**Final draft**

**The Turks & Caicos and Bermuda**

*A note by Dr. Edward Harris, MBE, 20 March 2016 Words 745*

The Turks and Caicos Islands, like Bermuda, were one of the last places on Earth to be settled by humans, after the long trek out of Africa 100,000 years ago by *Homo sapiens*, the modern version of our kind. It was originally occupied by the Taino peoples of the region, beginning after AD 500, while Europeans became aware of it in AD 1512 after the visit in that year of the Spaniard, Ponce de Leon. The following year, he explored Florida and is thought to be the discoverer of the Gulf Stream, the largest “river” in the world that begins north of the Bahamas archipelago (of which TCI is the southern end) and sweeps northward to Iceland and Europe, keeping Bermuda for part of the year as tropical as the Turks and Caicos. Thus two islands (both yet British Overseas Territories) were connected geographically, later to be joined culturally.

While known to Europeans from 1505, Bermuda was not permanently settled until 1612 by the Virginia Company of London (one of the first modern corporations), primarily as an outpost for Jamestown, where the United States was born in 1607. As such, the Island was a “company town”, with much of its scant 19 square miles divided into 25-acre lots for the London investors of the new Bermuda Company of 1615. For the next 69 years, the people who would become “Bermudians” were under the thrall of that corporation and particularly so in the case of shipping (the only international transport of the day), as they had to use Bermuda Company “bottoms” and not their own evolving vessels.

The Bermuda Company was dissolved in 1684 and the Island came under the administration of the English government, but it had its own parliament from 1620, making that internally governing entity the oldest in the British Commonwealth, after London. Thus freed from the London corporation, Bermudians took to the seas in their famous sloops, which were the fastest ships afloat in the eighteenth century. That was because of their design and build in Bermuda cedar, but also because they were powered by the “Bermuda Rig”, the greatest invention (made in Bermuda) in sailing technology after the European “square rig”. The Bermuda Rig is the fore-and-aft arrangement of sails still used by most yachts worldwide, include boats vying for the America’s Cup, though with technical and material upgrades. So Bermuda maritime heritage may be seen in most harbours and sailing races around the globe.

That maritime technology allowed the Bermudians to use and eventually settle the Turks Islands from the 1680s, mostly to extract salt from the sea, for a triangular trade with the fisheries of the Canadian Maritimes, the English U.S. colonies and Bermuda. Salt, which is essential for life, became, from its Turks and Caicos origins, one of the economic life-bloods of Bermuda, which had little to export other than people, timber, and stone.

Bermuda also exports ideas and none is more enduring that some of the historic architecture of the TCI, particularly in the classic “White House” on Salt Cay, yet in the Harriott Family who built in the early 1800s. Bermuda architectural designs are often seen in the kitchens of early TCI buildings, with their large external chimneys, such as the one, now restored, at the Governor’s Resident on Salt Cay.

In the early years, Bermudian salt rakers went to the TCI in the winter and left with salt in the late spring, while in later years, slaves were used in the labourious work of harvesting salt from the sea in the natural and manmade “Salinas”, or salt ponds. Perhaps the most famous Bermudian to work in the TCI was the slave, Mary Prince, whose autobiography about slavery in the New World was the first such missive by a woman and became a best seller in the cause against that slavery, which was abolished in British dominions in 1833.

In recent times, archaeologists and architectural historians have begun to record the standing vestiges of the Turks and Caicos Islands, of which Grand Turk, Salt Cay, and the Caicos Islands (including Wade’s Green on North Caicos of the Stubbs Family, who are yet present in Bermuda) hold significant monuments. Bermudians and Turks and Caicos islanders are involved in that process, for indeed much of that legacy is on the order of “world heritage”, given its role in the development of TCI, the West Indies and Bermuda, and the European settlement of the Caribbean and the eastern Americas.

CAPTIONS FOR PHOTOGRAPHS

1. The White House on Salt Cay, home of the TCI-Bermuda Harriott Family, was built in the Bermuda vernacular, including the stone roof.

2. The White House may be compared to this “old mansion” at Bermuda, photographed *circa* 1915, and fortunately now restored.

3. The cookhouse, or kitchen at the Governor’s House, Salt Cay (now restored) has a classic Bermuda chimney and its doors frames are made of Bermuda cedar.

4. A nineteenth-century cradle, with rockers, made of Bermuda cedar in the Turks & Caicos: portable joint-heritage of TCI and Bermuda.

The author

Dr. Edward Harris, MBE, JP, FSA, PHD, is a Bermudian and since 1980 has been the director of the National Museum of Bermuda (formerly Bermuda Maritime Museum). He is the inventor of the “Harris Matrix” (1973), which has been accepted in many countries worldwide as the industry standard for recording archaeological sites: the textbook is available for free download at [www.harrismatrix.com](http://www.harrismatrix.com).