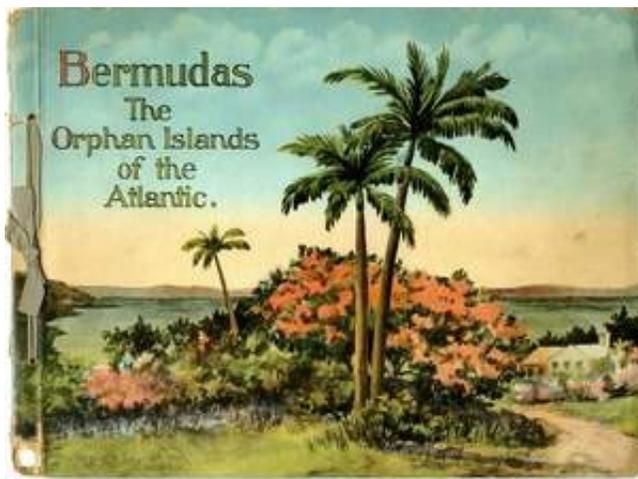


## An orphan in the visitor trade



Cover of the tourist booklet on the 'Orphan' of the Atlantic Ocean, about 1910.

By Dr Edward Harris

*'To sum up, Bermuda presents many of the attractions of a peculiarly foreign land, without the discomfort of a foreign tongue or the expense in time and money of a transatlantic voyage. The passage takes two days and two nights, and if the way sometimes seems rough it is the "life on the ocean wave".'* — **Judge Warren W. Foster, about 1910.**

In the first decade of the 1900s, a notable visitor to Bermuda, along with Samuel Clemens and a president-to-be and others, was the New York legal eminence, Judge Warren W. Foster. So taken with the island, he took judgment on it and penned a conviction upon its charms and advantages, versus the long haul to more foreign places in Europe, the West Indies figuring little on the tourism agenda of the day. Those views, anything but legal and dispassionate, were in from a pamphlet of the Quebec Steamship Company, then the main suppliers of transportation to Bermuda, 'this beautiful Isle of the Sea', or as some would now have it, 'the cultural capital of the western North Atlantic'.

The Judge's remarks were republished about 1910 in a booklet which had the cover title, never explained, of *Bermudas: Orphan Islands of the Atlantic*, with a subtitle of 'Bermuda, Land of Sunshine and Flowers'. A retreat to the dictionary finds a metaphor difficult to connect, although the parents who settled this place 400 years ago are, as a matter of natural course quite dead, though their bones, like those of Governor Bruere, might yet be found under St Peter's Church, the original and possibly first Anglican establishment in British America. The Island has not been abandoned by its overseeing authority, but rather, since the departure of Hong Kong from the family clutch, has given us the freedom of European passports, which, particularly for the young, grant unlimited access to the several dozen wonderlands of that continent: what an orphanage that is for students, old and adolescent, from this hot and isolated spot.

Evidence on the Judge, perhaps an orphan himself, but certainly a confirmed bachelor on the New York social scene, is not entirely lacking. In the *Automobile Topics Magazine* in 1909, he is found levying judgment in a case that would soon have import for the Age of the Automobile, when 'joyriding' would take on a more expansive, expensive and speedy meaning. In what was one of the first instances of a ruling on such antics, the magazine noted: 'Last week Judge Warren W. Foster, sitting in the Court of General Sessions, New York, sentenced Frank Kenny to three months' imprisonment upon a conviction of the defendant by a jury for petit larceny of taking and using a horse and wagon, although the defendant had not actually converted the property and claimed that he had taken it merely for the purpose of a ride.'

On more wide-ranging views, *The Spokane-Review* of 20 July 1912, noted that the Judge had passed through the town 'on a pleasure trip and spoke to reporters about the subject that had made him controversial: eugenics'. Foster believed that wrongdoers should be sterilised to prevent 'propagation among criminals' and that 'the marriage of persons physically unfit is a crime'. Perhaps also controversial but a bit more liberal for the times, Judge Foster advocated the presence of female lawyers in the courtroom and on the Bench, citing that they were better suited to rationale thinking than men. Be that as it was, or is, the Judge made no comment, eugenically or otherwise, on Bermudians, male or female, during his vacations to the far east of Washington State. He did write that 'the "Rig" of the Bermuda yacht is peculiar', a comment that shows that our invention of a fore-and-aft sailing design for small vessels was still rather localised, whereas now its reach is globally pervasive.

The Orphan Islands had many charms in the judgment of the learned magistrate and on arrival 'inside the reef the waters are peaceful and beautiful beyond description'. We are informed that 'for recreation the Bermudas are ideal ... the temperature in summer rarely exceeds eighty-five degrees, and is tempered by ocean breezes,

so that life out of doors is both possible and delightful'. For a man interested in transportation issues, Judge Foster maintained that the Bermuda's roads 'are an object lesson to the visitor of the States', a situation that perhaps does not now obtain, nor do many of the fine varieties of fish of which he wrote.

Of the natural world much was said, with the 'Devil's Hole' topping the list as 'one of the "lions" of Bermuda', and that 'an amusement company is being formed to erect bath houses' on a south shore beach. Cultural heritage, as we know it today, for, say, the town of St George's, is definitely an orphan in the Judge's declaration, due to its absence in all that he considered of interest in these islands.

Indeed, it might be said that the cultural heritage of Bermuda, especially as regards our splendid built-heritage of homes, fortifications and specialities such as the Dockyard, was orphaned for another half a century as regards the tourism trade, even though those treasures made the place unique and are now in some instances 'World Heritage'. Adoptive parents began to appear in the 1950s in the form of the Historical Monuments Trust, now the Bermuda National Trust, which cares for many heritage children in the natural and cultural worlds. The value of what such foster parents do has recently been acknowledged by the high agenda rating given to 'Cultural Heritage' in the new national tourism plan.

It remains to be seen if that adoption into the tourism family will last or can help Bermuda to overcome its present orphan status, following its gradual abandonment of the visitor trade by a number of authoritative bodies starting in the late 1970s. Perhaps judgment needs to be passed on those who aided and abetted in the decline of one of the world's most vibrant island tourism economies and the death of over 50 hotels and guest houses, to say nothing of the cultural heritage that has been degraded or destroyed in over the years. 'It was not a question, Your Honor, of taking a joyride, but of unnecessarily crashing the visitor-economy ship onto the North Rocks by poor parental navigation and seamanship.'

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