



**Remarks on the 60th anniversary of the First General Election held after the Cayman Islands received its first written constitution in 1959**

**By Hon. Alden McLaughlin, MBE, JP, MLA**

Just a few short months ago we celebrated the 60th anniversary of the first written Constitution for the Cayman Islands.

I said then that there would be many other observances and events over this two year celebration that has recognised the anniversaries of both our Coat of Arms and our Constitution.

Today is another one of those days as we recognise the 60th anniversary of the first General Election held on 23 September, 1959, after the adoption of our first written Constitution on 4 July, 1959.

But before the election on 23 September, 1959, could be held, candidates had to be nominated. On 16 September, 1959, the Office of Administrator Alan H. Donald advised the public that the nomination process was completed with 26 candidates nominated to run in the election.

What I find most interesting on that list of candidates is that four women were on the ballot

– Mrs. Birdell Jackson for West Bay; Mrs. Ethel Cook-Bodden for George Town; and Mrs. Francine Jackson and Mrs. Laurel Watler, both for Bodden Town. These patriotic and brave ladies were the first to ever be nominated and to appear on a ballot for election in the Cayman Islands, all due to the dedication and boldness of the women, including my grandmother Ethel McLaughlin, who fought long and hard for women’s suffrage and the right to run for office. They helped to usher in the Sex Disqualification (Removal) bill that was passed into law on 8 December, 1958.

While none of the women were elected, the mere fact that they were on the ballot is a testament to their temerity.

Those elections in 1959 were a turning point for our elections process because women finally had a voice and were able to run for elections and hold office. Those elections also ushered in our modern Legislative Assembly.

The important role that women have played, and continue to play, in creating a modern Cayman is significant. This is why when I was Minister for Education, Training, Employment, Youth, Sports and Culture in 2009, I and the Government I was a part of dedicated the monument “Aspiration” in Heroes Square as part of the 2009 Heroes Day observances, which focused on the contribution of women to the development and history of the Cayman Islands.

Again, the main purpose of this day is to recognise the 60th anniversary of the First General Election held after the adoption of our first written Constitution on 4 July, 1959. Below you

will see the listing of candidates – including my own grandfather William Allen McLaughlin - on that original ballot that included men and women, both the victors and those who lost in the 23 September, 1959, election:

**Elected members**

Arthur H. Ebanks - West Bay;

J. Cadian Ebanks – West Bay;

T. William Farrington – West Bay;

Roy E. McTaggart – George Town;

E. Ducan Merren – George Town;

A. Colin Panton – George Town;

Noland B. Foster – Sister Islands;

Keith P. Tibbetts – Sister Islands;

Malcolm Eden – Bodden Town;

James A. Miller – Bodden Town (resigned before swearing in);

William Allen McLaughlin – East End;

Craddock Ebanks – North Side.

**Those who had been nominated but did not win were:**

Spurgeon A. Ebanks – West Bay;

Mrs. Birdell Jackson – West Bay;

Prentice J. Powell – West Bay;

John S. Smith – West Bay;

William Wallace Bodden – George Town;

Malcolm H. Coe – George Town;

Mrs. Ethel Cook-Bodden – George Town;

Arnold Foster – Sister Islands;

Orin O. Jackson – Sister Islands;

Mrs. Francis Jackson – Bodden Town;

Mrs. Laurel Water – Bodden Town;

Samuel A. Powery – North Side.