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Royal History Is Revealed In Turnquest Book

As of Tuesday, December 6, 2016

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Sir Orville Turnquest, former Governor General of The Bahamas, is pictured giving remarks at the launch of his book titled, “What Manner of Man Is This?” held at Government House. Photo: Shawn Hanna/Tribune Staff

CELEBRATING an achievement 15 years in the making, loved ones and colleagues gathered at Government House for the launch of former Governor General Sir Orville Turnquest’s book on the Duke of Windsor’s reign in The Bahamas.

The highly-anticipated book “What Manner of Man is This, The Duke of Windsor’s Years in The Bahamas” takes an historical lens to the Duke’s governance and impact on the fledgling colony, a departure from tomes written about the controversial royal couple.

It has been heralded as “an unvarnished fresh look” at a crucial period in Bahamian history by Sir Sidney Poitier, who pens the foreword.

Sir Orville presented his first copy to Governor General Dame Marguerite Pindling at a brief ceremony celebrating the book’s worldwide publication yesterday.

The fifth governor general of an independent Bahamas, Sir Orville served from 1995 to 2001.

At the event, he explained that he was inspired to write the book during his tenure as governor general as he sought to learn more about the early occupants of the residence. He thanked attendants for their effort and expressed hope that they will enjoy reading the historical offering.

The Duke served as royal governor of The Bahamas from 1940-1945 after he abdicated the throne as King of England in order to marry the twice-divorced Wallis Simpson.

While the world revelled in what was portrayed as both one of the greatest love stories of all time and the scandal of the century, the reality for The Bahamas was that the Duke and Duchess of Windsor viewed his assignment as royal governor as severe punishment, banishment to a far-flung island country without any of the trappings of a royal life.

Though they gave of themselves personally in times of crisis, they never truly warmed to the people of the island nation, nor did they reciprocate the warmth with which Bahamians showered them.

Turmoil surrounded his tenure in this island nation – the Burma Road Riots, the Bay Street Fire, The Project, The Contract and the still-unsolved murder of Sir Harry Oakes, the richest man in the world at the time.

The Duke's friendship with a German industrialist who had taken refuge in The Bahamas during World War II further aroused suspicion and, moreover, he never denied his affiliation and friendship with those who British allies would have considered their most bitter enemies.

He also never entertained a black Bahamian at Mount Fitzwilliam (Government House), though black Bahamians were so excited to see the "romantic couple" that they insisted on a ceremony at Clifford Park to welcome them to The Bahamas when only a private ceremony had been planned.

At yesterday's launch, Sir Orville's publisher Diane Gedymin of Grant's Town Press, spoke warmly of the elder statesman, whose tireless conviction to his family, and the Bahamian people, she had come to love and respect. In her brief heartfelt remarks, she noted that his dedication to truth seeking was the driving force behind the publication.

Accolades have also come from former Prime Minister Hubert Ingraham, who called the work "insightful, informative".

Mr Ingraham noted that Sir Orville "has produced an easy, readable history of the period, well-informed by his own personal experience as a young black, who overcame the absence of the opportunities gifted to the Duke of Windsor to become the Duke's successor in the office of governor general of an independent Bahamas."

Other praise came from Tribune Publisher Eileen Carron, two former Governors General Sir Arthur Foulkes and Dame Ivy Dumont and from Lyford Cay resident Harry Oakes.

The book will be available at all major bookstores in New Providence, Grand Bahama, Harbour Island and Abaco as well as the National Art Gallery of The Bahamas and The Linen Shop on Bay Street, Nassau. An eBook is available at international online retailers.

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