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CULTURAL LANDSCAPE CHANGE AT SAN SALVADOR: 1984-2011¹

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ABSTRACT

Charting cultural landscape change is a daunting task. As a visual element it defies quantification. It is a 'now you see it, now you don't,' phenomenon. Changes can be relatively permanent or they can be ephemeral in nature.

This paper charts cultural landscape changes that have occurred at San Salvador since 1985. The main purpose of the photographic record I compiled during my first visit was for personal use as a memory prompt. At that time I had no reason to believe I would return to the island on a consistent, annual basis. Some of the photos can be categorized as before and after pictures. In other cases, the before pictures are absent because I did not anticipate development that would occur in later years. This is a personal record of the landscape changes that have occurred at San Salvador since 1985.

INTRODUCTION

I first visited San Salvador and the College Center of the Finger Lakes (CCFL) Bahamian Field Station in December 1984. The island faced a depressed economy and was comparatively undeveloped. Jobs were scarce. Working-aged males left the island in search of employment in Nassau or in the United States. The resident population had a 2-to-1 ratio of females to males. The Bahamian government, the CCFL Bahamian Field Station, and the recently re-opened Riding Rock Inn were the island's primary sources of outside revenues. The cultural landscape reflected the lack of economic resources. The east side roadways were un-

paved, signage was in need of a fresh coat of paint, and local services were limited. Tremendous change has come to San Salvador in the intervening twenty-five years and this paper provides a pictorial charting of that change over time.

TRANSPORTATION FACILITIES

As an island, access to San Salvador is limited to arrivals and departures from the air or from the sea. For most visitors, the San Salvador International Airport serves as their first introduction to the island. In the 1980s, the airport runway was a modest length. The arrival and departures building and Immigration and Customs areas were separate facilities (Figure 1). In the 1990s, the runway was lengthened to accommodate jet passenger aircraft and the ticketing, arrivals, departures, customs and immigration offices moved into a new facility (Figure 2).



Figure 1. San Salvador airport departures and arrivals area as it appeared in 1989.

¹ All photographs reproduced herein were acquired by the author on annual trips to San Salvador between 1984 and 2011.



Figure 2. San Salvador airport departures and arrivals area as it appeared in 1994.

The signage welcoming visitors to San Salvador also changed (Figures 3 and 4). The artwork of today may be somewhat more elaborate but the signs still have a very basic design.



Figure 3. 1986 Airport Welcome Sign



Figure 4. 2010 Airport Welcome sign.

Ships are the primary means of transporting goods and material to the island. They also offer a passenger alternative to air travel. In 1984, the government dock at Cockburn Town served as the primary landing point for goods brought to the island (Figure 5). The Riding Rock Marina served as a backup when weather conditions interfered with use of the dock. In the

early 1990s, freighters bringing construction equipment and supplies caused major damage to the dock (Figure 6). It has not been repaired. The Bahamian government funded construction of a marina that now serves as the primary docking point for freighters bringing goods and materials to the island. The government docks at Graham's Harbour (not shown) and French Bay (Figures 7 and 8) have also been destroyed by winds and waves over the past twenty-five years. They have not been repaired.



Figure 5. The government dock at Cockburn Town as it appeared in 1990.



Figure 6. The government dock at Cockburn Town as it appeared in 2009.



Figure 7. The government dock at French Bay as it appeared in 1992.



Figure 8. The government dock at French Bay as it appeared in 2010.



Figure 10. Gwen and the Native Straw Market as it appeared in 1984.

COCKBURN TOWN

Cockburn Town has been, and continues to be, the principle governmental and economic hub of San Salvador Island. The governmental center (Figure 9) fronts on Queen's Highway across from the Cockburn Town government dock. At one time, the building housed the commissioner's office, postal service, police department and the Bahamas Telephone Company (BATELCO). The police and telephone functions are now housed in their own buildings.



Figure 9. The San Salvador government center as it appeared in December 2011.

The native straw market has been a mainstay at the intersection of 1st Avenue and the Queen's Highway. It has undergone modest upgrades. The adjacent almond tree (also known as the 'Lazy Tree') still provides shade for both the patrons of the market and the craftspeople who sell their wares (Figures 10 and 11).



Figure 11. The Native Straw Market as it appeared in December 2010.

The structure directly across the street from the straw market at one time housed the Ocean View Bar and Grill (Figure 12). The upper story of the building remained in an unfinished state for quite some time. The top floor has been turned into residential space and the first floor has been converted into the Island Distributors food and variety store (Figure 13).



Figure 12. The Ocean View Bar and Grill as seen in 1986.



Figure 13. The Ocean Distributors Food and Variety Store in 2011.

The Harlem Square Club (Figure 14) once hosted a weekly gathering known as the ‘Rip.’ The club has undergone a facelift and image change (Figure 15), as have many of the businesses in Cockburn Town. Other structures, such as the so-called 7-11 food store, have completely disappeared from the landscape (Figures 16 and 17).



Figure 14. The view of the Harlem Square Club in 1988.



Figure 15. The Harlem Square Club as it appeared in 2010.



Figure 16. The 7-11 foodstore as it appeared in 1992.



Figure 17. By 2010 the building housing the 7-11 food store had been razed and left as open space.

While many Cockburn Town businesses in Cockburn Town have undergone change or remodeling, others have experienced minimal change over the past quarter century. The former home of the Seventh Day Adventist Church was converted to a funeral home after the congregation moved to a new locale (Figure 18). Other structures and establishments, such as Iris’ T-shirt Shop (Figure 19), Jake Jones’ Food Store (Figure 20), the historic building that once housed the Commissioner’s Office and Jail (Figure 21), the former Roman Catholic Church building (Figure 22), and the Anglican Church (Figure 23) appear much as they did in 1984.



Figure 18. The Riverside Funeral Chapel in a photograph from 2007.



Figure 19. Iris' T-Shirt Shop as it was recorded in this 1991 photograph.



Figure 20. Jake Jones' Food Store is still in operation though it has seen some decline since it was photographed here in 1992.



Figure 21. The site of the former Commissioner's office and island jail is one of the oldest preserved structures on San Salvador. It is now used as a museum. The building is shown here as it appeared in a photograph from 1986.

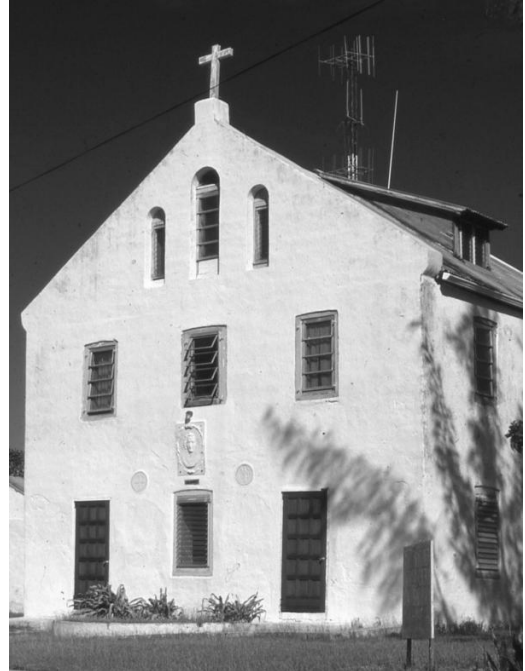


Figure 22. The site of the former Roman Catholic Church in Cockburn Town as it appeared in 1987. It was originally constructed in the 1920s, and at one time served as the retirement home for Father Chrysostom Schriener, the first Roman Catholic priest assigned to the Bahamas.



Figure 23. The St. Augustine Anglican Church as seen in 2011.

A number of severe hurricanes passed through the region since the 1990s and have transformed the landscape. The main building of the Riding Rock Resort and Marina (Figure 24) has not seen much change to its front façade, but storm damage required major modifications to the resort's rooms and oceanfront deck.



Figure 24. Storm impacts have brought change to the Riding Rock Resort and Marina although the façade of the main building, shown here in 2011, has changed little since 1984.

A number of new structures have been built in the Cockburn Town area. These included the new Roman Catholic Church building on the Queen's Highway (Figure 25) and the building that houses the San Salvador offices of the Bahamas Department of Environmental Health and the Department of Social Services (Figure 26). Other new construction (not shown) included the San Salvador Primary School, Bank of the Bahamas, Church of God of Prophecy, the Seventh Day Adventist Church, a new marina and an adjacent customs and immigration office, Jay's Drug Store, a health clinic, a strip shopping center, and several food and beverage shops.



Figure 25. This photo taken in 2011 depicts the site of the Roman Catholic Church in Cockburn Town that opened its doors in 1992.



Figure 26. The building housing the San Salvador offices of the Bahamas Department of Environmental Health and Department of Social Services is depicted in this image from 2011.

COLUMBUS LANDFALL MONUMENTS

The first monument constructed to commemorate the Columbus landfall on San Salvador was the Chicago Herald monument. It was built in 1891 on the east side of the island at Crab Cay (Figure 27). The monument was built in conjunction with the four hundredth anniversary of the landfall. It contained a time capsule that reportedly was vandalized in 1991 before it could be opened as a part of the Quincentennial celebration. The Herald monument has seen some weathering but it is in remarkably good condition given its exposed location on the bluff overlooking the beach.



Figure 27. 1987 photo of the Chicago Herald monument on Crab Cay. The monument was originally constructed in 1891.

On the west side of San Salvador, the first monument built to commemorate Columbus' landfall was a monument installed by the crew of the Yawl Heloise in 1951 (Figure 28). In 1991 the bronze marker at the base of the monument was stolen and it was later replaced by a plastic replica. The rock upon which the monument was erected was loosened during a hurricane and displaced from its original location. The monument is currently in a state of disrepair (Figure 29).



Figure 28. 1992 photo of the Yawl Heloise monument.



Figure 29. 2010 photo of the Yawl Heloise monument with the adjacent monument constructed in 1992 commemorating the Quincennial.

Landfall Park

The formal opening of Landfall Park, located above the beach across from the Long Bay settlement, occurred in 1956 when Ruth Wolper unveiled a cross she had constructed and placed in the area where Columbus' presumed landfall occurred (Figure 30). Other monuments followed. One such monument was the one celebrating the sea bird that landed in the rigging of one of Columbus' ships and signaled their proximity to land (Figure 31). Charles Hoffman excavated an archaeological site in the vicinity of the Long Bay settlement in 1983, 1984, and 1985. Artifacts unearthed at the site were linked to Columbus' first voyage to the New World.

Prior to the 1968 Olympics in Mexico, the Mexican government funded the construction of a monument on San Salvador. The monument served as a stop on the journey of the Olympic torch from Greece to Mexico for the 1968 Olympic Games (Figure 32).



Figure 30. 1992 photo of the cross erected by Ruth Wolper in 1956 on the beach overlooking Long Bay. This was the first of the monuments to be built in Landfall Park.



Figure 31. Monument erected to commemorate the sea bird that reportedly landed in the rigging of one of Columbus' ships indicating that land was nearby.



Figure 32. The monument built to commemorate the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City as it appeared in 2004.

1992 Quincentennial Celebration

A significant number of landscape changes were put into place on San Salvador in conjunction with the anticipated celebration of the 1992 Quincentennial celebration of Columbus' landfall on the island. The most significant change came through the construction of the Club Med Columbus Isle Resort on Bonefish Bay on the west side of San Salvador (Figure 33). The resort provided a surge of capital in the form of construction related revenues. The resort held its grand opening in conjunction with the October 12th Discovery Day celebration and then opened on a full-time basis in December.



Figure 33. 1996

Landfall Park was the site for a number of Quincentennial projects. A replica Lucayan village was constructed in the vicinity of the Long Bay archaeological site (Figures 34, 35, and 36). A film crew that was recording a reenactment of Columbus landing on the island required that electrical and telephone lines be temporarily placed underground and sand was moved across the Queen's Highway in the area leading from the beach to the replica village. It was a costly effort to remove a modern skyline from a replica landscape.

The replica Lucayan Village was not maintained as a viable visitation site. By 1993 the village had ceased to exist.



Figure 34. Sign erected at the entrance to the replica Lucayan village at Landfall Park in 1992.



Figure 35. A 1992 photograph of the replica Lucayan village constructed at Long Bay.



Figure 36. Replica Lucayan dwelling and canoe as seen in 1992.

A series of flagpoles were erected bordering the Queen's Highway leading up to Long Bay (Figure 37). The flagpoles flew the flags of New World nations. The flags began to disappear as souvenir hunters sought trophies of their visit to the island. Eventually, the flags were removed as were the flagpoles, which proved to be a bit of a traffic hazard.



Figure 37. A 1991 photograph of the flagpoles lining the coastal road at Long Bay settlement.



Figure 38. 1992 monument built by the Spanish Government commemorating the arrival of a replica fleet on San Salvador in February, 1992.

Although it was not directly linked to the Columbus Quincentennial Celebration, an iguana statue was installed in a waterfront park in Cockburn Town in 1992. A plaque at the site recognizes San Salvador as the site of Columbus' first landfall in the new New World.



Figure 39. Iguana statue in a waterfront park at Cockburn Town 2007.

OTHER PROMINENT FEATURES

One of the prominent features on San Salvador that is rarely visited is the gravesite of Father Chrysostom Schriener which sits atop a bluff overlooking Graham's Harbour. Father Schriener was the first Catholic priest appointed

to serve in the Bahamas. On a journey to visit San Salvador and other outlying islands, Father Schriener was shipwrecked near Conception Island. Father Schriener was rescued after a harrowing experience that lasted several days. Father Schriener returned to San Salvador at a later date. He would turn the island into a refuge and retreat for Catholic clergy and for wealthy benefactors of the Catholic Church. Schriener was convinced San Salvador was the island of Columbus' first landfall and helped lead the campaign to have the island renamed (it was formerly known as Watling's Island). Upon his retirement, Father Schriener moved to San Salvador. When he died, Schriener was buried on the site adjacent to the manor house of the former Harbour Estate plantation (Figure 40). His headstone was reset in the 1950s and the crypt was reconditioned in 2010 (Figure 41).



Figure 40. The crypt and headstone of Father Chrysostom Schriener as it appeared in 1988.



Figure 41. Father Schriener's crypt after it was refurbished and resurfaced in 2010.

POPULATION REDISTRIBUTION

At one point in time, a large proportion of San Salvador's population resided on the east side of the island where lands were more conducive to cultivation. Access was limited due to the poor condition of the roadways on the east

side (Figure 42) which were little more than single vehicle tracks. In the 1980s, student groups from the field station were limited to a single trip around the island to reduce wear and tear on the vehicles caused by the rough, unpaved roadways. If two vehicles met on the road it was often a challenge to find a place where they could safely pass. The Queens Highway underwent major improvement in 1991 (Figure 43). Ironically, by that time, most of the island population had relocated to either Cockburn Town or United Estates.



Figure 42. The Queen's Highway on the east side of San Salvador as it appeared in 1986.



Figure 43. The Queen's Highway on the east side of San Salvador as it appeared in 2011.

In 1986, one of the more picturesque locations on Pigeon Creek, the South Victoria Hill settlement, was an active settlement (Figure 44) and continued as a viable community in 1993 (Figure 45). The community was abandoned by 2008 (Figure 46) and in 2010 (Figure 47) it was completely overgrown.



Figure 44. South Victoria Hill settlement as it appeared in 1986.



Figure 45. South Victoria Hill as it appeared in 1993.



Figure 46. South Victoria Hill was completely abandoned by 2008.



Figure 47. The South Victoria Hill settlement was completely overgrown in 2010 and buildings were no longer visible from the roadway.

VEHICLE REGISTRATIONS

There was a time when you feared breaking down while out in the field. In remote locales, you were unlikely to see another vehicle unless another field station group passed in your direction. One indication of change is expressed in the increasing number of vehicle registrations. In the 1980s, there were perhaps a few dozen vehicles on the island. Vehicle license plates were predominantly in single and double digits (Figures 48 and 49). In 2011, there is clear evidence that the number of vehicles has increased over time (Figure 50).



Figure 48. 1987 Field Station Truck #3.



Figure 49. "Uncle Ben" ran the store he labelled as '7-11.' He also held the coveted rights to license plate #1.



Figure 50. A sign of the times in 2011 as license plate registrations creep ever higher.

SHIPWRECKS

The sea is indeed a harsh mistress. The reefs, rocks, and cays of the Bahamas Archipelago have long been known as a shipping hazard. Ships periodically founder on the reefs or shorelines of San Salvador. Some wrecks serve as popular dive sites. Others remain in place on shore until they break up and wash away under the impact of the wind and waves (Figures 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, and 56).



Figure 51. 1986 photo of the shipwreck (Circa 1979) anchored on the cliff line on the Rice Bay side of North Point.



Figure 52. By 2010 all that remained of the Rice Bay wreck was a completely submerged wreckage.



Figure 53. The 1988 wreck of a small freighter off Bamboo Point south of Cockburn Town.



Figure 54. In 1991, *The Lady Frances* ran aground on the rocks at the entrance to the Riding Rock Marina just prior to Christmas.



Figure 55. In 1992, a retired couple intended to sail around the world. Their sailboat became stranded on the beach at Cockburn Town when it broke free of its anchor chain in rough seas while the couple had dinner in town.



Figure 56. In 2004, a Haitian refugee ship was intercepted by Bahamian authorities off the coast of San Salvador. The ship broke free from its anchorage during a storm and was grounded on the beach at Barker's Point.

ICONS

A nostalgic look back at the changes on San Salvador must include structures that have become synonymous with the Gerace Research Centre experience. Club Shortstop (Figure 57) has been and continues to be the nightly destination for most of the visitors to the GRC. In a time that predated the extension of electrical service to the settlement of United Estates, anxious faculty and students listened for the telltale sounds of the generator that served as a signal that Club shortstop was open for business. Other establishments have attempted to draw away business from the club, but the faculty and student clientele of the research centre always seem to return to this familiar haunt.



Figure 57. Club Shortstop has seen little change from its status when this photograph was acquired in 1990. The only major changes have included the addition of a front porch and air conditioning.

Yet another iconic symbol of San Salvador and the Gerace Research Center is the Dixon Hill lighthouse (Figure 58). Although modern electronic communications equipment has supplanted the lighthouse's role as a navigation aid, it still stands silent sentry warning off ships that might steer too near to the treacherous rocks and reefs that guard San Salvador's coast.



Figure 58. The Dixon Hill Lighthouse as photographed in 2011.

Any tribute to the heritage of the Gerace Research Centre and the role it has played on San Salvador and in the lives of the thousands of college students who have learned the essentials of field science techniques through courses taught on the island must include a tribute to that fallen hero, the checkerboard salt water storage tank that once loomed above the grounds of the Gerace Research Centre (Figure 59). For those who remember the early years of the CCFL Bahamian Field Station, the water tower was spotlighted at a time when electric lines and lights did not extend past the field station property. Roving bands of students and fac-

ulty would be greeted by the stark image of the water tower as they turned the corner at the Rice Bay Coast Guard Stations on their return from nightly forays to Club Shortstop. It marked a destination in the darkness. Alas, the water tower has succumbed to the ravages of wind, salt spray, age and gravity.

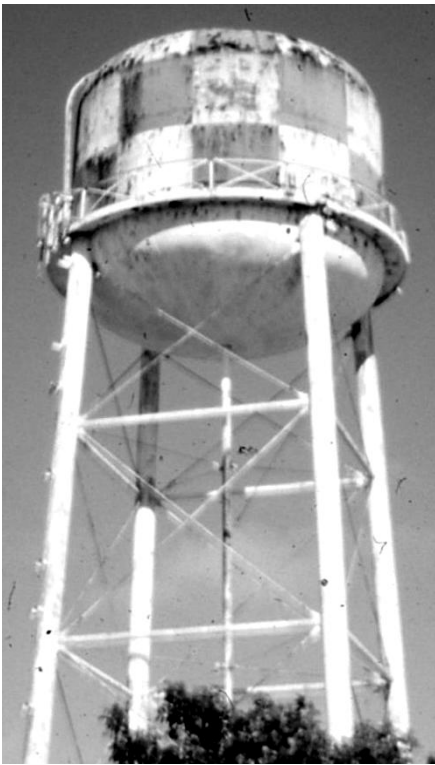


Figure 58. This 1992 photograph depicts the old salt water storage tank that was a leftover from the research centre's days as a U.S. Naval facility.

CONCLUSION

In a digital age, images of any locale can be recorded far more easily and more cost effectively than was possible in a bygone era dominated by print and slide film. They can also be shared instantly for global distribution. A far more comprehensive study of change at San Salvador is possible if others who have visited the island over time contribute to an electronic repository of historic images of the island.

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