

Who was Dr. A. C. Wathey?

Born Albert Claudius Wathey on July 24, 1926, "Claude" as he is popularly known, was the most long-lasting political leader St. Maarten has ever had. He joined the Democratic Party of his friend, Clem LaBega, and led the party to numerous electoral victories in a career that spanned four decades. He is generally credited with the transformation of the island from a postal economy into a booming tourist destination.

Although not known to be a very keen sailor, Claude had a close relationship with the sea. He is reputed to have been involved in a number of sea rescue operations, one of which included safely landing some school children aboard *The Surprise*, which got caught in a hurricane as it brought its youthful passengers from Saba and St. Eustatius, on their way back to go to school on St. Maarten.

On another occasion, he led a sea rescue operation to save three fishermen from Anguilla who had been lost at sea. This earned him official recognition in the form of a plaque from Her Majesty's Government of the UK and the people of Anguilla.

During the construction of the pier that would later bear his name, he is said to have donned a hard hat to join in efforts to remove rocks and debris that were being quarried to facilitate the works.

It is his singular vision for the development of tourism on the island which began in earnest in 1964 that has earned him a place in history. On March 20, 1964, former Dutch Prime Minister, Barend Biesheuvel officially opened the Princess Juliana International Airport on the site where it is now located in Simpson Bay. Then on June 3rd, 1964, less than three months later, the A.C. Wathey Pier was also officially opened to usher in the era of cruise tourism on the island.

Access to the Pointe Blanche area was near impossible by road until the Juancho Yrausquin Boulevard opened in 1964, just about the same time the A. C. Wathey pier became operational. The Boulevard stretched from the Emmaplein, where Maduro & Son is headquartered, to the harbor. Before then, and even after, there were stories of young men swimming across from Great Bay to reach Pointe



Blanche, where Hotel Hunter, which later became known as Castle Cove, had been constructed as one of the first tourist accommodations on the island in 1961.

In the decade between 1960 and 1970, the number of available hotel rooms increased by about 12 times from 60 to 723. In the subsequent five years from 1970 to 1975, no less than 13 tourist accommodation facilities opened on the island, including the Concorde Hotel that later became the present-day Sonesta Maho Beach Resort. In that same period, the population had grown by more than half to 10,458 inhabitants while the number of hotel rooms had shot up by more than 75 percent to 1,271.

Captain Autin Hodge

Captain Austin Hodge was a legendary seafarer who sailed both the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic. He was born in Grand Case and his ancestry can be traced to Anguilla and Ireland. His father, a shipwright, often took him on short sailing trips and by the time he was 14, considered him the best sailor on the northern side of the island.

For his 18th birthday, his father gave him an 18-foot sloop, which was launched on the very day the Armistice was signed ending World War I for which reason it was named "The Won". Captain Hodge was not only a skilled seaman who skippered among other government schooners such as the Trixie and the famous Blue Peter, but he was also a boat builder, cook and businessman who operated one of the first guest houses in town, the Captain Hodge's Guesthouse.

