

History of Clarendon

Clarendon's Geography

The Parish of Clarendon is Jamaica's third largest parish in size behind St. Catherine and St. Ann, with the parish covering approximately 1,196 square kilometers. It is located on the southern half of the island and is bordered to the north by St. Ann, to the east by St. Catherine, to the west by Manchester and to the south by the Caribbean Sea.

The topography of the parish is generally low, except in the north and north-eastern parts, and that is why historians have said that when flying over the parish, you will see Clarendon as a wide plain laying between the Carpenter's Mountain (Manchester) in the west, and the Braziletto Mountains in the east. Mocho Mountains (2000 ft) and the Bull Head Mountain Range (2792 ft), said to be the geographical centre of the island, are to be found in Northern Clarendon. Clarendon has five major rivers, the Milk River, Rio Minho, Pinders River, Cave River and Thomas River.



Origin and History

Clarendon was named in honour of Lord/Chancellor Edward Hyde, the first Earl of Clarendon; one of the chief ministers in Charles II government. The parish that we know today as Clarendon absorbed part of the former parishes of St. Dorothy and Vere during the mid 1800s.

The southern plains of the parish were first occupied by the Tainos, and afterwards by the Spaniards who established cattle ranches, referred to as 'hatos' or 'haciendas.' Clarendon's development started in the seventeenth century from land grants issued by Charles II to former Commonwealth troops who had established sugar estates along the Rio Minho Valley. This area

is considered the first place of settlement by the English in Clarendon. The names of these early settlers still remain as many places along the valley bear their names, including; Ballard, Sutton and Pennant.

The English gained control of the island from the Spaniards and in the subsequent years, the English settlers developed plantations on the plain. The principal crop cultivated was cotton and indigo, from the latter dye was made. Inescapably, the rise of sugar cane minimized the influence of cotton and indigo. Clarendon's topography aided the rise and spread of sugar as its flat plains ensured extensive sugar cultivation. However, dry weather affected the growth of canes on the plain, but sugar could still be extracted. Measures were put in place to help solve this problem including getting water from Rio Minho and Milk River. This was short-lived however, as it was too costly to get water from these rivers. The eventual solution was to pump water from the Cockpit River to a high point on the hillside that would be high enough to let it flow to acres of land east of the Rio Minho. This measure was completed in 1917.

Early Rebellion/ Maroon

In 1690, one of the earliest slave rebellions in Jamaica occurred in Clarendon at Sutton's Plantation. The runaways burnt the land and the Great House as it was weakly defended. Many of the runaways were later killed or recaptured; others joined the Maroons in the north of the parish. They continued over different points attacking different plantations and burning them. The government in response sent out soldiers to the hills to try to overcome them. The soldiers gained some level of success as the Maroons, who were led by Cudjoe; were gradually driven out from the Cave River Valley, first to the area around Ulster Spring and then into the Cockpit Country. Subsequently, the Maroons really had nothing more to do with the parish of Clarendon.

Carlisle Bay/ The last battle for Jamaica

Located at the mouth of the Rio Minho on the south coast near Rocky Point, Carlisle Bay was named after the Earl of Carlisle and the Governor of Jamaica (1678- 1690). It serves as a noteworthy reminder for being the principal scene of military engagement when the French

invaded and attempted to capture Jamaica from the English. In the 17th century, England and France were at war and the animosity between the two nations spread to the Caribbean area. In 1694, the French Governor of St. Domingue (Haiti) Du Casse, believing that Jamaica was weak and could be easily captured because of the 1692 earthquake, prepared to invade Jamaica. Jamaica was not surprised however, as an English sailor who was a prisoner in St. Dominigue had earlier escaped and sailed to Jamaica and broke the news. The Governor, Sir William Beeston immediately made preparations to resist the invasion by calling out the militia and free men; some slaves were brought out as well. A breastwork was constructed at Carlisle Bay, close to the sea shore. On the 17th of July 1694, the French fleet attacked. The French forced their way through the breastwork and attacked the English but the militia held out as long as possible. Shortly after, the troops from Spanish Town arrived. The French were immediately charged and forced to retreat and eventually gave up. The failed invasion led Jamaica's governor to build Carlisle Fort the following year. The events of Carlisle Bay marked the last attempt to capture Jamaica by any of England's European rivals.

May Pen- Capital

Located on the banks of Rio Minho, May Pen is the capital of Clarendon and is said to have begun with two inns. It was once part of an estate named after its owner; Reverend William May who was born in England in 1695 but in his later years resided in Jamaica. He was rector of the Kingston Parish Church but was later transferred to Clarendon, where he served for thirty two years. In earlier years, travelling to May Pen was a tedious task as travelers going from east to west had to lodge at the inns when Rio Minho was in spate (no bridge at that time). It is said that many well known members of the public drowned in an attempt to cross the river; most notably, Dr. Samuel Glaister Bell, who was a renowned doctor in the parish. A bridge was eventually constructed and in Dr. Bell's honour, a clock tower. As time went by, houses were erected and the village became the town of May Pen. Historians note that the first significant mention of May Pen was in 1887 Law 20. It stated that the parish of Clarendon and Vere shall continue under one parish under the name Clarendon and the town of May Pen shall be the chief town. In 1962 in the year of independence May Pen was granted mayoral status.

Clarendon has developed from the dependence on sugar and became a major player in the bauxite industry. Jamalco one of the principal companies in the precious metal is located in Hayes. The parish has also prospered due to the development of many business ventures that includes dry goods, confectionery and baked products. One of the island's largest patty company; Juicy Beef, has its headquarters based in the parish.

Notable Places/ Buildings in Clarendon

St. Peter's Church (Alley)

Situated on Montpelier Estate, the church was built with brick and stone quoins in 1671. The Alley Church is the oldest Anglican Church in the island.

May Pen Clock Tower

This clock tower was constructed in honour of Doctor Samuel Glaister Bell, a renowned doctor of the parish who died while crossing the Rio Minho after visiting a patient.

Halse Hall Great House

It is considered as one of Jamaica's historic houses. The lands on which it stands were given to an English officer, Major Thomas Halse, in 1655, and from him to Sadler Halse who played a leading role in the Maroon Wars. Henry de la Beche and Sir Hans Sloane are other famous occupants who resided in this historical house.

Bull Head Mountain

This is mountain is so called primarily because of the shape of this mountain, which rises to a height of 3600 feet. It is considered as being the geographical centre of the island and it is a very noticeable landmark to vessels that approach from the south.

Danks

Danks in Clarendon was the name given to a property that Sir Henry Morgan deeded to his German wife who said 'Danke' meaning thanks. He was also Governor of Jamaica in 1673.

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