

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Who Has Been Digging The Lawn At Fort Christianvaern, And Why?

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ST. CROIX -- The National Park Service-Christiansted National Historic Site announced this morning the opening of the Slave Wrecks Project Community Archeology Program. Archeologists from the NPS' Southeast Archeological Center and the University of Tulsa will be conducting investigations at the site of the 1750s Danish West India and Guinea Company Warehouse, excavating the locations of the residences of enslaved Africans who lived and worked in the Danish governmental complex at Fort Christiansvaern.

If you noticed people digging the lawn at Fort Christianvaern, that's most likely what you saw.

The archeologists are also joined by student interns from the University of the Virgin Islands, San Antonio Texas, and Aarhus, Denmark. The program is part of a multilateral collaboration with the Christiansted National Historic Site, the University of the Virgin Islands, and other community partners, catalyzing in a multi-year effort that combines research and archaeology in underwater and on land sites, with public engagement activities including educational and training programs, museum exhibits, professional internships, and archival and genealogical research. This program of community engaged research is part of the NPS' efforts to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the transfer of the U.S. Virgin Islands from Denmark to the United States.

In 2015, the National Park Service launched the first SWP research efforts in US territorial waters and the Western Hemisphere - a survey, inventory, and assessment of submerged resources at Buck Island National Monument (BUIS) St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands, to look for two slave ships that wrecked off the island's reefs, the Mary and the General Abercrombie. This work will be used in conjunction with investigations on land sites that are all related to St. Croix's unique history as an epicenter of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade.

Archeologists from the NPS' Submerged Resources Center (SRC) and the Southeast Archeological Center (SEAC), in collaboration with the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) and George Washington University, are locating and documenting archeological sites both above and underwater associated with the historic trade of enslaved Africans.

About the Slave Wrecks Project:

Since 2010, the Slave Wrecks Project (SWP) has fostered public and scholarly understanding of the role of the African slave trade in shaping global history by using maritime archeology as the vehicle for examining enslavement and its far-reaching global impacts. The archeological investigation of slaver shipwrecks and related terrestrial sites, such as markets in which the enslaved were sold like Christiansted National Historic Site, maroon sites and encampments, and free black communities, promises to provide a new perspective to bear on our understanding of the Trans-Atlantic and Indian Ocean trades in enslaved people and on the central role that this process played in constituting the modern world.

The SWP is an international network of researchers and institutions that combines collaborative maritime exploration and investigation with training, heritage protection, exhibits, and education to build and share new knowledge about the history of the global slave trade. SWP partners work in museums and in archives, on coastlines, and in the sea in a dynamic approach to public history that intersects with the latest in science, archaeology, anthropology, and historical research. SWP is building a global network with local and regional roots and works in a growing list of locations from Mozambique to South Africa to St. Croix, Senegal, Brazil, and Cuba.