

The contribution of Sir Anthony Musgrave

National Library of Jamaica

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Above the staircase leading from the Natural History Museum to the Lecture and Art Galleries of the Institute of Jamaica, hangs an oil painting of Sir Anthony Musgrave by the Hon. John Collier. An inscription beneath it, tells us that the portrait was placed in the rooms of the Institute as a grateful memorial of his beneficent administration.

Either Sir Anthony looked older than his years, or else the artist managed to convey an aged impression on his canvas, for the portrait is undeniably that of what one would consider a rather elderly looking man; yet Sir Anthony was barely sixty years old at the time of his death.

The features, however, as they confront us from the canvas, are full of gentleness and an overall benevolence, gentleness is particularly centred in the eyes of the subject, and the work itself is of extremely high artistic standard.

Sir Anthony Musgrave was born

in 1828, he was the third son of Anthony Musgrave, M.D., of the Island of Antigua.

In 1850, young Musgrave became Private Secretary to the Governor of the Leeward Islands, but a year later he went to England and entered at the Inner Temple to study for the bar. His father's death in Antigua interrupted his career, for he immediately set sail for the West Indies after receiving the news. There he acted as Treasurer Accountant for about a year, returning to London to resume his studies in 1853.

Administrator

While pursuing his studies, he was persuaded by a friend to enter the Civil Service, and to apply for the post of Colonial Secretary in Antigua. He decided to do so, and obtained the post with apparent little difficulty, spurred no doubt, by the high regard with which his family name was held in that Island. In 1854 he married Christiana Elizabeth, daughter of the Hon. Sir William Bryan of Antigua; but the marriage was of short duration, for Christiana died in 1859.

In 1860, Musgrave was appointed Administrator of the tiny island of Nevis, but two years later he was made Lieutenant-Governor of St. Vincent. Here his administration was marked by much trouble, but he unravelled the problems so successfully, that his name came to the attention of the Duke of Manchester, who was Secretary of State for the Colonies, and in 1864, Musgrave was given considerable promotion and assigned to Newfoundland. Later he became Governor of British Columbia, and here he fractured his leg; complications developed, but

the injured member finally healed.

The accident, however, was to leave an indelible mark on Musgrave, for the injured leg left him a partial cripple, and much of his later years were marked by pain. He was sent to Australia, but shortly after was offered the governorship of Jamaica. He accepted the post, no doubt glad to be once more posted to the familiar zone of his earlier years. Some time before his arrival in Jamaica, on August 24th, 1877, he married again—this time to the daughter of David Dudley Field of New York, U.S.A., Jeannie Luicinda by name. His family, however, did not arrive with him, but joined him in the autumn of that year.

Improvement

During his six years sojourn in the Island, he worked tirelessly and with great sincerity for the improvement of Jamaica, particularly in the fields of the Arts and Education. He was also instrumental in establishing the electric telegraph, and coastal steamship service.

Under his administration the Government purchased the railway for the Jamaica Railway Company at a cost of £93,932, and extended the line; the Island's Botanical Department was re-organized, provision for the preservation of the Island Records was introduced, and the Jamaica Scholarship awarded.

Musgrave founded the Institute of Jamaica on the lines of the South Australian Institute, its primary purpose being the fostering and encouragement in all branches of Art, Science and Literature.

In 1873 the articles in the old

museum of the Royal Society of Arts and Agriculture, located at the south-east corner of Harbour and Orange Streets had been handed over to the Government, when that Society had become extinct. These relics were housed at Date Tree Hall, (site of the present Institute), but on the establishment of the Institute of Jamaica in 1879, by a special law, the premises, together with the collection of books, historic, natural history, and geological specimens were handed over to the new organization.

Over-worked

Thus was our present Institute born, which today with many expansive and further plans for development both in the city and country parts contemplated for the future, houses, amongst its most valuable relics, a unique collection of West Indian literature.

It is said that Sir Anthony felt that his best and most satisfying work was done in Jamaica. But like so many others dedicated to duty, his health failed through overwork and he left the Island in April, 1883, despite the many petitions made to the Secretary of State by the Jamaicans to have his administration in the island prolonged.

In Queensland, his next assignment, his health broke down completely, but he recovered and paid a short visit to Jamaica in 1886. Back in Queensland, and approaching his sixtieth birthday, he wrote to the Secretary of State for permission to retire and return to England. That letter, however, remained uncompleted, for it was discovered half-written on his desk after his sudden death on October 9, 1888, when, in the words of his wife: "after five hours of alternate pain and swoon he passed from this life".

In 1889 the Rev. John Radcliffe, Rector of the Scots Kirk, who was a member of the Board of Governors of the Institute of Jamaica, proposed the establishment of the Musgrave Medal as a lasting tribute and memorial to Sir Anthony. These medals are now bestowed as a reward for accomplishments in the fields of Science, Literature and Art: the gold medal for excellence; the silver for sustained achievement by promotion, and the bronze, for individual performance.

Lady Musgrave's name is perpetuated by the Lady Musgrave Road, and until quite recently, by the Lady Musgrave Women's Self Help Society, founded in 1879 to develop local industries, and provide employment by self-help for poor craftswomen. This institution which did much valuable work in the past, has now unfortunately gone into extinction.