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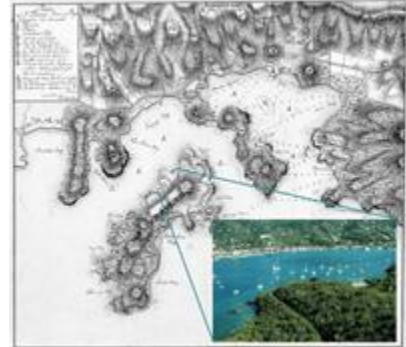
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Wealth in Ruins: The History and Archaeology of a Caribbean Plantation

By Emily Yates

Water Island is a small Caribbean island just south of St. Thomas. In 1996 it was officially recognized as the fourth US Virgin Island. At less than 500 acres it is home to 161 residents (2000 Census). On the northwest end of the island is Carolina Point (Figure 1; click on the images below to see larger illustrations). This promontory offers a clear view overlooking the West Gregerie Channel and Charlotte Amalie Harbor. This was certainly a strategic location for monitoring the merchants, traders, settlers and visitors arriving on St. Thomas.



The plantation on Carolina Point was excavated in 1998 by a team of archaeologists from the National Park Service (NPS). Those excavations recorded the Great House, several outbuildings, and 3 slave cabins (Figure 2). On either side of Carolina Point are freshwater wells likely associated with this plantation. The rich and varied history of this plantation was first brought to light by Historian George Tyson and through continued research by the NPS Project Historian David Knight with the aid of Translator Gary Horlacher. The NPS excavations punctuate the rich history of Water Island.

The historic occupation on Carolina Point began in the early 18th century. The first known resident, Albert de Ruyter, is indicated on a 1718 map. Sea captain De Ruyter was employed as a steward of the Danish West Indies Company to host incoming merchant ships. Carolina Point offered the clearest view into the harbor, allowing de Ruyter manage the flow and movement into Charlotte Amalie. Livestock was also kept on the island for provisions to the colony on St. Thomas.

After de Ruyter's death around 1720 his Water Island holdings were turned over to his widow and her nephews. She soon remarried a St. Thomas builder named Olle Hennigsen. He had a growing business as a mason and lime burner on St. Thomas, and this union proved to be rather profitable for him. To support St. Thomas' growing population and mercantilism, the essential building material limestone was harvested from Water Island by various St. Thomas builders at least as early as 1711. Hennigsen continued to export limestone from the island, and being the prudent businessman, he petitioned the Danish West Indies government for a formal sanction of his rights to Water Island's resources soon after his marriage. He received this sanction on April 10, 1725.

After Henningsen's death around 1730 the main exports of the island were cut stone rather than harvested limestone. Also exported was prepared lime, evidence that the widow's nephews were investing their efforts in the lime burning and quarrying industries rather than harvesting, livestock, or agricultural enterprises. From 1737 to 1740 exports of gray stone (locally known as "Blue Bitch") from Water Island appeared in the St. Thomas records (Figure 3). This rock must be quarried and like harvesting limestone and burning lime, this required a considerable effort to cut and transport. This extreme effort could have been fuel for a local insurrection. From a 1732 tax roll we learn that all of the slaves had run away from the island, and that Jan Cramieu, the widow's nephew and Overseer, left Water Island. The following year all property belonging to the Cramieu family was liquidated.



Ownership of the island becomes a complex affair after the Cramieus, and legal ownership is not entirely documented. Title to the land was exchanged several times by marriage. Separate estates were established by split inheritances. A New York carpetbagger labored for years to finagle distant relations out of their inheritance to claim it for his own. Time after time the estate at Carolina Point fell into bankruptcy and was auctioned. And one family's oral history includes the story of Joseph Daniel being presented the island as a reward by the British Navy for his support during the War of 1812. The list of owners includes numerous St. Thomas planters and merchants involved in many aspects of maritime trade. A few owned and rented commercial and residential properties on St. Thomas, several were sea captains or in the shipping industry. Two were freed men of color who themselves owned slaves. Most were absentee landlords. Several were newly arrived immigrants to the colony.

In 1769 the rightful title to the island was transferred to Jean Renaud. Renaud was an established planter on St. Thomas and was part of the growing population of French Catholics in the colony. Originally from Martinique, he was one of the free men of color to own this plantation. For two decades he worked towards rehabilitating the plantation back into a productive agricultural enterprise. The plantation structures underwent massive growth and renovation during his tenure and he progressively added to his slave population and arable acres. He began this plantation with 18 slaves, within a decade the number rose to 39, and by 1786 Renaud had expanded his workforce to 60, an extraordinarily high enslaved population for a non-sugar producing plantation.



The structures at Carolina Point reflect the bust and boom of the plantation as it moved from provisions to quarrying, and cattle to cotton. The growth and expansion of the plantation is coupled by the evidence from repeated

attempts to repair and rebuild the bankrupt estate. The plantation structures are attributed to Renaud's ownership and the labor of his slaves. Now obscured from view by dense vegetation, the configuration of the plantation is similar to a 1778 depiction (Figure 4) of a large house on the bluff, 9 cabins, fieldstone walls, cleared land for pasture, two freshwater wells, and a house on the opposite bay.

NPS excavations focused on the Great House, Kitchen, Overseer's Quarters, and Slave Village where three cabins were identified (Figure 5). No documentation has been found that describes the architecture of any structure on Carolina Point. Typical Dutch architecture during the eighteenth century included half-timbered homes with a brick or rock foundation, and tiled roof. What remains today of the Great House are rock and coral foundations and brick wall supports. Having been destroyed by fire, the upper portions of the house could surely have been constructed of timber. Glazed ceramic roofing tiles were also found throughout the Great House rubble.



The Kitchen had a paved stone floor and plastered walls constructed of fieldstone and cut coral -- very typical for the time and area. Inside the kitchen was an iron skillet, placed upside down, on the floor; a large grinding stone; fragments of a cast iron pot; and the remnants of a baking sheet. The Overseer's Quarters likewise had plastered fieldstone and cut coral walls, but an unrefined floor. The original flooring may have been wooden planks, now long since deteriorated. Few artifacts were found within this structure. Two slave cabins had fieldstone walls, and one had a plaster floor. The artifacts recovered have a wide timeframe which indicates these cabins and this area was occupied for an extended period. The artifacts show the presence of both men and women -- evidenced by hand tools, buttons, and beads.

Upon his death in 1793 Renaud's holdings were given to his wife Rebecca, although this was not to last long. The next year Rebecca married Peter Tameryn, a freed man of color and the Captain of the Free Negro Corps. He inherited this position from his father Mingo Tameryn. Mingo was respected for his role in maroon hunts throughout the colony and for his efforts to quell the slave revolt on St. John in 1733-34. (This was the same time all of Cramieu's slaves ran away from Water Island!) In accordance with Renaud's will Water Island was divided equally between Rebecca's new husband and the children of Renaud's sister. Thus, by the turn of the eighteenth century Water Island became two separate land holdings and each was operated independently.



Tameryn's control of Water Island was the northern half, where Carolina Point is located. Peter and Rebecca lived on

the estate briefly from 1803 until his death in 1806. It took four times on the auction block until the property, all household furnishings, and 27 slaves were finally sold to Captain Archibold Kerr in 1807. He employed an overseer for four years and worked as an absentee landlord, as he was already a well-established merchant and ship owner on St. Thomas. Unfortunate for him, Water Island proved to be a poor investment as the British gained control of the Danish West Indies in 1807 and stymied the trade relations both in and out of the islands. Also, between 1807 and 1818 Kerr lost his Carolina Point slaves at an alarming rate due to a prolonged outbreak of yellow fever. And so he opted to make substantial upgrades and needed repairs to the main residence before putting it on the market. Evidence of his renovations and repairs are visible in the arched cistern (Figure 6).



Baron Lucas de Bretton purchased the estate in 1819 with the ambition to bring new life into the plantation. First he gave the plantation a name: what was simply known as the "Water Island Estate" became "Caroline's Lyst" which means "joy" or "folly". The vast majority of ceramics recovered from the Great House date to the Baron's ownership. At the height of early 1800's European dining fashion was ceramics that mimicked Chinese porcelain (Figure 7). The Baron likely bought or brought this service set while residing on Water Island. He kept production at a slow pace, running a gentleman's farm rather than a commercial undertaking. He ran the estate for 9 years, but each year he experienced a decline in the estate's value. In 1828 the plantation was again put up for auction, this time as the bankrupt estate of the Baron.

Within 3 years the plantation had 3 different owners. Each had bought the property, all furnishings, some livestock and slaves hoping to establish a productive estate. Each was disappointed and resold everything at auction. For a meager amount the plantation was then sold to an Italian immigrant named Cosmo Francovitch, an established planter on St. Thomas, and ran Caroline's Lyst as an absentee landlord. But when Francovitch died three years later Caroline's Lyst and 3 slaves were auctioned and gleaned about half of its appraised value. James Hazzel, Jr. bought the property and set his son as the estate manager. The Hazzels were a prominent family in the islands and owned a growing amount of property within the Danish West Indies. They were involved in a number of various enterprises from maritime trades to rental properties on St. Thomas and other nearby islands. The Caroline's Lyst estate saw no agricultural enterprises during Hazzel's ownership, rather it was used for commercial industry -- limestone and gray stone.



In 1842 James Hazzel, Jr. sold the estate to a St. Martin sea captain, Benjamin Barton. He and common-law wife

Susanna Cohen lived on the estate for less than a year when Barton died suddenly. As they were not legally married and had no legitimate offspring, the property was given to Benjamin's sister Ann Quark, and the children of his deceased sister, Mary. Barton's brother-in-law became the executor of the estate in 1843 but was never in residence at Caroline's Lyst. He was a blacksmith on St. Thomas and leased the land to Raimond Certain of France. Certain labored to reestablish pasture and provision grounds while maintaining cattle, sheep, and goats on the property. Some of the artifacts recovered from the Great House are indicative of Certain's occupation. A stack of French-themed plates was recovered in a corner of the dining room (Figure 8). Other plates in the collection herald Napoleonic victories. The maker's marks indicate production between 1834 and 1839. Certain began leasing the plantation in 1843 when he arrived from France and likely brought these plates with him.

Certain was the last occupant of Caroline's Lyst to own slaves. When the 1846 plantation register (census) was taken he had 4 field laborers -- but they were no longer on the island when the first census after Emancipation was taken. While many freed slaves were tied to their locations by servitude or lack of a better option, Certain's slaves chose to leave the island altogether. Further notations on the 1850 census list three additional men in residence at the estate. Africa native Alfred, age 70; St. Thomas native, Johannes Paul, also 70; and St. John native, Jacob, 23 years old. The older men were listed as invalids, and Jacob's occupation was simply "unemployed". These men were likely former slaves, however not on Water Island. Their names do not appear on any register or census for the island prior to 1850. Their appearance on the island, however, may be related to the fact these men were infected with leprosy.

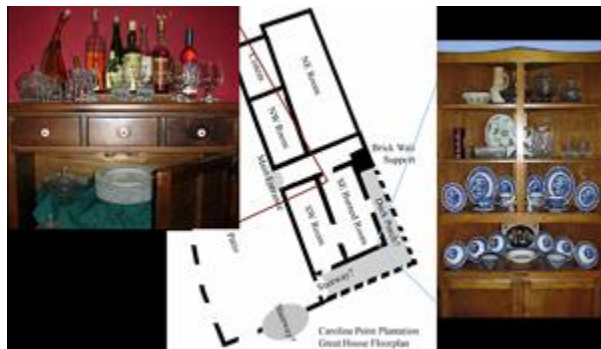
Leprosy was spreading at an alarming rate throughout the West Indies in the second half of the 19th century. The spread of the disease was not fully understood as medical writings of the time indicate it could be partly due to leprosy vaccines that were being administered. Several leper colonies throughout the Caribbean were established by the turn of the century. But prior to the inception of the St. Croix Leper Asylum, the closest "remote" locations were Hassel and Water Islands. A small leper colony was established on Hassel Island; however this is the first evidence of such on Water Island. More research is needed to determine if these men were part of a colony or just isolated individuals. A few years later a prolonged outbreak of Asiatic cholera on St. Thomas stalled the agricultural production Certain had reestablished at Caroline's Lyst. It appears that by 1853 there were no residents or production at the estate.

Meanwhile, Captain Joseph Daniel was methodically purchasing portions of Water Island. Daniel operated a ship repair and rigging yard business located in Charlotte Amalie, and ran a fleet of lighters which serviced approaching vessels into St. Thomas Harbor. He also owned a number of rental properties on St. Thomas, both commercial and residential. By 1859 he owned nearly all of Water Island. One small parcel, Caroline's Lyst, was co-owned with Eugene Pannet, whose two sons were living in the Great House. In 1862 Daniel petitioned the courts for a pardon from the yearly tax on Caroline's Lyst due to the main house suffering significant damage rendering it useless for residential living, and thus exempt from taxes. Pannet's son, according to Daniel, set a brush fire too close to the house.

The house was fully furnished at the time of the fire, and to the delight of the archaeologists, an outer brick wall fell in, sealing the contents of one room. Many of the ceramics recovered from within the house date around 1820, about the time Baron Lucas de Bretton took ownership of the plantation. It was after he went bankrupt that the property changed hands on an increasingly frequent basis due to bankruptcy. It is quite likely the estate was being auctioned with all furnishings intact. The archaeological record supports this idea -- the wide variety of artifacts and ceramics excavated in 1998 reflect the plantation's numerous owners since the Baron.

The intensity of the fire was located in the southeast corner room of the Great House. The brick wall was found under one-and-a-half feet of building rubble and enclosed a thick layer of ash that covered the entire room. The artifact collection recovered from the Great House is typical of a nineteenth century plantation (bone buttons, brass tacks, rose-headed nails); but the most significant find was the large amount of broken pottery -- over six thousand pieces from the southeast room alone, over 190 pounds!

Reconstruction of these pieces into vessels was a huge undertaking, but with fantastic results. The pieces recovered from just one room of the Great House have resulted in 176 reconstructed vessels. This is the largest known comparative collection of whole and nearly whole 19th century tableware ceramics (Figure 9).



From the reconstructed vessels and other artifacts recovered, reconstruction of the room, and house, is possible (Figure 10). For example, in the northwest corner of the room a large amount of bottle and drinking glass was found. This is also where the stack of French plates was, obviously stored, not displayed. The china cabinet in the southeast corner of the room fell over during the fire. Burn patterns on many vessels indicate they broke before burning. The resulting "spray" pattern of artifacts indicates where items were stored or displayed in the cabinet. Willow bowls were displayed below plates and larger serving dishes. Porcelain was above all Willow pattern vessels. And clear melted glass was found mostly among the porcelain.

Caroline's Lyst now lies in ruins. But there is wealth in these ruins. This is only a brief view of the plantation's Great House and three cabins. The outbuildings, including the kitchen, bake oven, and overseer's quarters have been largely uninvestigated. The remains of a privy have never been found and the entire Slave Village is a huge untapped resource. The

wealth in these ruins are the windows into the past. The rich history, both documented and excavated, is only a fraction of what this plantation has to tell us.