



# Newsletter

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# Our Island Heritage

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE  
GEORGIAN SOCIETY OF JAMAICA

## Black River-The Capital of the Parish of St. Elizabeth



*St. John's Parish Church, Black River – A National Monument*

The town of Black River was said to have started life as a small village about the year 1774 when the population was in the region of 1200 inhabitants – 800 coloured and 400 white residents. It was later called "the second most important port in Jamaica."

Logwood and sugar were the major exports in the 18th century from which the locals made their wealth. River traffic on the Black River brought sugar, rum, logwood, coffee, pimento,

annatto and other produce of the area to ships anchored in the harbour. It is said that as late as 1915, six or seven sailing boats could be seen in the harbour at any one time. Today, the economy is mainly based on fishing, tourism and the retail trade.

The town has a number of FIRSTS:

- The first town in Jamaica to have electric lights
- Telephone service first began in 1900

*Cont'd on pg. 2*



## THE PRESIDENT'S LETTER

*Dear Members and Friends,*

I must record my sincerest appreciation and gratitude to the members of the National Fund-raising Committee, headed by Pauline Simmonds, for the resounding success of the Brunch held at the Renaissance Jamaica Grande Resort on Sunday, February 22, 2004 in aid of the Restoration of the Clermont House, near Highgate.

I am grateful to those members and friends who made a special effort to attend the function and to those who donated generously to that worthy cause.

I take much pleasure, therefore, in quoting verbatim extracts from Pauline Simmond's report:

Quote:

"Once again, the Fund-raising Committee of the Georgian Society was able to arrange a successful event in aid of a very worthy cause, that is, the restoration of Clermont House, near Highgate, St. Mary which is the headquarters for the Swift Purscell Home for Boys and the Lyndale Home for Girls.

Three Hundred and Ninety persons attended the Brunch and from all reports, they thoroughly enjoyed the event. A number of persons who bought tickets were unable to attend, in addition to those who paid for tickets (as a donation) after the function.

All the members of the Organising Committee gave sterling contribution to the success of the Brunch but I would be remiss if I did not make special mention of the supreme effort made by Dorothea Whitehorne, not only in getting items for her stall (Tombola/Raffles), but also in assisting with items for the other stalls and in the sale of tickets.

For the first time in our fund-raising efforts, five tickets were sent to each member of the Society, island-wide. The breakdown of ticket sales on the attached Statement of Accounts has again proven that the Chapters of Kingston and St. Ann/St. Mary continue to lead the field in a nationally combined effort. Congratulations to all the members who made the extra effort to ensure success.

Although the Committee's ambitious target of One Million Dollars was not achieved, I think the amount of Six Hundred Thousand plus dollars will go some way in assisting the Friends Educational Council in their efforts to restore the Clermont House. I do hope that members of the Society will continue the association, individually or otherwise, with the Staff and Students at Clermont House."

*With my very best wishes  
George Faria*

## Black River- Cont'd

The first car landed in Black River in 1903 for a Mr. H.W. Griffiths of Hodges Pen  
One of the first racecourses - racing was done on the Lower Works property.

In 1837 the Black River Spa was opened to the public with two rooms and two pools. The water rises from a limestone bed next to the Black River. The springs were a part of the Lower Works property and in the days of slavery were used extensively by the Slaves for ailments including rheumatism and intestinal troubles. Up to a few decades ago, staff and boarders at Munro College were sent there to "improve their health."

The parish church of St. John the Evangelist has a tablet on the battlemented tower recording the laying of a foundation stone in 1837. However, Lady Nugent, in her Diary, describes going to church at Black River in 1802 when the church was "in a shabby condition" so that it may be that the original church (built in 1774?) was burnt down and subsequently rebuilt.

In the chancel, there is a pair of monuments by the well-known English Sculptor Henry Westmacott. These monuments were erected in 1828 to the memory of Robert Hugh Munro and his nephew Caleb Dickenson who left an endowment for the education of 'poor children of the Parish.'

Also to be seen in the Church is a memorial tablet to Duncan Robertson, Custos of the Parish from 1781-1850, bearing the arms of Robertson of Struan who owned Gilnock Hall.

Outside the west door a group of tombstone slabs record typical relationships of slavery times (prior to 1834). These slabs commemorate a local merchant - one Duncan Hook (1741-1779) and four of his children by Elizabeth Duncan - "a free Mulatto" who lies beside him.

Emoluments of the Rector at the turn of the 19th century - a Rev. Warren who had an estate at Lacovia - included the labour of some 60 slaves. They were "the property of the church" which received compensation in the sum of eighteen hundred pounds sterling for the slaves at the time of emancipation!!!

Black River is noted for the quantity and quality of its most intricate timber detailing. The High Street has several examples of old style colonnaded timber houses-Invercauld now a hotel and Waterloo House Hotel. Another such is MAGDALA which like most of the others on main street, was built by the Leyden family at the end of the 19th century when a boom in the logwood trade brought much prosperity to the town.

In 1999, the Jamaica National Heritage Trust made a proposal to Government that the town be declared a PROTECTED NATIONAL HERITAGE SITE.

# Scenes From The Brunch



BRUNCH SCENES CONT'D



The members of the Georgian Society deeply regret the passing of Colonel Hurley Whitehorne husband of Dorothea Whitehorne, Secretary/Treasurer of our St. Ann/St. Mary Chapter our sincerest sympathy to Dorothea and the Members of the Whitehorne family.

Col. Whitehorne was a very active member of the Georgian Society— He will be greatly missed.



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