

# The Welcoming Arms

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ST. THOMAS HISTORICAL TRUST

May 2016



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U.S. Virgin Islands



@STT\_Historical



## *A Message from the President*

Good day, members and friends of the St. Thomas Historical Trust. It is an honor to have accepted the position of President, and I would like to take this time to thank the members and board. First, however, I would like to thank our past President, Ronnie Lockhart, for his years of dedication, service, and leadership. Following in his mother's footsteps of generosity, Ronnie has given selflessly of his time to this and many other organizations, and I am very grateful for his dedication to making St. Thomas a better place.

The mission of the St. Thomas Historical Trust is "To identify, protect, and preserve the history, sites and culture of St. Thomas." Your personal involvement is an important part of this mission. As the new President of the St. Thomas Historical Trust, I am seeking ways to give each of you more opportunities to get involved. An immediate example: this Memorial Day Weekend we are partnering with the St. Thomas Association of Roadrunners (STAR) to bring you a fun run of the historical step streets (*see inside for details*). We are also reviving our very popular Lecture Series as many have requested.

The Trust has been working to preserve historic sites in St. Thomas, with the most recent being the completion of phase I of the Bred Gade Step Street Project. We are also continuing our efforts of preservation and promotion of historic Hassel Island. I am currently seeking grants, donations, and other funding to continue these important preservation projects.

I would like to solicit your help in spreading the word about the St. Thomas Historical Trust. Direct your friends to our website at <http://stthomashistoricaltrust.org/> where they can see the things we do in our community and sign up to become members. Membership is critical to our survival, and our mission. I look forward to bringing more opportunities for you to be involved, so please bookmark our website and "like" our Facebook page where we will be communicating upcoming events.

Kind regards,

Malcolm M. Schweizer  
President, St. Thomas Historical Trust

## Our Mission Statement...

*To identify, protect and preserve the history, sites and culture of St. Thomas.*



## Lively Traditions, Tasty Food The 2016 Annual Coal Pot Cook-Off

Hundreds of people attended the St. Thomas Historical Trust's 4th annual Coal Pot Cook-Off, held from noon to 3pm on Tuesday, May 17th in Emancipation Garden. Office workers and island residents came out to sample the specialty cooking, while many of the other visitors to the event -- who were off the four cruise ships docked in the harbor that day -- expressed delight to find themselves actively enjoying an age-old Caribbean culinary tradition.



Tourism Commissioner, Beverly Nicholson-Doty and Dreena



This year's participating chefs.



Alexandrena Anthony, Second place winner.

Six local chefs had assembled earlier in the day to set up individual booths on the south side of Emancipation Park. They and their helpers had fired the coal or charcoal in their traditional coal pot stoves, atop which they settled their many stew pots or grill racks. Several cooks sourced their ingredients locally – further embracing a challenge to recreate the methods and rewards of old-time local cooking.

As the food cooked, artisans set up their tents and crafts along the Park's paths, and steelpan music by youth bands added ongoing energy to the gathering. Menus were posted: fish, chicken, stewed pork, conch fritters, along with vegetarian soups and stews. Generously-sized \$2 tasting cups allowed strollers to sample a wide array of the offerings, and provided clear evidence of the many tasty foods that can be prepared using the Caribbean's traditional, portable cookstove.

The event is a Trust fundraiser that invites everyone on-island that day to participate and enjoy our island's food, our history, and our hospitality.



"The Coal-Pot Cook-Off is a way to continue to celebrate and promote a local tradition that has characterized and sustained Caribbean life for centuries," said Charles Consolvo, a STHT spokesperson for the event. "Everyone is welcome, everyone is fed!"

The results were assessed by three professional judges. This year's Coal Pot Cook-off winner was Cory Magras, head chef at Schneider Hospital, with Alexandrena Anthony placing second and chef Rosie Pemberton of Fresh Bistro coming in third.



The STHT also acknowledges with gratitude the Virgin Islands Council of the Arts, the Department of Tourism, West Indies Company, Caribbean Food Service, Sea Chest, Merchants Market and Merchants Bank, & VI Waste Management, sponsors of and contributors to this annual event.



## Lively History – All Around Us Coalpots

Cooking – we step to the stove to do it every day, sometimes several times a day! But for centuries, the remarkable, homemade Caribbean stove was the coalpot.

Why are coalpots so remarkable? One reason is that they're affordably made, of local clay. They're sized small-enough to be portable. Yet they are also supremely versatile. A coalpot can be used as an oven, or as a single large burner to set a pot on, or as a barbeque for grilling fish or meat.



Coalpots are shaped like a basin, set on a hollowed cylindrical foot. Charcoal burns in the top basin, with ventilation supplied by the foot. Usually set outdoors in the yard (for safety and best ventilation), coalpots cook food efficiently, preserving natural juices and nutrients, while imparting a delicious smoky, earthy flavor to the food. That unique taste is still preferred by many people, especially for the long cooking of ground provisions and stews.



Who brought coalpots to the Caribbean? Some say that the clay version evolved as a "folk" copy of iron coalpots brought from Europe in colonial days. But scholars have found clay braziers and cookstoves in northern and western Africa, with examples in Nigeria and Cameroon remarkably similar in shape to the coalpots of the Caribbean.



Each pot takes almost three days to make. A potter coils and smoothes clay into the overall shape, then a day of drying is required, followed by another day of firing and cooling, before the coalpot is ready.

Coalpots have certainly not disappeared from our landscape – though over time they have lost their primary role. But down-island, many street food vendors rely on these small handmade stoves, as do some twenty-first-century households. And all through the islands – even more families look out their long-proven clay (or metal) coalpot as they prepare for the aftermath of a hurricane!





# St. Thomas' Only Surviving Lime Kiln

— *found on Hassel Island*

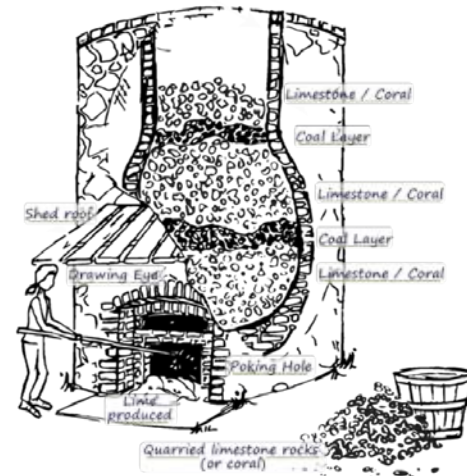
By Charles Consolvo and Kim Holdsworth

How did workers in past centuries make St. Thomas' impressive stone buildings? Many of these sturdy buildings still survive today; Bluebeard's and Blackbeard's towers, our several military forts, and our downtown shops are all examples. Island-made mortar was their secret ingredient, binding the stones.

Years ago, a number of kilns apparently operated in St. Thomas to produce the lime component essential for mortar. Lime is made principally by heating limestone, but St. Thomas has no natural limestone deposits (unlike St. Croix). Instead, St. Thomas workmen used shells and lumps of coral for the calcium carbonate. These were reduced to quicklime by being heated to 900° C or more in a lime kiln, then mixed with sand and water to make mortar. (Note: lime was also valuable in agriculture, and useful as whitewash for buildings).

## How does a lime kiln work?

Lime kilns have an ancient history, and those in use up to the 19th century were hardly different from the earliest lime kilns used by Greeks and Romans -- indicating the simple design's continuing effectiveness.



Here's a typical lime kiln structure. The lime kiln on Hassel Island, discovered only a few years ago on property belonging to the Virgin Islands National Park (VINP), was in extremely distressed condition. In 2014, the St Thomas Historical Trust bid for and got a generous grant from the Department of Interior, Office of Insular Affairs, to restore the kiln.



## How was authenticity ensured during the renovation?

Consulting with the VINP, guidelines were established for a historically accurate restoration, including testing mortar samples to insure that the new mortar was of similar

consistency and ingredients. Stone Masonry LLC, a local business with extensive experience doing historical restoration on St. Thomas and St. John, was awarded the contract. Work on the kiln began in December, 2014.



Figure 1 Stabilization of structure

The structure was carefully braced, with wood, with ties, and with a stabilizing collar at the top and around the base of the kiln, so that no additional damage would occur. Masons worked to replicate the original design and materials.



Figure 2 Restoration in progress

Although early lime kilns were frequently fired by wood, chunks of coal as well as coral and shells were discovered during this restoration, confirming coal as a heat source.



Figure 3 The Stone Masonry Crew

Restoration was complete by the end of March, 2015. For now and future generations, the lime kiln will be preserved to reflect an elemental piece of our earlier history.

## Just when was the kiln originally built?

One clue comes from the imprinted firebrick that lined the kiln's interior, stamped with a date of 1851. The kiln may be from that date or earlier, as the interior could originally have been lined with limestone or a similar material, with the firebrick applied later to restore it for a longer life.



Figure 4 The Lime Kiln Restored

Certainly, we've now ensured that 'longer life' for this once-common element in our island's working history. This lime kiln shows the resourcefulness of islanders who made the most of what was available. We urge you to access these resources also, and enjoy the rich history now being preserved on Hassel Island, including the lime kiln and the other historic sites.

Come join in our membership if you are not yet a member, and make a donation to help the Trust continue this important preservation work (visit [www.stthomashistoricaltrust.org](http://www.stthomashistoricaltrust.org), where you can do both). Why not contact the Trust for a tour of the island? Call 774-5541 for a schedule and to reserve. To get oriented beforehand, a wonderful, photo-rich resource for Hassel Island pre-history, settlement history, sites and current projects is at [www.hasselisland.org](http://www.hasselisland.org).

## VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Please consider lending us a helping hand.  
Walking Tour Guide (for next season)  
Board Members!

## Upcoming Events:

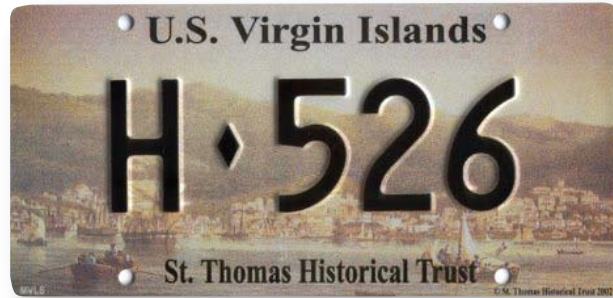
### STAR RUN Saturday, May 28th, 5pm Emancipation Garden

Trust members are invited to join former Trust Board member, Jason Budsan, and Roy Watlington for the Historic Steps Walk/Run sponsored by the STAR runners organization. Members can run, walk or volunteer to fill balloons and place them along the running route. Inspired by the restoration efforts of Nadine Marchena Kean, this run will highlight the many historic step streets that link the neighborhoods of Charlotte Amalie with downtown. The Trust has sponsored the restoration of the 99 Steps on Blackbeard's Hill and is currently raising money to complete the restoration of the Bred Gade Step Street that links Denmark Hill to town.

The 1.5 mile event starts at Emancipation Garden at 5:00PM. It includes the 99 Steps, then down Bunker Hill, through Catherineberg, Savan, Vester gade and Crystal Gade before returning to Emancipation Garden. Entry fees are \$8.00 for adults and \$5.00 for those under 18. Additional information: [jasonbudsan@gmail.com](mailto:jasonbudsan@gmail.com).

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.*

**COMPLETE THIS FORM AND MAIL WITH YOUR CHECK OR MONEY ORDER**

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

Application Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Payment Date: \_\_\_\_\_  Check # \_\_\_\_\_ Amt \_\_\_\_\_  
 Cash

- 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.

1st Choice: \_\_\_\_\_

2nd Choice: \_\_\_\_\_

3rd Choice: \_\_\_\_\_

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