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STATEMENT REGARDING MAGENS BAY

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In the next to the last revision of the Report on the Virgin Islands by the National Resources Planning Board, the establishment was recommended of a "Public Park and Beach with dressing and picnic facilities at Magens Bay for all the people".

That statement was written after I had talked over the matter with representatives of the Board and I approve of it in principle.

In the final report now completed, this opinion is modified, presumably due to existing conditions, and stress is laid upon financial considerations and the large outlays required for more necessary and practical public needs of which it is only necessary to mention a modern Hospital and a new High School. This attitude which has much to justify it does not in any way affect my belief that the Magens Bay site can be made one of the most attractive of its kind in the West Indies. Such a development however in order to reap the benefit of all the natural advantages would be not only a very considerable undertaking, but also would require careful preparatory study and planning.

Before going any further, I would like to review briefly my relationship with the property. For several years before I bought Magens Bay Estate from Dr. Mortensen in 1927 I had wanted--like most other people--a piece of land on the shore of the Bay with a strip connecting it with Louisenhoj. Such a sale would have injured his estate and he very rightly declined to consider it, having long previously decided to dispose of all his land as an entirety. I did not want to assume all the labor and responsibility that I foresaw its ownership would involve and only did so when a decision became necessary because of his return to Copenhagen.

Another consideration that influenced me greatly was my hope that I could preserve the extraordinary combination of the beauty of the bay and its surrounding hills. To allow these slopes to be deprived of their well wooded covering; to treat them otherwise than according to a general plan; or to utilize them for any commercial purpose would have resulted, I believed, in the loss by our Island of one of its greatest assets.

So with these principles in view the work then commenced and continued up to now, has been based. You and all who are acquainted with the results will, I trust, agree that the changes made have enhanced the beauty of the setting. Very few St. Thomians know that the view from the Drake Seat is-- in the opinion of many travelers--much more beautiful than a similar one near Honolulu called the Pali, which all tourists must perforce visit.

To continue the story of the Estate. The day after the purchase was closed, I let it be known that its Westernmost part amounting to 263 acres was for sale. Parcels of it had been rented mostly to people of French descent, and had been cultivated by them in some cases for long periods, but as yet no permanent houses had been built there. This operation took seven months to complete.



About the same time I deeded to the Municipality a plot of land in Lerkenlund containing the best living spring in that Estate. This transfer solved many problems of management and the spring has been of inestimable value to the surrounding community.

During this period a small parcel of land in the same region situated upon the central ridge of the Island was improved, fenced and named "The Outlook". It commands on the North, South and East one of the very finest views in the West Indies and under my will becomes the property of the Municipality. To make it accessible a strip of land from the Chapel at Mafolie all the way up to The Outlook was given to the Municipality. This strip, since increased in width and extended in another direction to the Lerkenlund Estate line changed an old footpath into a public road, one portion of which is today the eastern end of the St. Peter Mountain Road.

But the portion of the road up to The Outlook commencing at the entrance to Dr. Corey's house and leading up the hill has ever since, although gratefully acknowledged by the authorities, been left entirely unimproved in any way whatsoever, although several lots on its south side have been sold for building sites. The rough footpath, which is the only means of transit has perforce to be cleared of bush by the natives who cultivate the land on beyond, with occasional help by my employees. I mention these facts not only for the record and the benefit of the landowners but also because the difficulty of reaching The Outlook caused by this 15 years of neglect has deprived the public of the enjoyment of a great pleasure. This road should be included in any work now contemplated and is further desirable as it would, if extended, form a valuable circumferential connection with the Solberg road on an almost level grade.

In the summer of 1939 not many of us dreamed that a second world war was approaching, when on July 24, nearly four years ago, the people of the Island were deprived of their only public bathing facilities at Mosquito Bay without any substitute having been procured. This action was in reality the result of one of the early steps in the defence of the Caribbean. The situation seemed to me to be so regrettable that I informed the public on the same day by newspaper notices that permits for the use of the beach at Magens Bay would thereafter be issued only to permanent residents of the Island. This action was taken out of sympathy for those who unable to make private bathing arrangements or denied access to other facilities, found themselves deprived of the enjoyment in their own right, of the waters surrounding the Island.

From that time on all official efforts to decide upon a new beach have been fruitless. One especially thorough investigation, made by a representative committee of which Mr. Bornn was Chairman covered all possible beaches, but no action resulted. This report, so far as I am aware, was seen by but few and is today merely part of a bulky file. In fact the use of the Gregerie Beach was the final recommendation of the 1939 committee, provided its physical condition could be remedied.

Magens Bay in the meantime has been enjoyed--on holidays sometimes by hundreds of people--with but limited restrictions, while the work of improvement and maintenance has continued, but I have often felt that my well meant action in 1939 has postponed rather than hastened the solution of the problem.



But it is probable that some solution might have been reached had there not been an insuperable stumbling block in the way, and there was. It is the fact which has gradually become more and more evident that in reality two beaches are essential. One within walking distance of the town and one further away so that on legal holidays people could pass the whole day in the real country.

The former requirement I will return to later and deal first with Magens Bay and how best a general development can be adapted to its physical features.

The first requisite is a survey and plan in order to show in detail, first, the whole area, next, the most favorable distribution of necessary structures and lastly, the future possibilities. It was, I think, prior to Pearl Harbor, that I first discussed this matter with Mr. Wells, but war conditions have hitherto made it impossible for him to consider the matter seriously.

The preliminary steps seem to be the construction of a new road from a point on the present Bay Road running thence down to the southern end of the level land. This involves the erection of a short bridge over the main drainage outlet, at which point a simple pumping arrangement could dispose of the surplus water from the drainage area to the east, reduce the average level of the water table and greatly diminish the occasional annoyance caused by mosquitos and sand flies.

It is not difficult to imagine what might gradually be added:- a suitable pier at the foot of the present bay road, the necessary bath houses and other accommodations, a row of cabanas facing the beach; a shaded picnic ground with an adequate parking space nearby; the big Canaan or "Salt" Gut might produce a water supply; other attractive features which could later be added come readily to mind and their number need not be limited if the time in which to supply and pay for them is unlimited.

It is probably wiser however to consider the present lack of materials and gasoline and the slim chance of obtaining priorities for what is obviously a non-essential. But even so we can take satisfaction in the thought that delay will give us opportunity to plan solid foundations and by thinking things through avoid errors.

We might also to advantage having listed the attractions, take up some of the features which have to be given serious and careful consideration.

The rights of existing tenants have to be respected, first the U.S. Government, next those of the Picara Point Club with an unexpired lease on that portion north of the road and last but not least those of the fishermen and boat owners who pay rent for the use of portions of the strand and supply us with part of the food we so much need, just as the beach has been used back to the days of the Carib Indians traces of whom are scattered about this very area, and finally the present owner who for sentimental reasons would like to retain a portion of land at the southern end which he desired originally.

Then there are the footpaths leading up from the south end to the Mafolie and Louisenhoj districts which used, who knows how long, require public regulations and maintenance.



Also as regards the shore line just what is the actual legal status of the law in the Virgin Islands as to the respective rights of owners of coastal lands and the public? Whatever they are, they must needs apply equally to all the coast line and they apparently need clarification.

Another digression at this point may perhaps be permissible: St. Thomas has been for over 250 years a well known and cosmopolitan port, offering its hospitality gladly from the days of bucaners to those of bureaucrats and it should be kept in mind that while our streets are today thronged by those who protect us and the aliens who have helped us with their labor, the time will come when flocks of tourists will again be passing through and will leave more money behind them the more attractions we can offer; after the war also there will be many who will desire to come here to live in quiet retirement. Today we are put to it to raise part of our own food and we have long sought, with only partial success, to find a product we could raise as a cash export crop. When normal times return, needed products of every kind will flow in as before and to pay for them we will then discover that our climate and scenic beauty are our best though intangible exports.

But to come back to the present day. The shore fronting on East Gregerie Channel was once an attractive bathing place. It is near enough now and can be brought closer by a road along the shore which I am assured will be obtainable. I believe that with the removal of the two nuisances now there, which is imperative in any case, it can be restored satisfactorily and all traces of its previous use destroyed sooner than is feared by some.

The Commandant of the Naval Operating Base has expressed his desire for the early removal of the slaughter house and the night soil dump from Gregerie Channel. He has further stated that the Navy is prepared to assist in the transportation of sand to the proposed beach along Crown Bay Northwest of Careen Hill.

It is my personal opinion that the nearby Beach because of its greater accessibility and most constant daily use is the more pressing need, and that if the future development of Magens Bay can be assured, efforts should now be concentrated upon procuring the other, for as time has gone on restrictions of which we all are aware have increased, and if more delay occurs all opportunity of obtaining any nearby spot may be lost.

It is therefore my suggestion that the use of Magens Bay be continued as at present, with such alterations in conditions and management as may be feasible. Due to population and other changes it has become more difficult to preserve order and decency especially on holidays and some action must be taken.

While the survey and planning work is being done and probably much delayed, the future of the property as regards its operation will have to be considered.

Personally, it is not my fixed intention to remain permanently the owner of this spot, so favored by nature, nor do I wish to exploit it for my own personal benefit.

On the other hand, I should be strongly inclined to do everything possible to prevent any one person, or class, or element in the community from so doing.



There is however a method of accomplishing this objective that appeals to me as one that might afford general satisfaction.

Roughly, it would be based upon the transfer, as my contribution towards the project, of the land in question as then delimited, free and clear to a self perpetuating, probably incorporated body, In Trust, organized in such form as may be deemed best by our legal friends.

The area mentioned would contain at least:--The Park and a portion of the gut if needed; most of the shore frontage and Coconut Grove and ample space for roads, parking facilities, drainage and water supply purposes.

Certain essential features would be included in the necessary documents, which would specify as primary requirements the preservation of the natural beauty of the neighborhood, the ownership and sightliness of all buildings, and other structures, etc.

The deed would state that the property is dedicated to the benefit and enjoyment of the inhabitants of the Virgin Islands of the United States in perpetuity, without discrimination of any kind by reason of race, color or creed.

The body previously mentioned would undoubtedly be composed of a group of public spirited citizens including certainly some officials in office, and its representative character and permanence of tenure would place it apart from the stream of passing events.

The far reaching plan already sketched would call for a gradual but ultimately a sizeable investment in plant and upkeep. Only if the project were thoroughly approved by public opinion, and supported and patronized by all classes in the community could it be a success and in that event The Municipal Council, which holds the purse, can I am sure, be counted upon to provide the funds needed to supply the features demanded by the public.

To turn such a picture into a reality is not an easy task nor a short one. Social and other similar considerations will have to be weighed and adjusted. To aid and promote it will need the United efforts of all and the cooperation of our institutions and organizations:--Educational, Religious, Charitable, Athletic and youth movements of everykind--Boy Scouts, etc.

Faced with the uncertainties and obligations of the present day it might well be felt that a more unfavorable time for launching such a project could hardly be imagined.

I suggest however that if first we make sure of the Gregerie Beach and then with good will and practical methods seek to apply the plan here described, we may feel that to some extent we have helped to build the better world we hope to live in.

/s/ Arthur S. Fairchild

June 25, 1943.