



R/W - Florizel Glasspole

Sir Florizel Glasspole —
September 25, 1909 — November 25, 2000

A Nation, His Monument

Sir Florizel Glasspole – A Nation His Monument

On the eve of nationhood, at a time when the people looked for men of courage and vision to provide inspired leadership, Florizel Augustus Glasspole offered himself in a lifetime of commitment and service to his fellow Jamaicans. From the heady days of the struggle for workers rights, to the dizzying heights of statesmanship in the highest office of the land, Florizel Glasspole lived the full and productive life of a patriot extraordinaire.



Following the retirement of Sir Clifford Campbell in 1973, Florizel Glasspole was asked to serve as Governor-General of Jamaica, and he remained in office for 17 eventful years. In stepping into that high office on June 27, 1973, he became only the second Jamaican to be appointed Governor-General of this country. His distinguished service, the longest period for a Governor-General

to date, spanned different People's National Party (PNP) and Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) administrations.

But it was a long journey to King's House, along which this son of a preacherman was to leave a trail of impressive achievements and win the hearts of his compatriots.

The Early Years: Awakening of A Social Conscience

Sir Florizel Augustus Glasspole was born in Kingston on September 25, 1909, the son of Reverend Theophilus Glasspole, a Methodist minister and his wife, Florence. He received his early education at Buff Bay Elementary School in Portland between 1914 and 1918 while his father was working in that parish. In 1919, his family returned to Kingston where he attended the Central Branch Primary School until 1922 when he enrolled in Wolmer's Boys School.

The man who would become the country's second native head of state recalled that his school boy days at Wolmer's were some of the best of his life. While there, he participated in several sports and excelled academically, graduating after four years with both Junior and Senior Cambridge Examinations.

His loyalty to his school remained strong and over 60 years after graduating, he served as chairman of the 250th Anniversary Fundraising Committee.

Sir Florizel's first job was in the Civil Service with the Registrar of Titles Office. Although he was interested in pursuing Law as a profession, he eventually decided



Bringing Christmas cheer to a delighted child during his annual Christmas tour of shut-ins.

on accountancy for a career, because his parents could not afford to send him to England and legal training was not yet available in Jamaica. He studied with local accountant P. A. Parkinson while doing correspondence courses with the Scottish School of Accountancy.

It was in the 1930s while working at the Serge Island Sugar Estate in St Thomas that Sir Florizel was smitten with the desire to help improve the lot of his fellowman, a theme he had often heard ringing out from the pulpits occupied by his father. Years later, he could still recall how the working conditions and low salaries of plantation labourers made his heart pound with sympathy.

In 1932, when he returned to Kingston and began working as an accountant with S.N. Shoucair, a dry goods merchant, he soon got involved in the fight for workers rights.

As his interest in the trade union movement grew, Glasspole married the beautiful Ina Josephine Kinlocke. Lady Glasspole predeceased her husband. They are survived by their only child, Sara Lou Mena.

Politics and Struggle: The Fight for the Working Class

Taking a job as an accounting clerk at the Serge Island Sugar Estate in St Thomas in 1930 played a pivotal role in Sir Florizel's life. "My heart shuddered with sympa-



Sir Florizel and Lady Glasspole descend the stairs of King's House enroute to an official function.

thy for the canefield workers," he recalled later. They worked long hours for very low wages. Conditions in the country were poor. The rumblings of social dissent which started quietly then, were to erupt in the 1938 riots.

The 1930s and 40s were a turbulent period in Jamaica's history with strikes occurring regularly in the depressed economy, organised by labour and political organizations which were taking root in the island.

To prepare himself for a role in the changing environment, the young Glasspole joined the Kingston and St Andrew Debating Association, a leading cultural organization. He also served as Secretary for the Coke Methodist Church Young Men's Club and remained a life-long member of the Church.

Along with barrister and politician, E.A Campbell and former Mayor of Kingston and outstanding cricketer, Ernest Rae, he formed the Jamaica United Clerks Association in 1937, which he served as General Secretary until 1948.

The following year was no less momentous for him as he was one of the founding members of the People's National Party (PNP) in 1938. And in 1939, he became General Secretary of the Trade Union Advisory Council. This period was at the peak of the labour and

political unrest in Jamaica with riots breaking out in several areas of the island.

Impressed with the role that he had played in the labour movement, the British Trade Union Congress assisted Glasspole to get a scholarship to study trade unionism at Ruskin College, Oxford in England.

From this early start as one of the founding fathers of the trade union movement, Sir Florizel went on to become a key player in its evolution. Between 1941 and 1952, he helped form the Water Commission Manual Workers Union; Jamaica Printers and Allied Workers Union; Machado Employees Union; Jamaica Trade



Sir Florizel, a fighter for the workers who was fondly called the “Brown Bumber” welcomes world heavyweight champion Evander Holyfield to King’s House.

Union Congress; Mental Hospital Workers Union; Municipal and Parochial General Workers Union; The General Hospital and Allied Workers Union; and the powerful National Workers Union (NWU), which was to help spawn the People's National Party. He served these organizations in various capacities, including that of President and General Secretary.

As an important leader in the Trade Union Movement in Kingston, he was the ideal candidate for the PNP in their bid to capture the East Kingston and Port Royal seat in the elections of 1944. He was one of only four PNP candidates to win a seat in those elections, which were the first to be held under Universal Adult Suffrage in Jamaica.

Sir Florizel served as leader of Opposition Business in the House of Representatives and was appointed Secretary of the PNP's Parliamentary Group.

His role took a dramatic turn in 1955 when the PNP won the general elections of that year. At the time he was a Vice-President of the party. Sir Florizel was sworn in as Labour Minister. He was also appointed leader of Government Business in the House and became Secretary of the local Executive Committee of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

During his two years as Labour Minister, he achieved

far-reaching success in reviving the Jamaica Farm Work Programme in the United States. The programme had been contracting but he successfully lobbied the US government, farmers and that country's trade unions. He was also responsible for settling a number of strikes, and passing the Registration of Travel Agencies Act.

Among the organisations he served, he remained proud of his contribution to the regional integration movement during his time as Member of the Standing Federation Committee on West Indian Federation 1953-58; and his membership of Jamaica's House of Representatives Committee which prepared the Independence Constitution and the delegation which finalised the Constitution with the British Government in London.

Called the Dean of the Labour Movement by father of the nation, the Right Excellent Norman Washington Manley, Sir Florizel, in his role of patriot, struck a balance. While proudly declaring he was a firm believer in trade unionism and recalling that his United Clerks Association "raised plain hell for any bad treatment or wages problems," he firmly advised University of the West Indies graduates that "you are expected to put in your share of hard work, sweat and toil."

Education — The Glasspole Years

The current strong emphasis on education by the state, arguably, had its genesis in the Glasspole Years. Sir Florizel twice presided over the Education portfolio, from 1957 to 1962 and again from 1972 to 1973, when he rose to become Governor-General. In an accolade to his legacy, Sir Florizel was described by the incumbent Minister of Education as “the consummate educator.”

Sir Florizel's service at the helm of the Education sector came at a time of great political significance in the fledgling Jamaican nation. The first period, 1957-62, was the period of Self-government and Independence, marked by heightened black consciousness and the rise of popular movements.

It was the period when Jamaicans were realising that they had to take charge of their own destiny, which meant that they had to develop a clear vision of nationhood and be prepared to end their dependence on the developed nations for sustenance. There would be need for technicians, highly skilled craftsmen, managers, agriculturalists and other professionals in a wide range of skills that were critical in meeting the manpower needs of Jamaica.

Sir Florizel believed in the ability of his people to meet those needs and hence the educational policies put

His interest in education never waning, Sir Florizel was again called to be Education Minister in the new Government of 1972. It was a time of political and social renaissance; ideas contended; visions of nationhood expanded and there were dreams of social equity, upward mobility and prosperity. The people looked to education to point the way forward and Sir Florizel was again called upon to provide the leadership.

The following is a snapshot of high points in the Glasspole Years at the Education Ministry:

It was Sir Florizel,

- who saw to the construction of the Ministry of Education headquarters at National Heroes Circle. A highly controversial project, it was regarded by critics then as being too elaborate for the purpose.
- who saw to the introduction of Common Entrance free places to high school which allowed for the children of the "Nonmoneyed class" to obtain quality secondary education, a ticket to social equity and upward mobility.
- who instigated the democratisation and expansion of secondary education to meet the growing demand for qualified personnel in every field of activity. Schools singled out then, were the post-primary schools and departments attached or specially related to elementary schools, the

primary schools and departments attached or specially related to elementary schools, the practical training centres, the technical high schools which were so designated between 1960-61. Sir Florizel himself recalled:

“When I started Technical High Schools, people disliked the idea. They did not want their fingers to get dirty. They wanted white collar jobs. I had to go around the country and preach the gospel of Technical High Schools, and it was finally accepted by the people.”

- who saw to the College of Arts, Science and Technology (CAST), now the University of Technology (UTech), to operate as a multi-faceted tertiary institution, and the Jamaica School of Agriculture (JAS) which found a new home in Twickenham Park.

Other accomplishments were:

- The Free Education Policy of the 1970s, and the In-service Teachers Education Thrust (ISTET) which allowed teachers to upgrade their qualification on the job.
- Declaration of Spanish as the second official language of Jamaica to help break down the language barrier between Jamaica and her Spanish-speaking neighbours.



Sir Florizel : he has left behind a grateful nation.

Even when he no longer walked the corridors of the Education Ministry, Sir Florizel maintained a strong interest in the nation's education. In many respects, the education infrastructure of today will remain a lasting monument to this stalwart of a leader and giant of a man.

Walking with Kings

Truly it could be said of Sir Florizel that he walked with Kings but remained in touch with the common man. As Governor-General, representative of The Queen, Sir Florizel took the office to the most humble of communities, even as King's House played host to royalties and high dignitaries.

His social conscience continued to play out as patron of a range of organisations, including the Jamaica Red Cross Society, the Scouts Association, the YMCA and YWCA, the Jamaica Cancer Society and the United Nations Association of Jamaica.

Less than a month after he was officially sworn-in, Sir Florizel received his first overseas visitor, it was the Lord Mayor of London. The Governor-General was the guest speaker at the Regional Conference of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association on July 23, 1973.

He was the recipient of a long and impressive list of national and international awards and honours, culmi-

nating in the Order of the Nation (O.N.), Jamaica's second highest honour after National Hero. These awards include the Order of Andres Bello, one of Venezuela's highest which he received in 1970 and the Order of Liberator in 1978, also from Venezuela.

The following are high points of his occupancy of King's House:

- November 1973 – at a special function at the Ward Theatre, he received the Keys to the City



Sir Florizel and Lady Glasspole (4th and 5th l) with royal guests, Her Majesty The Queen (3rd l), her husband Prince Philip (2nd l); Prime Minister Michael Manley and Mrs Beverly Manley in 1975

of Kingston.

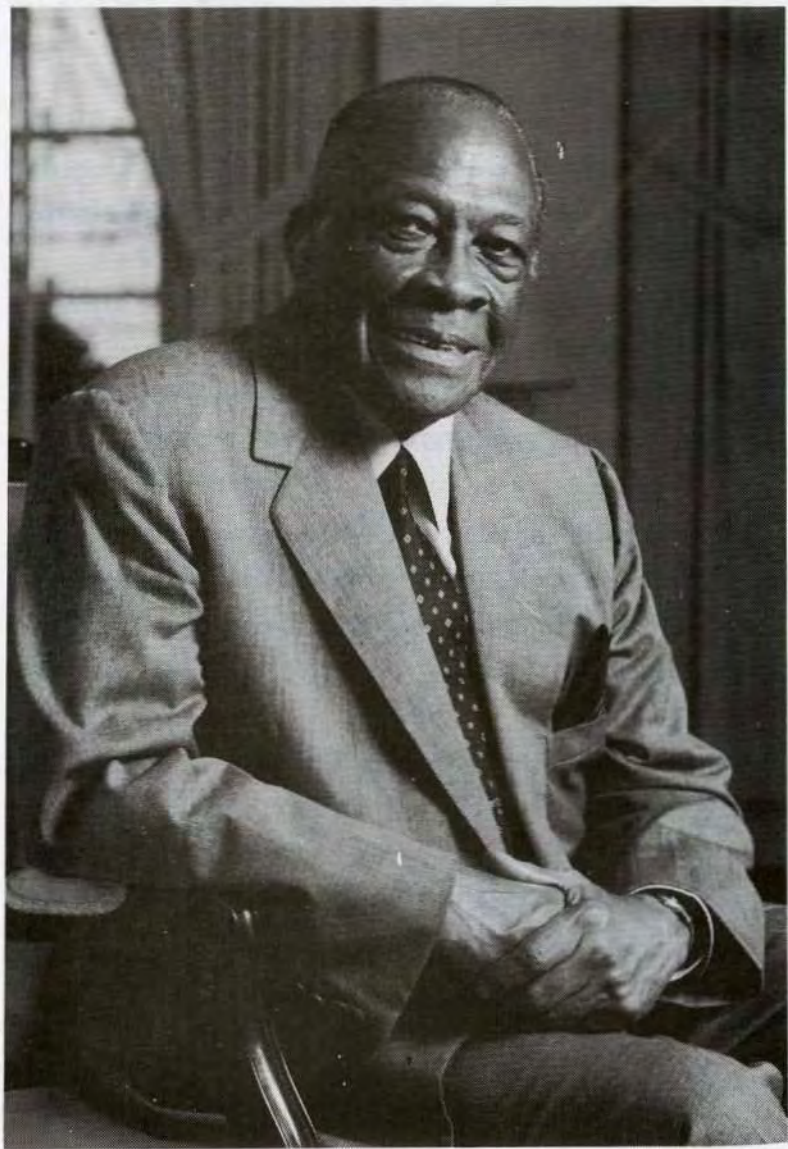
- First Royal visitors for the G-G were Princess Anne and Captain Mark Phillips, December 12 – 15, 1973
- April 26, 1975, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II stayed at King's House while she attended the Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference
- Recipient of the Order of the Nation which is reserved by the Government for governors-general, in 1975
- Recipient of a second Venezuelan national honour, the Order of Liberator in 1978 while on another trip to that country
- He became the Gleaner's first Honour Awardee in 1979
- October 1980 when the JLP won, he was asked to remain in office
- In 1981 he was knighted by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, receiving the Grand Cross of the Most Distinguished Order of St Michael and St George (GCMG) in a private function at Buckingham Palace

- The Honorary Doctor of Laws degree by UWI was bestowed on him in 1982
- 1983, he was made the Grand Commander of the Royal Victorian Order (GCVO) by The Queen. Giving his own take on his stay in King's House, Sir Florizel said:
"I think I have brought a new thrust to the office of governor-general. I have undoubtedly created a new image for the post and I have engaged in more widespread activities."

He retired from the office in 1990. Away from the glare of public life and the glamour of hosting royalties and heads of state, Sir Florizel spent his last days working on his memoirs.

In tribute to the great man, the ICWI Foundation hosted the Sir Florizel Glasspole Lectures for 10 years, with the final lecture being staged to a capacity audience at Le Meridien Jamaica Pegasus Hotel on November 29, 2000, a mere two days after his passing at the age of 91.

of Program
1970-1971



George M. Johnson, former Director of
Southwest Area Office

1970-1971

Tribute to Sir Florizel Glasspole
by the
Prime Minister of Jamaica
Rt. Hon. P. J. Patterson, QC., MP

We are all saddened by the passing of the Most Honourable Sir Florizel Glasspole, a former Governor-General of Jamaica.

Sir Florizel had been a pivotal participant in the country's journey from colonialism through Self-government and finally Independence.

He served his country courageously in the trade union movement, where he was a pioneer of outstanding stature. A passionate believer in workers' rights, he was a guiding light in the growth and development of Jamaica's labour movement.

As an early stalwart of the People's National Party, he exerted significant influence in the cradling of the democracy which we enjoy today.

He was a true patriot and one who was profoundly involved in the country's political and constitutional development.

His contribution to the country's parliamentary life was legendary and the nation will always remember his

tenure as Minister of Education.

When he ascended to the nation's highest office, it was a deserved recognition for sterling service.

Sir Florizel endeared himself to the entire population, throughout his over 60 years of public service. He held this office with pride and determination, yet never lost touch with the nation's humanity.

Jamaica has lost a statesman of high esteem.

I have lost a towering political mentor, from whose tutelage I derived great inspiration.

He will be fondly and respectfully remembered for his distinguished service as a remarkable politician, parliamentarian, trade unionist and social worker.

On behalf of the Government and people of Jamaica, I extend deepest condolence to his daughter, Sara-Lou, the Glasspole family, his many friends and associates.

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