

The Danish West Indies – building a colony

Ulla Lunn
Lunn & Co, Kagerupvej 42, 4420
Regstrup, Denmark.
ulla_lunn@yahoo.dk



The Danish West Indies –Building a Colony
Exhibition at The National Museum of
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**Travel back in time to an almost forgotten
chapter of Denmark’s past when The National
Museum open the exhibition ‘The Danish
West Indies – Building a Colony’ on April 2nd
2011.**

**The exhibition tells the story of the founding
of the Danish sugar empire, of enslaved
Africans and their Danish masters, but also
explores the beauty of the architecture that
still stands on the islands today.**

Denmark sold its West Indian islands almost a century ago, but the heritage of Danish colonialism can still be seen, both in the West Indies and now in the exhibition ‘The Danish West Indies – Building a Colony’ at The National Museum of Denmark.

Slave Stations, Forts and Mansions

From 1670 to 1820 four forts, two slave stations, three towns and numerous churches were built in the Danish West Indies, as well as hundreds of plantations, all of which comprise a rich architectural and historical heritage. Danes earned a fortune from the relentlessly hard labour of African slaves in the sugar cane fields. Riches they invested in stunning mansions and a luxurious lifestyle here in Denmark, including landmarks like Odd Fellow Mansion and the French Embassy at Kongens Nytorv in Copenhagen.

Witness the Beauty and Horror

The exhibition charts the founding of the colony and tells the story of Danish slave masters and African slaves, but also the story of the slaves’ descendants on the West Indian islands today. Witness the beauty of the architectural plans, maps and historical pictures. And experience the horrific stories of life in slavery. See where the nobility lived in Copenhagen – with their black servants. A series of video interviews with leading figures from St. Thomas and St. Croix today round off the exhibition, where the melancholic beauty of the architecture and landscape put the horrific story of the colony’s first 150 years in perspective.

The exhibition is designed and curated by the architect Ulla Lunn, and will subsequently be shown at Flensburg Maritime Museum and the Museum of Gl. Estrup Manor, Auning.

This catalogue consist of the exhibition text to read before or after visiting the exhibition.

THE EXHIBITION TEXT

INTRO

The Danish West Indies were a colony in the Caribbean Sea and consisted of the islands of St. Thomas, St. John and St. Croix. Approximately 90% of the population was of African ancestry, known in this exhibition as Afro-Caribbean. They or before them their ancestors were brought from Africa to The Danish West Indies as slaves. The rest of the population was European. They were: Dutch, English, Irish, Scottish and French. Danes and Norwegians were only a limited part of the European population and the Danish language was never commonly spoken.

The islands were under Danish rule from 1670 to 1917, then sold to the U.S. and renamed the U.S. Virgin Islands. This exhibition covers the first 150 years until 1820 the period when the colony was built and slavery was a part of the system. From the very start till 1755 the colony was ruled by the West India and Guinea Company, a trading company with a monopoly on both the slave and sugar trade. Then the Danish Crown took over and trade was freed, leading to high growth and the period usually referred to as the "flourishing". After the Napoleonic wars the sugar prices began to fall. The exhibition theme stops around 1820.

In the U.S. Virgin Islands to day the landscape, cities and architecture speak of the early days of the colony. The exhibition focuses on those who built the colony not least the slaves, who did the actual physical work. Many buildings from the Danish colonial era still exist, but several are overgrown and in ruins. Both plantations with sugar mills and slave villages

as well as forts, slave station and official residences can still be seen and experienced.

The story is told with contemporary photos of the U.S. Virgin Islands, Danish architectural surveys 1961-2001, with old maps, pictures and documents. Danish archives hold collections of pictures of landscapes, buildings, a.s.o. However there are no pictures that depict slavery, neither the hard work nor the severe punishments. However one can find ample written sources. The exhibition builds on what is available in Danish archives and a few German and American archives. The research behind the exhibition can be seen in detail on www.denvestindiskearv.dk

MAPS

When Denmark decided to enter the European race to colonise in the Caribbean, French and Dutch maps existed over the area that showed some of the conditions important to this decision. If the islands were to be colonised there had to be a natural harbour, fertile soil and fresh water. The hills, mountains and area of forest on the island were important conditions to know. On expeditions it was important to be able to recognise landfall and the silhouette of an island. These were often drawn on maps.

After the colonisation Danish civil servants, officers and engineers drew their own maps. It was in the interest of the Company that precise maps were produced, because it became the basis for dividing the parcels of land for sale. In that process the knowledge of where there was fresh water played a particularly important role, but information of hills and quality of the loam were also important if you wanted to invest in the land and means of production. The parcelling out of land on St.Thomas and St.Johns show the irregular and mountainous landscape of these islands. St. Croix is flatter, but the straight

lines on the map show a more systematic survey, parcelling of land and sale from the very start.

Each map documents which stage the Island has reached at the time of survey; how many plantations had been sold, how many grow sugar and how many cotton and what number of plantation owner had invested in sugar production plant. Many of the maps indicated who owned the different plantations; this gave a picture for the basis of taxation. Especially with the purchase of St. Croix and the Crown's acquisition of the whole colony mapping becomes systematic and is updated regularly. It will have given a good background to following the colonisation, cultivation and development of plant particularly on St. Croix. For example the move from treadmill to windmill meant that big sums were being invested in sugar production.

CONSTRUCTION

The colonisation of the Danish West Indies in 1672 was the start of many big developments of both dwellings, warehouses in towns and factories and homes out in the country. This created a building tradition in the colony of simple beauty often based on good workmanship, but there were rarely architectural drawings.

The built heritage was dominated by Northern European building traditions; arches above windows and doors, shutters with forged iron furnishings and hipped roofs. The Danish West Indian building tradition did not change much in two hundred years, but was adapted to the tropical conditions. The roofs resist hurricanes and the high ceilings in the living quarters ventilate and cool. The arched galleries along the streets in the towns create shade but are also a characteristic of the building tradition.

With the building inspector J.V. von Schopen's planning of Christiansted and Frederiksted from 1741 a norm for a Danish West Indian town was fashioned, which resulted in a uniform architectural expression. The traditions of the building trade were brought to the West Indies by the Europeans, including the Moravian Missionaries, gradually a highly trained group of enslaved and free Afro-Caribbean craftsmen emerged.

Many of the ships that sailed to the West Indies had on the way out up to 10,000 yellow brick as ballast. These were the modern 'Flensburger' which was produced at brick works near Flensborg Fjord and on Sjælland. In the West Indies they were used in the forts as well as private houses and for the fine detailing like arches and frames for doors and windows. The precise shape could also be used for corners of buildings and stairs. Building with brick demand mortar and for that you need lime. This was burnt in a kiln. Often on the beach as the lime came from coral, shells and coral stone.

PLANTATION

Sugar – 'the White Gold of the West Indies' – made the Europeans rich. Sugar cane became the predominant crop from the middle of the eighteenth century, ousting indigo, tobacco and spices. Only cotton was grown to a certain extent. The cane was grown on large plantations with slave labour. The work in the cane fields was particularly laborious and mortality among the workers was high. Land had to be cleared, the field had to be holed, sugar cane planted and later harvested. The working day of the slave was from 5 a.m. to 7 p.m. and in the harvest season there was a 24-hour work schedule.

During the harvest the cane had to be pressed through the grinder in a mill driven by wind, horsepower or oxen, and sugar mills still stand

as landmarks in the countryside. After milling the juice was boiled in the boiling house, the 'factory', until it began to crystallize. All plantations had slaves trained as sugar boilers – a highly specialized job. The sugar was left to clarify in a 'curing house', where it was precipitated and the thick brown molasses (treacle) from which rum was made dripped off. The cooper was indispensable on the plantation, for he made the barrels in which the sugar and rum were to be transported.

The buildings on the plantations would be densely clustered: the slave village, the houses of the planters and the European overseers as well as cook house, privy, chicken run, animal shed, a slave hospital and a cistern for the rainwater. The planter thus lived with a view of the whole production apparatus where the money was made. But some planters lived in the town, while others – especially aristocratic and royal plantation owners – kept well away from the West Indies. If the plantation had a mansion, it would often be a elegant, simple building with a few large rooms and a high ceiling for the sake of the ventilation, and with Venetian blinds on the windows.

SLAVE

The enslaved Afro-Caribbean quickly became the dominant workforce in the Danish West Indies, where they from 1700 represent about 90% of the population. Some were house slaves, others artisan slaves. The majority was field slaves and lived on the plantations. Here there would be between 20 and 200 enslaved Africans living together. Coming from Senegal to Angola on the West African coast they spoke different languages, belonged to diverse religions and traditions. During the 1700's more and more Afro-Caribbeans were born in the West Indies and a mutual culture and a common Creole language developed – Creole meaning a mixture of African and European elements.

In the plantation village neighbors helped each other with loan of food, and with minding the children. Of course they all shared the same fate and followed each other into the fields six day a week. Sunday, the only day off in the week, was spent in the provision grounds producing their own food. But there was also a time for dancing, going to church, relaxing, visiting friends and relations in other plantation villages, or going to the market in town where the slaves could sell the produce from their garden plots.

The enslaved Africans were valuable so strength and health was important for the price. Skilled artisan slaves fetched an even high price. Slaves were chattels, but the law recognized their humanity. For example, an owner was not allowed to kill his slave, but he was allowed to administer physical punishment. However, most important was it that the enslaved was robbed of his family, his homeland and his identity. The enslaved Africans did not have the rights over their own destiny.

TOWN

In the Danish West Indies there were three towns of importance. Charlotte Amalie on St. Thomas grew up west of the fort immediately after the beginning of colonization. It began as a single street, but spread up to the cooler and airier hills where the finest houses were built. Charlotte Amalie was ravaged by fire in the course of time, most recently in 1832, when more or less all the older buildings disappeared. The houses one sees today are built after the last fire.

On St. Croix two towns, Christiansted and Frederiksted, were established with straight streets as in the European Baroque city. In the years after the purchase of the island, Chris-

Christiansted became the Governor's seat in 1733, and the capital in 1755, and acquired large, imposing government buildings. The centre was dominated by the rich plantation owners' and merchants' brick houses with shady arcades along the street. Frederiksted never grew as large as planned, and also partly burned down in 1878, but was rebuilt in a Victorian colonial style.

In the towns the houses of the elite faced the street with a courtyard or little garden at the back, where one also found the dwellings of the slaves and a cookhouse. At first the Europeans and the free Afro-Caribbeans lived among one another, but in 1764 the Savane neighbourhood in Charlotte Amalie was founded specifically for free Afro-Caribbeans. In the two towns on St. Croix, too, special Afro-Caribbean neighbourhoods arose, but there the towns tended more to have large European and small Afro-Caribbean houses alongside one another. The free Afro-Caribbean residents were traders, innkeepers, washerwomen, prostitutes and not least artisans, who along with the slaves were responsible for all the work of building up the towns.

FORT

The first important task in colonizing an island was building a fort. They were built with high walls, bastions of Flensburg brick and cannons, so they could protect the colony against attacks by both foreign powers and rebellious slaves. A fort signaled that the island had been occupied. In the pioneering period, until the Danish Crown's takeover of the colony in 1755, the fort on St. Thomas was the centre of government for the colony, and had accommodation for the Governor and his civil servants, staff quarters for the soldiers, church, prison, kitchen, armory, a powder room and a cistern for collecting rainwater.

New African arrivals came from the crowded slave ship direct to the 'Negro Quarter', the space where they were kept until – fed, oiled and plied with rum – they were sold at auction. The fort was also the place where criminals, both Afro-Caribbeans and Europeans, were imprisoned. It was in the yard of the fort, too, that Europeans were given corporal punishment – concealed from the Afro-Caribbean gaze so that the Europeans would not be dishonored in their eyes. The Afro-Caribbeans were punished at the 'justice pillar' outside the fort as a warning and deterrent.

On St. John a fort was built with earth ramparts and palisades in Coral Bay. It was taken by the rebels in 1733 and was therefore subsequently furnished with bastions and walls. When St. Croix was purchased, Fort Christiansværn was built in Christiansted. Some of the workers were rebels who had been captured on St. John, now chained in fetters. In 1750 work began on the building of a fort in Frederiksted, Fort Frederik, which eventually was to form the setting for Peter von Scholten's declaration of the emancipation of the slaves in 1848.

REBELLION

Resistance to slavery was mainly on the small scale. Slaves worked slowly, pretended to be ill or were insolent. But the overseer and the bomba kept a watchful eye on them and punished anyone without a valid reason for absence from work – usually with a whipping.

Many slaves also ran away – 'went maroon'. Some sailed in stolen boats to Puerto Rico, where conversion to Catholicism gave them their freedom. Others hid with family or friends in the town, or tried to survive in the bush. On St. Croix there is still a 'Maroon Hill', called after small communities of runaway slaves. However, most runaways came back by

themselves or were captured. 'Going maroon' was the safety valve of the slave society, which could ease the pressure of smoldering rebellion.

But once there was a serious uprising, in 1733, when a large group of slaves on St. John occupied the fort and plantations and held the island for six months. It took several attempts and help from both the English and the French to put down the rebellion. All Europeans had a common interest in quelling rebellion so that the unrest would not spread through the region. Once it was clear that the uprising would fail, several of the rebels committed collective suicide.

The rebels who were captured were tortured, interrogated and sentenced to the bestial punishments common in 18th-century Europe. Some were executed, others were sold, and others again were sentenced to work in chains. The violent procedure was repeated in 1759 when a supposedly planned revolt was exposed on St. Croix. After that there were no attempted uprisings until the one in 1848 that led to the abolition of slavery.

MISSION

In the century 1730-1830 most of the Afro-Caribbean population converted from African religions to Christianity, a development that affected the whole of Afro-Caribbean culture, which thus lost many African elements. The reason for the change was not forcible conversion, but the extensive missionary activity in the islands.

The first organized mission began in 1731 when missionaries from the Moravian Brethren in Herrnhut, Saxony, established themselves on St. Thomas. The missionaries were artisans and lay preachers who worked for their living, and alongside this began to build up a network among the Afro-Caribbean population. Through

personal dialogue and the involvement of Christian Afro-Caribbeans as assistant missionaries Christianity spread from plantation to plantation and the community thus became a social network that gathered Afro-Caribbeans, free and unfree, across ethnic and plantation boundaries.

Some plantation owners supported the Moravians, others tried to resist them, since they feared that Christian slaves would be insubordinate, although the missionaries preached the preservation of the social order.

In 1755 the Danish Crown attempted to found an organized Lutheran mission, but with no great success. However all religious communities admitted Afro-Caribbeans, who became involved in ministries everywhere. In the middle of the nineteenth century almost the whole population had been baptized. The Catholic Church and the Moravian Brethren had most members by that time.

The Moravian missionaries have left large quantities of source material that not only tells us about the mission itself, but is also one of the best sources of knowledge about Afro-Caribbeans' individual stories and everyday life. The Catholic missionary activity in the Danish West Indies has on the whole not been researched.

FAITH

From the mid-eighteenth century the framework of religious life in the colony changed. In the early colonial period religious services were held at the fort and in private homes. But as the colony lost its pioneering character many churches were built – first simple wooden churches, later magnificent masonry buildings that became striking features of the street scene in the towns and in the landscape.

The churches belonged to various religious communities: Danish Lutheran, Anglican, Reformed, Catholic and Moravian. A synagogue appeared too. In the Kingdom of Denmark other religious communities than the Lutheran state church were only tolerated in special cases, but in the colony there was widespread religious freedom, which made it easier to attract colonists from other European countries. Only the Moravian churches were built specifically for the Afro-Caribbeans.

However, most of Afro-Caribbean religious life took place not in beautiful church buildings, but on the central squares of the slave villages, in the small huts or out in 'the bush', where Europeans rarely went. For most Afro-Caribbeans were not Christian, but had many different religions from all over West Africa, and people of the same origin gathered to practice a common faith and rituals.

With the birth of new West Indian generations the African religions were mixed and were gradually challenged by Christianity. But the sources testify that far into the nineteenth century food and gifts were sacrificed to African divinities, that there were gatherings where dancers were possessed by gods, and that the dead walked the earth unless they were given proper burials and sacrifices. African religions were never prohibited, unless the rituals were intentionally harmful, but many Europeans feared gatherings and rituals they did not understand.

WEALTH

From 1670 until 1755 the Danish West Indies were governed by the independent merchants of the West India-Guinea Company, who earned their money on sales of shares and plantation sites, and had a monopoly of the slave and sugar trade. It was mainly the absolute elite of society who bought the shares at the foundation of the Company: the King, the

Queen, princes, princesses, the King's illegitimate sons and the circle of aristocrats around the monarchy. But ordinary citizens too bought shares.

These activities grew explosively with the purchase of St. Croix in 1733. In 1755, on the recommendation of A.G. Moltke and H. Schimmelmann, the King bought all the Company's assets and the Company was dissolved. The colony thus came under the direct rule of the Absolutist monarch and free trade was granted.

The plantation owners and merchants brought riches to the Dano-Norwegian United Monarchy in the long period of peace from 1720 to the end of the century. They thus helped to create the foundations for Copenhagen to grow and flourish. The colonial trade transformed Europeans' access to luxury goods. The consumption of coffee, tea, sugar, chocolate, tobacco, cotton and silk exploded and moved from the upper class down to ordinary citizens and farmers.

This "Flourishing" era, as it was so poetically called, was based on a global trade that linked Europe with all continents. The prosperity and success increased for many people, but for the c. 200,000 Africans that the Danes transported to the West Indies as slaves, there was a direct connection between the economic growth and a life of brutal compulsory relocations, loss of families and friends, raw exploitation and miserable living conditions.

PAGE

In 1689 the summer palace Sophie Amalienborg burned down during a public opera performance. Many people perished, including 'the Queen's Moor', Christian Carl. The story of the fire is one of many examples where boys and young men born in Africa or the Caribbean suddenly appear in the history of Copenhagen

in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as pages or servants.

A few of the pages were painted together with their owners, as this signaled great riches and thus the capacity to consume exotic commodities – including people. In the paintings the slave often wears a neck ring, showing his slave status. A turban and a pearl in his ear underscore the exotic element. It was members of the Royal Family and the aristocracy who were portrayed with a page. They owned shares and plantations, but they did not travel to the colonies themselves. It is at the castles and the mansions in Frederikstaden of Copenhagen that we find the first pages – presumably sent home from the Company's plantations.

A little later, in the eighteenth century, slaves also appeared in Copenhagen bourgeois homes. Wealthy commoners who had themselves been in the West Indies now also brought slaves home with them. Among the bourgeoisie the slaves functioned more as ordinary servants, and they were not portrayed as decorative elements with their masters.

Behind the portraits and lists of names with the designations Negro, or Moor many strange and often tragic human destinies are concealed. At the same time the very presence of these people in the city testifies that Copenhagen was an international city with many different cultural inputs.

BIOGRAPHIES ON KEY PERSONS IN THE NARRATIVE OF THE FORMER DANISH WEST INDIES 1670 – 1820

ANTON ULRICH

Anton was born on St. Thomas, but as a youth became a 'chamber Moor' i.e. a page, to F.A.

Danneskjold-Laurvig in Copenhagen. There he met N.L. Zinzendorf, leader of the Moravian Brethren. They spoke about the lack of Christianity among the Afro-Caribbeans, and Anton was invited on a visit to Herrnhut, where his moving story inspired the Moravians to start a mission on St. Thomas. After a few more years in Copenhagen Anton was freed and went back to St. Thomas, where he acquired his own plantation. He then lived with both a wife and a mistress and rejected all contact with the missionaries and their church. In 1756 he hanged himself behind his house and was buried close by – an African custom that was widespread in the West Indies. This ended a life lived in the transatlantic world, a life which despite good material conditions was apparently not so easy.

DIMNA BELINDA BENEBA

Dimna was born in the Senegambia region of West Africa. As a young woman she was sent to St. Croix on the slave ship Ernst v. Schimmelmann and was bought by Peter Lotharius Oxholm in 1784. He gave her the name Belinda. In 1802 she was baptized by the Moravian Brethren and surnamed Beneba. She lived and worked on Oxholm's plantation Concordia for 36 years until she died in 1820. She experienced being sold six times in her life: in Africa, on St. Croix and each time the plantation changed ownership. In the reality of the slave society she was a survivor. Of 24 slaves who came to Concordia with her, half had died after six years. She had two sons with two different men: the coppersmith Hendric, born in Africa, and the house slave Harry, who was a Creole: Jacob was born in 1802 and reached the age of 28; George, born in 1806, reached 41. Both worked their whole lives, like their mother, in the sugar-cane fields on Concordia. A single grandchild died in infancy. Dimna's family never experienced freedom, as

all her descendants had gone when slavery was abolished in 1848.

JOHANN LORENTZ CARSTENS, ennobled as CASTENSCHIOLD

J.L. Carstens was a Danish Creole born on St. Thomas. At the age of 16 he inherited two plantations. In 1728 he married his great love Jacoba von Holten, also a Creole. She gave her name to his ship *Vrou Jacoba*, which sailed in the Lübeck trade. As the name shows, Dutch was the everyday language for Euro-Creoles on St. Thomas – including those of Danish origin. Carstens travelled several times to Europe and North America as a merchant and as a spokesman for the planters on St. Thomas. In 1739 he moved to Denmark and took lodgings in Ny Kongensgade in Copenhagen with his family and several slaves he had brought with him. He advised King Christian VI on sugar-growing and lived on the earnings of his West Indian possessions. In 1745 he was ennobled as Castenschiold and bought the manor Knabstrup near Holbæk. He died in 1747.

DAMMA MAROTTA MADLENA

Damma was born in the kingdom of Popo in West Africa at the end of the seventeenth century. As a young woman she was enslaved and taken to St. Thomas. She became a field slave on the Mosquito Bay plantation owned by Johan Lorentz Carstens and given the name Marotta. She was one of the few who were freed, and after that she lived in the town with her husband Djacki, also from Popo. In 1737 they were baptized Madlena and Joseph and received into the Moravian Brethren. She became an assistant missionary and an elder of the church and is thus an example of the cultural change that the transatlantic slave trade brought with it. Nevertheless she held

on to her African identity. She continued to sacrifice to her ancestors or African gods, and still called herself Damma when she spoke her African language. Her story shows that despite adaptation to life in the colony, neither memories nor African customs disappeared completely. Damma Marotta Madlena died in 1747.

SIMON LAMAR

Simon Lamar was a slave and was of mixed European and African origin, a so-called 'mulatto'. He was born on the Dutch Caribbean island of St. Eustace, from which many colonists and slaves came to the newly founded Danish colony on St. Thomas. In 1674 Governor Jørgen Iversen Dyppel took Simon on exchange for a period of seven years. He was worth 1800 pounds of sugar – a considerable value, for he was the indispensable mason who was to supervise the erection of the fort. He was given clothing as a free European servant – but no wages. His work on the fort was completed as planned, and in the 1680s he was as a free man and the owner of a plantation. He married Ebbonetie Bokolli from the British Caribbean island Nevis, and they had at least one son – Martin, who was baptized in 1691. Simon Lamar's work stands to this day as the largest and oldest monument in the islands.

ELSE GERTRUDE LUND CHALLANDER

Else was one of five slaves of the plantation manager Carl Gustav Lund, who lived in Frederiksted with his family. Else purchased her freedom in 1779, and subsequently she both bought and built several town houses and rented them out. She also owned slaves, all of whom were baptized. In 1792 she went with two other free Afro-Caribbeans on a 'scientific expedition' to Fort Christiansborg on the Guinea Coast, but came back to St. Croix

the next year, because those she was to meet never turned up. Perhaps her object with the journey to Africa was to missionize. In Frederiksted she became an assistant missionary in the Lutheran church, and in 1805 she became the supervisor of the church. She acted as godmother at 29 christenings. In 1809 she married a free man from the community, Benjamin Challander. They lived together in Else's house until his death in 1812. Else probably died in 1814 – a strong, free woman who was a driving force in the town and church life of Frederiksted.

PETER TONGOLO

Peter Tongolo was a priceless enslaved carpenter owned by Governor Frederik Moth. Peter's price was 3-4 times as high as other carpenters. Never the less he was able to buy his own freedom in 1752. He earned well on building, renting out or selling the houses. The year after he bought the woman Cato/Catherina and her seven children of Adrian van Beverhoudt; one of the wealthiest planters on the island. From then he built his construction company and 'dynasty' and bought a plantation ground by Christiansted and named it 'Cathrina's Hope'. He owned numerous houses in Christiansted and has been involved in a large part of the buildings of the town. Tongolo is the name of several towns in Africa and indicates that Peter held on to his African background. He was also the spokesman of the free Afro-Caribbean community in relation to the authorities where he would be present at court cases. He witnessed baptizing, weddings and funerals and lent money to his neighbor. All in all he was a strong resource in the local community. In 1758 he was appointed Captain of the Free Colored Militia that should help keep up law and order but also was sent off to capture runaway slaves. The copperplate shows a view

of Christiansted and 'Capitain Dongerlo's' Place Cathrina's Hope. Oldendorp 1767.

ENGELBRET HESSELBERG 1728 - 1788

Englebret Hesselberg was Norwegian and came from a large estate in Ringerike. He was a lawyer and he became a judge in Christiansted. He owned several plantations including Waldberggard in the West End Quarter, and a plot of meadowland at Sandypoint still bears his name, Hesselberg. He had to mete out punishments after the attempted rebellion in 1759 that would not entitle the owners of the executed slaves to too much compensation, but which would still act as a deterrent. Hesselberg did his job according to the Gardelin Code and determined 84 cases. 59 Afro-caribbeans were free of charge. Seven were sold off the island. 12 were executed. Of those assumed leaders they were 3. They were tortured but kept silent. After that they were put in each an iron cage and left to die there. Several issues around Hesselberg and the present governor general v. Prøck leaves an impression of corruption and greed.

Hesselberg died in Copenhagen in 1788.

QVAID SAMUEL HECTOR

Samuel Hector, born Qvaid, ended his life suspended in an iron cage, where he sat for 42 hours before he died, convicted as the ringleader in plans for a failed rebellion. He was born on the British Caribbean island of Antigua and was mixed up in a revolt there. He avoided punishment, as he testified against his father who was executed. He himself was simply sold off to St. Croix. In the cage he insisted on his innocence to a passing missionary. The revolt, planned for Christmas 1759, should have created an

Afro-Caribbean state on St. Croix. Of the 30 who were convicted, some had confessed despite an oath of silence sealed by drinking soil, blood and water. Hector was convicted on the basis of testimony, but never confessed. The judge, Engelbret Hesselberg, thought that Hector, with his history and his sharp intellect, was an obvious candidate as the leader of a revolt. Did he quite simply take the oath seriously, or was he innocent?

LUCAS

Lucas was a slave on Concordia, where he was born in 1784. He began working when he was between 5 and 6 years old, tending chickens and mules in 'the small gang' that consisted of children and old people. As an older boy he carried cane to the sugar mill, and at 17 he became part of 'the large gang' – the group for the adult field slaves who did the hard, constant work in the cane fields, supervised by the 'bomba', who cracked the whip over those who failed to keep working. But Lucas refused to submit: twice he ran away as a 'maroon' – as part of a group protesting against two harsh overseers, the first of whom was removed from his post, while the second was allowed to stay. The runaways were punished hard. The regime of this overseer lasted three years, from 1816 until 1819. In that period only three children were born alive on Concordia, while 21 slaves died. Lucas was one of them. He died in 1818, 34 years old, perhaps worn out, perhaps after punishment.

CHRISTEN HENRIKSEN PRAM

(1756 – 1821) He was a Danish-Norwegian writer, civil servant, editor and engaged in social economic topics. He wrote '**On the trade of Negroes**' in 1792. By this he

became the first citizen describing and arguing against the atrocities of transport and trade of enslaved Africans in the Danish West Indies. He argues that if the slave trade didn't give a profit for its entrepreneur one would expect that they would not do it or defend the institution of slave trade.

PETER LOTHARIUS OXHOLM

(1753- 1827) He was a Naval Officer and came to the West Indies in 1777 for the first time. Later he moved over there and married Anna Heyliger. This made it possible for him to buy the plantation Concordia that he possessed for 14 years. In 1796 he got actively involved in the Trans Atlantic slave trade that continued until 1803. He returned to Denmark for a decade. Here he published the pamphlet "**the Danish West Indies condition regarding population, culture and finance**" in 1797. In this he argues against the ban of the slave trade in cool figures. There is c. 25.000 Afro-Caribbeans but every year more people die than there are children born. And it is bound to be like that unless the women work less, or the slaves in general are fed better. Both factors would give less profit to the planter. In 1814 P.L. Oxholm returned to the Danish West Indies as Governor General

NIKOLAUS LUDWIG VON ZINZENDORF und POTTENDORF

The Saxon count N.L. Zinzendorf (1700-1760) was brought up in a Pietist family. He developed fervent religious convictions and from his youth had a dream of spreading the Christian message to all the peoples of the world. The dream was fulfilled when a group of Protestant refugees from the wars

of religion in Bohemia-Moravia settled on his estate and founded the town of Herrnhut. With them he developed the Moravian Brethren. In 1731 the community began to send missionaries out into the world, first to St. Thomas, later to Greenland and many other places. The Danish-Norwegian colonies were central to the Moravians' mission, because Zinzendorf was related to King Christian VI's Queen, Sophie Magdalene, and in the 1730s had close relations with the Danish monarchy. The Moravian beliefs were based on 'inwardness' and 'sensibility' – i.e. emotion. Zinzendorf was a charismatic leader who travelled around and visited the missionary communities. He was in the West Indies in 1739. His own and the missionaries' personal involvement with and amenability to the proselytes were an important reason for the great success of the mission.

COFFY JENS

Coffy was born around 1770 on the plantation Beck's Grove and as a child was sent out to tend the animals. In 1783 he was sent to Denmark to serve as a page to the owner of the plantation, Jens Michelsen Beck, at the latter's home by Lake Gentofte, but as early as 1786 he was sent back to the field work on St. Croix, because he had stolen rum from his master and forgotten to turn off the tap, so that the whole basement was flooded with the good rum. Beck wrote to the plantation manager Søbøtker about Coffy: "Now it is presumably best that he takes up his former post and serves his former principals, their lordships the mules, on the plantation". Before being sent back he was sentenced to bread and water in 'the black hole' for eight days. Back home again he was christened Jens and died 18 years old in 1788.

THE BECK STORY

Jens Michelsen Beck 1721-1791 and Sofie Louise Hagen 1737-1777

The colony was a career opportunity for many young men, even if they came from a humble background. Jens Michelsen Beck is a typical example of the upcoming bourgeoisie. He was the son of a cabinetmaker in Svendborg. As a young man he went to the West Indies, where his mathematical abilities as a surveyor and cartographer came in useful. Like all other officials he bought plantation land and town land, and earned very well from it.

After 12 years he could go home and let Adam Søbøtker manage the plantation Beck's Grove. He married Sofie Louise Hagen, the daughter of a Copenhagen pharmacist and founded a large family.

Beck's correspondence with Søbøtker is the source of the narrative thread in the exhibition, where the story of the ordinary citizen is woven into the overall narrative.

BECK AS LAND SURVEYER

Beck was instrumental in mapping St. Croix before the Crown took over the colony from the Company. He finished the work of Cronenberg and Jaegersberg by mapping the North Side. The Company's 'Land survey Negros' have helped him through the wilderness. He was then accused of favoring the size of his own plantation. However the Company dropped the charge on him when he defended his actions. He claimed that surveying in the hilly area of rainforest was difficult and he had done it pro bono. And last but not least, by putting the north side plantation plots up for sale the maroon slaves were robbed of their hiding places.

BECK'S GROVE

Beck took part in the development of the West End of St. Croix and took a good plantation in 1750 with two springs for fresh water. In 1754 he travels back and lets an overseer take care of the plantation and sugar and rum is sent home to be sold. It gives Beck a good income for many years. In 1766 he has 83 slaves. Beck sells a piece of land by Frederiksted in 1782 and invests the revenue in the plantation when Adam Søbøtker takes over the stewardship. Beck gives him instructions to buy young 'negros', not to exhaust the fertile soil, to keep an eye on the wood towards the neighbor. This means that hard wood is still valuable. Beck's son Michael went over to take over the plantation, but died just after a harsh hurricane in 1786 that ruined a lot of buildings, crops and forest at Beck's Grove. Beck decided to sell the plantation in 1787.

The ruin of Beck's Grove today consists of the remains of a factory building in two storages built of rubble and tiles round windows and doors, a slave hospital, an animal pen. Even a gate pole can be seen.

BECK ON CONSTRUCTION

From Beck's letters we know that he invested in the buildings on his plantation Beck's Grove in 1784-85 hoping that his son Michael would take over the plantation. First he sought for the cure house and the still house (for sugar and rum production) late for the dwelling house. He sent out drawings of a new dwelling and asks Mr. Søbøtker who managed his plantation what is the current price for ballast brick? If they could burn the lime on the plantation? He asks to the supply of hard wood from the forest. And he considers if it would be cheaper to make the timber construction in Denmark and ship it to be assembled over

there.

Søbøtker answers that the factory buildings now have been roofed with shingled. He answers that brick are too expensive but they have fieldstones enough to build. He also states that there is plenty of wood for timber but he has to use a bit for a negro house once in a while. Søbøtker has stopped the construction of the dwelling so far because the overseer has been sacked and Michael can then live there for a while. 'A penny saved is a penny earned' was the way of thinking.

BECK'S PAGE COFFY

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