



**GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS OF THE UNITED STATES**

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**DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND NATURAL RESOURCES**

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**TESTIMONY**

**Dawn L. Henry, Esq., Commissioner**  
Department of Planning and Natural Resources

**COMMITTEE ON CULTURE, HISTORIC  
PRESERVATION, YOUTH, & RECREATION**

Cleone Henrietta Creque Legislative Conference Room  
Cruz Bay, St. John

Monday, September 19, 2016

**RE: Discussion and consideration of a resolution to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the founding of the town of Cruz Bay.**

Good afternoon Senator Myron D. Jackson, Chairman of the 31st Legislature's Committee on Culture, Historic Preservation, Youth, & Recreation, committee members, other members of the 31st Legislature, and the listening and viewing audience. I am Sean L. Krigger, Acting Director and Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer of the Virgin Islands State Historic Preservation Office (VISHPO).

I respectfully appear today on behalf of Dawn L. Henry, Esq., Commissioner of the Department of Planning and Natural Resources (DPNR) and State Historic Preservation Officer to offer testimony from the Department on the discussion and consideration of a resolution to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the founding of the town of Cruz Bay.

While the oldest areas within the towns of Charlotte Amalie, on St. Thomas, and Christiansted and Frederiksted, on St. Croix, have long been recognized for their historical value and have received Historic District designations, the primary settlement on St. John, Cruz Bay Town, has gone unrecognized. This inadvertent oversight has placed Cruz Bay's highly significant cultural and historical resources in great peril, and has hindered community based efforts to preserve and protect important vestiges of Virgin Islands' heritage.

In prior years, through a Historic Preservation Fund Sub-grant from the Virgin Islands State Historic Preservation Office (2013/2014), a comprehensive historical background survey was carried out in order to determine the eligibility of Cruz Bay Town for inclusion as a Historic District on both the Virgin Islands Registry of Historic Places and the National Register of Historic Places. The results of that project have clearly demonstrated that Cruz Bay holds substantial historic and cultural significance, on both the National and Territorial levels, and that it retains a remarkably high degree of historical integrity in its layout and design.

The town of Cruz Bay (aka Christiansbay) was originally surveyed and mapped by Danish Crown Surveyor Julius Philip Benjamin von Rohr in the mid-eighteenth century. von Rohr's

hand-drawn survey map of Cruz Bay, rendered in 1766, shows the town laid out in an orderly grid pattern of three primary streets running parallel to the shoreline, and two cross-streets running inland from the harbor. This plan, produced some 250 years ago, is the very same layout encountered in the town of Cruz Bay to the present day.

Among the town's notable historic structures, landmarks, and features are:

- A public square and landing place measured and laid out by Crown Surveyor von Rohr in 1766.
- The ruins and repurposed remains of 18th and 19-century warehouses, homes and commercial structures, some retaining remarkable integrity, that clearly demonstrate the architectural styles and building practices of their respective time periods.
- Two historic cemeteries and other burial sites: one cemetery dating to the mid-19th century is exclusively associated with a prominent Free-Colored family of the period; the other, currently utilized as a public cemetery, is potentially much older and may hold burials dating to as far back as the 18th century or earlier.
- Numerous vernacular structures with associated outbuildings and yards dating from the early 19th through mid-20th centuries, which are representative of Cruz Bay's cultural and economic progression from a small, rural village to a thriving center of commercial development by the late 1900s.
- A fortified courthouse and jail (known locally as "the Battery"), along with its associated outbuildings and infrastructure, first constructed as a military defensive position in c1774 and converted to a civil administrative headquarters for the island in 1824.

- The Cruz Bay dock, constructed in 1838 and still in use to the present day as St. John's primary point of entry. Although it has been lengthened and improved a number of times, the original structure has never been totally demolished or relocated.
- A reservoir built during the period of United States Naval administration of the Virgin Islands of the United States in the 1920s. It was the first public water supply system for the town of Cruz Bay, which appears never to have had potable ground water.
- Numerous stately "heritage trees," along with other plantings, reflective of the town's rich cultural landscape. Among these trees are mature Lignum vitae, tamarind, saman, mahogany, a wide variety of palms, and one particularly notable genip tree that is believed to be more than 300-years old.

Utilizing the Historic Preservation Fund from the Fiscal Year 2013 Sub Grant Program and in collaboration with the St. John Historical Society, VISHPO granted a total sum of \$10,000 through a sub grant to the St. John Historical Society for the Free Colored Cemetery Restoration Project in Cruz Bay. The project included the cleaning, stabilization and restoration of the historic Free-Colored Cemetery (a.k.a. van Beverhoudt heirs' cemetery) which is situated on the southern end of the town on a hillside overlooking Cruz Bay harbor.

In recent years, there have been significant strides in rectifying the historical recognition of the historical prominence of the town of Cruz Bay, St. John. In December of 2015, VISHPO funded a national register district nomination for the town of Cruz Bay, which was completed by David W. Knight, Sr. (historian and cultural resource consultant) and subsequently has been submitted to the National Park Service in Washington, D.C. for

review and approval. This proposal provides invaluable historical background information on a previous justification study, outlining relevant and anticipated notable outcomes.

In considering a Historic District nomination for Cruz Bay, it is important to note that the town's remote setting and small natural harbor, historically sets it apart from major networks of international commerce. Left to its relative solitude, a distinctively St. Johnian culture evolved there. Self-reliant, grounded in deep religious faith, and supported through the hard work and cooperation of close-knit family networks, the people of Cruz Bay endured long years of hardship with little prosperity, yet remained rich in spirit and fortitude.

It has only been in recent decades that outside economic forces and invasive exposures have begun to seriously erode the underpinnings of this proud and culturally unique community. It must be kept in mind that the preservation and retention of cultural memory, while less tangible than physical features of the landscape, is no less important to the significance of a Historic District.

The Department of Planning and Natural Resources (DPNR) and the Virgin Islands State Historic Preservation Office (VISHPO) is in support of the Legislature's intent and plans to organize commemorative celebrations in recognition of the 250th anniversary of the founding of the town of Cruz Bay. The anticipated activities will serve to not only identify the significant and catalytic role of the island of St. John in Virgin Islands history, but will serve to document a historically unique and rich part of Virgin Islands historical and cultural existence which will allow the Virgin Islanders and St. Johnians in particular, to embrace a sense of historical place and identity in future generations.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

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