

HISTORIC NASSAU

By Gail Saunders and Donald Cartwright
Macmillan Caribbean, 1979. 54 p. illus., maps. ISBN
0-333-27790-2.

In their Preface the authors indicate that they have attempted to trace the major influences on the growth of the city of Nassau and "to give the general reader a quick look at Nassau's main historic buildings." (p.v.) They also hope that the work will prove useful to both tourists and Bahamians alike. Historic Nassau is certainly 'a quick look' but one wonders how useful it actually is to the students of Bahamian history. Unfortunately, the work barely scratches the surface of its subject matter, especially architectural history, and in several instances the reader is left wondering about some of the statements made. Saunders and Cartwright, again in the Preface, hope that the book "will spark interest in the subject so that more detailed research will ensue." (p.v)

Further research in Bahamian history, geography, social life, customs, etc., is needed and Historic Nassau is enhanced with contemporary quotations but nowhere are these quotations footnoted or their sources given. Succeeding historians will, no doubt, find these quotations useful and interesting but must, in effect, duplicate the research conducted by Saunders and Cartwright in order to find, evaluate, and expand upon research done by these two authors. Mrs. Saunders, Archivist for the Bahamas, should be aware of the importance of accurate scholarly reporting. Footnoting of quotations used would have added considerably to the usefulness of this book.

Historic Nassau is liberally illustrated with thirty-one illustrations, an inset of 18 photos, and 5 maps and/or plans. Many of the illustrations are reproductions of etchings and pen and ink drawings or old photographs. Rarely are these illustrations dated and in no cases are sources given. How useful dates would have been in this book! Fortunately, the majority of the maps/plans are dated but, again, no sources appear. Like the lack of footnotes, the lack of dates and sources on the visual elements of the book proves to be a hindrance to further research.

To illustrate this point and to show the confusion which may arise in some readers' minds because of statements, as mentioned above, let us look at pages 38 and 39. On page 38 there is an undated illustration of St. Agnes Church. On page 39 the following statements appears: "The first St. Agnes Church was consecrated in 1848 on the site of what is now the St. Agnes School Room on Market and Cockburn Streets." Now, is the illustration that of the first St. Agnes Church or a subsequent church? How many St. Agnes Churches have there been? What happened to the first one?

There are other examples of this. On page 7 the following statement appears: "The Deanery is perhaps the oldest residence in the Bahamas. It was believed to have been built as early as 1710 (1803 - as corrected by the errata sheet) and was acquired by the Anglican Church in 1800." If the Deanery was built in 1803 (as amended by the errata sheet) how was it acquired by the Anglican Church in 1800, three years prior to its existence?

This leads to another point, in that the errata sheet is a necessary companion to the book. Fortunately, there are few corrections but the unsuspecting reader may not know that the errata sheet is necessary and not all copies of Historic Nassau are sold with the errata sheet included.

Finally, Historic Nassau gives a "quick look at Nassau's main historic buildings" (Preface, p.v) and, of necessity, describes them architecturally. It would have been useful to include a short list of adequate definitions of the architectural terms used or margin sketches illustrating the terms. In fact, a detailed architectural study, including plans, perspectives, and illustrations of all or most of the buildings discussed would have made for fascinating reading. The closest the authors come to this is the plan (undated) of Fort Charlotte. (p. 27)

Historic Nassau does bring together snippets of information found in other sources and, despite comments above, the illustrations do enhance the text. As a 'teaser' to Bahamian history and architecture, the book does fulfill its function. However, it does fall short of being a substantial contribution to the literature of the Bahamas.

by Paul G. Boulton