

# A PLAN AND £600 STARTED THIS REMARKABLE SCHOOL

## *Memories From Retiring Superintendent's Scrapbook*

By MARTHA GENTRY

Mr. Arthur St. George Tucker has retired as superintendent of the Nonsuch Training School for Boys, founded by him and Mrs. Tucker 24 years ago. During the week I turned the pages of his scrapbook and selected some of his many memories to pass along. Most of those of the last quarter-of-a-century are linked with the school—and its fine record of accomplishment in piloting erring boys onto the path of good citizenship. There are clippings of earlier happenings, though, that wrote the prologue to Mr. Tucker's years of hard work and service.

His father, Canon Arthur Tudor Tucker, was born in England of Bermudian parents, brought up in Nova Scotia, ordained in Bermuda and was back in Nova Scotia when his son Arthur was born. He returned here to stay as the beloved rector of St. George's. Arthur and his brothers and sisters were reared and educated here. At the age of 15 he left for England to join the Merchant Marine. His love of ships and the sea are in the scrapbook in wonderful pictures of sailing vessels and later ships and is evidenced in the school that runs like a ship.

### Death Report

There are documents and clippings regarding Mr. Tucker's World War I career with the Royal Navy. He survived the Battle of Jutland in 1916. He was severely wounded. Here among cuttings of family births and deaths, is his obituary from a Halifax paper in 1918! He died of Spanish influenza on Trafalgar Day aboard H.M.C.S.

Shearwater, it says. One sees cables of condolence and cables of correction and A. St. George Tucker is with us again.

After the war, he was again in the Merchant Marine and eventually settled in Bermuda when he "swallowed the anchor" for reasons of health and Elsie Green, whom he had met in England in 1917, proposed to in 1919, and married in 1927. She arrived in Bermuda at 11 a.m. and Canon Tucker married them two hours later at the Cathedral. (They had to marry early in the afternoon because workmen repairing the Cathedral roof reached a crescendo with the hammers as the day went on.)

Arthur Tucker was soon at Nonsuch in charge of the Quarantine Station under Dr. Henry Wilkinson of the Health Department. It was a primitive place with no electricity or telephone and a fortunately slow business.

### The Original "Nonsuch"

A clipping from an English magazine shows that the original "Nonsuch" was the palace Henry VIII began building in Surrey and Elizabeth I enjoyed as an unofficial retreat. As it did not exist in official records, "Nonsuch" became its name.

The Quarantine Station at Nonsuch became the headquarters of Dr. Beebe and his bathysphere about 1928 and Mr. Tucker was skipper of the deep sea tugboat Gladisfen that transported and lowered the doctor and the sphere to the mysterious world beneath the water.

The Tuckers now had a daughter and a nickname — the Crusoes on the Island — and acquired a little boy, Friday. This was a Bermuda lad in trouble in a community that had no correctional institutions for erring children but a growing awareness of its lack. Dr. Wilkinson asked the Tuckers to take other boys and the school was born, with Dr. Wilkinson as "Godfather."

### A Plan and £600

Three Tuckers (four when their son arrived a year later), nine boys, a plan and £600 were the beginning of a new era in which 276 young offenders have, for the most part, had their kinks ironed out at Nonsuch and learned the meaning of the word that describes its method: honour. Of the £600 grant for the first year's expenses, the leading expenditure was £105 for a refrigerator the



Mr. Arthur St. George Tucker

is still operating today. The young seamen are properly fed (perhaps in spite of some one-time parliamentary economists, to judge by more cuttings in the scrapbook) by Mrs. Tucker, the matron. Nonsuch believes that healthy minds and morals thrive better in healthy bodies.

The scrapbook reveals that Mr. Tucker like most pioneers, had to defend his ideas and practices and press for the things needed by Nonsuch and its "crew," but he weathered the storms with equanimity. One sees the change in responsibility for the Island buildings passed from Health to Police to Education departments, and that's where they belong, says Mr. Tucker. One sees that the school retained its name when it was moved to the ship-shaped Fort Cunningham on Paget Island in 1948. More clippings show the sailor-suited lads on watch ("uniforms are good for them — gives them something to be proud of"). Some tell tales of boys who broke ship and defied the law, but another points out that the number genuinely corrected at Nonsuch far exceeds that in most places.

## School's Boat

"The Sea Horse" that Mr. Tucker had specially built for the school ("the tradition of the school is built around that little boat") ferried sick boys, expectant mothers among staff wives, supplies, and Valentine, the aristocratic goat which was presented to start a herd. Reports of boys gardening, cooking, baking bread, caring for livestock, learning trades, studying, sleeping in hammocks, earning small wages and depositing them in postal savings accounts in their own names ("if anyone has had no money for five or six years, he may make a grab at the first he sees"). Boys earning good conduct awards, taking responsibility, boys on the double for a quarter of an hour with their hammocks on their shoulders as punishment for breaking rules, boys in the chapel.

## Sentry's Shot

The war years on Nonsuch Island. The American "invasion" of Cooper's Island and the restriction of Castle Harbour waters after 6 p.m. The afternoon Mr. Tucker, 25 boys and the little daughter of a staff member were delayed by bad weather when returning from a boating party in "The Sea Horse." The American sentry in the dusk whose challenge was not heard and the shot he fired at them. Mr. Tucker's defence at the inquiry that followed ("26 children had to get home in spite of the Base agreement") and the letter of apology from the U.S. Army.

Another letter of apology from the U.S. Navy when a miscalculation by the gunnery officer aboard an American aircraft carrier sent a shower of anti-aircraft fire down on a fishing party from Nonsuch. Frightened boys flattened in the boat but sailor Tucker insisted they stand up to make less target. Near misses were the worst that happened. Dauntless Mr. Tucker remarked that if he had to be fired on, his background made him prefer that the Navy do it!

Nonsuch boys hauling a dangerous floating chemical warfare canister ten feet long from the sea and making it fast, and a bomb minus its firing pin. Also, tallow and fats, which they made into soap and moulded into candles

to keep the altars in Bermuda churches alight when the supplies could not be replenished. Mrs. Tucker making hundreds of shirts due to wartime shortages. Nonsuch making do and half-a-dozen Nonsuch graduates serving their country's Navy with bravery.

## Nazi Spy

Two men handling 37 lads — the second assistant promised Mr. Tucker when the number of boys reached 20 was unavailable due to the war. The German woman billeted at Nonsuch by special request of the Government. "She was a rank Nazi — a real spy," reminisced Mr. Tucker. They saw to it that she had no contact with other German prisoners held in Bermuda and worried about the fact that Mrs. Tucker's family was being bombed in England.

"I think we indoctrinated her with civilised opinions," said Mr. Tucker. "We sent her back to Germany a good German and she's quite pro-British now." They still hear from her occasionally.

## Courage and Resource

The letters of congratulation on the awarding of the M.B.E. and later the Coronation Medal to Arthur Tucker. The entry in the visitors' book at Nonsuch by Mr. Alexander Patterson, then His Majesty's Commissioner of Prisons for England and Wales: "Nonsuch must be one of the most remarkable schools in the Empire. It has courage and resource associated with the real spirit of the pioneer. I trust it may receive the whole-hearted support of the court and the community."

Mr. Tucker is on retirement leave for three months and his wife, as much a part of Nonsuch as he, will continue as matron until that is up. Retiring for health reasons, (what other could there be?), the indomitable Arthur Tucker has no intention of spending, all his time with a footstool and his pipe. There will be more social work on a less demanding scale. Looking back on things, he expresses gratitude for the loose reins in which the Government held the school during its formative years and says: "We have been very happy. It was hard work and for a long time under primitive conditions, but we trained some good boys."