

TESTIMONY FOR THE 31st LEGISLATURE OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS,
COMMITTEE ON CULTURE, HISTORIC PRESERVATION, YOUTH AND
RECREATION, on behalf of The St. John Historical Society

Public Hearing in Cruz Bay, September 19, 2016

Good Evening, Members of the 31st Legislature of the Virgin Islands, Committee on Culture, Historic Preservation, Youth and Recreation; Senate Chairman Jackson, Senators Sanes, Francis, Gittens, Nelson and Roach, other Distinguished Officials, fellow Citizens and interested Friends of the Virgin Islands.

My name is Lawrence Wilson. My wife, Joan, and I are full time resident home owners in Estate Carolina, 10-8-17 for the past 5 years. I appear at this hearing on behalf of the St. John Historical Society, of which we are members and I serve as newly elected to the Board of Directors.

After visiting the West Indies many times, we were so taken with the rich cultural diversity of the Caribbean, we committed to finding a way to make our home in the islands after retirement from our stateside careers. We chose the USVI and St. John in particular, for many reasons, but have been strongly reinforced henceforth by the “small town” atmosphere that lies just below the surface of the tourism and island beauty. The historic culture of St. John has shown welcoming courtesy for many years, and this has led many to join this special community.

From the beginning, I have had interest and appreciation for the histories of my island home, prompting my personal investigations and our membership in the St. John Historical Society. While tourists are able to learn some about the Danish Plantation history, the St. John Historical Society has had the benefit of many years of recognizing a more broad based history of these islands and its people. Much has been learned from St. Johnians who have shared the stories from their youth and their forbearers. I am grateful for an organization which promotes these important values and interests.

It is in this regard that the Historical Society welcomes and supports commemoration of the 1766 establishment of the town of Cruz Bay. While those who chose to populate and build this village in the late 18th century were visited

frequently with hardship, they bound together with an energy and commitment for the future of their township. Cruz Bay was a vibrant and rich community for two centuries before the National Park began to bring tourists and accelerated change. It's the responsibility of citizens and our government to preserve and hold up the cultural histories and traditions of those before us, much more so, as these become harder to discover and understand.

The membership of the St. John Historical Society is pleased that the recognition and celebration of Cruz Bay occurs amid the commemoration of the Transfer Centennial. The more recent transfer is an historic event for the Territory, but recognition of the longer history of these early citizens is an important remembrance to highlight at the same time.

We commend and thank you for proposing this resolution to facilitate the celebration of this important anniversary among the people of the Virgin Islands and especially for the many who have made St. John their home all these years.

Respectfully submitted,

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