**Southside, St. David’s – a Lost way of Life**

I want to make it quite clear that in the mid to late 1930’s, it was a reality that a world war was on the horizon, and tiny Bermuda could and would play a significant role in the war effort.

Like most St. David’s Isanders, (**SDI’s**), I have heard stories of old St. David’s. However, I was always drawn to the stories of St. David’s and what life was like prior to WWII. My parents were born in the mid 1920’s and I would often hear them reminising with family and friends about what life was like before the base (Kindly Air Force Base) came to Bermuda.

This is how the conversations would often start with my parents and their friends “During the War …… …. Before the war, do you remember when ……” or “until the base came…..”

The area on the southern side of St. David’s encompassing the the present day runway and air terminal; Clearwater beach and the Cooper’s Island Reserve; the hill-side area across the water from Clearwater beach where the white-washed water-catchment on the hill; and then going north towards the St. David’s Gas Station/Liquor Store including where the Clearwater Middle school is located - This is where the majority of the people of St. David’s Island lived and worked – Southside.

Southside consisted of islands, large and small, homes were built on these islands. Some of the islands were connected by narrow wooden bridges; there were numerous beaches; coves; mangrove swamps etc; The soil was rich and there were farms large and small; there were lilly fields, and a cricket field.

This whole area was part of Castle Harbour making Tucker’s Town the closest neighbour.

 St. David’s was isolated from mainland Bermuda until the Severn Bridge was built in 1934.

The people of St. David’s like their neighbours in Tucker’s Town were self-sufficient.

They were expert carpenters, masons, boat builders, sail-makers, chefs, farmers, fishermen and pilots to name a few of their skills.

Henry Mortimer (Tommy) Fox and his brothers and sister owned a large portion of land on St. David’s, and in particular, on Southside. This land was inherited from their father Charles Styles Fox.

Their homes, mostly wooden, (but several built of stone) were built of cedar including the porches, blinds, doors, flooring etc. One such cottage had been in the Fox Family for over two hundred and fifty years.

However, after listening to all the conversations between my parents, aunt and friends, it bacame clear to me, that during those days, the nucleus of the St David’s Island Southside Community was Ruth’s Bay.

Ruth’s Bay, which was owned by Victor Fox (the son of Tommy Fox) was actually a magnificant Bermuda cedar-tree lined beach which was located directly across from the present-day Clearwater Beach and just below the present-day white-washed water-catchment. This ‘bay’ is where the fishermen went directly out to sea for whaling and their catch; pilots (prior to the pilots association being formed) could race straight out to sea to incoming ships in their swift sail boats and gigs.

During the summer months, Ruths bay was reknown throughout Bermuda as a prime picnic area and various groups as far away as Somerset would visit St. David’s via boat to enjoy their picnics, parties and social gatherings.

Also, some SDI enterpuertuers had businesses on Southside such as the restaruants “The Happy Hit” owned by Mrs. Doris Minors and “The Quarry” owned by Mrs. Evelyn Bodden, and a dance hall and recreation centre, “The Eastern Star Casino” owned Mr. Charles (Warbaby) Fox - there were probably others businesses as well.

Like most small isolated communitess the SDI’s had their dignity, customs and their way life.

However, there was war coming and tiny Bermuda, stratigically located in the middle of the Atlantic ocean became a prime location for a United States Military base and it was decided that Southside St. David’s would be the *‘best’* location for this military base.

There was great urgency with very short notice to the residents. They were told that their property would be required to create this military base and they would get stone cottages to replace their lost homes and property.

For King and country the residents of Southside St. David’s (SDI) complied.

Some SDI being good loyal subjects complied willingly and others such as Mr. Benjamin Melville (Red Benny) Lamb absolutely refused to leave his property and home and was moved by a piece of construction equipment lifting part of the room and the chair he was sitting on out of the way and then demolished his home.

I was told that the men and equipment were waiting as a family put their belonging in a horse driven cart. The cart was barely moving away when the wracking ball was demolishing their home. Their mother was crying, father was upset seeing their home annihilated.

Families were moved into barracks in the Cashew City area. They were long wooden buildings on the northern side of present day Cashew City Road behind these buildings on the rocky shore-line were the outhouses. Each family had three rooms but there were often 9/10 to a family. I am not certain of the number of families per building. Old and young were moved there. Babies were born and people probably died there. These families lived in the barracks from nine months to a year before they were able to move in their permanent locations.

The authorities built little stone cottages for the displaced SDI, these generic cottages, were built in the area of present day Texas Road, St. David’s, and some were also built in other parts of St. David’s as well. You can still see some of them, or the form of them as many have been renovated and are now part of larger homes.

The building of the base was of such urgency, that sorting out the homes for the displaced SDI was not a priority at the time.

I was also told, but have **not** been able to confirm, the SDI’s had to pay a mortage for these cottages -

Did they actually live on Southside debt free and end up being relocated with a debt and less land for their patriotism? - plus their new cottages did not have large tracks of land for farming etc., or provide easy access to the sea.

I was told that many of the older St. David’s Islanders died during the 1940’s probably some may have had broken hearts due to their lost way of life

My mother spoke often of these days as she got older, we would be on the phone until wee hours in the morning and she would recite her memories time after time. I still have notes on odd pieces of paper or anything I could write on when she started talking. On the back of a paper place mat I drew a diagram of where everyone lived on Southside as Ms. Dolly Pitcher and my mother were talking.

A series of beautiful islands in Castle Harbour, unmaginable sea and bird life and relocation of human life and a quaint way of life crushed out of existence.

The beautiful Ruth’s Bay was were the base authorities decided to locate the base dump, was literally burnt out of existance.. Today the Ruth’s Bay base dump has been replaced with large granite boulders and a forest of casurina trees.

Ironically, I was also told that two of my grandfather’s sisters, Helen and Elsie Fox married two Foggo brothers from Tuckers Town and that they moved (either by force or by choice) from Tucker’s Town to St. David’s and twenty years later they had to give up, for a fee, their land on Southside.

ESFox - 22 October 2020