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# The Welcoming Arms

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ST. THOMAS HISTORICAL TRUST

February 2021



Pamela Montegut  
*President*

Dear Trust Members and Friends;

Welcome to 2021, a bright new year for your St. Thomas Historical Trust. It is time to renew your membership and participate in a vibrant year of activities. Won't you please take a minute to renew your membership? <https://www.stthomashistoricaltrust.org/membership>.

2020 had its challenges – COVID, funding shortages, even a flood, but your Historical Trust soldiered on, as it has since 1965. A big thank you goes out to all of you who donated funds, those who donated their expertise and those who volunteered their time to bring the museum back on line. We still lack the funds to replace the office computer, but furniture and file cabinets have been donated.

So many volunteers helped in 2020, but I want to recognize the family of Kenneth E. "Duke" Richards. Mr. Richards passed before he was to teach our Caning Workshop, but his spirit lives on at the Trust, through the new caners who are ready to take on repairing antique furniture. His family supported the workshop being named in his honor and presented the Trust with a portrait to preside over caning instruction!

We recognize the hard work of volunteer Carole Pazik, who has undertaken the study and cataloging of our extensive historic bottle collection, as well as many, many days of volunteering to clean after the flood in our office and storeroom.

We'd like to say a big thank you also to members Shirley Honore, Anna Monica Villa, and to the entire Ruan and Boschulte families for all of their many hours of work in the clean-up.

As 2020 saw the continuation of the Trust's community programs to preserve traditional skills like chair caning, the Trust also supported the return of (COVID-protocol compliant) nightlife to Charlotte Amalie with the opening of the wonderful Gallery 81C, and reviving and maintaining our wonderful museum.

Raadets Gade, the location of the museum itself has undergone a wonderful transformation, with the installation of new stone street and sidewalk surfacing. Raadets Gade, (aka Crazy Cow Street for the old ice cream shop), will see the opening of a brand new ice cream shop practically right next door to the Trust!

We hail the arrival of 2021 because the Trust is ready to return being a dynamic preservation force in the Virgin Islands. Your membership in 2021 includes exciting developments, including:

- rebuilding of the dock on Hassel Island and resumption of Hassel Island Tours\*
- regular downtown walking tours for family groups\*
- more programs like the Kenneth E. "Duke" Richards chair caning workshop.\* Some additional proposed adult classes include traditional basketmaking, basket-wrapping a demijohn or bottle, and broom making. Children's classes are also in the concept stage.
- Historical Happy Hour select wine tastings by Zoom and perhaps, in person, when COVID relents.
- and a new lecture series, also via Zoom, the real story behind Herman Wouk's Don't Stop the Carnival led by Vince "Doc" Palancia, starting February 24. See inside to sign up.

These are just a few of the activities the Trust has planned for 2021. When the Trust can resume in-person social events, expect our annual Halloween Gala and other fun social outings.

Finally, please share this message with your friends and neighbors and invite them to join you in Trust membership. The Historical Trust serves all members of the community and invites everyone to join so that we can all continue to preserve, protect and promote the history, culture and traditions of the Virgin Islands. For convenience, here is that link again. <https://www.stthomashistoricaltrust.org/membership>

Sincerely, *Pamela Montegut*  
Pamela Reid Montegut, President

## Our Mission Statement...

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



# Annual Meeting Notice

*The St. Thomas Historical Trust Annual Meeting*

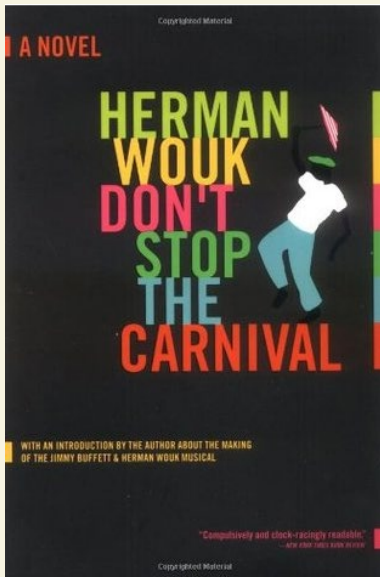
Tentatively scheduled for **March 24, 2021**, the Trust's Annual General Meeting is open to all members of the Trust. The meeting opens with an interesting presentation, followed by announcing the new members of the board of directors.

The annual meeting will be held via Zoom or call in (audio only), unless COVID precautions have been lifted.

## Presentation

**7:30pm AST**  
**February 24, 2021**

Some say that the novel "Don't Stop The Carnival" written by Herman Wouk, published in 1965, was based upon tales of The Royal Mail Inn on Hassel Island. Others say the description of the fictional Gull Reef Club was based on The St. Croix by the Sea Hotel on Protestant Cay in Christiansted in St. Croix.



And some say Herman Wouk wrote his novel from stories he heard while sitting at the bars of the Water Island Hotel, or listening to stories told by Bill Dowling, owner of the Carib beach Hotel.

This STHT short discussion will examine the possible origins of the novel based upon conversations with the living children of the owners of these properties and attempt to prove or disprove the origins.

## Volunteering for the Trust

**what's in it for you?**

For those who are deeply committed to spending time keeping our 55-year-old organization Trust running, there are opportunities to serve on several committees, including the Board of Directors. Currently there are openings for those with experience in digital communications, accounting, program management. Board members can also gain experience in museum management and winning grant writing by serving on the board.

2021 will be a dynamic year for the Trust, and your skills, interest and time can help propel the Trust into its rightful role of protecting and promoting the history, traditions and culture of the Virgin Islands. This requires active participation from the membership and the community. Members can join one of the committees that are outlined below to support the Trust's mission.

Volunteers are rewarded! Often the first to learn about new initiatives, volunteers are the members who take the most advantage of all that the Trust has to offer. Those who want to improve their skills,

like students, and those entering and rejoining the workforce can support and learn from experienced volunteers. And high school students can gain community service credits by volunteering for the Trust.

Marvelous opportunities for volunteers abound in the museum, as a docent, on Hassel Island as a Trail Guide or with the maintenance crew, or in other capacities. Like to plan events? The Trust needs your help to organize and support post-COVID festivities. Planning on a career in finance? Join the finance committee and support the Treasurer's team. Human resources? Working with volunteers will sharpen your management skills. See committees on next page.

## \$200K in Grant Funds

**Available to Restore Hurricane Damage to Historic Sites**

Your home may be eligible for up to \$200K in grant funding – DEADLINE 3/31/21!

Even though you have already repaired it, you may be able to receive funds to assist with costs due to hurricanes Irma and Maria! Damage from hurricanes Irma or Maria to historic sites can be funded by a grant available through the VI State Historic Preservation Office. The Trust encourages members and friends to apply for the program which has over \$5M to help pay for restoration in the Territory.

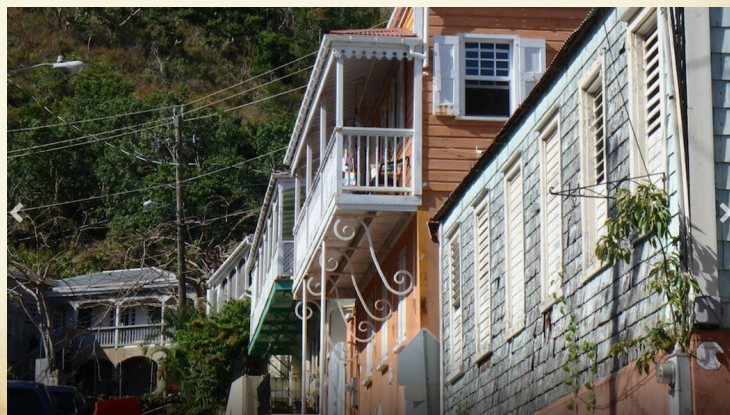
The program is largely a reimbursement program, but there is a possibility that some funds may be available to directly fund projects.

"It is a good program and we encourage the community to apply and see if their project is eligible," said Sean Krigger, Director for State Historic Preservation Office for DPNR Individuals, businesses, private owners, governmental agencies, organizations that are a public entity (non-federal), or a non-profit with proof of 501 (c) (3) status are eligible. Step one of the application can be found here:

[Grant Application Form](#)

Please do not wait for the March 31 deadline to fill out the brief questionnaire.

If you need assistance completing these forms, the Historical Trust is ready to help you. Just email [execdirector@stthomashistoricaltrust.org](mailto:execdirector@stthomashistoricaltrust.org) with your questions.





# Join One of our Committees

To join a committee, send an email to [execdirector@stthomashistoricaltrust.org](mailto:execdirector@stthomashistoricaltrust.org)

Dedicated to member engagement, **COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE** members possess photography, writing and/or digital publishing skills and can commit several hours a month to promote the Trust's message to members, and the community at large. In 2021 Trust wants to reach out to young Virgin Islanders and the world by expanding its social media footprint to include Instagram, TikTok, SnapChat as well as other platforms used by this demographic. For those who want to gain exposure in this field, you will be working with experienced marketing, publishing and copywriting professionals, this committee can really boost your skills and give you an island-wide network.

The Communications Committee is the official Public Information Office of the Trust and disseminates the Trust's message via broadcast and print media. Retired as well as active working press credentials are a big help here.

**THE EVENTS COMMITTEE** is not just another bunch of party animals, the committee members plan the organization's schedule, keeps members engaged with interesting things to attend. Attention to detail, and a commitment from start to achieving goals are the hallmarks of an Events Committee member.

**THE FUNDRAISING COMMITTEE** members generate the "fuel" that run the "engine" of the organization by raising funds to support the Trust's programs for preservation, education as well as operational costs. Committee members identify sources of income, donations, grants and bequests and then work with the public and businesses to encourage giving, as well as applying for assistance from government sources and foundations. Persons who have an excellent network in the business community, those who have proposal writing experience and those who want to add these assets to their resumes are excellent candidates.



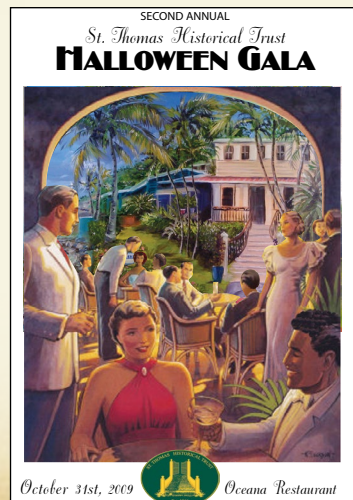
Annual Halloween Gala



Annual Halloween Gala



Coal Pot Cook-Off



Annual Halloween Gala



Local Artist Show



Downtown Walking Tours

**HASSEL ISLAND TASK FORCE COMMITTEE** also called the Hassel Island Initiative is a longstanding cornerstone of the Trust's activities. This committee sets the agenda for the Trust's activities concerning the Hassel Island within the parameters of our agreements with the National Park Service and the Virgin Islands Department of Planning and Natural Resources. Task Force members volunteer their time for a variety of tasks, including trail clearing, guiding tours, island cleanups as well as administrative tasks like liaising with the two partner government entities.

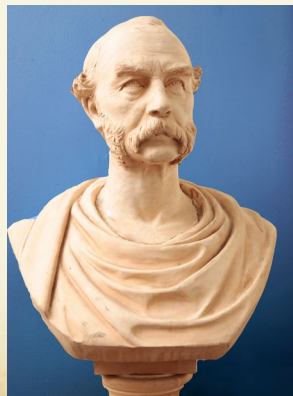
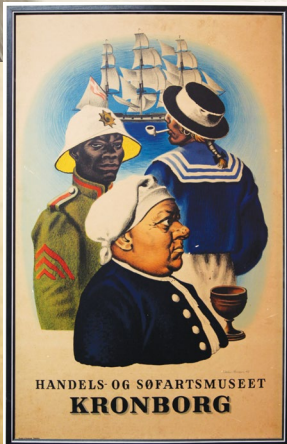


Historic Hassel Island



One does not need to be an expert Virgin Islands historian to be part of the **MUSEUM COMMITTEE**. Expert historians are helpful, but those who enjoy history, the arts, architecture, anthropology, as well as a variety of the humanities make excellent members of this committee, but most of all a commitment to keep our free museum on Raadets Gade open to the public is what is required. Members of this committee volunteer as few as one day per week at the museum.

Social butterflies will revel as docents, and it is rewarding to tell visitors real stories about St. Thomas, its history and culture.



## Interested in Serving on our Board?

Finally, there are openings on the Trust's Board of Directors, which is an elected position. Nominations are sent to the **NOMINATING COMMITTEE** in February or March who meet with candidates and come up with a slate for the Trust Members to vote upon at the General Membership Meeting held in late March-early April 2021. Running for this board means that you commit your time (between 4-10 hours a week) to supporting and governing the Trust. Board members set the Trust's agenda, provide value to the general membership and are responsible for fundraising and budgeting for the Trust operations, activities and events, as well as a thousand other details. Board members possess skills and experience that support the Trust's administration, including proven communications, finance, accounting, operational, organizing, and logistical experience. Board members must be prepared to push their sleeves up as a team to support Trust projects that are outside of their realm of experience, to see a projects through to completion.



# Caning Class

In late autumn of 2020, the traditional art of hand caning furniture had dwindled in the Virgin Islands to only one active caner on St. Thomas, one on St. John, and one on St. Croix. To prevent this art, skill, craft and tradition from being lost to history in the Territory, the St. Thomas Historical Trust, in partnership with My Brother's Workshop created a program to save this art, by teaching the skills needed to members the community.



## Challenges

Several obstacles prevented the class from beginning in October as planned, including a flood at the Trust museum – the venue for the class. The flood destroyed the Trust's office and required well over a hundred hours of volunteer cleanup at the museum, and then, even worse, Mr. Richards fell ill, and in November, he passed away.

To honor his wish that the tradition of caning in the Virgin Islands carried on, the Trust, with the help of the Community Foundation, contacted Lavonne Wise, a Crucian caner. Without a moment's hesitation, Ms. Wise agreed to take up the mantle, and teach this tradition, despite the challenges imposed by COVID-19, the distance or uncertain travel logistics.

Further, COVID interruptions in the global supply chain prevented half of the caning sets from arriving in time at the mainland vendor to be sent for the class. With a hastily assembled and sent infusion of materials on hand at Frank's Cane Supply, and a wonderful community response to an appeal from the Trust for privately owned chairs with broken caning, there were enough materials for all the students. In addition, Mr. Richards' family provided his own bin of basic caning supplies, which afforded the program enough extra pegs, awls (caners tools) and cane, so every enrolled student could participate fully.

The program was underwritten by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities and administered by the Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands.



## Background

In late spring of 2020, Kenneth "Duke" Richards agreed to teach caning at the St. Thomas Historical Trust, to ensure the traditional skill was not lost to history. Mr. Richards, along with his wife Yvette, who also knows how to cane, worked with the Trust to design a plan for the class.



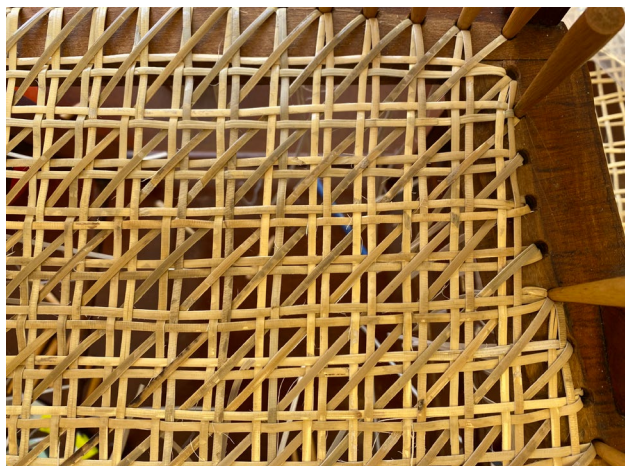




## Grant Work Performed

Ms. Wise and Pamela Montegut of the Trust revised the program so that the students could learn caning over two consecutive weekends, the timeframe in which travel and budget constraints would now allow.

The new program offered two 10-hour classes of instruction: a Saturday class and a Sunday class to take place on the first two Saturdays and the first two Sundays in December of 2020. Each day would include 5 hours of instruction, with students spaced according to COVID protocols. Students had time to work between classes and during the week at the Trust Museum Workshop, which remained open as requested.



## The Results

Twelve people learned the art of traditional hand caning as a result of the first Kenneth E. "Duke" Richards Memorial Caning Workshop. Eleven students caned stools that they were able to keep, one student brought in her own furniture, a settee. One community member supplied chairs for the class and one of attendees caned one of those chairs. Together, the group acknowledged their role in carrying the tradition forward. The Department of Tourism filmed the entire class for archival purposes and with possible public viewing opportunities.



The Trust is preparing for the next classes which will begin first weekend in March. The intermediate students will begin their first commission – seven dining chairs belonging to Mr. Pat Bailey!

## A Trade Preserved

At one time, caning furniture was a thriving industry in the Virgin Islands but in late 2020 there remained only one professional caner. The Trust's class taught over a dozen people this art, ensuring that this tradition continues.

A new offering of classes commences March 6- March 14. To join a class or for more information, email:

[execdirector@stthomashistoricaltrust.org](mailto:execdirector@stthomashistoricaltrust.org)



# TRUST CALENDAR

Please note that many of the events will be dependent upon the current COVID restrictions.

**JANUARY** – Museum reopens by appointment. Email the Trust at [execdirector@stthomashistoricaltrust.org](mailto:execdirector@stthomashistoricaltrust.org)  
Historic Downtown Walking Tours Resume. By appointment – contact [execdirector@stthomashistoricaltrust.org](mailto:execdirector@stthomashistoricaltrust.org).

**FEBRUARY 24** – Lecture “The real story behind Don’t Stop the Carnival” Presented by Vincent “Doc” Palancia. Please watch your email for the invitation. Free for members, \$15 for non-members. See the article in this newsletter.

**MARCH 6 - MARCH 14** - Caning classes resume – details to be announced. Contact [execdirector@stthomashistoricaltrust.org](mailto:execdirector@stthomashistoricaltrust.org)

**MID-MARCH** - Trust Board Election Ballots distributed\*\*

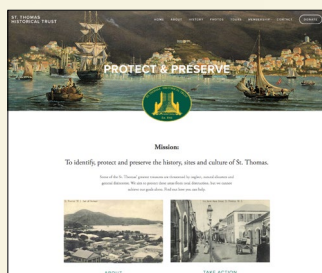
**MARCH 24** – General Membership meeting (Virtual). Topic: Apprentishship and Learning a Trade inthe 20th Century on St. Thom-  
as. Speaker: Mr. Hubert Raimer

**MARCH 31** – Transfer Day. Deadline for Historic Recovery Grant (see article)

**MAY 16** – CoalPot Cookoff in partnership with Virgin Islands Police Department and Department of Education\*\*

**OCTOBER 30** – Annual Gala\*\* Gala committee now forming. Email [execdirector@stthomashistoricaltrust.org](mailto:execdirector@stthomashistoricaltrust.org) to participate in its planning.

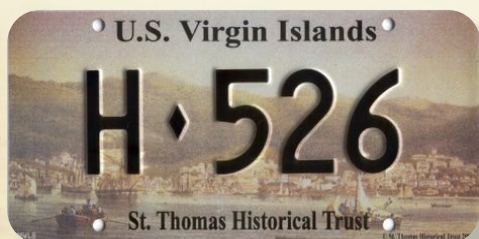
(\*\*COVID permitting)



## Check Out our New Website [www.StThomasHistoricalTrust.org](http://www.StThomasHistoricalTrust.org)

Still somewhat under construction, we invite you to see our new website. Hopefully this updated Trust site will offer easier navigation along with some interesting historical information. Browse past newsletters, catch up on the Board Members, order license plates & more!

## License Plates: Part of “the Drive” for Historic Preservation!



### Numbered Series License Plates

\$75 – Member Price / \$100 – Non-Member

### Personalized Plate

\$130 –Member price / \$150 – Non-Member

[click here to download the license Plate order form.](#)

### AS A MEMBER YOU’LL RECEIVE:

- |   |                                      |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| • Seasonal Newsletter                             | \$30 – Individual                    |
| • VIP Invitations to the Trust’s Parties & Events | \$75 – Family<br>\$125 – Contributor |
| • Discounts on Tours, etc.                        | \$250 – Corporate                    |
| • Free Museum Access                              | \$5000 – Lifetime                    |

Fill out the form online:

[Membership Application Form](#)