

The Virgin Islands Consortium

New Book Documents St. Croix's Estate Mt. Washington -- One Of American's Oldest Fully Restored Plantations

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ST. CROIX -- One of America's oldest fully restored plantations is the subject of a book that will be released this week on St. Croix: "Estate Mount Washington – The discovery and Resurrection of a Lost Plantation," by Anthony J. Ayer and Nancy S. Ayer, and published by Posterity Press.

In 1984 Anthony Ayer, who moved to St. Croix as a child with his family 70 years ago, and his wife, Nancy, discovered the ruins of the Mount Washington greathouse while exploring a large parcel of land near Frederiksted, according to the release. The Ayers

were part of a group of investors who bought the land. But when the Ayers discovered the ruins, they were inspired to restore, or “resurrect” the buildings and grounds that was one of the island’s original Danish estates, dating to 1750.

Highly sensitive to the issue of slavery, the Ayers went to great lengths to “tell it like it was.” They and others did extensive research using Danish Colonial records, including census reports and tax records, and other historical data to create a factual presentation of the people who lived and worked on the estate, including their jobs, religions, places of birth, mortality rates and other information, the release said.



Indeed, by 1990, when most of Estate Mount Washington's restoration was completed, the Ayers were well ahead of today's direction of not glossing over the slavery issue but putting it out front, as does the Whitney Plantation in Louisiana, which opened in 2017, and the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C., which opened in 2016.

The book includes numerous photographs of Estate Mount Washington from its initial "discovery" by the Ayers throughout the restoration, as well as extensive information about the history of the estate and its residents.

Today, Estate Mount Washington remains open to the public – free of charge. Visitors can explore the grounds, which includes a labyrinth, rum factory, sugar mill, dungeon, and stables. Nancy Ayers has spent years collecting authentic West Indian mahogany furniture of the period with which to furnish the greathouse.

ESTATE MOUNT V

THE DISCOVERY AND RESURRECTION



The greathouse remains a private residence and is closed to the public, but the Ayers have made it available for many events benefiting U.S. Virgin Islands charities. Research shows that in 1899 the greathouse was destroyed by a hurricane. The greathouse was not occupied again until the ruins were restored in 1986.

Some 14 acres of the estate are planted in citrus and avocado trees. The surrounding property has been designated a wildlife refuge and provides habitat for wild parrots, parakeets, hawks, and deer.

Coinciding with the release of "Estate Mount Washington," this week Nancy and Tony Ayer will participate in two book signings and discussions on St. Croix:

4:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m., February 15 at Undercover Books & Gifts, Gallows Bay, Christiansted; and at 4 p.m., February 23 at Caribbean Museum Center for the Arts, Frederiksted.

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