

History of Trelawny



19th century view of Market Street, Falmouth

The settlers in St. James (named after His Royal Highness, James-Duke of York) had once complained that their parish was too large. Some had a hard time getting to the parish capital (Montego Bay) to transact business. They wrote to the Assembly asking that the parish be divided in April 1733, and the Governor-Major-General, Robert Hunter, was informed that the name “New Brunswick” be given to the proposed new parish. However, thirty-seven years would pass before the new parish was actually formed. This first Bill for the partition of St. James that was submitted to the House of Assembly was thrown out to the disappointment of its supporters but in 1770, however, another Bill for this purpose was passed.

In 1770 the new parish of Trelawny was formed and named after the then governor, Sir William Trelawny, with the chief town being Martha Brae. However, Martha Brae’s size and location had made it unsuited to be the capital of the

parish. Near Martha Brae, on the north coast of the island, was a small seaside village known as Martha Brae Point. This was renamed Falmouth and it was so named to establish an additional link with Sir William Trelawny; Falmouth in the county of Cornwall, England was the birthplace of this governor. Around 1790, Falmouth took the place as the capital of Trelawny and in its early years, the new capital was particularly quite prosperous. Several ships could be seen in the Falmouth harbour unloading cargo and taking on sugar and rum. Falmouth even became home to prominent planters John Tharpe and Edward Barrett-two of the wealthiest planters in the 18th century. So rich and diverse is Falmouth's heritage that in 1985, under the Jamaica Heritage Trust Act, a section of Falmouth was declared a Protected National Heritage Site; this section known as the Falmouth Historic District was declared a National Monument by the Government of Jamaica, in 1996.

Agriculture is the main focus of Trelawny's economy. Trelawny goes down in Jamaica's history as the parish with the most sugar estates and sugar factories. At one time, the estates numbered as many as one hundred, with over forty sugar factories. By 1927 the number of estates had declined to sixteen (16), but Trelawny still produced more sugar than any other parish in the island. In the early 1900s, a fall in the price of sugar on the world market resulted in the decline of Trelawny's sugar industry. Banana growing took over as the major agricultural enterprise but today yam is said to be the major agricultural product of which about sixty (60) percent of the nation's total production is grown. Trelawny is also known for producing persons who have greatly impacted Jamaica, including Hugh Lawson Shearer, Reverend William Knibb, Guy S. Ewen, Rev. John Maxwell, Rex Nettleford, Usain Bolt and Veronica Campbell-Brown. Trelawny also boasted its

own newspapers: the Falmouth Post, the Falmouth Gazette, the Trelawny and Public Advertiser and the Trelawny Advance, the Cornwall Courier and the Cornwall Chronicle.

Historic places in Trelawny include:

Fort Balcarres- This fort was built in 1811 with a Garrison to defend the Harbour. It is now the site of the Falmouth Primary School.

William Knibb Baptist Church- Built in 1844 but was destroyed by fire in 1944 and later rebuilt in 1948. It was named after the Reverend William Knibb who was born in Kettering, Northamptonshire. He was buried in the church yard.

Dome- when sugar was king, an iron foundry to repair sugar estate machinery was a necessity. The Dome located at the corner of Tharpe Street and Upper Harbour Street was constructed in 1801 for this purpose.

Falmouth Parish Church- the Anglican Church of St. Peter's was built in 1795 and is the oldest church in the parish as well as the oldest public building in Falmouth. The land for the church was donated by Edward Barrett who had sold a part of his estate to have the township built. In 1842, it was enlarged with a western extension.

Falmouth Court House - the Court House was built in 1915. After a fire in 1926, it was successfully rebuilt except for a variation in the original roof line.

Sources

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