

COMMITTEE ON CULTURE, HISTORIC
PRESERVATION, YOUTH AND RECREATION

BILL NO. 31-0449

Thirty-first Legislature of the Virgin Islands

September 16, 2016

An Act commemorating the 250th Anniversary of the establishment of the Town of Cruz Bay; directing the Office of the Governor and various entities of the executive branch to plan a ceremony celebrating the anniversary; and encouraging entities of the executive branch to market Cruz Bay as a cultural heritage destination and work with local artisans to develop cultural products in commemoration of the 250th anniversary

PROPOSED BY: Senator Myron D. Jackson

1 **WHEREAS**, the establishment of the town of Cruz Bay, St. John in 1766 was a departure
2 from the exclusionary practices of St. John's entrenched plantocracy, in that for the first time modest
3 town lots were made available for private purchase and allowed Free-Colored tradespersons with
4 their families and slaves to populate; and

5 **WHEREAS**, as a result a locally-based economy that opened opportunities for self-
6 advancement soon emerged; and

7 **WHEREAS**, the preparation for a prolonged global conflict prompted the construction of the
8 long-planned Cruz Bay Battery in 1774; and

9 **WHEREAS**, after the construction of the battery, little interest appeared to have been shown
10 in providing administrative oversight of the town or in fostering the development of infrastructure; and

1 **WHEREAS**, by the close of the eighteenth century Cruz Bay finally begun to flourish, perhaps
2 due in part to the posting of a military detachment with its officer, troops, support staff and slaves after
3 the completion of the battery; and

4 **WHEREAS**, Cruz Bay reached a pinnacle in its Danish-colonial period development of twenty
5 privately owned buildings in 1812; and

6 **WHEREAS**, there was a decline to fourteen structures after a destructive hurricane passed
7 through the islands in 1816; and

8 **WHEREAS**, by 1824, the year in which Governor Von Scholten ordered the conversion of the
9 former Cruz Bay Military Battery into a civil administrative headquarters; the town had largely been
10 rebuilt; and

11 **WHEREAS**, after 1825 the number of buildings in the town remained stable for a period of
12 just over a decade until 1836 when another powerful hurricane caused widespread damage throughout
13 the islands; and

14 **WHEREAS**, at the time of the Cruz Bay population census in 1841 the tax rolls indicated that
15 there were fifteen buildings in Cruz Bay; and

16 **WHEREAS**, from that point onward the periodic censuses allowed for accurate analysis of the
17 make-up of individual household within the town; and

18 **WHEREAS**, by the time Emancipation was achieved in 1848, Cruz Bay had effectively become
19 a Free-Colored town; and

20 **WHEREAS**, with the unraveling of the Danish-colonial plantations system during the second
21 half of the nineteenth century, Cruz Bay's remote setting and small natural harbor set it apart from
22 established networks of international trade and commerce; and

23 **WHEREAS**, outbreaks of yellow fever, a devastating cholera epidemic in 1854, hurricanes in
24 1867 and 1871, and an earthquake in the fall of 1867, triggered a tsunami that sent an estimated eighteen

1 feet of seawater surging into the town, greatly diminished Cruz Bay's population and damaged or
2 destroyed many of its old colonial-era buildings; and

3 **WHEREAS**, as the turn of the twentieth century approached, Cruz Bay all but lost the
4 characteristics of a town and became little more than a dusty, rural hamlet on the margins of a failing
5 colony; and

6 **WHEREAS**, left to its relative solitude, a distinct Creole society evolved there, informed by
7 age-old traditions and steeped in Afro-Caribbean life-ways and belief systems; and

8 **WHEREAS**, through self-reliance, grounded in deep religious faith and supported through hard
9 work and cooperation among close-knit family networks, the people of Cruz Bay endured long years
10 of hardship with little prosperity, yet remained rich in spirit and fortitude; and

11 **WHEREAS**, after the sale of the Danish West Indies to the United States, in 1919, North
12 American influences began to filter into a Creole society, especially after a detachment of U. S. Marines
13 was posted to Cruz Bay in the early 1920s; and

14 **WHEREAS**, with this heightened outside presence came a growing sense of worldliness and a
15 more cosmopolitan outlook; and

16 **WHEREAS**, these perspectives gained traction in the mid-to-late 1940s with the arrival of
17 increasing numbers of American "Continental" tourists and transplants and the return of a first
18 generation of native Virgin Island service men from the United States Armed Forces after World War
19 II; and

20 **WHEREAS**, St. John's late economic reawakening upheld traditional lifeways and prolonged
21 its historical integrity well into the second half of the twentieth century; and

22 **WHEREAS**, what most of the western world regards as modernization was indeed slow to
23 occur on St. John, where much of its infrastructure and public services - health care, sanitation,
24 electrical power, telephones and drivable networks -did not begin to be developed until the 1950s; and

1 **WHEREAS**, it was the creation of the Virgin Islands National Park on St. John in 1956 that
2 prompted the rapid transformation of Cruz Bay from a quiet rural village into a booming gateway town
3 for one of America’s treasured National Parks, which today welcomes an average of roughly 500,000
4 visitors per year; and

5 **WHEREAS**, in gaining this Historic District nomination, it is noteworthy that there are few
6 places under the United States flag where old-world Afro-Caribbean traditions and lifeways were
7 upheld for as long as on St. John; and

8 **WHEREAS**, the fact that Cruz Bay town is a place where “Native” built commercial sailings
9 vessels continued to call at the port of Cruz Bay throughout the 1960’s serves to remind us that the
10 preservation of memory and cultural identity, while less tangible than physical features on the
11 landscape, are no less important components of a Historic District, because they represent the true soul
12 and essence of a place; Now, Therefore,

13 ***Be it enacted by the Legislature of the Virgin Islands:***

14 **SECTION 1.** The Legislature of the Virgin Islands on behalf of the people of the Virgin
15 Islands, recognizes the longevity of the Cruz Bay Township and commemorates the 250th Anniversary
16 of this township.

17 **SECTION 2.** The Department of Tourism in conjunction with the Department of Planning and
18 Natural Resources, the Office of the Governor and the Department of Education shall plan a ceremony
19 celebrating the 250th Anniversary of the founding of the Town of Cruz Bay, to be held no later than one
20 year after the passage of this Act.

21 **SECTION 3.** The Department of Tourism and the Department of Planning and Natural
22 Resources shall engage and include any local, civic and cultural organization or person interested in
23 participating in the ceremony; and assist in planning and carrying out the provisions of this Act.

