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## AN INVENTORY OF THE HISTORICAL LANDMARKS OF ST. KITTS-NEVIS

(Revised Edition)

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## Preface

### AN INVENTORY OF THE HISTORICAL LANDMARKS OF ST. KITTS-NEVIS

(Section IV (c) of the IRF-CCA Natural and Historic Sites Survey Master Plan)

The following inventory is based upon a study visit to St. Kitts-Nevis by George and Carolyn Tyson in July, 1973. It was carried out as part of the joint Island Resources Foundation's and Caribbean Conservation Association's cooperative survey of the natural physical and historic features of St. Kitts and Nevis on request from the Government.

With the exception of the Basseterre central urban area, most of the significant visible historical landmarks of St. Kitts-Nevis were viewed and their present condition evaluated. The many historic buildings in Basseterre, such as those surrounding Pall Mall Square, were not inventoried because a separate inventory and architectural evaluation is being carried out by the United Nations Planning office.

The helpful cooperation and historical knowledge of the following individuals greatly facilitated the completion of this inventory:

Mr. Edmund Morton, Principal Assistant Secretary, Ministry  
of Trade, Development, Industry and  
Tourism

Mr. George Ward, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Trade,  
Development, Industry and Tourism

Mr. William Phipps, Government Tender for St. Kitts

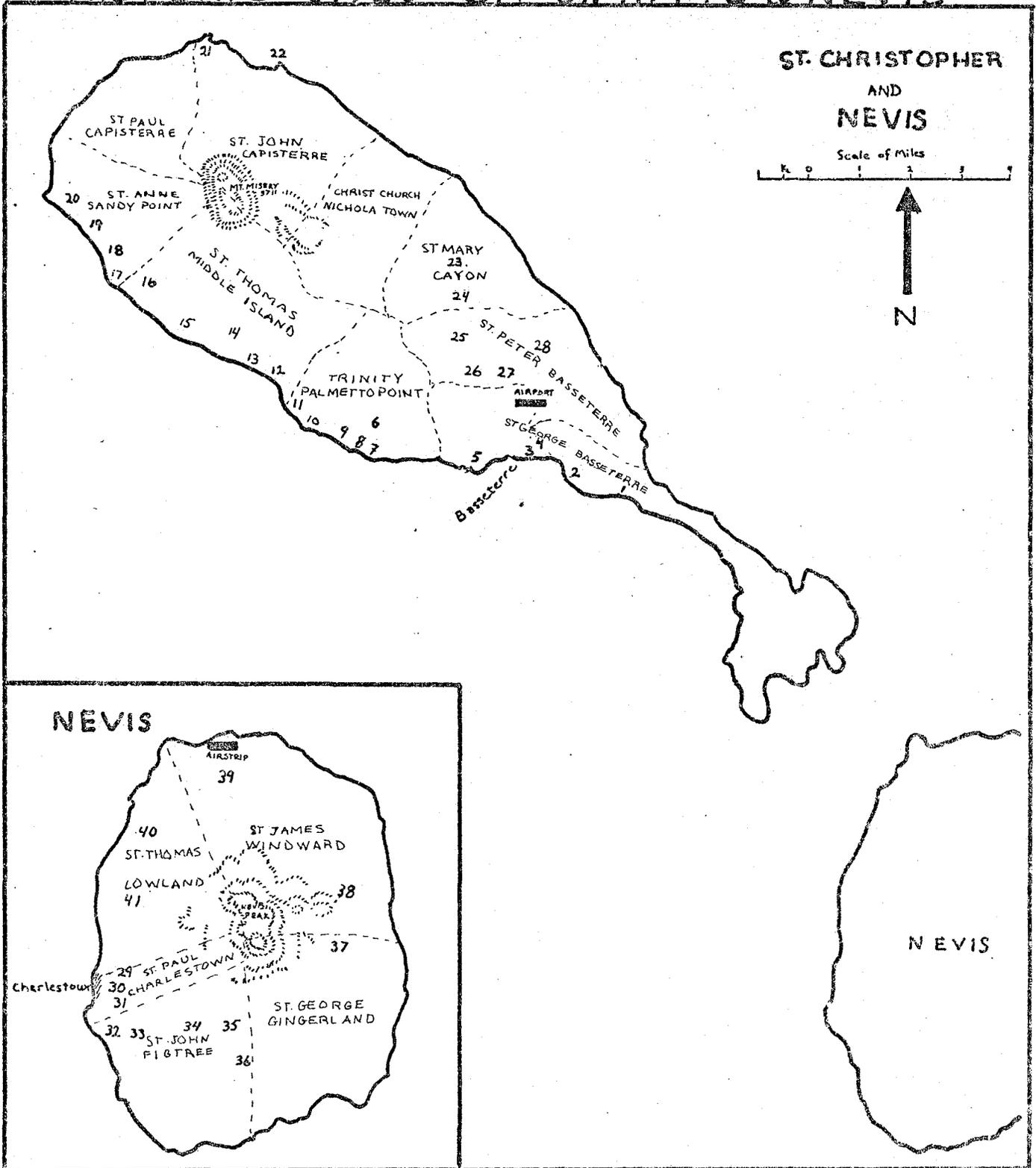
Mr. D. L. Matheson, President, The Society for the Restoration  
of Brimstone Hill

Mr. Earle Clarke of St. Kitts

Mr. Hubert Clarke, Government Tender for Nevis

George and Carolyn  
Tyson

# HISTORIC SITES OF ST. KITTS & NEVIS



## BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF HISTORIC SITES IN ST. KITTS-NEVIS

### ST. KITTS

#### St. George Basseterre Parish

##### \*1. Fort Tyson:

Located on a small sliver of land overlooking Frigate Bay. The only surviving ruin is a small powder magazine almost completely hidden from view by shrub. No stone walls remain, but some parts of the stone floor are visible. The site is dotted with garbage. The fort is reached by an unmarked dirt path from the Frigate Bay beach kiosk, but to reach the path it is necessary to wade through a sea of garbage. Directly above the ruin is the proposed site of a new hotel.

##### 2. Fort Smith:

The ruins of this fort, allegedly built by the French, are located on land belonging to the St. Kitts (Basseterre) Sugar Factory, Ltd. There is a small intact powder magazine. One main wall, overlooking the sea with gun ports distinctly visible also remains intact, although it is badly deteriorated. There are what appear to be old stairs connecting the upper with the lower fort. Two rusted cannons are embedded in the ground along the wall of the upper fort. Behind the upper fort wall is a dilapidated wood house the foundation of which was probably part of the fort building. A sizeable number of 18th century pottery fragments can be found in the vacant lot near the battery wall, leading one to expect that archaeological excavation might prove fruitful. The site is badly overgrown with bush, debris is scattered here and there. Sea erosion threatens to undermine the single remaining wall. The access road is rough and unmarked and in order to get to the site, it is necessary to cross over sugar depot land. Permission to see the site must be obtained from the depot foreman, who lives just behind the fort. Also located at the sugar depot are an anchor, chains, and two cannons, allegedly from Long John Silver's slave ship "Phantom". The foreman states that this story is nonsense and that the anchor and chain were taken off a modern wreck in the water just off the depot. It is not clear where the cannons came from, but most likely from the fort.

\*Numbers refer to site locations on preceding map.

3. Archives Office, Government Headquarters:

Located in an extremely small room, which contains only one desk, two uncomfortable chairs, inadequately lit and ventilated. The records consulted seemed to be in fair shape, although not in total correspondence with Baker's (1965) estimates; viz. some volumes do not appear to be as fragile as Baker indicated. The archivist, Mrs. Weeks, was most helpful, but access to the archive room is restricted because she is not employed there full time. Some of the volumes listed in the Baker guide could not be located and should be tracked down.

4. St. George Anglican Church:

Located in Basseterre. First constructed in 1670, destroyed and rebuilt in present form as a result of the fire of 1867. The burial grounds contain many tombs of prominent planter families including the Tyson family with inscriptions dating 1738- , also Thomas Pilington (1748), Samuel Woodley (1795) and Lt. Gov. Charles T. Cunningham (1847). Many of the inscriptions are worn and illegible. Parts of the tombs are missing or badly damaged, and several tombs were found to be covered with garbage and debris. Much of the burial ground is unkept, overgrown by bush and scattered with garbage. No marker indicating the past history of the church is in evidence.

5. Fort Thomas:

Located on grounds of the Holiday Inn, Basseterre. The site is maintained in fair condition by the Holiday Inn. However, some paper, bottles and other trash is still in evidence and no garbage receptacles are available. There are six painted cannons situated along a 75 yard battery wall, while one rusted cannon was found in front of the fort wall. A single wooden building constructed on a stone foundation is located nearby. Old brick and rubble have been cleared from the ground. At the entrance to the Holiday Inn stands an anchor allegedly from the wreck of the H. M. S. Childs Play (1707) which is said to have sunk off the point in front of the Inn (Bluff Point). The anchor was obtained from the Department of Public Works, which apparently has the responsibility of collecting all such heavy historical pieces from various sites throughout the island.

Trinity Palmetto Point Parish

6. Fairview Inn:

Recently adopted for use as a hotel, the old greathouse was built in the 1720's as the residence of the French Commander-in-Chief. A detachment of troops was stationed there to man the forts atop Otley's level and at Palmetto Point, marking the division between the French and British

controlled portions of St. Kitts. An old powder magazine still stands on the grounds. The old cut stone walls of out-buildings have been tastefully used in several of the cottages, and are placed in a colorful tropical garden setting. The Fairview is an example of a functional and attractive revovation.

7. Palmetto Point Fort:

This fort was built by the English around 1685. The site is badly deteriorated due primarily to earth slippage into the sea. One wall has completely broken up, another stands precariously. The foundation of the powder magazine is visable as are certain parts of the brick floor. Five or six guns were recently carted off by the Department of Public Works. Two or three cannons are said to be still buried around the site and another is said to be in the sea. The site is heavily overgrown and is surrounded by an old Methodist cemetery. There is no access road and the site is unmarked on the main road.

8. Palmetto Point Methodist Church:

These are the ruins of an old stone church built by the slaves. The church was used by the local peasants until recently when it collapsed due to an earth tremor. A private party is said to have claimed the building and taken many of the stones from the site to construct his house in Basseterre, leaving the local people to go elsewhere to church. The ruin is in bad shape and heavily overgrown, although two of the walls are partially intact.

9. Willits Gut (Palmetto Bay):

This is the site of a famous 1667 battle between the French and the British in which the English were ambushed and defeated after suffering many casualties, hence, the name. The site is visible from the road, but is unmarked.

10. Bloody Point:

The unmarked site of the English-French massacre of the Caribs in 1626. The point looks like a likely site of a Carib camp, although no archaeological work has been undertaken. Approximately  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles up the river from the road are a number of small Carib carvings on the side of the ravine. In order to reach these, it is necessary to follow the river bed as there is no trail. This site too is unmarked from the main road.

## 11. Stone Fort:

Currently used as a cemetery. The site is located about 100 yards from the main road, but is unmarked. An intensive amount of the wall remains intact, although it is heavily overgrown. There is considerable deterioration, and the sea is threatening to undermine certain parts. A stone powder magazine survives intact, but is overgrown and barely visible. Along the wall by the sea is an old well which is quite hidden by the bush and a tree growing out of the well. In the main wall four gun ports survive, but the wall is badly decomposed and only held upright by tree roots. There are, however, substantial ruins and the site is potentially restorable.

## St. Thomas Middle Island Parish

### 12. Old Road Town:

The site of the first permanent English settlement in the Caribbean in 1624. Fort Charles is located at the eastern entrance to the town right off the main road. There is extensive wall with several gun ports intact, as well as sections of other walls. The fort seems to continue across the main road, although the pattern is not too clear. The fort is now located on private property, and is not marked by any signpost, etc. Much of the present town between the two streams appears to be built on the ancient ruins of the old capital. The ruins are extensive enough to merit consideration as a major site of renovation - re-creating the architecture, etc., of the old 17th century town, a la Williamsburg. However, this would require a major relocation effort, as all ruins are now located on small homesites. There are no markers indicating the importance of this site for the tourist and access to the ruins is difficult because it is necessary to cross over private property. The sea is encroaching on the walls of the fort and other buildings, and already a few structures have toppled into the sea. A second danger to the ancient ruins is that the residents of the town are systematically dismantling the old stones in order to break them down into pebbles to be sold to government for cement and road making.

### 13. St. Thomas Anglican Church:

The present church is a relatively new structure. The grounds are badly overgrown. This is the site of Sir Thomas Warner's Tomb, which is fairly kept up, although the same cannot be said of the surrounding tombstones, and inscriptions include: John Hutchinson (1733), William Coventry (1734), John Battrymanning (1734), Lt. Gov. William Lambert (1724), Thomas Butler (1727). Many other inscriptions are badly worn and illegible.

14. Wingfield Estate Petroglyphs:

There are two Carib carvings on a large rock, which unfortunately have been marked over in white paint for better visibility. The site is protected by a wire fence, but inside the fence the site is overgrown. There is a sign on the main road indicating the location of the site.

15. New Guinea Estate:

Located at the foot of Brimstone Hill. These are the ruins of a former limestone work, which supplied the fortress and other buildings in the island. Access to the public is limited and no trespassing signs are posted in several places. The ruins are badly deteriorated in spots, there is much rubble, and garbage has been dumped in some of the old buildings; yet this is a potential site for renovation, since the standing walls are extensive and the limestone making works visible.

16. Brimstone Hill:

A detailed description of this site is omitted because the historical value is widely recognized and major restoration efforts are now in process. Historical details are available in printed form from the Brimstone Hill Society.

St. Anne Sandy Point Parish

17. Charles Fort:

Presently the site of the leper colony. Access is difficult, and of course, not encouraged. The fort walls are largely intact and for the most part in good repair. The front wall is in fine shape, standing about 25 feet high. The sea wall survives only partially, while sections of the side walls have crumbled. Inside an old powder magazine is intact, and many of the wooden houses used by the residents have been built on the old stone foundations. The fort would be an excellent site for restoration.

18. St. Anne Anglican Church:

A building of modern origin. The grounds are well kept and clean. This is the best church in the island from point of view of cleanliness and grounds. Several old tombstones, many of which are legible, contain the names of leading families: William Woodrup (1687), Briskett Woodrup (1705), Benjamin Clifton (1720), the Georges Family (1725, 1727), George Fahie (1774), Mary Somarsall (1795).

19. Sandy Point Town:

Many of the old stone foundations of this once active seaport are still in evidence along the sea-side. Most are being used as lower floors of private houses. Several stone ovens can be seen.

20. Fig Tree Fort:

Few ruins of this fort remain standing. Most of the walls have fallen into the sea or slipped down the side of the cliffs. Part of a flag staff survives, as well as a small powder magazine, but both are badly deteriorated. The general fort area, which is rich in pottery fragments, is covered with brush, and is partially being used as a field for growing vegetables. There is difficult access and no markings.

St. John Capisterre Parish

21. Gibson's Pasture:

Some ruins on this point overlooking Dieppe Bay, but no evidence of either a fort or battery. D. L. Matheson claims this was the site of an early French fort, while Earl Clarke maintains it was the site of a shore battery protecting British ships from French privateers at St. Barts. The ruins are set back from the point and would appear to be part of a sugar works. The only evidence of fortifications are two cannons resting on the reef immediately below the point.

22. Sandy Bay:

Earl Clarke claims that a Fort Lewis, of French origin, once stood on the eastern point of this bay, but in modern times slipped into the sea.

St. Mary Cayon Parish

23. St. Mary Anglican Church:

This is an old and decayed stone structure which is not well kept inside or outside. There are a few old tombstones, including those of Elizabeth Thompson (1772) and Ann Dalzell (1768), both of prominent planter families, also Council President John Wilson (1825). Most inscriptions, however, are recent.

24. Greenhill Estate:

There exist a few ruins of the old works, but nothing spectacular. The surviving foundations are overgrown and in poor condition.

St. Peter Basseterre Parish

25. "The Fountain" (De Poincy's Chateau):

This landmark is currently part of a private residence. Only the outline and a few walls of the former chateau remain visible. Best preserved are wall and stairs leading to the garden, and (below the house) the flower room, where according to legend an entrance was once located to a tunnel running between the chateau and St. Peter's Church (about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles). A substantial number of pottery fragments can be seen in the gardens below the private house. Adjacent to the chateau area are ruins of a modern sugar mill and boiling room, complete with a rusted steam engine and long chimney. These ruins are very overgrown and in an advanced state of deterioration. The road leading to the site is unmarked and extremely rugged. The historical importance of this site demands a major excavation and renovation project, which might be partially supported by the French government if undertaken.

26. "The Glen":

An old great house of undetermined origin located in Monkey Hill Village. It is well known to the local people as a former (circa 1900) dance and party center. The main building is two stories, with a small adjoining room on the second story (probably a kitchen). From the site a magnificent view of Basseterre and its valley can be had. The site is heavily overgrown with brush and trees and the floors of all rooms are filled with garbage from the neighboring houses. There is also some evidence of fire. This spot would be excellent for a nightclub/restaurant in period style. It is about 5 minutes from Basseterre. Very little restoration work would be required as most walls remain intact. Several trees that have taken root inside the ruin lend atmosphere. Present ownership undetermined.

27. St. Peter Catholic Church:

Located just off the main road near Monkey Hill Village. A rather uninteresting, modern looking structure built on ancient foundation. It is quite opulent on the inside, but poorly kept (by grazing goats) on the outside. Most of the gravestones are modern. There are a few that are badly overgrown or completely illegible. The family tombs of the Mardenbrough Family, with inscriptions dating between 1761-1794.

28. Stapleton Estate:

A few ruins remain, but in bad condition. Most of the present estate buildings are of modern vintage, although of an elaborate and interesting design.

NEVIS

St. Paul Charlestown Parish

29. Hamilton House:

On the outside wall of the former residence is a plaque commemorating Hamilton's birthplace dedicated by the Alexander Hamilton Bicentennial Commission and dated January 1957. All that remains standing of the original house are two stone stairways on either side of the entrance way to the second floor. Walls are non-existent, although much of the old foundation remains visible. The site is clean and well kept, with a few shade trees, but there is no historical date available to the visitor. No work of restoration is in process.

30. Jewish Cemetery:

Recently repaired and cleared by Robert Abrahams (owner of Nelson Museum at Morningstar Estate). A modern concrete wall protects the grounds, which have been cleared of all overgrowth. The absence of trees, however, exposed the visitor to the sun, and makes the site rather stark and unnatural. There are about 15 tombstones dating between 1684-1730, although most inscriptions are worn, and in Hebrew or Portuguese. The grounds, which are maintained by local funds, contain a vast number of pottery fragments and a few clay pipes.

31. Jewish Synagogue:

The outside of this ancient structure is badly deteriorated, surrounded by brush, cars and debris. The door is locked, but a peephole reveals that there are 2 or 3 vaults on the inside and the old walls are clearly visible. The outside looks ancient but is non-descript due to deterioration. This could be the oldest synagogue in the West Indies, if not the hemisphere. No mention of it made in local books or histories, and local knowledge is skimpy. Robert Abrahams is seeking to raise funds to help in its restoration, but even he seems to be unsure of its authenticity. Cab driver, Hubert Clarke says that according to the story he heard the building was owned by Lawyer Liburd around 1900. After his death the government purchased the property, moved two old women off the site (these are Clarke's sources - both now dead) and converted the building into a power station. The building subsequently proved too small, so government established a new station just behind the synagogue, dismantled the synagogue, and are currently using it for storage purposes.

St. John Figtree Parish

32. Fort Charles:

This was the main fortification on Nevis, and the ruins are extensive. The walls still stand, although there is some deterioration. In the center of the fort stands a single building with one wall completely intact and others partially so. There is a deep stone well in the center which is in fair shape. Seven cannons are located in the gun ports along the sea wall, although much of the upper level of this wall has collapsed. The walls are being steadily eroded by the encroaching sea, and some slippage is already in evidence. In the immediate vicinity of the fort are two major garbage piles, and Mr. Clarke says that garbage is occasionally dumped near the site. A certain amount of garbage is scattered along the walls at the entrance to the fort. Goats feed on the grounds of the fort and appear to do a good job of keeping it clear of bush. The access road to the fort is poor and there are no signs indicating how to get to the fort.

33. The Baths:

The Baths were built by Thomas Huggins in 1778. The present building is relatively modern (late 19th century) but of interesting architecture. The ruins of the original building are clearly visible and in fair shape, with several of the walls and steps nearly intact. The Baths are currently owned by the government, but there is no effort or plan for restoration. Much could be done to restore the old building and put the Baths back into operation.

34. Fig Tree Church:

The site of the registration of the marriage of Horatio Nelson and Francis Nesbit. The church appears to be old and in good condition, easily reached from the main road. Most of the inscriptions are illegible. Those that could be discerned include: John Eddy (1682), William Woolward (1779), Fendilla Broadbelt (1782), Henry Broadbelt (1800), Thomas Browne (1779).

35. Morningstar Nelson Museum:

A sparkling room privately maintained, filled with Nelson pictures, memorabilia and period pieces gathered by Robert Abraham. The mill, which serves as the private residence has been beautifully renovated as have several other old estate buildings. This complex stands as a model of what can be done with a little money and imagination.

36. Montpelier Estate:

Currently in use as a hotel under private management. This was the site of the Nelson-Nesbit wedding and reception. It is another example of functional and attractive renovation. A number of other old estates on Nevis have been renovated and converted into hotels, all of which are

tastefully done. These include, the Old Manor Estate, Golden Rock Estate, and Nesbit Estate.

St. James Windward

37. New River Estate:

Many old ruins of a former sugar estate and one of the last estates to produce sugar on the island. The old steam mill, "Minnie" is intact and in place. There is an old well and several other estate buildings with their walls intact, including an old cookhouse and oven. This estate is currently owned by the government and used as an agricultural station. There are pieces of machinery and other pieces of debris scattered about. Directly below is the Coconut Walk Estate with an old mill.

38. Eden Brown Estate:

This site contains extensive ruins of the main estate buildings, the sugar mill, and the estate greathouse. The buildings appear to be in good shape, although a few of the walls have crumbled. Especially interesting is the old greathouse which is said to have stood abandoned since the 18th century. Local legends surround the estate, which is reputedly haunted. The estate is owned by the government and would appear to offer a most favorable site for restoration. The greathouse is overgrown, but the estate buildings are fairly clear of growth. The worst feature is the next to impassable main road leading to the estate.

39. Cottle Church Ruins:

These ruins of an old church built by a slave owner for his slaves are marked on the main road, but the access road is in poor condition and becomes impassable for cars after 100 yards. It is therefore necessary to walk about three quarters of a mile before reaching the site. The ruins are quite overgrown, but the walls are mostly intact, and only the roof is missing. The walls show some degree of deterioration. Weeds and trees have taken over the inside of the building. The site could easily be restored. The story is that Sir John Cottle, President of the Nevis Council, built this church in order that he could worship alongside his slaves, thus earning himself the hostility of the planter class. The church bell has been removed and is currently located on top the St. Theresa Church in Charlestown.

St. Thomas Lowland Parish

40. Fort Ashby:

This site is badly ruined. The upper walls have completely collapsed, but the lower section (about 6 ft. high) still stands in fair shape. There are four cannons located amid the rubble and overgrowth on top the fort. There is a small building with one wall standing outside of the fort. This site seems to have been more of a battery than a fort. It is located about 50 yards off the main road, but is unmarked, and access is via a narrow overgrown path.

41. St. Thomas Anglican Church:

A relatively new building constructed on the old foundation with a beautiful view of the surrounding area. It was the first Anglican Church on the Island (circa, 1640). Most of the inscriptions are illegible, and overgrown; some are in an advanced state of deterioration. Inscriptions include: Aron Chapman (1693), illegible name (1679), Phillip Brome (1705), Jasper Wall Jr. (1714), Peter Thomas Huggins (1787 - 1857), Elizabeth Brown (1734).

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The islands of St. Kitts and Nevis possess many fine landmarks rich in historical and cultural association. The potential of these sites, both as tourist attractions and as educational tools for familiarizing the local population with their unique heritage is enormous. Every effort should be made to protect, preserve and eventually restore, these historical monuments.

At the present time two obvious and immediate dangers to these sites can be identified:

1.) Steady encroachment and erosion by the sea threatens to undermine many of the old forts and batteries. Already some forts, such as the one at Palmetto Point, have slipped into the sea, while others are precariously situated.

2.) A more serious problem perhaps, is the local practice of removing old stone from historical sites for use in making cement or road construction. If the practice is not soon stopped many of the ancient ruins will simply disappear within the next decade to two.

The government is urged to take immediate preventive steps in order to bring further destruction under control. Beyond this, a major restoration program should be developed. There are several sites which, because of their intrinsic historic value and their potential as tourist attractions, are worthy of renovation or restoration. On St. Kitts these sites are: Fort Smith, "the Glen", dePoincy's Chateau, Palmetto Point Methodist Church, Stone Fort, Old Road Town, New Guinea Estate and Charles Fort at Sandy Point. On Nevis the sites are: Cottle Church Ruins, Fort Ashby, the Jewish Synagogue, The Baths, Fort Charles, Hamilton House, and Eden Brown Estate.

On all of the above sites major restoration work is necessary. The restoration projects should be functionally designed to attract and inform both tourists and local residents. Detailed historical and archaeological surveys should coincide with actual restoration.

Pending the implementation of major restoration projects, a number of immediate measures should be taken to protect these valuable monuments and render them more accessible and attractive:

1.) The construction or improvement of access roads. Access to the

major historical sites on St. Kitts is, for the most part, adequate, although certain sites remain inaccessible to the average resident or tourist due to bad roads. On Nevis, the leading sites are less easily reached due to the poor road system. The roads in Nevis are so treacherous that taxi drivers often refuse to take visitors to certain sites.

2.) Markers providing historical information should be provided for all sites referred to in this report. These should be situated along the main roads, as well as the sites. It is suggested that some kind of weatherproof plastic be used for the markers, and that they be placed upon a metal stand. Maps should be printed indicating the exact location of each site and the roads of access.

3.) Efforts should be made to clean up these sites and to keep them clear of garbage, debris and weeds. At present most sites are both inaccessible and unattractive because they are overgrown and littered with garbage.

4.) Arrangements should be made to acquire a full-time historic site archaeologist (with supporting funds for a regular program of excavation at Brimstone Hill and sampling, test-site excavations at many of the locations cited in this report). In the meanwhile, funding should be sought for some preliminary historic site archaeological work to determine the full dimensions of the problems and prospects of managing this "historical resource" as part of and in the face of development programs.

A final recommendation: Both islands abound in historical lore and legend among the local population. This historic resource, too often overlooked, constitutes an unrivaled source of information, which should be utilized in any effort at historical reconstruction. It is strongly urged that a comprehensive oral history program accompany every research and restoration project.