

BELIZE FACTS AND FIGURES

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SECTION: PART II: THE PEOPLE OF BELIZE AND THEIR HISTORY/BARON BLISS

Baron Bliss

Born: 1869, Died: 1926

Baron Bliss was an Englishman who adopted Belize as his home in his final days and became the country's most celebrated benefactor and philanthropist to date.

Henry Edward Ernest Victor Bliss, JP was born in Buckingham, England in 1869. One of his ancestors had gained the title of Baron for service to Britain and Portugal during the Peninsular War in which the British sent troops to assist Portugal against Napoleon. In his early adulthood, Henry Edward took on the title of Baron Bliss, Fourth Baron of Portugal.

Bliss was an intelligent, industrious person and became a trained engineer; the income from this profession made him a multi- millionaire by his late 30s. Bliss was married to Ethel Alice but this union produced no children. In 1911, when Baron Bliss was 42, he contracted polio which paralyzed him from the waist down. It was after this that he decided to leave England.

Bliss acquired his second yacht, the Sea King II, after World War I and set rudder for the Caribbean. His first stop was the Bahamas where he purchased property and intended to stay. However, he grew disillusioned with the jurisdiction. He then set sail for Trinidad where he was afflicted with food poisoning, causing him to decide to move on to Belize on the advice of his friend Willoughby Bullock, who was Attorney General of Belize. He stopped off briefly in Jamaica to see to his ailing health.

The Baron arrived in Belize on January 14th 1926 and dropped anchor off Fort George in Belize City. The local fishermen quickly made friends with him and took him fishing on the Belize barrier reef in his smaller boat also named the Sea King. He enjoyed this experience for a month but, by the first week of February, his health deteriorated and he was advised of the inevitable. Bliss responded by becoming a resident of Belize and creating a will to leave the majority of his estate to the people of Belize. Upon his death, this gift was valued at one million, eight hundred and fifty thousand USA dollars.

The Baron was meticulous with his will and devised a forward-looking scheme whereby his money would be used for developments and not merely to be used to finance Government responsibilities. As a result, he stipulated that the monies could not be used for frivolous expenses or even for schools which he insisted were the responsibility of Government. However, the will allowed financing for agricultural and vocational schools which were greatly needed in Belize at the time. The will also created the Baron Bliss Trust which made provisions for an annual boat regatta.

After the death of Baron Bliss, the British Government challenged the will in a British court and, as a result, the people of Belize lost over one quarter the value of the bequeatment by the Baron.

Projects which have been financed by the Baron Bliss Trust include the Bliss Institute, the San Ignacio Town Hall, the Benque Viejo Town Hall, the Corozal Town Hall and the Bliss School of Nursing. Monies from the Trust were also used to purchase the land for Belmopan.

The present trustees of the Baron Bliss Trust are the Governor General, the Attorney General and the Financial Secretary.