

The Welcoming Arms

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ST. THOMAS HISTORICAL TRUST

August 2012

President's Letter

Dear Trust Members,

It's been a momentous summer at the Trust.

Fort Christian, Garrison House and Fort Willoughby will soon be part of the Trust's historic preservation programs and tours, and we are honored to have been selected to partner with the VI Department of Planning and Natural Resources in this endeavor.

The Trust gratefully acknowledges the work of DPNR Commissioner Alicia Barnes, Director of Libraries Ingrid Bough, Acting VISHPO Director Sean Krigger, the Trust's Hassel Island and Fort Christian Task Forces and scores of others who worked over the years to bring this day about.

To date, the Trust has seen over \$300,000 in funding, preservation of Hassel Island's historic features and development of trails, signage, benches, and historic tours for the enjoyment of Virgin Islanders and visitors. In addition, the Trust is also working with grants from Diageo, the Lana Vento Foundation, the Prior Family Foundation, and a number of private individuals.

We've introduced dozens of young people to the history and beauty of Hassel Island this summer.

Our little museum is on a roll, making the front page of the Daily News twice in August; for a lunchtime chair caning demonstration and for a tasty adventure in coal pot cooking. Watch for upcoming events like traditional broom making 12-2pm September 14, and basket-making in October.

I am encouraging all members to attend both the Annual Meeting on October 11th, at 6 pm at the Windward Passage Hotel and the Annual Halloween Gala on October 27th at Oceana.

Looking forward to seeing you all then!

Ronnie

Ronald Lockhart, President, St. Thomas Historical Trust

Our Mission Statement...

To identify, protect and preserve the historical identity, structures, sites and cultural heritage of St. Thomas through education, advocacy and promotion.



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Physical Location

of Office & Museum:

Roosevelt Park West

St. Thomas

U.S. Virgin Islands



@STT_Historical



Holiday Gift Ideas!
*Historical Images on our
2013 Calendars
and Note Card Sets
\$15 each*

Raising Cane at the Trust

By Larise Joasil

NOTE: Larise Joasil is a St. Thomas native, who is a sophomore at the University of Virginia, where she majors in Anthropology. Larise is developing a database of local artisans and craftspeople who practice traditional arts. She organized the chair caning demonstration and her interests in coal pots led to a hands-on experiment in coal pot cooking in the Trust Museum's courtyard.



Kenneth Richards demonstrates caning before a packed room at the Museum. The Trust will host more demonstrations of caning, and other traditional Virgin Islands arts.

A standing-room only crowd watched chair caning in action on August 6 at the Trust Museum. Kenneth Richards, who has been practicing the art for over 30 years, wove a spell over his audience as he wove cane through the openings of an antique side chair.

Trust members, together with enthusiasts from the public participated in the lunchtime demonstration, excited to be a part of what is considered a dying art. Research to date has located only two other caners on St. Thomas.

Richards demonstrated that caning is a marriage of skill, craft, art and a little magic. Not all the holes in an old chair line up exactly plumb or level, so a professional caner makes some judgment calls for the caning to work out properly. Richards admitted that once a mistake was made, there was no patching, the work had to be fully re-done.

Members of the audience tried their hand at the craft and went away with a new appreciation of the art.

With only three caners on St. Thomas, the need to teach others is critical. The Trust's mission is aligned with ensuring that this historic art is preserved, so that antique caned furniture can be professionally repaired, and so hold its value.

Publicity from the event generated calls to the Trust asking about finding caners.

Coal Pot Johnny Cake Demonstration

By Larise Joasil

On Thursday, August 16th, The St. Thomas Historical Trust hosted a live demonstration of the coal pot, a local cooking ware that was once a staple item in homes. Consisting of a ventilated base and a shallow top to hold the coal that would be under the cooking pot, a cooking pot, and a large metal covering that could withstand burning coals to put on top of the cooking pot, the coal pot demonstration would show one of the older styles of cooking that was prominent in the Virgin Islands and the general Caribbean. For the demonstration, two coal pots were brought in for use by volunteers from the Trust and johnny cake dough was prepared to be made and distributed to the viewing public. The recipe for the johnny cakes is as follows:

- 6 cups of flour
- 1 ½ tsp. salt
- 4 tsp. baking powder
- 2 ½ tsp. shortening
- A 'pot spoon' of sugar
- Water or milk to form the dough

Initially, the coal was placed incorrectly in the ventilation area by the intern, leading to a small and inefficient heat source for the cooking pot and fire was not placed on top. After some well-needed advice from the reporter, Thomas Layer, which suggested placing a mound of coal in the shallow container, the coal produced a great source of heat.

The type of coal used in the demonstration required fanning and re-piling to ensure that the flames caught and kept to each individual coal piece. Once the coals were well heated, the pile was then separated with half being placed into a baking sheet that was wide enough to cover the top of the cooking pot. The dough, which was sectioned and flattened out, was placed into the pot a few at a time; the pot was then covered by the baking sheet. After ten minutes,



Coal Pot cooking in the old days.

After ten minutes,

the pot was uncovered to find the cakes cooking considerably fast and only requiring a few more minutes on their other side. When the first batch came out, they were immediately consumed with homemade jams and delight by the intern, the trust's executive director, Pamela, and Thomas Layer. People from the area were then encouraged to gather around to taste the next batch; the johnny cakes were met with approval. As the johnny cakes were handed out, some people expressed interest in the coal pot. Questions arose about how the coal pot functioned and what it was capable of cooking, which then lead some knowledgeable samplers to share their experiences with coal pots. Two teenage viewers soon tried their hand at fanning the coals and keeping the coal pot ventilated. At the end of the day, many were excited about the coal pot demonstration and the results: the community gathering for a historical demonstration, knowledgeable stories from local sources, and great food. The only actual downside to the event was the missing accompanying fry fish and fungi.

The Coaling Ladies of St. Thomas

By I-Dahlia Babrow

NOTE: I-Dahlia grew up on St. Thomas, and interned this summer at the Trust. She selected researching St. Thomas' Coaling Ladies and developing content for a web page as her internship project. I-Dahlia is currently a sophomore at the University of Virginia.

Coaling began in the Virgin Islands in 1823, increasing the importance of the port of St. Thomas as many coaling companies established coal depots around Charlotte Amalie's harbor.

The German Hamburg-American Line, the West Indian Coal Depot Company, the British Royal Mail Steam Packet Company, the East Asiatic Company, and the Italian Bronsted Company all established operations here. Both men and women worked for these companies, but it was the women who gained the most recognition; they became known as the Coaling Ladies of St. Thomas.

These women earned 1 cent per basket and \$1 a day (100 trips per day) and were paid with a coaling token stamped with the company's name. Although scarce, tokens are still occasionally located in St. Thomas. (One will be auction at this year's Gala on October 27.)

As time progressed, the Mexican Dollar became more important in local commerce but late in the 19th century it was being devalued. However, coaling companies continued to pay the workers with the Mexican Dollar. On September 12, 1892, the coal workers, both men and women, stopped working and demanded to be paid with Danish silver. Along the street they



shouted, "Dollar for Dollar", which later became the name of the annual march that is held in September in the Virgin Islands.

The demonstration threatened to become violent and both the army and the police became involved. However, before any bloodshed, the coaling companies agreed to pay their workers with Danish silver. This bloodless strike lasted only one day.

Research to date has not uncovered any lists of coaling ladies' names, but The Caribbean Genealogy Library is currently researching to compile a list of the coaling workers who were a part of the strike on September 12, 1892.

History has provided us with the name of the most prominent coaling lady - the legendary Queen Coziah.

From images depicting the Coaling Ladies, one can ascertain that their work was physically grueling. Once a ship docked, the workers would grab their baskets, fill it with coal and then head up a narrow and often steep gangplank that barely allowed for two-way traffic.

The Trust is supporting further research into the coaling ladies' rights and working conditions at that time.

Hassel Island Task Force

Reported by Charles Consolvo

We are focusing on fundraising to stabilize and restore the Garrison House, Prince Frederik's Battery and Cowell's Battery and Signal Station. Thanks to the generosity of Diageo USVI and the efforts of our fundraising chairman, Filippo Cassinelli, we are making significant progress. We are awaiting finalization of a Memorandum of Agreement with DPNR, and an agreement with the VI Port Authority for the assignment of a lease on Cowell's held by Edward Killibrew, who has graciously agreed to the assignment, before expending any funds on these significant historic sites owned by the VI government.

We have scheduled a series of tours for youth from Camp Wesleyan again this year, and have taken about 100 young people on tours over the summer. Hiking to and viewing sites is much easier as trails have been cleared, thanks to the efforts of Alan Wentworth and his crew at SeaTow, as well as the donors who have made it possible, the Vento Foundation and the National Parks Foundation.

The Virgin Islands National Park has received an \$8,000 grant from the National Park Foundation, sponsored by Disney, through which they hope to take 500 students to tour Hassel Island this fall. Plans are still being finalized for the Historic American Building Survey documentation of the Napoleonic War era structures, hopefully to commence in October.

The plantings for our Urban Forestry grant for landscaping at Creque Marine Railway are being grown as this is written. Thanks to the generosity of Michael Bornn and the shoveling of Aaron (Smitty) Smith, approximately 1,500 pounds of horse manure were collected and transported to Hassel Island for use as compost.



Smitty unloading bag of horse manure



Shore clean-up



Manure being dropped in compost enclosure



Clearing grass from planting sites



A volunteer crew from Rotary Sunrise and EAST cleared grass from the planting sites and cleaned up the general area.

Our thanks to Lesley Comissiong, Miller Lite and Premier Wines and Spirits for the refreshments. We hope to set the plants in October.

The VI National Park is in the process of awarding contracts to stabilize the lime kiln and make improvements to the dock at Careening Cove, both much needed projects.

Upcoming Events:

Sept 3

Labor Day, Museum Closed

Sept 14 Noon-2pm.

Traditional West Indian Broom-making Demonstration by Justin Todman at the Museum

Sept 15

Dollar fo' Dollar March.
Emancipation Garden

October 8

Columbus Day, Museum Closed

Oct 11

Annual meeting 6 pm
Windward Passage Hotel

Oct 27

Annual Halloween Gala

November 1

D. Hamilton Jackson Day, Museum Closed.