

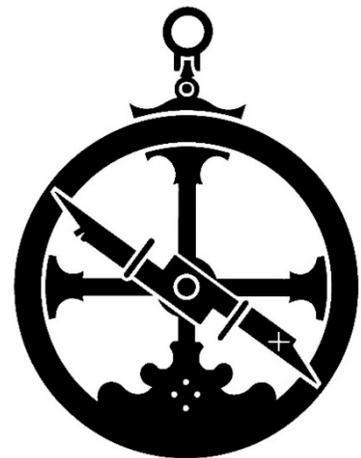
# The Turks and Caicos Islands: The Beginning of a New Era

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The Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI) has a very fascinating history. The islands were believed to be first settled by the Amerindians who were later disposed of by the Spaniards. Following this, several nations controlled the islands with no official settlement taking place. For a number of years, the TCI served as a popular hide out spot for pirates. The islands witnessed their first permanent settlement (after the Amerindians) by the Bermudians who came to harvest salt. This is believed to have taken place in either 1678 or 1681. Between 1765 – 1783, the islands were occupied by the French. After the American Revolution (1775 -1783), many Loyalists settled various islands in the Caicos chain. In 1799, the British annexed the islands as part of the Bahamas. This lasted until 1848 when the islands were administered by the Presidency. During the period of the Presidency (1848 – 1874), there were four British appointed Presidents. Following allegations of corruption and mal-administration, the British placed the islands under Jamaica in 1874. This lasted until August 1962 when Jamaica gained their independence from Britain.

By being administered by various countries, the TCI was denied adequate political growth and constitutional advancement as decisions were always in the hands of an external power with the local population as onlookers.

While the TCI was associated with Jamaica, there was an attempt by the British West Indies to move towards the Federation of the West Indies. The Federation spanned all the island groups (both the Greater Antilles and the Lesser Antilles). Since the TCI was associated with Jamaica at the time and Jamaica was one of the key players in

the Federation movement, the political status of the TCI was critical as it came up for discussion during that time.

The West Indian Federation was however a short-lived initiative (3<sup>rd</sup> January 1958 – 31<sup>st</sup> May, 1962). The expressed intention of the Federation was to create a political unit that would become independent from Britain as a single state. Before it could happen, it collapsed due to internal political conflicts. The politics of the embryonic federation were wrecked by struggles between the federal government and the provincial government and between the two large provinces (Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago) and the smaller provinces. Another problem was that the federation had a weak federal structure. The budget that was allocated was also inadequate to meet the demands of the territories. Hence, the federation collapsed and the independence movement commenced in August 1962 with Jamaica followed by Trinidad & Tobago and other countries in the British West Indies, following at different intervals.

Following Jamaica's decision to go independent, the TCI also faced the decision whether to remain with Jamaica or sever ties. The TCI chose the latter. The leaders at the time voted against remaining a colony of Jamaica. On 4<sup>th</sup> July, 1959, the islands became a separate colony assuming full Crown Colony status with Britain. An Order in Council was made giving the TCI its own constitution appropriate to its status. This was done under the provisions of the West Indies Act 1962. This Act enabled:

- Provisions to be made to cease the inclusion of colonies in the federation established under the

British Caribbean Federation Act 1956 and for the dissolution of that Federation and of matters consequential on the happening of either of those events.

- Provisions for common Courts and other authorities to be established.
- Provision for new forms of government for combinations of such colonies.

This decision also led to some concern being expressed by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Anthony Greenwood. He argued that there was an error in the Order (as well as a similar order for the Cayman Islands) as it was not laid before both Houses of Parliament as was required. Despite this delay tactic, the orders came into effect in 1962.

Another major development took place with the implementation of the 1959 Constitution (the first of its kind in TCI political history). This Constitution was published on 13<sup>th</sup> May, 1959 and came into effect on 4<sup>th</sup> July, 1959. Prior to this, politicians were appointed, not elected. This Constitution opened the door for the election at the polls by secret ballot. The new Constitution also gave rise to universal adult suffrage. For the first time, residents could now elect persons to government who they see fit to represent them. It also gave local elected officials the opportunity to chart a course for the TCI based on the needs of the TCI, unlike what was done in the past when all decisions were made externally. The Constitution also marked the end of Jamaica's administration of the TCI. It also severed the formal link with the government of Jamaica.

A third major development gave rise to the creation of an Executive Council and Legislative Assembly with an Administrator as President. These bodies were responsible for giving advice to the British appointed Administrator.

The Constitution provided for the TCI to be administered by the British Secretary of State for the Colonies through the Administrator who resided in Grand Turk. The first Administrator was Mr. Geoffrey C. Guy CMG, CVO, OBE. He served from 1959 – 1965.

The Executive Council had to be consulted on all important matters. It consisted of five members, two chosen from the elected body of the Legislative Assembly, two official members and one appointed by the Administrator. The Legislative Council was made up of nine elected members from throughout the islands. Members were elected on 21<sup>st</sup> September, 1959. According to Hon. Gustarvus Lightbourne, the life of the Legislative Board was extended for three months to facilitate the writing of the Constitution. By the end of 1962, the Legislative Board comprised of the following members:

**Official Members:**

G.C. Guy MBE, (Administrator/President)

E.T. Wood ISO (Treasurer)

E.B Johnson (Magistrate)

**The nominated members were:**

G.E.M. Ewing – Cockburn Harbour

J. N. Morgan – Salt Cay

R.N.F. Glennie RN (retired) – Grand Turk

## **Elected Members**

R.E. Basden – Grand Turk

L.H. Francis – Grand Turk

A. Smith – Salt Cay

W.H. Mills – Cockburn Harbour

Emmanuel C. Hall- Middle Caicos

Paul S. Higgs – Bottle Creek

James S. Walkin – Bottle Creek

Harry Musgrove – Kew

Gustarvus O. Lightbourne – Providenciales  
(Colonial Reports, 1963)

The above listed individuals were the architects along with others of the new constitution. As new comers to this new political process, it was a challenging situation for them. They had already voted to end the political relationship with Jamaica. Now it was time for the TCI colloquially “to paddle their own canoe”. In the words of Daniel Malcolm (Sr), this was the beginning of a new era in politics in the TCI. He also described this period as being volatile as within the first few years, several amendments were made to the constitution twice in 1967 and once in 1968 and 1969 respectively. They were attempting to get it right. It was a period of trial and error. Despite this, they did not give up. These men were determined, dedicated and committed to seeing the TCI charting its own course – being the architects of creating a new TCI – a TCI where Turks Islanders were first and the architects of their own destiny. Despite their trials, despite the challenges that they faced, they did not give up on trying to find political and

constitutional balance. They were desirous of developing their constitutional wings to take flight – flight from the dominance of the takeover by another Regional Administration. It was Turks’ time.

Despite many of the elected members not having any formal education, they knew where they wanted the TCI to go. Their persistence to sever political ties with Jamaica led to a visit to the TCI by the Governor of Jamaica, Sir Kenneth Blackburne on 23<sup>rd</sup> May, 1962 to meet with members of Government. This was a five day visit. During their meeting, members reiterated and re-affirmed their desire to remain under British Administration as a colony after Jamaica’s independence. An agreement was then reached on the nullification of the country’s ties when Jamaica becomes independent and their government would cease to have jurisdiction over the TCI.

Also discussed was the setting up of a Public Service Commission and Ministerial Government. The latter became a feature of the 1976 Constitution. At the meeting with the Governor of Jamaica, they also expressed appreciation to the Governor of Jamaica for the assistance that Jamaica had given to the TCI over the years. These included medical and educational opportunities that Jamaica assisted with. Several locals benefitted from studies in Jamaica at the popular Teacher Training Institutions, Mico Teachers College (now Mico University College) and Shortwood Teachers’ College. Agreement was also reached where the Jamaican Government would assist the islands with the repayment of the loan. They also agreed that Jamaica would provide technical assistance to the islands. Furthermore, agreement was also

reached on the amendments to be made to the Constitution of the TCI upon Jamaica's independence.

The TCI's geographical scattered nature presented challenges to the new administration. To effectively address this issue, the Administrator in 1966 appointed a District Commissioner who resided in South Caicos. He also had responsibilities for the day-to-day administration of the Caicos Islands. The Administrator also appointed two Government Officers, one for Salt Cay and the other for South Caicos. Both islands were ports of entry so it was necessary to have someone on the ground to ensure customs, postal and other government related services were adequately addressed.

To further assist with the administration, the Administrator set up District Boards in the Caicos Islands. The Boards comprised of eight members and usually included the local representative, a police officer, a school teacher and the District Constable. He also provided funding to enable them to carry out their functions. The Administrator usually made about three visits annually to the islands

while the District Commissioner was required to make monthly visits.

Although the TCI currently has an established Public Service Commission and Ministerial Government, the aforementioned elected individuals have not been given much credit for their stellar initiatives in laying the foundation, despite these instruments not being formalized in their time. One can assume that these leaders followed political events in the region and in particular Jamaica where these instruments were already in place. It is evident that they were not only aware of them but saw how beneficial these instruments could be to the TCI. They must be commended and publicly rewarded for their vision.

Under the leadership of the nominated and elected individuals, the TCI took on the image of a family – it was the beginning of a movement to dispense with the divisive Turks and 'Caucus' mind-set that existed for years. It was a move to instil the concept of country, encouraging Turks & Caicos Islanders to see themselves as one people, with one goal, striving for one destiny.

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