Chapter 4 Early Connections with America

The people in The Bahamas have always been closely associated with America. In 1629, King Charles I of England gave the lands of the American Carolinas and The Bahamas to his chief legal advisor, Attorney-General Sir Robert Heath. By this grant, these lands became British territories. In those early years settlers in The Bahamas looked to settlers in North America for advice, help and trade. Settlers in America sent help to the Adventurers. In return the Adventurers later gave money towards the building of the famous Harvard College in Massachusetts. Many of our islands made a living by trading with the American colonies. Nassau became a second home to many American sea captains and pirates, and Bahamians sailed to and from Carolina, Virginia and Massachusetts. The Lord Proprietors of Carolina were also Proprietors of The Bahamas.

In 1670, Charles II of England had given The Bahamas to the Lord Proprietors of Carolina. This meant that the Proprietors took over The Bahamas to make money. But they had very little interest in the islands, and appointed Governors to rule over them. The people who lived in The Bahamas were expected to pay some of their wages to the Proprietors in America. The Governors were supposed to collect this money, but often the people refused to pay. The rule of the Lord Proprietors ended in 1718, when Woodes Rogers was appointed as the first Royal Governor of The Bahamas.

Nearly 60 years later, in 1775, the American War of Independence began. Americans wanted to govern themselves, and not to be ruled by Britain. Ships of the American navy were sent to Nassau to take the powder and ammunition stored at Fort Nassau. But Governor Montfort-Browne had already sent most of it away. When the Americans landed they found only 24 barrels of gunpowder and a little ammunition. They took over Fort Nassau for two weeks. Then they set sail again, almost empty-handed. Not long afterwards, in 1782, New Providence was invaded again, this time by Spaniards. The Governor was forced to surrender to the Spanish troops who took over the island. They remained therefore nine months, until a Loyalist officer, Colonel Andrew Deveaux, attacked with forces from Harbour Island and Eleuthera and recaptured the fort.

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Wrecking had been big business in The Bahamas since the first settlers arrived. Many ships were caught by the tricky currents around these islands, and swept ashore. Some ships were deliberately attracted on to the cays and reefs by false lights. Then the goods on board were carried away by the wreckers, and later sold. In the 1780s, after the end of the American War of Independence, trade between America and The Bahamas increased – and so did the wrecks. Many Bahamian wreckers worked along the shore of Florida, and carried goods from the wrecks there to Nassau.

The first official American representative or **consul** in Nassau arrived in 1821. By 1859 the consulate was known as the Consulate General. It was not until this century, on 10th July 1973, when The Bahamas became fully independent, that an **embassy** was established here, headed by an **ambassador**.

The first steamships began a regular service between New York and Nassau in 1859. This was the start of our tourist industry. Many years later, in 1929, the first regular airline flights between Miami and Nassau began. Between 1861 and 1865, during the years of the American Civil War, all ships were prevented from using the ports in the southern states of America. This was a **Blockade.** Nassau became very important at that time, supplying guns and ammunition to the troops of the Southern States, which were called The **Confederacy**.

Nassau also exported cotton from the plantations in these states to Britain. In 1919 the American government passed an act which prevented the American people from making, selling, importing and exporting liquors anywhere in the United States. So from 1920 to 1933 during the period that was called **Prohibition**, many people in The Bahamas were involved in **smuggling** liquor into America.

During the Second World War (1939 – 1945), many American men went to Europe to join the troops there. It was a difficult time for farmers in America, because there were not enough people to work the land, so people from The Bahamas also went to America to work on the farms and in the food product Du ion factories there. This was the result of an agreement called **The Project**, or **The Contract**, arranged between the governments of the United States and The Bahamas.

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