



Forgotten Dreams

A People's Desire to Chart Their
Own Course on Abaco, Bahamas

By Rick Lowe
Edited by Larry Smith



A Nassau Institute Publication

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in Abaco, Bahamas

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2010

Cover image: Proposed flag for the Commonwealth of Abaco

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Foreword

This brief essay was originally published in two parts in The Tribune and on the Nassau Institute website.

The story begins with the factual accounts available through the local press, the Internet and personal stories of some of the participants as published in books and journals. It closes with a discussion of what might have been had the people of Abaco won the right to pursue their dreams.

I'm grateful to Eileen Carron, publisher and Paco Nunez, news editor, of The Tribune for giving this essay more exposure than I imagined was possible.

I must also thank Norwel Gordon for the use of his archives, Richard King for his extensive help with documentation of some of the missing pieces of data, and Adrian Day and Chester Thompson for their invaluable insights.

Larry Smith deserves lots of credit for his expert editing and guidance.

Finally, I owe a debt of gratitude to the people of Abaco for their foresight. Had more Bahamians considered the important ideas they proffered I am confident our country would be a much better place today.

As Nobel Laureate Friedrich Hayek noted in his *Studies in Philosophy, Politics and Economics*:

“...Unless we can make the philosophic foundations of a free society once more a living intellectual issue, and its implementation a task which challenges the ingenuity and imagination of our liveliest minds, the prospects of freedom are indeed dark. But if we can regain that belief in power of ideas which was the mark of liberalism at its best, the battle is not lost.”

I believe the people of Abaco understood this.

Introduction

The island of Abaco in The Bahamas was settled by British loyalists and enslaved Africans in the years following the American War of Independence. In the second half of the 20th century, many of their descendants sought to keep Abaco British as The Bahamas pushed for its own independence.

From the beginning of the loyalist influx, the Bahamian population had been mostly black, although economic and political power rested with the minority of English and American whites. After the British abolished slavery in 1834, the African population made gradual progress towards full citizenship.

Political parties did not appear until well after the Second World War. The predominantly black Progressive Liberal Party (PLP) was formed in 1953, and this led to the formation of the United Bahamian Party (UBP) by the mostly white governing class five years later.

The PLP came to power in an historic, non-violent election in 1967 (dubbed the Quiet Revolution) and the expectation was that the new government, led by a young black lawyer named Lynden Pindling, would seek independence from Britain. This was opposed by many Bahamians at the time and Abaconians, in particular, made it known they would launch their own “quiet revolution” in response.

At the time, a clear majority of both black and white Abaconians wanted their island to remain British - as the Turks and Caicos, the Cayman Islands, Anguilla and other bits and pieces of the old British Empire would be able to do. This desire would find expression through several different political movements - each more determined than the other - before finally collapsing in the mid-1970s.

The Greater Abaco Council

In June 1971 Prime Minister Lynden Pindling formally announced his government's independence agenda. By this time, the UBP had disbanded and many of its members had joined with a breakaway faction of the PLP to form a new opposition party - the Free National Movement. The FNM was opposed to early independence for The Bahamas.

On Abaco, a number of community leaders - including former parliamentarians Leonard Thompson and Sherwin Archer, and leading businessmen like Lucien Stratton - formed the Greater Abaco Council to lobby for continued British rule. The GAC drew black and white supporters from Crown Haven in the north to Sandy Point in the south.

The more prominent supporters included Jeremiah Russell and Kenneth Major (Cooper's Town); Cecil Mills (Murphy



Members of the Greater Abaco Council. Photo courtesy of the Tribune

Town); Walter Lightbourne, Blach Dames and Rev. Samuel Sands (Sandy Point); Ulrick Bethel (Guana Cay); Roy Russell (Cherokee Sound); Chester Thompson and Willie Russell (Hope Town); John Ward (Dundas Town); Roswell Sawyer (Green Turtle Cay); Floyd Thompson (Fox Town); Lucien Stratton and Ivan Russell (Marsh Harbour); Whitfield Russell (Crown Haven); William Albury (Man-O-War Cay); Hayward Russell (Crossing Rocks); James Cooper (Grand Cay) and James Williams (Moore's Island).

In July 1971 they submitted a petition to the Queen via the British governor - Sir Francis Cumming-Bruce - in Nassau, seeking to have Abaco remain under "the British Crown and jurisdiction" and asking the monarch to "protect the rights of the loyal British residents".

The petition claimed to have the signatures of two thirds of Abaco voters ((in 1970 there were about 6,500 people living on Abaco and 2,350 registered voters). It envisioned a "completely self-contained and fully self-supporting" territory that would be available as "a base for operations of Your Majesty's armed forces and forces of other nations friendly to Your Majesty, should the necessity ever arise."

The petition was forwarded by the governor to Sir Alec Douglas-Home, then Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs. The governor also informed the government in Nassau.

Bahamas Independence - All or Nothing

Although it was seeking independence from Britain, the Bahamas government wasn't about to contemplate an independent Abaco. Addressing a political rally in Nassau on July 9 1971, Prime Minister Pindling had this to say about the GAC and its petition:

“The rest of us, who have been taking things for granted, now realise that the unity of the Bahamas could be threatened.”

In early August the British informed the GAC that their petition would be considered only “at the request of the Bahamas government”. Pindling then declared that he would seek a mandate for immediate independence in a general election scheduled for September 1972.

The result of that election was decisive. With a turnout of 86 per cent, the PLP won 60 per cent of the overall vote and 28 seats in parliament, while the FNM won only nine seats. But there was a mixed result on Abaco. The PLP won the North Abaco constituency by a razor-thin margin, while the FNM held onto the South Abaco seat by a wide margin.

As *Tribune* Publisher Sir Etienne Dupuch noted in an editorial, “a majority of the votes polled in the September 1972 election (in Abaco) were cast for candidates who were opposed to independence for The Bahamas. These people wanted to retain their link with the Union Jack.”

Nevertheless, the government considered the election a successful referendum and published an Independence White Paper in October, setting out policy details. All-party talks took place in London that December to draft a new constitution.

Abaco Insists on Being Heard

The government in Nassau viewed the Greater Abaco Council as a fringe group, inferring that the minority white population was up to no good. Meanwhile, some opponents of independence were warning of a campaign of “destructive black nationalism” by the Pindling administration.

According to Sir Etienne Dupuch, “from the beginning (Abaconians) have not been happy with the Pindling government. It is unfortunate that some of this feeling has a racial overtone, but they are on solid ground when they say that the PLP has fallen far below the standards maintained under a British administration...with the result that everyone living in the islands must accept the harsh injustices inflicted on many of them by this government.”

Norwel Gordon - an American who arrived in Abaco during the 1960s, married a Bahamian, and became a permanent resident - agreed with this view: “By far the greatest motivation was fear of more exploitation and victimization by a PLP government released from any possibility of British constraints. Without an understanding of the rampant, overt political victimization occurring since 1968, the history of these efforts is incomplete.”

And according to Abaco businessman Chester Thompson (in a recent interview), “We were simply trying to remain British, and do it constitutionally. We wanted no part of independence.” He noted that Abaconians were descended from British loyalists

and had a right to be heard: “My brother Leonard had fought for the British in World War Two and represented Abaco in parliament for three consecutive seven-year terms. He was the logical choice to lead a delegation to England.”

At the request of sympathetic members of the British parliament, the Council sent representatives to London that December for a so-called “collateral conference” that ran simultaneously with the official talks between the Bahamians and the British. The official conference achieved unanimous agreement between the PLP and FNM leaderships on the independence constitution.

The GAC collateral meeting included Leonard Thompson, Sherwin Archer and Errington Watkins. “It was an ambitious and costly undertaking,” according to Chester Thompson. “Leonard and I agreed to underwrite the expenses and it took us two years to pay for everything. But we received a very cold, and frankly rude, reception from Lord Balniel, the Minister of State for the Colonies.

“He told us that Britain did not want to fragment the Bahamas, and feared that if they gave Abaco the right to remain British, similar requests would come from other islands. We accepted our defeat with great disappointment, but were satisfied that those involved, both black and white, from north to south Abaco, had done the best we could do. After that, we set ourselves to the task of nation building as Bahamians.”

Following the London conference, Leonard Thompson quit politics altogether. According to his brother, Chester, Prime Minister Pindling “never held any malice against some of us who were involved with the Greater Abaco Council. He seemed to regard it as one of the growing pains of becoming a new nation.”

Norwel Gordon took a somewhat different view: “I cannot know whether Pindling felt ‘malice’. Possibly he just considered victimization part of normal political activity. Leonard frequently expressed a different opinion. He gave up his dream of developing the Great Abaco Beach Resort because of overt victimization by the Pindling government. I, and many other

Abaconians, also felt discriminated against by Pindling and the PLP.”

Meanwhile, although the opposition FNM had achieved a consensus with the PLP government on nationhood, Errington Watkins, the FNM representative for South Abaco, declared himself unalterably opposed to independence. He argued that the Pindling government would “fall apart economically” and become “a second Uganda or Cuba.”

The Council for a Free Abaco

The Greater Abaco Council died at the end of 1972, but Watkins carried on with other ardent loyalists like Chuck Hall and Albert Albury, who organised a successor group called the Council for a Free Abaco. This new group produced a 10-page manifesto on Independence and Freedom, criticising Nassau's exploitation of Abaco.

The CFA believed that Abaco had a legal right to self-determination, and circulated another petition that was signed by half the registered voters on the island. In May 1973 Watkins carried this petition to London, hoping to influence the debate on the Bahamas Independence Order in the British Parliament.

During this debate, Conservative MP Ronald Bell introduced an amendment that would have excluded Abaco from an independent Bahamas. The amendment read:

“Greater Abaco shall continue to be a colonial dependency of the Crown under the name of the Colony of Abaco, and shall be governed in accordance with the provisions of any Order in Council which may be made by Her Majesty.”

According to a transcript from the House of Commons Hansard (vol 857 cc 393-428), Bell cited several cases of political victimization against Abaconians, as well as statements by Bahamian cabinet ministers characterizing black supporters of the CFA as

traitors and white supporters as racists.

The House of Commons rejected the amendment and approved the Independence Order on May 22. A similar amendment providing for Abaco to remain British was defeated in the House of Lords on June 12 (House of Lords Hansard vol 343 cc 619-49).

Watkins returned to Nassau, and later that month introduced a last-ditch resolution in the House of Assembly calling for a United Nations-supervised referendum on Abaco. This gained support from a few FNM MPs (Mike Lightbourn, Cleophas Adderley and former Premier Sir Roland Symonette), but the measure was easily defeated and Watkins then dropped out of the fight.

“I suppose it is fair to say that the Pindling government feel it would be an affront to their pride and dignity if land occupied by the descendants of loyalist slave owners were to be carved out of their kingdom,” wrote Sir Etienne. “It is unfortunate that the leaders of the FNM apparently shared that feeling.”

The Bahamas became independent on July 10 1973 in a ceremony at Clifford Park attended by Prince Charles, the heir to the British throne. For The Bahamas, it was the end of more than 250 years as a British Crown colony.

The Abaco Independence Movement

But the movement for a free Abaco did not die with independence. Within three months, Prime Minister Pindling warned at a PLP convention that Abaco's continuing separatist tendencies carried "serious implications" for the Bahamas.

After Watkins' departure, some islanders decided the only option left was to seek some form of autonomy for Abaco. Among the die hards were Chuck Hall and Bert Williams who, in August 1973, formed a political party called the Abaco Independence Movement. The goal of AIM was self-determination within a federal Bahamas.

Hall had been in touch with an American financier and political activist named Michael Oliver, who had published a libertarian manifesto in 1968 entitled *A New Constitution for A New Country*.

The Movement Continues

The movement for a free Abaco did not die with Bahamian independence. Some activists continued to seek autonomy for the island. They included Chuck Hall and Bert Williams who, in August 1973, formed a political party called the Abaco Independence Movement. Its stated goal was self-determination within a federal Bahamas.

Just before independence, Hall had been in touch with an American financier named Michael Oliver, whose libertarian Phoenix Foundation had attempted to create a micro-nation in 1971



on some low-lying Pacific atolls. This so-called Republic of Minerva was to have “no taxation, welfare, subsidies, or any form of economic interventionism”. It reflected what was to be suggested for Abaco.

Oliver, a Jewish survivor of the Holocaust, had written a libertarian manifesto in 1968, *A New Constitution For A New*

Country, (<http://amzn.to/cZUIqd>) that supported property rights and an unrestricted market as the basis for human liberty, with a minimalist role for the state.

He agreed to help finance AIM in order to set up a libertarian refuge on Abaco. This campaign for "self-determination through legal and peaceful political action" was launched in the inaugural edition of AIM's newsletter - *The Abaco Independent* - on October 18 1973.

THE ABACO INDEPENDENT

Issue No. 1 FREEDOM • ORDER • PROGRESS

Abaco Party Formed

A new party has been formed to represent the people of Abaco, and to seek home-rule and self-determination. The ABACO INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT (AIM) is organizing councils in all Abaco settlements, and is preparing for a public meeting on Sat., Oct. 20 in Marsh Harbour. (See notice.)

AIM's first convention will be on the following Saturday, October 27, also in Marsh Harbour, with delegates attending from each council.

AIM's basic philosophy is: "The purpose of government is to protect the freedom of the individual from force and

fraud. Government should be the servant, not the master, of the people."

AIM will press to establish an Abaco government elected by Abacoians, and with each settlement selecting its own council to oversee its own internal affairs.

AIM will seek changes through constitutional means and other methods recognized in international law. Petitions, home-rule bills, constitutional amendments, and referendums will all be used.

Watkins: A Frightened Man?

Frington Watkins has recently been attempting to convince Abacoians that joining an independence movement is treason and will be severely punished by the PLP government in Nassau.

Watkins may only be trying to frighten the people into supporting his new alliance with the Labor Party. (There are no labor unions on Abaco, and the constituency was not consulted on his change of affiliation.)

But Watkins may also be truly frightened, and may indeed have received threats of reprisals against those seeking freedom for Abaco. If this is so, may we point out that frightened men are the tools of would-be tyrants, used to divide, confuse, and demoralize the citizens who would otherwise work to protect their liberties.

To join ANY political party seeking ANY ends through peaceful means is not yet illegal in the Bahamas. We still have a constitution to protect political freedom; we still recognize

the British common law; we still have free courts and the right to appeal points of law to the Queen's Privy Council. These facts may be changed in the future by an unjust government, but for now we are protected by law.

Those seeking independence elsewhere in the Commonwealth have not been put in jail for organizing such movements using lawful means. Mr. Findling and his followers were not put in jail for seeking independence for the Bahamas.

The Abaco Independence Movement seeks self-determination through legal and peaceful political action.

If the PLP government intends to destroy freedom of speech, press, assembly, and the other personal and political freedoms which are the birthright of all Abacoians, let us find out now. Let us not be frightened into silence by political intimidation! LET THOSE ABACOIAN'S WHO LOVE AND CHERISH THEIR FREEDOM STAND UP NOW!

PLP May Split

Rumors abound in Nassau and Freeport that the PLP convention to be held this week on Grand Bahama will result in a major rift in Pindling's government, forcing an early election.

The pro-labor wing of the PLP has been preparing resolutions and stirring up public opposition to the current government. At least one former member of the FNM in the Assembly has declared himself in alliance with Labor. A realignment bringing many PLP Assembly members into Labor could spell the end of Pindling's reign. But Abacoians should take little

comfort in this. While Pindling may be a self-serving politician, Labor governments are notorious for their destruction of economic progress and personal freedoms, and for their sympathy for communist governments.

The remnants of the FNM has begun preparing for the expected early campaign, through public speeches, literature, and heavy press support. Abacoians, whose aspirations have been ignored and rejected by both the PLP and FNM, should begin now to develop an Independent Movement.

No More Crown Land

One of the movement's key proposals was the placement of all 300,000 acres of Crown land on Abaco in a land trust drawn up by "internationally respected economists". At the time, Abaco's Crown land was said to be valued at \$60 million. In addition to home lots, citizens were to receive shares in the trust, whose income would be derived from land leases and sales.





In addition to this revenue, “a free economic climate will attract businesses, providing high-paying jobs,” AIM said. The plan called for a balance between nature preserves, recreational, farming, commercial and industrial areas, as well as traditional real estate developments.

To avoid “the threat of land expropriation” the trust was to provide a registered voter share issue that could not be transferred to non-Abaconians. And each Abaconian would receive a land entitlement deed for one-acre home lots.

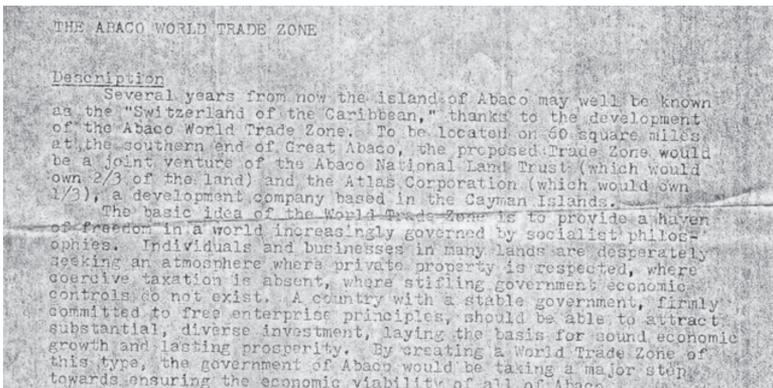
Estimates at the time suggested that by leasing 137,000 acres of the 300,000 acres of Crown Land to developers, the yearly income could have amounted to \$55 million.

Free Trade Zone

An Abaco World Trade Zone was also proposed as a joint venture between the land trust and the Atlas Corporation, a development company based in the Cayman Islands that was supported by wealthy libertarians. A four-page outline of this 60-square-mile free trade zone was published. Two thirds of the zone would be owned by the land trust, and one third by the Atlas Corporation.

In late 1973, AIM surveyed 200 Abaco residents and reported strong dissatisfaction with high taxes and poor service from the central government in Nassau, together with an almost unanimous demand for more local control. These opinions still resonate today.

On February 23 1974 AIM held its first convention. A key



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speaker was Dr. John Hospers, of the University of Southern California. He was the author of *Libertarianism: A Political Philosophy Whose Time Has Come* (<http://bit.ly/cOZQwF>). He was also the first Libertarian Party presidential candidate in the United States.

On May 10 1974 the Abaco Development Bureau (headed by Hall), the economic arm of AIM, held a conference in Marsh Harbour whose participants included a dozen American investors. This time Hospers was barred from entering the country by Bahamas Immigration



Left to right: Dr Hospers and Richmond Bostwick, speakers at the AIM Convention

Beginning of the End?

At about the same time, reports surfaced of a mysterious group called the 20th Century Revolutionaries, which appeared to threaten the overthrow of the central government on Abaco. AIM said this group was diametrically opposed to its philosophy of individual liberty, limited government and peaceful political action.

According to a February 1975 article in *Esquire* magazine, plans were being drawn up for an alleged insurrection in Abaco. The article by Andrew St. George titled, *The Amazing New-Country Caper*, centred on an interview with Mitchell WerBell, an American mercenary and arms dealer, who claimed that Abaco was set to declare unilateral independence on January 1, 1975.

WerBell had helped plan an abortive invasion of Haiti by Cuban and Haitian exiles in 1966 called Project Nassau. And according to the *Esquire* article, AIM was being “financed and managed from WerBell’s headquarters in Powder Springs, a suburb of Atlanta”.

But some of those associated with AIM have said that WerBell was a peripheral figure at best, and wondered at the logic of disclosing to the press in advance the date of a supposed armed takeover of Abaco. However, there was wild speculation at the time among political leaders in Nassau, as evidenced in the biography of Sir Lynden Pindling by Michael Craton.

It is clear that the Bahamian prime minister saw the Abaco independence movement as a serious national issue. In June 1974, Lord Bellhaven (who had supported the Council for a Free Abaco during the British debates on Bahamian independence) asked questions in the UK parliament about the Bahamian government's "harassment" of Abaconians seeking home rule.

And much was made at the time of a dynamite explosion during a political meeting in Marsh Harbour where the prime minister was speaking. No-one was injured in this incident, and the prevailing view among Abaconians is that there was never any intention to harm the prime minister.

The Amazing New-Country Caper

by Andrew St. George

Capitalist revolution, the ultimate solution

For the first time in history, the successful managers of America's economy—its entrepreneurs, financiers, merchandisers, investors—are talking rebellion. A kind of rebellion, anyway. There is no call to subvert the Republic, only to abandon it. In increasing numbers, America's most affluent and active elites are threatening to withdraw their funds, their assets, ultimately even themselves and their families from the centers of the U.S. economy, which many of them seem to consider done for. Nicholas von Hoffman, the acerbic and irriter-

investments to move to a secluded farmhouse may find there a measure of protection from random violence—or he may find, if real trouble starts, that in his isolation he's utterly defenseless.

Unless, of course, he has planned ahead—as far ahead and as carefully as the originators of what one can only call, for the moment, the Abaco Plan (it remains to be seen by events, of course, whether the Abaco planners were as wise and prescient as they were farsighted and careful). The originators of the Abaco idea were the first to implement the urge to abandon Amer-

No, sir! Not here in Duke Ziebert's place you don't; this well-bred Washington restaurant admits no animals. Not even if they're wearing eighty-dollar Church's shoes. Not even if they happen to be the familiar old two-legged war-hounds who were made immortal in the Shakespearean line, and who are being made fashionable again this year by the success of Frederick Forsyth's latest book, *The Dogs of War*.

Here we are in 1974, murky, angst-ridden, confusing old 74, and with Forsyth's novel a best seller, hailed as "soon to be a major mov-

According to one local source involved with AIM, a handful of Abaconians also visited WerBell's Georgia estate, but no serious evidence of an armed takeover ever came to light and no arrests or charges were ever laid against any of the alleged participants.

Nevertheless, rumours of such a plot led AIM to change its name in March 1975 to the Abaco Home Rule Movement, and plans were made to contest Abaco seats in the 1977 general election. The newly styled organisation denied any association with WerBell, and disclaimed any military objectives.

Constitution of Limited Government

The AHRM continued to work on a draft constitution for a proposed Abaco Commonwealth. This document, based on Libertarian principles, called for a limited government controlled by elected representatives from each settlement. A bi-cameral legislature would be responsible for:

- Establishing laws and procedures to protect citizens from force and fraud;
- Raising revenues, setting a budget and supervising government expenditures;
- Organizing and maintaining a peace-keeping force and judicial system;
- Acting as a permanent agency for the review of actions by government officials.

Abaco's assembly would have the power to suspend or remove from office any official suspected of infringing on individual rights, and most laws would be set to expire after five years, forcing parliament to review the costs and benefits of each initiative it passed.

One of the most unconventional provisions of the proposed constitution was the way in which government activities would be funded. Persons wishing to participate in government services would make voluntary premium payments. And official powers and duties would be restricted largely to peace-keeping, registration and recording of legal documents; and adjudication

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of disputes concerning contracts, ownership, property and other personal rights.

In the July 1977 general election Pindling's Progressive Liberal Party won 30 of the 38 seats in the national parliament, including North Abaco. Even though the South Abaco seat was won by Michael Lightbourne of the opposition Bahamian Democratic Party - with the backing of the Abaco Home Rule Movement - the results were a major disappointment for those seeking home rule. Momentum was lost as a result, and the movement eventually died.

In a 2003 Tribune interview, Jack Albury, a community leader in Marsh Harbour who had supported home rule, acknowledged the success of the Pindling government in "keeping the peace during difficult and stressful times". But he remained disappointed that Abaco had missed a marvellous opportunity to achieve self-determination.

CHAPTER I

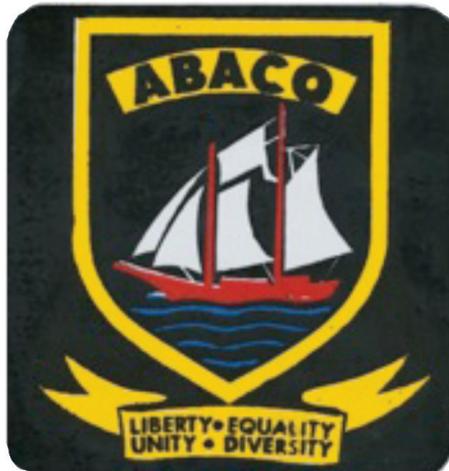
ARTICLE I. DEFINITION OF TERMS

1. COMMONWEALTH: A social system in which persons and entities may own and control property, but over which no state, monarchy or nobility in any form, shall have any claim or control; and in which personal rights are fully protected. Persons may join any form of voluntary social or economic structure and shall not compel others to do likewise.
2. ENTITY: Any business, agency, club, or other organization formed for any purpose.
3. FRAUD: Any intentional misstatement of a material fact which is intended to deceive and which in fact deceives.
4. FREEDOM: The absence of restraint by other persons or entities upon the exercise of another individual's personal rights. Freedom does not imply the license to interfere with the personal rights of others.
5. FORCE: Any physical act, or threat to perform such an act, by any person or entity, which act is destructive to the personal rights of others.
6. GOVERNMENT: As defined in this Constitution is that entity hired by participants to protect their personal rights against external and internal force and fraud.
7. GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEE: Any person or entity directly hired by any level of government of Abaco.

What if?

If Abaco had remained British, he argued, it could have become “another Switzerland, the financial mecca of the western world. Its hard-working people, its sense of mission, and the stability ensured by British protection would have propelled the island to new heights.”

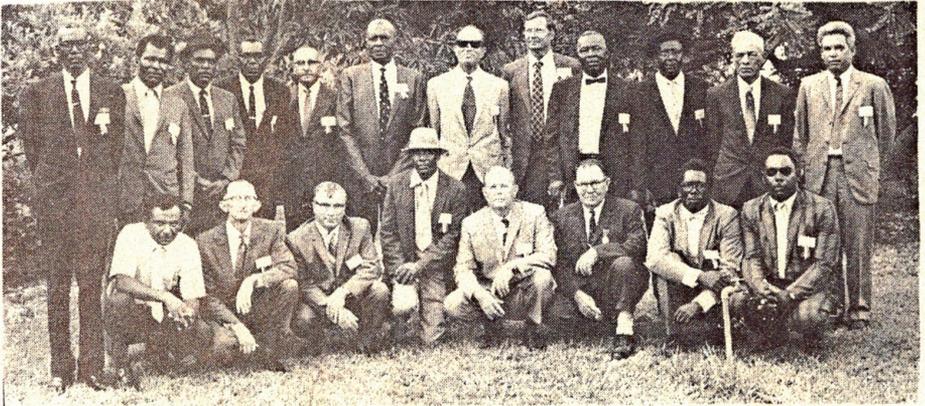
And if every Abaconian had been able to own the land of their birth, benefit from a free trade zone unencumbered by political control from Nassau, experience limited government and economic freedom for all, it is certainly interesting to speculate on how different history could have been.



Proposed Coat of Arms

FORGOTTEN DREAMS

Addendum



Abaco petitioners

THE GROUP of 20 Abaconians from all the settlements of Abaco who presented a petition to Governor Lord Thurlow today to remain apart from the Bahamas should it become prematurely independent.

BACK ROW (l. to r.): Jeremiah Russell, Cooper's Town; Cecil Mills, Murphy Town; Walter Lightbourne, Sandy Point; Kenneth Major,

Cooper's Town; Urick Bethel, Guana Cay; Capt. Sherwin Archer, UBP member for Abaco; Capt. Roy Russell, J.P., Cherokee Sound; Chester Thompson; the Rev. Samuel Sands, Sandy Point; John Ward, Dundas Town; Willie Russell, Hope Town; Roswell Sawyer, Green Turtle Cay.

FRONT ROW (l. to r.): Floyd Thompson, Fox Town;

Lucien Stratton, Marsh Harbour; Ivan Russell, Marsh Harbour; Whitfield Russell, Crown Haven; Capt. Leonard Thompson, O.B.E. Hope Town; William Albury, Man-O-War Cay; Hayward Russell, Crossing Rocks; Blach Dames, Sandy Point. Not shown in the photo are James Cooper, Grand Cay, and James Williams, Moore's Island. PHOTO: Stanley Toogood.

Photo compliments of The Tribune

" A PETITION "

TO

HER MAJESTY, QUEEN ELIZABETH II AND HER GOVERNMENT:

We, the undersigned citizens and land owners of GREATER ABACO, being primarily British subjects, 18 years of age and older, do herewith humbly request HER MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT, on behalf of the Crown, to take immediate action to preserve and honour the rights of those loyal British Subjects, whose forefathers and we the descendents, settled and developed the Bahama Islands.

We humbly and respectfully request, that the area of GREATER ABACO be granted full and complete separation from the Bahama Islands. That the said area of GREATER ABACO, comprising all of the islands and Cays of THE LITTLE BAHAMA BANK, save and excepting therefrom the island of GRAND BAHAMA and those islands or Cays immediately adjacent to same and presently under the jurisdiction of authorities based in GRAND BAHAMA, together with the small group of Cays known as Mores Island. The remaining islands and Cays of the Little Bahama Bank Group, which make up the area known as GREATER ABACO, do herewith humbly request that after separation from the Bahamas group, GREATER ABACO be retained under the British Crown and jurisdiction, in the same manner and with the same rights and basis as the Cayman Islands enjoy.

We humbly and earnestly beseech HER MAJESTY to immediately take the action necessary to separate the area of GREATER ABACO from the Bahamas group and **retain** same as outlined above, in order to protect the rights of the loyal British residents of these islands in particular and through-out

the Bahamas in general and to insure their having a place of asylum here in GREATER ABACO, if and when the Bahama Islands are granted full and complete independence, as presently being advocated.

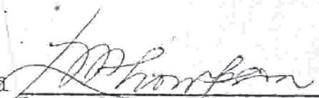
We further humbly suggest to HER MAJESTY, that the Island of GREATER ABACO, retained on the basis suggested herein would be completely self-contained and fully self-supporting. Our residents, primarily British subjects, are proud of their heritage and the right to fly the UNION JACK. We would be pleased to have the honour and privilege of being available as a base for operations of YOUR MAJESTY'S armed forces and forces of other Nations, friendly to HER MAJESTY, should the necessity ever arise.

The Bahamas Government recently published the latest census figures and these show GREATER ABACO having an adult population of 2350 persons and we are holding a signed petition exceeding 67% of the eligible total.

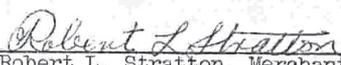
We humbly beseech YOUR MAJESTY to accede to this request from your obedient servants, whose signatures are attached hereto.

We certify that the information contained in this letter is true and correct.

signed


Leonard Thompson, O.B.E.

signed


Robert L. Stratton, Merchant

Marsh Harbour, Abaco
Bahamas
March 24th, 1971

TO

8

HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH AND HER GOVERNMENT.

We, the undersigned residents and or land owners of GREATER ABACO, being primarily British Subjects, 18 years of age and older, do herewith humbly request Her Majesty's Government, on behalf of the Crown, to take immediate action to preserve and honour the rights of those loyal British Subjects whose forefathers and we as decedents, settled and developed the Bahama Islands.

We humbly and respectfully request, that the area of GREATER ABACO be granted full and complete independence from the Bahama Islands and that the said area of GREATER ABACO be retained Under the British Crown and jurisdiction, in the same manner, basis and rights, as the Caymen Islands presently enjoy. Such action is desireable and we believe necessary, to protect the rights of British Residents, of these Islands in particular and through-out the Bahamas in general and to insure our having a place of asylum here, in GREATER ABACO, rather than being forced to leave the Bahamas, should this country be granted full independence as presently being suggested, without this area of GREATER ABACO being witheld from any such agreement.

Your obedient servants,

Robert L Stratton
A J Russell
Doyle Bethel.
P. H. Higgs
Frederick Abney
Capt Lambert Sands
Van Stratton
Harry W Collins
Maudie W. Allmy.
Sharon B. Albany
James Higgs
A. S. Roberts
Walter Vey
Donald B. Lewis



Editorial Cartoon
from the period

The British Parliament and its Papers: <http://cnx.org/content/m12841/latest/>

House of Commons Hansard: <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1973/may/22/colony-of-greater-abaco>

House of Lords Hansard: http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1973/jun/12/bahamas-independence-bill#S5LV0343P0_19730612_HOL_380