



ISLAND OF WOMEN

Life at Home During our Maritime Years

Major Events Timeline

The major events in the history of the Cayman Islands that have shaped these islands and function as milestones of progress are laid out here in this timeline to help contextualise the themes and subjects presented in this exhibition. Women's contributions to social, cultural, political and economic development in the Cayman Islands extend far back to the nation's settlement and continue to this day.



1735

In the 1730s and 40s, the first formal land grants begin to be issued to some living in Cayman, if they meet the necessary criteria.

In 1735, Jamaican authorities grant three thousand acres to John Middleton, Daniel Campbell, and Mary Campbell. According to historian Michael Craton, Mary is likely to have been Daniel's widowed mother, not his wife, as at this time any property women owned belonged to her husband.

1742

Mary Bodden is granted one thousand acres of land.

1794

Wreck of the HMS Convert and nine other boats off Gun Bay, known as the Wreck of the Ten Sail.

1809

Slavery is still ongoing in the Cayman Islands. Elizabeth Jane Trusty was freed in March by Elizabeth Mary Thompson. Trusty went on to own her own slaves, but was also recorded as being involved in the freeing of 5 other enslaved people.

1820

An enslaved woman known as 'Long Celia' is put on trial for allegedly inciting rebellion, and stands accused of speaking to a white woman about the rumours of emancipation in a threatening manner. Her jury consists of 12 slave owning white men. She is sentenced to 50 lashes, to be given in a public place in George Town.

1830-40

Attempts are made over the next few years to establish a permanent church and clergy. Further, the first schools are established. Women played a key role in the establishment of educational facilities and religious institutions, whether as teachers, missionaries, or community leaders.

1835

All enslaved people are declared free as Governor Sligo arrives from Jamaica to deliver the Emancipation Act of 1833.

Those who owned slaves received compensation from the British Government, who set aside 20 million pounds for former slaveowners across the Empire. Those who were enslaved received no such compensation. In the Cayman Islands, those who were formerly enslaved were due to undertake an enforced 'apprenticeship' lasting 6 years, with pay, under their former owners; this ceased after 10 months.

1876, 1877

In quick succession, two hurricanes hit the Cayman Islands causing widespread devastation and death. 64 people drowned in the 1877 hurricane, leaving countless families without fathers. In such times of hardship, women and communities banded together to ensure that everyone had a home to live in, and that each family was taken care of.

1881

Census is taken. The occupations of women are not included, except for those working as 'agricultural labourers.'

1891

Census is taken. Women are listed as working as washerwomen, laundresses, milliners, seamstresses, domestic workers and general labourers. The increase in diversity of jobs listed does not necessarily mean that more women were in the formal workforce than in 1881, but could mean that there is a greater recognition of the jobs that women perform.



1907

With the arrival of Commissioner George Hirst, the Cayman Islands now has an official Medical Officer. During the early years without a permanent doctor or hospital, many Caymanians rely on folk ('bush') medicine, and experienced women and men to provide medical care. Midwifery is particularly important for all in Cayman, and the women who performed these roles were well-known and respected. Community medical knowledge is of the utmost importance to learn and pass on, as the only other alternative is travel to Jamaica.

Also in 1907, the Commissioner's wife Mrs. Hirst and Miss Amy Bodden create the Grand Cayman Benevolent Society for Women, providing a library and reading room that also functioned as a concert hall and club room.

1911

Census is taken. This year, 87 women were listed as ropemakers, dressmakers, needlewomen, nurses, teachers, domestic workers, laundresses – and one clerk.

1915

A hurricane devastates the Sister Islands, and with it their coconut industries. In such times of hardship, the management of the home and resources would be especially important to ensure the survival of the family.

1930

Leila Ross-Shier writes 'Beloved Isle, Cayman', which becomes Cayman's unofficial National Song until 1993 when it is officially adopted as the National Song of the Cayman Islands.

1932

The 1932 hurricane resulted in a loss of life, homes, cultivated land, and ships (both at sea and on shore), with Cayman Brac suffering severely.

1935

The Friendly Society is formed, for the purpose of participation of women from all districts in delivering charitable work to those in need.

1937

First hospital is built in George Town, in part thanks to the donation of £383 from Helen Lambert. For the years that Cayman was without a permanent doctor, people would rely on a 'dispenser' – acting as a pharmacist – as well as folk ('bush') medicine, local women who would act as midwives and nurses, and Jamaican healthcare.

1939

The George Town Public Library is opened. Alice V. Bodden is appointed as the first full-time librarian.

1946

The Girl's Brigade is founded. Founder Mrs. Olive Miller, MBE, JP, was also the Organiser of the Girls' Guildry in Jamaica.

1948

On the 19th of August, 24 women in George Town sign a letter notifying the government of their intent to vote in the upcoming election.

1948-1957

Over this decade, women begin the fight for suffrage and the right to stand for public office.



1953

Miss Gwen Bush joins Pan Carib Agencies as assistant to the owner, Colin Panton, supporting and dispatching seamen. At a time when few women were working in the field, she holds her position for nearly 30 years and becomes a beloved figure amongst seamen in the industry. After her passing, the Cayman Island Seafarers provided her with a headstone inscribed: 'She was a Seafarer at Heart'.

1954

Ethel Cook-Bodden attempts to stand for election. She is told she cannot, as it is not technically legal. The law does not explicitly ban women from voting and holding office, but as it does not explicitly allow it, the law is interpreted as disallowing women from voting and holding office.

1957

358 women from seven districts sign petitions, delivered to the Government, demanding women's right to vote and hold office.

1958

Ena Watler is nominated as a candidate for the general election. Her nomination is rejected as still it is not technically legal.

On the 8th of December of this year, the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Law is passed. The right of women to vote and hold office is finally recognized by law.

1959

In the first elections for which women had the right to vote and stand for election, Hon. Sybil McLaughlin, MBE, JP, is appointed the first woman Clerk of the Legislative Assembly. She is the first woman across the Commonwealth to hold this position.

1961

Annie Huldah Bodden, OBE, becomes the first women to be nominated as a Member of the Legislative Assembly.

1962

Hon. Mary Evelyn Wood, Cert. Hon, becomes the first woman to be elected as a Member of the Legislative Assembly.

Jamaica gains independence from the United Kingdom. The Cayman Islands, after much campaigning and debate in which women were very active, decide to remain a British dependent.

1991

Hon. Sybil McLaughlin, MBE, JP becomes the first woman Speaker of the House.

1996

Hon. Sybil McLaughlin, MBE, JP, is designated a National Hero in recognition of her contribution to politics and community life. She is the Cayman Islands' second National Hero and the first woman to be so designated.

1997

Hon. Juliana O'Connor-Connolly, JP, is the first woman appointed to Executive Council as Minister for Community Affairs, Sports, Women, Youth and Culture.

Also this year, the Women's Resource Centre – now the Family Resource Centre – opens.

2004

The Cayman Islands National Policy on Gender Equity and Equality is published. This policy broadly attempts to ensure that gender inequality is taken into consideration across government policy and programmes.

2009

Hon. Juliana O'Connor-Connolly, JP, becomes the first female Premier of the Cayman Islands.

To celebrate the 50th anniversary of women's suffrage, the monument *Aspiration* by artist Al Ebanks is installed and dedicated to the women of Cayman. It lists the names of the 1957 signatories of the letter demanding the right to vote.

2011

The Gender Equality Law is passed, protecting women from discrimination based on their sex.

Also in 2011, Gladwyn 'Miss Lassie' Bush's house is placed on the World Monuments Watch list by UNESCO.

2016

The United Kingdom extends the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women to the Cayman Islands.

All images courtesy of the Cayman Islands National Archive Photographic Collections.

Research material:

Bodden, J. A. (2007). *The Cayman Islands in Transition: The Politics, History, and Sociology of a Changing Society*. Ian Randle Publishers: Kingston.

Craton, Michael. (2003). *Founded Upon the Seas: A History of the Cayman Islands and Their People*. Ian Randle Publishers: Kingston.

Ebanks, Consuelo (ed.). (2003). *The Southwell Years: Recollections of Caymanian Seaman and Those Who Served at Home*. Cayman National Cultural Foundation: George Town, Cayman Islands.

Smith, Roger C. (2000). *The Maritime Heritage of the Cayman Islands*. University Press of Florida: Gainesville.

