

The Beautiful Lady Bustamante Dies: 1912-2009

Lady Gladys Bustamante, widow of Jamaica's National Hero, the Rt. Excellent Sir Alexander Bustamante, and a prominent member of the Jamaican trade union movement, died in the Tony Thwaites Wing of the University Hospital of the West Indies (UHWI) this afternoon.

Lady Bustamante, as she is well known, had been confined to home for the past two years and, although she had not made any public appearance since then, "she was feeling no pain or discomfort," according to close family friend, Seragh Lakasingh. However, things changed for the worse yesterday afternoon, when she expressed a feeling of discomfort and developed a high temperature. She was taken to the Tony Thwaites Wing of the Hospital at 2 p.m. She died at 4.45 p.m. Although she is usually referred as the widow of Sir Alexander, Lady Bustamante, or Lady "B" as she is even more affectionately known, was a prominent member of the Jamaican trade union movement since 1938. At the time of her death she was still Honorary Treasurer and a Trustee of the Bustamante Industrial Trade Union (BITU), founded by Sir Alexander. She was also a member of the executive and a trustee of the Jamaica Labour Party (JLP), which was also founded by Sir Alexander, as well as patron of the Bustamante Hospital for Children in Kingston. Born Gladys Maud Longbridge to parents Frank Longbridge and Rebecca Blackwood, in Parson Reid, Westmoreland on March 8, 1912, she grew up in rural Jamaica with her grandparents, after her mother left for Cuba when she was only three years old. She attended the Ashton Primary School. In later years, her Aunt took her to Kingston, where she lived in Jones Town. She attended Tutorial Secondary and Commercial College, where she learnt the secretarial skills that would, eventually, shape her life. In the early 1930's she returned to Westmoreland, with the intent of using her skills in the community, but was unable to find employment. In 1934, she returned to Kingston. In March 1936, she was employed by Alexander Bustamante as his private secretary, in his capacity as businessman. She continued in that capacity, following his entry into the trade union movement, politics and until he became Prime Minister of Jamaica in 1962. She also did social work, islandwide, particularly among portworkers in Kingston and their families, in sugar communities and with the children of destitute parents. She was actively involved in voluntary work and with charitable institutions. During her employment to Bustamante, she was also actively involved in trade unionism and travelled with him around Jamaica on the workers' business. On September 7, 1962, she and Sir Alexander Bustamante were married. Lady Bustamante has been presented with a number of awards including: the Order of Jamaica, 1982; the Golden Orchid Award from the Venezuelan Government in recognition of dedication to Sir Alexander's ideals, 1979; and the Plaque for Outstanding Public Service to Jamaica to mark the end of United Nations Decade for Women, 1976 - 1986. In 2006, the Kingston and St. Andrew Corporation (KSAC) named October 16, Lady Bustamante Day, and honoured her with the Key to the City. This year, the leadership of both the JLP, headed by Prime Minister Bruce Golding, and the BITU, headed by its president, Kavan Gayle, celebrated her birthday with her at her Irish Town, rural St. Andrew residence.