

# The surrounding community of JC 1958-2018

By Michael Burke

Up to the 1950s, the centre of unity among students at Jamaica College was its boarding school, which contained for the most part boys from the upper and middle classes which included many white Jamaicans in those days. This began to change by the end of the 1950s.

Mona Heights housing scheme was established under the premiership of Norman Washington Manley, national hero. To the immediate south east of JC, many of the home owners were civil servants and young professionals. By 1960 the first students resident in Mona Heights attended JC mainly as day students.

The government of Jamaica under the leadership by JC Old boy Norman Washington Manley as chief minister initiated the Common Entrance Examination in 1957. But the first recipients of that scholarship came to JC in 1959. Further investigations need to be done, but was this the reason why the JC trust was disestablished, because of the resistance of the trust to allow common entrance awardees into JC?

And to the immediate south of JC was the Blue Castle Housing Scheme for civil servants. The residents' sons for the most part also came to JC. Add to the mix the Wellington Drive and Karachi Avenue housing scheme. By the time the boarding school closed in 1967, there were many JC students who lived in Mona Heights or in Hope pastures (to the east of JC) that was established in 1962.

With the advent of the Common Entrance examination in 1957, there were also JC students who lived in Standpipe, Kintyre, August Town, Gordon Town and even as far as Mavis Bank. In the case of Mona Heights, most of the parents of the students knew each other as they met at the Mona Heights Citizens Association and Mona Heights Cooperative meetings. In a real way, the parents of JC students from Mona heights were a natural Home-School Association.

As Mona heights was a cooperative, the parents came together for the needs of the community in the citizens association. The Cooperative had fund raising activities such as the Mona Fair in each year. This was to augment certain costs in the community such as public utilities and so on.

And the students roamed each other's homes and to an extent this was true of Hope Pastures. In addition, when the boarding school closed in 1967, many of the ex-boarders from rural Jamaica sought lodging in Mona Heights or Hope pastures.

Further, if the children wanted to play they came across to JC even with their sisters and cousins on weekends. They played tennis and with permission they swam in the swimming pool. Needless to say this formed a very close knit community of JC students. Even as a school with day students, this was perhaps the time of the closest-knit among JC students. The 'comradeship and loyalty to one another' as in the line of the school prayer was perhaps greater than it was in the old boarding school.

It was also a time when students at the University of the West Indies lived on Campus. University students that lived off campus had to get permission to do so. The lack of space for students to board at the University forced the University to change its rules in the 1980s so today it is a minority that live on campus even with the building of many more rooms for students at the University. But it was not so in the 1960s and 1970s.

So anything that went on at the UWI was known at JC. The JC students attended the parties at the Students Union. The JC students were a part of all of the political discussions that took place at the University. It was the in-thing to become a Rastafarian at that time at the University and this had its spillover-effect in JC.

The 1960s was time of ferment in the Jamaican society and again this was felt in JC before any other high school. So at the time of the Rodney riots in 1968, there were deep sympathisers at JC. The fact that many then recent JC graduates were among the student body at UWI also helped to bring about this identification with the cause.

There was a mood inside the University that the establishment was irrelevant and that we needed new political parties and this had a reverberating effect in JC, because of the closeness of the University where the students lived on campus, or boarded in the Papine /Mona/Hope area of St. Andrew. While it is true that the People's National party and the Jamaica Labour Party have remained the major parties in Jamaica, the fact is that in the 1960s and 1970s there was great clamour for change in this direction.

In 1965 the Welshman Mr. W.H. Middleton became the headmaster of Jamaica College. No doubt the JC board of directors at the time wanted to bring JC back to the colonial values that existed before political independence.

While he might have fitted well the sort of person the board was looking for to be principal, to a large extent Middleton was highly unsuited for the era because the demographics of the school was changing. Middleton did not seem to understand what was taking place, despite having been in Jamaica for about two years before and serving as principal of Morant Bay High School in St. Thomas and before that Vice principal of Clarendon College in Chapelton, Clarendon.

For example, Mr. Middleton would have the students listen to European classical music and there was great consternation about this. The author of this article, himself a JC student of the 1960s asked Mr. Middleton if he could play African music on the record player but he replied that he had not got any African music, but he was willing to play it if he could locate some.

It was a time when 'Black Power' was gaining momentum in Jamaica, especially from the University of the West Indies and local Rastafarians. The ripple effect from the University students would be felt in JC because they JC students for the most part shared the same bedroom area with the UWI students.

Some say that because in those days most UWI students were male and therefore more prone to have confrontational type protests also added to the fact that they shared the same bedroom area with JC students. This was noticeable in 1964 when there was a student 'strike' at JC and university students came on the JC compound and held up placards against then headmaster Mr. V. Harvey Ennever which stated "JBC or JC". Mr. Ennever was also Deputy Chairman of the Jamaica Broadcasting Corporation, one of only two radio stations operating in Jamaica at the time.

It was felt by some that Ennever was spending too much time at JBC. In December 1964, Ennever resigned as headmaster to take up an appointment as general manager of JBC. Yes, female University students took part in all demonstrations such as the Rodney affair of 1968, but it was the male university students who always took the lead.

It was the time when students clamoured for a student council, principal of which was Michael Burke the author of this script. The

student council was established in 1969. It was the time of the boycott of the school's canteen. It was also a time when the prefect body resigned in protest over an appointment to the body of a student they felt not worthy of such appointment. All of this can only be understood in analysing the social context of the time

It was also true that with the Common Entrance Examination in vogue, there were some every poor students coming to JC, whose parents were working class and many of them unemployed. They also hailed from the broken family situation that has been the bane of Jamaican society for a very long time.

One tragedy of the era was that in April 1971 a third form student slept at JC even in the Easter holidays to escape the realities of staying with his grandparents who rejected him. His mother was in Canada and his father was in England. He was killed by the watchman as he slept in an area called the prefects' room in those days. This was a reality that pointed to the fact that there were also students who lived outside of the surrounding community such as this student lived on Waltham Park Road. Still, the reality of the close-knittedness of JC because of the surrounding community was still most factual.

Mr. Middleton was succeeded by Mr. Ruel Taylor in 1971. Taylor retired in 1993 when the demographics of JC was changing again. By the 1990s, students of Mona Heights grew up and moved out of their parents homes, and this being Jamaica many migrated. Mona Heights became a residential community of grandparents and even later, great grandparents.

Eventually the old residents in Mona heights and Hope Pastures passed on and their children inherited their homes. Many in Mona heights sold their homes to persons not members of the Cooperative. This was the beginning of the end of the cohesiveness of the Mona Heights residents that earlier had a spillover effect in JC. In the beginning one could only own a house in Mona Heights by joining the cooperative but there was no rule that prohibited Mona Heights house owners from selling their houses to whomever they pleased.

By this time there were a plethora of schools choose from such as Campion, Mona High, Ardenne and so on. Yes, Campion and Ardenne were around earlier but the academic performances of the students had improved by the 1990s signifying better teaching in those schools which made a big difference to parents in selecting schools for their children.

In any case by the 1990s most of the new housing schemes were in Portmore St. Catherine and by the year 2000 most of the students at JC as with any other school lived in Portmore. The cohesiveness of the students took another shift as students were bussed from Portmore in the mornings and left early each day, a reality that is even more so in 2018.

The new reality of a boarding hostel that came about in 2016, 49 years after the old boarding school closed in 1967 will take some time to recreate that sort of cohesiveness that was known previously in the old boarding houses.