floor on the southern end of the building. An old oven remains preserved on the property.

On November 7, 1931, Maria Moore conveyed the property by deed of gift to her son, Walter Kingsbury Moore (later Sir Walter) in trust. The property was occupied by Maria Moore's two daughters who were unmarried – Hattie Julia Elizabeth Moore and Olive Rhoda Moore until the latter of them died in 1975. The property was then rented as an antique shop for a few years.

On May 21, 1979, Sir Walter's children, Walter Kingsbury Moore, Junior through his company Kingsbury Securities Limited and Winnifred Maude Sands (nee Moore) sold the property to Splendid Investments Limited.<sup>66</sup> It was then transferred to Star Corners Limited and prominent Bahamian lawyer, E. Dawson Roberts, in 1982.<sup>67</sup> E. Dawson Roberts renovated and restored the building. He removed the plaster from the exterior surfaces of the building to expose the cut quarry stones for decorative effect. The interior was also renovated, and the roof replaced. The building was repointed in 2017. It was Roberts who named the buildings "Magna Carta Court." Today, the buildings house the firm of E. Dawson Roberts and Company.



Magna Carta Court building prior to removal of plaster, circa 1979. Photo courtesy of Lori Lowe.

<sup>63</sup> Russell, *Nassau's Historic Buildings*, 29.

<sup>64</sup> Conveyance, Registry of Records (Book Z. 4), 143-146.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, (Book P. 10), 360-393.

<sup>66</sup> Ernest Moore had previously sold his one-third share to his brother Walter K. Moore, Jr.

<sup>67</sup> "Lawyer E. Dawson Roberts Dies Age 85," *Tribune* (Nassau, N.P.), April 1, 2012.



Magna Carta building during renovations, circa 1980. Photo courtesy of Lori Lowe.



Magna Carta building during renovations, circa 1980. Photo courtesy of Lori Lowe.



Remains of an oven within the Magna Carta building (2020).

## Bahamas Mortgage Corporation Building (Former Ministry of Foreign Affairs Building Former East Hill Club)



Former East Hill Club. Presently the Bahamas Mortgage Company (2021).

The East Hill Club/former Ministry of Foreign Affairs building, located on the south side of East Hill Street, was built between 1840 and 1860. The original deed of sale for the property is dated May 21, 1840 between Henry Adderley and John Campbell Lees.<sup>68</sup> It is believed that the property was developed by Welshman, Thomas Matthews, a lawyer and colonial police magistrate during the 1860s.<sup>69</sup> The property was five and a half acres and stretched from East Hill Street south to Lewis Street. The house, originally constructed of cut limestone, was built in Georgian Colonial style following a central hall plan where a drawing room and library opened off with verandas on both sides.<sup>70</sup> The original kitchen had two fireplaces and chimneys and was later turned into a bar. The home was formerly the winter residence of Lord Beaverbrook and it was called Aitken House.<sup>71</sup> The home was then owned by Welsh newspaper proprietor, James Gomer Berry (Lord Kimsley). It was purchased from Lord Kimsley by American businessman S.K. Wellman of Cleveland in 1960 when it was converted into the exclusive East Hill Club. It became a place where high-level financial executives and other professionals would meet and have lunch in the quiet, attractive surroundings.

In 1966, the annual meeting of Deltec Panamerica, S.A. was held at the East Hill Club. This was a multinational meeting of a highly influential conglomerate of companies that specialized in financing private enterprise in Latin America.<sup>72</sup> One of the largest groups at East Hill was composed of officials of major American banks that were prospective shareholders in Deltec. They included the First National Bank of Chicago, the Manufacturers National Bank of Detroit, the Philadelphia National Bank, and the State Street Bank and Trust in Boston. The property is now the proposed site of the Bahamas Mortgage Corporation's head office.

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<sup>68</sup> "A Selection of Historic Buildings of The Bahamas," Booklet by the Public Records Office February 17-25, 1975.

<sup>69</sup> "Opening of Bahamas Mortgage Corporation Headquarters," *Office of the Prime Minister* (2020).

<sup>70</sup> "A Selection of Historic Buildings of The Bahamas," Booklet by the Public Records Office February 17-25, 1975.

<sup>71</sup> United States Congressional Serial Set, (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1967), no. 12750-12751: 420.

<sup>72</sup> Congressional Record, United States Congress, (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1968), Vol. 114 part 6: 7243.

The property was purchased in the 1980s by Carlton Williams, restored and renovated. It was later purchased by the Bahamas Government and used to house the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 1987 until 2010. The property was transferred to the Bahamas Mortgage Corporation by an Act of Parliament in 2016. The building was renovated and extended between 2017 and 2020. Renovations included the addition of handicap accessibility. The building is presently four floors with an area of 18,600 square feet.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> “Opening of Bahamas Mortgage Corporation Headquarters,” *Office of the Prime Minister* (2020).

## General Post Office



General Post Office building on East Hill Street (2018). Photo by The Tribune.

The General Post Office, located on East Hill Street, was constructed in 1970 at a cost of \$3 million.<sup>74</sup> The building was designed by Milton Weis and Associates of Nassau. The post office was designed for 4,000 postal boxes with allowances for expansion to 7,500. There would be a moving conveyor belt to take mail and packages to sorting rooms and generous parking.



Post Office building during demolition (2021). View looking east from East Hill Street.

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<sup>74</sup> *The Bahamian Review*, vol. 11 & 12 (1969-1970), 13.



Post Office building during demolition (2021). View looking west from East Hill Street.



Post Office building during demolition (2021). View from Parliament Street.

## Ansbacher Building



Ansbacher House building (2021). View from Bank Lane.

The Ansbacher House building is located between East Street and Bank Lane, fronting the Public Square. The building was originally the Bahamas International Trust Company (BITCO) building, which was built between 1961 and 1962, and opened on April 10, 1962. BITCO had been established in Nassau in January 1957. In five years, the company had grown from a small staff of two to a large organization with over 30 staff members.

At the opening of the BITCO building, Chairman of BITCO, Mr. P. L. A. Folliss, referred to the building as “a symbol of international co-operation and confidence in the Bahamas, and an example of the Government’s urging for all to live and work together.”<sup>75</sup> The building was designed to be compatible with the surrounding architecture. At the opening, Governor Sir Robert Stapledon remarked that “it behooved all who replaced old buildings to be sure that the new ones fitted in with, and complemented the charm and character of their surroundings.”<sup>76</sup> The Governor felt this had been accomplished with the BITCO building. He also commended the company for incorporating a basement parking garage as parking was a major issue in the area.

The building was designed by J. Raymond La Thonus of Palm Beach and constructed in 13 months by Henry C. Beck Ltd. at a cost of half a million pounds. The building was constructed with the steel frame and reinforced concrete. It was one of the first buildings to be built with a steel frame and to have a basement. It was built at four-stories with a basement car park accessible from East Street. The underground garage had capacity for 30 vehicles. The architectural style of the building

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<sup>75</sup> “Governor Opens BITCO Building,” *The Nassau Guardian*, April 11, 1962, 1.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.



represented the Georgian colonial period. The exterior of the building was painted “Lyford Cay” pink. The interior walls were a pale green-blue shade, and the columns were in terracotta. Features of the building included:

- Blue-green tinted Sun Ray glass in all of the casement windows, which filters out 40% of the sun’s rays.
- Large doors and casement windows made of Honduran Mahogany manufactured in Miami.
- Solid brass hardware used in the Trust Company section on the ground floor.
- Mahogany furniture with panel work made by three local companies – Charles Carey & Son, Designs Unlimited and Mosko Company.
- Vinyl tile called Corlon on the floor.
- Mansard roof raised a few feet to conceal cupolas associated with the air conditioning and elevator.
- Studio offices, with battered ceilings and dormer windows on the fourth floor.
- Ceilings with interlocking acoustical tiles.
- Two Otis elevators.
- A 15’x23’ vault spanning two floors and containing a spiral staircase and gallery.<sup>77</sup> It was encased in reinforced concrete 23 inches thick, capable of withstanding up to 5,000 lbs. of pressure to the square inch.
- A colonnaded East Street entrance.
- Modern central air conditioning units on each floor.
- Elevators and restrooms in the middle of the building so that the windows provide maximum light all around.
- An emergency diesel-run generator.

Prior to the BITCO building, the site was home to the Mosely family for 60 years. The Mosely home was known as Eastbourne House and built over 100 years prior.<sup>78</sup> The property had been purchased by Edwin Mosely, founder of the Nassau Guardian, in 1847 at a cost of £104-3-4. The home was purchased in early 1960 by the Bahamas International Trust Company. The building was taken down in August 1960 and construction for the BITCO building began in March 1961.

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<sup>77</sup> *The Nassau Guardian* cites the vault size as 15’x23’. *The Nassau Daily Tribune* cites the vault size at 15’x20’.

<sup>78</sup> “Half Million BITCO Building Opens Today at 4:30 p.m.,” *The Nassau Guardian*, Section B, April 10, 1962, 2



Ansbacher House building (2021). View from East Street.



Ansbacher House door facing East Street (2021).

# The Nassau Guardian

SECTION B

NASSAU, BAHAMAS, TUESDAY, APRIL 10, 1962

8 PAGES

## HALF MILLION BITCO BUILDING OPENS TODAY AT 4:30 P.M.



EAST STREET ENTRANCE to the new BITCO Building, and the entrance to the basement parking garage on the extreme right.

—(Photos in this Supplement by Jarvis Darville, Jarvis Studios)

### GOVERNOR WILL PERFORM OPENING CEREMONY

By Guardian Staff Reporter

**T**HIS afternoon at 4:30 o'clock the half million pound BITCO Building, latest addition to Nassau's rapidly expanding array of architectural show pieces, will be officially opened by His Excellency the Governor, Sir Robert Stapledon, K.C.M.G., C.B.E.

Designed by J. Raymond La Thomas of Palm Beach, and the result of a year's construction activity on the part of the prime contractors, Henry C. Beck Ltd., the handsome office block, fronting the Public Square, has a number of unique (for Nassau) features. Least obvious, but by no means least in importance is the

basement car park with accommodation for 30 vehicles. This feature should do much to relieve any congestion in nearby narrow roadways which might come about if tenants had to find parking elsewhere, said Mr. La Thomas.

#### FORESIGHT

The parking facilities are in fact merely an indication of the foresight and care taken in erecting the four-storey building and the consideration exercised on behalf of those who will be using the building.

The sun's glare will beat in vain on the blue-green tinted Sun Ray glass in all the casement windows. This glass, not a common feature

even in the United States due to its expense, filters out nearly 40 per cent of the sun's heat rays, as well as presenting a rather attractive appearance.

The style of the building, resembling that of the Georgian Colonial period, is further enhanced by the massive doors of Honduran Mahogany, which themselves provide an ideal expanse of beautifully grained wood for setting off to perfection the solid brass hardware, which has been lavishly used in the Trust Company section on the ground floor.

#### MANSARD ROOF

Attention to appearances has even been carried as far as the aesthetically pleasing

mansard roof which was raised a number of feet to conceal cupolas associated with the air conditioning system and the elevator over-travel.

Fortunately in this last respect there was less to conceal than there could have been, since the elevator machinery is located in the basement rather than in the more common location on the roof.

It was suggested by Mr. La Thomas that the fourth floor of the building with its mansard roof, battered ceilings and dormer windows would be ideal for studio-type professional offices.

#### STEEL FRAME

Least any of the foregoing suggests that the building is all

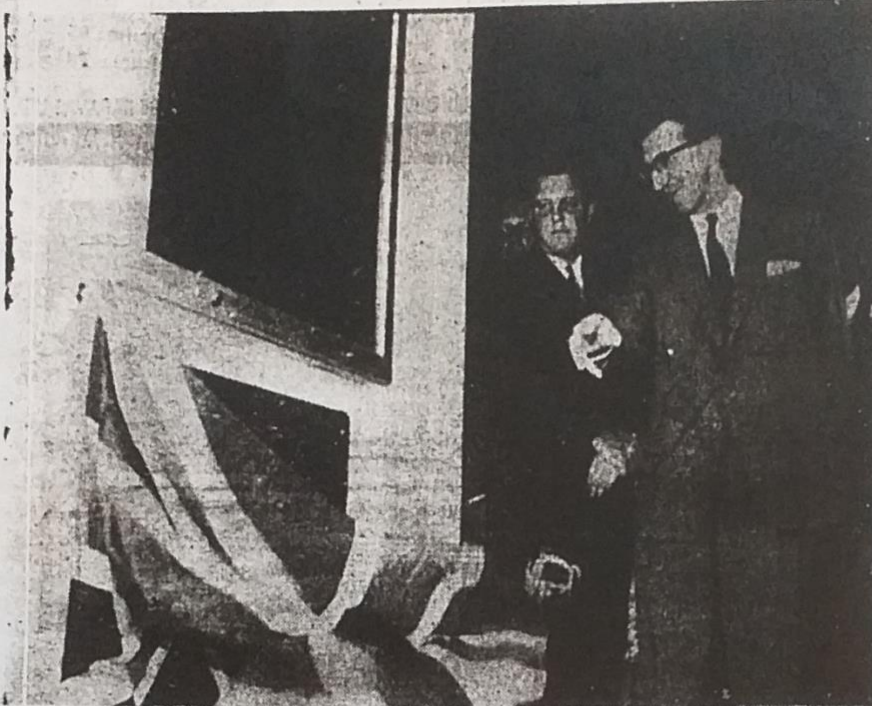
finishing touches, it might be well to mention that its basic construction has been of the steel frame, reinforced concrete method.

An indication of its inherent strength can be gained from the specifications of the vault, an important point where financial institutions are concerned.

The vault, 15 feet by 23, and high enough to contain a circular staircase and a gallery is encased in concrete capable of withstanding pressures up to 5,000 lbs. to the square inch.

The BITCO Building stands on the site of Eastbourne House, home of the Moseley family for 60 years, which was purchased by Edward Moseley in 1847 for £104-3-4.

The Nassau Guardian, April 10, 1962.



**HIS EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR, Sir Robert Stapledon, releasing the Union Jack, which veiled the commemorative plaque in the entrance to the new BITCO Building.**



**MR. P. L. A. FOLLISS, Chairman of Bahamas International Trust Company delivering his welcoming address to His Excellency the Governor, and Lady Stapledon. To the immediate left of the microphone is the architect of the building, Mr. Raymond La Thomas.**  
 —(Photos by Jarvis Studios)

## CHANGE LAW J

Mr. Selwyn Lloyd, Ch told the House of Common speech on Monday that he p property abroad within the Duty.

## GOVERNOR OPENS BITCO BUILDING

By Guardian Staff Reporter

The Bitco Building was opened yesterday afternoon by His Excellency the Governor, Sir Robert Stapledon, K.C.M.G., C.B.E.

His Excellency was introduced to visitors thronging Bank Lane by Mr. P. L. A. Folliss, Chairman of Bahamas International Trust Company, who expressed his grateful thanks for His Excellency's presence.

The half million pound building was, he said, a symbol of international co-operation and confidence in the Bahamas, and an example of the Government's urging for all to live and work together.

Particular praise was given to the Planning Committee which had helped in every way and was the chief instrument of the Government's interest in the project.

The building, continued Mr. Folliss, was, he felt, the outstanding achievement of architect Raymond La Thomas. This was supported by Beck's, the prime contractors, who had stated that it is one of the finest buildings they have ever worked on.

Mr. Folliss' final accolade was reserved "for the workers, the Bahamian workers" ..... "to whom he wished to convey

(Continued on Page 11)

The Nassau Guardian, April 11, 1962

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