

# COLONIAL GOVERNORS



## WOODES ROGERS

When Woodes Rogers first arrived in The Bahamas in 1718 to take administrative control, he found that the islands were in a general state of neglect. Prior to this, The Bahamas had been governed by governors sent over by the Lord Proprietors who had been granted these islands, by Charles II in 1670 for colonization purposes. These governors were inefficient as very little was done to develop the islands. The social conditions were very bad. There was general lawlessness and rebellion against the authority. The islands were also overrun by pirates. The local government allowed the pirates use of the harbour for a share of their booty.

Born in Bristol, England Rogers had been a privateer from 1708 to 1711. He gained renown as a privateer during the War of the Spanish Succession when he returned to England after a voyage with much booty. Consequently he was considered to be an excellent candidate for the expulsion of the notorious pirates who roamed Bahamian waters using Nassau as their piratical base.

In 1717 the proprietors leased the island to Rogers for 21 years. On February 6, 1718, Rogers was officially appointed Captain - General and Governor in Chief in and over the Bahama Islands by King George I. Thus he became the first Royal Governor of The Bahamas. Rogers arrived at Nassau on July 26, 1718. He had with him a Royal proclamation of Pardon from King George I for the pirates.

The pirates were not surprised by Rogers arrival. They had discovered a document on a captured ship that stated the English government's plan to eradicate piracy. The pirates met and discussed the situation. Most decided to surrender but some refused and were later captured and hanged.

On his arrival Rogers was faced with some serious problems. The Bahamas was in poor state -it was filthy, in disrepair, the fort was in ruins, buildings were dilapidated, and the roads overgrown. Rogers had to use his own money to try to overcome these problems.

During his first tenure of office 1718-21 Rogers succeeded in expelling the pirates, in cleaning up Nassau, rebuilding the fort and reforming the civil government. It was during his administration the Bahamas' first motto "Expulsis, Piratis, Restituta Commercium" was coined.

In 1729 he arrived in The Bahamas with instructions to call an assembly. As a result an election was held and twenty-six members were elected. One of the men elected, John Colebrook, became Rogers' political enemy. He seriously opposed Rogers' policies and influenced others against him.

However in spite of political problems the new House of Assembly passed a number of laws one of which was an act for the laying out of the Town of Nassau.

On 1732 Woodes Rogers died and was buried in Nassau. The Woodes Rogers Primary School was named to commemorate the contribution of the First Royal Governor to The Bahamas.