



ENGLISH VERSION OF

Dansk Vestindisk Selskab

MAGASINET

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**NEW TIMES
– NEW METHODS.
About modern
sugarcane growing
in St. Croix.**

Look page 8

TO OUR USVI READERS

We are pleased to be able – for the third time – to give our USVI readers an opportunity to read some of the articles from Magasinet, the circular of Danish West Indian Society. This time focus is on the debate over removal of statues and establishment in Denmark of a center to focus on as well the good as the bad parts of Danish colonialism.

We also briefly report on the newly established sugar cane production in Estate Prosperity.

If you have friends who want to receive this circular please let me have relevant email addresses.

Michael Keldsen

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EDITORIAL

RACISM AND STATUES

This is a translation from Danish of the editorial in the Danish issue of Magasinet for September 2020, written by the editor, Michael Keldsen.

The Black Lives Matter movement has managed to engage most of us, unilaterally in the understanding, that the black community in USA has been challenged by a predominant white community, and particularly by a police force, which allegedly is tainted by racism. We have been horrified by the murder of George Floyd – particularly by the cynicism shown on the pictures. We have been able to understand the exaltation caused by the murder and which led to massive demonstrations and violation and destruction.

Many of us have seen the behavior of the President as a confirmation of the injustices, on which the American society is based and which mainly involves the black population; and we may have had some understanding for the removal of some of the most challenging statues and monuments.

Now, this is written in a circular, which focuses on the former Danish West Indies and the activities of the publisher, Danish West Indian Society in relation to the islands today as American. Articles in Magasinet are often of historical character and with focus on a time, when the islands were Danish. We must admit, that there for a Dane – from a small country with no influence on world affairs since the Viking Age – easily can rise a romantic, even national romantic aura over

many of the stories and the persons in those stories. And even if the principle of the editing is always based on the knowledge, that a substantial part of today's life in the islands has its roots in slave trade and slavery, and that this is more than a dark chapter in Danish, European and American history, then even the most learned reader may have difficulties in knowing and understanding how life is today in the islands – in reality!

I think that many of us are of the opinion, that there is not or only to a limited extent is racism in USVI. The population is mainly of African descent; historically racism has been limited, and the islands have self government to a certain degree, which means that important community functions are dealt with by representatives elected by the inhabitants of the islands. This illustration is hardly completely true.

At least it comes to light in an e-mail, which Deanna James circulated in June 2020. Deanna James is CEO of St. Croix Foundation, which is one of the 3 largest philanthropic organizations in St. Croix. This organization is i.a. involved in "The In Search of Identity" project, which has been the target for many articles in *Magasinet* over the years.

Deanna James elaborates over white influence in the mainly black Territory (which she calls "the only predominantly Black American colony"). In the philanthropic world, which is an important part of American life, even in USVI white domination is experienced. This Deanna James exemplifies with the fact, that donations to organizations, led by blacks, is 24 per cent less than to organizations led by whites, and net

assets in black led organizations are 76 per cent less than in white organizations. Deanna James therefore concludes, that "systemic issues of race in America do not take a siesta at our shorelines. Our systems here in the Territory are governed by and rooted in the same structurally unequal, unjust and racially biased national systems".

She and her organization try to do something about this. The work must have its roots in "our", that is "the black Virgin Islands history", which is a history of slavery, insurrection, resilience, and the history must constantly be repeated, so that it shall not be forgotten ("repetition, repetition, repetition"). The ambition is to constantly discuss race and racism, and thereby be a model for the local community and maybe the outer world in handling racism and all its negative consequences.

While this awareness about the presence and influence of racism is ongoing, there has – particularly in St. Thomas – started a debate about removal of the statue of King Christian IX, which is placed in Emancipation Park in the centre of Charlotte Amalie, and which surely is known by everybody from Denmark, who have visited St. Thomas. There has

even been presented a bill for the removal of the statue in the USVI Senate.

It would cause no difficulty to approve, that a statue placed far away from Danish shores, among a population, that hardly knows who King Christian IX was, has no mission here, and then even in a park, which is called Emancipation Park. Added to this the fact, that to an American/West Indian any memo-



Deanna James

ries over kings and governors must be a bad memory, because kings are European phenomena, and it was the Europeans that brought slaves and slavery to the more or less uninhabited Caribbean islands. So, remove that part of history!

If you suspend the emotional parameters, which definitively play a role in the Black Lives Matter discussion, then you can't remove everything, which has to do with a specific epoch, you for some reason don't like.

Yes, of course in 1945 you could and should in Nazi Germany remove all Hitler statues and Nazi artefacts, and likewise had Lenin, Stalin, Marx and Engels to disappear at the collapse of the Communist regimes in 1989 in Eastern Europe and in 1991 in the Soviet Union. But here the mere removal of the statues were a part of the revolution/events, that removed the dictators and their regimes. Memorials of all kinds must only be removed after serious consideration about the symbolic value of the memorial and its removal. And in my opinion King Christian IX is not in this category, that has caused the Black Lives Matter movement to justify their cause by removal of symbols of slavery. King Christian IX was a constitutional monarch; he was not an oppressor or ruler, nor did he take decisions in the affairs of the realm; slavery in The Danish West Indies had long time ago



been abolished (1848), and did not exist during his reign from 1863 to 1906, and life conditions, which during this period were certainly not acceptable, were the result of decisions (or lack of the same) by the Danish Government and the Colonial Councils in the islands, not by the king.

If you remove the statue based on the reasons, which i.a. have been heard from La Vaughn Belle (who is well known in Denmark for her statue of Queen Mary), it is because you construe a story for a particularly purpose. And if such a decision of removal is taken, you must seriously go all the way and remove everything in the islands, which can be traced

back to the Danish times, including names of towns and streets. If not, you have not been acting with consequence in your mission, and in fact betrayed it. And if there are no longer traces of the Danish period, which after all was more than 200 years, the islands may not anymore be tourist attractions for Danes, who presently is the second largest group of visitors to the islands and come visiting mainly because of the Danish history.

I hope that our West Indian friends give it second thoughts before a decision of removal of King Christian IX is taken.

Michael Keldsen

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DO THE DANES CARE ABOUT THE DESCENDANTS OF THE COLONIAL REGIME – OUR FELLOW CITIZENS?

By Ulla Lunn, architect and active member of the Advisory Council for In Search of Identity. This is an extract translated for the use of the Danish West Indian Society of an interview given to DR1 (The Danish Broadcasting Corporation).

During the last few months when the BLM movement has surfaced in many European countries there has also been some activities in Denmark and even the Danish media have focused on the colonial history of Denmark. Several TV channels and newspapers have asked various experts about how one can trace the colonial history in the capital of Denmark (DK). As I have done an extensive study on this topic in Copenhagen I was asked the same question by DR1.

In DK we do not have an extended tradition of statues of politicians and private persons in public spaces. However, we have a lot of knowledge about who built what house in the capital of Copenhagen, and we have a tradition of street names that honor historic persons. So it is fairly clear where we find traces of the colonial history. Appelby's Place and Gyldenloeve's Gade are just two examples, and furthermore rich urban palaces have been built side by side owned by merchants, counts and kings involved in the triangular trade.

At the same time there is a debate on how or if Denmark should establish a research center and dissemination center in the former West Indian Warehouse on the waterfront of Copenhagen harbor.

This is the right setting for such a “colonial history centre” as this building contained goods coming from VI and going to VI from Denmark. Here one will also get the feel of the spirits of place as the wheel of the lift inside the high warehouse was powered by the work of enslaved Africans. Also, the salon for the board of directors is still there, and one can imagine how the directors coldly and calculating were gaming with lives and money.

The public debate in DK has mentioned the need of shedding more light on Danish colonial history for several years now. Some will remember the former Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen visited VI in 2017 for the Centennial. At this occasion he donated some grants for VI students to study in DK. This was just a halfhearted promise as it is only one term in DK and not, as it ought to have been, a full education to help more young people into the academics.

During 2017 many Danes involved with collaboration with friends and colleagues in VI created various outreach initiatives to the Danish public. Anne Walbom and I took the initiative of the VI Cultural Embassy in Frederiksberg. For 8 months we facilitated 8 art shows, 25 public speeches, hosted film venues, book launches, theatre shows and small concerts. Furthermore, we facilitated the centennial ceremony on SKYPE and celebrated Emancipation. Last but not least we hosted the “Unofficial Apology Party” with 70 friends from VI and 1000 visitors during the day in total. We facilitated an initiative to collaborate with artists, politicians



*West Indian Warehouse
in Copenhagen.*

In respect to this perspective the NGO Historic Houses of Denmark is taking part in the two NPOs on VI called “In Search of Identity”. This program aim at establishing a much needed academy of architecture and crafts on St. Croix. On St. Thomas the aim is to establish a center for culture and history.

and academia on the Islands to give a voice and a platform for what is really needed on VI.

In short what is really needed is that we, the Danes, support the VI struggle for equal rights in the US and a place in the international community. Nothing less.

The fact that VI was hit by 2 major hurricanes in 2017 makes the industry suffer and at the same time VI is struggling to get a fair share of the recovery funds. And now during the COVID 19 crisis the industry is fighting for its life.

The resources in this community of 100.000 good people is a tremendous cultural heritage, a rich landscape and nature and a lot of sunshine. VI have a potential to develop and become a sustainable island community, but it is a difficult task without friends in the world.

Precisely an effort to establish cultural institutions with an educational component could be a contribution from Denmark that would be helpful in this process.

The programs are developing slowly but surely. It is however very difficult to fund these projects.

My concern today is that if a Colonial History Center is to be established in Copenhagen it could end up as an elitist exercise in how to create a new museum only focusing on visitors from Denmark. We do not need yet another museum.

There is a profound need for places where we can develop new norms for non-racial language and mindset. New codex for collaboration and dialogue. There should be facilities for artists and exhibitions. And there should be funding for exchange of scientists and craftsmen who can create and maintain cooperation with countries, which have been exploited or suppressed by the Danes.

Most logically it would be to include and fund the various ongoing collaboration projects in the political initiative to create a colonial historic center in The West Indian Warehouse. This would show a genuine approach to new relations that are so much needed internationally.

MEMORIES FROM THE VIRGIN ISLANDS 1922-1932

The Danish Film Institute is in possession of a film, which was shot in USVI from 1922-32 by Mrs. Gerda Laub, during her years in the islands, where she accompanied her husband, Frederik Wilhelm H. Laub, who was CEO for West Indian Company and Danish Consul General in the islands.

The film is probably the first 16 mm film shot in USVI. Its running time is 29 minutes and it is silent. The sequences of the film are the following:

Denmark Hill, the residence of the Danish Consul General in St. Thomas with the family and their black servants.

Charlotte Amalie, trading going on, and street life in i.a. Main Street and Bethania.

Coaling, the coal is carried on the head in big baskets weighing 40 kg, and are loaded on board a ship. For each basket the women were given a "coalcoin", that could be exchanged into money.

The sugar factory Bethlehem in St. Croix, where the sugar cane is transported from the field into the factory.

Sister Maren`s Children`s Home, which is the same as Queen Louise Home in Frederiksted with the Danish sister Maren Knudsen, in charge of the home, with children (1908-1947).

4th July masquerade in St. Thomas.

Dances and parades in the harbor celebrating Independence Day.

Lindberg visits St. Thomas. The American pilot hero Charles Lindberg visits St. Thomas in 1928 in his plane "Spirit of St. Louis", the same with which he in May 1927 crossed the Atlantic.

President Hoovers visit 25th of March 1931. The President is on a short, sailing visit to Charlotte Amalie, where he is received with tribute and parades – notice the fancy way, that Stars and Stripes is carried.

Departure. The family departs from the islands in 1932 and sails back to Denmark.

The film can be downloaded from <https://filmcentralen.dk/museum/danmark-paa-film/film/minder-fra-virgin-islands-1922-1932>



**Festival 2021 in
Denmark postponed
till 2022 due to
Covid-19.**

DWIS

ESTATE PROSPERITY



The factory on Estate Prosperity (1916). Cotton is produced.

Technology Revives Agriculture in Estate Prosperity Sugarcane Plantation on St. Croix.

For the last 100 years farming activities in St. Croix have been very limited. An attempt with high-tech sugarcane growing in the Estate Prosperity is now in progress. The story told by Susan K. Beach, Secretary for the Society of Virgin Islands Historians¹.

One of the most scenic properties on St. Croix is Estate Prosperity, West End. Although it used to span 450 acres from the hills to the east gently sloping towards the Caribbean Sea, it once again has become a picturesque plantation with 170 acres of fields, some in sugarcane waving in the breeze.

For nearly 30 years the Estate had been left to the elements and became overgrown with bush and tangles of weeds until its

new owner began an aggressive effort of mulching and burning. Today the entire property has been cleared, the village cottages of the workers renovated, and a fleet of modern farm equipment can be seen working the fields throughout the days.

Robert Apfel of New York has developed and owned several entities in the securities and banking sectors and is well known in the fiduciary industry. For a change of pace, he purchased Fortuna Mill in St. Thomas several years ago. Upon visiting St. Croix he recalls a guided tour of Cruzan Rum Distillery. When he realized all the molasses for producing rum must be imported from as far away as South America, he decided to become a sugarcane farmer to supply the island's two rum distilleries. In 2018 he purchased Estate Prosperity from the Christensen family and began this exciting new chapter in St. Croix to bring back a way of life and to impact the economy of the Virgin Islands in a positive way. Mr. Apfel sees Prosperity farm serving as

a site for developing and demonstrating modern, socially responsible, hi-tech sugar cane agriculture methods.

Estate Prosperity had been producing sugar cane (and other plants) since 1874. Acquired in 1901 by Gustav Adolph Hagemann he was instrumental in improving sugar manufacturing with modern machinery. Even though there were great investments made in the upgrading of the factories, these were very lean years filled with daunting droughts and ferocious hurricanes and dwindling sugar prices.

Following a long line of owners Estate Prosperity was eventually bought by Frederik J. Christensen and his wife Frances in 1940. Frederik had come to St. Croix from Copenhagen as a young man and worked as a book keeper for many clients. He also managed several other estates and met his wife Frances Elcock when she was seventeen. Together, they eventually owned multiple estates and were able to purchase Estate Prosperity from the previous owner, the G.A. Hagemann group. The sale was not without controversy as one of the financiers, a Mr. Knoll and his wife Beatrice refused to sign legal papers to allow Frederik Christensen to purchase the property. The reason was that Mrs. Frances Christensen was of mixed race².

They prevailed but after acquiring the property realized they could not pay the mortgage and feed themselves on agriculture products alone. The couple opened a highly successful restaurant and nightclub at # 1 Strand Street in Frederiksted called the Tropicana and used the proceeds to slowly fix the Prosperity Great House which was in extreme disrepair and in need of electricity and plumbing. By 1943 the move was complete and along with the couple and their children came 600 sheep!

After Frederik Christensen died in 1945, the property eventually was inherited by his son Arthur and the nightclub was moved to the Great House and became the famed Plantation Nightclub. It was a lovely venue with a spacious outdoor patio with a stage for a band and a well-stocked bar.

The future

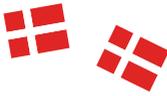
In nearly 3 years since Mr. Apfel has cleared the bush and weeds, he now has close to 40 acres in cane cultivation, built a modern barn, acquired myriad implements to work with the GPS tractors and precision agricultural technology, and he has renovated six stone masonry cottages with air conditioning and furnished tastefully. These are reserved for visiting consultants and engineers. There are about a dozen associates cultivating the fields and a computerized, sub-surface drip irrigation system.

The great house has been stabilized with a new roof and all the windows boarded. Only the bottom floor is utilized for storage. It will be renovated as an administrative center with classrooms and conference rooms to support the research. Once the entire farm is planted, Mr. Apfel plans to partner with community members to cooperatively plant an additional 9,850 acres of cane, returning the luscious sea of green back to the island! "It will be a research farm to enhance farming technologies and techniques," says Mr. Apfel. In addition, a boutique distillery utilizing cane juice will produce "rhum agricole" as it is done in Martinique and other Caribbean islands. The farm will become a site for visitors with a tasting lounge and perhaps a new small gauge railroad for viewing the entire farm. You can expect more great news and help for the Virgin Islands economy to come out of this endeavor.

1. The article is abbreviated by the editor

2. Christensen, Frances E. Me and Mine part 1 Manuscript 1980

BIRTHDAY



ANNE WALBOM 75 YEARS



On July 26, the chairman of Danish West Indian Society through many years, Anne Walbom, turned 75. Here is our raised flag on this important occasion.

Anne was a very active chairman for the Society from 2003 to 2018, and is still active in the board of directors. Much would have been different in the Society without Anne, and she is the living image of what is so special about DWIS – a forum, where a majority of the members have a history linked through family at one point of time to the Danish West Indies. So, Anne too. Her great great grandfather was a lawyer, who in the 1820'ies moved to the islands, where he established a law firm, thus becoming an important part of life of white people in the small colony. He, however, did leave traces, as he fathered two children with his house slave. He never got married, neither with his slave, but in the 1830'ies he returned to Denmark and brought with him the two children, whom he had granted full inheritance rights. Thereby he created a Danish family of which Anne is a descendant. We know, that Anne has traced and found a lot of sources to her family story, and that part of her time now is spent writing a book about her great great great grandfather and the family that has its roots in the Danish West Indies. We look forward to read that, when Anne has finished writing and editing.



Generally speaking, it is very characteristic for Anne's efforts for DWIS, that she has given the history of the islands and the Danish time a lot of focus. Thus, she has published a number of books, f.inst – jointly with Betsy Rezende - 2 photo books about St. Croix and about St. Thomas/St. John, and during her presidentship she has secured the publishing by the Society of a number of books concerning West Indian matters; f.inst. "In the Eye of the Hurricane" about the journey in 1915-16 of the Marine cruiser "The Valkyrie".

Many ideas has during her presidentship been realized, incl. establishment of the mobile USVI exhibition, trip for members to Ghana, the West Indian Embassy, participation of the Society in Historical Days in Copenhagen, establishment of culture historical committee, improvement of Magasinet etc.

Anne graduated in 1964 and started at Copenhagen University studying ethnology, but was at the same time active in theater life and earned her living working in a record store, as it was called in those days. The combination of those activities led to her employment in DR, the Danish Broadcasting Corporation, which lasted a lifetime. In DR she worked in the discotheque and in Radio Drama. It was also in DR, that she met her husband, the journalist Ole Bidstrup – "the miracle of my life", as Anne expresses it. Ole and Anne were jointly an important asset for the Society; i.a. Ole was the editor of the circular for many years. Ole died in 2003.

Every year Anne has – during Danish winter times – a long holiday in the islands, where she catches up with all her friends. And in the Society we look forward to many active years from Anne.

*Michael Keldsen
Editor
(Translation from the Danish)*

