

History of Kingston & St. Andrew

Kingston



(View of Harbour Street- 19th century)

Early Beginnings

The parish of Kingston is the capital of Jamaica and it is located on the southeastern end of the island. Port Royal which was originally separated from Kingston is today part of the parish and is served by the same parochial body.

Initially it was Port Royal and not Kingston that originally held the interest of the world as Port Royal was the headquarters of the English buccaneers or pirates; chief among them the famous Captain, Sir Henry Morgan. Port Royal became wealthy from the goods that were pillaged from the Spanish and as a result of the turbulent life of the town's inhabitants; Port Royal was dubbed as the wickedest city in the world.

Kingston's Rise, Port Royal's Demise

Until 1692, there was no such place as Kingston. Kingston came into existence in 1692 after a massive earthquake and tidal waves destroyed up to two thirds of Port Royal and caused the deaths of about three thousand inhabitants. The survivors fled to the Liguanea Plain, where an even larger number perished from exposure and disease. As a result, two weeks after Port Royal's destruction, two hundred acres of land known as Colonel Barry's Hog Crawle was purchased by the government from Sir William Beeston at a cost of £1000. Nicholas Lawes, Beeston's attorney, sold Hog Crawle on behalf of Beeston who was absent from the island at that time. This was done for the erection of a new town, Kingston. Early maps listed Kingston's name as "Beeston". This could have easily been said as the land was purchased from Sir William

Beeston. In July 1692, plans for building “the new town of Kingston” by John Goffe, a surveyor, were drawn up and terms by which settlers could acquire land were issued. Port Royal was still the choice of residence by many persons because of the former grandeur: consequently, this stalled the development of Kingston. As soon as the horrors of the earthquake were forgotten and a sense of normalcy was restored, migrants sailed back to Port Royal. This all came to a halt a few years later however, when a catastrophic fire in 1703, completely destroyed most of what the earthquake had spared, as well as the buildings that were restored. Once again Port Royal residents migrated to Kingston, most never to return. Soon after 1703, a law was passed declaring Kingston to be the chief seat of trade and head port of entry into the island. From this moment on, the prosperity of Kingston was assured, and in 1713 it was declared by law that the place should “forever be taken and esteemed as an entire and distinct parish with all the powers of any other parish” and that, further it should “have the right of sending three representatives to the Assembly.”

More development of Kingston took place in the latter years as the population continued to grow. In 1842, the city received its first public water supply, from the Hope River. It was dirty and unfiltered but supplied approximately one thousand six hundred homes. Three years following that development, the railway to Spanish Town was opened on November 21st, 1845. In about the middle of the century, a coaling station was established near the foot of East Street. This meant that steamers now called at Kingston on their way to Central and South America, and crews and passengers came on shore and spent a certain amount of money in the city.

Kingston – Capital of Jamaica



The idea of Kingston becoming the capital of Jamaica was first put forward by the Governor of Jamaica, Admiral Charles Knowles. Historians have pointed out

that somewhere around the mid eighteenth century he sought to have the capital city moved from Spanish Town to Kingston. A reason for this historians note is because Kingston's port had a greater capacity than all other ports in the island combined. Also, because of its location, Kingston benefitted from the trade in contraband with Spain's recalcitrant colonies in the Caribbean. Not many shared the view of Knowles especially because Kingston was merely fifty years old and many thought that it could never succeed Spanish Town as a suitable capital especially as Spanish Town had been the capital for two hundred and thirty years. Admiral Knowles' proposal met with strong support from members of the Assembly from Kingston and other eastern parishes, and a harsh and vigorous opposition from members from Spanish Town and the western parishes. Eventually steps were taken to make Kingston the capital of Jamaica by Governor Knowles who sent the paperwork to Britain for it to be made into law. His successor Henry Moore announced in 1758 that the King had not allowed the Bill making Kingston the capital city of Jamaica. As many years went by, the capital of Jamaica soon switched from Spanish Town to Kingston. In 1872, after over a century of lobbying by Kingston merchants, Kingston became the official capital of the island, primarily because the population of Kingston was rapidly increasing; its location was said to be more in touch with the outside world through shipping, and commercial activity in Kingston eclipsed that of Spanish Town.

Growth and Development

During the post – emancipation period, private and speculative builders added two suburban zones to the settlement which had been developed during the eighteenth century. Areas that were built before 1890 were laid out in geometrical designs reminiscent of Goffe's original town plan. By 1848, new houses had been constructed in the west, north and east, and major settlements developed at Rae Town, Brown's Town, Lindo's Town, Hannah Town, and Smith Village (West Kingston). To these were added, between 1848 and 1889, the suburbs of Fletcher's Town, Kingston Gardens, Allman Town, Franklin Town, and Passmore Town. By 1920 several of these districts were composed of densely populated tenements, and the continuously built up area had spread across the parish boundary into St. Andrew, reaching Up Park Camp, Jones Town, and the Mental Hospital in the north, west, and east respectively.

The second zone of more sparsely populated suburbs developed after 1890. It expanded rapidly between the first and second world wars, as the population of the capital doubled and the inhabitants of some of the older parts of Kingston moved into St. Andrew. By the 1940s the built up area extended eastward to Long Mountain, northeast to Matilda's Corner, north to Cross Roads, Half Way Tree, and the Sandy Gully.

From the late eighteenth century until around the 1890s, the Liguanea Plain existed as a quasi suburb of Kingston. Its agricultural character declined with the eclipse of the sugar industry. Cattle pens and former estates overtime became residencies of business men.

Not long after the twentieth century the City of Kingston was to undergo another major tragedy. A massive earthquake struck the city on January 14, 1907. A large part of the downtown area was destroyed and virtually all the buildings south of Parade. Casualties of eight hundred up to one thousand were believed to be a result of the earthquake and a tsunami which ensued. As a result of the damage, building codes now had restrictions of not more than sixty feet high. A grant of £150,000 and a loan of £800,000 were secured from the British Government, and shared among the property owners, who were responsible for their own redevelopment. Residencies as far north as Half Way Tree in St. Andrew had to be reconstructed, but the most comprehensive rebuilding was undertaken in the commercial area.

St. Andrew

The parish of St. Andrew was originally called Liguanea and the name still lingers around the plain as Kingston the capital city is located there. "Liguanea" is one of the few surviving Arawak words. Presumably, it stems from the word "iguana" meaning lizard. The Parish of St. Andrew was one of the original parishes created between 1661-1664 and also one of the first parishes to be established by law in 1867. The name St. Andrew was derived from patron saints from Great Britain. St. Andrew stretches from Cross Roads to Rockford in the east, and reaches up into the Blue Mountains, sharing borders with St. Thomas, Portland, St. Mary and St. Catherine. In 1923, Kingston and St. Andrew were amalgamated to create the corporate area of Kingston and St. Andrew, which is what it is commonly referred to by most Jamaicans.

Capital



Half Way Tree is the capital of St. Andrew and it was originally called Half Way Tree Pen. It is said to have been owned by the “Hotchkyn” family for 130 years. Robert Hotchkyn who was attorney General of Jamaica in 1707 was a lineal descendant of this family. Historians have said that Half Way Tree was named after a huge cotton tree which was at the junction of four roads near to the Parish Church. People travelling from the western parishes

into Kingston, or further east, often stopped at this point (half-way) for rest or refreshments at a nearby tavern. The cotton tree is believed to have been in existence even before the conquest of the island by the British in 1655. The Clock Tower which is also at the centre of Half Way Tree was erected as a memorial to King Edward VII of England.

Some Notable Places/Buildings in Kingston & St. Andrew

Parade- located in the heart of Downtown Kingston and was originally called Victoria Park, named after Queen Victoria. It was renamed in 1977, St. William Grant Park after noted labour leader and Black Nationalist, St. William Grant.

Fort Charles (Port Royal) - a historic fort built by the British a year after capturing Jamaica from the Spaniards. Its strategic location benefitted them by allowing the British full command of the entrance to Kingston Harbour

Gordon House - named after one of Jamaica’s National Hero, George William Gordon. It is where Jamaica’s House of Representatives meet in Jamaica and was built in 1960.

Institute of Jamaica - considered as the collector of Jamaica’s history, the Institute of Jamaica was founded in 1879 for the encouragement of Literature, Science and Art.

National Heroes Park - this park used to be known as the Kingston Race Course because of its dominant activity and remained so up until 1953 when horse racing was transferred to Knutsford Park. It was later renamed the George VI Memorial Park 1953 in honour of the late King; father of Queen Elizabeth II and for her first visit to the island. Finally, in 1973 the National Heroes Park was the name given to this historical site. This park has been home to monuments that have been erected in honour of the island's National Heroes.

National Library of Jamaica - the National Library of Jamaica serves as a very important historical collector of Jamaican History. It collects information on Jamaica and information written outside of Jamaica but about Jamaica or notable Jamaicans. Its collection dates back to the 1500s includes many rare books, maps and documents, pictures and manuscripts.

St. Andrew Parish Church - a historic building located at the heart of Half Way Tree, the St. Andrew Parish Church was founded in 1664 and is one of the oldest churches in Jamaica.

Jewish Cemetery - this cemetery is an important landmark in the history of Jamaica as it is the oldest denominational cemetery.

Half Way Tree Court House - this building was occupied by imperial censors, during the Second World War and was also the venue for the second Junior Centre by the Institute of Jamaica

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