

developed some of the smallest and fastest, most efficient seagoing vessels, the fitted dinghy and the Bermuda sloop, but now they have dwindled to an alarming few. It has been fashionable in recent years to import boats from New England and even from Britain. Some organizations have vowed to change this, for example the Bermuda Sloop Foundation, which has commissioned the construction of a Bermuda sloop.

Belonging to the island — being born and bred in Bermuda — is a valued status. Bermudians meeting for the first time ask immediately, “What’s your ‘title’ (your surname)?” followed by “Who’s your Momma?” Further inquiry may be needed to place individuals in their larger families; so the next question may be something like, “Are you from the Pembroke Dills (or Pearmans, or Outterbridges) or from the Warwick (or Devonshire, or Flatts) Dills?” Finally, “What school (or church) did you attend as a child?” With a mariner’s precision, Bermudians calculate social longitudes and latitudes to orient the conversation.

All Bermudians see family as the foundation of society. Genealogy and family history structure many social relations. Bermudians extend kin and kinlike affiliations into the formation of clubs, lodges, government, schools, businesses, and institutions of worship. Most Bermudian businesses are family businesses, from the smallest shop to the largest Bermuda-owned law firm. As in communities around the world, family and community bonds in Bermuda are reaffirmed and strengthened



Traditions of Bermudian friendly societies have had a central role in supporting families and community-building in Bermuda. Members of one Bermuda lodge gather to celebrate an anniversary. Photo courtesy Joy Wilson Tucker

through play such as cricket, celebrations such as Cup Match and the Easter holiday, and collective work such as house-building.

The ball game of cricket has special significance for Bermudians. Generations of cricketers in the same family tend to belong to the same clubs. Bermudians living or traveling abroad tend to come home in late July for the annual celebration of Cup Match, a cricket tournament that commemorates and celebrates the emancipation from slavery of Bermudians of African descent in 1834. Bermudian Cup Match also illuminates the complexity of the island’s history and society. Cricket was a segregated sport, like many other public activities in Bermuda before the 1970s civil rights protests and popular uprisings in Bermuda.

NOTES ON BERMUDEAN LANGUAGE

from a report by Ruth Thomas

The English language that Bermuda’s first settlers brought with them has evolved into two main forms — a standard English and a local vernacular. Many Bermudians switch back and forth between them at will, depending on the situation. For example, standard English is used in professional settings and in writing, while vernacular Bermudian English is spoken on more casual occasions. Some people who always use the vernacular orally write in perfect standard English.

As much as any other aspect of culture, Bermudian speech reflects the islanders’ connections with neighbors around the Atlantic. Early settlers to Bermuda came from various places in England and brought their various local accents and vocabularies with them. Bermudian speech also echoes influences from the United States, Canada, and the Caribbean.

Portuguese-speakers immigrated to Bermuda in the mid-1800s, mainly from the Azores. Most came without knowledge of English. Eventually, they added a different accent, rhythm, cadence, and even vocabulary to the English spoken on the islands. Some young Bermudians try to emulate the English of the Rastafarian community in Jamaica, reggae dub poets, or American rap artists.

In spite of evolutionary change in Bermudian English and the effects of frequent contact with other English-speaking countries, some elements from the past still linger. An example is the way Bermudian English sometimes interchanges the sounds /v/ and /w/: for example, “Vere is Villiam’s violin?” for “Where is William’s violin?”

Other characteristically Bermudian words and expressions include nicknames. Many people in Bermuda,



The Cup Match holiday is a cricket match, a time of family reunion, and an annual celebration of the end of slavery in Bermuda.

Photo by John Zuill, courtesy the Bermuda Government

particularly men, have nicknames. For example, the name "Bus Stop" was given to the owner of an old taxi who picked up his clients at bus stops rather than at the usual taxi stands. A boy who could not afford his own shoes once wore his mother's shoes to a party; the nickname "Mama's Shoes" followed him through his adult life. Sometimes all the male members of a family will share the same name. The eyes of members of one such family, all called "Cat," were thought to have a feline appearance. Nicknames are so frequently used that a person's given name is often forgotten. Nicknames appear in the telephone directory and also in death notices.

A sampling of more general Bermudian terms referring to people includes:

- sparrow:** local woman. This bird never leaves the island, hence the comparison with Bermudian women.
- longtail:** female tourist. The longtail is a seasonal bird that comes to Bermuda in the spring. That is when the tourists usually begin to visit.
- diddly bops:** teenagers on motorized bikes.
- Onion:** Bermudian. The island was known for growing onions.

Ruth Thomas, BA, MSC, worked in education for many years before joining the Department of Community Services, where she founded the Department of Cultural Affairs (now the Department of Community and Cultural Affairs). She is co-founder of the spoken-word group Mosaic.