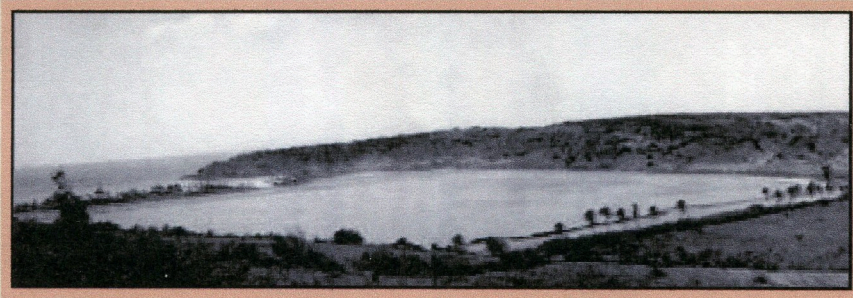


The Salt Industry of Anguilla – A Brief History

By Sir Emile R. Gumbs

Anguilla's main source of salt has been the Road Salt Pond. With a total area of 130 acres the pond is capable of producing an average of 37,000-40,000 barrels (300 lbs each) yearly. In dry times West End Pond and Long Pond have produced salt but not in significant amounts.

The Road Salt Pond is normally below sea level so that sea water percolates through the sandbar on which Sandy Ground Village stands. This sea water would evaporate and form salt crystals.



Road Salt Pond

Some archeologists believe that prior to the arrival of the English settlers in 1650 Arawaks took salt away from Anguilla but these reports are unconfirmed. After Anguilla was settled the English recognized salt as a valuable commodity and the Road Salt Pond was 'held' in common.

The salt was harvested each day by slaves and paid labourers for the benefit of the 'free' but after 2.00 pm they could harvest salt for themselves which they could sell.

Earth works to prevent rain water running into the pond were put in place. A dam elevated 3-4 ft. above pond level was built on the eastern and southern sides of the pond which in very heavy rains emptied into a canal which could be opened in low tide to channel the flood water into the sea.

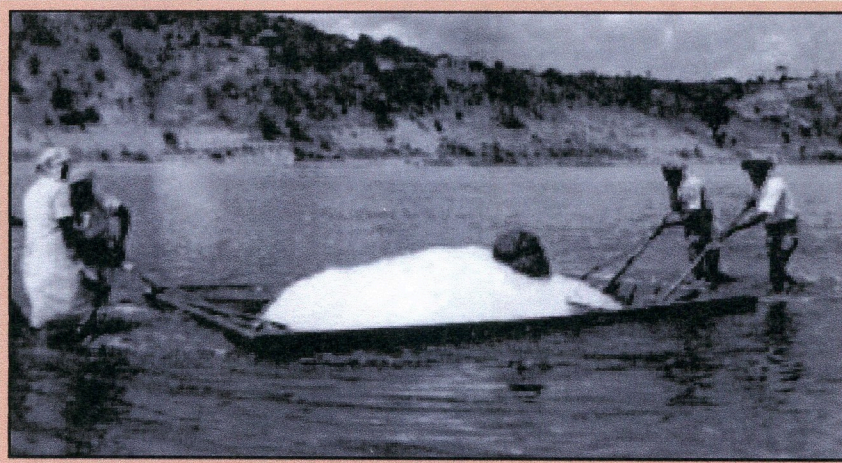


An inner 'ring' dam was built inside the perimeter of the pond. This prevented run off rain water from entering the salt making area. Also the old natural canal at the northern end of Road Bay was opened during high tide to allow the pond to be filled with sea water and thus produce much more salt. In times of hurricanes or floods this canal could be opened to let the flood water flow into the sea during low tide.

Several attempts by the Crown to commercialize the industry were short lived and not very successful until a lease was granted in 1908 to Wager Rey, son-in-law of Edward Carter Lake who at one time held a lease on the pond.

Wager Rey was a good businessman. He put together a good management team of William H. Owen and Thomas Babrow to develop the industry. They built the middle dam which divided the pond into two sections, the large salt making area and a smaller storage and settling area in which sea water was stored. This allowed any impurities (mud and marine flotsam) to settle out of the large volume of sea water which could be let into the salt making area of the pond as needed. This process greatly increased the output of salt as well as improving its quality. Upon Wager Rey's death his son Carter Rey inherited the lease and continued to manage the industry profitably.

When William Owen and Tom Babrow retired Carter Rey persuaded Captain Arthur Carty to retire as captain of his schooner Warspite and manage the industry. Years later Arthur Carty retired and his son Elliot became the manager.



Salt Barges

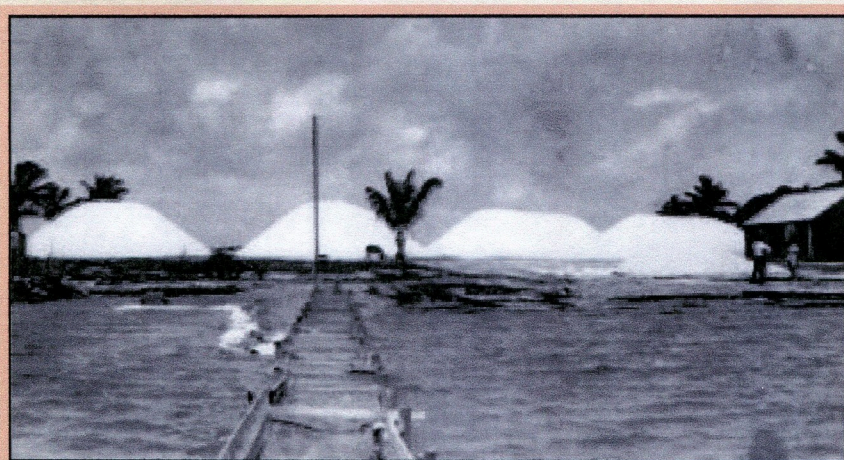
A reliable diesel pump was installed in 1935. Salt production increased and the industry became a major player in Anguilla's economy. The main market at the time was Guyana where salt was required as a diet additive for the large numbers of steer, water buffalo and mules which worked in the hot and steamy cane fields. Schooners from Saba and the Grenadines carried the salt to Guyana and returned with rice for the Windward and Leeward Islands.



When tractors replaced the work animals in the cane fields in Guyana there was a down turn in demand for coarse salt but that was offset by a new demand in Trinidad for fine salt. The old pump house was enlarged to house a mill and storage area for up to 200 tons of fine salt and the industry continued to prosper.

An added benefit to Anguilla was that the salt was now carried to Trinidad in Anguillian schooners. Smaller shipments were made to the Windward Islands in Anguillian trading sloops.

In the late 1950's Anguilla lost the fine salt market to cheap iodized fine salt from the United States and Canada. This coupled with heavy rains culminating in hurricane Donna in 1960 caused the collapse of the industry. The Rey lease expired and the pond lay idle.



Harvested Salt

In late 1962 Rupert Carty, son of Arthur Carty, who was employed with Texaco in Trinidad at the time, realized that Texaco was increasing its demand for salt. He came to Anguilla and revived the industry. The Anguilla Road Salt Company was

registered in early 1963 and Joseph Owen was granted a lease on the pond on behalf of the Company and Elliot Carty was appointed as manager.. 35,000 barrels of salt was harvested that year. Texaco started importing Anguilla salt in increasing amounts and the industry prospered once more.

In November that year the Manager Elliot Carty passed away and Emile Gumbs retired from being Captain of the famous family schooner Warspite, and stayed ashore to manage the industry, just as his grandfather Captain Arthur Carty had done decades earlier.

The onshore handling of the harvesting process was mechanized and the daily output doubled. The Salt Company prospered delivering more and more salt to Trinidad. In 1967



during the tense time of Anguilla's break away from St. Kitts a record 71,000 barrels was harvested. But in 1986 when the oil industry suffered a major slump, the salt market was lost indefinitely and the Salt Company discontinued the operation.

Today the salt works are severely eroded by frequent hurricanes and flood.

The pond is fast becoming a bird watchers paradise. Flocks of white cheek ducks, red legged stilts, common gallinule, herons and egrets inhabit the pond year round and breed there. Hundreds of lesser yellowlegs and other waders are winter residents. The sight of a mother duck with 6-9 baby ducks following in a line is beautiful but the flash of a peregrine falcon coming out of the western sun at 150 mph to strike down a duck in full flight is a never to be forgotten experience. Occasional pelicans and frigates also visit. Hundreds of laughing gulls congregate in the Road Pond in late April to early May before flying off to Scrub Island to breed.

The Pumphouse is now a favourite night spot in Anguilla, housing a bar and restaurant with live music most nights. Laurie and Gabi Gumbs have preserved all the old relics of the salt industry, including the mill and its diesel engine which are still in working condition. Many relics of the famous old schooner Warspite. are also on display.

