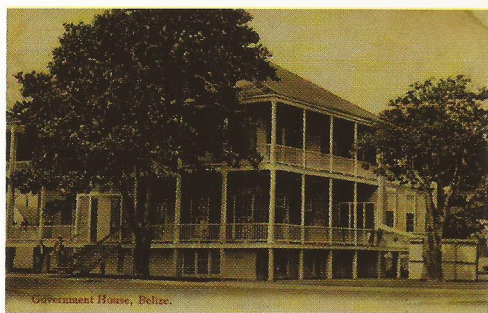




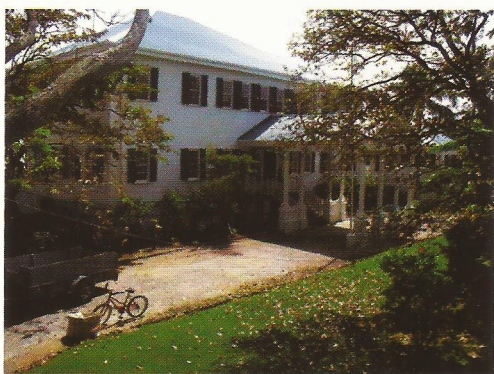
**Government House,  
House of Culture**  
Belize City



Government House, Belize.



Government House - Belize



# The House of Culture

**Belize City**

*formerly Government House*

The gracious mansion at the end of Regent Street is one of Belize City's most important political and historical landmarks. For over 150 years, it was the seat of colonial government and private residence for a series of Superintendents, Lieutenant Governors and Governor's sent from Great Britain, and the first Governor General of an independent Belize.

For most of its history, the general public was not allowed inside, and only the colonial elite was granted entrance by special invitation for official and social gatherings. In 1834, the Emancipation of the slaves was observed here with much fanfare, and on September 21, 1981, the Union Jack was lowered and the Belize flag raised for the first time on the grounds of Government House, ushering in the era of independence for Belize.

In 1998, this colonial building was opened to the public by the new People's United Party government, and renamed the "House of Culture" transforming into a vibrant community center which welcomes all residents of Belize City, and their guests.

Through its art and music courses, exhibitions and concerts, available gallery space, meeting halls, and an open-air theatre, the House of Culture seeks to revitalize, conserve and promote cultural expressions that reflect the complex identity of the country's diverse population, while also exposing Belizeans to international and traveling artists and performing arts companies.

The colonial character of the building has been preserved and its permanent collection includes period furniture and silver serving pieces once used in the banquets held by the Governors.

Recently, in dire need of repair, the building was refurbished to restore it to its former glory and provide for the comfort and enjoyment of visitors, whether they are just stopping in for an hour, attending classes or concerts.

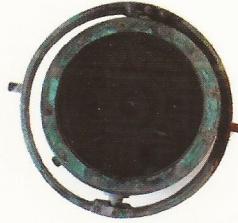
# History of Inside and Outside the House

The Government House dates back to 1815 when a Public Meeting voted to allocate the funds—not to exceed £3000—to build a house for the new Superintendent of the colony sent from Britain, Colonel Arthurs. The Colonel was to have the choice of location and design.

Previous Superintendents of the territory had lived in a wooden house on the Belize River near the upper end of Haulover Creek, at a spot chosen by the first Superintendent Marcus Despard. But perhaps due to the inconvenience of having to cross the river in a dory, and the desire to be closer to Belize Town itself, Colonel Arthurs chose a spot downtown, right across from the Anglican church, St. John's Cathedral (on what is known today as Regent Street). The area was previously known as "Rogue's Point," perhaps because there was a famous pub there, "Frost's Tavern."

Some years later, in 1830 Colonel Francis Cockburn, demanded that the house be furnished and the now dilapidated structure be repaired 'as is the custom in other Colonies.'

The Magistrates of the Public Meeting agreed to pay £14 for the brick foundation for the Superintendent's coach-house and stable. They also paid for a new roof, added an open verandah, improved the interior and built servants' quarters. Colonel Cockburn was given £2000 for furniture.



Navigation instrument used aboard the Merlin, 1798



19th century colonial chair



Cover Belize Billboard 1950

He wrote London that he was “surprised and delighted” that the Settlers were so generous in meeting the expenses of Government House that had had no repairs for 14 years and, even though it had been built by the Public, had been taken over by Home Government almost immediately.

(Perhaps the Public Meeting had forgotten that they no longer owned the place or thought they could get back some control by paying for the repairs.)

Since then, Government House has survived two major hurricanes, one in 1931 and “Hattie in 1961,” which leveled much of Belize City. It has had periodic renovations, the most recent of which was in 2003, and according to the Belize Historical Society, the house has probably been completely rebuilt at least twice.

In 1980, Government House ceased to function as the Official Residence of the Monarch’s Representative. After Independence in 1981, the Governor-General’s official residence became Belize House in Belmopan. In 1998, it was renamed the “House of Culture” and the once elite residence was opened to the public on a daily basis.

*—Notes courtesy of the Belize Historical Society Newsletter (1995).*



The grand stairway inside the newly renovated House of Culture, November 2003

# Exhibitions and attractions

Art and cultural displays are featured year-round at the House of Culture, giving Belizean artists the opportunity to present their work to the Belizean, and visiting, public. Exhibitions can be scheduled by contacting the HOC staff. Music Master classes, Garifuna and Creole drumming classes are also offered periodically.

The beautiful garden surrounding the colonial mansion is an attraction in itself and is available for special events such as weddings or banquets for a fee.

The House of Culture is also in a prime bird watching area of Belize City and birders are invited to make the grounds part of their itinerary.



"Untitled" by Ruben Miguel,  
Mahogany,  
c.1970 (Private Collection)



Exhibition space

# The Eric King Collection

an exhibit of historical Belize photographs

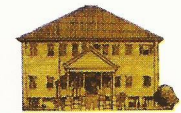
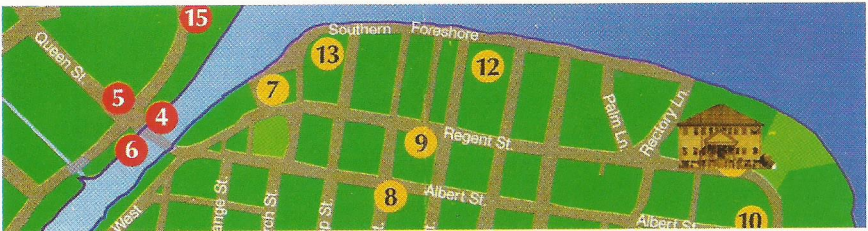


One of the permanent installations at the House of Culture is the Eric King photo collection. Mr. King, a public officer and amateur historian, spent many years collecting vintage photographs and postcards of Belize. His family made available copies of Mr. King's collection and stipulated that in Mr. King's memory the images be used for educational purposes.



**Directions:**

The House of Culture is within walking distance of downtown Belize City at the end of Regent Street, across from St. John's Cathedral. It can be reached via the Swing Bridge by heading all the way up Albert Street, or coming from Central American Boulevard by driving down Ceasar Ridge Road towards the Yarborough Cemetery.



**Government House**  
House of Culture  
Belize City



**Museum of Belize**



**national institute of culture and history**



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