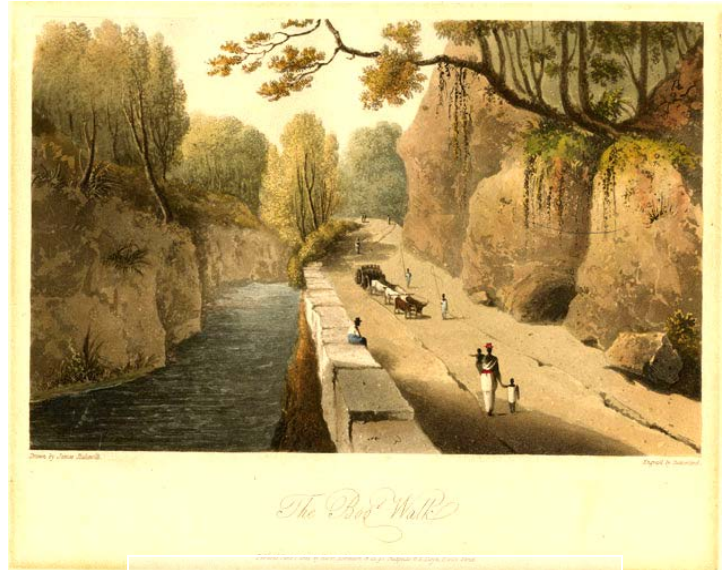


History of St. Catherine

St. Catherine's Geography

The parish of St. Catherine is located on the southern coast of Jamaica. It is approximately 1,192 square kilometers and is bordered to the west by St. Andrew, to the east by Clarendon, to the north by both St. Mary and St. Ann and bordered to the south by the Caribbean Sea. Two very important geographical aspects of St. Catherine are its plains and the Linstead Basin.



Primarily so because the St. Catherine plains and the Linstead Basin both make up one of the largest and most critical basins in Jamaica; the Rio Cobre basin.. The Rio Cobre is the only river that travels along the plain. It enters from the Linstead basin and moves through the Rio Cobre Gorge. To the north are the foothills of St. John's Hill and Red Hills.

Brief History

St. Catherine is considered as one of the largest parishes in Jamaica. It was named after the Queen of Charles II who was on the throne of England when it was formed in 1660. In the first Act in which the name is mentioned, it was spelt "Katherine." St. Catherine as we know it today was not always as large. In 1867, Law 20, the number of parishes was reduced from 22 to 14. The boundaries of St. Catherine were expanded to include the former parishes of St. Dorothy, St. John and St. Thomas in the Vale.

The Capital- Saint Jago (Santiago) De La Vega

(Under the Spaniards)

Spanish Town or Santiago De La Vega as it was previously known, is one of the most historic and important places in Jamaica. The entire island of Jamaica along with Spanish Town was called Santiago by the Spaniards in honour of their country's Patron Saint, but the name only continued under the latter. Its relevance came into being as early as 1509 when Spanish colonists arrived to established 'Sevilla la Nueva' in St. Ann as the capital of Jamaica. This would be short-lived as the area was deemed to be unhealthy and swampy. Consequently, the search was on to find a more suitable site for the capital. In 1534, Santiago De La Vega was the chosen site and request for habitation was made to the King of Spain.

Santiago De La Vega was subjected to attacks on account of European rivalry. During that period, the Spaniards colonized most of the area in and around the Caribbean as well as the mainland, and there were considerable efforts from Spain's rival's to loosen the monopoly that she enjoyed. In January 1597, a celebrated Elizabethan adventurer; Sir Anthony Shirley, marched on Santiago De La Vega. Facing little or no opposition from the Spaniards, he and his men plundered and burnt the city. Six years later, there was another attack on the capital, this time by Christopher Newport. Another attempt was made in 1643 by Captain William Jackson. A culmination of these attacks over the period of a few years struck fear in Spanish inhabitants to the point where if an ordinary ship was seen, they would take to the hills their goods and their women. (Black)

The Capital Saint Jago De La Vega (Spanish Town)

(Under the English)

On May 10 1655, an English expedition led by General Robert Venables and Admiral William Penn anchored at Kingston Harbour. They captured Jamaica from the Spaniards at Passage Fort, after over a century of Spanish occupation. It is believed that in the initial stages, the island was taken with little or no resistance as it was weakly defended. When first captured, casualties were few as most of the Spaniards fled to the coast and some to Santiago de Cuba. Barely a shot was fired but in the latter stages of conquest, under Don Cristobal Arnolde De Ysassi;

guerilla warfare was to continue for another five years. He was assisted by enslaved Africans who were freed upon the arrival of the English. It was not until five years after in 1660 that the English were in full and total control of the country.

The English did not have things easy in the initial stages of settlement as the Maroons often times attacked them, fevers and diseases took their toll, and food and water were scarce. As a result, it is estimated that up to five thousand English men died. It took some time for Spanish Town to recover from the many unfortunate circumstances and during this time Port Royal operated as the capital. Around 15 years after the English wrestled ownership of Jamaica from the Spaniards, in 1670, Jamaica was now formally recognized as an English possession by the treaty of Madrid. They (English) renamed Santiago De La Vega “Spanish Town,” and after Port Royal was devastated by the earthquake of June 7, 1692, Spanish Town regained its supreme position as capital and remained that way for nearly 180 years.

Spanish Town became the administrative centre of the island. It housed the Parish Council, the House of Assembly and the Supreme Court

Capital Changing to Kingston

By 1755, there was serious lobbying in Kingston for the capital to be transferred to there from Spanish Town. By 1836, Governor Lionel Smith had noted that Spanish Town was in ruins, with little or no commercial, agricultural or manufacturing activity. This called into question, the suitability of Spanish Town as the capital. Kingston was seen as a more ‘natural capital’ for Jamaica, primarily so because of its spectacular harbour and major trade links. In 1872, the formal transfer of the capital was implemented and historians have said that along with losing the capital, Spanish Town had also lost much of its life and richness.

Sligoville: Jamaica’s First Free Village

Embedded in St. Catherine’s history is the fact that it is home to the first free village established in Jamaica. Sligoville derived its name after the Marquis of Sligo, then Governor of Jamaica. With its creation, it marked the starting point of the free village system in Jamaica.

Development

Since that time, St. Catherine has undergone major development and foremost in its development is the changes in land settlement and residential development. St. Catherine now absorbs the residential population outside of Kingston. Chief among these places is Portmore. Much of modern Portmore was built on a vast coastal property owned by the Dawkins. It was originally called Dawkin's Salt Pond Pen before it was finally renamed Portmore in the 1870s to honour the Earl of Portmore. Modern Portmore (1960s) started with the establishment of modern housing schemes in the area. Up to date, over ten schemes have been built.

Further development in the parish is in the form of Manufacturing and industry. Unique only to St. Catherine is that it is home to the largest salt producing plant in the Caribbean, and also having the only condensed milk factory in the island. The parish has the only police training facility in the island, located in Twickenham Park. Another place that has benefitted from the parish's progress is Old Harbour, which in the earlier days was a shipbuilding town. But presently, the town's close proximity to the fishing port, Old Harbour Bay, enables it to gradually develop and prosper each year. Many housing schemes have also been developed in and around the Old Harbour area. St. Catherine is also seen as an industrial centre, as apart from Kingston, it is one of the chief parishes in that regard.

Notable places/buildings

The Rodney Memorial

Located at the northern side of Spanish Town Square, this memorial contains a statue that was crafted by John Bacon of the famed British Admiral, Lord Rodney. It commemorates his victory over the French at the 'Battle of the Saints' on April 12, 1782, off the coast of Jamaica.

The Old Iron Bridge

The bridge is the oldest of its type in the Western Hemisphere. It was built in 1801 at approximately £4000.

The Old King's House

Home to the Governors of Jamaica for over 100 years. King's House occasionally housed the Council Chamber and welcomed many distinguished guests. It was burnt down in 1925 but has since been restored.

Spanish Town Court House

Erected at a cost of £15,700, this Georgian building is located at the southern end of the square. It was built on a site which was originally a cemetery and later a chapel and an armory

St. James Cathedral (Spanish Town)

It was built around 1525 on the site of the Spanish Chapel of the Red Cross. It stands today as the oldest ecclesiastic structure in the British Empire (Outside of United Kingdom). When the English captured Jamaica, the English destroyed the existing cathedral and instead built an Anglican Church. In 1843 the church was named the Cathedral of the Anglican Diocese, in honour of the patron Saint – St. James. It is the chief church of the Anglican denomination in Jamaica and contains the earliest existing Anglican records, some which date back to 1668.

Spanish Town Cathedral/ Parish Church

The St. Catherine Parish Church also known as the Spanish Town Cathedral, was built in the second half of the 1600s. After the conquest of Jamaica by the British in 1655, the British destroyed the original Catholic Church and replaced it with the Anglican Church, which is now the St. Catherine Parish Church or the Spanish Town Cathedral.

Bog Walk Gorge

It derived its name from Spanish origin, 'Boca de Agua' which translates to Water's Mouth. During the 1660s, after the British occupation, the Bog Walk Gorge or Rio Cobre Gorge was discovered by Carey Helyar. In 1770 the first road was cut through the Gorge. The first bridge, connecting both sides of the gorge, was of wood but was later replaced by the present structure.

Highgate House

It is considered to be the oldest structure in the district of Sligoville. Highgate House was built as a summer residence on the country estate called Government Mountain, for the Governor. Sir John Dalling was the first Governor to occupy the house.

St. Dorothy's Anglican Church

St. Dorothy's Anglican Church located about two miles from Old Harbour, was built on land donated by Colonel Thomas Fuller and his wife, Catherine Fuller in 1681. Old Harbour was once a part of the Parish of St. Dorothy and hence the name St. Dorothy.

Fort Small

Fort Small was built in 1782 to protect the bay between Port Henderson and the Hellshire Hills. The fort was built by David Small and designed to mount eight 24 pounder guns and one ten inch mortar. Fort Small was extensively repaired in 1790 and was placed on the island's list of forts in 1799. It was about that time, that the name of the fort was changed to Fort Clarence, probably in honour of William Duke of Clarence. He became King of England in 1820 and reigned until 1837.

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