

ELEUTHERA

A History of the Island of Freedom

From the Eleutheran Adventurers to the Modern Era

By Claude as directed by RDC

Part I: The Founding — Puritans, Bermuda, and the Articles of Freedom

The story of Eleuthera begins not on its shores but in the turbulent religious politics of seventeenth-century Bermuda. The English Civil War (1642–1651) had set Puritans and Anglicans against one another across the Atlantic world, and the tremors reached even small island colonies. In Bermuda, a group of dissenting Puritans — Independents who refused to swear unconditional allegiance to the Crown or conform to Anglican worship — found themselves increasingly unwelcome. Led by William Sayle, a former governor of Bermuda, they resolved to seek a new home where they could worship freely and govern themselves on their own terms.

In 1646, Sayle sailed to England to obtain the necessary royal permission to settle in the Bahamas — then technically English territory — and to recruit investors. The result was the Company of Adventurers for the Plantation of Eleutheria, formed in London in 1647. Before departing, the company drafted what historians regard as the first constitution of the Bahamas: the "Articles and Orders of 1647." The document was remarkable for its time. Although its preamble acknowledged the reign of King Charles I, the articles made clear that the new settlement would function as a republic in practice, with no further mention of the Crown. The Articles established freedom of religion and opinion for all settlers, granted each of the first hundred adventurers three hundred acres of land in perpetuity, and created a government composed of an elected governor serving a three-year term, a council of twelve, and a senate of one hundred — among the earliest experiments in representative self-governance in the Americas.

Sometime between spring 1646 and autumn 1648, Sayle led approximately seventy settlers — Bermudian Puritans, English Independents, and a few moderate Anglicans — aboard a ship called the *William* toward the Bahamas. The voyage was immediately eventful. Internal disputes erupted between Sayle and his assistant Captain Butler over the meaning of religious freedom; Butler eventually had to be separated from the main party. Worse, the *William* wrecked on the treacherous Devil's Backbone reef off Eleuthera's northern shore, stranding the settlers and destroying most of their provisions. The survivors made their way to a large limestone cave on the northern end of the island, ever after called Preacher's Cave, where they held religious services and took stock of their desperate situation. A commemorative stone plaque at the cave's entrance still marks the site today, and for the next century islanders gathered there each year on the anniversary of their salvation.

The rescue of the colony was itself an episode worth remembering. Sayle took eight men in a small boat and sailed all the way to Virginia, where he secured a relief ship and supplies and returned to save the stranded colonists. More Bermudian Puritans arrived in 1649, and when that second wave also faced starvation, it was the Puritans of New England who rallied to their cause, collecting £800 in supplies. In gratitude, the Eleutherans sent their relief ship back to Boston loaded with brazilletto wood — a valuable dyewood — asking

that the proceeds be donated to Harvard College, making it one of the earliest charitable gifts to what would become Harvard University. The episode caught the imagination of poet Andrew Marvell, whose poem "Bermudas," written around 1653, is thought to have been inspired by the Adventurers' story and is one of the earliest literary expressions of what would later be called the American Dream.

Key References — Part I

- **Wikipedia — Eleutheran Adventurers:** https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eleutheran_Adventurers
- **Grand Bahama Museum — Articles and Orders (full text):**
<https://www.grandbahamamuseum.org/images/pdfs/gbm-the-articles-and-orders-eleutherian-adventurers.pdf>
- **Grokopedia — Eleutheran Adventurers (detailed):** https://grokopedia.com/page/Eleutheran_Adventurers
- **Our History UK — Journey of Faith and Freedom:** <https://www.ourhistory.org.uk/the-eleutheran-adventurers-a-journey-of-faith-and-freedom/>

Part II: Settling the Islands — New Providence, Pirates, and Spanish Raids

The Eleutheran colony did not flourish as its founders had hoped. The island's soil, though beautiful, proved thin and sandy — ill-suited to the large-scale agriculture the settlers had envisioned. Hurricanes destroyed crops and shelters. Internal disputes over land and governance sapped communal energy. By the 1650s and 1660s the original colony had dwindled; only the hardest settlers remained, surviving largely on fishing, ambergris, and the salvage of shipwrecks — an occupation that would remain a Bahamian staple for generations. The colonial centre of gravity began to shift.

New Providence Island, about 160 miles to the northwest, was first settled around 1666 by a fresh group of Bermudians. It offered a superb natural harbour and became the commercial and political hub of the emerging Bahamian settlements. Charles Towne (later renamed Nassau, in honour of King William III's Dutch title of Prince of Nassau) was established at its harbour. For a brief time the island enjoyed a modest agricultural economy — cotton, tobacco, and sugarcane — but the promise was quickly extinguished. A succession of corrupt and ineffective governors let order collapse, and the island became a haven for English, Dutch, and French buccaneers who preyed on Spanish treasure fleets passing through the Bahama Channel. The Spanish responded with savage reprisals: in 1684 they burned Charles Towne to the ground, and over the fifteen years following a 1703 raid, Governor Woodes Rogers would later report that the Spanish and French mounted thirty-four raids of various sizes against the islands.

By the early 1700s Nassau had become the epicentre of what historians call the "Golden Age of Piracy." Some one thousand pirates occupied the town, which was filled with taverns and brothels; burned-out trading vessels littered the harbour. Among the buccaneers who made Nassau their base were Charles Vane, Anne Bonny, and Edward Teach — the infamous Blackbeard — who actually served as a community figure of sorts, attending regular meetings among the pirates' loose confederation known as the Flying Gang. Eleuthera and Harbour Island, meanwhile, maintained smaller but resilient communities. Their residents, known as "Conchs," lived by wrecking, fishing, and small-scale farming, and they proved remarkably durable in the face of the chaos engulfing the wider Bahamas.

Order was finally imposed in 1718 when King George I appointed Woodes Rogers — a former privateer himself — as the first Royal Governor of the Bahamas. Rogers arrived in Nassau harbour with warships and a royal proclamation offering pardons to pirates who surrendered and promising death to those who did not. Most accepted the amnesty; those who refused, including several notorious figures, were tried and hanged. Rogers fortified Nassau, established a functioning court and assembly — the precursor to today's Bahamian Parliament — and drove out the remaining buccaneers. His motto, *Expulsis piratis, restituta commercia* ("Pirates expelled, commerce restored"), became the motto of the Bahamas itself. The era of piracy was over, but it left an indelible mark on Bahamian culture, folklore, and economy.

Key References — Part II

- **Frommers — History of the Bahamas:** <https://www.frommers.com/destinations/bahamas/in-depth/history/>
- **Bahamas.com — Our History:** <https://www.bahamas.com/our-history>
- **Nassau History — Island Map Store:** <https://islandmapstore.com/2021/01/a-history-of-nassau-and-new-providence-island/>
- **CSP Historical — Life in New Providence 1716–17:** <https://csphistorical.com/2015/07/26/the-strongest-man-carries-the-day-life-in-new-providence-1716-1717/>

Part III: The Revolutionary War Emigrants — Loyalists and a New Social Order

The American Revolution transformed the Bahamas almost overnight. When the thirteen colonies declared independence in 1776 and eventually won, thousands of colonists who had remained loyal to the British Crown found themselves unwelcome in the new United States. Their property was confiscated, they faced persecution, and many were forced to flee. Britain, seeking to compensate and resettle these Loyalists, offered generous land grants in its remaining Caribbean territories. The Bahamas, so close to the American coast, became a primary destination.

Between 1783 and 1785 — in the immediate aftermath of the Treaty of Paris — more than six thousand Loyalists and the enslaved Africans they brought with them arrived in the Bahamas. They settled across New Providence, Abaco, Eleuthera, Cat Island, and Exuma. The demographic impact was staggering: the population of the islands essentially tripled almost overnight, and the racial composition shifted dramatically as the enslaved population came to outnumber the white settlers by a wide margin. Many Loyalists were from the plantation South — Georgia, South Carolina, East Florida — and they arrived with both their agricultural expertise and their deeply entrenched institution of slavery. New towns were laid out, farms cleared, and for the first time the out-islands received sustained investment.

On Eleuthera and Harbour Island the Loyalist arrival brought both energy and tension. The newcomers introduced American-style agricultural techniques and expanded farming operations considerably, establishing cotton plantations that worked well for several years before soil exhaustion, insect pests, and eventually the abolition of slavery caused them to collapse. The social fabric of Eleuthera changed profoundly: the relatively simple, seafaring "Conch" communities that had existed since the 1650s were now overlaid with a more stratified plantation society, with new Anglican churches, new surnames, and new architectural styles — many of which can still be seen in Eleuthera's colonial-era buildings today. Lord Dunmore, formerly

governor of New York and Virginia, served as governor of the Bahamas from 1786 to 1797, presiding over this transformative period from Nassau.

The political transition was equally significant. The influx of Loyalists — many of them educated, politically experienced, and accustomed to colonial assemblies — reshaped Bahamian governance. Conflict quickly arose between the old Bahamian settlers and the new arrivals over land rights, governance, and economic control. In 1783, one Loyalist commander, Andrew Deveau, had already demonstrated his loyalty and audacity by mounting a daring expedition that recaptured Nassau from the Spanish (who had taken it the previous year), doing so through an elaborate ruse with far fewer men than the garrison he faced. The Loyalists ultimately gained political dominance over the islands, a precedent whose social reverberations — particularly the entrenchment of racial hierarchy — would not be undone until the twentieth century.

Key References — Part III

- **Britannica — British Colonization of the Bahamas:** <https://www.britannica.com/place/The-Bahamas/British-colonization>
- **Native Stew — The Loyalists of the Bahamas:** <https://www.nativestew.com/2024/12/the-loyalists-of-bahamas.html>
- **Conch & Coconut — History of Harbour Island:** <https://www.conchandcoconut.com/blogs/the-good-life/history-of-harbour-island-bahamas>
- **Florida Historical Quarterly — American Loyalists in the Bahamas:** <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2802&context=fhq>

Part IV: The Pineapple Plantations — Eleuthera's Golden Age

If the Loyalist era planted the seeds of Eleuthera's agricultural ambitions, it was the humble pineapple that brought the island its greatest era of prosperity. The "Eleuthera red" — a variety of pineapple uniquely suited to the island's red clay soils and warm climate — became one of the most prized agricultural commodities in the nineteenth-century Atlantic world. Allowed to ripen slowly without chemical assistance, Eleuthera's pineapples developed an extraordinary sweetness that commanded premium prices in American and European markets. As early as 1845 the island was exporting 400,000 pineapples annually to England and the United States — a remarkable figure for such a small and sparsely populated island.

By the 1880s pineapples had become the chief export crop of the entire Bahamas, and Eleuthera was at the centre of the industry. Over one million pineapples were being exported per year by 1885. The first pineapple canning factory was established in Governor's Harbour — the historic heart of the island — in 1857, and the industry became so important that the United States established its first consul to the Bahamas right there on Cupid's Cay to facilitate the booming trade. Entire Eleutheran families were organised around the pineapple cycle: men cleared land and planted the crowns; women and children helped with the harvest; ships regularly carried the fruit north to market. The pineapple became more than an economic product — it became a symbol of the island's identity and of the generous hospitality for which Eleuthera became known.

The industry also had a dark side. Workers at the J.S. Johnson canning factory in Governor's Harbour were reported to have been exploited, and the broader plantation system that sustained pineapple production rested on a labour force made up largely of formerly enslaved people and their descendants who had little

alternative employment after the formal abolition of slavery in the British Empire in 1834. Emancipation dismantled the old plantation hierarchy but left the freed community economically constrained, turning to maritime pursuits — sponging, turtling, fishing, and wrecking — alongside agricultural labour to survive.

The pineapple boom was not destined to last. Overproduction exhausted the island's distinctive red clay soils; plant disease spread through the plantations; and by the early twentieth century a formidable new competitor had appeared: the Hawaiian canned pineapple industry, which could produce at enormous scale and at far lower cost. Although historians note that many American consumers actually preferred the Bahamian product's flavour, the price difference proved decisive. The Eleuthera pineapple industry collapsed by the late 1920s, leaving behind the vestiges of a once-great trade — a few remaining farms, the old Cupid's Cay consulate building (now a gift shop), and a cultural identity so firmly tied to the fruit that Eleuthera still calls itself the Pineapple Capital of the World.

Key References — Part IV

- **Everything Bahamian — Eleuthera Pineapples:** <https://www.everythingbahamian.com/blog-1/td99xsoy97c915pn72vqj80qwgky6q>
- **Marinalife — Pineapple Farming in Eleuthera:** <https://www.marinalife.com/articles/pineapple-farming-in-eleuthera>
- **Bahamasnet — The Pineapple Story:**
https://www.bahamasnet.com/bahamas_vacation_guides/previous_issues/dining_guide_archives/dining_guide_july_2005/pineapple_527.html
- **Governors Harbour Travel Guide (Cupid's Cay & Consulate):** <https://www.kupi.com/en-ae/explore/bahamas/governors-harbour>

Part V: Independence and the New Government — "The Quiet Revolution"

For much of the twentieth century the Bahamas remained a British Crown Colony governed by a small white elite — the "Bay Street Boys," as they were derisively known — who controlled commerce, politics, and land with little accountability to the black majority that made up the overwhelming proportion of the population. Black Bahamians were largely excluded from the vote, from quality education, and from economic opportunity. Eleuthera, like the other out-islands, was governed from Nassau and had little direct voice in its own affairs. That began to change in the 1950s with the rise of organised political opposition.

In 1953, a young London-trained lawyer named Lynden Oscar Pindling helped found the Progressive Liberal Party (PLP), the first national political party to represent the interests of the black majority. Pindling — born in the Over-the-Hill neighbourhood of Nassau — proved a gifted and charismatic leader. He was elected to parliament in 1956, and by 1967 he had engineered a coalition that made him the first black Prime Minister of the Bahamas — the first black colonial premier in the western hemisphere. This historic transition, often called "Majority Rule," ended three centuries of white political dominance without violence, through the ballot box. Dame Doris Johnson later described the whole transformation as "The Quiet Revolution."

Pindling and the PLP moved steadily toward full independence. A new constitution in 1969 established domestic autonomy, and negotiations with London proceeded in a spirit of mutual respect. On 20 June 1973, the British Parliament passed the Bahamas Independence Order. On 10 July 1973, in the presence of Prince Charles, the Union Jack was lowered and a new flag — black, gold, and turquoise — was hoisted before 50,000

people gathered in Nassau. Eleuthera and the other Family Islands celebrated alongside the capital. The Bahamas became a fully sovereign, independent nation and a member of the Commonwealth, ending more than three centuries of colonial rule. Pindling, hailed as the "Father of the Nation," served as Prime Minister continuously until 1992, overseeing an ambitious programme of education, infrastructure, and economic diversification that transformed the archipelago.

The new government faced genuine challenges in governing such a dispersed archipelago. Eleuthera, stretching nearly 100 miles from north to south but rarely more than two miles wide, had always been difficult to administer as a single unit. Under the post-independence system, the island was divided into district administrations reporting to Nassau, with elected representatives in the House of Assembly. Eleuthera has produced notable figures in national politics — Roland Symonette, the first Premier of the Bahamas (before independence), was born at Current in North Eleuthera — and the island's communities have maintained a fierce sense of local identity even as the centre of Bahamian political and economic life has remained concentrated in Nassau.

Key References — Part V

- **Britannica — Lynden Pindling:** <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Lynden-Pindling>
- **Encyclopedia.com — Pindling, Lynden Oscar:** <https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/pindling-lynden-oscar>
- **Riches Karayib — Bahamas 52 Years of Sovereignty:** <https://richeskarayib.com/bahamas-52-years-of-sovereignty-together-we-rise/>
- **Eye Witness News — Ghosts of Independence 1973:** <https://ewnews.com/ghosts-of-independence-1973/>

Part VI: Modern Eleuthera — Expatriates, Tourism, and Storms

In the decades following independence, Eleuthera found a new economic identity — one built not on pineapples or cotton but on its extraordinary natural beauty and an emerging international reputation as one of the Caribbean's most unspoiled destinations. The island's 100-mile spine, flanked by the turquoise Atlantic on the east and the calmer Exuma Sound to the west, its pink-sand beaches, and its small, genuine communities began to attract a very different kind of settler: the expatriate. American, Canadian, and European buyers — some wealthy retirees, some artists and writers, some simply seeking a slower pace of life — began purchasing property in Governor's Harbour, Rock Sound, and the villages that dot the island's length. This influx brought investment, raised land values, and created service-sector employment, but also began the perennial tension between development and preservation that characterises resort communities everywhere.

Tourism became the cornerstone of the Bahamian economy as a whole — accounting for roughly half of GDP by the early twenty-first century — and Eleuthera found its niche in the high-end, low-density end of the market. Harbour Island, just off Eleuthera's northern tip, became one of the Caribbean's most fashionable small destinations: a three-and-a-half-mile sliver of an island famous for its pink sand beaches, colonial architecture, and golf-cart lifestyle, attracting celebrities and design-world visitors alongside the loyal return travelers who have been coming for decades. French Leave Resort on Governor's Harbour, now part of the Marriott Autograph Collection, brought luxury accommodation to the main island. In June 2024, a landmark

addition to the island's tourism profile opened at its southern tip: Disney's Lookout Cay at Lighthouse Point, a \$250–400 million cruise port that can accommodate multiple Disney Cruise Line ships and thousands of passengers daily.

Yet Eleuthera's modern story cannot be told without the storms. The Atlantic hurricane season is an existential fact of life for the island. Hurricane Andrew struck northern Eleuthera as a Category 4 storm in 1992, generating a 23-foot storm surge that destroyed homes, docks, and infrastructure and killed four people. Hurricane Floyd in 1999 caused widespread flooding. The catastrophic Hurricane Dorian in 2019 — the strongest Atlantic hurricane ever to make landfall on record — devastated the Abacos and Grand Bahama but spared Eleuthera direct impact while still disrupting tourism across the entire nation; the storm's damages were estimated at \$3.4 billion, equivalent to roughly a quarter of the country's GDP. These recurring disasters have tested the resilience of Eleutheran communities repeatedly, requiring cycles of rebuilding and adaptation that are woven into the island's character.

Today Eleuthera occupies a fascinating position in the Bahamian story: a long, thin island of about eleven thousand people, simultaneously one of the oldest European settlements in the hemisphere and one of the most sought-after new-discovery destinations in the Caribbean. Its communities remain tight-knit and proud of their deep roots — the descendants of Adventurers, Loyalists, freed slaves, and "Conchs" living alongside a growing community of expatriate residents and seasonal visitors. The island's pineapples are still grown and still prized. Preacher's Cave still stands. And Cupid's Cay — where William Sayle's settlers first set foot nearly four centuries ago, and where the first United States consulate was later established to serve the pineapple trade — remains connected to Governor's Harbour by the same causeway that links ancient history to the living present.

Key References — Part VI

- Grokipedia — Eleuthera (modern history & Disney): <https://grokipedia.com/page/Eleuthera>
- Grokipedia — North Eleuthera (storms & tourism): https://grokipedia.com/page/north_eleuthera
- Eleuthera.com — About Eleuthera: <https://eleuthera.com/about-eleuthera-1>
- IDB — Impact of Hurricane Dorian in The Bahamas: <https://publications.iadb.org/en/impact-hurricane-dorian-bahamas-view-sky>