

2009



Caribbean Volunteer Expeditions Newsletter

HANDS ON AT BRIMSTONE HILL FORTRESS

There are few more spectacular places in the Caribbean to participate in historic preservation work at than Brimstone Hill Fortress on the island of St. Kitts. Look up from the task at hand, and feast your eyes on the surrounding vistas of green hills blanketed in tropical vegetation, the blue Caribbean Sea far below, or neighboring islands that rise out of the ocean to a cloud-topped peak.

But it's not only the surroundings that impress! First used in 1689, when the French hauled guns up the hill to bombard the small English coastal fort below, construction of a permanent fortifications began in 1690 and continued for another 200 years, eventually becoming so extensive that it became to be known as the 'Gibraltar of the West Indies'

The fortress fell to a French siege in 1782, and when it and St. Kitts, were later restored to Britain, work on the citadel of Fort George was begun in earnest, continuing until the 1820s. Today, it stands as a testament to the expertise of the military engineers who designed it and the skills of the many Kittitians, free and enslaved, who built it.

Towering almost a thousand feet above sea level, the fortifications have a commanding view, but one that comes at a cost. Exposed to salt air, hurricanes and earthquakes, and built on an unstable geology, the past centuries have managed to leave their mark on the volcanic rock and limestone so carefully shaped by the early masons, and now the parade square echoes to the sound of stone chisels and hammers instead of soldiers' boots. Restoration, the never-ending race against Mother Nature, and the enhancement of the fortress facilities for the thousands of international visitors to the site, is the work of the Brimstone Hill Fortress National Park Society, and it is to this worthy cause that Caribbean Volunteer Expeditions makes its contribution.

Regulars on CVE programs sign up for the unique hands-on opportunities and challenges our projects offer. Others look, but we do, and doing is what it is all about at Brimstone Hill! In the past two years we have sorted and cataloged thousands of archeological finds, repaired display cases and mounted exhibits, refurbished artifact storage rooms, cut trees and cleared vegetation. Each project has made a significant contribution the sustainability of the Fortress and its visitor programs, and helped preserve a part of this important history. No previous experience is necessary to enjoy the satisfaction of a job well done and the knowledge of having made a worthwhile contribution.

Brimstone Hill was awarded UNESCO World Heritage Status in 1999, and since then extraordinary efforts have been undertaken to preserve the stone work, ambience and sense of place of the park. As a part of this effort for the next year we will focus our work on the substantial 17th century stone walls that form a part of the citadel defense. Our past vegetation control work on this section has proven successful, so now we need to remove dead tree roots, replace the historic masonry and any missing stones and provide the wall with a new lease on life.

By David Rollinson



Brimstone Hill Fortress



Repairing exhibit furniture



Afternoon field trip

Hunt's Bay and Orange Street – March 2009

By Shai Fierst and Sam Petuckowski

Jamaica's Jewish community is one of the oldest and storied communities in the Americas with impressive contributions to art, literature, politics, and more in the non-Jewish and Jewish spheres in and outside of Jamaica. A request by Ainsley Henriques' of the Jamaican Jewish community for inventorying of Jamaica's Jewish cemeteries was a catalyst for a partnership between CVE and the community. That work continued in March 2009 with a Rachel Frankel led team to continue inventorying the Hunt's Bay Cemetery and begin inventorying the Jewish Cemetery on Orange Street in Kingston. The goal of the work beyond collecting data is to post the information on the World Wide Web thereby making Jamaica's historic and difficult to access sites available to a worldwide public.

The Hunt's Bay Cemetery is Jamaica's oldest Jewish cemetery and the burying ground for the Jews of Port Royal across the harbor where the high water table prevented burial. The cemetery is located to the west of Kingston having been established before Kingston was founded. Hunt's Bay's earliest grave stone dates to 1672 and its latest dates to the mid 19th century. 360 grave markers remain at Hunt's Bay. Undoubtedly many markers have been destroyed or looted for construction over time.

The Jewish Cemetery on Orange Street, located near the beautiful and century-old Shaarei Shalom Synagogue, contains stones from the early 19th century and is still in use. The cemetery is located in the newer, northern end of Kingston. Previous to the Orange Street Cemetery, Kingston's Sephardim buried their dead in the no longer extant Old Kingston Jewish Cemetery in the older, southern part of Kingston's downtown. 18th century grave stones from the Old Kingston Jewish Cemetery were transposed to the Orange Street cemetery when the former was closed possibly for sanitary purposes. We found the grave stones towards the end of the week having been placed along the inner side of two of the cemetery walls, often times partially covered by earth.

The Hunt's Bay Cemetery contains bluestone, limestone and marble grave markers with epitaphs largely in Portuguese and Hebrew. The horizontal markers rest upon brick bases varying in height. The older section of the Orange Street Cemetery contains horizontal grave markers mostly of marble elevated almost three feet above ground on red brick bases, with epitaphs written, for the vast majority, in English, with less and less Portuguese and Hebrew.

Our inventory work discovered that many of the grave markers in the Orange Street Cemetery are not in their authentic locations likely due to destruction by looters and then further destruction by well intentioned restoration. Natural disasters, such as an earthquake in 1907, have also impacted the cemetery. The Jewish community employs persons to care for the grounds, but there is still an incredible amount of work that needs to be done in order to maintain the site. There is also much work that needs to be continued with regard to inventorying, as we were only able to work in a small portion of the cemetery.

Building relationships with Jamaican Jews such as Michael Cohen and Michael Nunes added to the experience and hopefully they will continue to work with CVE groups in the future. Additionally, spending time with Ainsley Henriques was invaluable. He was extremely gracious throughout the week and truly is an incredible person. In fact, many in the Jewish community were kind and supportive hosts, which was evident at dinners in the community and Friday night services.



CVE will be continuing with the Orange Street Jewish Cemetery Project March 8–13 2010

NEVIS VOLUNTEER PROJECT

By Kathy Rimmel

My experience as a CVE volunteer for the Nevis Historical and Conservation Society NHCS have been memorable and deeply rewarding. My first -year assignments varied, ranging from attending and reporting upon a government presentation for contractors on coastal and marine development regulations to taking tickets at a fundraising fashion show. Particularly interesting to me, as a biologist, was transcribing onto the biodiversity website a description of the flora and fauna written in 1720 by reverend William Smith.

This year I worked under the direction of Gail Dore in the Archive Department. Among the different projects I particularly enjoyed, was learning how to add photographs to the computer files and how to accession early photographs of Nevis into the Photo Archives of NHCS. In addition it was exciting to learn about a proposal to make Nevis Peak a National Park.

NHCS is a dynamic organization and I have been grateful for the opportunity to contribute to its mission. Nevis is a special place in both its physical beauty and the extraordinary people who have lived in the past, as well as those living today. I have a deep respect for the people and hope to continue to volunteer in the future.

Kathy Rimmel is a retired private school administrator from Portland, Maine. As a teacher she was named Maine Biology Teacher of the Year by the National Biology Teacher's Association.

PRESERVATION PROJECTS IN NEVIS

We can provide you with a custom designed volunteer preservation project in beautiful Nevis. We will arrange the project as well as the dates, and accommodations to suit your interests, abilities, schedule and budget. Work can include archival and display work at one of the museums in Nevis or gardening, clearing, or light construction work on historic structures. Two of the CVE group leaders live in Nevis and will coordinate the project with the Nevis Historic and Conservation Society. Contact: Anne Hersh: ahershcv@eol.com

Summary of Recent and past Projects

2006

BVI Historic Site Inventory *
 St. Kitts Cemetery Inventory *
 St John Historic Preservation *
 San Salvador, Bahamas, Kerr Mount- mapping and archeology
 Antigua Fort Archeology Project
 Grenada- La Sagesse Recommendations

2007

Falmouth, Jamaica Jewish Cemetery Inventory
 BVI Historic Site Inventory *
 St. John Preservation *
 St. Croix Historic Preservation for Landmarks Society*
 St. Kitts Historic Cemetery Inventory *
 Lunenberg Preservation
 Brimstone Hill Restoration *

2008

Wingfield Archeology*
 St. Kitts Cemetery Inventory *
 Brimstone Hill Restoration *
 Hunts Bay Jamaica, Jewish Cemetery Inventory
 St. John Preservation *
 St. Eustatius Wattle and Daub construction
 San Salvador Archeology *

2009

Hunts Bay and Orange Street Kingston Jamaica
 Brimstone Hill St. Kitts*
 St. Kitts Cemetery Inventory*
 San Pedro de Macoris Historic Buildings Survey Dominican Republic

* Projects with Elderhostel Volunteers

www.cvexp.org



HISTORIC BUILDING INVENTORY SAN PEDRO MACORIS DOMINICAN
REPUBLIC JANUARY 2009

CVE Mission Statement:

Throughout the Caribbean, historic structures representing each island's rich and unique heritage suffer due to natural and man made threats ranging from tropical storms to tourism-related development. Caribbean Volunteer Expeditions' mission is to support local efforts to preserve historic and architecturally valuable resources. We recruit volunteers from the US and Canada to work on preservation projects with local Caribbean agencies. We seek to contribute to the broader base of information about Caribbean styles, influences, history, and architecture, and to help preserve the region's architectural and cultural heritage.

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