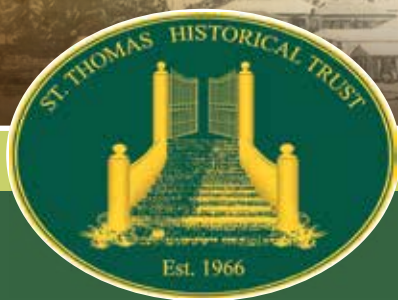


The Welcoming Arms

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ST. THOMAS HISTORICAL TRUST

January 2016



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A Transition

Ronnie Lockhart, our leader and president of many years, has decided to resign his executive position with the St Thomas Historical Trust. We won't be losing him entirely as he has agreed to remain as a regular Board member. Lucky for us as he brings to us a wealth of knowledge about Virgin Islands history and a vast experience of service from the many other historical preservation boards and organizations on which he serves.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank Ronnie for his many years of service as our president. He has been a wonderful (and witty) leader and has overseen the huge growth and effectiveness of the Trust. He has guided the many projects that the Trust has been successful in completing; the Hassel Island Preservation project, the Step Streets repairs, our educational projects, and the Annual Halloween Gala. He used his many connections, both personal and governmental, to expedite the cumbersome red tape that comes along with the types of projects taken on by the Trust.

The Trust will continue with its forward momentum but, we need more dedicated Board members to help us. We would like to invite any members that have an interest, to apply for a Board position. Voting for proposed Board members will take place at the annual meeting on April 6th at the Windward Passage Hotel. Please let us know a few weeks in advance of your interest in being on the St Thomas Historical Trust Board so we may add you to the list.



Our Mission Statement...

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

Peter Von Scholten, Mayor of St. Thomas



HISTORY CORNER

by Isidor Paiewonsky

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

When Peter von Scholten assumed the position of Mayor, (Stadshauptmand), of St. Thomas, 1818, he took full charge of the policing power of that island. One of the duties of the position called for the issuance of regulations telling the citizens of St. Thomas what they could or could not do.

A proclamation issued by "Stradshauptmand" von Scholten, Jan. 1, 1819, related directly to a catastrophic event that occurred in 1804, shortly after Peter von Scholten arrived in St. Thomas as a young cadet. This event, a devastating fire, practically destroyed the city of Charlotte Amalia.

Peter von Scholten arrived in St. Thomas the first time, Aug. 13, 1804. He was 20 years old. Exactly 3 months and 9 days later, at 7 o'clock in the evening, a terrible fire struck the city of Charlotte Amalia and practically wiped it out.

The fire started in a 3 story house in the heart of the business district. It spread so rapidly that within 10 hours, 1200 houses were burned down. The entire commercial area was destroyed and much of the outskirts of the city. To quote from an earlier column:

"The buildings on the waterfront area where the fire started were practically all 3 stories high, jammed tightly against each other. They were built of timber, much of it dry-rotten with wooden shingles on the outside and heavily tarred roofs. The merchandise, solidly packed inside, was highly inflammable; tar pitch, ship-stores, oils, resins, paints, sail-cloth, oakum, ropes. Also such combustible materials as raw cotton, dry tobacco, lumber, etc...."

Once the fire got out of control there was nothing that anyone could do but stand helplessly by and watch a



Portrait of Peter von Scholten

city burn to the ground. For the rest of his life, Peter von Scholten could never forget the experience. He developed a fear of fire that influenced his future actions particularly during those years in which he directed the erection of magnificent and durable public and private buildings. Everything he touched had to be as totally fireproof as possible.

Few persons in St. Thomas slept that night of November 22, 1804. After

Casimir von Scholten and his staff had done everything humanly possible to protect the inhabitants and to lead them to safety, the Commandant assembled his staff and family on a high vantage point and watched the fire burn itself out.

The fire started in a 3 story house in the heart of the business district. It spread so rapidly that within 10 hours, 1200 houses were burned down.

It was a remarkable spectacle. A strong wind, blowing from the northeast, leaned the huge central flame at times away from sections of the town. With each lull in the breeze, the great flames settled back and engulfed the houses waiting to be destroyed. High up on the hill, the onlookers could feel the heat and smell the acrid fumes of burning pitch and old wood. It was nightmarish looking down into a vast bonfire in a valley, the huge blaze illuminating the hills on one side, the harbour on the other. Vessels in the bay were silhouetted against the orange glare. A huge column of smoke blew south westwardly over the narrow strip where Orkanshullet peninsula, (now Hassel Island), joined the mainland.

It was not until the morning of Nov. 24, that searchers could enter the burnt out area. Deep layers of ashes and red hot embers made passage difficult. In the smoking ruins of the city, 2 dead bodies were found. Peter knew one of the victims. Only a matter of days before he had admitted him to his father's office on some private matter. He was a German merchant, a stout and good looking

man, Van Carnap by name, reputed to be very wealthy. Evidently he had been trapped in the cellar of his Commercial establishment while trying to recover money cached away there. Smoke must have smothered him. At a little distance from him lay the corpse of his slave.

This single episode in a night of terror and great danger to an entire population was a remarkable tribute to the efficient evacuation directed by Casimir von Scholten. Peter never forgot his father's strength, his efficiency and calm dignity in the face of overwhelming crisis. And crisis it was! A whole town, or at least the best part of it, lay in ashes. Millions of dollars worth of losses were sustained. There was no fire insurance on the island for dwellings or commercial houses or inventories

In the weeks that followed, Casimir von Scholten worked around the clock. He drove his staff equally hard. Everything was done that could be done within the limits of human endurance to give relief to human suffering, to provide temporary shelter for the homeless; to distribute relief supplies to the victims.

Peter was present at the official investigation into the cause of the fire. His father presided. The facts were shocking. A city had been burned to the ground through the carelessness

of a dull-witted, teenage servant who had forgotten a light on a bale of cotton. Wanton carelessness had started the fire. Once started, bad city planning, plain human stupidity and government laxity had provided a tinderbox.

As a result of the fire, Peter von Scholten made an important contact that was to influence his future. When word was received in St. Croix of the huge conflagration, Governor-General B. F. Muhlenfels left Christiansted in a government vessel for St. Thomas to personally survey the disaster area. Once there, he designated members of his staff to work with Casimir von Scholten. Before assuming the job as Governor-General of the Danish West Indies, Muhlenfels had been widely known as an outstanding engineer and city planner. A disaster such as had occurred in St. Thomas was a challenge to his special talents as a building expert. Muhlenfels offered his services to Casimir von Scholten in the planning of a new city and his offer was gratefully accepted. The months that followed were exciting ones for Peter von Scholten. Muhlenfels had taken a fancy to him and brought him under his wing. He taught Peter a great deal about city planning, engineering, classical designs in architecture and various other phases of building. Watching his son's enthusiasm and obvious happiness

with what he was doing, Casimir von Scholten jokingly reminded him that his forbear, Heinrich von Schulten had been Chief national master builder in Amsterdam, and that he expected his son to follow in the illustrious gentleman's footsteps. Slowly but surely the building of a new city progressed.

Large houses were being built on both sides of Main Street subject to the discipline of design, spacing and height controls established by Muhlenfels.

Tradesmen arrived from St. Croix and from the English Islands, especially carpenters and masons. There was much activity. American ships brought lumber and shingles, and the European vessels came laden with bricks. All sorts of ironware were brought in vessels from Liverpool. More and more Muhlenfels assigned responsibility to Peter and the young man took pleasure in carrying out the assignments. The streets laid out by Muhlenfels were much broader than formerly, and there were cross lanes, passages, small parks. Large houses were being built on both sides of Main Street subject to the discipline of design, spacing and height controls established by Muhlenfels.



Charlotte Amalie in the 1700's showing the many wooden structures which were eventually destroyed in the 1804 fire.



City of Charlotte Amalie before the great fire.

New tradesmen arrived, some from Europe, such as cabinet makers, goldsmiths and watchmakers who established themselves and received a good deal of encouragement. Likewise there was much activity in the harbour with ships coming and going. There seemed to be no shortage of money. Heavy trading invited more trade. People were optimistic. With the surge of prosperity, many of the former sufferers strove to recover what they had lost in the great fire. Peter found himself in the middle of everything, enjoying the part that he was playing.

The job of Royal' Weigher for the Port of St. Thomas was an important one. It placed the official in charge in a strategic position to know everything that was happening on the waterfront, in the harbour and on the shipping. Ship Captains and officers were important sources of information on what was going on elsewhere, particularly in the other West-Indian islands. Peter went out of his way to make friends with one and all. In a short time, through his job as Scalemaster, he established himself as one of the important persons of the harbour town. The Weighing area over which von Scholten assumed control was

located in a large building adjacent to the Custom House. This Weighing building was built of stone with a flat brick roof supported by heavy wooden beams. It had large openings to the south and similar openings to the north. In the center of the spacious structure was the weighing apparatus. All incoming items were brought into the building through the southern openings, were weighed and dispatched through the northern side. There were 2 permanent checkers generally, but on busy days the number was increased to cope with the volume.

It did not take von Scholten long to find out that considerable revenue was bypassing the official collection area. Certain ships agents took advantage of inadequate controls to unload their cargoes on privately owned docks and notify Customs officials after the fact. One had to take the word of the agent for what had been landed. The laxity of certain officials indicated a "working arrangement between officials and agents.

Von Scholten put a stop to this condition quickly. If "deals" were to be made, they had to be made with him. He went to Governor Christian von Holten and demanded remedial

action. Peter von Scholten played an active part in preparing the Proclamation that the Governor issued on the 22nd. Day of December, 1817.

- will be continued in next newsletter

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Please consider lending
us a helping hand.

Museum Guides

Walking Tour Guides

Board Members!

Upcoming Events:

Hassel Island & Historical Walking Tours

Call the Trust Office at 774-5541
for next tour date.

Saturday, Feb 6th Locals Tour to Hassel Island

Limited to the first 24 people who
sign up. Call "Doc" at
910-545-8288

Saturday, Feb 13th Hassel Island Clean Up

Have a chance to see Hassel Island
while helping our clean up effort.
Snacks and drinks will be provided.
Call "Doc" at 910-545-8288

Wednesday, April 6th Annual Meeting

Special Presentation on the Sole-
doid Archeological Dig

Tuesday, May 17th 2nd Annual Coal Pot Cook Of

In Emmanicipation Garden
Noon until 4pm

St. Thomas Historical Trust Preservation Stakeholders Lecture Series

“The Preservation Conundrum. When to preserve, when to let go.”

On Saturday April 4 at the Johansen House, St. Thomas, **David Knight, Sr.**, an historian on the Preservation Commission, was the first speaker in a series of St. Thomas Historical Trust Historical Trust Preservation Stakeholder lectures.

At the inaugural lecture, historian David Knight traced the historic development of Charlotte Amalie, emphasizing the diversity of our origins and resulting difficulty of coming together around a common vision.

He spoke about the many groups involved, on all 3 islands and the BVI, in the preservation of Virgin Island history, culture and architecture. Unfortunately, few of them talk to each other in meaningful ways. This results in lack of funding and coordinated will to move forward with any

one of the many plans that exist. What if all these groups had better ways to connect and were better able to communicate/coordinate their trajectories. What are current trends in ideas and history of historic preservation? We need to go deeper than the buzzwords like “adaptive reuse.” What does that really mean for our cosmopolitan and varied island cultures.

Recommendation: Find the will to come together and allow fresh ideas to develop. Find the common denominators and establish priority first steps that ALL GROUPS agree on and can find doable ways to garner support.

“Preservation and Possibility”

The second of the St. Thomas Historical Trust lecture series was presented by **David Bornn** and was held Saturday, May 9, 2015.

Attorney Bornn, a driving force behind the Downtown Revitalization (DRI) effort for Charlotte Amalie, gave an update on a few of the new possibilities coming into fruition as a result of the vision developed during the past 5 years by the DRI program.

Attorney Bornn presented a well-developed perspective on how to upgrade the town’s infrastructure, enhance resident’s quality of life and tourist’s experience, and stay within mandated historic preservation laws.



Third Series Speaker: Nadine Marchena Kean

“Preservation, Revitalization & Me.”

The third in the series of the St. Thomas Trust’s lively lecture series was presented by **Nadine Marchena Kean**, Director of the VIEDA’s Enterprise and Commercial Zone Commission, was held Saturday, June 20, 2015.

As a Virgin Islander who has been an economic developer for over 25 years in New York, Japan and now here in the Virgin Islands, Director Kean currently focuses on community development.

Her talk highlighted the most critical issues we face in revitalizing our historic towns. She focused on potential solutions and answered questions from the audience.

Director Kean also holds board memberships in the VI Genealogy Society and Caribbean Genealogy Library.

Lecture Series sponsored by the Vento Family Trust.



First Series Speaker: David Knight, Sr.

Keeping Cooking Alive - 2015 Annual Coal Pot Cook-Off

The St. Thomas Historical Trust hosted a fun fundraiser on Tuesday, May 19, 2015 in Emancipation Garden. The public was invited to watch as Island chefs demonstrated the historic art of coal pot cooking. Samples were served up to the public as well as to a panel of judges.

All the ingredients were sourced from local farmers, who were also on hand at the event selling their fresh produce. The Trust also sold Coal Pot Cook-Off aprons and T-Shirts as part of their fundraising effort.

Milo's Kings Band entertained the throngs of locals and tourists who sample old-fashioned island food with a modern twist.

Prizes for first, second and third place included a replica miniature coal-pot crafted by ceramist Jessica Rosenberg. The award ceremony was hosted by Addie Ottley.

Sponsors of the event were the Virgin Islands Council of the Arts, the Department of Tourism and West Indies Company, Sea Chest, Merchants Market and Merchants Bank.



*The 2015 Winners:
First Place: Dawn Wheatley
2nd Place: Maura Hennessey
3rd Place: Rosie Pemberton*



*The 2015 Judges:
(Thanks to Patricia La-Corte for organizing)
Cory Magras
Digby Stridiron
Denise George*



2nd place winner, Maura Hennessey, making Saltfish Papaya Pickup with green banana-parsnip cake



Coal Pot Cook Off volunteers from the VI Department of Tourism and The St Thomas Historical Trust.

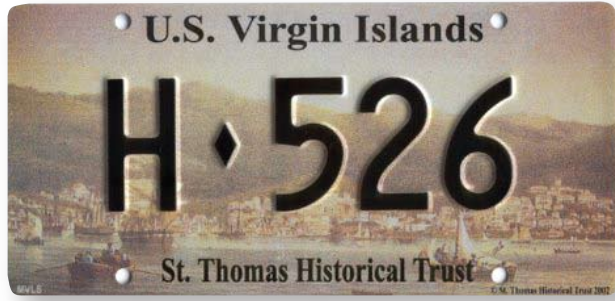


Local Farmers displayed and sold their produce. All Coal Pot ingredients were locally sourced from these farmers.



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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DON'T STOP THE CARNIVAL

EIGHTH ANNUAL
 St. Thomas Historical Trust
 2015 HALLOWEEN GALA
 October 31, 2015
 at Oceana Restaurant

