

A tropical harbor scene with a wooden dock, palm trees, and a boat in the foreground. The water is clear and blue, reflecting the sky. In the background, there are several palm trees and a small wooden building with a thatched roof. A boat with a white hull and a dark wooden trim is in the foreground, with a Union Jack flag visible on the right side.

THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

MAN-O-WAR CELEBRATES ITS
BICENTENNIAL

The teenagers, a boy and a girl, were side by side on the middle seat of a smooth-planked dinghy. Behind them, the girl's father stood, wearing a tricorne hat, as the boat made its way through the calm waters of the harbour.

The scene was straight out of the early 1800s. And yet it was on a bright morning in late November 2022 that the dinghy came alongside a concrete dock, and the three stepped ashore on Man-O-War Cay.



Photo by Gabrielle Manni Sawyer

Dressed in period clothes, the older man walked up to a podium, adjusted the microphone, and introduced himself as Benjamin Archer.

In fact, he was author and chief district councilor, Jeremy Sweeting. But in character as “Benjamin Archer,” he began telling his story to the assembled crowd.

He explained that, as a man still loyal to the British crown, he had fled from the United States after the Revolutionary War. Originally from New England, he had come by way of the Carolinas and had settled, with his wife and children, in Maxwell Town – known today as Marsh Harbour.

In addition to his property there, Archer owned farm land on Man-O-War, a then-uninhabited cay four miles east of the Abaco mainland.

One day in 1820, Archer and his family were tending the farm, when his 13-year-old daughter Eleanor heard voices in the distance and set out to investigate.

On the beach, beyond a grove of trees, she discovered the crew of an Eleuthera schooner that had wrecked off Man-O-War’s eastern coast. Among the survivors was 16-year-old Benjamin Albury of Harbour Island.

Local lore says that for Eleanor Archer and Benjamin Albury, it was love at first sight. They were inseparable, and when his crewmates returned to Eleuthera, Benjamin remained in Abaco.

A year later, on May 7, 1821, he and Eleanor were married.

In his book, “Man-O-War: From Shipwreck to Boat Building Capital,” Jeremy Sweeting writes that Eleanor felt a strong connection to Man-O-War and wanted to establish a permanent settlement there.

Knowing this, her father gave her his property on the cay so that she and her new husband could make it their home.

Their successes, both in raising a family and in founding a community, are cause for celebration even 200 years later. Which is why Sweeting, George Weatherford (“Benjamin Albury”) and Isabella Albury (“Eleanor Archer”) reenacted their arrival on that November morning last year, as Man-O-War marked its bicentennial.

In fact, the marriage of the couple now remembered as Pappy Ben and Mammy Nellie was more than just the union of husband and wife.

It was a symbol of the partnership between two very different waves of pioneers – a partnership that would profoundly affect the Abaco we know today.

Benjamin Albury had descended from a group of 70 or so people who, in 1648, set sail from England and Bermuda for the island they named Eleuthera.

These Eleutheran Adventurers were puritans, religious outcasts who planned to create a new, egalitarian society where they could practice their beliefs without persecution or ridicule. But their utopian vision was short-lived.

Discord between group members broke out before they even reached land, and a subsequent shipwreck took many of their meager possessions.

Reduced to living in a cave while they built rudimentary homes, they existed on seafood and whatever fruit and wild creatures they could find. They made a subsistence living from fishing, farming, and exports of wood and ambergris.

In the late-1700s, another group of refugees arrived on Bahamian shores. These were the British Loyalists, including Eleanor’s father Benjamin Archer.

Knowing the struggles of their own ancestors, one might imagine that the so-called Old Inhabitants would welcome the new arrivals with open arms. They did not.



Instead, they resented the growing population, citing what they saw as overcrowding, overfishing and overlogging. What’s more, they found the Loyalists haughty, obnoxious, and demanding.

Whereas most of the Old Inhabitants had grown up in the Bahamas and were more than a century removed from the British school system, the Loyalists were modern, educated, and cultured.

The Loyalists saw the Bahamas as a backwater and blamed the lack of progress on the ignorance and laziness of the Old Inhabitants. They derisively nicknamed them “Conchs,” after the region’s fleshy, slow-moving mollusks.

Filled with pride and industrious zeal, the Loyalists were determined to transform Abaco into a booming agricultural and com-



Boat Race, an original oil painting by Abaco artist Alton R. Lowe celebrates the region's rich boatbuilding history.

mercial center. They planted coffee, cotton, and corn, cut mahogany and lignum vitae for lumber, and built a fleet of cargo vessels.

But the Loyalists' ships would sit idle and rot. The water from their new wells was salty and, although it was fertile, Abaco's soil was exceptionally thin. The crops withered.

Like the Eleutheran Adventurers a century before, the Loyalists were left hungry, weary, and struggling to get by. They too had seen their grand ambitions fall apart.

But eventually, as the sea smooths a rocky shore, the animosity between the two groups faded. And in what might look today like a parable about diversity, the differences between them would become their strength.

In the early 1800s, as they began mingling and intermarrying, they would discover that the very things that once caused their mutual contempt would be to their mutual advantage.

To this blended society, the Old Inhabitants brought boatbuilding, seafaring, and pioneer skills learned over a century in the Bahamas. The Loyalists brought organization, better education, and more formal legal standards.

Nowhere is there a more perfect illustration of this partnership than in the marriage of Pappy Ben and Mammy Nellie.

"Mammy Nellie was a visionary and had tremendous foresight," writes Sweeting. "She set apart land for... a cemetery, a church and a school."

Today, they are exactly where she put them.

In fact, the crowds marking Man-O-War's bicentennial last November were walking on streets the young Loyalist had imagined, in the places where she imagined them.

"Man-O-War holds the distinction of being the only original settlement in the Bahamas that was designed and planned," says Sweeting.

As the Alburys' settlement grew, so did their family. According to Haziell Albury's

book, "Man-O-War: My Island Home," Ben and Nellie had thirteen children – twelve of whom survived to adulthood.

Through the mid-1800s, Albury wrote, other families moved to Man-O-War too, often as their children married into the family of Mammy and Pappy.

And with time, the skills drawn from Benjamin's Old Inhabitant roots became as important to the cay as Nellie's civic planning.

Two of Ben and Nellie's sons, Samuel and William, became well-known for their

boatbuilding. One of their great-grandsons, William H. Albury was also a master boat-builder. Another, Norman, was a renowned sail maker who founded the Sail Shop.

In more recent years, Edwin Albury founded Edwin's Boat Yard while brothers Willard and Benny Albury launched Albury Brothers Boats.

Schooners and racers, dinghies and ferries, Albury after Albury – with the occasional Sands or Thompson - contributed to Man-O-War's reputation as a boat building capital.

So renowned were Man-O-War boat builders that in the mid-1990s, as part of the Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife, Joe Albury and brother Hartley were invited to demonstrate their work on Washington D.C.'s National Mall.

In celebration of this heritage, a new boatbuilding museum was launched as part of last November's Bicentennial. Tools, photos, and models were put on display, while Joe and Hartley Albury demonstrated the art of rope making.

Students of Man-O-War Primary School joined in, singing the island's unofficial anthem "Launchin' Day" written by long-time visitors, Pete and Dot Lund:

*"Hey, hey, boat launchin' day,
Everyone's comin' down to the bay.
Women and children, old men too
Dogs are running two by two
Oh, how lucky can we be
To live on Man-O-War Cay."*

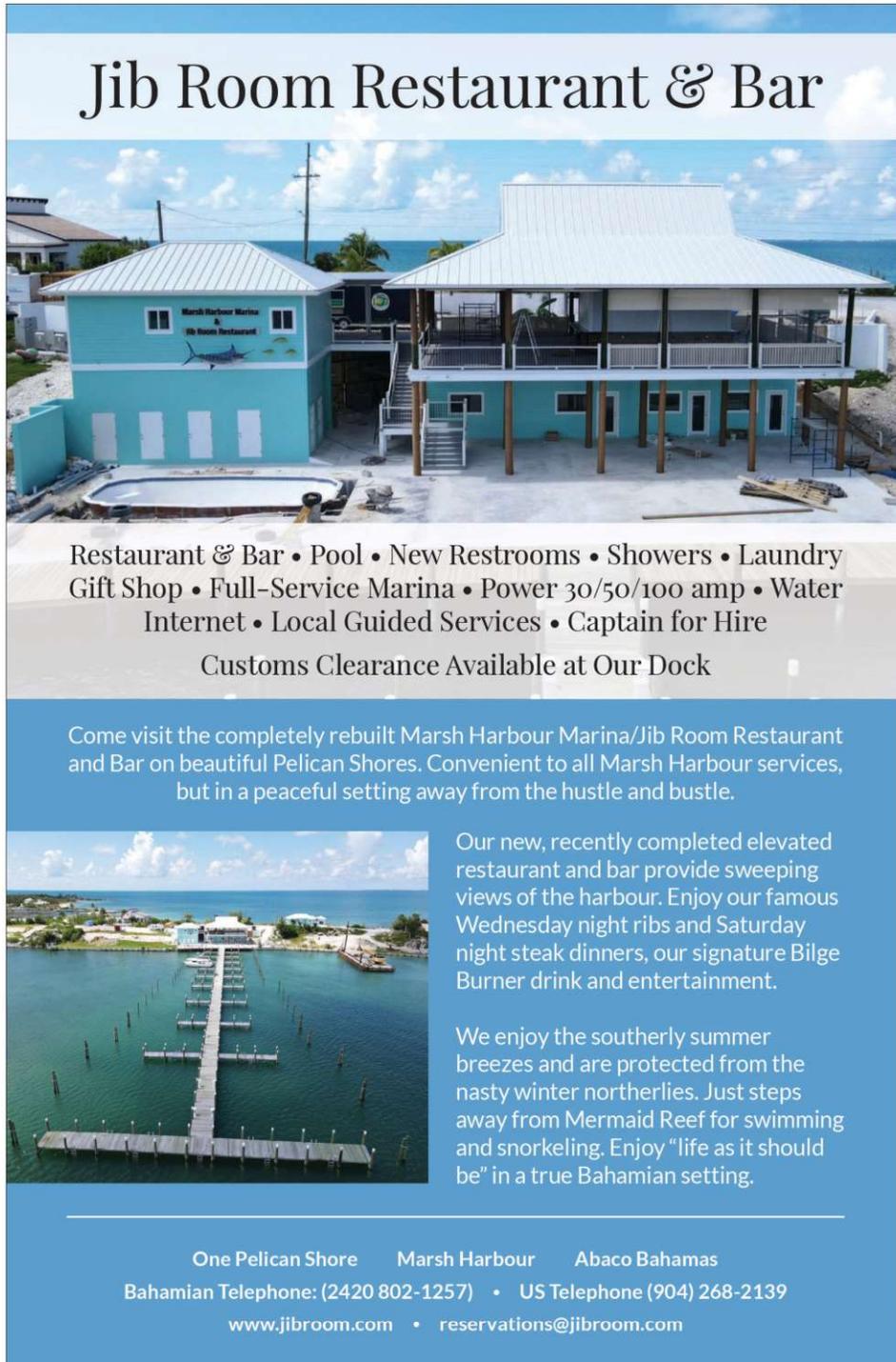
In his closing remarks Jeremy Sweeting echoed those sentiments.

"I've dubbed our island The Promised Land, mostly in teasing friends from other settlements. But the truth is there is something so special about it, from its physical landscape to our colourful history."

In a tribute to Man-O-War's history, the bicentennial celebration included the unveiling of a permanent monument to its founding couple.

Of course, those who know the story of Pappy Ben and Mammy Nellie may see it as one of two monuments.

The other is the thriving community that exists today, born from the best of two worlds and from the dreams of a pair of teenaged newlyweds, two centuries ago. ●



Jib Room Restaurant & Bar

Restaurant & Bar • Pool • New Restrooms • Showers • Laundry
 Gift Shop • Full-Service Marina • Power 30/50/100 amp • Water
 Internet • Local Guided Services • Captain for Hire
 Customs Clearance Available at Our Dock

Come visit the completely rebuilt Marsh Harbour Marina/Jib Room Restaurant and Bar on beautiful Pelican Shores. Convenient to all Marsh Harbour services, but in a peaceful setting away from the hustle and bustle.



Our new, recently completed elevated restaurant and bar provide sweeping views of the harbour. Enjoy our famous Wednesday night ribs and Saturday night steak dinners, our signature Bilge Burner drink and entertainment.

We enjoy the southerly summer breezes and are protected from the nasty winter northerlies. Just steps away from Mermaid Reef for swimming and snorkeling. Enjoy "life as it should be" in a true Bahamian setting.

One Pelican Shore Marsh Harbour Abaco Bahamas
 Bahamian Telephone: (2420 802-1257) • US Telephone (904) 268-2139
www.jibroom.com • reservations@jibroom.com



Photo by Gabrielle Manni Sawyer

Joe Albury showcases an Abaco dinghy being built in his workshop.

*You define your dream...
and we'll help you find it!*

**HIDEAWAYS
REAL ESTATE**

We Sell Real Estate!
ABACO * NASSAU * THE BAHAMAS
T: 1 (242) 366-0216 or C: 1 (242) 359-2542
E-mail: realestate@hopetown.com
Website: www.hideawaysrealestate.com

Shore Leave Cottage
 White Sound, Green Turtle Cay

Beautiful water views.
 Simple pleasures.
 Off-the-grid living.
 Solitude.

- Sea-to-sea property accessible solely by boat
- Private dock
- Spacious screened porch and waterfront gazebo
- King bed
- A/C
- Backup generator
- Laundry

\$1400 per week
www.ShoreLeaveCottage.com