



# FROM LEDGERS TO LAPTOPS, 1914—2026

## The Reinvention of The Bahamas Customs Department

NASSAU, *The Bahamas* — On a humid morning at Lynden Pindling International Airport, a traveler scans a QR code on his phone and walks forward. No paper declaration form. No carbon copies. No frantic search for a pen. A customs officer glances at a screen, nods, and waves him through.

It is a scene that would have been almost unrecognizable a decade ago.

The Bahamas Customs Department, born in law on March 21, 1914, has spent the last century collecting revenue at the edge of an archipelago that depends on trade for its survival. For generations, customs officers stood as both guardians and gatekeepers, armed with stamp pads, tariff books, and a formidable knowledge of valuation. But since March 14, 2014, the department has been in the midst of a transformation that reaches far beyond new computers and software upgrades. It has been reshaping its identity.

This is the story of how a paper-heavy colonial revenue office is becoming a digital border agency in a global economy that waits for no one.

### Department Forged in Revenue

When the Customs Department separated from the Treasury in 1914, the new office of Comptroller of Customs was created to oversee revenue collection and supervise officers across scattered islands. In those days, customs was not merely an administrative function. It was the financial backbone of government. Duties on imported goods paid for schools, roads, and the machinery of the state.

Over the years, leadership passed from E. R. Pashley, who served from 1914 to 1921, to J. H. Peet, then to A. K. Cole, S. A. Eldon, E. H. McKinney, Gerald A. Isaacs, Caleb B. O. Hepburn, J. Edison Deleveaux, Wilfred A. Horton, John Rolle, Anthony Adderley, Glen Gomez, Charles Turner, Dr. Geannine Moss, and today Ralph Munroe. Each comptroller inherited the same triad of responsibilities: collect revenue, protect the border, and facilitate legitimate trade.

By 1976, the Customs Management Act formally established the department under its modern name. In 2011, a sweeping Customs Management Act replaced older statutes, laying a legal foundation for a new era. Regulations followed in 2013. On paper, the modernization had begun.

In practice, the culture of customs is slower to change than legislation.

### The Old Way of Doing Business

Before the current wave of modernization, clearing goods in The Bahamas was often a choreography of stamps and signatures. Importers and brokers submitted documents that traveled desk to desk. Officers examined invoices, scrutinized tariff codes, and calculated duties by hand or through aging electronic systems.

Pre-entry checking was the norm. Goods waited while officials confirmed details. Efficiency depended on experience, and experience was often heroic. Officers memorized tariff schedules and could spot undervaluation with a glance. But the process was labor-intensive and vulnerable to delay.

In a country of 700 islands and cays, with 32 official ports of entry and numerous approved suffrance wharves, consistency was an ongoing challenge. Procedures could vary by island, by shift, even by supervisor.

By 2014, the world had changed. Global trade moved at digital speed. International standards promoted risk management and post-clearance audits instead of universal inspections. Travelers expected airport processing to resemble online banking. The Bahamas had to adapt.

### The Click That Changed Everything

The shift began quietly.

Click2Clear, formerly known as the Bahamas Electronic Single Window, was introduced as the new backbone of customs operations. Soft launched in August 2018, it promised to compress hours of paperwork into minutes of electronic submission. Instead of routing forms between agencies, traders could access a single digital portal linked to multiple government entities.

The philosophy behind Click2Clear was as important as the software itself. Rather than scrutinizing every shipment before release, the system incorporated a risk module designed to flag high-risk transactions while allowing compliant trade to flow. The emphasis began to move from pre-entry control to post-entry verification.

It was a profound cultural shift. Customs officers were no longer simply document examiners. They were becoming analysts.

At the airport, another change was underway. The EX-EMPT App replaced the paper C17 baggage declaration for residents in 2023. Travelers now complete declarations in advance, upload receipts, and present a QR code on arrival. Payment can be made electronically. Lines move faster. Cashier windows are less crowded.

For a nation whose economy depends heavily on tourism, the optics matter. Efficiency is not only an administrative virtue. It is economic strategy. Ports of Entry in a Maritime Nation

Customs operations in The Bahamas reflect geography. Entry is lawful only through designated ports, whether at major hubs such as Lynden Pindling International Airport in New Providence, Grand Bahama International Airport in Freeport, or Leonard M. Thompson International Airport in Marsh Harbour, Abaco.

Seaports and container facilities, including Arawak Port, Prince George Dock, Freeport Harbour, and Freeport Container Port, serve as commercial lifelines. Across outer islands, approved docks and marinas operate under the authority of the Comptroller of Customs.

In an archipelago, the border is everywhere. And that makes modernization not just desirable, but essential.

### Legislation in Motion

Since 2014, amendments to customs laws and regulations have continued steadily. Environmental levies were introduced for hybrid and electric vehicles. Definitions were updated to reflect evolving commerce. Governance provisions were refined to clarify authority and delegation.

The law is no longer static. It evolves with trade patterns, technological capacity, and international expectations.

The Customs Management Act of 2011 remains the cornerstone, but it is increasingly supported by a web of amendments that mirror the digital age.

### Far We Have Come

The progress is tangible. Electronic declarations. Integrated risk modules. Paperless passenger processing. A national system accessible across islands.

Release times have shortened. Transparency has improved. Traders can submit documentation without traveling between offices. Officers have access to centralized data rather than stacks of files.

Perhaps most importantly, the mindset is shifting. Customs is no longer solely about collecting duties. It is about balancing enforcement with facilitation.

### How Far There Is Still to Go

Modernization is not achieved at launch. It is achieved in discipline.

For all its advances, the department faces familiar institutional challenges. Procedures can still differ from port to port. Manual workarounds sometimes creep back into digital systems. Post-clearance audit capacity, the backbone of risk-based control, must continue to grow.

Training must keep pace with technology. Officers must be as comfortable analyzing data as they once were reading paper invoices. Performance metrics should be transparent and measurable. Internal administrative processes, from human resources to procurement, require the same digitization applied to trade.

The next frontier is cultural. A fully modern customs administration measures success not by how much it inspects, but by how intelligently it targets. It empowers officers with analytics. It rewards integrity and professional development. It communicates clearly with brokers and travelers alike.

In short, modernization is less about software than about systems of accountability.

### The Long Arc of Leadership

From E. R. Pashley in 1914 to Ralph Munroe today, the department has been shaped by a succession of comptrollers who navigated political change, economic upheaval, and the realities of island geography.

Few outside customs circles know that the department predates many other formal government structures in its present form. Fewer still realize how much of the country's fiscal stability has historically depended on its officers.

Customs work is rarely glamorous. It unfolds in warehouses, on docks, at counters and terminals. Yet it touches nearly every product on a Bahamian shelf and nearly every traveler who enters the islands.

### The Road Ahead

The Bahamas stands at a pivotal point. Global trade is accelerating. Digital commerce is expanding. Border threats are evolving. International compliance standards are tightening.

The Customs Department has made significant strides since 2014, shifting from ledgers to laptops, from manual inspection to algorithmic selectivity. But modernization is a journey without a finish line.

If the next decade brings stronger post-clearance audit teams, deeper risk analytics, consistent training across all ports, and seamless integration with other government agencies, The Bahamas will not merely keep pace with international standards. It will define its own model of island-state efficiency.

On that humid Nassau morning, as another traveler clears customs with a quick scan of his phone, the transformation feels subtle. There is no ribbon cutting. No fanfare.

Just a quiet signal that an institution more than a century old is learning to move at the speed of the modern world.



**Deputy Comptroller Cloretta Gomez Retires After 44 Years of Service**

After forty-four years of dedicated service, Deputy Comptroller Cloretta Gomez has retired from the Bahamas Customs Department, leaving a lasting legacy of integrity and discipline.

For many years, she led the Revenue Recovery Unit, strengthening enforcement efforts and safeguarding the revenue of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas. Her service spanned multiple station postings in the Capital and across the Family Islands, where she was respected for her firm, fair, and no-nonsense approach.

Known for her strong Christian faith and unwavering commitment to duty, Deputy Gomez exemplified professionalism in both collection and protection of the nation's revenue.

We salute Deputy Comptroller Cloretta Gomez and thank her for her outstanding years of service.



**Message From The Comptroller of Customs, Mr. Ralph Munroe LLB**

As Comptroller of Customs, and as a career Customs officer who has risen through the ranks of this Department, I remain firmly committed to strengthening the framework of Customs and Border Management in The Bahamas. Our mandate is clear and enduring: to protect our borders, to collect the lawful revenue of the Government, and to facilitate legitimate trade and travel in a manner that reflects our responsibility as global citizens.

Modernization is not a departure from our core mission. It is the disciplined evolution of it. Through the continued implementation of digital platforms, risk-based systems, and streamlined administrative processes, we are building a Customs administration that is more efficient, more transparent, and more accountable. At the same time, we remain vigilant in safeguarding national security and ensuring full compliance with our laws and international obligations.

As a legal practitioner, I bring to this office a deep respect for the rule of law and the constitutional framework within which we operate. I work closely with the Judiciary and legislative stakeholders to ensure that our statutes and regulations reflect the practical realities of the job, support effective enforcement, and withstand judicial scrutiny. Sound legislation must align with operational practice, and operational practice must align with the law.

Having served in uniform as a Customs officer, I understand the demands placed upon our men and women at the ports of entry. My goal is to ensure that they are supported by clear legal authority, modern tools, and professional standards that empower them to execute their duties with integrity and confidence.

We are advancing toward a Customs administration that balances protection with facilitation, enforcement with fairness, and national interest with global responsibility. That balance defines our work, and it defines our future.



# BIMINI

**BIMINI, The Bahamas:** Bimini sells itself easily. A short hop across the Gulf Stream, a ribbon of sand and mangroves, and waters so clear they look edited. Anglers call it the heart of Bahamian game fishing, a place where marlin and tuna feel close enough to touch. But the real story of Bimini is not only what bites the hook. It is what arrives at the dock, what clears at the counter, and what quietly keeps three small islands functioning like a much larger nation. North Bimini, South Bimini, and Ocean Cay form a triangle of maritime life, and in that triangle the Bahamas Customs Department does what it has always done best: protect the border, collect the revenue, and keep lawful movement moving.

## When Bimini became an official Port of Entry

Bimini is formally recognized today as an **official Port of Entry**. The national tourism authority notes that the **North Bimini Airport is an official port of entry with Customs and Immigration**, and local marina guidance in Bimini echoes the same, describing on-site Customs and Immigration availability for clearing arriving vessels.

A precise "first designation date" is not clearly stated in the public sources above, but what is clear is Bimini's long-standing practical role as a first stop for crossings from Florida. Even modern boating guidance is written with that reality in mind, pointing captains to clear at the nearest designated port of entry and follow standard quarantine and clearance protocol.

## The cargo lifeline, the vessels that keep Bimini stocked

Pleasure boats may bring the headlines, but cargo boats bring the groceries, construction materials, engine parts, appliances, and the everyday items that make island life possible.

From online operator sources, the cargo and freight story is anchored by a few familiar names:

- **Munson Shipping's M/V Captain Emmett:** Munson's own public postings reference sailing dates to Bimini and the vessel's ongoing service.
- **Bimini Shipping's landing craft fleet:** Their fleet page lists **Bimini Cat**, a shallow-draft landing craft built for Family Island freight realities, meaning it can move cargo even where infrastructure is limited.

These are not just boats. They are the supply chain made visible. When freight is delayed, contractors wait. Marinas wait. Shelves thin out. Bimini feels it quickly.

## What life looks like for Customs officers on Bimini

A Family Island Customs posting is not a desk job with predictable rhythms. It is a frontline role in a community where arrivals are personal and time is driven by weather, tides, and travel windows.

Visitor guidance from major Bimini marina operators describes Customs and Immigration as available on property during normal business hours, and notes that after-hours clearance attendance can be arranged through the marina. That single detail captures the reality officers live: service expectations remain high even when schedules are not.

Official boating guidance reinforces the disciplined choreography: arriving captains clear at a designated port of entry, fly the quarantine flag, and limit disembarkation until clearance is completed.

For officers, this translates into a workday that can include:

- Clearing sportfishing vessels and cruising yachts, then switching immediately to freight documents.
- Monthly posting to Privately owned Cat Cay's private airport and private docking facility.
- Handling questions from visitors who are excited, tired, unfamiliar with process, and sometimes both impatient and grateful.
- Operating where consistency matters more because the community is small and memory is long.

It is demanding, but it is also career-shaping. Officers who thrive on Bimini tend to develop strong judgement, strong customer control, and strong integrity, because everyone sees everything.

## Ocean Cay and the aragonite story Customs never forgets

Twenty miles south of Bimini proper sits **Ocean Cay**, and its origin story is pure industrial Bahamas. The island is not simply "a cay." It was **built by dredging in the late 1960s** as a base for mining **white oolitic aragonite sand** for industrial purposes.

Aragonite mattered enough to be backed by legislation. The Statute Law of The Bahamas includes the **(Ocean Industries Incorporated (Aragonite Mining Encouragement) Act, 1971**, an act created specifically to encourage the mining of aragonite.

Then the island's industrial life changed hands and direction. Reporting in *The Tribune* describes Ocean Cay as Dillingham's aragonite mining base, later shifting through various development interests as market conditions and national priorities evolved.

More recently, Ocean Cay became globally visible again, this time as a tourism asset. Public information summarizes that Ocean Cay was redeveloped as **Ocean Cay MSC Marine Reserve**, transforming an industrial footprint into a cruise destination.

For Customs, Ocean Cay is a reminder that "industry" in The Bahamas is often maritime. A place can move from export-mining to cruise-tourism, but Customs remains the constant: controlling what comes in, what goes out, and what is lawfully declared. This History will soon be expounded on with the opening of Ocean Cay II.

## Other industries in Bimini that matter to Customs

Bimini's economic identity is tourism-forward, but several sectors intersect with Customs work in ways visitors rarely see:

- **Sportfishing and marine tourism:** Bimini's reputation draws constant vessel movement and high-volume clearance activity at marinas and ports of entry.
- **Cruising and transient yachting:** The rules around clearance, permits, and arrival procedure are a daily operational reality, not a brochure detail.
- **Freight, warehousing, and island distribution:** Local logistics operators market consolidation, purchasing, distribution, and expedited delivery, which are all Customs-adjacent in practice because freight rhythm shapes compliance rhythm.
- **Heritage tourism:** Even the government's official portal leans into Bimini's historic allure and famous visitors, helping sustain the visitor economy that drives much of the movement officers manage.

## Why Bimini can be a dream posting, if you want responsibility with your sunrise

To visitors, Bimini is a postcard. To Customs officers, it is something more serious and more rewarding: a compact border environment with real consequences, where you can see the impact of good service and strong enforcement immediately.

A posting here asks a lot. It also gives a lot. Officers learn how to balance facilitation with control, hospitality with authority, and speed with compliance. And on an island where the sea is always within sight, the mission feels less abstract.

Bimini is not only where people come to fish. It is where the country quietly proves it can welcome the world and protect itself at the same time. pause for long. When the **Sweet Homecoming Festival** or Easter celebrations roll around, the island transforms. Drums echo through the streets, locals don new wardrobes, and vibrant church concerts and parties stretch into the morning, reminding everyone that even in a small station, life pulses with energy.



NASSAU, Bahamas — Newly graduated Trainee Customs and Revenue Officers assigned to the Risk Management and Scanner Unit of the Bahamas Customs and Excise Department have recorded an early operational success after assisting in the interception of a large quantity of contraband tobacco products at Lynden Pindling International Airport.

The discovery was made during a joint inspection operation on March 3, when officers identified suspicious cargo moving through the airport's scanning system. Further examination revealed a substantial quantity of undeclared tobacco products concealed within the shipment.

The seizure highlights the effectiveness of the Department's risk management strategies, scanning technology, and the vigilance of its officers in protecting the nation's borders.

On March 4, Comptroller of Customs Mr. Ralph Munroe met with the officers to congratulate them on their successful operation and encourage them to remain committed to excellence in their service.

"This is an outstanding start to your service," Mr. Munroe said. "Remain focused, stay disciplined, and take every opportunity to learn, because the habits, judgment, and professionalism you build now will shape the future of your career and strengthen this Department for years to come."

The Bahamas Customs and Excise Department continues to strengthen its border protection efforts through professional training, modern technology, and strong operational teamwork.

## IN LOVING MEMORIES

During the past quarter, several members of our Customs family have experienced the loss of loved ones. These moments remind us how closely connected we are as colleagues and as a community. The Customs Department extends its heartfelt sympathy to all staff members who are grieving during this difficult time.

It is with particular sadness that we remember one of our own, **Customs Guard Alonzo Forbes**, who passed away on **February 12, 2026**. Guard Forbes served the department with dedication and professionalism, and his loss is deeply felt by his fellow officers and staff.

We also acknowledge the passing of **Retired Senior Transport Officer Bradley Adderley**, who will be laid to rest on **March 28, 2026**, at **Salem Union Baptist Church**. Officer Adderley devoted many years of service to the department, and his contributions will be remembered with gratitude and respect.

As we reflect on these losses, we pause to honor their lives and the service they gave to the Customs Department and the wider community.

May their souls, and the souls of all the faithfully departed, rest in peace.

## NEWLY TRAINED CUSTOMS OFFICERS RECORD MAJOR TOBACCO SEIZURE AT AIRPORT

### HIGHLIGHTED Staff



**Nathan Butler**  
Chief Customs/  
Revenue Officer

Nathan Butler, widely known as the Intelligence Officer, leads the Investigations and Preventive Branch with decades of cross-border experience.

A former Police Investigator, he served for many years in the Miami Intelligence Office of the Bahamas Customs Department, acting as liaison to the United States Government and international enforcement partners. That global network and strategic insight strengthen his investigative leadership and case management.

Known for his sharp eye and disciplined professionalism, Officer Butler represents firm accountability to those who choose non-compliance, while remaining fair and measured with genuine victims of circumstance. He embodies intelligence-driven enforcement that reinforces border protection with professionalism and justice.

**Lakeatha McDonald**  
Senior Customs/Revenue  
Officer

Lakeatha McDonald is proudly known as the "Lady of the North." A native of the Northern Bahamas, she serves in Spanish Wells with a commanding and distinguished presence.

She shines not only in the black, white, and gold uniform, but in the confidence and professionalism she projects. Vigilant and poised, Officer McDonald carries herself with authority and earns the respect of her community.

Her dedication and commitment to standards make her a standout representative of service in the Northern region.

**Theoman Parker**  
Customs/Revenue  
Officer Gr. I

Officer Theoman Parker is a sharp-eyed professional with an instinct for detection. His record of drug interceptions ranks among the highest in his unit, reflecting vigilance and discipline.

Quiet, composed, and resolute, he approaches his duties with deep responsibility to country and command. Through precision and unwavering commitment, Officer Parker strengthens the Department's mission of protection and enforcement.

**Luther Mortimer**  
Customs/Revenue Officer  
Gr II

Officer Luther Mortimer is widely regarded as the heartbeat of the South. A class valedictorian of his training cohort, he demonstrated excellence from the outset of his career.

His firm, no-nonsense presence reflects deep respect for the laws and guidelines of the Bahamas Customs Department. Well known in the boating community and among southern agents, he upholds standards with consistency and earns respect at every level.

Committed to continuous learning, Officer Mortimer regularly reviews legislation and procedures, strengthening both his performance and that of his colleagues. His work shows that integrity and preparation naturally produce strong enforcement.