



The Welcoming Arms

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ST. THOMAS HISTORICAL TRUST

March 2012

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Physical Location
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Roosevelt Park West
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U.S. Virgin Islands

RECENT GRANTS

The Following Grants Have Been Received and Will Help Fund Several Ongoing Trust Projects:

- The VI National Park Service has received a grant in the amount of \$198,000 from the Department of the Interior to document the Napoleonic War era structures on Hassel Island. The project will take place over the summer, using interns under the guidance of a senior architect.
- \$20,000 from the VI Historic Preservation Office for Step Street Preservation
- \$25,000 from the Department of Agriculture for landscaping with native plants of the Creque Marine Railway area of Hassel Island.



*Highlights of
the 2011
Halloween Gala*



Our Mission Statement...

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

The History of PRINCE FREDERIK'S BATTERY (*Ft. Willoughby*)



Prince Frederik's Battery (re-named Ft. Willoughby by the British during their occupation 1807-1815) is located on the southeastern tip of Hassel Island, guarding the entrance to the harbor of St. Thomas. Shown is a section of a map of the harbor from 1780 with the Battery located by the arrow. Research in the Danish Archives, funded under a grant from the National Park Service, revealed that planning for construction of the Battery began in 1767, when it was proposed that a Battery of six 8lb cannons be constructed at what was then called Magens Point, when revenues were available, although if war commenced, it was to be immediately constructed.

Ft. Christian, (C) on the map, could not stop vessels from entering the harbor. The objective was to keep privateers from entering and seizing merchant ships. In 1776 an English ship

sailed into Frederiksted harbor on St. Croix, causing great consternation. Construction of the Battery commenced in 1777 and by 1780 it was completed. During this period, a total of 5,265.44 Danish rigsdalers was expended on construction. The next mention of the Battery comes in 1782, when a boat was purchased to service the Battery, together with a lock and chain. In 1786 an inquiry was made as to the best way to secure the cannons so they are not carried away by the sea. Apparently very violent waves had been causing a problem. The agreed solution was to install iron staples in the floor and wall of the cannon platform and to chain the cannons. This was accomplished, and two of the staples (ring bolts) can still be found on the platform today. During this entire period, a large number of barrels of lime were used, probably for whitewashing the walls of the Battery. It was recorded that the battery saved an English merchant ship from a privateer, and in gratitude, the ship captain provided the Battery with some gunpowder. Lt. Peter Oxholm, a Danish officer sent out from Denmark to survey and make a report on the fortifications of the Danish West Indies produced the map, to the left, and also the drawing below of the completed Battery, which provides identification of its structures.

Plan drawing and section of the Battery



The structure to the left on the drawing is the latrine and kitchen, the one on the right includes the quarters for soldiers, a powder magazine and a cistern. The terreplein (a flat space where a battery of guns is mounted) shows six cannons, and at the western end (center bottom of plan) a set of stairs "leading to a battery not yet constructed" which remains true today!

The Battery's only recorded battle, and the basis for the National Park Service American Battlefield Protection Program grant received by the Trust, occurred on March 3, 1801. Rumors of war with England had reached Danish Governor von Scholten on St. Croix, together with news of Danish ships being seized by the English. On the morning of March 3, 1801, von Scholten dispatched the Danish brig of war HDMS Lougen under the command of Captain Jessing together with the war schooner Den Aarvagne to cruise to St. Thomas to gain intelligence of the rumored war. In the event of obtaining such intelligence,

the Den Aarvagne was to immediately carry the news to St. Croix. Nearing the western end of the island of St. Thomas, the two Danish ships encountered two English ships, the sloop of war, HMS Arab, and the privateer Experiment. The Arab fired several shots near the Lougen to warn her to heave to. The Lougen apparently responded with a broadside, and a running battle took place, beginning about 4 in the afternoon, heading east along the southern shore of St. Thomas. Eventually, the Lougen drew sufficiently close to the Battery for it to join in the battle, and the Arab ceased its pursuit, unwilling to suffer damage from the Battery. The accounts of the battle in Danish records and English records differ significantly. Details of the battle will be forthcoming in the next newsletter article.

Painting of the battle between HDMS Lougen and HMS Arab



Despite this heroic effort by the Danes, on March 28, an English fleet of 29 ships together with approximately 4,000 men appeared off St. Thomas and the island was surrendered without a shot being fired. The English occupied St. Thomas for about a year, returning the island to Denmark in 1802. They again seized St. Thomas in 1807, renaming the Battery as Fort Willoughby, and remained until 1815 when the island was again returned to Denmark under the Treaty of Vienna, ending the Napoleonic Wars.

No records have been located documenting any activities at the Battery after 1815. There is a Hamburg America Line postcard from about 1900, showing the battery with cannons mounted, sent by an unknown passenger on the SS Blucher in 1907.



Prince Frederik's Battery today



Despite years of neglect by the Government of the Virgin Islands, the Battery remains remarkably intact, but at great risk of additional significant damage from hurricanes and the ravages of sun, wind and rain.

With funds from the grant from the National Park Service, the Trust has acquired an extremely detailed three dimensional baseline laser survey of the Battery, together with an underwater survey of the surrounding area which located several cannonballs undoubtedly associated with the Battery, and a detailed list of recommendations for stabilization of the Battery. In addition, the consultant for the project is producing a virtual three dimensional model of the Battery as it appeared in 1780. Shown below is an initial model of the Battery.

Virtual 3D Model of Prince Frederik's Battery



The St. Thomas Historical Trust is actively soliciting contributions to help save this very important piece of our history for future generations to enjoy. Please consider joining us and making a donation. call 340-774-5541

Hassel Island Task Force

Reported by Charles Consolvo

We have experienced a busy and rewarding winter season to date. In November 2011, we celebrated the grand opening of the trails connecting all of the historical sites on Hassel Island. More than 100 members, supporters and dignitaries attended the opening ceremony and subsequent hikes. The Trust has another hike planned for **Mid-April, date TBA**. If you haven't gone on one of the tours, please sign up by calling 774-5541.

In January 2012 the VI Department of Agriculture awarded the Trust an Urban Forestry Grant to be used to landscape the area around the Creque Marine Railway with indigenous species. This project will commence in March, 2012 and **we need volunteers** to assist. Please let Pamela Reid at 774-5541 know if you can help, especially with preparations for planting and the actual planting.

A roof for the iron cistern behind the Head House at Creque Marine Railway has been completed, thanks to the efforts of Alan Wentworth and his crew from Sea Tow, and we will have water available to irrigate the new plants.



New Roof on Iron Cistern

Thanks to the contributions from Dia-geo USVI, the Vento Foundation, the National Park Foundation, and the VI Port Authority, as well as the efforts of private individuals, we now have benches installed at key locations on the trails, the dock at the southeastern side of Hassel Island is more safely accessible, and the trails to Cowell's Battery and the barracks have been cleared and re-aligned.



Repaired Dock

We hope to host guided tours of Hassel Island at least bi-monthly, and hope that you will take advantage of the opportunity to enjoy the physical exercise, as well as learn about the fascinating maritime and military history of the island. We would also like to encourage you to become one of our volunteer tour guides. Just contact Pamela Reid, our Executive Director at 774-5541.

In February, a group of architectural interns sponsored by the Friends of the Park and under the supervision of Ken Wild, VINPS senior archaeologist, made measured drawings of the structures at the Officers' Quarters, which will be available soon on our web site, www.hasselisland.org.



Documenting the Officers' Quarters

Neil and Trudi Prior have made a significant contribution to the Hassel Island Fund, enabling us to commission Erik Miles to produce a follow-up DVD of the history of Hassel Island and our progress to date, which will be available in the Fall of 2012. Additionally, thanks to the efforts of Filippo Cassinelli, our fundraising chairman, contributions have been earmarked for the stabilization of the Garrison House, a significant landmark on the southeastern shore of Hassel Island.



Garrison House

The VI National Park has secured funding in its 2012 budget to be applied to stabilization of the lime kiln in Careening Cove, the only surviving kiln on St. Thomas, as well as repairs to the Creque Marine Railway slipway dock.



The Lime Kiln

Coming Up:

Hassel Island Hike
Mid-April, date TBA
call 774-5541

**VOLUNTEERS
NEEDED!**

Come help us with
the landscaping
of the area around
Creque's Marine
Railway.