

Annual Report for Fiscal 2018

Good afternoon members, on behalf of the Council, I wish to thank you all for attending this Annual General Meeting. As some of you know, the Regulations of the National Trust of Trinidad and Tobago Act Chapter 40:53 still stipulate that the Annual General Meeting must take place between September and November. The Regulations also provide that an Annual Report of the work of the Trust during the preceding year be presented to the membership, namely Fiscal 2018 (October 2017 to September 2018) for the present AGM. This means we are always playing catch up and while it is very useful to tie the activities of the National Trust to the year covered by the year being audited, I am sure you would wish me to also comment on activities that are more current and give an indication of what has transpired since our last Annual General Meeting in November 2018.

I decided to report by topics rather than in chronological order.

The Council

At the commencement of Fiscal 2018, there were still only the six appointed members of Council. These were Mr. Geoffrey MacLean, Deputy Chairman, Ms. Candice Ramsaran, Secretary, Ms. Neisha Ghany Treasurer, Ms. Aduke Williams, Member and Mr. Louis Villain, Member and Representative of the THA as well as myself as Chairman. However, at the AGM held on 9 November 2017, the five nominated members were elected by acclamation and the Trust welcomed Ms. Avril Belfon, Mrs. Marie Abdulah, Ms. Tavernelle Wells, Mrs. Roma Wong Sang and Mr. Akil Abdullah as members of Council. Mr. Abdullah was unable to continue his attendance at the monthly meetings and subsequently vacated his position on the Council effective July 2018. The Council has functioned with ten members since that time. A call for nominations went out prior to this AGM but no nominations were received. The additional members enable the Trust to have two more cheque signatories as in addition to Candice Ramsaran, Neisha Ghany and myself, Ms. Avril Belfon and Mrs. Marie Abdulah agreed to serve in this capacity. In addition, to the statutory Council Meetings, members of Council have assisted on the Landmarks Sub-Committee – Geoffrey MacLean, Roma Wong Sang and myself; the Tenders Sub-Committee – Candice Ramsaran, Neisha Ghany, Marie Abdulah and myself and the entire Council had spent many hours during Fiscal 2018 to get the Strategic Plan 2019-2023 completed.

The Listing Process

At the last AGM, I reported that there were approximately 400 sites that had been identified as possessing some heritage merit. This number has grown to 450 and counting and are all part of the Heritage Asset Register on the website. However, the actual listing process in accordance with the Act is extremely complicated and demands a great deal of manpower and time. The three Heritage and Preservation Officers supported by the Landmarks Sub-Committee identified and obtained approval from the Honourable Minister to gazette the National Trust's Notice of Intention to List in respect of 41 properties of interest. This triggered an intense preparation period that has spanned the entire two years, with a Notice of Intention to List gazetted in January this year and culminating in the signing this morning of the Notice to Gazette the Final Listing of 30 of these properties of interest which all have dossiers prepared and all information necessary for listing. This has been a herculean task especially as the small staff of Kara Roopsingh, Ashleigh Morris and Leslie Ann Paul were also involved in assisting with the rest of the activities of the Trust and also were required to liaise with the 14 Regional Corporations and the THA to be able to undertake some monitoring of heritage sites and to assist these bodies as needed.

Archaeological Activities

Fiscal 2018 saw the continuation of the liaison with the Archaeological team out of the Leiden University (Netherlands) to undertake research in Trinidad and Tobago, namely, at the Banwari Archaeological site and environs as well as research on the Spanish Mission sites.

In March 2018, the National Trust hosted a lecture on the Nexus 1492 project delivered by Professor Corinne Hofman, Dean of the Faculty of Archaeology of Leiden University. Our discussions culminated with the preparation of a Memorandum of Academic Understanding with Leiden University which, after receiving approval by Cabinet, has recently been signed by both parties. One of our Heritage and Preservation Research Officers participated with that team at an archaeological work site in the Dominican Republic. The same officer also worked with an Austrian Group of Archaeologists who camped out on Nelson island and undertook research on Caledonia Island.

Management

In April of 2018, the interim CEO, Ms. Valerie Taylor and the Administrative Manager, Judith Marchan, left the Trust. While this was not unexpected as it had been signalled several months prior, the post of CEO has proven difficult to fill and the Trust is still operating without its most senior person at the helm. The void has been partially filled by the Chairman, the Secretary and the Treasurer, who each have accepted additional management responsibility. The Operations Coordinator, engaged in January 2018, was also instrumental in ensuring smooth operations at the office and to assist the Trust staff in meeting the demands of the office as best as possible. While the search for a CEO has not been met with success as yet, we expect to go back out to advertise and attempt to get a person with the right fit in terms of management expertise and heritage knowledge as well as one willing to accept the very small salary that we can afford.

In January 2018 the Trust was able to obtain accounting services to prepare financials and management accounts to facilitate the audit; undertake all the routine accounting for the Trust including entering all accounting data on Quickbooks™ software that the Trust was able to procure; to provide monthly and quarterly management accounts; monthly payroll; make recommendations in terms of changes to the processes and systems; prepare audit schedules and liaise with the auditor. The contractor, Mrs. Kathleen Kanhai-Bujhawan also provided a part time presence in the office to liaise with staff and collect data to be entered and analysed off site. The addition of professional accounting expertise has been invaluable and has ensured that the Treasurer and the Council is able to manipulate its scarce financial resources to the best of its ability. She also worked to ensure a smooth transition to the new auditors who were appointed at the AGM 2018.

Outreach and Education

The National Trust is best known for its tours and events as this is the area that is most advertised both to members, on our social media and sometimes in the newspapers. It is also the vehicle whereby new members are encouraged to join and provides much needed revenue for the Trust. I think a simple list by month would give a good picture of the broad focus and variety of activities that were successfully implemented in Fiscal 2018.

October 2017/November 2017 –

Vintage Calypso

4-Part Lecture Series

December 2017

Ponche de Crème and Parang –

January 2018

Carnival Lecture Series – Four Wednesdays

Outreach to San Fernando Presentation College

February 2018

Caledonia Archaeological Research

OUT Tours

Traditional Carnival Tour

Camboulay

Cocoa Tour

East Tour

March 2018

3 Nelson Island School Tours

Little Tobago Wildlife Sanctuary Tour

Details Exhibit Starts in Tobago

Meeting with the World Heritage Committee – UNESCO and THA– Main Ridge Nomination

Dossier Training and meeting with stakeholders in Tobago

Rancho Quemado Tour

South Tour

East Tour

April 2018

4 Western Isles Tours

Observation of International Day of Monuments and Sites

Lecture on the History of Rastafari in TT

South School tour

Film on Jewish Heritage – The Last Goldfish and exhibition on Refugees

Merikin Tour

May 2018

3 Nelson Island School Tours

Museum tour

June 2018

3 Nelson island School Tours

Central Tour

Launch of award-winning Heritage Keepers project in Tobago

July 2018

Western Isles Tours

August 2018

Western Isles Tours

Heritage Camp

September 2018

Patriotism Month – Trip to Chacachacare

The small team of Marlon Green and Joseph Bertrand, assisted by Karlene Phillip who came on as an intern from the Trinidad and Tobago Hospitality and Tourism Institute were also supported by Cheryl Ali, Chennelle Spooner and Tiy Cross-Lovelace and of course the Heritage Preservation and Research Officers.

Interaction with International Agencies

In Fiscal 2018, the National Trust continued its discussions with UNESCO towards World Heritage nomination. In November 2017 several members of the National Trust attended the 3rd Caribbean Conference of the National Trusts and Preservation Societies in Curacao where two staff members presented in the poster category and attracted great interest. The members of Council who attended were able to make many valuable contacts which are still very active. The National Trust has formed close bonds with the International National Trusts Organisation (INTO) and this has become even stronger in the last year. The National Trust of Trinidad and Tobago had to decline an invitation by INTO to attend a conference in Bali, Indonesia in 2018 due to a lack of funds. The National Trust also hosted for the second time an intern from US ICOMOS, Maryrelis Perez-Hernandez, who was able to undertake detailed research on the Police Barracks and Police Academy and this property is being prepared for listing. The interaction with Leiden University has already been mentioned. The High Commission of India has offered to provide funding to construct a reception centre and monument on Nelson Island and we are awaiting the comments of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Caricom on our draft MOU. Mention must also be made of the screening of “The Last Goldfish” by Trinidadian-Australian filmmaker Sue Goldfish whose visit was sponsored by the Australian High Commission in Port of Spain.

Nelson Island

Subsequent to the departure of the Administrative Manager, the Trust then contracted a Property and Facilities Manager, Mr. Justin Charles in April 2018, who agreed to provide services to manage the Island. His main task was to get major remedial works underway utilising funding that had been identified in the PSIP for 2018. The deadline was extremely tight as all designs, tender activity and approval of contractors had to be done in time to enable the draw-down of the PSIP funding. Some of the work was completed but all of the funds were not received in time. As no funding had been identified for the next fiscal year, the Trust was able to persuade the Ministry of Planning and Development to vire funding from another source to enable the work that should have been done in Fiscal 2018 to continue. While the contractor was unable to continue with the Trust as he had other commitments, we have recently obtained a Senior Project and Facility engineer, Mr. Kumi de Souza who is also making a major difference to the management and maintenance of Nelson Island. We will have great news to report next year.

The other major change was in terms of the security personnel as the then CEO was able to negotiate for personnel from the St Vincent De Paul to work on two-week shifts. This arrangement has had its challenges, but it is basically the same system in operation and we have had many changes of personnel. By the time I meet with you next year, I want to be able to report that we have a better system for management of the Island.

Challenges

As members would understand, the main challenge that the National Trust faces is its lack of funding. Its main revenue comes from a Government subvention that is inadequate to meet its needs. In 2018, we estimated that to undertake all the activities planned required a minimum of \$4.7 million. However, the subvention was \$2.1 million. The other revenue comes mainly from membership dues and events/tours/ lectures, but these provided just over \$600,000.00 in Fiscal 2018 – which was an increase from the year before but still a far cry from achieving self-sufficiency. The leasing of marketable heritage properties to the National Trust is considered one of the solutions so that the Trust can enhance its income generation.

A significant challenge that has faced the Council is the lack of payment to its elected members. Our client Ministry has held the view that its subvention can only cover the appointed members and all the additional revenue that the National Trust makes goes to partially make up the shortfall of its operations. However, there have been discussions between the Ministries of Planning and Development and Finance and myself and I am hoping for a change in this position in the very near future.

The National Trust is being housed in temporary accommodation which is most unsuitable. All of you who have visited us will understand what straits we are under. For the whole of Fiscal 2018, we made representations to relocate. Once again, we have been assured that a new location is being negotiated for the Trust and we are making every effort to ensure that the process is expedited. I hope that before the end of the year we will at least have good news in that regard.

Nelson Island was a financial burden in Fiscal 2018. We are however more confident that with the energetic and professional Senior Project and Facility Management officer and the links that he is making with other agencies, as well as the assistance of the PSIP funding, the Island will be able to accommodate increased events and visitors that will bring in more revenue. Unfortunately, a failed attempt to procure a solar system in 2018, almost threatened to derail our efforts to get funding under PSIP; this is still an issue and we are trying to resolve it. However, we have found that the Client Ministry is understandably being cautious about disbursements to the National Trust and we have had to work hard to regain the trust of the officers.

Our biggest challenge is in convincing decision makers in the State that the National Trust is ready and able to manage heritage properties effectively. The creation of fiscal and tax incentives for the encouragement of heritage preservation is another area that needs to be effectively argued. We need to do more to cite best practices in other countries and to have cogent arguments in favour of conserving the heritage asset through incentives. This is an area in which members could assist and we would welcome input from finance professionals in particular.

I want to conclude by thanking the persons who have worked tirelessly and passionately to keep the National Trust afloat; increase its services; identify and negotiate with new partners; and expand its reach and image, namely:

Council Members

Geoffrey Maclean
Candice Ramsaran
Neisha Ghany
Aduke Williams
Louis Villain
Roma Wong Sang
Avril Belfon
Marie Abdulah
Tavernelle Wells

Other Members of the Landmarks Sub-Committee – Rudylynn Roberts, Avril Sui-Chang

Staff

Graeme Suite
Pauline Philip
Kumi De Souza
Kara Roopsingh
Ashleigh Morris
Leslie Ann Paul
Marlon Green
Joseph Bertrand
Karlene Phillip
Tiy Cross-Lovelace
Cheryl Ali
OJTs: Safiya Da Silva, Maya Doyle
The Accounting contractor – Kathleen Kanhai-Bujhawan assisted by Margaret Harewood
Chatrika Harripersad – (Banwari)
Our two very dependable cleaners - Natalie and Alicia La Badie

I thank you all and all those volunteers and tour guides that have helped us to improve our product.

Margaret Mc Dowall-Thompson
Chairman
October 2019