

2015



# Caribbean Volunteer Expeditions Newsletter, 2015

## JEWISH CEMETERY INVENTORY PROJECT 2014 by David London

The 2014 Jamaica Jewish Cemeteries CVE trip was an incredible experience I'll never forget. Under the fearless leadership of Rachel Frankel, ten very different people- a young architectural preservation grad student, a father and son exploring their roots, Jews and non-Jews, and a variety of middle-aged desk jockeys taking time out from their daily routines to try something new- came together to further the ongoing cemetery documentation project and explore Jamaica's unbelievably rich Jewish history. Our driver Brian and our Jamaican guide Cleveland "Poppa G" Gooden rounded out our group and became indispensable members of it.

On Monday and Tuesday we worked in Kingston's Orange Street Jewish cemetery, furthering the work that has gone on for the last several years. We measured, transcribed, and photographed the graves, which date back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As I performed this work with my new friends, I tried to imagine what each person's life was like- what their hopes, dreams and challenges were- as a Jamaican Jew hundreds of years ago. Sadly, present-day reality intruded, as a man was shot and killed by the police across the street from the cemetery in an apparent case of mistaken identity. We were never in any danger whatsoever, but it brought home the fact that when one travels, he becomes a participant in the life of the place visited, for good and bad.

Tuesday evening we journeyed to the small hamlet of Alligator Pond, on Jamaica's south coast, and spent the next three nights at the oceanfront villa of one of the members of Jamaica's Jewish community. The place was nothing short of spectacular and we fell asleep each night to the sound of the waves crashing on the shore beneath us. On Wednesday, we explored the small Jewish cemeteries at Rowe's Corner and Auchindown, the latter on property now owned by and just across the road from the Sandals Resort. We were given a tour by three gracious Sandals employees who could not have been nicer. On Thursday we visited the small Jewish cemetery in the town of Lucea (pronounced Lu-Cee) and did some documentation work there. To find Jewish cemeteries all over Jamaica- not just in the capital city- shows how integrated the small but vibrant community was into the broader society. While these cemeteries show the obvious wear and tear of the centuries, they are treated with respect by the local population. As a Jew myself, all I can say is that I was filled with a sense of wonder and pride during the entire trip.

On Friday morning, many of us took a short boat ride to a tiny cay a few miles offshore for some snorkeling and relaxation. On the return trip, I spotted a pod of dolphins who stayed near our boats for several minutes. What a treat! We then headed back to Kingston and attended Friday night services at the Duke Street synagogue, where we were both participants and honored guests. While smaller than it used to be, the Jamaican Jewish community remains active and vibrant. We were privileged to meet many of its members, including Ainsley Henriques and his wife Marjorie, whose hospitality was nothing short of incredible.

Beginning late Friday evening, members of our by now very close knit group began to go their separate ways. Some of us stayed an extra day, returning to synagogue for Saturday morning services and visiting the National Art Gallery and the Bob Marley museum. Kingston is not normally considered a major tourist destination but it really does have a lot to offer. By Sunday we had all returned home to our loved ones and normal lives; a few days after that the whole experience seemed like an incredible dream to me. But I have the pictures, memories and emails from new friends to prove otherwise! This is one of the best trips I have ever taken and if at all possible, I will return next year. I am profoundly grateful to CVE for giving me the opportunity to have such an enjoyable and meaningful experience.



## Report from volunteer for

## NHCS museum

## The Nevis Historical and Conservation Society (NHCS)

The Nevis Historical and Conservation Society (NHCS) accepted a volunteer in February of 2014. Nevis is a 36 square mile island with approximately 12,000 inhabitants which attracts tourists to enjoy its beauty and peaceful environment. The NHCS is dedicated to conserving the natural and cultural history of Nevis through the protection of historical buildings, its ecology and natural life forms, and community education. Nevis is part of the St. Christopher—Nevis Federation which is a signatory to several important international initiatives designed to protect the environment.

A volunteer with a background in environmental issues worked with the Director of the NHCS who was interested in establishing a recycling program. Unfortunately, like all small islands, the disposal of solid waste poses a significant challenge due to Nevis' geography and limited resources. That the landscape and important ocean resources are under intense pressure from modern life is evident from the litter scattered on the island; a landfill that is filled to overflowing; uncontrolled dumping; and the significant debris collected during beach clean-up efforts.

The volunteer worked to provide useful information for developing a recycling program: collecting data regarding the existing situation, relevant statutory provisions and ongoing efforts in the Caribbean; identifying the elements necessary for a successful recycling program and the important role of other strategies such as re-use and waste reduction efforts; and the identification of requirements in grant programs that might provide a potential source of funding. At the end of two weeks, the NHCS Director had a discussion draft for use by a committee that she planned to establish to develop the details of a recycling program as well as relevant background materials.

Due to the generous hospitality of the society's membership, our volunteer had a very positive experience learning about the island, its people and its life. A special thank you to Isabel Byron for hosting our volunteer.

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**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.*

**Summary of Recent Projects****2009**

Historic Jewish Cemetery Inventory Jamaica  
Brimstone Hill Archeology, St. Kitts  
St Kitts Cemetery Inventory  
San Pedro de Macoris Historic Building  
Survey, Dominican Republic  
San Salvador, Bahamas Archeology

**2010**

Curacao Fort Knip Site Assessment  
San Juan Historic Site Preservation  
St Kitts Cemetery Inventory  
Wingfield Archeology, St Kitts  
Archeology in St Eustatius

**2011**

Construction of Cacti Wall, Curacao  
Orange Street Historic Jewish Cemetery Jamaica  
Wingfield archeology, St Kitts  
Historic Cemetery Inventory  
Archeology in St Eustatius

**2012**

Archeology in St. Eustatius  
Winfield and Brimstone archeology, St. Kitts  
Historic Jewish Cemetery Survey, Jamaica  
Documentation for USVI National Park Service at  
Hassel Island and Beverhoutsberg  
Drawings of Fort Engelenberg, Curacao.

**2013**

Archeology project in St Eustatius  
Brimstone Hill Archeology Project St. Kitts  
Historic Jewish Cemetery Survey, Jamaica

**2014**

**Brimstone Hill Arch. St. Kitts  
Historic Jewish Cemetry. Jamaica**

**2015**

**Historic Jewish Cemetry. Jamaica**

REPORT ON THE CARIBBEAN VOLUNTEER EXPEDITION ON JAMAICA, JANUARY 2015  
 CATALOGING OF JEWISH CEMETERIES CONTINUES, GROUP EXPANDS, AND NEW PLANS HATCHED

January 17 to 24, 2015 marked the eighth CVE (Caribbean Volunteer Expedition) to Jamaica in an on-going project to catalogue the, now, 21 known Jewish cemeteries and burial grounds found throughout the island.

The expedition, led by Rachel Frankel, Lauren Stahl and Elizabeth Lorris Ritter, grew to 14 volunteers for this visit. Several in the group were the true veterans, some back for the second and third time, and some newcomers, like myself.

The group was once again invited and hosted by the United Congregation of Israelites, in the person of Ainsley Henriques whose right-hand man, (Cleveland Goodin) Poppa "G," was assigned to work and travel with the group for the entire week which he did with enthusiasm.

The plans for the week were, beginning in Kingston: to catalogue the Children's section of the Orange Street Jewish Cemetery, to seek the Old English-German Jewish Cemetery on Elletson Road, and to begin cataloging the New English-German Jewish Cemetery on Windward Road (on the northeast intersection of Elletson Road). Then to proceed westward to the town of Black River (staying overnight at Alligator Pond) with a stop at the Hunt's Bay Jewish Cemetery and in Spanish Town.

The process for cataloging is, in brief: to mark the graves to be cataloged with a number in chalk. An attempt is made to compare the number and location to the prior pioneering catalog work by Philip Wright and Charles Barnett.

Once gravestones are identified with an number, volunteers are paired off to catalog a section or group of rows of graves. Volunteers are equipped with paper forms with the name of the cemetery and a list of items to be filled in. The volunteers put these forms on clipboards and begin to take down the measurements of each grave site, the epitaphic inscription, the material of the gravestone (i.e. marble, blue-stone), the condition of the grave marker, and to provide a drawing if possible.

If an inscription is very faint or worn, flour is brushed over the relief to make the letters stand out. This technique is tremendously effective. The conservationists of the group, Mary Jablonski and Lauren Stahl, advised on this and how to classify the graves by their brick, mortar, and stone type. Toni Pitock and Elizabeth (Liz) Lorris Ritter were available to read and comprehend the Hebrew epitaphs.

The paper form is then placed on the grave held down with a stone. Meanwhile, another group is took the measurements and coordinates of the graves to create a survey from which a scaled plan will be drafted.

Lastly, a compass reading for each grave is noted on the form.

During the entire process Joseph deLeon, Junior, descendant of old Jamaican families, photographed each grave and the surrounding area both with digital and black-and-white film cameras.

This work continued each day until mid afternoon with a break for lunch.

In addition to those already mentioned, the volunteers included Vann deCordova, descendant of the founders of the national newspaper, The Gleaner, founded in 1834 by his great, great, great grandfather and still in full production today; Joe DeLeon, Senior (father of the aforementioned photographer); Ross Urken a native of Princeton, New Jersey, who was virtually brought up by a Jamaican nanny; Vishnu Khwalsingh (a business colleague of Joe deLeon Sr) who grew up in Jamaica; Heidi Kaufman, English Professor at U of Oregon; Susan Lockwood who has done independent research on Jewish gravestones, David London who while practicing law has obtained a Master of History degree with a focus on the Atlantic World, and myself, descendant on my father's side of the Lyon, Alberga, Lindo, and Delgado families, all measured and sketched and helped as much as possible to complete the forms and survey the cemetery.

This CVE Group is a fabulous, thoughtful, caring set of people. I enjoyed conversations with each and every one about shared interests, past and present.

One of the highlights of the trip for me was finding the graves my Ggrandfather and mother, side by side, in the corner of Windward Road cemetery with headstones fully intact. I have read a great deal about this couple--the founders of the Lyon family in Jamaica. Many of the graves in this cemetery are without headstone or inscription, so it was a special bonus for me to be able to see these with my own eyes.

Why would fourteen, seemingly sane people, choose to spend their vacation time tramping around in the hot sun, overdressed, with clipboards, pencils, measuring tapes, compasses, large paintbrushes, and cooking flour, for a week?

Simple. As Rachel Frankel put it, the sites being cataloged are an "outdoor archive" of tremendous importance to the history of the Caribbean, the Jewish diaspora, and the descendants of the people who are represented there.

By Diane Lyon Wead



## CVE Research and Where to Find It

by Hannah Mathilde Little

### Reviewing the Research

Thanks to all who participate and support CVE, your time, effort, and enthusiasm is outstanding! Much of your work is represented at the website: [cvexp.org](http://cvexp.org), and we have submitted records for archives at other locations. As Caribbean Volunteer Expeditions, you have been preserving architectural and cultural heritage for 25 years. Please take a moment to recognize number of organizations CVE has partnered with--more than eighteen--including:

US Virgin Islands National Park  
St Croix Landmarks Society  
BVI National Trust  
Nevis Historical and Conservation Society  
St. Kitts Heritage Society  
NPS: San Juan Historic Site  
Museum of Antigua and Barbuda  
Bahamas Archive Department

Remember that CVE has done well over 100 projects; those required historic building surveys, cemetery surveys, drawings of sites and buildings, recommendations for restoration of historic buildings and sites, adaptive re-use plans, reports and guidelines for preservation development, archaeological projects, and preservation construction. You have experienced first-hand the architectural and cultural eccentricities of the islands and towns which are more widely known through the fiction of books and movies. If you would like to review past expeditions in greater detail, please check out past newsletters at our web site, or at the archive locations mentioned below.

### How to access the research

In order to preserve our numerous heritage preservation projects, we have submitted the drawings, reports, and inventories to be archived with the Digital Library of the Caribbean (DLoC, <http://dloc.com>) and the USVI Archive (<http://>

[www.virginislandspubliclibraries.org/](http://www.virginislandspubliclibraries.org/)). We also leave a hard copy of the findings with the sponsoring agencies. Some projects are preserved further, as in Rachel Frankel's work; hard copies are at the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati and findings are published in *Remnant Stones: The Jewish Cemeteries of Suriname* both books, *Essays and Epitaphs*, are excellent for curiosity and research (Aviva Ben-Ur with Rachel Frankel; Hebrew Union College Press, 2009). Ms. Frankel is additionally working with the DLoC to further represent projects in Jamaica and make them easily accessible.

Please visit the DLoC yourself to see our drawings there (cemetery inventories submitted only recently). The easiest way is to find the drawings is by visiting the DLoC home site first at: [dloc.org](http://dloc.org). Type "volunteer expeditions" in the Search Collection" field in the middle of the web page. Click "Go" and then click the picture or title that results from the search to bring you directly into the drawings. At the top left of the window, you will see "All Volumes;" you will need to click that in order to see all of the project drawings submitted.

For those who are in the Virgin Islands, you can visit the VI Public Library and ask them about the archives. It's valuable to give the staff some practice in making our work accessible.

Again, congratulations on 25 years!

Where to next?

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