

## A SYNOPSIS OF THE HISTORY OF THE NASSAU BAHAMAS ASSOCIATION

In the early years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, hundreds of Bahamians sailed northward from Nassau, and other islands of the Bahamas, in search of a better life in America. The stories told of the bright lights, and the golden opportunities waiting to be had in New York City, inspired dreams of grandeur in the hearts of young men and women in venture forth in search of their dreams.

It is scarce to find a Bahamian during those early years, and perhaps thereafter, who did not know, or heard of a relative, or friend, who had left the Islands and came to the United States.

In the year 1912, ten (10) men of Bahamian ancestry, came together and formed an organization in hope to fill the needs of fellowship and community among fellow Bahamians, and their families, in the New York City area. It surely was an act of vision, and caring.

With the forming of this Association, Bahamians coming to New York from the Bahamas, and elsewhere, could now find a place to meet, greet, and receive support, as they sought to find a job and establish themselves in the new country because during these early years, Bahamians were then subjects of the British Empire, and as immigrants, the British Colonial Office in New York City could not be relied upon to assist, or facilitate Bahamians immigrants.

### THE EARLY YEARS

The ten Bahamians that founded the Nassau Bahamas Association in New York City were Mr. Austin A. Wilson, Rubin Clinton, Charles Sawyer, Bruce Roberts, Frank Russell, Robert Carey, Arthur Minnis, Edward Brown, Henson Styles and Willie White. Apart from Nassau, the Founding Fathers could have had roots at Andros, Abaco, Cat Island, Eleuthera and Long Island.

Once these men came together, they determined that an organization was needed for the purpose of fellowship, to carry on Bahamian traditions and to be responsive to Bahamians in need. The association was duly organized, a constitution drafted, and by-laws framed September 17, 1912, in the home of the first president Mr. Austin A. Wilson. Ten years later in 1922, the membership was expanded to include women. And afterwards expanded to include not only Bahamians, but their descendants and spouses and honorary membership to non-Bahamians.

On July 6, 1939, the organization was incorporated in New York state under the name of the "Nassau Bahamas Association, Inc". In 1946, the Association purchased a building to serve as its headquarters located at 211 West 137th Street, NYC. It took the Association three years to complete all mortgage payments on the building.

The inclusion of women in the membership led to an immediate broadening of the activities and programs conducted by the Association. The highlight of the women's involvement in the early years was the annual pre-Mother's Day dance held at the Rockland Palace near the famous Polo-ground, home of the New York Giants baseball team. The prominent women during those years were Mrs. Georgie B. Roberts, Mrs. Augusta Hall, Victoria Hall, Susan Jolly and Ida Braynan. The fashion shows, the bus trips, boat rides, picnics and other family-oriented activities became the occasions when the women reaffirmed the wisdom and progressiveness of the Association in extending its membership to the fairer sex.