



**OFFICE OF THE  
PREMIER**  
CAYMAN ISLANDS GOVERNMENT

**Remarks about Cayman anniversaries of Coat of Arms, Constitution to the LA**

**By Premier Hon. Alden McLaughlin, MBE, JP, MLA**

**16 March 2018**

Mr. Speaker, those of us who have the privilege to serve in this Honourable House know the work we do here impacts not only Cayman today, but the generations of Caymanians to come. And for some of us, if we are fortunate enough, the decisions we make here will create important national symbols or institutions that last for generations and help define our Islands.

So I am certain all of us in this House will agree with me that it is important that we pause to look back and reflect on where we have come from and celebrate key moments in our history; in particular historic moments that represent the work done by past legislators.

Our Islands have two such significant opportunities in the next two years to celebrate our wonderful and colourful history: the 60 year, Diamond Anniversaries of our Coat of Arms on 14 May, 2018, and our first Constitution on Constitution Day, 1 July,

2019.

A small project team has been assembled to organise the events that will celebrate and commemorate these historic anniversaries. Celebrations are expected to begin in May this year, both here at home and in the United Kingdom.

The proposal for a Coat of Arms was approved by the Cayman Islands Legislative Assembly in 1957, and public input was sought on its design. The Royal Warrant assigning “Armorial Ensigns for the Cayman Islands” was approved by Her Majesty’s command on 14 May, 1958. Unfortunately, our original document displaying our Coat of Arms was lost in the fire that destroyed the old Government Administration Building in the 1970s. And so the Cayman Islands London Office is arranging for two facsimiles of the original Coat of Arms document to be produced. One will be displayed in the London office and the other here in Cayman.

Almost a year to the day of the assigning of our Coat of Arms, The House of Commons in the United Kingdom approved our first Constitution on 13 May, 1959, and it was adopted by the Cayman Islands on 4 July, 1959.

Mr. Speaker, since that date the document that governs us has gone through a number of revisions, with the latest coming in 2009 following the country’s first referendum when the voters of the Cayman Islands agreed it was time to modernise our Constitution.

Mr. Speaker, our first Constitution was extremely important for several reasons. Firstly, we ceased to be a dependency of Jamaica and became a Crown Colony in our own right.

It also recognised full suffrage allowing women the right to vote and stand for election for the first time. The Constitution also allowed the Cayman Islands the ability to make and pass our own laws and thus helped to usher in many of the early laws on which we built our tourism and financial services industries. So in many ways the 1959 Constitution was the foundation on which the modern Cayman Islands was built.

Indeed, our Constitution was also the first step toward political advancement for the Cayman Islands, as the Islands were now specifically exempt from the control of the Jamaican Legislature. The arrival of our first Constitution had the effect of returning some independence to our legislators – linking us back 128 years to the formation of our first legislative body, the Assembly of Justices and Vestry in 1831 at Pedro St James. Under the 1959 Constitution, the Assembly of Justices and Vestry was replaced with a Legislative Assembly. Mr. Speaker I would like to remind this House and the public of the members who comprised that first Legislative Assembly in 1959.

The Administrator of the Cayman Islands, Major A. H. Donald, served as the President with the official members comprising Hon. James Astwood, Hon. Earnest Panton and Desmond Watler. There were also members nominated by the

Administrator, namely Emmis Forbes, Capt. Theophilus Bodden, and William Warren Conolly. The elected members, Mr. Speaker, were for West Bay – Arthur H. Ebanks, J. Cadian Ebanks, and T. William Farrington. For George Town – Dr. Roy McTaggart, E. Ducan Merren, and A. Colin Panton. For Bodden Town – Malcom Eden and Arley James Miller. For East End William Allen McLaughlin. North Side – Craddock Ebanks; and for the Sister Islands – Nolan B. Foster and Keith P. Tibbetts.

It was these legislators, Mr. Speaker, who were soon grappling with the difficult conversations about the future that these Islands would take, including joining the West Indies Federation, remaining part of Jamaica, or maintaining a constitutional relationship with the United Kingdom. Their decisions in those early days set us down the path to today.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that you were quoted in a newspaper article in 2009, on the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Constitution, saying: “We should be proud of our rich history, especially our constitutional heritage, because it underscores the importance we place on the rule of law and self-determination as an Overseas Territory of the UK”.

Mr. Speaker, in 2009 we were unable to have the celebration that such an anniversary of the Constitution deserved. But we now have an opportunity with the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Constitution, and of the Coat of Arms, to not only celebrate our history but to educate our young people, and remind us older ones, of the importance of our Coat of Arms and our first Constitution.

Mr. Speaker, to mark these anniversaries there will be a 2-year programme of activities focused on engaging, educating, and inspiring our Caymanian youth; celebrating our diversity; celebrating the Cayman Islands' colourful history and engendering national pride.

Mr. Speaker, the Coat of Arms, as I said previously, was officially assigned by the House of Commons in the United Kingdom on 14 May, 1958, and so it is fitting that the year-long celebration begins on the anniversary, Monday, 14 May this year in London.

We will host a reception at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London where we will celebrate the 60-year anniversary of the Cayman Islands Coat of Arms.

Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Boris Johnson and Garter King of Arms Thomas Woodcock will speak at the reception. Plans are to promote our links with the United Kingdom as well as tell the fantastic success story of the Cayman Islands.

On 15 May, Michelin Star British Chef Claire Smythe will host a private Cayman bespoke lunch in London and share her experiences of the Cayman Islands. Some of you will remember that she was in Grand Cayman for 10 days in March last year to encounter Cayman's fresh produce, meats and seafood, which she used to produce pop up culinary events.

Our London Office is working with the Maritime Authority to take our anniversary celebrations to the Monaco Boat Show later this year in September. It is only fitting

that we are there to share in our commemorations because the Cayman Islands flag dominates 70 per cent of the super yachts in the world.

Mr. Speaker, we will also have a presence at the Conservative Party Conference in Birmingham at the end of September, first of October, hosting events and a lecture in the context of a Global Britain, including Cayman's role.

Our own local celebrations begin with a 28 May launch. I have promised the local project organising team not to steal their thunder about the plans under way so I will leave it to them to announce the Cayman activities and events.

Throughout the celebrations of our Diamond Anniversary of our Coat of Arms and the first Constitution we will undertake a programme of celebration and education about the Cayman Islands and our links to the UK. This includes the creation of an education pack on the history of the Cayman Islands that can be used in our schools in Cayman and perhaps also in schools in the UK, an e-book about the Cayman Islands as well a book on the Cayman/UK connection being produced by the Cayman Islands London Office in partnership with the West India Committee.

Here at home a book commissioned by you, Mr. Speaker, is being penned by former Speaker Hon. Mary Lawrence to record for posterity the history of the Legislative Assembly from its beginnings on 5 December, 1831, at Pedro St. James to today.

I look forward to sharing with you more about our celebrations once they are all confirmed. I am certain the members of this House will join me in these events and I look forward to the observances.

Thank you.

###