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INFORMATION ABOUT GRAND BAY

(from the Case Study Report)

The village of Grand Bay, or, as is more commonly identified by the villagers, *Berricoa* (Berekua), is situated in the parish of St. Patrick, in the lower south-central and eastern part of Dominica (see Map 1). The village is located some 6 to 7 miles to the south of Roseau, the capital, and is accessible by a steep, narrow, pitched road, winding its way circuitously, and in some ways very dangerously, up to the 2,000 foot elevation.

The area generally referred to as *Grand Bay* is made up of several small hamlets, the main and most populous one being Berricoa, and contains the most intense concentration of population within the parish. It should be noted that, while Grand Bay refers sometimes to the main village (Berricoa), it is commonly understood in a wider sense as referring to the group of villages and hamlets stretching across the lower, southern part of the island, from Tete Morne to Petite Savane (see Map 2). Moreover, this geographical stretch does not quite adequately encompass what, in the minds of villagers, can be identified as the *Geneva-Grand Bay* area. For this, one should include the little village, north of the Geneva Estate, known as Pichelin.

It is also common to hear the area described as *Geneva*. This is not without good reason, for, other than the geographical designation used on account of the actual residential location of the population, the term *Geneva* adequately describes the area, in terms of the place of work on which a sizeable proportion of villagers depended for their livelihood.

The village is hemmed in by steep mountains on all sides, and by the Geneva Estate itself, which is a logical extension to the village. The estate of Geneva dominates the village, for it is expansively spread over an area of 1380 acres, with forests and slopes, valleys and slightly modulating lands, on which coconuts, limes and grapefruits were cultivated, with pasture lands for sheep and cattle. There are very few open and flat spaces in the area. Much farming activity is carried out by farmers on the high mountain slopes.

The parish was estimated to have a population of 6,998 persons, according to the 1970 Population Census, and with this size of population, it is the second largest district, other than the main town and central administrative-commercial area of Roseau, which contained then a population of 9,949. The entire parish contains about 14 per cent of the total population of the country.

At present over 60 per cent of the population is of school age, and 13 per cent over 55 years. Thus, there is a large dependent population in the village, even when allowance is made for the fact that many of the post primary age group are out of school and employable, and many *senior adults* are engaged in active farming, and far from retirement.

Traditionally, Geneva has been the main source of employment and

sustenance for the community of Grand Bay. It has been a privately-owned estate, which has had changing fortunes, depending on the policies of management, and the market conditions facing the crops which have been cultivated from time to time.

The estate is of the plantation tradition. During the estate's heyday, it is believed to have carried a labour force of nearly 300 people. Apart from Geneva, there is very little other cultivable land in the immediate environs of Grand Bay to support the population, and very little (if any) alternative forms of employment. Besides this, the result of inheritance patterns have only led to fragmentation of the limited resources. In a real sense, therefore, the villagers of Grand Bay have been at the mercy of the fortunes of the Geneva Estate and its management.

The Grand Bay area in general, and the Geneva Estate in particular, has had a tradition of turmoil and unrest, arising essentially from these poor socio-economic conditions under which most of the community have had to live.

In recent times, the employment prospects of the estate have continuously declined, as the pressure of the rural population has grown. In such a situation, it is not surprising that the simmering problem of unrest which has always manifested itself in this area, would have exploded at some time.

Just two years ago, in 1974, the property experienced a spate of terrorism, vandalism and arson, during which five of the buildings, including the office and the owner's house, were destroyed by fire. Consequently, all the operations on the estate ceased, and in July 1974 the property was acquired by Government, and placed in the control of the Land Management Authority.

A brief summary of the main event at that time is useful. On March 30, 1974, the *New Chronicle* (a weekly Dominican newspaper) carried the headline story entitled *Grand Bay in Turmoil*, in which it was reported that the village of Grand Bay, which had been in the news recently, during the Carnival celebrations in the preceding week, had erupted into violent activities, and that there had been several incidents of destruction of property on the estate, owned by a Syrian who had been in Dominica for several years. It was claimed that during this period cattle were stolen, other livestock killed in the vicinity of the estate, with the entrails left on the ground, and several coconut trees, the main crop of the estate, cut down.

With increasing disturbance on the estate, it was found necessary to send a contingent of police, who arrested a young villager, suspected of being the principal instigator of the incidents. However, following his arrest and subsequent escape, the situation at night became increasingly turbulent in the village. An attempt to burn down one of the work-houses used for cocoa storage was successful. Telephone wires were also cut, thus preventing contact between Grand Bay and the police in the capital, Roseau. At this stage, the situation in the village had escalated into an early *volcanic* turbulence. A shop was looted, trees had been felled across the path of the Geneva road to prevent police contingents arriving from Roseau, and generally an acute state of unrest was evident.

In the course of the following week, the conflict had heightened and the situation in Grand Bay was one of near chaos. Efforts were made to try to determine the demands of the villagers. Within the same week the Geneva Estate was completely destroyed by fire. By Wednesday April 3, a State of Emergency had been proclaimed. This had been accompanied by the destruction of estate diesel tanks, a coconut drying shed and the stoning of firemen who attempted to contain the arson. By this time, the public sector had been forced to see the social conditions of Grand Bay in a new light.

The villagers, perhaps, were once more reliving features of Grand Bay's history. A people well acquainted with resistance and rebellion, against what they see as frustrating and unjust conditions under which they were expected to live, it was clear that long contained feelings of discontent had exploded. Only a month earlier, in the *New Chronicle*, a villager from Grand Bay had written of the village:

Failure of agriculture there is due largely to the failure of large estates to work the land that they hold, or lease land available to those people who desire it. Another setback is inaccessibility of land and the type of soil that village people are confined to. An additional source of earning from straw plaiting, brings but little income to many residents. Population increase and the number of young people who find themselves without work grow as an army.

In its attempt to restore order, and resume normal operations of the estate, the Land Management Authority encountered great hostility from the villagers. A militant section of the community claimed that it was acquired for them, and that it should be immediately passed to them for management and control. Failure to meet their demands led to widespread larceny and animals were let loose to roam the estate, and destroy the plantation. Consequently, in its first year of operation, the Authority sustained a loss of approximately \$19,000.

The estate now carries an undetermined number of squatters, and 120 tenants, 107 of whom operate half-acre units. The nominal crops grown by these are dasheen, tannias and plantains. The Government is urgently seeking a strategy that will prove viable, and meet the approval of the community.