

Government House

Mount Fitzwilliam
Nassau, The Bahamas



1801

GOVERNMENT HOUSE

GOVERNMENT HOUSE comprises the offices and residence of the Governor-General. The ten-acre estate is named for a former owner - Richard Fitzwilliam - who was Governor from 1733 to 1738. The site was purchased by The Crown in 1800 for four thousand pounds, sterling (£4,000).

The Governor-General is the representative of the British Monarch who is the head of The Commonwealth of Nations, of which The Bahamas is a Member State. The Governor-General lives and works at Mount-Fitzwilliam.

The mansion has undergone many changes over the years. The original structure was built during the administration of John Halkett, who served as Governor from 1801 to 1804.

In 1907, the East Wing was added to house the offices (ground floor) and Grand Ballroom (upstairs). Badly damaged by a hurricane, the East Wing was replaced by a new structure in 1909.

Substantial damage to the mansion, caused by the hurricane of 1929, led to its rebuilding. Retaining the original, solid, outside walls, the new structure was given a new facade, including a carport, as well as improved entry and hallways. It was ready for occupancy by Governor Sir Bede and Lady Clifford in 1932.

Additional quarters in the West Wing (now known as the Windsor Wing) were constructed to accommodate the personal staff of the Duke of Windsor, formerly King Edward VII of Great Britain, and Governor of The Bahamas from 1940 to 1944.

During 1964 considerable renovation was carried out, at which time the office accommodation on the ground floor of the East Wing was also remodelled.

In 1977 the roof of the Patio on the south side of the building was added to facilitate the accommodation for the visit of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in October of that year.

THE RESIDENCE

The Residence includes the Main Entrance Hall and Grand Staircase, Drawing Room, Library, Dining Room, Bedroom Suite for the Governor-General, three main guest suites, and four smaller suites in the Windsor Wing, to accommodate family members and household staff.

During the Governorship of Sir Orville Turnquest (1995-2001), major renovations were carried out. The Ballroom was refurbished and transformed. The porch leading from the Master Bedroom was enclosed to facilitate the remodelling of the bedroom and bathroom. The Windsor Wing, which consists of five (5) bedrooms was also refurbished and the porch converted into a Family Room. A portion of the porch of the office block was converted into an office to house the Registry. Central airconditioning was installed throughout the Residence in 1997.

The front door to the Residence is the original door to the home of the Duke of Windsor, which was imported from England. This door is approximately sixty-two years old.

The Dining Room table which is about 200 years old, seats 24 persons.

Housed in a special safe in the Library of the Residence are various gifts presented to the Governor-General, a Crystal Urn from the Crown Agents; a Crystal Vase from Sweden; a key to the city of Metropolitan Dade County; a Gold Pen which was used to sign the Constitutional Instruments; a Gill Key from the City of Miami; a Porcelain Centrepiece from the United States of America; a Jade Fish from Canada; a Silver Rose Bowl and Candelabra from the British Government; a Wooden Gavel from Bermuda; a Fobwatch from Iran; a set of coins, Coat of Arms and Book Ends from the Cayman Islands and a Fire Dispatch Box from Jamaica. The most unusual of all the gifts is a piece of rock which was brought from the moon by the first American Astronaut.

STATUE

The Statue of Christopher Columbus which stands on the steps leading to Government House, was modelled in London by the Aide to Washington Irving, and presented to The Bahamas in 1830 by one of its Governors, Sir James Carmichael Smythe.

GUESTS

Members of the British Royal Family have been entertained at Government House: They include:

- Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II
- H.R.H. Prince Phillip, Duke of Edinburgh
- H.R.H. Prince Charles, Prince of Wales
- H.R.H. Princess Anne & Captain Mark Phillips
- H.R.H. Princess Margaret
- H.R.H. Princess Alice, Countess of Athlone
- H.R.H. The Duke of Kent and the Dutchess of Kent
- H.R.H. Princess Alexandra
- The Hon. Angus Ogilvy & Mrs. Angus Ogilvy
- H.R.H. Princess Michael of Kent
- H.R.H. Prince Henry of Wales (Prince Harry)

Other Distinguished Visitors received at Government House include:

- Sir Winston Churchill, Prime Minister of England
- Mr John F. Kennedy, President of The United States of America
- The Earl Mountbatten of Burma, Admiral of the Fleet, Former Governor-General of India
- Dr. Kenneth Kaunda, President of Zambia & Mrs Kaunda
- General Yakubu Gowon, President of Nigeria
- Herr Walter Scheel, President of the Federal Republic of Germany & Frau Scheel
- Sir Harold McMillan, Prime Minister of Great Britain
- The Archbishop Makarios, President of Cyprus

- Dr. Robert Runcie, Archbishop of Canterbury
- Mr. John Diefenbaker, Prime Minister of Canada
- Sir Sidney Poitier, Bahamian Actor
- Miss Marion Anderson, International Soprano
- Baroness Maria Von Trapp
- His Excellency Comrade Robert G. Mugabe, President of the Republic of Zimbabwe and Madame Mugabe
- Rt. Hon. Sir Murray Fox & Lady Fox, Lord Mayor of London
- Mr. Nelson Mandela, President of South Africa
- Mr. Gerd Jarchow, Head of the European Commission
- His Excellency Festus Gontabanye Mogae, President of the Republic of Botswana and Madame Mogae
- Rt. Hon. Lord Woolf Barnes, Lord Chief Justice of England & Wales & Lady Woolf
- Rt. Hon. Alderman David Howard, Lord Mayor of London & Lady Mayoress Mrs. Howard
- Rt. Hon. Lord Peter Millett & Lady Millett
- His Excellency Vincente Fox, President of Mexico
- Rt. Hon. Lord Johan Steyn & Lady Steyn

HER MAJESTY'S REPRESENTATIVES

Governor

Sir John Warburton Paul, GCMG, OBE, MC served as the last Royal Governor and as the first Governor-General of The Bahamas - 1972-1973

Governors-General

- Sir Milo Boughton Butler, GCMG, GCVO:
August 1st, 1973 - January 22nd, 1979
- Sir Gerald Christopher Cash, GCMG, GCVO, OBE, JP:
September 24th, 1979 - June 25th, 1988 (acted 2nd, September, 1976 - September 23rd, 1979)
- Sir Henry Milton Taylor, Kt., JP:
March 1st, 1991 - January 1st, 1992 (acted June 26th, 1988 - February 29th, 1991)
- Sir Clifford Darling, GCVO, JP:
January 2nd, 1992 - January 2nd, 1995
- Sir Orville Turnquest, GCMG, QC, JP. LL.B:
January 3rd, 1995 - November 12th, 2001
- Dame Ivy L. Dumont, DCMG, JP:
January 1st, 2002 - November 30th, 2005 (acted November 13th, 2001 - December 31st, 2001)
- His Excellency the Honourable Arthur D. Hanna:
February 1st, 2006 - April 14th, 2010
- Sir Arthur Foulkes, GCMG:
April 14th, 2010 - July 8th, 2014
- Her Excellency Dame Marguerite Pindling, GCMG:
July 8th, 2014 to present