

Edwin Wallace Rey who emerged as a political stalwart in the revolutionary and post-revolutionary times in Anguilla. Was a man of great conviction, who fiercely stood for what he believed.

“Wallace as he was commonly known was born in Anguilla on November 21st, 1906. Because of his poor and extremely inauspicious beginnings, He recognized the plight of his circumstances he established goals for himself and embarked on the arduous campaign of acquisition. This was not to be easy, as he later learned. Spurred by destitution his primary education was sacrifice in exchange for the cane fields of the Dominican Republic. This blind and disappointing venture brought more despair, but the lad was not deterred. The experience seriously fuelled the heated engines of his unswerving ambitions.

Wallace however, not contented with circumstances there, returned to Anguilla to pursue a trade in carpentry. The restless and yet dissatisfied young man, in his indefatigable quest for a better life, was off again in the late thirties, joining the stream of other Anguillans to Aruba. By 1940 he felt stagnated in Aruba and moved on to Antigua to seek his fortune there. He worked with the U.S. Army until 1948, when he was overcome with nostalgia. All this time, his insatiable yearning for progress spurred him to complete courses in Building and Electronic Technology; so he was builder day and by night the radio repair technician. HE returned home in 1948 tired of roaming abroad, and determined to survive in his native land. By 1950 he was appointed foreman of works with the Anguilla Department of Public Works, a position he held until his retirement in 1961.”

If at any time he may have seemed over-eager, it was but the reflection of a zealous Anguillan who knew who knew where he wanted the island to go and was prepared to help take it there at any cost so long as he had won the approval of the people. But with all his strong views and seeming arrogance, Edwin Wallace Rey was a man of good humour and a good mixer among small and great. His casual salutation along the road especially to young people was usually: “Hello Sonny Boy” or “Hello Sweetheart.”

It was after his retirement from Government service in 1961 that Mr Rey went back into private enterprise and owned, up to the time of his death, the Crescent Store on the George Hill Road, supplying spare parts for almost every type of vehicle on the island.

He was devoted to the forward movement of Anguilla in terms of constitutional and economic development. His attitude to the separation of Anguilla from St Kitts-Nevis in the early days of the revolution, when he was a member of the Anguilla Council, was that Anguilla should go independent while some of the more moderate members favoured to remain in the Commonwealth and go on trying to attract Great Britain’s attention.

Then came the political upheaval in Anguilla on May 30th 1967. It was in this movement that Mr Rey sprang into the limelight of the island’s political arena. He was a stout-hearted Anguillan; a crowd-puller; a motivating force behind an excited people, and most of all, a leader. Therefore, he came forward as a candidate in the first election in the island, since the revolution. The election date was October 17th, 1967. However, on Nomination Day Mr Rey was one of five candidates who stood unopposed and was therefore declared duly elected.

It was not surprising that no one opposed Mr Rey. He was a leader; and he had the leadership qualities, the sense of purpose, dedication and the ability to lead in those times of rebellion and revolution. The people liked him and he was an excitable man at a public meeting.

On the 30th of July 1968, the Anguilla Council, as elected in October 1967, was dissolved and fresh elections were held. This time, Mr Rey was among seven men who were elected. The others were Ronald Webster, Atlin Harrigan, Emile Gumbs, John Hodge, Collins Hodge and Kenneth Hazell. As a result of what was then known as the Lord Caradon Declaration, of March 1969, the members of the 1968 Anguilla Council – of which Mr Wallace Rey was a proud and most worthy member – were recognised as the elected representatives of the people, who would work with the newly-appointed Commissioner at that time, Mr Tommy Thompson.

Among the various Government Committees, which were set up, was the Public Works Committee of which Mr Rey was Chairman, by virtue of his previous experience in Public Works matters. At that time, the Royal Engineers were on the island and had recently become engaged in a series of construction projects. One of these projects was a mile-long stretch of road, which was completed in July 1969 at Mount Fortune by the Royal Engineers with local help. Mr Rey opened the road in his capacity as Chairman of the Public Works Committee. In doing so, he cut the ribbon and made a speech.

Mr Tommy Thompson, the recently appointed British Commissioner on the island in delivering a short address, referred to Mr Rey as a “distinguished guest” adding: “It is his day: he is our Public Works man.” For two years, the Commissioner, and the fourteen-man Council which included Mr Rey, administered the island until in 1971 when it became clear, despite the recommendations of the Wooding Commission of Inquiry into the subject, that there could be no question of Anguilla returning to the Associated State of St Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla.

With Britain now formally administering Anguilla in close consultation and cooperation with the Anguilla Council, preparations were made for the first British-recognised general elections in the island for a new Anguilla Council. MR Rey contested those elections and was one of three candidates in Valley South.

In the election results, Wallace Rey was jubilant. He had won his seat, scoring 242 votes compared with 84 and 44 votes scored respectively by his independent opponents – John Thomas and James Woods.

The Anguilla Council which emerged out of the 1972 elections comprised Ronald Webster, leader; Wallace Rey, Reuben Hodge, Evans Harrigan, Camile Connor, John Hodge, independent elected member, Emile Gumbs and to co-opted member, Mrs Idalia Gumbs.

Over the next few years, Mr Rey became increasingly obsessed with the thought that Anguilla needed urgent development and soon began to charge that the Council was weak and that both the Council and the British Development Division, Britain’s financial aid agency in the Caribbean, were dragging their feet to the disadvantage of Anguilla and Anguillans. He seemed to favour a crash development programme whereby Anguilla would be developed quickly. On the other hand, Britain preferred a slow development process – developing the island from a solid base. One way Mr Rey saw leading to the fast development of Anguilla was the leasing of Dog Island to the US Navy as a naval firing range. This was the subject of a series of public meetings he held in various parts of the island.

If at any moment MR Rey seemed to have departed from the path of his fellow members of the Anguilla Council, it was only because he believed there was a need to accelerate the progress of the island.

In May 1967 Mr Rey was part of a delegation which travelled to Britain to discuss the constitutional future of Anguilla. He participated in the March 1976 general elections under the new and separate Anguilla Constitution, which proved for the setting up of a ministerial system of Government. This time

contested the seat in Valley South as an independent candidate, but lost to Mrs Albena Lake-Hodge who subsequently became Minister of Social Services.

For the next four years after his election defeat, he maintained an interest in the welfare of the island, though not actively involved in politics and continued to run his private business. It was during that period that he became ill, an illness from which he never recovered.

When he passed away in death of Tuesday 20th May 1980, he had come to the end of a full life, with his place assured in the annals of Anguillan history.