

The National Gallery of the Cayman Islands

Now & Then

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Image and artwork Courtney Platt, 2012.
Original image Cayman Free Press Steinmetz Collection c. 1950.

In the fast moving world of modern Cayman, it is difficult to imagine a time when life moved at a slower pace. Yet such a life existed only a few short decades ago. 'The Islands That Time Forgot', as the American photojournalist David Douglas Duncan called our three tiny islands, didn't have a private telephones until 1965, or TVs until the 1970s. Today, they are home to 50,000 people and have one of the most advanced banking economies in the world.

The images in *Now and Then* illustrate the gigantic leap that we have taken as a society. Working with archival photographs from the Cayman Islands National Archive (CINA) and the Cayman Free Press Steinmetz Collection, photographer Courtney Platt has replicated and digitally merged the past and present to provide a window into this bygone era.

Past and current landmarks, buildings, events and generations of people blend together in a surreal, and at times, haunting mixture of imagery. They evoke a way of life that is rapidly becoming confined to memory and remind us of the importance of preserving our unique heritage before it is lost forever.

Curator: Natalie Urquhart



Welcome Home — C. Platt
Original image by Joseph Steinmetz,
courtesy of Cayman Free Press



Turtle Crawl — C. Platt
Original image by Joseph Steinmetz,
courtesy of Cayman Free Press
Steinmetz Collection, 1950



Helicopter/Schooners preparing for
a regatta — C. Platt
Original image from the Cayman
Islands National Archive, Jack Cohen
Collection, c. 1942

About the Contributors

The Steinmetz Collection, Cayman Free Press (Select archival images)

The pictures from the Cayman Free Press archives were taken in 1950 by Joseph Janney Steinmetz, a world-renowned commercial photographer whose work has been referred to as "an American social history". He visited The Cayman Islands in 1950 and took a series of photographs depicting life here.

Steinmetz was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1905 and died in Sarasota, Florida in 1985. Steinmetz earned a degree in English from Princeton University. Following college, Steinmetz travelled the world. In Egypt, he purchased his first professional camera in 1928. A chance encounter at a society event with Pete Marin, an editor for The Saturday Evening Post, led to Steinmetz's first consistent work as a professional photographer. After moving to Sarasota, Florida in 1941, Steinmetz's work appeared in numerous nationally distributed magazines.

Text provided by Cayman Free press

The Cayman Islands National Archive Collections (Select archival images)

CINA plays an essential role in documenting the evolution of Caymanian society by preserving and contributing to the individual and collective memory. As keeper of the nation's memory, they provide three main services: public access to archival records, the acquisition and preservation of archival records and records management for Government records.

The historic holdings of the National Archive consists of records, archival materials (photographs and documents) and publications in various formats which document the history of the Cayman Islands and its way of life. The collections featured in *Now and Then* are:

C Bernard Lewis collection 1938
Ira Thompson collection c. 1940
Jack Cohen collection 1942
Ray Stride collection c. 1940

Everette Humphrey collections 1968 & 1973
Royal Commonwealth Society Expedition collection 1962
Marcia Bodden – Bush collection c. 1940s
Aarona Kohlman collection 1925-1928

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Photographer Courtney Platt with his parents on the Bayou — C. Platt
Original image from the Platt family archive, 1949



Church of God/Bayshore Mall — C. Platt
Original image by Joseph Steinmetz, courtesy of the Cayman Free Press Steinmetz Collection, 1950



George Town Post Office — C. Platt
Original image from the Cayman Islands National Archive, Everette Humphrey Collection, 1968



Welcoming the H.M.S. Orion — C. Platt
Original image from the Cayman Islands National Archive, C. Bernard Lewis Collection, 1938



Peace Memorial/George Town Hall — C. Platt
Original image from the Cayman Islands National Archive, Ira Thompson Collection, c.1930s



Seven Mile Beach — C. Platt
Original image by Joseph Steinmetz, courtesy of Cayman Free Press Steinmetz Collection, 1950

About the Contributors

Courtney Platt (contemporary images and artwork)

Courtney Platt has been living in Cayman Islands since 1983 and creating photos since 1976. He describes himself as an eclectic photographer who “specializes in everything” from weddings and events, which he enjoys immensely, to family and corporate portraits, underwater photography, architecture, you name it. Eight assignments done for National Geographic Magazine since 1987 have taught him a great deal about analyzing available light, how to augment it as necessary, and the value of making these skills all come together precisely at “the Geographic Moment”.

Although photo finishing has evolved in the digital age, which means late nights at the computer, he finds gratification in the level of image refinement made possible through new technology. He is amazed at the differences between his current work, produced with Nikon’s latest, greatest professional digital cameras and Photoshop, versus the images on film he started with over 30 years ago. Courtney continually remains on the leading edge of technology in both hardware and software, ever learning and always pushing the envelope.

Courtney can be reached at www.courtneyplatt.com; courtney@candw.ky; or (345) 945-3939/916-1945.

Artist Statement

Still photos have always been about capturing a single moment in time. We say they are worth a thousand words, but often they are worth much more. In preparing this exhibit I have blended two moments captured at the same location, but from very different times, creating a wormhole effect. At times it was an incredibly moving experience. Goosebumps rose out of respect for a man deceased when I realized that was standing at the precise spot that the renowned photographer, Joseph Steinmetz stood 52 years ago. Shear gestalt has struck me repeatedly regarding the passage of time; relevance of photography in recording history; and the pros and cons of development. Much has been gained. Much has been lost. Some has been recorded in photos, but much is relegated to ephemeral memory. What do you recall when you see these images? Enjoy and give God the glory.
Courtney Platt 2012

Highlights ...

Welcoming the H.M.S Orion

The *HMS Orion* was commissioned on 18 January 1934 for service with the British Home Fleet, but was transferred to the North America and West Indies Station in 1937. She visited the Cayman Islands in 1938 and her crew is pictured here marching down Shedden Rd towards Harbour Drive. The National Museum can be seen in the far right of the photo. After the *HMS Orion* had left for Jamaica, a storm hit the Cayman Islands and the schooner *Goldfield* broke her moorings in West Bay and drifted out to sea. The *HMS Orion* was called back and helped to recover the *Goldfield*. (Adapted from CINA Oral History Interview with Heber Elroy Arch.) The *HMS Orion* returned to the Mediterranean in October 1942 to join the 15th Cruiser Squadron. She spent most of WWII patrolling the Mediterranean and also took part in the Normandy landings in June 1944, where she reputedly fired the first shell.

Peace Memorial/George Town, Town Hall

Some of the buildings on display in the exhibition have changed beyond all recognition, while in other images, it is only the environment around them that has been transformed. This is the case with the Town Hall 1919 Peace Memorial. The earlier photo shows that the town hall was originally surrounded by pasture-land rather than busy paved streets and traffic. Built by Captain Rayal Bodden in 1923 to function as a court house, assembly room and town hall, the building remains a centre of civic and social activities. In the years since it was built the Legislative Assembly, the Court buildings and Heroes Square have been added to the adjacent area.

Text adapted from Cayman Free Press

Seven Mile Beach

Perhaps better than any other image, this early photo of Seven Mile Beach dramatically illustrates how rapidly our Islands have developed. Miles of endless beach, ringed by Casuarina trees and other fauna offered residents and visitors alike a little piece of paradise in the Caribbean Sea. Soon after this photo it was taken, the Galleon Beach Hotel opened to the public - the very first hotel on SMB - and the Caymanian Hotels Aid Law of 1950 was passed, providing incentives for further hotel developments. By 1958, three more hotels had opened. By 1960, there were a total of eight hotels, clubs and guest-houses on Grand Cayman. Jump ahead sixty years and the Islands now have over 200 tourist residences and the beachfront captured in this photo has been transformed beyond recognition with many residents and tourists flocking to the beach and still enjoying paradise.