

DAVID LESLIE WHITE

b. December 15, 1933

Birthplace: Paget, Bermuda

Occupation: Editor of *The Royal Gazette* (1976-1998), Editor of the *Mid-Ocean News* (1968-1976),

Accomplishments: Chairman, Bermuda National Gallery; Chairman, Bermuda National Trust.

Awards: Bermuda Arts Council Patron's Award (2010), Commonwealth Press Union Fellow (1967), John Bard Scholar and Fairbairn Prize (Bard College, New York), Florence Sabin Distinguished Alumni Award, Vermont Academy (1994)

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Best-known as editor of *The Royal Gazette* newspaper from 1976 to 1998, Bermudian David Leslie White also ranks among the Island's foremost and active patrons of the visual arts as well as one of the leading individual collectors of Bermuda-related works of art.

The only son of Leslie Arnold White, a self-made man who owned Freeza Fresh Foods, and Stella Hollis, Mr. White was born in Paget on December 15, 1933. He grew up in Paget and later Knapton Hill, when the family moved to Smith's Parish in 1952.

He was educated at Mount St. Agnes Academy in Bermuda and Vermont Academy, Saxton's River, Vermont, receiving the latter's prestigious Florence Sabin Distinguished Alumni Award in 1994.

After graduation from Vermont, David enrolled at Bard College in Annandale-on Hudson, New York, where his love of the written word flourished and he was actively involved with the college's two publications, *The Bardian* (as managing editor) and *Communitas*, serving on the editorial board. He was recognised as a John Bard Scholar and received the Fairbairn Prize, the college's highest academic award, earning a Bachelor of Arts degree with honours in history and political science.

He then studied at the London School of Economics in England, before returning to Bermuda in 1956 to work full-time as a reporter on *The Royal Gazette*, having worked as a summer intern while a student. In 1967, he became the first Bermudian ever designated as a Commonwealth Press Union Fellow, the Commonwealth's highest educational award for journalists.

He was appointed editor of the *Mid-Ocean News* in 1968 and by the time he left to become assistant editor of *The Royal Gazette* in 1973, he had increased the paper's circulation from 2,500 a week to more than 10,000. He succeeded Eric Hopwood as editor of the *Gazette* in 1976.

During Mr. White's tenure, the *Gazette's* circulation rose from 10,500 to around 17,000, as it covered some of the most turbulent events in Bermuda's modern history including the 1977 riots and the 1981 hotel strike. As editor, David withstood often intense criticism from both Government and Opposition politicians but always backed his reporters and did not back down from defending what he regarded as right.

On his retirement in 1998, politicians from both parties paid tribute to him as a man of conviction and a defender of democratic principles. Indeed, in 1976 he had been awarded the Press Award of Merit by the then opposition Progressive Labour Party for "his outstanding, objective and meritorious journalistic coverage of the political life of Bermuda".

He promoted free speech not only thorough the newspaper, but also through the arts as a patron of many different art forms, including painting, writing and theatre.

He was among the key figures in reviving the Bermuda Musical and Dramatic Society (BMDS) in the 1960s, serving for many years as vice-president and chairman of the drama committee and helping to purchase and renovate Daylesford, a house on Dundonald and Washington Streets, which became the Daylesford Theatre.

Although never a serious actor himself – save for some memorable performances as the Dame in Christmas pantomimes – Mr. White directed a number of successful plays, including *Tiger At The Gates*, *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *The Killing of Sister George*. The latter was described by playwright Terrence Rattigan, a Bermuda resident at the time, as better than the West End production in London.

He withdrew from active theatre work in 1976 because of his commitments as editor of the *Gazette* but maintained his interest in the arts as a patron and an astute collector.

He built an extensive collection of historical Bermuda maps but sold it in the 1980s to finance a growing interest in paintings. In 1987 he bought a 1940 painting by the American artist Reynolds Beal of people waiting for the St. David's ferry in St. George's and, in his own words, "I was hooked". From there he built up an extensive collection of more than 60 impressionist Bermuda landscapes by painters such as Ogden Pleissner, Prosper Senat, Adolph Treidler, and William Chadwick.

In 2009, he published a book about his collection, *Cross Currents – Impressions of Bermuda (The David L. White Collection)*, with proceeds donated to the Bermuda National Gallery (BNG). The collection was featured in a special BNG exhibition, *The David L. White Collection*, in 2010, and in May 2012, he donated most of the collection - some 62 works - to the Gallery.

Mr. White served as chairman of the Board of Trustees on the BNG from 1997 to 2008, overseeing five Biennial Exhibitions and more than 60 exhibitions that contributed significantly to Bermuda's cultural diversity. He was particularly proud of *Light Air and Colour*, an exhibition of American Impressionist Paintings; *Made in Bermuda*; *A Window on the Azores*; and *Living with Art*, an exhibition of African-American Art.

As chairman of the BNG's Collections Committee, he helped build the BNG's Permanent Collection and was instrumental in stewarding major gifts to the BNG, including the John Hinson Young II and Nelga Young Collection in 2006.

When the Gallery was first opened in 1992, Mr. White donated several pieces, including an etching by American artist James Whistler and two original 1919 poster designs for the Folies Bergère by the Russian art deco artist Erté. On his retirement, he presented the museum with an oil painting from his own collection by Mary Parker West of Hamilton Harbour (1876), one of the earliest known Bermudian landscapes.

Outside of the arts, Mr. White was vice-president and then president (1993-1996) of the Bermuda National Trust. He spearheaded a successful \$6 million fund-raising campaign to help restore Trust properties in St. George's and later served on the Trust's National Advisory Board. He authored the Paget edition of the Trust's acclaimed Architectural Heritage series of books, and edited the editions covering Smith's Parish, Hamilton Parish, Sandys and St. George's. He is (as of 2012) writing the City Of Hamilton edition.

He also served on the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board for 17 years and was a founding appointee to the National Alcohol and Drug Agency. He also served as president of the Bermuda TB, Cancer and Health Association after Leslie (b. 1973), his daughter by his second wife Sarah, was successfully treated for leukemia.

Twice married and divorced to Americans, Mr. White married Eva LaSalle in 1957 and Sarah Dey in 1972.

Mr. White was awarded an OBE (Officer of the British Empire) in 1994 for service to journalism and the community, and received the Patron's Award from the Bermuda Arts Council in 2010 for his contribution to the Bermuda National Gallery.

References

Bermuda Arts Council citation, 2010

Bermuda National Gallery

Bermuda National Trust

The Royal Gazette

Vermont Academy

The Bard College

Interview, April 2012