



*Government of Bermuda*  
Ministry of Social Development and Sports

## **Emancipation Commemoration Ceremony 2016**

### **MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

To the House of Assembly  
By

**The Hon. Sylvan D. Richards, JP, MP**  
Minister of Social Development and Sports

July 15<sup>th</sup> 2016

**Mr. Speaker,** today I wish to share with Honourable Members and the people of Bermuda the Emancipation events being organized by the Department of Community and Cultural Affairs to commemorate the Emancipation of enslaved peoples in Bermuda. This year, 2016, is especially significant because it marks the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the arrival in Bermuda of the first person of African descent and the first Native American Indian, both of whom remained in Bermuda as slaves.

**Mr. Speaker,** few would challenge the critical importance of taking time to commemorate the end of slavery in Bermuda. In this regard, I note that the Bermuda National Gallery recently opened a multimedia exhibition on one of our National Heroes, Mary Prince. The exhibition, sponsored in part by the Government of Bermuda, featured the work of Barbadian-Canadian artist Joscelyn Gardner, who examined historical perspectives of the slave narrative by Mary Prince entitled “the History of Mary Prince”, which is widely recognized as one of the earliest narratives on slavery in the West Indies.

**Mr. Speaker,** the Department of Community and Cultural Affairs has planned several events and activities in recognition of the emancipation of enslaved peoples in Bermuda. The first of these events is the Dr. Kenneth E. Robinson/Cyril Outerbridge Packwood Memorial Lecture that will take place on Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> July at 6pm at the Bermuda Underwater

Exploration Institute, organized with the assistance of the Bermudian Heartbeats Committee. The speaker on this occasion will be Jay Butler, Assistant Professor of Law, William and Mary Law School. The title for this lecture is “*At Freedom’s Helm: Labour, Politics, and Family in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Bermuda*”.

**Mr. Speaker**, this is the eleventh year that the Department has organized this lecture, which takes place annually, and is in honour of and named after two outstanding Black Bermudian historians – Dr. Kenneth E. Robinson, former Chief Education Officer and author of *Heritage* which recounts the lives of black people in Bermuda post 1834; and former Bermuda National Librarian and author Cyril Outerbridge Packwood who wrote the celebrated work on slavery in Bermuda entitled – *Chained on the Rock*. Through their scholarly works these two men have made enormous contributions that will continue to impact our understanding about aspects of Bermuda’s cultural heritage. The event will begin with the reading of a Proclamation recognizing the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the arrival of the first person of African descent and the first Native American Indian who remained in Bermuda as slaves.

**Mr. Speaker**, to encourage community recognition of this important 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the Department is inviting churches to peel their church bells at 12 noon on Monday August 1<sup>st</sup> 2016.

**Mr. Speaker**, the second event will take place on Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> July at 7pm at the Ruth Seaton James Centre for the Performing Arts. The purpose of this ceremony is to call particular attention to individuals and organizations of both Devonshire and Paget Parishes who have made significant and lasting contributions to their respective communities in the spirit of progress.

**Mr. Speaker**, permit me to put the event planned for July 24<sup>th</sup> in its larger context. I wish to emphasize that this event is part of a series that began

in 2012 to bring attention to the many black people in the respective parishes who had persevered, against tremendous challenges, to support others and help build their local communities. Moreover, one of the overarching aims of this initiative was to publically extol and recognize those persons of African descent who, despite the cruelties of either enslavement, bondage or segregation, had risen above these man-made manifestations and not only thrived but excelled. **Mr. Speaker**, it is fitting that we pause to honour, applaud and affirm the contributions that were made so selflessly by persons of African descent.

**Mr. Speaker**, in prior episodes in the series, we have shone the spotlight on courageous, hardworking entrepreneurs, sailors, boatmen, crafts persons, educators, tradesmen, doctors, community activists, businessmen and women, architects and public servants who endeavoured to be self-reliant and offer a helping hand to others in their communities. Primarily the focus has been on the work, worth and meaningful contributions of black Bermudians because it is associated with the Emancipation programme; and the intent is to give recognition to those of us who are the descendants of the enslaved. However there were non-blacks who went against the status quo and assisted black people as well; and such persons have also been recognized.

**Mr. Speaker**, The Department has, over many years, created numerous programmes, through dramatic presentations, which have highlighted aspects of the cruelty of slavery here in Bermuda; and some presentations had focused on slave rebellions and uprisings that were orchestrated by some of Bermuda's bonds people. The Department has also been most responsible in demonstrating that people of African descent had a rich and vibrant cultural heritage prior to being enslaved.

However **Mr. Speaker**, in 2012, the Department decided to expand the narrative about Black Bermudians and share how we as a people met the challenges of a segregated society and worked hard to forge paths that

would benefit the people in the communities in which they found themselves. The Department, aided by the Emancipation Committee therefore shifted the focus from life of the Black Bermudians pre Emancipation to life post Emancipation. In doing so much of the rich history of our people has been unearthed and brought to light for the public to be further educated and informed. Thus, we have created biographical sketches of people throughout the parishes; and the vast majority of this research has been done by Meredith Ebbin. The Department is tremendously indebted to her for her efforts.

And so **Mr. Speaker**, I am honoured to inform my colleagues and the public that persons and organizations of Devonshire and Paget Parishes will be featured in our Emancipation Ceremony this year under the theme of *The Trail of Our People: Jabulani/Jubilee*. Persons and organizations from Devonshire who will be honoured include Mr. Wilfred Mose Allen, Mr. Reginald Ming, Mr. George Arthur “Doc” Morris, Mr. Edward P. Skinner, Mr. Herbert G. A. Stirling, Dr. Dorothy Thompson, Mr. Kingsley Tweed Sr., the Dill Family, Founders of Devonshire Recreation Club, and the Founders of the Old Elliott School.

**Mr. Speaker**, persons and families of Paget Parish who will be recognized include Ms. Geraldine Johnson, Mr. John G. Bassett Sr., Mr. Henry Conyers, Mr. David Critchley, Mr. Edward Forbes Sr., Mr. Esau Simmons, Mr. J. Fred Tucker, “Ma” Hilda Hinson Tucker, Ms. Olivia Tucker and the Musson family.

**Mr. Speaker**, I invite my Honourable colleagues and fellow Bermudians and residents to join me on July 24<sup>th</sup>. This event is free to all. Should persons also be interested in attending the Robinson Packwood Lecture on July 21<sup>st</sup> I invite them to call the Department at 292-1681 and secure a ticket, priced at \$5.00 per person.

**Mr. Speaker,** The third event is a collaboration of the Department of Community and Cultural Affairs, The St. George's Foundation, and the African Diaspora Heritage Trail Bermuda Foundation. On Thursday August 4<sup>th</sup> starting at 7pm the St. George's Foundation invites the public to a lecture at the World Heritage Centre by Dr. Clarence Maxwell, Assistant Professor of History at Millersville University, who will speak on the early black presence in Bermuda.

**Mr. Speaker,** in closing I would like to thank the Department of Community and Cultural Affairs and the Emancipation Committee for their efforts in bringing focus to aspects of Bermudian heritage and culture which can only uplift our people for the betterment of all.

**Thank you, Mr. Speaker**