

The Earthquake of 1907

The 1907 Earthquake Monument is built over the graves of about five hundred and one (501) victims and stands as a lasting reminder of the earthquake which severely damaged the capital city of Kingston in 1907.

As the clock struck 3:30pm on Monday, January 14, 1907, the earth began to shake. The quake, which lasted exactly thirty-six (36) seconds, with a magnitudinal scale of 6.5, caused over one thousand (1,000) of Kingston's inhabitants to perish and many others died as a result of fires triggered by the earthquake.

The Gleaner reported the following morning that, "hundreds of bodies were found burnt and charred along the principal streets of Kingston."

Though many of these bodies were unidentifiable, they were taken up for burial. The city, however, was now faced with a dilemma as with the large number of dead, coffins were exhausted. The remaining bodies were therefore wrapped in sheets and buried in hastily dug trenches on that portion of the Bumper Hall property, adjoining the May Pen Cemetery, which was consecrated for use as a cemetery in 1898.

The idea for a monument over the graves originated with John McKenzie, then Superintendent of the May Pen Cemetery, who became concerned with the neglected state of the trenches. The Gleaner Company was approached for assistance and in 1908 the Company launched a fund for the erection of a suitable Memorial. This led to an overwhelming response from the public and a sum of three hundred and seventy-eight pounds, five shillings and nine pence (£378 5s 9d) was collected. Once funds were raised, an independent Committee was then formed to determine the design the Memorial.

The Earthquake Monument was later completed in 1909 and on Wednesday, June 2, 1909, over six thousand (6000) persons gathered to witness its unveiling. In unveiling the Monument, His Excellency the Governor Sydney Olivier said: "This is the monument raised by the citizens of Kingston to their fellow citizens who perished in the earthquake of January 14, 1907."

The Earthquake did not only shake the areas of Kingston but in fact, created rippling effects for other parishes throughout the island. Several tsunamis were observed along much of the north coast of Jamaica in areas such as Hope Bay, Port Antonio, Orange Bay, Sheerness Bay, Saint Ann's Bay, Buff Bay, Port Maria and Annotto Bay. There were also some reports of waves along the south coast. The level of the sea at Annotto Bay was reported to have initially dropped by more than 3 metres as the sea withdrew about 80 metres before returning at a height of about 2 metres above normal thus flooding the lower parts of the town.

January 14, 2020, marks one hundred and thirteen (113) years since the earthquake of 1907.



View of the 1907 Earthquake Monument



Harbour Street looking east after the earthquake, Courtesy of the National Library of Jamaica



View of Storyboard at the Earthquake Monument Site



View of the Base of the Monument

Sources:

“Earthquake Memorial. Unveiling of the Monument Erected at May Pen Cemetery by the Citizens of Kingston” in *The Daily Gleaner* Thursday, June 3, 1909.

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Loop News. “Prime Minister among those present at commemoration ceremony for victims of 1907 earthquake” <http://www.loopjamaica.com/content/prime-minister-among-those-present-commemoration-ceremony-victims-1907-earthquake> Accessed on August 18, 2016

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