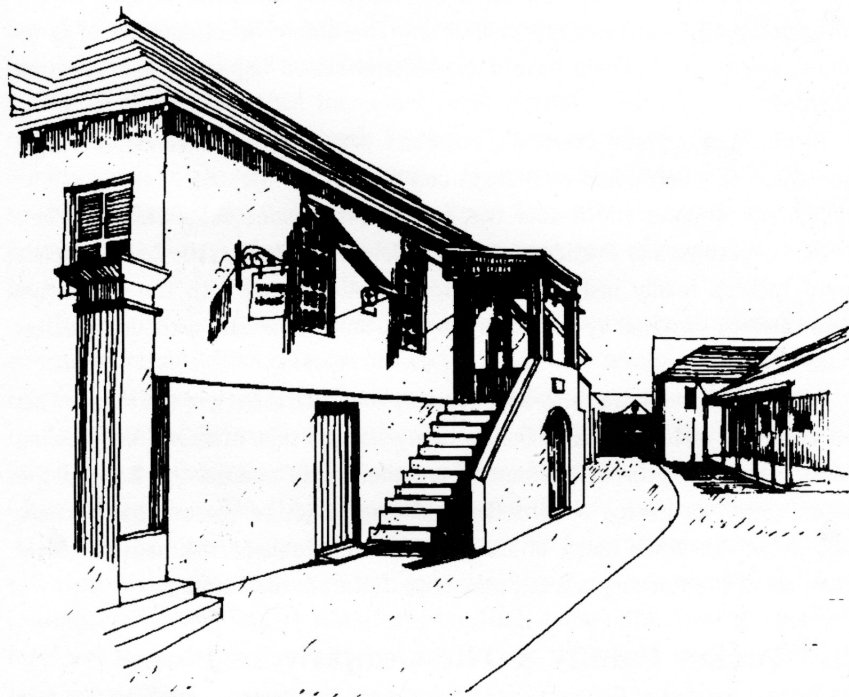


Tucker House Museum

WATER STREET, ST. GEORGE'S



The Bermuda National Trust



History

Of the three major National Trust museums, the President Henry Tucker House is the most typical of early Bermudian house construction. The date of the building is unknown, but archaeological evidence suggests that it was standing, largely as it appears today, by the middle of the 18th Century. Minutes of His Majesty's Council, recorded in June of that year, refer to this house as one where Governor William Popple "further declines to permit a court to be held, it being more noted for punch than for law." During this period it was the home of the Honourable Thomas Smith, tavern keeper, ship owner, and a member of the prestigious Governor's Council.

The Smith family lived on the upper level of the house where the rooms are constructed with high tray ceilings, which follow the roof pitch and are ingeniously designed to enhance air circulation. The ground level consists of large cellars, where Smith would have unloaded and stored important cargoes from his ships.

In those days, Water Street did not exist. A sanded path meandered to the Square and this house had an undisturbed view of the harbour.

In 1775 Thomas Smith sold the house to the Honourable Henry Tucker, Colonial Treasurer and President of the Governor's Council. It is believed that Henry Tucker's family installed the large panelled doors with the decorative wood carvings, inspired by the Adam brothers, some time during the last quarter of the 18th Century.

A two-storey wing was also added at this time to the back of the house. This was later sold and demolished. During Henry Tucker's time it housed his growing family, while the present bedrooms were the library and pantry. Beyond the "silver room," or library, a short flight of steps leads to the original kitchen, once detached. While much of the woodwork throughout the house is local cedar, all of the flooring is pitch pine imported from the Carolinas.

The Tucker Family & The Gunpowder Plot

The Tuckers are one of Bermuda's oldest and most distinguished families. The first Tucker to arrive on the island was Daniel, who came out from Kent in 1616 to serve as the Colony's second Governor. Later he was followed by two nephews, George and Henry, who settled the extensive Tucker holdings in Southampton. There, in the middle of the most fertile planting land in Bermuda, was built the family home known as The Grove, where President Henry Tucker was born in 1742. He was the eldest son of Colonel Henry Tucker, one of the colony's most prominent citizens at the time.

In the drawing room are two important portraits of Colonel and Mrs. Tucker, nee Anne Butterfield, painted in 1753 by Joseph Blackburn, a visiting artist who was also well known in New England. We do not have a portrait of President Tucker, his wife Frances, nee Bruere, or their nine children, many of whom eventually settled in England. We do, however, have portraits of Henry's brothers and sisters, some of which were also painted by Joseph Blackburn. One of these is of President Henry Tucker's younger brother, Thomas Tudor Tucker, who became the third, and longest serving, Treasurer of the United States.

President Henry Tucker moved into this house in 1775 and was quickly embroiled in a major crisis. On the night of August 14 that year, a group of Bermudians brought several whale boats into Tobacco Bay on the North Shore of St. George's. They crept up the hill to the small building which served as Bermuda's arsenal, broke into it and stole gunpowder, sending it to the Revolutionary American Forces besieging Boston.

President Henry's father, the Colonel, was alleged to have been part of the conspiracy. So was the President's brother, St. George, whose portrait by John Durand hangs in the dining room alcove. President Henry himself was married to the daughter of the fiercely patriotic Royal Governor, General George James Bruere, and the days that followed must have been ones of anguish and crisis for him.

The powder was stolen because the Continental Congress had declared a ban on exports to all British colonies not taking part in the revolt. The 13 mainland colonies were the granary for Bermuda, and the ban was a shrewd blow.

An unofficial Bermuda delegation to Philadelphia asked that the ban be lifted, but the Congress refused—unless Bermuda supplied the powder in the Colony's magazine. This the Bermudians did and the ban was eventually lifted.

The theft of the powder led to a British warship being stationed in Bermuda and there were a number of clashes between British seamen and Bermudians. Feelings ran high, and it would appear that among the Colony's leaders President Henry was one of the few able to work with both sides to promote internal peace.

Furniture

The furniture and silver collection is particularly notable because it is largely inherited from the Tucker family. Much of the collection was originally assembled by President Henry's sister, Frances, who married a cousin, also named Henry Tucker. It was generously bequeathed to the Bermuda Historical Monuments Trust, predecessor of the Bermuda National Trust, by their great-grandson,

Robert Tucker, when he died in 1950 at the remarkable age of 102.

In the drawing room is a superb Bermuda cedar tea table, with pinched "apple leaf" knees and "drake" feet (circa 1730-1740), along with a fine set of Bermuda cedar side-chairs with caned seats (circa 1730). These and the tea table are thought to have once belonged to the original Tucker home, The Grove. The dining table, also a Tucker piece, was made in England of Cuban mahogany around 1790-1800. The decorative plates and tureen are stone china, Hicks and Meigh, circa 1820. Nearby is an early English mahogany secretary with mirrors; it is a perfectly proportioned piece, circa 1740.

The bedroom has an English mahogany four-poster bed with rice pattern carvings, on which lies a remarkable hand sewn quilt. A rare example of a Bermuda cedar three-sided cradle bed can be seen in the nursery, together with side chairs made for children in the early 18th Century.

The library houses a handsome tilt-top table of Honduras mahogany, the top being of a single piece of wood. The Chippendale tallboy is Bermuda cedar of about 1760 and has masterfully carved ball and claw feet, in curious contrast to the apron which is comparatively primitive. The mahogany breakfront houses an impressive collection of Tucker family silver, engraved with their coat of arms.

The kitchen beyond displays an interesting assortment of period items. It is thought that during the mid 19th Century a free black man from South Carolina named Joseph Hayne Rainey operated a barber shop in or near this room. Largely self educated, Rainey returned to the Carolinas in 1866 where he became the first black member of the U.S. House of Representatives in Washington D.C.

If you have time, please spend a few minutes in the two small kitchen gardens which are planted with various herbs and perennials known to have been growing in Bermuda in the 18th Century.

Archaeological Exhibit

The archaeological exhibit located in the 18th-Century basement storage area of the house reviews archaeological procedures used over five years of Tucker House investigations and offers solid physical evidence with respect to the daily lives of the building's occupants.

JOHN COX
MUSEUMS COMMITTEE