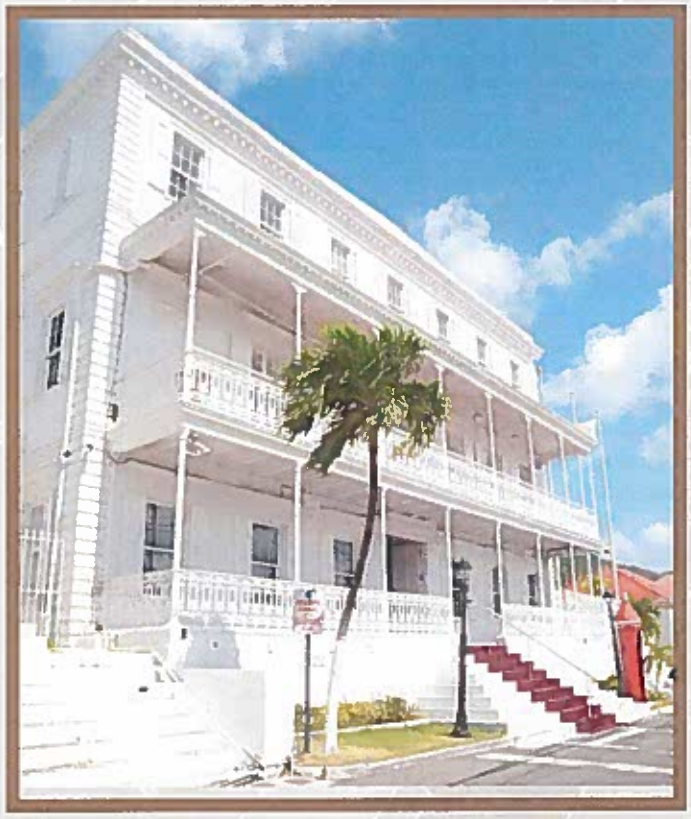
The Honorable Kenneth E. Mapp
Governor

The Honorable Osbert E. Potter
Lieutenant Governor

2015

Government House



ST. THOMAS

Kongens Gade 21-22, Kings Quarter
St. Thomas, United States Virgin Islands

GOVERNMENT HOUSE
Kongens Gade 21-22, Kings Quarter
St. Thomas, United States Virgin Islands

Government House on Kongens Gade served as the official residence of the Governor since Danish Colonial times. Discussions to replace an earlier structure of 1819 with the present Government House began in the Colonial Council in 1864, and work began in August of that year. The cornerstone was laid by the Vice Governor Chamberlain Louis Rothe, Knight of Dannebrog, who was also President of the Colonial Council, in a ceremony on April 8, 1865. That date was chosen because it was the forty-seventh birthday of His Most Gracious Majesty, King Christian the Ninth.

The contractor chosen was a master carpenter or "tommermester" from St. Croix named Richard Bright. Mr. Bright, a Crucian, lived on St. Thomas; his home still stands on Kongens Gade today. Richard Bright died in the summer of 1866, at which point the roof was on and the floors in, but the exterior and interior finishing were incomplete. The building was finally completed in 1867 by George Nunes & Company. From that date until 1872, Government House was the home of the Vice Governor. From 1872 when the capital moved from St. Croix back to St. Thomas, the building was not only the focus of official life but also the residence of the Governor.

Government House is a large, formal, three-story building of imported Danish yellow brick with neoclassical detailing of quoins, belt coursing and an elaborate projecting cornice of brick with dentil course. The building is crowned with a brick parapet and low hip roof behind it. The most outstanding feature is the ornate cast iron porch on the first and second stories with fluted columns and a fancy cast iron cornice around the porch roof.

The office of Protocol and Policy Staff are situated on the first floor. There are many items of interest in the lobby. The most treasured, however, are two paintings by the "Father of Impressionism," Camille Pissarro, a native of St. Thomas. On the walls are photographs of former governors, as well as the present governor, Kenneth E. Mapp. Visitors are invited to sign the guest book.

A few steps up from the lobby on the north foyer wall are three murals painted in the 1930s by Pepino Mangravatti as part of the United States Government's Public Works Projects Administration of the depression years. The three murals by Mangravatti replaced a large one by the itinerant Danish artist, Visby, which was in existence from 1867 until the turn of the century. One of the murals depicts the landing of Columbus and his men on St. Croix in 1493; the second records the official Transfer of the islands from Denmark to the United States on March 31, 1917 in St. Thomas. The third shows the processing of muscavado into rum at a sugar plantation on St. John.

Located on the second floor of Government House is the reception room, a large ballroom and the state dining room. On the dining room wall is a large painting of St. Croix as it was long ago, discovered in Denmark and purchased there by former Governor Ralph Paiewonsky and his brother, Isidor, and given by them to Government House. Most official functions are held in the ballroom and state dining room, although many are now held at Catharineberg. Doors from the dining room lead to a large patio. Other artifacts and artwork on this floor include a French tapestry dating back to 1700, the Danish coins, the Texas longhorn, and the sword over the door which are also gifts to the people of the Virgin Islands.

Also displayed on the second floor is a Bible that once belonged to Danish Governor-General Peter von Scholten, which is a gift to the people of the Virgin Islands from Jobst von Scholten, a direct descendant of the Governor-General. Another gift from the von Scholten family is the blue and white porcelain inkwell set used by Governor von Scholten to sign the Emancipation Proclamation, which freed the enslaved Africans of the Danish West Indies on July 3, 1848. July 3rd is now celebrated in the United States Virgin Islands as a local holiday, "Emancipation Day."

The third floor, which originally served as the Governor's residence, now houses the offices of the Governor's executive staff, the Governor's Lounge, a conference room and kitchen. There are various paintings by well-known artists displayed on this floor, including two watercolors by J. W. Turner, pastels by Edouard Viullard and Mary Cassatt, and oils by Thomas Hart Benton, Henri Rousseau and Gustave Courbet.

The small, red wooden sentry box at the foot of the entrance staircase outside Government House is an authentic Danish guardhouse, as used by sentries in front of the queen's palaces and military facilities in Denmark. It was presented to Government House by the Danish West Indian Society in 1967 on the 50th anniversary of the Transfer of the Virgin Islands.

The people of the U.S. Virgin Islands began electing their own governor in 1970. Dr. Melvin Herbert Evans was distinguished as being the last governor appointed by the President of the United States and first elected governor of the U.S. Virgin Islands. His tenure as elected governor began in January 1971. Other elected governors include: Cyril Emmanuel King, Juan Francisco Luis, Alexander Anthony Farrelly, Roy Lester Schneider, Charles Wesley Turnbull, John Percy de Jongh, Jr. and Kenneth E. Mapp. Governors Luis, Farrelly, Turnbull and de Jongh each served two terms in office. Governor Kenneth E. Mapp. and Lieutenant Osbert E. Potter began their term in office on January 5, 2015.