

The Georgian Society of Jamaica



Newsletter

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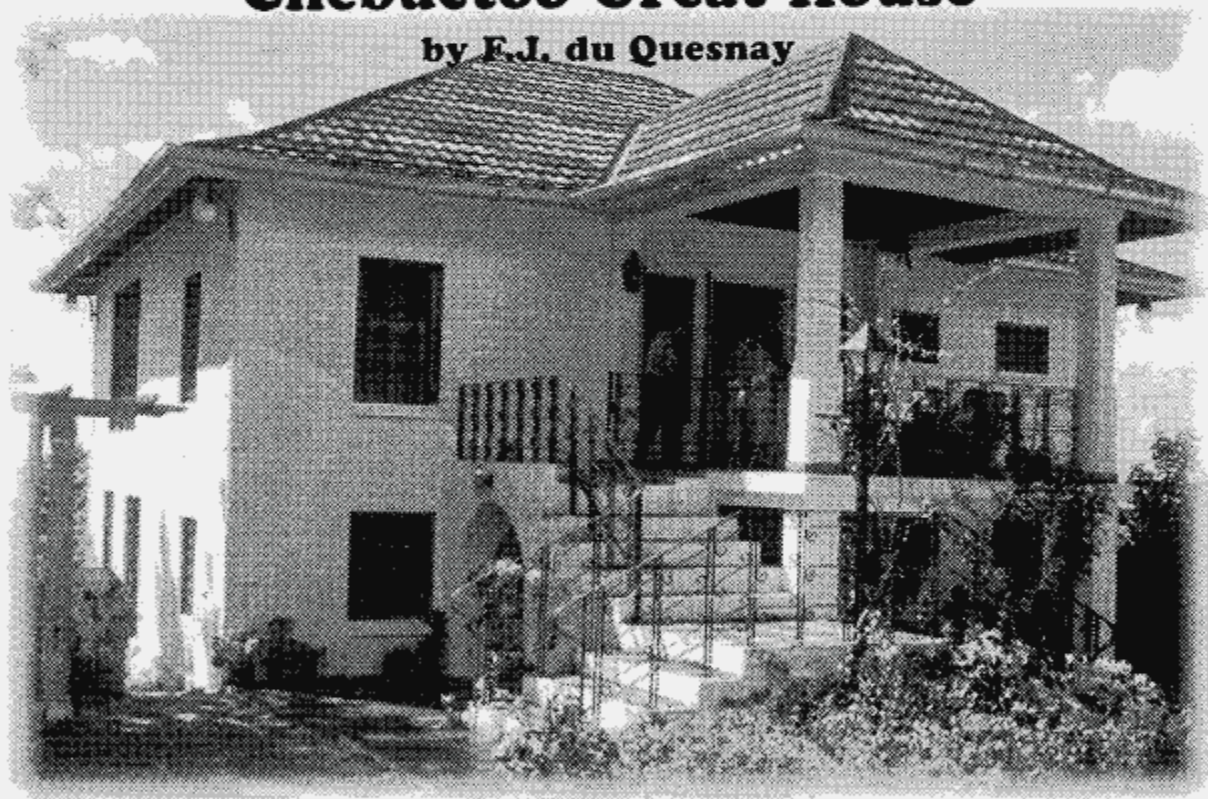


Our Island Heritage

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE
GEORGIAN SOCIETY OF JAMAICA

Chebuctoo Great House

by F.J. du Quesnay



Near the small village of Cave in the Parish of Westmoreland lies Chebuctoo. The Great house set on a high bluff overlooks a wide expanse of sea, with a view of Negril Point and the town of Savanna-la-mar nestling on its promontory clearly visible in the distance. The house, a gem of West Indian Georgian architecture, is fixed in a setting of woodlands, with the mountains rising to the north, clothed in a mantle of verdant growth, the deep emerald of

the pimento trees blending with the forest trees. Decorated with cutstone quoins, and keystones over some of the window apertures, the house is two storied with a gabled shingled roof. Two small porches placed one above the other face the sea, supported by three slender wooden posts on the upper storey, but replaced more recently on the lower floor by concrete pillars, when the building was damaged by the earthquake of 1957. Entrance is gained here by

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The Georgian Society

THE PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Dear Members and Friends,

I take this opportunity to send you my best wishes for a healthy and rewarding 2005 and to again thank you all for your tremendous support over the past year.

Your support during 2004 allowed us to accomplish a number of things – particularly the holding of another successful fund-raising brunch at the Jamaica Grande Resort, Ocho Rios, which raised just over \$600,000.00 which will be the Society's contribution to the restoration of the Clermont Great House, near Highgate, St. Mary. You will, no doubt, recall that the house is the administrative office of the Swift Purscell Boys Home and the Lyndale Home for Girls.

For some time the Society has been planning to produce a set of Videos on Georgian Jamaica Heritage buildings -one on each County and the fourth to be an overview of buildings across the island. Help is truly needed to get this project off the ground and so I am now appealing to members to assist, if at all possible, in getting additional funds for this worthwhile project. Total cost is estimated to be One Million Jamaican Dollars.

*Yours sincerely
George Faria
President*

MEMBERSHIP FEES – THE GEORGIAN SOCIETY

Supporting Corporate Member	–	J\$5,000 per annum
Corporate Member	–	\$2,500 per annum
Ordinary Member	–	\$500 per annum
Pensioner	–	\$200 per annum
Student Member	–	\$100 per annum
Overseas Member	–	£10 or US\$20 per annum

Jamaica Georgian Architecture, with its emphasis on light and air, is ideally suited to the climate of the West Indies. It has the style and charm of its eighteenth century origins, with features added to suit the tropics. Its utility and grace not only appear in the design of great houses and civic buildings, but is also the vernacular for the average modest dwelling.

The Georgian Society was started in 1967 out of concern for the destruction and neglect of period buildings in all parts of the island. These were frequently replaced by structures of poor design and little character, the pleasing and practical details of Georgian architecture having been largely forgotten or misunderstood. The ups and downs of the nation's economy and changes in building materials and methods of construction had resulted in little continuity of development of design from Georgian to modern times. Often there were few good architects in the island so no sympathetic bridging of the periods took place. The Society's local chapters take a special interest in an area, parish, town or even a single landmark building.

In these days, there is a strong worldwide movement to record and preserve heritage buildings, furniture, prints and other artifacts from the past and membership of the society should prove to be interesting and stimulating.

We urge you to support the objectives of the Society in the interest of your community and of the island. We shall then help to pass on to future generations important parts of our heritage which will be a continual delight to both Jamaicans and their visitors.

Information on membership of the Society can be found in this newsletter.

S.O.S.

All members are reminded to look out for old buildings which seem worthy of preservation/restoration and for any buildings which seem in danger of being wantonly destroyed.

All such information should be sent to our National Headquarters at Richmond Park Great House, 58 Half-Way Tree Road, Kingston 10 so that the appropriate action may be taken.

Preservation/Restoration

Are you planning on restoring a house, saving a landmark or helping to revive your neighbourhood? Gain valuable information by joining The Georgian Society of Jamaica and support preservation/ restoration efforts in Jamaica.

*Make preservation one of your
blueprints for the future*

Chebuctoo Great House cont'd

a short flight of stone steps hemming in the lower porch on three sides.

The north entrance lying directly off the drive is even more impressive and charming, and although one must consider this to be the back of the premises, the house has been so designed that both entrances appear equally important. Here again we find two porches, one above the other, the upper floor being gained by a low double flight, protected by a delicately traced iron balustrade, under which a clump of oleander bushes nestles in the curve of the rails. Two Spanish jars, a standing lantern, and a hitching-post, fashioned to represent a horse's head, all add a touch of charm to this aspect of the dwelling.

Across the drive the barbecues, dark and weathered by the years, lie on the lawn awaiting the next crop of pimento berries, for Chebuctoo is essentially a pimento property.

Just how this property acquired the North American Indian name of Chebuctoo is not clear, but the name occurs in Nova Scotia, and we know that during the 18th century there was a considerable amount of traffic between Jamaica and Nova Scotia.

The house was obviously built some time during the 18th century, and is reputed to have been partially destroyed by the terrible hurricane of 1780, which lasted from October 3rd-October 12th. This "Great Hurricane", as Frank Campbell describes it, did severe damage in Westmoreland estimated at £700,000, towards which England granted £40,000 relief to the stricken colony. After the hurricane, Chebuctoo great house was restored, and seems to have enjoyed a long period of comparative calm until the earthquake of 1957 again did extensive damage to the fabric of the building.

According to information found in the Jamaica Almanacs, Chebuctoo was owned by Frances Jones in 1811, and the estate then contained fifty slaves, and five head of stock. This lady according to the Almanac retained the property well into the 1830's, and a tale which evidently concerns this character, and which still persists in the area, will be recounted below. In 1845, after which date the Almanacs cease to give these estate details, Chebuctoo was owned by J.A. Hoskins, and the property then consisted of 346 acres. It must have been shortly after this that the McIntosh family acquired Chebuctoo, for it is known to have been in the McIntosh and Phillips families for eight generations to the present time. Emma Caroline, daughter of the original McIntosh owner, married George Phillips of Bristol, England, and finally the property fell into the possession of the Phillips family. It might also be of interest to note that Emma Caroline's grandmother is buried on the estate.

We will now consider the story mentioned above which seems to refer to the person of Frances Jones: According to the reports, Chebuctoo was once owned by a certain Fanny Jones, who was reputed to have been a stern and cruel mistress in her dealings with the slaves. During her ownership, it was said that floggings and other severe punishments were the order of the day on the estate. When death finally claimed her, her body was placed in a leaden coffin and buried in a vault at some little distance from the great house. This vault is known to have been intact until the early twenties of this century, when it was broken into by a band of thieves. According to the story, a party landed at Savanna-la-Mar and proceeded to Chebuctoo, with the intention of plundering the grave. The coffin was ripped open, but it is not known whether the bandits found the jewels with which it was believed the corpse had been decked before interment. The door of this vault is reputed to be still on the property today.

Like many old mansions of the period, Chebuctoo has its share of ghost stories. One tells of a woman bearing a pitcher on her head, who was frequently seen ascending the back stairs of the house. This apparition was never known to enter the building, for on reaching the door, it would turn away, retracting its steps downstairs, where it would then disappear in the garden. This spectre, however, has not been seen for the past thirty years.

Another story concerns a Reverend gentleman who was spending some time at the great house. One night this man was awakened by sounds of revellry coming from downstairs, as if a great entertainment was taking place. Deciding to investigate, he went downstairs, noticing that the sounds of clinking glasses and merrymaking were coming from what was in those days the dining room. Entering the room he saw a group of shadowy figures assembled about a round table, drinking and making merry. The clergyman made up his mind to do something to dispel these uninvited guests, and it is said that he performed some kind of exorcism, which seems to have been successful, for the apparitions have not been seen since then.

As already stated, the great house was badly damaged in the 1957 earthquake, and during restoration a Spanish coin with an 18th century date and an ash tray were found. These relics have been preserved, and are now displayed amongst the beautiful furnishings of the house, much of which has been carefully collected over the years by the late Harold Phillips.

Thus the mansion lives on today, rising like a phoenix from disaster; the royal palms in its lovely garden conversing with the breeze, whispering stories of long ago.

During a visit to Westmoreland on November 07, 2004 thirty six members of the Kingston Chapter of the Georgian Society visited Chebuctoo where they were warmly greeted and shown around by Mr Paul Bicknell whose family (Phillips & Bicknell) own the property.

TRANSPORTATION IN MONTEGO BAY A HUNDRED YEARS AGO

On January 19, 1895, the railway reached Montego-Bay. During its construction visitors had been able to tour (by carriage) various sites along the way as the tracks were laid. Upon completion, service commenced between Montego Bay and Kingston. Each morning the train left Montego Bay at 7:45 a.m. and arrived at Spanish Town, the central terminus, at 2:23 p.m. At Spanish Town there was a half hour stop to facilitate passengers joining from Port Antonio and Ewarton lines before departure for Kingston. For the Journey west, the train left Kingston at 10:45a.m. and after twenty stops arrived at Montego Bay at 5:55 p.m., a total of 113 miles. On Wednesdays, there was an additional service between Montego Bay and Green Vale. The cost of travelling on weekends was 50 pence higher than a regular week-day fare. Besides a first and second class passenger service, the railway was used to transport goods and had its own parcel (courier) service.

Before this railway service from Kingston to Montego-Bay began, transportation was mainly by coastal steamers which sailed from port to port around the island. They carried passengers, cargo, and mail. In addition to coastal communication, a network of roads ran throughout the country. The mail coach which travelled each day to and from the inland towns also carried passengers. the rural roads were narrow and unpaved and, like the town's streets, were made of broken stones and marl and macadamized for durability. Needless to say, they were very dusty in dry periods, and in extremely bad weather were susceptible to water damage, thus constant repair was necessary. Despite those inconveniences pot holes were few. Most other personal transportation was by horseback, carriage, or buggy. As late as the 1930's the Misses Mills who lived at Tower Hill (now the site of the Roman Catholic church) drove their buggy into the town to do their shopping, visit the bank and manage their "Self Help Centre". Mule drays were used by the businesses to transport goods from wharves. The drivers of the two mule carts belonging to the Mills' Dairy Farm at Retirement, delivered milk to householders by six o' clock each morning, rain or shine, seven days a week. To ensure uninterrupted delivery, each driver was provided with an axe to clear the roads of fallen trees following bad weather.

Larger carts, drawn by three mules - the shaft mule being larger than the other two - were used to transport heavier loads to and from the country. Butchers who had stalls in the large Albert Market sited behind the Court House, and whose stalls also encompassed the whole block bounded by Market, Strand and Church Streets, would go out each Friday to one of the cattle pens in the surrounding country-

side, buy steers, butcher them on the property, and transport the carcasses by cart back to Montego-Bay to be ready for sale at their stalls by five o'clock the following morning. Other stall-holders in the market brought their produce to town in hampers placed on their donkeys, or carried in baskets placed on their heads. They balanced those baskets on "cotters" made of twisted cloth which protected their heads.

Imported into Jamaica during the mid nineteenth century mysore cattle (oxen) were bred on the Hon. John Ellis's Montpelier/Shettlewood estates. He imported them through his Attorney, "Mass" John Edwards, who was later to acquire the properties from the Ellis family. Sugar cane was transported along the roads from field to factory in large wagons hauled by those animals which were harnessed in teams. Because they were not easily manuvrable, a man walked in front blowing a conch shell to warn oncoming traffic. When herds of oxen were being driven from place to place, the same precaution was taken.

In the 1980's, prior to transport by the railway, bananas were conveyed to the wharf of J.E. Kerr & Co. by mule wagon or drays. From there the fruit was trasported to New York. At first they used sailing ships but were soon replaced by steamers. J.E.

Kerr & Co. owned one of the first refrigerated ships, the "Pomona" an engraving of which appeared below the bust of Mr John Edward Kerr at the Parade. More than any other company on the North coast at the turn of the century, J.E. Kerr & Co. were contributing significantly to the economy of Montego-Bay by providing opportunities for work at all levels and helping small farmers export their produce to the USA and elsewhere. The Hamburg-American Line afforded direct steamship service fortnightly between Montego-Bay and New York. Their ships were designed to carry cargo and had limited but comfortable cabin space for passengers.

Motor cars were introduced during the second decade of the century and if one was able to rent one the cost was one shilling and three pence per mile.

by George Palmer

THE GEORGIAN SOCIETY OF JAMAICA

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