

# THE SIGNIFICANCE OF Spanish Point

BY ELIZABETH JONES



Dr. Savage's rendition of Spanish Point, from afar.

**From temporary settlements made by the Spanish in 1603, to the arrival of the naval Commander-in-Chief of the American and West Indies Station at Admiralty House, Spanish Point has had its role in Bermuda's history.**

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ook at Spanish Point on the map and you'll see that this promontory's coast line dips in and out of bays and coves on its eastern and southern sides. And yet when you walk along Spanish Point Road towards the Boat Club, the only clear sea view is at Spanish Point Park tucked around Stovell's Bay.

To see, for example, Boss's Cove, Green Bay, or Peter Tucker's Bay, means walking through residential areas because access to the coast is mostly via private estates. On the northern side before Spanish Point Park only the names of a few lanes, such as Cove Point Lane and Philips Cove Lane, give the clue they lead to views of the coast.

It was not always so, of course. Its name reminds us that once Spanish Point was, like the rest of Bermuda, uninhabited but for a time an interim refuge for Spanish sailors. After Captain Diego Ramirez's ship was shipwrecked in the Great Sound in 1603, Henry Wilkinson says in *The Adventurers of Bermuda* that he left signs of temporary settlements in Bermuda—"certain crosses left erected upon rocks and promontories, some pieces of their coyne



A sketch by Dr. Savage showing islands in the Great Sound, as drawn from Boss's Cove.

INSET:

Johnson Savage, MD joined the Royal Artillery as a surgeon in 1830 and his first overseas posting was to St. George's, Bermuda, from 1833-36. He painted 39 known images of Bermuda, from whaling activity to general and detailed scenes at St. George's in the east to Dockyard in the west: an unparalleled record of Bermuda at the time of Emancipation.

found scattered under trees and the like signs." One place in particular suggested an encampment or rendezvous. No doubt it was that of Ramirez and, ever since, this site has been known as Spanish Point. However, the Spanish left no signs of buildings, so Ramirez and his crew must have had unhampered vistas of the picturesque coast.

his assignees, and William Payne respectively. And on the map, Abraham Goos's for example, housing symbols show that, as early as 1616, homes (palmetto thatched cabins) were being erected overlooking the coast.

During the eighteenth century stone buildings began to go up, one of the oldest in existence being Old House, now the store

whole of Pembroke as, confusingly, for some time Bermudians referred to it as Spanish Point. By the time Dr. Johnson Savage arrived in Bermuda in 1833, the promontory was still sparsely built upon as shown in his painting of the islands in the Great Sound from Boss's Cove whose beauty could then be clearly seen from the road. Susetta Harriet Lloyd, a missionary who was staying with Archdeacon Spencer in Bermuda during the same period, describes Spanish Point in her *Sketches of Bermuda* as "an isolated promontory indented with numerous creeks and surrounded with black naked rocks which make a striking contrast with the white surf of the breakers."

### Admiralty House

Once work began on Ireland Island to create the "Fortress Bermuda" and the Royal Naval Dockyard, Spanish Point's geographical position became more significant since its rocky peninsula points a hand towards the

western tip of Bermuda, offering clear views both of Dockyard and of St. George's. The naval commander-in-chief had previously resided at Mount Wyndham in Hamilton Parish, but with the growth of Dockyard and the establishment of the City of Hamilton as Bermuda's new capital, Spanish Point seemed a far better location for the admiral's Flag Station. In 1816, the Colony bought a house and part of the present grounds from John Dunscombe for £3,000, transferring them to the Crown as the new official residence for the commander-in-chief, Admiralty House. Thus Spanish Point became an attraction for visitors for whom an official call with the admiral and his wife was a social cachet. In addition, social events such as picnics, tea parties and balls would be hosted there, especially after the ballroom was added in 1897. Another painting by Savage depicts tents and men at ease in the grounds of Admiralty House the day after a ball given by Admiral Sir George Cockburn. In 1850, another commander-in-chief, the Honourable Earl of Dundonald, dubbed "Dauntless Cochrane," gave a magnificent full dress ball for 350 guests. According to the *Gazette*, after the ball was over he invited them into a tunnel he had excavated and "thence into a room hewn out of the solid rock, about 14 ft in height and 40 in circumference, lighted by day through an aperture in one side..." In the centre of the cave was a table "furnished with small brown jugs from which each visitor might quaff a beverage..." Dundonald was famous for the tunnels he excavated, including the one that runs from Admiralty House to the government's Tulo plant nursery, formerly the paddock and kitchen garden.

Several written accounts about Bermuda include references to visits at Admiralty House. In *Sketches of Bermuda*, Lloyd writes about an "elegant fete" given by Admiral Sir Charles Ogle in honour of the king's birthday. "You will be no less surprised at our

courage than at our persevering loyalty, when I tell you we had to go a distance of four miles in an open row boat, without a breeze to carry us forward, or a moon to guide us." But she arrived safely to enjoy an entertainment "said to be the finest in Bermuda..."

"Supper," she writes, "was laid for an hundred persons, in a room fitted up like a tent; a number of beautiful flags were disposed in tasteful drapery, and at the upper end there was a brilliant transparency of the royal arms..."

Not all the visitors were complimentary. For example, Georgina Gholson Walker, a young American woman who joined her Confederate husband stationed in Bermuda from 1862-65 during the American Civil War, was not altogether impressed: "Admiralty House is a very pretty little structure about three miles from Hamilton; with neat grounds around

"But," she says, with her usual ebullience, "both places are beautifully situated, with fine grounds and extensive gardens; and what does it matter if the house be fine or otherwise, when one lives out of doors?"

Admiralty House would be the residence of the commander-in-chief of North America and the West Indies right through the Second World War until the British Navy left in 1951. In the 1960s it briefly became the home of the Bermuda Rifles after the Armoury Building on Reid Street was sold and until the relocation of the Bermuda Regiment to Warwick Camp. In 1974 it was deliberately burned by the government. The ballroom, built in 1897, was a large room and used as a military staff-room and cypher office during the Second World War. During the '50s and '60s it continued to be used for parties, dances, weddings and

**"an isolated promontory indented with numerous creeks and surrounded with black naked rocks which make a striking contrast with the white surf of the breakers."**

— A DESCRIPTION OF SPANISH POINT BY SUSETTE HARRIET LLOYD

After Bermuda was officially settled and the land carved up into Tribes and shares, Spanish Point became a part of Pembroke Tribe and was divided into four shares as shown on early maps based on Richard Norwood's 1616 survey of Bermuda. These shares, Numbers 24, 25, 26 and 27, were owned by Richard Edwards, Richard Caswell, George Sandys or

house for the Soares's Grocery Store. But there was no church, the first and nearest being St. John's as is true today. And until the beginning of the nineteenth century, Spanish Point was probably a sleepy area if the old jingle has it right: "All the way to Spanish Point, There the Times are out of joint"—although the rhyme probably referred to the



Admiralty House, the former residence of the naval commander-in-chief and location of many high-class social events in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

and the House furnished handsomely but with no remarkable elegance."

Some 22 years later, Julia Dorr in her Bermuda *An Idyll of the Summer Islands 1884* agreed with her: "Neither Mount Langton, the Government House, as it is called, nor Clarence Hill, the Admiralty House, are fine buildings. Indeed, they are quite the opposite."

other events until its slow dilapidation. Later, it hosted a variety of organisations serving the community and Bermuda's youth.

Today, the buildings are no more, but the grounds, including the picturesque Clarence Cove, named after Prince William, the Duke of Clarence, have been since 1975 a much loved public park.



Kids in punts, circa 1957 at Flat Rock Close in Spanish Point.

## Spanish Point Park

Tucked around Stovell Bay, these days Spanish Point Park is the one place where the sea can readily be seen from the road. Bobbing with fishing boats and dinghies, the bay also inadvertently became home to the wreck of the Great Floating Dock HMS Bermuda. Once the largest iron docks in the world, it was built in London between 1866–68 and towed to Bermuda for the cleaning of ships of the West Indian squadron. Sold for scrap and partially dismantled in 1906, it literally blew into Stovell Bay during a storm two years later. Known also as the pontoons, children in the neighbourhood enjoyed swimming there. From time to time visiting belted kingfishers swoop for fish near it.

## Childhood at Spanish Point from the 1940s

Former art teacher Shirley Pearman, daughter of former Chief Education Officer and historian Dr. Kenneth Robinson and educator Rosalind Robinson, moved to Wedgewood Villa on Spanish Point Road when she was four. Later, her parents would build Seville House next to it. She remembers when the roads were paved with white coral jail nuts and when getting from A to B mostly meant riding in a horse and cart or riding bikes.

There was some motorised transportation: she recalls the big green buses used to transport the “base school children.” But on

the whole, life was leisurely in her childhood. There was plenty of time for her to sit on the front wall and watch the traffic go by—often runaway horses from the nearby stables. Indeed, a rearing horse was the subject of one of her early drawings. Where there are now houses, she remembers vacant lots, which she called “The Land” and which from the roadside “descended into a grassy plain and rose again, sweeping into a hill that rose and descended onto the North Shore cliffs.” There, she and her childhood friend Carolyn Wellman, who was related to the Kennedys, a well-known piloting family, would fly kites, play “my house” with their tea-sets, run in and out of trees and play games of rounders.

Cedars were plentiful and she remembers a swing on a cedar branch in her garden. Summer nights they would sprinkle salt on slugs and “watch them leave their goo and curl up.” Often they would pick bouquets of flopper plant and try to sell them to neighbours who might supply them with cookies but not with the money they would have preferred. The stretches of open land meant a greater physical freedom for children than is possible today, especially given there was easier access to the water. But there were restrictions caused by the presence of the British at Admiralty House and by the racial segregation of the time, and these restrictions affected, or at least were supposed to affect, where people could and couldn’t swim. Clar-

## Point Girls

By Deborah Lombardo

Taken from *This Poem—Worthy Place*  
*Bermuda Anthology of Poetry Volume II*

Point girls were hard  
Point girls were rough  
brash and brittle outside  
inside, way hard and tough enough

Point girls beat up boys  
Point girls could really cuss  
scornful and loud  
all fooling and bluff

Point girls rode the bus  
MSA and Dellwood fought every day  
over seats, over boys  
over sisters, brothers and cousins

BHS girls rode the bus too  
quiet, not talking to us,  
but, them too, on the bus  
the equaliser, the bus

Diving off Chiappa’s cliff  
jumping off the mount  
all day long in the summertime  
for years, it seemed, for years...

Then, it was jobs  
and real grown up stuff,  
like babies  
and bad husbands

Point girls were like casuarinas  
spiky, bendy, but hard to break  
Point girls ran on rocks, feet like leather  
light as feathers. Point girls turned to dust

ence Cove at Admiralty House was supposedly strictly off limits. Shirley’s grandmother, Olivia Robinson, was hired during the 1920s to be available at Admiralty balls for mending the ladies’ dresses, and Shirley remembers a sentry at the gate. She learned to swim at Deep Bay around the side of the cliffs which she accessed by descending steps from the roadside. “It was pretty and pebbly, but also dark and secluded,” she remembers. “Climbing back up the steps was tortuous.” The beach disappeared at high tide. Eventually, Deep Bay fell out of favour because the cliffs fell in. Sometimes she would swim at Bluck’s Point but “though the land was lovely the beach itself was not nice.” Later, in 1953 the beaches at Spanish Point Park opened up and she would swim there with her friends.

Dr. George Cook, former president of Bermuda College, whose family had also been tenants of Wedgewood Villa and later moved nearer Cox’s Hill, remembers it being a school boy’s point of honour to reach Stovell’s Bay from Mill’s Creek without

traversing Spanish Point Road. That meant swimming and clambering over rocks and open, but probably private, land. He incidentally remembers the American searchlight station erected near Admiralty House.

Debbie Lombardo, *The Bermudian’s* winning poet for 2015 whose childhood memories go back to the ’50s and ’60s, recalls an idyllic childhood thanks mostly to the

grownups to use for catching snapper. She remembers swimming all day long “until we were absolutely exhausted.” Sometimes, she says, “We did incredibly dangerous things, especially in the cove off Sugar Apple Lane.” She, too, remembers a sentry at the gate of Admiralty House but he didn’t stop her from enjoying the forbidden thrill of swimming into Clarence Cove and seeing Neptune’s

***She remembers when the roads were paved with white coral jail nuts and when getting from A to B mostly meant riding in a horse and cart or riding bikes.***

— MEMORIES OF SPANISH POINT FROM SHIRLEY PEARMAN

freedom she enjoyed over open space in Spanish Point. Living on Flat Rock Close, just 30 seconds away from the water, she would play and climb along the rocky coast from Admiralty House to the Point and around Boss’s Cave. A tomboy, she sailed in a punt and constantly fished with boys in the neighbourhood. They’d catch bait for

head on the dock (Neptune was subsequently moved to the Maritime Museum, now the National Museum of Bermuda) or from exploring Admiral Dundonald’s tunnel into the Tulo plant nursery.

Animals played an important part in her childhood. She had a pony, “Flicker,” whom she rode all over Spanish Point. “I set up my

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Boss's Cove



Snipes getting ready to race in front of Spanish Point Boat Club in 1969.

own gymkhana," she laughs, "with trails and routes meandering through Spanish Point Park to Plaice's Point." Her mother wasn't too fond of Flicker. "Flicker chased her for carrots and she couldn't stand it!" But her father, Vincent Lombardo, a mechanic for Stevedoring Service, was sympathetic: he created a stable for Flicker out of a wooden crate in front of their house not far from Soares's Grocery Store.

Debbie also had a dog, as did most residents in Spanish Point. Called Boy, "he was half collie and half Alsatian and he was my protector and defender and he was hated

### Boss's Cove

John Kennedy, from a piloting family and a pilot himself, grew up at Boss's Cove as did Captain Llewelyn who moved there as a young boy. It was known as "the Bay" and it was here Captain Hollis started fishing during the summer and the Easter and Christmas holidays when he was four or five. He learned from his grandmother and mother whom he remembers fishing off the rocks with their lines to catch bait. His grandmother would take him out on the water in her punt. He would also go out with various fishermen to learn different types of fishing. Often he

other fishermen. Captain Llew still lives at Boss's Cove. He has often lamented the fact that moorings are so prohibitively expensive today young people find it virtually impossible to join the commercial fishing industry. He often gave permission to neighbours to swim at the cove. Shirley Pearman remembers as a child visiting Charlotte Oats, who also lived there, and who would give her bread, possibly homemade in a brick oven, topped with slabs of butter and sprinkled with sugar. She remembers walking along the road "very gingerly" because of the many dogs "who were not afraid to express their personality."

### The Spanish Point Boat Club

Debbie Lombardo remembers the Spanish Point Boat Club's annual social. Her parents belonged to the club although they did not sail. "Most people belonged to it," she says, although, in its early years, during the 1940s and '50s, as Shirley Pearman recalls, it was racially segregated. Founded in 1941, the club became famous for Snipe Class dinghy sailing, winning the Western Hemisphere Snipe Championship, the SPBC Championship and the Bermuda National Championship in 1956. Every year they would organise a picnic with activities such as bobbing for apples, swimming races and musical chairs outside on the dance floor. But the event Debbie most vividly recalls was crossing the telephone pole. "The men at the club would spend months greasing it up with layers and layers of vaseline," she says. "Then they suspended it over the water and made people crawl on it to see if they could cross it. It was very dangerous!"

**Founded in 1941, the club became famous for Snipe Class dinghy sailing, winning the Western Hemisphere Snipe Championship, the SPBC Championship and the Bermuda National Championship in 1956.**

by the postman! Everybody had dogs in the neighbourhood and they mostly didn't tie their dogs up."

She remembers farming being an important part of life in Spanish Point. Her family's neighbour Jerry Bothelo, for example, had a large vegetable garden and kept rabbits and chickens. Farming was in her blood since her maternal grandfather was a farmer, but it skipped her mother's genes. "Everybody in the neighbourhood had as big a plot as they could but we were the only ones that didn't." However, that didn't stop her from digging up a part of her parents' yard and planting it with potatoes.

would join the net fishermen on shore before daylight and then go out with them. As an adult he ran the Boss's Cove Boatyard and his *Lana J*, a boat he built himself mostly out of cedar, has long been a familiar sight although sadly it is now destined for destruction. Used to going out to sea in all weathers, he was responsible for a number of rescues, especially to the north and northwest of the island. Indeed, a number of people owe their lives to him. In recognition of his rescues, he was made Water Safety Person of the Year, along with Mark Selley, in 1999.

He became a full-time commercial fisherman, but by 2010 "retired" to provide bait for

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Later, as a teenager she would attend dances there.

Today, the club is also the venue for the well-known Bermuda Folk Club and for rowing events organised by the recently founded Bermuda Pilot Gig Club. Two of the six gigs now in Bermuda are kept at the Spanish Boat Club.

## Variety Stores

Spanish Point may not have had a church or a

school but at one stage had two variety stores and one grocery store: Cove Lane Delicatessen, Howell's Variety Store and Soares's Grocery Store, the only one still in existence and owned by brothers Craig and Dean Soares.

Howell's was at the corner of Spanish Point Road where Cheriton Lane is now. Well-known artist Emile Verpilleux lived at Cheriton from 1938 to 1964 when he died. His picture of a Bermudian cottage being built of quarried Bermuda stone has recently

been restored and is hung in the St. George's Heritage Centre. Both Shirley Pearman and Debbie Lombardo remember Howell's. Shirley says that Captain Hollis, who lived above the shop, was pretty generous with his scoops of ice-cream. She remembers buying Cadbury's chocolate from him that sometimes had worms in it. Captain Hollis was a friend of Debbie's father. She recalls the shop smelling of spray and selling bread, candy, milk—the basics—and being open on Sunday afternoons. They didn't buy their milk there, though, because it was delivered by Dunkley's Dairy. The bottles were short and fat with a two-inch neck and a wax lid. The milk was topped with cream.

The Cove Lane Delicatessen business by the junction at St. John's Hill (the building is no longer there) was owned by Captain Hollis's mother. The history of Soares's Grocery Store, 1 Old House Lane, goes way back in time. According to Pembroke from the Bermuda National Trust's *Bermuda's Architectural Series*, what is now the store house was probably built before 1770 and was once a grocery store and then a private house. In 1911, it was sold to the present Soares brothers' ancestor, Emmanuel Soares de Figueiredo, who converted it back into a store in 1913. His son, John Soares, sold it to his nephew, Colin Edward Soares, Dean and Craig's father. He would take orders sent in by telephone, the number being 1426, and then deliver them on his bicycle, which had a huge basket on the front and another behind. The store became self-service in 1958. Their father learned butchery from his uncle and later taught the boys. Both sons helped their father after school and during vacations by bagging potatoes and delivering groceries. Later, in 1984, Dean started working at the store full time; Craig following him soon after. Today, the store focuses on offering "old fashioned service" in a neighbourhood where "everybody still knows each other." Dean has the theory one reason Spanish Point is such a popular area is that there are four ways to reach town which makes it an easy commute.

"When people leave Spanish Point," Dean smiles, "they spend the rest of their lives trying to get back."

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