



search...

Search

War & Military Records

Millions of War & Military Records. All Searchable and Easy to Find!
www.myheritage.com/Military_Records



WEATHER The Abacos

Mostly Cloudy
Max: 78°F | Min: 65°F

Call 302 2360 to subscribe

National Profile: Dr. Gail Saunders

Sonia Farmer
Guardian National Correspondent
sonia@nsguard.com

Published: Nov 28, 2011

Dr. Gail Saunders has done a huge service to The Bahamas through her invaluable research into Bahamian history over the years. Her desire to uncover and preserve Bahamian history taps into an inherent desire many feel to know where they came from in order to better understand who they are — a passion, she feels, is hardly being shared by Bahamians today.

Share This:

Rate this article:

Add To Favourite

“In this modern society many young people don’t know or appreciate their history,” she laments. “If you go to a high school and ask who the prime minister is, it’s alarming how much they don’t know. But I think if we as a society know and appreciate our history, we would not be in the state we’re in — all this crime and dishonesty.”

Dr. Saunders knows what she’s talking about — she was, after all, a pioneer, establishing the National Archives and acting as its director for 33 years to record and preserve Bahamian history. In that position, she supervised the establishment of the Pompey Museum in 1992 and assisted the Central Bank in establishing Balcony House Museum. She also served as president of the Bahamas Historical Society for a decade (1989-1999), as well as various positions in archival and historical associations in the Caribbean.

Her passion has led her to write countless books on the nation’s history and co-author others, many of which are used by students at home and internationally, including “Slavery in The Bahamas”, “Bahamian Society After Emancipation”, two volumes of “Islanders in the Stream” (with Michael Craton), and her most recent book, “Historic Bahamas”.

“It’s just a love,” she says of her work. “I just find it fascinating. I’m passionate about Bahamian history and I know there’s still so much more to learn and uncover.”

The beginnings

It was a passion first sparked during her third year of undergraduate degree studies in history in the mid-sixties at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne. For her thesis, she wanted to focus on the abolition and emancipation of slavery in The Bahamas, yet would have to work from primary sources. For a summer, she spent copious amounts of time at the Public Records Office and British Library in London in order to write her comprehensive thesis.

“It really opened my eyes,” she remembers. “From that day I had a desire to write.”

After earning her BA in History in 1966 from University of Newcastle upon Tyne and her postgraduate certificate in Education from the University of Leicester in 1967, Dr. Saunders taught history at Government High for two years before the Ministry of Education approached her to start an archive.

She agreed, and while her then new husband, the late Dr. Winston Saunders, studied for his postgraduate certificate in England, the Ministry of Education arranged for her to take classes at University College London and the British Council had her work in Public Record Offices in several locations in order to learn more about the process of archiving.

When the pair returned to The Bahamas in 1969, Dr. Winston Saunders became deputy headmaster of Highbury High School (now R.M. Bailey) while Dr. Gail Saunders took up a desk position at the library in the Ministry of Education. Having learned a great deal about archiving abroad, she soon found an opportunity to put her training to good use.

“The records for the old Board of Education were just knocking around so I asked them for some shelves to put behind my desk and I collected them and sorted them and listed them and they formed the first deposit of the Bahamas National Archive,” she remembers.

A year later, and after a first survey of records in government ministries, a representative sent by the United Nations Development Programme, who was the archivist of Her Majesty’s Customs in London,

Teach English Worldwide

rossieronline.usc.edu

Become an English Teacher Overseas Earn Your TESOL Online at USC.



Today's Front Page

THE NASSAU Guardian

Dr. Porter ready to fight charges

Ailing cancer doctor speaks out

Technician killed in airport accident

Kofie Goodman denied bail

Nottage suggests more bail to address prison overcrowding

MAGIC & DANCE CIRCUS

PREPARED - MARCH 17th - ST. GEORGE'S GYM

visited Nassau. Together they were able to get temporary accommodation for the archive at the Eastern Public Library (the Eastern Post Office) — which lasted for 16 years.

In addition, the United Nations Development Programme gave them two fellowships to further train staff for the archives. One went to Elaine Toote, who is presently the director of the archives, and the other went to Shirley Strachan, who is now the chief archivist.

Transition

Many years and building extensions later, with Dr. Saunders as the director of archives and well-trained staff to work with her, she felt an itch to get back to writing and academia.

“When you work to build an institution, it takes quite a lot out of you. I felt I needed to be recharged,” she says. “I thought of going into another profession but I loved what I was doing.”

Instead, she pursued a doctorate at the University of Waterloo under the direction of her future collaborator of “Islands in the Stream”, the historian Michael Craton, which proved to be good move.

“Just being back in academia, it was wonderful,” Dr. Saunders remembers. “I had to work a lot, but it was amazing.”

Throughout her 33 years as director of archives (1971-2004) and her position as director-general of archives until her retirement in 2008, Dr. Saunders has never stopped researching and writing about Bahamian history. Even now as scholar-in-residence at the College of The Bahamas, she’s working on a new book that explores race relations in the colonial Bahamas.

To her, history is a vital part of a society’s self-identity and pride. In fact, she believes Bahamian history should be a mandatory paper in the Bahamas General Certificate of Secondary Education (BGCSE) exams in order to instill a sense of self-assurance in every Bahamian.

“It’s not mandatory because Bahamians don’t demand it,” she says. “If they don’t demand that history be an essential subject in BGCSE, it’s not going to get there.”

Indeed, she believes that if that were the case, many young Bahamians in school would be exposed to heroes in all parts of society — great Bahamian politicians, heroes, artists, and thinkers. She points out, for example, that a Bahamian, Dr. Robert Love, influenced Marcus Garvey — yet barely any Bahamians know this important fact. If they did, Dr. Saunders says, they may begin to think about themselves and their country differently.

“What we’re lacking, I think, is recognition of our heroes. Why are we so hesitant to recognize the greats among us?” she points out. “You don’t have to be in high office to be a hero — people of very simple means can be heroes.”

“You know what it does when our own people perform and do well? It gives us national pride, and that’s what we’re lacking,” she continues. “If we had national pride, we wouldn’t litter, we wouldn’t curse and we would be a kinder and gentler society. To me, lately Bahamians don’t seem happy and it’s a shame because if we had this appreciation for our culture we would be a happier people.”

For her part, Dr. Saunders continues to provide fascinating insights into Bahamian history in the hope that her books will inspire others to pursue the same path and continue to push the vital knowledge of Bahamian history.

“I hope that they will learn some Bahamian history from my work and do more research and study history themselves,” she says. “We need young people to become interested in it. Hopefully they will be as productive as me.”

Attachments

1 [GailSaunders-colour](#)

This content has been locked. You can no longer post any comment.



* [Work for us](#)
* [Make us your homepage](#)

* [Community Relations](#)
* [Events](#)

* [Corrections/Suggestions](#)
* [About Us](#)

* [Contact The Nassau Guardian](#)
* [Newsletter & alerts](#)

Free Obituaries Search

Obituaries.Archives.com

1) Type In Someone's Name 2) Find Their Obituary Instantly!



Quick Links

National Review

