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Saint Lucia

"Helen of the West Indies"

By ALLAN PATRICK
& JIM MURRAY

I. HISTORY:

A Jacobin monk Pere Labot arrived in St. Lucia on September 25, 1700 landing at 5:00 a.m. on the Roseau River. The area around the river at that time, records Labot, was "thick jungle" — enough to make him skeptical of fulfilling his wish to do some successful shooting. However, making his way along the pathways, he was able to bring down some birds including parrots. Winding his way through the "jungle", the roaming friar eventually reached a small colony of carpenters and woodsmen. Labot decided to spend the night with the men as they had a sufficient store of barbecued wild pig and pigeon for him to realize "that one need not die of hunger". To complete his comfort and needs for the night, Labot sent off one of the men for his hammock, some biscuits, wine and brandy. Such is an early account of a visit to this Caribbean island by an early explorer.

St. Lucia, as far as it is known, was not discovered by Columbus. The first mention of the island occurs in a Spanish document dated 1511 and signed by King Ferdinand. In this document (Real Cedula), Ferdinand permits his subjects to make war on the Carib Indians. In 1605, a group of 67 English seamen from the ship *Olive Blossom* put to shore on St. Lucia. Only 19 of these first settlers escaped with their lives. The first permanent settlement of St. Lucia was attempted by the English in the late 1630's and lasted 18 months before natives forced them to abandon the island. Next to settle the island was a group of colonizers from the French West Indies Company. The French maintained settlements till 1663 when 15 Barbadian planters bought the island (its Carib name was Hewanorra) from "Indian Warner", a son of Sir Thomas Warner and a Carib woman. Governor Willoughby of Barbados then mounted an expedition and seized control of the island for the British. The possession of the island went back and forth between the French and English 14 times from 1667 to 1796. Finally, in 1803, the British took over for good. The 19th century brought peace and prosperity to St. Lucia. In the early part of the century, slave trade dwindled until on August 1, 1838, slavery was abolished. The island was built up with roads and fortifications in the 19th century as plantations thrived.

Past explorers to St. Lucia, "The Helen of The West Indies", have left their influence on the land and the people. French and British settlers controlled this influence while there still continues to exist some Spanish traces from the long gone explorers of the Spanish Armada days. Huge fires in 1927 and 1948 destroyed the islands' Georgian architecture while the Victorian style continues to exist in such local Castries buildings as the library and the Governors' Residence.



St. Lucia is an Associated State of Great Britain at present with a Governor appointed by the British Crown and a Premier elected by the people of the island. The House of Assembly is comprised of 17 elected members (5-year terms), 3 nominated members, an Attorney General, and a Speaker elected by the Assembly members. Island affairs are administered to by a Cabinet made up of the Premier and 5 Ministers. The local towns and villages have their own elected Councils.

II. GEOGRAPHY:

Geographically speaking, the 27 miles by 14 miles of varied natural scenery is situated on a rugged volcanic formation found 21 miles south of French-owned Martinique and 110 miles north-west of the Barbados. The estimated population (over 80 percent is African) is around 113,000 and the main languages spoken are English and Patois. Patois is a combination of English and French but forms a dialect not easily associated with either language. Temperature can vary between 16 and 32 degrees C but our visit in December saw sunny weather 13 out of the 14 days with

average night temperatures of 24 degrees C. Day temperatures were usually 27 degrees C with the beach water a beautiful 22 degrees C. Water on the Atlantic side of the island is usually cold and clear blue while the Caribbean side is turquoise green and warm. At night time, the warm Caribbean trade winds provide a comfortable relief from the ever-present salty, humid air.

The island is rich in flowering vegetation year-round and causes a bombardment to the visual faculties for a Canadian in December. Our pre-Christmas

break provided the sighting of flowering poinsettias and ripening almonds from huge almond trees found on the beaches, not to mention the many other flowering plants which added fragrance to the warm tropical air. Other unusual and interesting plant-life included tall coconut trees, banana plants, shak-shak trees, bamboo, cacao trees (from which they derive chocolate from the ripe pods) and rubber trees to name but a few. The climate also provides the proper conditions to support the growth of oranges, lemons, grapefruit, plantane, mangoes, guava and tangerines. Honey is harvested from the wild

tropical bees by simply locating a nest in the forest and smoking out the inhabitants. Sugar cane used to be the prime local export but markets dwindled after the Second World War when other islands (such as Cuba) started producing and Europe discovered the sugar beet. At present, bananas harvested year-round are the primary export, but Brazil is coming on strong with bigger and better bananas that are produced at a lower price than the St. Lucian growers can compete with.

Local artists and craftsmen have their work for sale in local shops and market places. The islands' most renowned craft items are straw goods, hand silkscreened printed cloth, tortoise shell jewellery, mahogany and wood carvings, bracelets of tropical shells and seedwork, cane furniture and finally, unglazed pottery. The famous unglazed St. Lucian coalpot is a type of West Indian hibachi made of a heavy reddish-brown clay that is used for roasting food. Coal is placed in its lower section and acts as the heat source. Modern North American items of technology are not common anywhere on the island and as a consequence, items like the coalpot get high use by the native St. Lucian.

(Con't overleaf)



A quiet moment on the beach at Cap Estate, on the northern tip of the island. Largely foreign-owned, this area of the island still offers land for a good price and fewer people than on the southern half of the island.