

Historical and Archaeological Society

The Museum of Antigua and Barbuda

“Knowledge to be of any Value must be communicated”



HAS Newsletter No. 128

January, February, March 2015

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Chairman's 2015 New Year's Message

By Walter Berridge

As we enter into a New Year 2015, we reflect again on the past year. Despite the continued economic times, decline in membership renewals and flat door revenues, the Museum continued to hold its own. Sadly, we lost several members and friends. 2015 poses new challenges paramount of which is to develop new strategies to increase our membership base and engage the younger generation. This became extremely obvious when a group of school children recently visited the Museum. None of them could connect with the refurbished locomotive which is placed at the entrance! For anyone born post 1970's, the locomotives are an anomaly! However, the sugar industry is an integral part of the history of Antigua & Barbuda.

Education is extremely technology and internet driven today. Therefore the Museum will have to get on board with the use of technology and social media to capture the interests of the younger generation. We welcome your feedback.

We look forward to completing our locomotives project and welcome one and all to come and visit the Museum and view the refurbished locomotive which is on display. Be sure to capture a picture or two or even a selfie and share it on social media.

Finally, on behalf of the Museum Board, our Curator Michelle Henry and the dedicated staff, we extend best wishes to you for 2015. We look forward to meeting you soon in the Museum or on social media.

THE SILSTON LIBRARY – A LESSON IN TENACITY

By Janice Augustin

The study of history is most rewarding in many ways, and one reward for the student of history is to see the triumph of the underdog, success in the face of harsh disadvantages. The story of the Silston Library, situated at 39 Redcliffe Street, is such a story. The local newspaper, *The Workers' Voice*, on Wednesday August 31, 1960, reported on a speech by Mr. Clement Silston, the founder of the library, in which he explained, "... lions in the way were overcome, and served only as a stimulus towards greater effort."

When the doors of the grand new Silston Library were opened on 25 August 1960, the event represented the realization of the vision of one man, Mr. Clement Silston, and the unwavering support of many other persons. An article by Gerald Price in the *Antigua Star* on Wednesday, September 25, 1960, recounts the story of the events leading up to the Silston Library, as told by the founder himself, Mr. Clement Silston. It makes fascinating reading. (Perhaps some enterprising teachers of Social Studies and History may want to prepare teaching materials available on the Silston Library at the Archives for projects and SBA's.) There are also wonderful photographs of the founder, in the library, as well as an excellent photograph of the building itself.

The library started at the headquarters of the Antigua Trades and Labour Union at 46 North Street in 1946. An excellent calendar, *Inspirational Pioneers of Antigua & Barbuda* published by the Silston Library Restoration Committee, 2014, traces the career of Mr. Clement Silston, and his work in building the Silston Library. According to notes taken from the Silston File at the Archives, by 1949, the library was incorporated, and fund raising began. The Government Archives has an excellent file on the Silston Library. There the researcher can read the various appeals made for help in financing the building of the library. *The Workers' Voice* on Thursday 24 February 1955 published an appeal giving an account at the Royal Bank of Canada, where contributions could have been made, as well as The Manufacturers Trust in New York, for the convenience of contributors living in the United States.



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THE SILSTON LIBRARY – A LESSON IN TENACITY *cont'd*

The acquisition of a suitable piece of land on which to build the library proved worrisome for the founder. The Gerald Price Article in the Antigua Star describes the search by Mr. Clement Silston thus:

Mr. Silston approached the Government for land but his efforts proved unsuccessful: and even his associates in Antigua could not help him.

But things turned out for the better when Mr. and Mrs. J. I. Hawkins, Antiguan living in America, bought lands owned by the Buckley family in Redcliffe Street, and in 1950 they donated a bit of land measuring 36' x 99' for building a library.

And so *The Workers Voice*, actually carried a headline on Tuesday 25 August 1959 which said, **“NEW SILSTON FREE LIBRARY GETS UNDERWAY.”**



The ground-breaking ceremony was held on Friday 24 August 1959. The list of the officials attending is interesting:

- Mr. Hawkins (the donator of the land), residing in New York
- Mr. P.A.W. Gordon Ed Officer
- The Hon. E.E. Williams, Minister of Public Works & Communication (Opening remarks)
- The Hon. Denfield Hurst, Librarian and Trustee

- Dr. King (Made special remarks about the strong support from Mr. Edward Davis of Market Street)

Pictures of the occasion were taken by Mr. Emil Pigott and Mr. Ottway Davis. (These names may bring back memories for some readers.) The contractor Mr. William Isaacs of Parham Road explained to the guests that there was going to be a 60' x 20' two-storey building, and the project would take approximately 10 months.

And so we come full circle, back to that grand opening of the Silston Library on 25 August 1960, with the ribbon being cut by children of the Davis family who were close friends of the Silston family. Mr. Hewlester Samuel was the first librarian, who is still alive in Miami.

The Silston Library still exists. The Silston Restoration Committee must be congratulated for its efforts in keeping the doors open and the library functioning. Mr. Clement Silston recounted his experience of being chased from the door of the Public Library on Lower High Street in 1910 because he could not afford the subscription fee. Today, that structure is no more. The Silston Library stands as a monument to his vision for a free library. He visited schools, encouraging children to read. The motto of the Silston Library speaks for itself – ‘Man owns only what he knows.’



Acknowledgements - Thanks to Mrs. Margaret Irish of the Silston Library Restoration Committee and the staff at the Government Archives.

GUIANA ISLAND- AN ECOLOGICAL GEM

By Desmond Nicholson

Off the north-east coast of Antigua there is a group of fifteen islands forming a marvellous wildlife area which is a very valuable asset for Antigua's growing eco-tourism efforts. One of the group, Long Island (now known as Jumby Bay) has been so developed that it can no longer be classed as a wildlife area, but it still boasts "the most concentrated hawksbill turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) nesting area in the Caribbean". Thankfully, the developers are mindful of the importance of the natural environment and how it can enhance the property. These turtles are being scientifically monitored and protected and are of much interest to their guests.

The largest of the North Shore Islands is Guiana Island, still undeveloped; it is home to many species of wildlife. Other smaller islands are scattered in the calm clear waters of the area, with picturesque names such as Maiden Island, Great Bird Island, Galley, Redhead, Rabbit, Lobster, Exchange, London Bridge and Hell's Gate Islands.

Guiana Island is close to the northeast coast of Antigua, immediately southeast of Crabbs Peninsula. It is only about three hundred feet from the main island so it is possible to attach cables which enable a barge to be pulled back and forth for access. It is a low island, with its highest point approximately fifty feet. It is almost two and a half miles long and about half a mile across. It was named by English settlers from Guiana (now known as Guyana) in about 1667. They emigrated to it when their country was surrendered to the Dutch by the Treaty of Breda in 1667.



Mangroves and swamps support a rich fauna and flora and fringe parts of the coast, but most of the island consists of xerophytic trees and scrub. The word 'xerophytic' is an adjective that describes plants that are seasonally devoid of moisture and can thus survive in dry conditions. Guiana Island's climate is drier than it is in most parts of Antigua. The Dagger or Agave, Antigua's national flower, is an example of xerophytic vegetation.

The following paragraphs refer to the historical resources of Guiana Island. It seems to me that this aspect of the environment is seldom taken into account in an Environmental Impact Assessment. We are proud of such well-known places as the Dockyard and Shirley Heights, but we have many other potentially valuable historic resources, so we should take them into account when environmental assessments are made. That way, we can care for them, and then rehabilitate them for education and heritage tourism when funding is available.



Pull along moat with car near Guiana Island

To return to Guiana Island, three different groups of people have occupied the Island in the past. The first were an archaic people from South America

(Continued on page 5)

Guiana Island *(Continued from page 4)*

probably arriving by canoe well over four thousand years ago. Their material remains can be found at various locations and consist of flaked flint tools and ground conch shell gouges or stone axes.

Some time after the birth of Christ, seafaring agricultural people arrived. These first prehistoric peoples on Guiana Island thrived because of an abundant supply of marine resources in the area. The later people, who were of "Arawakan" origin, have left ceramic sherds, showing that they practiced the skill of pottery making. Towards the end of this period, in about 1500 AD, Island Caribs absorbed themselves into the original agriculturists living on Guiana Island. Their war captives were used as slaves. We discover this type of history through missionaries' writings and by doing archaeological research on the Island, revealing remains which exhibit different styles.

The third group of people to use the Island was a manufacturing people, the Europeans of historic time. They planted cotton, sugar and ground provisions. These English people used white indentured servants and enslaved Africans to cultivate their crops.

The island was owned by Charles Tudway of Parham Hill estate in the mid 18th century and was leased to Edward Evanson, who owned two houses on Guiana Island. Hon. Edward Byam, Council Member, occupied one of the houses in 1749. Evanson died in 1760 in debt of £11,000, due to an extended drought. A new lease was made to his heir. In 1754 the rent was paid with 5 hogsheads of sugar, then worth £100. In 1812, Sir William Codrington III bought Guiana Island for £4,272 and it remained within the Codrington family until 1929. Coconut trees were planted on the island in 1914. Up to recently, the old Great House was in fairly good structural condition, but now it is uninhabited.

In 1991, the Guiana Island Society was planned, with the aim to create a wildlife sanctuary on the island. It was proposed that the Great House be restored to provide facilities for a reception area, a lodge, an office and an interpretation centre. Unfortunately this

plan was put aside when the island was sold to be a huge hotel complex.

Fallow Deer (*Dama dama dama*) Antigua and Barbuda's National Animal, were introduced into Guiana Island, as well as Barbuda, in the second quarter of the 18th century by the Codringtons. In 1740, deer meat was sold in Antigua for 2/6d per lb. Deer in Barbuda were sometimes caught by netting so as not to injure their skins, for it was intended to establish a trade in deerskins. In 1831, a sample deerskin was sent to England and 13 others were sent in 1834. This resulted in an out-of-pocket loss of 4/7d, because they were "much perforated with shot". In 1980 there were about 40 free roaming deer on Guiana Island.

The once large flock (60 to 100 in 1980) of wild Tree Ducks (*Dendrocygna arborea*) is considered to be endangered in parts of its range. "Such a congregation of free-ranging Tree Ducks almost surely cannot be found anywhere else in the world" (all are quotes from a Smithsonian letter dated 29 Sept, 1980). Also on Guiana Island in 1980 was a thriving population of the Tropical Mockingbird (*Mimus gilvus*), which is rare elsewhere.



"Guiana Island is of outstanding interest and is worthy of preservation".

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Guiana Island

(Continued from page 5)



Taffy and Bonny Bufton were at that time the only human inhabitants on the island, and had “created a sanctuary on Guiana that is unique in the Antilles” (Smithsonian quotes). They tamed and fed the deer that roamed the island, as well as the rare West Indian Tree Duck.



Now we may well ask if there is any way that we can heed the expert assessment of the Smithsonian Institute given in 1980, and re-create the environmental jewel that once adorned Antigua’s shore? The recent focus on Guiana Island is healthy, and let us hope that the dialogue will result in it being used in a way that honours its full potential, environmentally, ecologically, historically and economically.



“Continued wise management of the island, combined with some programme of limited access to the island, could probably render Guiana Island into one of the major natural attractions of Antigua”, so important in this age of eco-tourism.

Ole Antigua Christmas & New Years Traditions

<http://antiguahistory.net/Museum/cultural.htm>

LONG GHOSTS with their heads levelled to the galleries above the ground floor of merchant's homes, once numerous in the city, roamed the streets in search of Christmas donations. If a donation was not forthcoming, a string inside the 'ghost' was pulled which made the arms wave about, giving an added sinister effect, and it showed that the operator was displeased!

Long Ghosts were about 12 feet from the head to street level. The top section was a cylindrical shaped mask with cuts for eyes, nose and grotesque figuration of teeth through which a lighted candle would throw its illumination sufficiently to light the immediate surroundings. The mask was inscribed on both sides - a kind of Janus Head effect which gave the illusion of the ghost facing you though the operator's back was turned.



JOHN BULLS were replicas of the grotesquely masked African Witch Doctor with a bull's horns on the head. They were the dominating feature of the festivities in town and country. There was terror and excitement in the young and old.

John Bulls were tended by a 'Cattle Tender'. The crack of the whip he would tease the bull. The bull would then shoot off in the direction of the crowd of children or grown ups and plough through them and they would scatter.

The costume was sometimes just a sugar crocus bag with the head cut out and two armholes, with a big piece of rope around the waist. To absorb the blows from the whip they would stuff the back with grass or straw, like a hunchback. On his head he had a cow's horn clamped onto a rigid piece of cloth. His head was padded with a big 'catacoo', which was a soft support.

The John Bull generally wore a mask, but sometimes that reverted to blackening their face with grease and paint and sprinkling with a little fine chalk dust. They looked very grotesque.

Some of the best John Bulls came from the villages to town, but most of them were porters or stevedores, men who would hang around the rum shops on Long Street.



If any older Antiguan and Barbudans can contribute further to old time Christmas, please call the Museum of Antigua & Barbuda. We must remember these things.

Early Antigua Villages

<http://antiguahistory.net/Museum/cultural.htm>

VILLAGE BEGINNINGS (After Emancipation)

- 1834 Liberta was the first village to be built. Named after the word "Liberty"
- 1834 Desire to own land gave rise to villages, e.g.. Liberta.
- 1834+ Proprietors sold 30'x50' land plots at \$30. 2 room houses built.
- 1834+ Freemansville was the second village built.
- 1835 Greenbay was established after emancipation when people crowded into St. John's.
- 1835 Freed slaves sought land in the hills when planters denied them land, e.g. Hamilton's
- 1836 Dr. Murray's wife had an infant school of 30 pupils at Falmouth.
- 1837 There were no independent villages. Planters were unwilling to give land.
- 1837 "Ten acre lands" were made available for ex-slaves to settle off estates
- 1837 Near Grace Hill an estate sold in acre lots to labourers (Liberta)
- 1837 Free villages spurred on after Governor released Government (ten acre) lands.
- 1838 Ex-slaves owned 1037 houses in 27 villages created. (36,000 people)
- 1839 Many labourers had purchased land and settled in villages.
- 1840 Planters found it necessary to sell of some lands, e.g. c. Buckleys, Swetes.
- 1840 All Saints was firstly called Free-Centre Village
- 1841 May. First mention of Cedar Grove when land bought for a Moravian mission.
- 1842 A group of houses near Liberta was called the Hamlet. (Tyrell's?)
- 1842 There were 27 independent villages of 3,600 population (9,273 in 1846)
- 1842 Bridgetown almost non-descript.
- 1842 Ottos Hill, on suburbs, belonged to heirs of Bastien Otto Baijer.
- 1842 There is "scarcely a relic" left of Bermudian Valley town.
- 1843 Freetown's population grew after earthquake damage at Bridgetown.
- 1843 Many ex-slaves have purchased land, built houses and have many comforts
- 1843 'Quake damaged estate cottages. Owners refused to rebuild. Free villages
- 1843 The population of Willoughby Bay was removed to the upcoming village of Freetown.

A Heartfelt Thank You to Agnes Meeker *by Walter Berridge*

Agnes Meeker came back to Antigua in 1995 and joined the Board shortly after, so she has been on the Board for approximately 20 years. She took over the Presidency from Desmond Nicholson (with trepidations for those were hard shoes to fill) in which capacity she served for about 10 years. This post was passed on to Dr. Reginald Murphy about three years ago and since then she has served as Secretary for about the same amount of time.

During her tenure, she made several note worthy achievements. She headed up the Windows Project so that all of the windows were replaced in the Museum. She created several Power Point presentations some of which included – “The History of Antigua Girls High School”; “The History of the Antigua Sugar Factory”; “The History of Rum with Montpelier Sugar Factory”; two presentations on “Then and Now”; “The Antigua Sugar Estates”. She also planned four bus tours – “The North Shore”; “St. John's to Parham”; “St John's to Tranquil Vail” and “Sugar Estates in the middle of the island.”

Agnes still found time to search for artifacts for the Museum - copper, wash stand and sharpening stone from Guiana Island; a mail box from park behind the market; a bench from Mrs Dew, some papers and small artifacts from Montpelier Estate. She had the 1934 map of Antigua reprinted for sale in the gift shop. She over sighted two years of Christmas card contests in the schools.

Agnes assisted with articles for the Newsletter. Most recently, she collaborated with Doug Luery in getting four locomotives refurbished by Lawrence Gameson from the UK. She has done years of research on all of the sugar estates in Antigua that hopefully will one day be published.

Agnes decided to retire at our last AGM. We wish her all the best and thank her for her years of sterling service to the Museum.

New Member

The Historical and Archaeological Society & Museum of Antigua & Barbuda would like to welcome our newest member:

Ship Jolly Wrappers

FAREWELLS

The Museum expresses deepest sympathies to the families on the loss of:

- Ian Shoul
- Paul Meeker
- Clare Mc.Clean

Upcoming Events

JANUARY

- *January 31st* in the upstairs gallery, “*The Secrets of Forts in the Caribbean/Forts of Antigua and Barbuda*” documentaries. Featuring Patrick Baucelin and Dr. Reg Murphy. Entrance fee is \$20.00 all inclusive. Cocktails at 7:00pm, presentation starting 7:30pm.

FEBRUARY

- February 6th at 10:00am, GARD/FAO “Botanical Jewelry “Exhibition in the Upstairs Gallery. Artisans of Antigua showcase their jewelry made from seeds, and found forest objects

MARCH

- Museum Membership Drive Outreach : “*We miss you at the museum*”
Are you currently a paid up member? Please Email us at museum@candw.ag, we are presently updating our database.
- Heritage Education Digital Programme for schoolchildren from 2:30pm -3:30pm Mon-Thurs.The upstairs gallery. Multimedia and documentary presentations on history, culture and Archaeology of Antigua and Barbuda.

APRIL

- T.B.A. Antigua Sugar Factory locomotives, and their restoration – multimedia.



Fort James? Can you help?

The Historical & Archaeological Society Newsletter is published at the Museum quarterly in January, April, July, and October. HAS encourages contribution of material relevant to the Society from the membership or other interested individuals

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Historical and Archaeology Society

JANUARY, FEBRUARY, MARCH 2015 HAS NEWSLETTER, No. 128

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