

Parliamentary Statement
The Appointment of New National Heroes
Premier Hon. Juliana O'Connor-Connolly
5th February 2025

Mister Speaker, it is with great pride that I rise to share details of our four newly appointed National Heroes today on the floor of this Honourable House. Last Monday, on the 27th January 2025 during our revered National Heroes Day Ceremony, I had the privilege of announcing that the Cabinet had given approval for the Honourable Captain Keith Tibbetts, the Honourable Ernest Craddock Ebanks, the Honourable Frank Hugh Scotland and the Honourable Francine Jackson to be appointed as National Heroes of the Cayman Islands.

Mister Speaker, our history is filled with many Caymanians who have left noteworthy impacts during their lifetimes on our community. Often times these contributions have been unsung, under-appreciated or even unspoken, perhaps in part to the fact that our country is relatively young, and many of our iconic contributors who made lasting impacts have not been written into history because few have been writing our history from a Caymanian perspective.

Mister Speaker, if you will oblige me, I will speak briefly to each the contributions of each of our National Heroes— noting that it is inevitable for me to miss a detail or two based on the magnitude of their works.

The Honourable Captain Keith Tibbetts who was born in Cayman Brac served the Cayman Islands in many capacities. First, in his youth as a seafarer where he became known for his shipbuilding and carpentry skills; then later as a business leader and most notably through his representation of Cayman Brac for 23 years as an elected member of government. He played a central role in the shaping of the constitutional and political future of the Cayman Islands by leading the charge for the Sister Islands to remain with the UK under separate Crown Colony status if the political leadership in Grand Cayman sought to remain with an independent Jamaica. To support their position they presented a petition signed by 345 of the 435 registered voters on the Sister Islands. It was a bold move and arguably helped to shape one of the greatest debate of our times.

Mister Speaker, I am delighted that Hon. Capt Keith Tibbetts' place in history has been secured and am grateful that the people of the Sister Islands of Cayman Brac and Little Cayman

can now proudly say that one of our own is a National Hero of the Cayman Islands.

The Honourable Ernest Craddock Ebanks of North Side also dedicated his life to public service through government, leaving a legacy for generations to come. He too began his career of service on the seas, first on simple merchant voyages and later as a member of the Royal British Navy. He then served as a member of the Legislative Assembly for 32 years and championed the needs of the people of North Side for decades. He served his community with unparalleled integrity and care and he is revered amongst the people of North Side until this day. Once again, he is also the first National Hero to hail from the district of North Side.

Honourable Frank Hugh Scotland, was born in St. Andrews, Jamaica, in 1918. His career started as a radio technician, and he later joined the Jamaica Public Service Company and served as a signalman in the Royal Signal Corps during World War II.

His travels throughout the Northern Caribbean led him to meet his wife, the late Joyce Elaine Ritch, and in 1960, they moved to the Cayman Islands. Although he left the conveniences of

electricity behind, Mr. Scotland was determined to help the islands progress.

Soon after settling in the Cayman Islands, he founded the Bodden Town Power and Light Company, which was franchised by the government to provide electricity to the eastern districts of Grand Cayman. In 1968, the government purchased the company, recognizing the vital service Mr. Scotland had brought to the islands. His legacy continues to shine through the progress he helped spark, and his contributions remain a cornerstone of Cayman's development.

Finally, Mister Speaker, we honoured a living Hero – the Honourable Mrs. Francine Jackson. While an exemplary Caymanian in many ways and a role model bar none, the significance of Mrs. Jackson's life journey was literally written out of history until the work of the Celebrate Cayman team brought to light a hidden gem of a story called the "Phenomenal Four".

You see Mister Speaker, on page 311 of Michael Craton's *Founded Upon the Seas*, which is the most comprehensive retelling of Caymanian history, the author notes under the

heading Political Rights for Women that (and I quote) “*No women were elected (or even stood) in 1959*”.

Mister Speaker, if ever there was an example of being written out of history- it is this. This is a most unfortunate error that was corrected in 2021 when we recognized the first four women who stood for election in September 1959, the first election after the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Law was passed in December of 1958. While she was unsuccessful at the polls, the glass ceiling was shattered and the way was paved for National Hero, Hon Evelyn Wood to become the first woman to be elected as a Member of the Legislative Assembly in 1962.

Hon. Francine Jackson’s has played a pivotal role in the Caymanian women's suffrage movement, served as a strong advocacy for families as she continues to speak about the challenges and triumphs of those days as a means to educate our young people about from whence we came. Mister Speaker, I, and all the women present today in this Honourable House owe her a debt of gratitude.

The naming of four new national heroes brings the total number of National Heroes to 14. Mister Speaker, we continue to build up our people by promoting and protecting our culture, heritage and identity, a major public policy platform of this administration.

Mr. Speaker, continuing we are to celebrate our best; our builders, our beacons, those who used their time, talents and resources to leave an indelible mark on these Cayman Islands.

So Mister Speaker, we encourage Caymanians to embrace their four new national heroes and salute the memories of those who have sacrificed so much for the benefit of future generations of Caymanians.

As I close Mister Speaker, it is my hope that we will expand our awareness and public education on our all of our National Heroes so we can ensure that their legacies can be easily called upon by any Caymanian. It is our duty to keep their stories alive and to use them inspire Heroes to come.

Thank you Mr. Speaker.