

Sir Leton Thomas

St. Lucia has produced outstanding sons and daughters throughout its history. A few of them from the days of French colonization are well known. Others surfaced during the days of British rule. The warriors are well known, but some whose careers were not in the limelight but whose contributions are priceless are worthy of being given some attention and public exposure.

From Vieux Fort came the Thomas family. One son Leton was born on July 26th, 1926. He was one of the few survivors of a family of eight. In 2016 he celebrated his 90th birthday.

Sir Leton was responsible for children from the time he finished primary school at the age of 16 in the "Intending Teachers Programme", where bright youngsters were groomed and apprenticed to be teachers. Except for the Anglican and Methodist schools all schools in the island were managed by the Roman Catholic Church. In some cases, the government provided lands on which the priests built and managed the schools. The first purely Government built school was the Vide Bouteille Primary School, erected as late as only in 1947.

The tradition of teacher education in St. Lucia once commitment was made was to be trained in the United Kingdom to get certified. He qualified as an ACP (Associate of the College of Preceptors) and an LCP (Licentiate of the College of Preceptors) and graduated in the United States with a Master's Degree from Columbia University in 1965.

Music at the London College of Music

It was a long journey from the Vieux Fort Boys School to become Principal of the highest institution of learning in the island. The achievements have been outstanding and the awards deserved. The Sir Arthur Lewis Community College, of which Sir Leton was founding Principal from 1987 to his retirement in 1995 was one of the top Community Colleges in the islands, attracting delegates from as far as the Pacific (Cook Islands), to learn how a community college could be made to work and operate.

In a long inaugural address to his staff as Principal of Sir Arthur Lewis Community College he spelt out his goals and those for the college which should be the guide for future principals.

"Now let me seek your active co-operation on two matters. Our college is named after a most celebrated and illustrious St. Lucian of renowned intellectual distinction. His life and work should inspire us towards the pursuit of excellence. We need to inspire in our students and support staff pride in this institution, a concern for the appearance of the buildings and grounds in such a way,



that your enthusiasm for pleasant College buildings and grounds will be caught by students and non-teaching staff alike. The College through members of staff more than anyone else must create an intellectual and moral atmosphere in which members of the entire College community can grow, achieve, extend their skills and perceptions, and in the process of the entire community".

It must be disheartening for Sir Leton to see the present state of the institution, where buildings have been allowed to deteriorate, temporary classrooms torn down, classes relocated in other schools, the library building non-operational and classrooms being turned into administrative offices.

Sir Leton served St. Lucia in Education, teaching and administration for 45 years, from 1950-1995. Two of these years were spent as an advisor to UNESCO in a Regional Education Project as Co-ordinator of the Caribbean Network of Educational Innovates for Development (CARNEID). After retirement, he was appointed a member of the Senate in 1996 and was designated Minister for the Public Service and Public Service Reform in the office of the Prime Minister up to 1997. Following this period he served in different capacities on different boards with UNESCO on Caribbean and Latin America Education projects.

In paying tribute to Sir Leton, the work and inspiration of the Honourable Hunter J. Francois, Minister of Education cannot be overlooked. He was the longest serving Minister of Education of St. Lucia, A visionary, lawyer and musician beloved by all, he was responsible for the conversion of the military buildings on the Morne to an Education Complex, comprising the A' Level College, the Morne Technical College and the Saint Lucia Teachers' College. These institutions eventually became the nucleus of Sir Arthur Lewis Community College, established in 1985. The College's library has been named after Hon. Hunter J. Francois in honour

of the pivotal role he played in establishing Morne Fortune as the premier location for tertiary education in Saint Lucia.

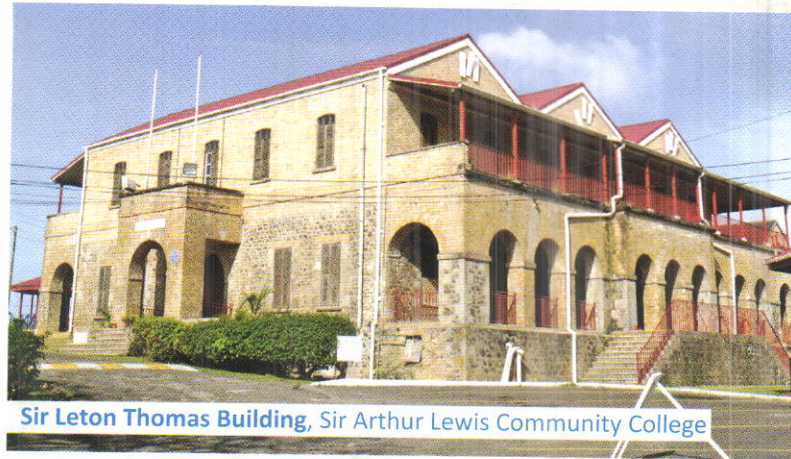
It was through the inspiration and support of the minister that Sir Leton was able to work and achieve, as part of the team headed by Hunter J. Francois and supported by Mr. (later Sir) Ira Simmons, Mr. (now Sir) Leton Thomas and Mr. (now the Honourable) George Theophilus.

Awards Received

- 1961 Order of the British Empire
- 1991 Knight Commander of the Order of St. Michael & St. George
- 1992 Commander of the British Empire
- 2003 Honorary Doctor of Letters conferred on him by the UWI at the 2003 graduation ceremony held at the St Augustine Campus, Trinidad.
- 2006 The Saint Lucia Cross
- 2012 Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Medal
- Simon Bolivar Medal

Behind every great man is a great woman. Lady Thomas, from the distinguished Alexander family of Soufriere played that role. His companion throughout, she was also a teacher and was Principal of the Teachers College section under Sir Leton. Ironically the building named after Sir Leton was that which Lady Thomas ran her section. One wonders why the building was not named or renamed the Sir Leton and Lady Thomas Building.

During that time, Sir Leton was involved in teaching, teacher training, inspection and supervision, education planning,



education and curriculum development and administration of tertiary education. He was an Inspector of Schools, Chief Education Officer, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Education and founding Principal of Sir Arthur Lewis Community College. An impressive list of writings on all aspects of Education produced over the years reveals the range and depth of his work

Sir Leton is known as the composer of the music to the National Anthem written by Fr. Charles Jesse. In addition he was an organist in the Cathedral and choral director in the Roman Catholic Church.

As Mandela said to us “Because you are small you do not have to be coward”