

The Welcoming Arms

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ST. THOMAS HISTORICAL TRUST

Dec/Jan 2013/14



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@STT_Historical



President's Letter

Hello fellow Trusters!

A short note to let you know how things are going.

We are now offering twice weekly tours on Hassel Island and we will add more tours as demand grows. Please feel free to contact our office for special custom group tours and we will try to accommodate your request.

We also offer downtown historic walking tours and anticipate having these available every day that there are a lot of cruise ships in port. We will hopefully be adding the Fort to these tours as we now have permission from DPNR to access the interior to conduct tours.

The 2013 Halloween Gala was a great success. See the last page of this newsletter issue for some photos from the event. Thank you to Filippo Casinelli for all the incredibly hard work he did to organize the Gala. From ad sales to the solicitation of silent auction items. His presence on our Board will be sorely missed. Thanks to Penny Woods for the Silent Auction which she also worked very hard on soliciting, organizing and supervizing the night of the event. Thanks to all of the businesses that placed ads in our Gala booklet. This special event is our largest fund raising event of the year.

It is time to renew your membership to the St. Thomas Historical Trust. You can easily do this by going to our website: <http://www.stthomashistoricaltrust.org/membership-paypal.php>.

Your President,

Ronnie

Ronnie Lockhart

Our Mission Statement...

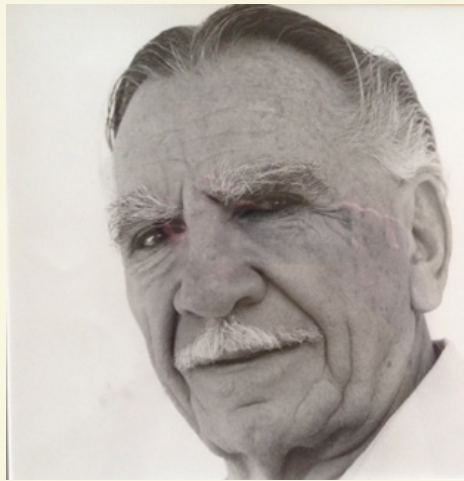
To identify, protect and preserve the historical identity, structures and sites, and cultural heritage of St. Thomas through education, advocacy and promotion.



Looking east across the harbor. Late 18th Century

HISTORY CORNER

by Isidor Paiewonsky



Isidor Paiewonsky, one of St. Thomas' great historians, wrote a column called "History Corner" for the Daily News-paper from 1973-1992

The following ran in the Daily News June 18 and July 2, 1973

NISSEN'S DIARY

An eye witness account of happenings in St. Thomas during the period 1792-1837

1793

The significance of St. Thomas in respect to trade and navigation rose materially in this year and the number of inhabitants increased. The war in Europe had much influence on the West Indies. Produce rose in

price and the sale of merchandise became important. A great many goods were sent to Europe and the vessels returned laden with produce. A large number of houses and stores were built. 104 persons became burghers and many foreigners resorted to St. Thomas.

Early in the morning of August 13, the weather indicated a hurricane and from 8 o'clock in the forenoon to 12 o'clock at night, it raged with dreadful violence. At 7 o'clock the little battery and an English ship with 400 slaves on board, which had arrived here the day before from the coast of Guinea and lay anchored in

the mouth of the harbor, were still visible from the town. But it soon became so dark that objects could no longer be seen at the smallest distance.

The wind carried the roof of a large house, 3 stories high and opposite to mine, over our roof and into the sea. Some empty coffee casks, lying in our yard, were raised by the wind over the tops of the large coconut tree and disappeared.

No one was able to go out, and it was impossible to resist the force of the wind which threw down the strongest men. The spray of the sea, mixing with the rain, beat and

scoured the face to such a degree to make it bleed.

At 2 o'clock P.M., when the winds abated a little, we were able to open a door or a window. The sight was dreadful. Of more than 47 vessels, large and small, that had been lying in the harbor, only 1 brig and a schooner were left. The brig was called the "Jane", from Altona. Many were lying onshore, thrown upon the King's Warf or in the Main Street and in store yards.

For some time after, no one was able to walk the streets which were blocked by fragments of houses, furniture, etc. Many persons lost their lives by this hurricane, especially such as belonged to the shipping. The English ship, mentioned before, as well as another English slaver lying in the harbor, were totally lost and a great many persons aboard them perished.

In the country, on the estates, the hurricane had done a great deal of damage. Many houses were blown down, many lime trees were lost and numbers of cattle destroyed. The scene of destruction throughout

town and country and in the harbor presented a horrid spectacle. Much of the shipping, especially schooners and sloops which had been thrown on shore, were recovered and repaired, but a great number of vessels were entirely lost. Never had I experienced such a sight. I had seen many storms and floods in Altona, but none to be compared to this hurricane. The most experienced navigator, who had been exposed to severe storms and bad weather at sea, had no idea of the violence of such a hurricane.

The wind veers frequently and blows from every point of the compass. The anchors and cables of the vessels become fouled from the continual drifting of the small sloops and boats which caused many of the large vessels to be set adrift. If this were not the case, many of the European vessels that are well fitted out and have good cables and anchors, might probably be able to withstand such a hurricane in this harbor. Loss would not be so considerable.

We were much distressed at this time for a glass of good water be-

cause that in the cisterns, and there were but 5, had become mixed with sea water, so that we were obliged to make use of rain water which collected from some of the houses in casks. A glass of clear water is certainly the most healthy and pleasant drink in the West Indies.

We were a long time without any fruit, greens and vegetables which are so necessary here for preservation of health. It was some time before we were able to eat bananas, peas, salads and various other greens.

Our little island looked quite destroyed. The trees were destitute of leaves. Everything presented so bare and desolate an appearance that you would have thought the whole had been burnt down. But through the aid of a kind Providence, we were blessed with refreshing showers of rain.

Trade increased and foreigners were daily coming to St. Thomas. More than 100 persons became burghers. A number of vessels were purchased, and in consequence, the Danish flag was to be seen more frequently on the seas. Many vessels arrived from Altona, Hamburg, Copenhagen, Flensberg and Bremen. All returned home laden with produce. Trade and navigation were in demand and rents rose very high.

It was a matter of great distress that so many persons died of the yellow-fever after this dreadful hurricane, especially among the seafaring class. Many of the vessels that were lying in the harbor lost the greatest part of their crews. The Danish brig "Jane" from Altona, lost her captain, the mate and her many men. C.P. Haycken, who came out with the brig as a boatswain, commanded her as her captain on her return to Altona.

We had much rain, thunder and



The Arawak Indians Greeting the English



Illustration of Neu-herrnhut, St. Thomas, circa 1777

lightening and several shocks from earthquake.

In the missionary church in Nisky, 25 children were baptized, 22 adults and 5 children died. In the church at Newherrnhut, 23 were baptized, 8 adults and 10 children died.

1795

Trade became more animated. Four or five respectable English merchants arrived here from St. Eustatius and commenced business. These merchants had vessels of their own which navigated under Letters of Marque and were allowed to sail without convoy.

Note: Based on English law at the time, Letters of Marque were granted by the King, or his designated authorities, to any or all English subjects, owners of vessels, who felt themselves oppressed or grieved in time of truce by



Agostino Brunias (1728 - 1796) Title: *A Linen Market with a Linen-stall and Vegetable Seller in the West Indies, circa 1780*

any foreigners, and where justice was flagrantly denied by that state to which the oppressor belonged.

By virtue of these letters, the holder

could attack and seize property of the aggressor nation without hazard of being condemned as a robber or pirate.

- I.P.



Nissen continued:

Many British vessels arrived here, also, under convoy and returned in the same manner with produce. The convoys sailed from Tortola three or four times in the course of the year. Much business was done under the Danish flag and the merchants in general made large profits.

A number of vessels visited the island from Hamburg, Altona, Flensburg, Copenhagen and Bremen. Produce was in demand and each year rose in price.

The French sent hither a few vessels which they had captured from the English convoys during the night. All these goods were usually sold at auction. The prices were stipulated in pieces of eight, bits and stivers. The English merchants who had arrived here lately did not understand this method of reckoning. They requested the Government to have it altered to dollars and cents in future, which was granted. After that time everyone commenced keeping their books and accounting in dollars and cents and everything was bought and sold in the same coin.

On the whole, this was much more convenient as accounts are kept more readily in dollars and cents than in pieces of eight, bits of reals and stivers.

The inns were always crowded and the streets not less so. At that time we had no public houses or taverns at which respectable strangers could be accommodated or lodged. It was common practice with foreigners to bring letters of introduction to some of our merchants. They were hospitably received and lodged in their homes. The custom of giving dinner parties was introduced at which hard drinking became usual, so that very seldom indeed were the guests permitted to return home perfectly



Agostino Brunias - *West Indian Creole woman, with her Black Servant, c.1780*

sober. This was particularly the custom in the English houses.

The hours for business or work and for dinner were altered. At 6 o'clock in the morning we now took coffee. We breakfasted at 10 and dined at 5 o'clock. The workmen remained at their work until 9, then went home for breakfast. They returned at 10 o'clock and remained until a later hour.

A great many tradesmen arrived here to the island, but again the yellow fever proved destructive to many, especially those foreigners who had lately arrived.

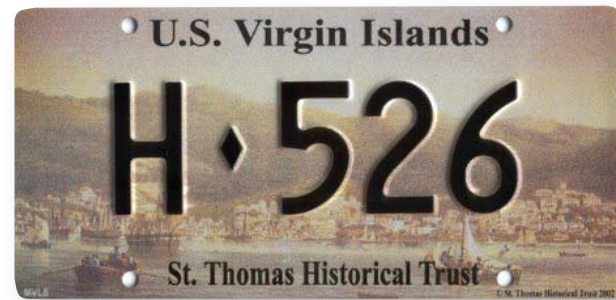
Sugar was bought at seven to nine dollars, coffee, sixteen to eighteen, Spanish cotton, fourteen to sixteen. St. Thomas, ditto, twenty-eight to thirty. The inhabitants commenced to plant cotton. Rum, forty-six to fifty dollars without the puncheon. Pto. Rico tobacco, seven to nine dollars. Gin, six dollars.

At Nisky, 23 persons were baptized. 29 adults and 11 children died. At Newherrnhut, 20 were baptized. 2 adults and 9 children died.

STHT will continue to publish these articles in future newsletters.

Show your support for historical preservation in the Virgin Islands with

ST. THOMAS HISTORICAL TRUST LICENSE PLATES



These attractive plates are based on Fritz Melby's 1850 painting of St. Thomas harbor. Through your contribution, and every time you drive your car, you'll show your support for the Trust. Profits from the sale of these license plates will allow the St. Thomas Historical Trust to pursue its mission:

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

Please complete this form and mail, email, fax or bring by the Trust Office along with your check or credit card information.

Plates can be legally registered at the VI Motor Vehicle Bureau.

The MVB will charge a one-time \$10 plate transfer fee for Numbered Series Plates and a yearly \$30 fee for Personalized Plates.

Allow 3-6 weeks for delivery. Please use one order form for each set of plates. *Make check or money order payable to St. Thomas Historical Trust.*

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY: _____ STATE/ZIP _____

DAY PHONE: _____ EVENING: _____

EMAIL: _____

- I will register my plates in the Virgin Islands
- I am purchasing these plates as souvenirs
- I am a MEMBER I am a NON-MEMBER
- I want to become a member of the St. Thomas Historical Trust.** Fill out information on form and send with check or money order payable to: St. Thomas Historical Trust.

Membership Fees are (check one):

- Student (under 21) \$10.00 Individual \$25.00 Family \$50.00
- Business \$75.00 Sponsor \$100 Benefactor \$250 Patron \$500.00

Payment Date: _____ Check # _____ Amt _____
 Cash

Credit Card: Mastercard Visa Discover Card

Number: _____ Exp: _____ Sec: _____

- Send me a set of Numbered Series Plates. Numbered plates commence with H for Historical. \$45 for Trust members and \$50 for non-members, plus \$6.00 for shipping and handling.

Total: \$51 for members or \$56 for non-members

- Send me a set of Personalized Plates. Select up to seven (7) characters and numbers only. No symbols allowed except for a dash ("-"). No offensive wording is allowed. Leave a blank to indicate a space. \$90 for Trust members or \$100 for non-members, plus \$6.00 for shipping and handling.

Total: \$96 for members or \$106 for non-members.

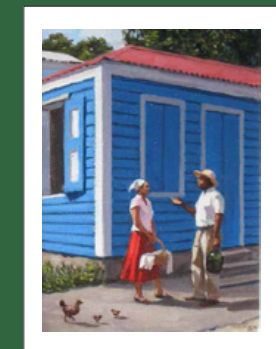
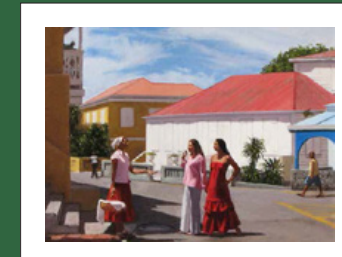
- Send me a set of Plates with a number between 1-10. Total: \$1000.

1st Choice: _____
2nd Choice: _____
3rd Choice: _____

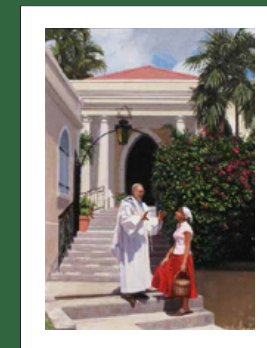
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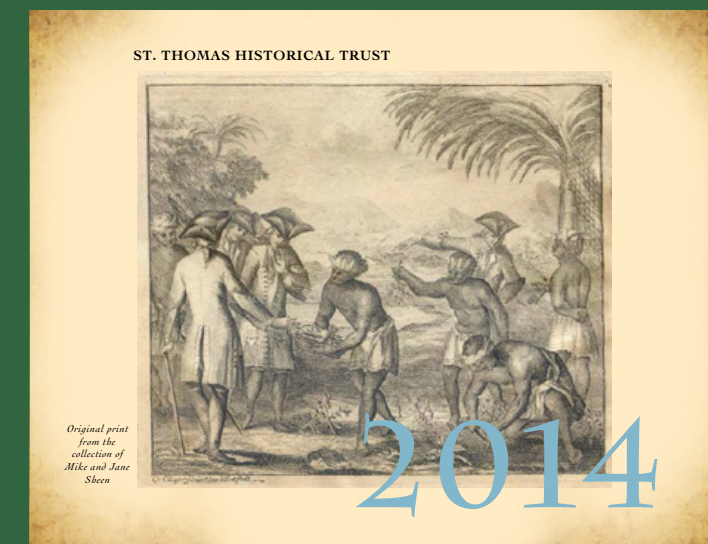
"Lady in Red" painting series images donated by Shansi Miller



and 2014 Calendars

Note Cards
\$15

Calendars
\$15



Call the Trust Office at 774-5541

Photo Gallery from the 2013 Halloween Gala

Saturday, October 26th
at Oceana Restaurant



VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Please consider lending us a helping hand.

Upcoming Events:

Twice Weekly Hassel Island Tours

Call the Trust Office at 774-5541 for next tour

January 20 - February 7

Archeological Dig under Main Street

Volunteers needed. Call Trust office at 774-5541

January 26 - February 1st

"The Lady In Red Visits"

Art Show with all sales of prints, books and T-shirts
by Shansi Miller going to support the Renovation
of Fort Christian • at Yacht Haven Grande

January 31st

Fundraising Cocktail Party

Learn about the history of Fort Christian

Yacht Haven Grande, \$50 per person

Call 774-5541 for Reservations & Info

February 2014 • TBA

Chair Caning Seminars

10 Lessons teaching how to do this almost lost art

\$100 for the series.