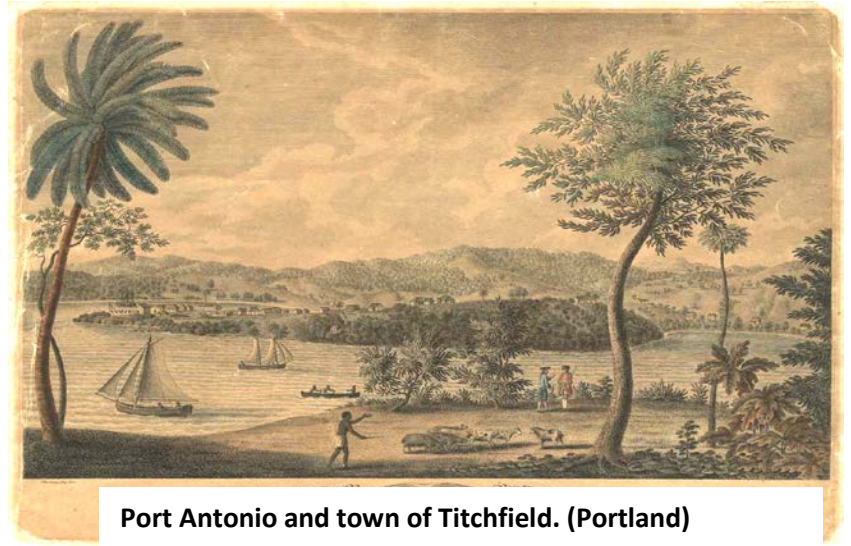


# History of Portland

The Parish of Portland is located at the north eastern tip of Jamaica and is to the north of St. Thomas and to the east of St. Mary. Portland is approximately 814 square kilometres and apart from the beautiful scenery which Portland boasts, the parish also comprises mountains that are a huge fortress, rugged, steep, and densely forested.



**Port Antonio and town of Titchfield. (Portland)**

The Blue Mountain range, Jamaica highest mountain falls in this parish. What we know today as the parish of Portland is the amalgamation of the parishes of St. George and a portion of St. Thomas. Portland has a very intriguing history. The original parish of Portland was created in 1723 by order of the then Governor, Duke of Portland, and also named in his honour.

## **Port Antonio**

Port Antonio, the capital of Portland is considered a very old name and has been rendered numerous times. On an early map by the Spaniards, it is referred to as Pto de Anton, while a later one refers to Puerto de San Antonio. As early as 1582, the Abot Francisco, Marquis de Villa Lobos, mentions it in a letter to Phillip II. It was, however, not until 1685 that the name, Port Antonio was mentioned.

## **Earlier on**

Portland was not always as large as it is today. When the parish was formed in 1723, it did not include the Buff Bay area, which was then part of St. George. Long Bay or Manchioneal were also not included. For many years there were disagreements between St. Thomas in the East

and Portland about where this area belonged until in 1779 Manchioneal was at last given to the Portland Vestry. Later on in 1867 when the Governor, Sir John Peter Grant cut down the number of parishes from twenty two to fourteen, Buff Bay and Long Bay were added to Portland.

## **Settlement**

In 1721, enormous efforts were made to induce immigrants from the British Isles to settle in the north eastern part of the island. It is said that when Portland came into existence, anyone who settled within twelve months was to be entitled to a barrel of flour and two barrels of beef on his/her arrival. This was to be handed over to him by a beneficent Government of Port Antonio free of cost; for three years. To encourage new settlers and on account of the distance from the Supreme court, all settlers were to be exempted from all suits, actions or arrest, that might take them to distant Spanish Town. These attractions, however, proved ineffectual as it is noted that the inducements were offered to new immigrants only, and no one in Jamaica really believed the north east was safe on account of the Maroon settlement there. It is often said that under British rule, the Maroons were perhaps the first people to settle in Portland, and as a result, this along with unfavourable climate did not attract settlement. It was not until 1725 that the benefits of the laws were vainly extended to residents of the land.

Another way in which the government tried to encourage settlement in Portland was empowering the Governor to make land grants in the King's name. To every white person, being a protestant, thirty acres; to every white person in the family, thirty acres; to every free mullatoe Indian or Negro, twenty acres; to every slave bought, five acres; with a proviso that no person not having fifteen white persons in the family should have above four hundred acres in the whole. Another condition was that the grantees should settle and plant the land, or some part thereof, within six months from the date of the patent, and should not alienate the land for seven years from that date. In addition to that, special facilities were given to intending settlers: the lands were cleared from all arrears of quit rent and all grants made without fee of office, and the settlers free from all taxes general or parochial except quit rents for seven years.

In 1743 settlers in Portland were granted the same privileges as persons settling at Manchioneal and Norman's Valley in St. Thomas in the East. That is; their passages were paid and that of their slaves not exceeding twenty, and the receiver general was to subsist them and their slaves for twelve months on the following scale: each white person 4 barrels of beef and 400 lbs of biscuit or bread; each slave a barrel of Herrings and 400 lbs of biscuit or bread – the number of slaves not exceeding 20. It is said that under the inducements of the laws passed between 1736 and 1752, in 16 years, 108 families and 15 artificers (skilled craftsman) were introduced into Portland. In 1780, all the restrictions, conditions, penalties and forfeitures imposed on settlers by the several Acts from 1721 to 1776 having failed, were repealed. Subsequent to this, lands were to be held free from such restrictions and therefore, grants were to be made free with a proviso excepting persons who had within four years before evaded the conditions of their grants.

### **Maroons and Portland**

Originating from the Gold coast of Africa, Maroons were ex-slaves who ran away and took to the hills in an attempt to escape their captors, determined to keep their freedom. Much like St. Thomas, their presence in the parish of Portland was very strong. The eastern Maroons settled in the Blue Mountains in Portland and were joined by runaway slaves in St. Thomas and other parishes, thus forming the 'Windward Maroons.' The Maroons of Portland greatly affected the settlement of the parish by white people. The Maroons raided various towns in Portland and its environs, and historians have noted that for 76 years, the Assembly spent nearly £250,000 trying to defeat the Maroons in Portland. The Maroons were said to comprise not more than 600 women and children. Qua, who emerged as the leader of the eastern Maroons, was said to have a fighting force of only 300 men.

In 1723, a group of volunteers captured the settlement of Moore Town, but this was retaken by the Maroons the following year. The Windward Maroons terrified a few inhabitants of Port Antonio when they captured three estates within three miles of Port Antonio; other estates were plundered and burnt and many people killed. In 1774, while the maroons were plundering Port Antonio, a group of volunteers led by Colonel Brooks, captured Nanny Town, one of the

most important Maroon settlements. Nanny town was strategically built between the Rio Grande and the Back River, which is a large tributary of the Rio Grande. It was always difficult for the forces to reach it when the river was in spate, this time however Colonel Brooks was able to get to the town before they were discovered.

Nanny Town was the home of 'Nanny of the Maroons', the first and only national heroine of Jamaica. She was a celebrated Maroon chieftainess and was of Ashanti origin. She was said to have been a brave warrior and to have led her people in successful fights against white settlers. It is claimed that a slave called Cuffee was the one to have killed Nanny and for this he was rewarded by the Assembly. There is some debate about this story; however, as the Maroons denied that she was killed in this way and at that specific time. They asserted that and this time she died in the 1750s. The capture of Nanny Town did not mean defeat of the Maroons as they continued to build new settlements and went on plundering.

In March 1738, the Maroons in the west of the island led by Cudjoe, made peace with the English. Qua, decided upon the same. The treaty was signed in June 1739. Historians say that Nanny did not agree with the treaty since Portland Maroons were not defeated in war. In 1746, however, she signed a separate treaty with the English and received 500 acres of land. It is believed that this land forms the present site of Moore Town.

### **Agriculture/ Sugar/banana**

Agriculture has always been an important feature of Portland. Sugar plantations which have defined much of the slavery period in Jamaica were not widespread in Portland, primarily because of strong Maroon presence which made it difficult for persons to settle. Edward Long, a Jamaican Planter and historian notes that in 1768, forty five years after the parish was formed, only twenty nine sugar estates were there. As time went by, the number of estates increased as it is said that thirty eight large estates and more than one hundred small properties and cattle pens were established. This rapid development was accredited with peace being made with the maroons. Many of the place names in the parish of Portland came from the name of old sugar estates; names like, Snow Hill, Norwich, Prospect, Fairy Hill, Boston, Egg Hill, among others.

Of all the crops that were cultivated in Portland, the one that was most important was banana. Portland, it is said, owes its banana industry to an American Captain, Lorenzo Dow Baker. He arrived in Jamaica in 1870 when the island was experiencing hardships because of the decline in sugar production and loss of the protected market for sugar. He saw bananas growing around the country side. Initially, the wealthy planters of the parish thought of the banana as 'negro' food and did not dream that it could be valuable to them. It was Baker who saw the value of banana as an export crop. As a result the banana industry which he started; the Boston Fruit Company, which was later known as the United Fruit Company saved many Jamaicans from poverty. Historians note that Baker owed the idea to Captain Busch who in 1869 came to Port Antonio in search of 'Gros' bananas. He got a load of bananas and sold these at a profit in Boston. The following year in 1869 he arranged to buy bananas and other fruits more regularly. It was merely by chance Baker came across the banana trade. In 1871, on his way from Orinoco, he stopped at Jamaica to pick up a load of bamboo. He anchored at Morant Bay and loaded his ship with coconuts, coffee, pimento, banana and bamboo. This was an experiment as he was unsure if Americans would like the fruit. When he arrived in Boston however, he quickly sold his cargo at a good price. On his return to Jamaica, he decided to begin a regular business in banana. When he landed at Port Antonio, he hoped to get a cheap cargo of banana for his return. During this period Port Antonio was in a bad state as a hurricane had just torn down a few buildings and people were living without proper housing and food. Captain Baker offered to buy the natives of Portland banana at 25 cents a bunch. They quickly sold him 1450 bunches and upon his return to Boston, he sold it at \$2.50 and \$3.25 per stem, as a result he made a substantial profit. He eventually bought Bog Estate and Bowden Estate.

As time went by, the cultivation of banana in the parish of Portland coupled with the introduction of the product by Baker aided in prosperity of the parish and its people. However short-lived it may have been, it played a pivotal role in the agricultural development of Portland.

## **Notable places/buildings in Portland**

### **Titchfield Peninsula**

This was the first place to be settled by the English, known as the oldest settlement of the town.

### **Folly Point Lighthouse**

Built in 1888, the Tower is constructed of masonry and is fire proof.

### **Moore Town**

Previously known as New Nanny Town, Moore Town was a stronghold of the Maroons. Today, Moore Town is governed by a Colonel, a Maroon given the honorary title earned by his ancestors.

### **Seaman's Valley**

This property has on it the ruins of the great house, and the first European cemetery in this area.

### **Port Antonio Court House**

It was erected in 1895 on the direction of the Colonial Secretary.

### **Portland Parish Church**

Also called Christ Church, is built on land indentured on third September, 1836.

### **DeMontevin lodge**

Built in 1881 by The Hon David Gideon, former Custos of Portland, Demontevin Lodge is of a Victorian architectural style. Many distinguished guests have visited this lodge such as Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon 1923; Duchess of York, subsequently referred to as "Queen Elizabeth I, and more popularly known as The Queen Mother" stayed at DeMontevin. Queen Elizabeth II visited in 1953 and 1956 and subsequent to her visit a room was renamed the Queen's Room.

## Sources

Brown, Beryl. *A Short History of Portland*. Kingston: Ministry of Education Publications Branch, 1976. Print.

Jacobs, H.P. The West Indian Review "*The Parishes of Jamaica: Portland*".

Jamaica information service. *Portland*. A Series of "Parish Profiles". Kingston: JIS, 1990. Print.

Jamaica National Heritage Trust "*St. Andrew Heritage Sites*". Web Wed May 28 2014.

<http://www.jnht.com/portland.php>

Senior, Olive. *Encyclopedia of Jamaican Heritage*. St. Andrew: Twin Guinep Publishers Ltd, 2003. Print.

Sibley, Inez Knibb. *Dictionary of Place – Names in Jamaica*. Kingston: The Institute of Jamaica, 1978. Print.