

Long, distinguished history

WESTERN BUREAU - LUCEA THE capital of Hanover and the Hanover Benefit Building Society (which since February 29, 1996, merged with and took the name of Jamaica National Building Society), share a long and distinguished history.

According to Marguerite Curtin, in her special report which appeared in *The Jamaican* magazine in 1990, Lucea's history is unique. Unlike her fellow capitals across the island, Lucea pre-dates the parish of Hanover which was established in 1723 when it was formed out of the parish of Westmoreland.

She has had her share of sailors and bootleggers in the early years but not much is known as valuable records of estates and commercial activities in the Western end of the island were destroyed in the hurricanes of 1744 and 1780.

Ms. Curtin noted that "the name Lucia means light and represents a lady who brings a glow to even the darkest lives. In this respect, Santa Lucia, the early Christian martyr seem to have been especially dear to the Spanish sailors and settlers who came to Jamaica in the late 15th and early 16th Century. Whether it was Columbus himself who gave Lucea... her name, is a matter for conjecture. The present-day town of Lucea, capital of Hanover is therefore, Spanish in origin, no matter how obscure her beginnings may be."

The middle years of the 18th Century were said to be prosperous for Jamaican planters, so much so that Governor Trelawny commented on the remarkable expansion (1948-1770). In fact, the four parishes of Cornwall produced three-sevenths of the island export. The slaves on the sugar estates beyond Lucea were responsible for the prosperity enjoyed by the parish.

Lucea became the great escape for planters and estate managers, from the canefields and sugar facto-

ries. Cock-fighting rings or taverns like that of Isaac Lyon took their minds off the harsh realities of daily living.

It was therefore not necessary for them to journey to the 'Bay' (Montego Bay) 25 miles away, as itinerant companies of actors like the American Company of Comedians would come from time to time by drogher to present a series of performances in Lucea's handsome courthouse.

Many too, were the elegant evenings in Lucea when the military personnel entertained. Centered around Fort Charlotte, illumination lit the entire town and its surroundings including the ships in the harbour.

While often in the surrounding plantations grim starvation took the lives of many slaves, in the town the itinerant entertainers were always sure of a profitable performance and ready patronage of their plays, lectures and magic - these diversions helped to keep the wealthy Hanoverians in high spirits.

But it was an illusion that could not last.

Attitudes of the majority of the Hanoverian planters and managers were well known to be deplorable so it was not surprising that by the early 19th Century, with the arrival of Nonconformist missionaries and the emergence of the evangelical clergy with the Established Church itself (The Church of England) there was mounting hostility and sometimes violent reactions from the plantocracy: Evangelicals were equated with Wilberforce and the Anti-slavery movement. It was the rector of Hanover who first came into conflict: Daniel Warner Rose, a native of Antigua, and a well known Evangelical was sent to prison in 1860 for a month on a charge of violence.

What the true story was has never been ascertained: he was sentenced for having hurled a bottle at a planter over a disagreement con-

cerning baptismal fees for slaves. On returning to Lucea however he was given a civic reception.

From contemporary comments, we know that the Christmas Rebellion of 1831 left an indelible mark on the psyche of Western, Jamaica.

What started out as a 'sit down' by workers turned out to be a fearful event which culminated in the hanging of Samuel 'Daddy' Sharpe and many others. The effect of the event was evident to two English Magistrates who visited Lucea six years later.

Joseph Sturge and Thomas Harvey had much to say about the condition of Lucea prisons and their captives. Lucea was on her way to profound change in her life as she knew it.

After Emancipation in 1834, Lucea showed vigorous growth in freeholds and planters pointed to this new phenomenon with great alarm. In the 1840's carpenters, sawyers and handicraftsmen were building homes for themselves and their neighbours in the hill districts around Lucea.

It was 1893, in response to the need for more homes, that the Hanover Benefit Building Society was founded by the Reverend C. Henderson Davis and fellow directors A. J. Salmon, G.A. L. Sanftleben, I.D. Kirk lady, F.G. Miller, Walter W. Hogg and G.R. Davis.

Since then both the town of Lucea and the HBBS have never been short of self-reliant individuals who will take initiative. Today, Lucea celebrates the 1st anniversary of the merger of Hanover Benefit Building Society and Jamaica National, another miles stone in the two entwining histories of inter-dependence and mutual support. Experts from 'Lucea an old Marine Town' a special report by Marguerite Curtin which appeared in *The Jamaican* 17th edition in 1990.