

We Need Your Help to Complete the Restoration of the Free-Colored Cemetery of Cruz Bay

By SJHS Newsletter Staff

Tucked away in a corner of Cruz Bay, between establishments reflecting modern life in this little island town, is the final resting place of six Free-Colored St. Johnians who died between 1820 and 1879. Although Cruz Bay's Free-Colored Cemetery is incredibly significant for myriad reasons it had been all but forgotten until last month, when local residents joined forces with the St. John Historical Society (SJHS) and the VI Government to rescue this important site.

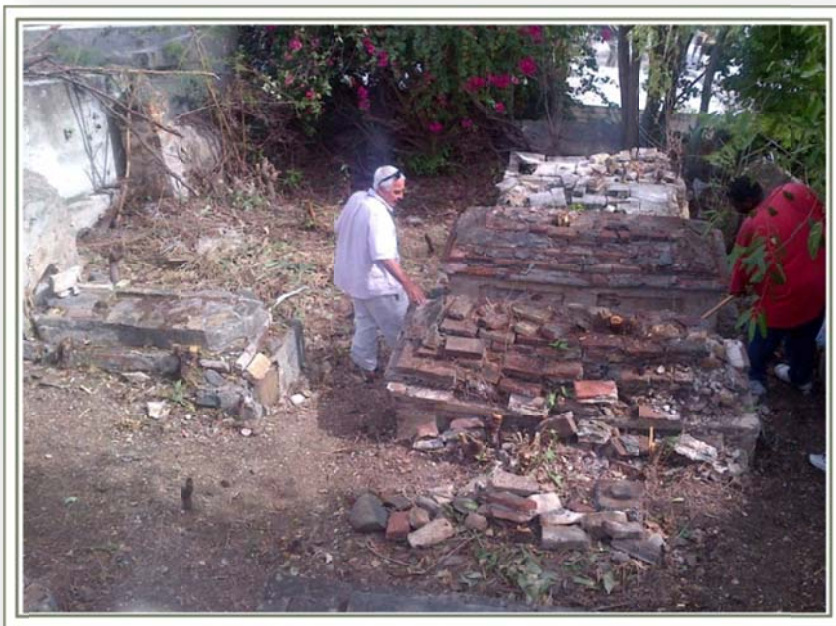
During the time of Danish ownership of the United States Virgin Islands, then known as the Danish West Indies, there developed a Free-Colored population composed of individuals of African or Afro-Caribbean descent who, through birth, manumission or purchase, had achieved freedom from slavery prior to Emancipation in the colony in 1848. Cruz Bay has the distinction of being the only town in the Danish West Indies that was primarily settled and developed by Free-Colored artisans and tradespersons. *(Pictured here is the Free-Colored Cemetery, as it appeared in 2009)*



David W. Knight, Sr., former President of the SJHS and currently a St. Thomas-St. John Historic Preservation Committee Commissioner is leading the restoration initiative.

“The site has been totally desecrated,” said Knight. “The two markers that remain in the cemetery, which

both date from the 1800s, are broken. Someone recently smashed one of the memorial plaques and attempted to access the burial.” *(Pictured below is 2014 image of the cemetery, after an initial clearing.)*



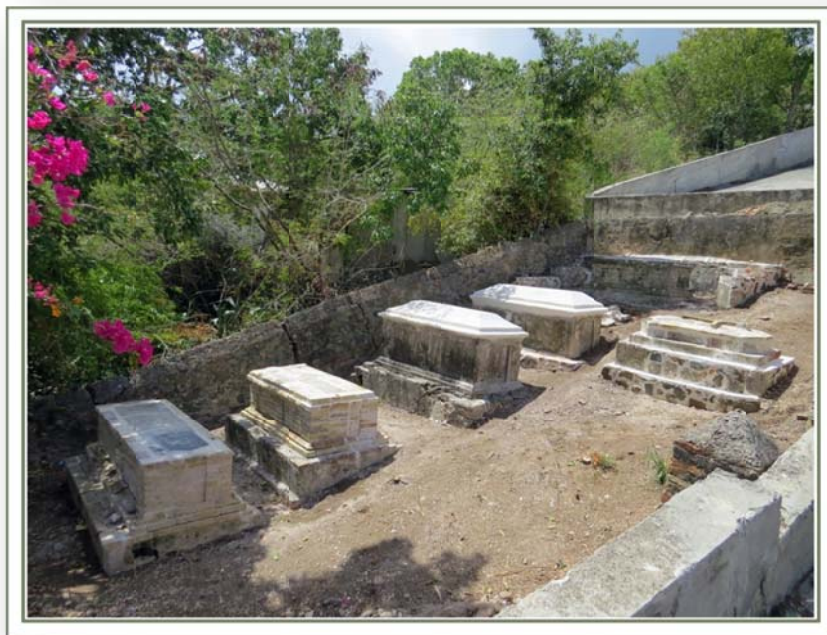
One burial marker identifies the resting place of Sarah Elizabeth Martin. Eleven children resulted from the union of Sarah and the heir of the Beverhoudtsberg and Bellevue plantations, Stadeshouptman Peter van Beverhoudt, (who was the head of the local militia... a position similar to that of sheriff). Sarah

Martin was born enslaved on Estate Susannaberg in or about 1774 and died at the age of 84 on August 21, 1858. The other marked grave is that of Sarah's daughter, Anna Louisa van Beverhoudt, who was born about 1811 and died at the age of 68 on August 24, 1879.

Under the auspices of the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC), the State Historic Preservation Office, the SJHS, and other concerned citizens and groups are being invited to help with the restoration, which will take an estimated three to six months and cost approximately \$24,000. With support from the HPC, the SJHS has applied for a \$10,000 grant from the Historic Preservation Fund Sub-Grant program, which is administrated by DPNR's State Historic Preservation Office. Additionally, the St. John Historical Society Board has pledged \$5,000 and the Society is currently reaching out to the community for the additional \$9,000 in funding to help complete the restoration. *(The cemetery midway through the restoration process.)*



St. Thomas-St. John Historic Preservation Committee Chairperson Felipe Ayala II hopes the restoration of the site will facilitate a greater awareness of Cruz Bay's historic past. "It is unfortunate that so many people do not show proper respect for our historic burials," said Ayala in response to the recent desecration. "It is my hope that out of this tragedy will come a heightened appreciation for the rich history of Cruz Bay, and that the restoration will bring the memory of those buried there, and the Free-Colored community as a whole, back into the public's consciousness."



Several businesses, organizations and individuals have already signed on to donate their time and talent for this restoration project including the St. John Community Foundation, Roger Harland, former territorial archaeologist Emily Lundberg, naturalist Eleanor Gibney, NPS archeologist Ken Wild and licensed St. John contractor Eric Cazaubon and Brent Squires's Stonemasonry Inc. *(The picture at left, with the restoration of the graves nearly complete—all masonry work complete and the*

plaques reset).

The plaque at right marks the grave of Sarah Elizabeth Martin. It reads: **Sacred to the memory of our beloved Mother Sarah Elizabeth Martin, died August 1, 1858, age 84, a token of affection from her dutiful daughters.**

The other marker, to Sarah's daughter, Anna reads:

Sacred to the memory of Anna L. von Beverhoudt, died August 24, 1879, age 68 years, RIP.

All of the excavated material from the site has been screened and what has been kept is now at the NPS archaeology lab where Emily Lundberg and Kourtney Donohue are analyzing and cataloging any artifacts.



A landscape plan is currently in the works by Eleanor Gibney. Students from Giffit Hill School have offered to assist with the planting. *(Pictured are Kourtney Donohue, Brent Squires and Emily Lundberg at work.)*

As the site is already attracting a lot of visitors, installing an interpretive sign has become a high priority... Contemplated is one that is similar to the sign the Society placed at the William Wood cemetery at the Sprauve Library.

The grant money and contributions from the Historical Society will cover the majority of the work completed to date. However, we are reaching out to our members and the community at-large to raise additional funds so that we can

complete the landscaping, the signage and the restoration of the perimeter wall. The \$9,000 campaign will enable us to complete all of this work transforming what was an eye-sore in the community to a beautiful and peaceful resting place and a reminder of the Island's rich history.

This is simply one more example of how this Society has given back to the St. John community over the past forty years. To donate to this cause contact the St. John Historical Society at contactus@stjohnhistoricalsociety.org or call project coordinator David Knight at 714-5872. Monetary donations can be sent directly to the Society at:

St. John Historical Society Inc.
PO Box 1256

St. John, VI 00831

~ All pictures courtesy of David Knight, Sr.~