

VIRGIN ISLANDS SOCIAL HISTORY ASSOCIATES

ST. CROIX AFRICAN ROOTS PROJECT

Launched in 2002 by the Virgin Islands Social History Associates (VISHA), a non-profit organization based on St. Croix (see below), the St. Croix African Roots Project (SCARP) is a unique historical documentation and research project involving Virgin Islanders, Danes and Americans in a collaborative effort intended to enhance knowledge and understanding of the population, families and individuals on the island of St. Croix during the period of Danish rule through systematic utilization of historical documentation, computer technology, applied research and educational outreach. SCARP's primary goal is to encourage a balanced, nuanced historiography of the Danish West Indies in which individuals of African descent are accorded identity, humanity, agency and assume a central place in Virgin Islands' history.

SCARP is being carried out under the direction of historian George F. Tyson of St. Croix, who is the Project Director, anthropologist Dr. Svend E. Holsoe of Philadelphia, historian/archivist Poul Olsen of Copenhagen and educator Roland Roebuck of St. Croix and Washington, who are the founders and Directors of VISHA. The Project Team has also included twenty-four data entry specialists in Denmark, St. Croix and the United States.

Funding for SCARP, in excess of one million U.S. dollars, has been provided by the Carlsberg Foundation of Denmark, the U.S. Department of the Interior and the Solar Foundation of Denmark. Additionally, VISHA has contributed over US\$ 300,000 in goods and services.

SCARP's first major product is the St. Croix Population Database 1734-1917, an extraordinary educational resource that will profoundly transform the way that Danes and Virgin Islanders understand their common Past, their ancestral heritage and themselves.

Focusing on the West Indian island of St Croix while it was a Danish plantation colony, the Database is a searchable, virtual archive, currently consisting of 1.84 million biographical entries, each with multiple pieces of information, transcribed from a vast array of historical records found in Danish, American, and Virgin Islands archives (see below). This treasure trove of information, which will ultimately contain over two million records, constitutes a powerful research tool that will provide scholars, educators, students, genealogists and others with easy access to widely dispersed historical documentation relating to the history of St. Croix and its multi-ethnic, multi-racial population. It will facilitate new historical and anthropological research. It will allow Danes, Virgin Islanders, Americans and Africans to reconstruct life stories and family histories of forgotten ancestors, thereby adding a rich human dimension to our understanding of a shared History. It will enable Virgin Islanders to investigate, analyze and reconstruct the Past from an indigenous perspective. And, very significantly and uniquely, it will permit thousands of families on both sides of the Atlantic to trace their ancestral roots to individual Africans and to specific African homelands (See the attached story of Venus Johannes as one example).

The Database has been hailed as having significant potential for historical research by prominent American and Caribbean historians. In the Virgin Islands, it has been strongly endorsed by Governor John de Jongh Jr., Delegate to Congress Donna Christiansted, members of the Virgin Islands Legislature and enjoys enthusiastic support from a broad cross-section of the community.

The Database remains a work in progress. Some 160,000 records must still be entered, and one million entries await verification and standardization. This work will be completed by March 2011.

Meanwhile, VISHA has begun making the Database publicly accessible. Public launches have been held in St. Croix and Denmark, and VISHA officers have made presentations to groups and organizations in Denmark and the Virgin Islands.

In July 2009, VISHA - in partnership with Ancestry.com, the world's largest family history website - began publishing the St. Croix Population Database online, starting with the eleven Danish West Indian censuses prepared between 1835 and 1911. This important collection can be searched for free at VISHA's website found at <http://www.visharoots.org>, or it can be searched for a fee at <http://www.ancestry.com/virginislands>. Collectively, the two Websites have already had more than one-half million visitors. The entire Database will progressively go online over the next eighteen months.

Also in partnership with Ancestry.com, VISHA is digitizing thousands of documents used to compile The Database, so that they too can be viewed online. This digitization work will be completed by the end of 2009.

Starting in November 2009, VISHA will be collaborating with the University of Southern Denmark to upgrade the VISHA website into an interactive WEB 2.0 format, so that it can be equipped with a more powerful search engine and be used to support a diversity of educational, research and tourism related projects. The new Website should be ready by February 2010.

VISHA is also partnering with the Virgin Islands Department of Education and the UNESCO Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade (TST) Project in Denmark in implementing a pilot project that will make the Database available for classroom use in 2010.

Starting in 2011, VISHA and its partners plan to expand the scope of the project (which will be renamed the "Danish West Indian Roots Project") to include the following activities:

- 1) Initiate a 3-year project to produce databases for St. Thomas and St. John. This work will be carried out in collaboration with the Virgin Islands Genealogical Society on St. Thomas, the St. John Historical Society, Ancestry.com and the Rigsarkivet.
- 2) Initiate comprehensive program of collaborative demographic research focusing on the former Danish West Indies. This work will involve Virgin Island, American and Danish scholars and institutions.

3) Initiate a multi-year education enrichment project that will incorporate database material and research findings, as well as historical maps and images, into Virgin Islands and Danish schools. This initiative will be carried out in close collaboration with educational institutions and educators in Denmark and the Virgin Islands.

4) Initiate a multi-year project that will utilize database material, research findings, maps and images to promote and enhance heritage tourism in the Virgin Islands and Denmark. This project will be carried out in collaboration with the Virgin Islands Department of Tourism, the soon to be established St. Croix Heritage Area, the Virgin Islands National Park and the Innovative Tourism Program of Southern Denmark University.

5) Help establish mutual heritage research and documentation centers in the Virgin Islands that would house project documentation, databases and other research material, and would facilitate cultural dialogue and exchanges. VISHA has identified the old, government owned, rum factory ruins at La Grange as an ideal location for such a center on St. Croix, and is working closely with government agencies and private sector organizations on that island, as well as with interested parties in Denmark, toward marking a suitable renovation of that facility a reality as soon as possible.

VISHA is seeking financial assistance within Denmark, as well as elsewhere, to help carry forward all of the above initiatives. Accordingly, we are requesting that the Cultural Committee incorporate VISHA's St. Croix African Roots Project into whatever programme may ultimately emerge to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of the transfer of St. Croix, St. Thomas and St. John from Denmark to the United States.

The creation of the St. Croix Population Database already constitutes a remarkable international achievement, thanks in large part to the major contributions of the people and resources of Denmark. It is hoped that Danes and Virgin Islanders will continue working together to expand its enormous potential to promote the knowledge, mutual understanding and good will so essential to overcoming the bitter memories of an often dark and tragic collective Past.

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501 (C) (3) Non-Profit Organization

Delaware & U. S. Virgin Islands

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THE ST. CROIX POPULATION DATABASE 1734-1917 has been compiled from documents found in the Danish National Archives (Rigsarkivet), the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) and various collections in St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands. The records found in the Database consist of:

1. Slave Trade Shipping Records 1749-1802. This data set consists largely of names and prices of enslaved Africans sold from slave ships to named purchasers and plantations on St. Croix.

2. St. Croix Slave Lists 1772-1847. The Slave Lists are annual head tax returns for all enslaved and free individuals submitted by all urban and rural slave owners on St. Croix to the government bookkeeper from 1772 through 1847. Essentially, these returns comprise island-wide censuses of the enslaved population. There are near complete data sets for the years 1772-1780; 1784-1787, 1790-1796; 1798-1800, 1818 and 1847. Partial sets exist for the years 1802-1811.

Each Slave List contains the names of all slaves and free individuals on the property. Additional information varies. Between 1772 and 1792, enslaved individuals are classified under the following headings: "capable", "infirm", "12-16 years" of age, "under 12 years" of age. Newly acquired Africans (bosals) are listed by name, and frequently the vessel from which they were purchased is identified. Deaths and births are also recorded by name, as are runaways (maroons). Occasionally, cause of death and still births are specified. From 1793, individuals are also classified by occupation (field workers, craftsmen, domestics). From 1804, individuals are also classified as "African" or "Creole". Family relations are often indicated.

3. Property Inventories 1755-1848. Over 6,000 town property and plantation inventories, listing enslaved individuals by name, gender and price. Generally children are distinguished from adults. Frequently, newborn children are listed with their mothers. Drivers, tradesmen, domestics, sick nurses, invalids, watchman and runaways are identified. Many nineteenth century inventories record recent deaths.

4. Population Censuses 1835-1917. Official censuses of the entire St. Croix population were compiled for the years 1835, 1841, 1846, 1850, 1855, 1857, 1860, 1870, 1880, 1890, 1901, 1911. All but the 1835 and 1890 censuses are complete. The censuses record each individual by name, age, gender, occupation, religion, birthplace, marital status, and residence. The 1841 and 1846 censuses also contain information on health, character and punishments of the enslaved. From 1855, families/households and family relationships are usually designated.

5. Free Persons of Color Records 1777-1834. These records consist of periodic censuses, lists and manumission records for the free colored population. Included are detailed censuses prepared in 1816, 1824, 1831-1832.

6. Church Records 1744-1917. Records of baptisms, marriages, births and deaths of slaves and free persons belonging to the Lutheran, Dutch Reform, Anglican, Roman Catholic and Moravian churches. Among other items, the baptismal records of the Moravian

congregations (which encompassed between forty and fifty percent of the island's Black population) list the individual's place of birth and, in the case of Africans, their "nation" or ethnicity.

7. Vital Statistics 1820-1917. This data set, with gaps, records individual births, deaths and marriages on an annual basis between 1820 and 1917. Most entries contain additional information about family relations. About two-thirds of this data was extracted from the church records, some of which no longer exist. The remaining one-third, covering the period after 1865, was compiled from data obtained directly by various government offices.

8. Vaccination Records 1823-1853. This data set includes smallpox vaccination records for all plantation slaves for 1824, and annual lists people vaccinated in the towns and plantations between 1829 and 1853. These records list name, age, gender and place of residence. Family relations are often noted.

9. Emancipation Records 1848. This set of records was compiled for all plantation slaves freed in 1848 in order to establish compensation amounts for the owners. One set is for the Christiansted District including the town of Christiansted; the other covers only plantations in the Frederiksted District. The set for Frederiksted District contains much more biographical data, including name, date and place of birth, occupation, family relations, as well as information about movements, marriages and deaths in the post-emancipation period.

10. Movements of Plantation Workers 1848-1870. These records trace the movements of ex-slaves between the plantations and towns of Christiansted and Frederiksted, during the years immediately after emancipation. They contain information about age, occupation, births, deaths and family relations.

11. Immigration Records 1850-1917. These records document the place of origin and biographical information for over 10,000 persons from other Caribbean islands who immigrated to St. Croix after 1848. They contain information about age, occupation, births, deaths and family relations.

13. Laborer Lists 1849-1917. This data set includes lists of laborers and land renters (called "squatters") working on individual plantations after emancipation.

12. Miscellaneous 1740-1917. This assemblage consists of police records, court records, auction records, runaway slaves, criminal lists, mortgage records, notary records, wills, probates, pension fund applications, property tax records, voter lists, militia rolls and lists of school children and their parents.

VENUS JOHANNES – A WOMAN FROM SENEGAL ON ST. CROIX

VENUS, according to her own declaration, was born along the Saloum River in modern day Senegal. She was captured as a young girl and taken to the island of Gorée, an active port in the trans-Atlantic slave trade. There she was sold to Anne Roussine Pepin, a prominent free color woman and wife of the mustee Nicholas Pepin, who owned and built in the infamous "house of slaves." She served as a domestic in the Pepin household until the arrival in 1800 of John George Maddock, captain of a slaving vessel from St. Croix.

Captain Maddock took lodgings with the Pepins, and there became so infatuated with the servant girl Venus that he offered to purchase her. Anne Roussine refused to sell Venus, but agreed to take one slave in exchange if Maddock would free Venus unconditionally and go through the motions of marrying her. The following morning the arrangement was publicly validated with a traditional Gorée marriage ceremony.

Venus lived with Captain Maddock on Gorée for about 2 months. When time came for Maddock to return to St. Croix she agreed to go with him on condition that he would give her bond to carry her back again to Gorée. Maddock consented and the signed bond was left by Venus in the hands of Nicholas Pepin.

Along with 61 enslaved Africans, Venus reached St. Croix in October 1800, with Captain Maddock. On her arrival at Frederiksted she was sold by Maddock to Jehodan Yates, daughter of his friend Captain John Yates. Venus resided with and worked for, Jehodan Yates in Frederiksted between 1800 and 1815, during which time she had four children - Charlotte, Elvira, John Frederick and Rosalina.

In 1815, Venus brought her illegal enslavement to the attention of the Danish magistrate, who conducted a detailed investigation into the matter. A decision was reached whereby Venus and her youngest child Rosalina were declared free, but her other 3 children were to remain enslaved until freed either by Venus or Jehodan Yates. By 1820, they too had become free.

Once free, Venus married John Johannes, a barber, and they had three children – Perla, Mary Ann and John Richard. She and her family lived in a small house belonging to John Johannes located at 36B Hospital Street in Frederiksted. John Johannes died in August of 1825. Prior to his death, he and Venus gave their three children a deed of gift to the Hospital St. property. Members of Venus' family retained possession of this property until the early 20th Century.

Like most free people of color on St. Croix, Venus struggled to sustain herself and her children. But it was not easy. She was so impoverished in 1839, that she was exempted from paying taxes on the Hospital St. property. During the last decades of her long life she was being supported by her children. Venus died of consumption in March of 1851. Her exact age is unknown, but several sources suggest that she was over 80 years old.

Venus Johannes had several grandchildren and great grandchildren, many of whom died without issue, or emigrated from St. Croix. However, through her son John Richard Johannes (1823-1876), a blacksmith, his grand-daughter Rosabel Johannes (b.1871) and her son Joseph Franklin (b.1893) there are many living descendants, who currently reside on St. Croix and in the United States. One of them is Alphonso Franklin, a writer and Frederiksted community activist.

Prepared by George F. Tyson from documentation found in the St. Croix Population Database 1734-1911.