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Coral Bay Community Council Working to Provide Recognition and Protection for Historic Schoolhouse Properties in Coral Bay and East End, St. John

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Historic Schoolhouse and Ball field By. CORAL BAY COMMUNITY COUNCIL

The Coral Bay Community Council (CBCC) is set to begin a new project recognizing a part of local history important to many Coral Bay residents' families and their memories: documenting the significance of our "one room" schoolhouses from the 1860s to the 1940s and forward.

According to a recently issued release, the primary focus of this effort is on two early schoolhouse buildings, one in central Coral Bay ('The Coral Bay School', later to become part of the Benjamin Franklin School and then renamed the Guy H. Benjamin School) and the East End Schoolhouse run by the Moravian Church for decades in the East End neighborhood. Research will also be

gathered on the Horace Mann School (now the John's Folly Learning Institute) on Southside Coral Bay, while working on developing the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) applications for the first two properties.

The project is made possible through a grant from the Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands with funding provided by The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH): Democracy demands wisdom, according to the release. More information about NEH can be found at www.neh.gov. To accomplish this work over the next year, CBCC will hire a Project Associate to prepare the national and local historic register applications, and applications are open at this time.

Research conducted under this project will document the history of these historic school properties in Coral Bay and East End – schoolhouses which hold a special significance to the local community, as current residents' grandparents and elders attended them. To foster recognition, and most importantly, protection, for these significant historical and cultural places on St. John, CBCC will work to develop successful applications for listing these historical structures on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), the nation's official list of properties recognized for their significance in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering and culture.

This process will also make the properties eligible to be included in the Virgin Islands Registry of Historic Buildings, stated the release. The grant will fund collection of oral history, outreach on this history and the culture surrounding it, and additional work to preserve and share this cultural history.

CBCC will host a public meeting, probably virtually, in the Spring of 2021 to engage the public in providing information and gaining more understanding of the significance of these educational facilities, collect additional oral history, and document the history of these buildings to ensure this information remains accessible for future generations.

Work under this grant will be conducted in partnership with other local organizations including the St. John Historical Society, St. Jan Co., and the V.I. State Historic Preservation Office, and other government agencies.

"We are glad to be able to start this project during Black History Month, honoring and acknowledging the ancestors and their lives. Listing these schoolhouse properties as notable historical places is also a stepping stone to further the community's vision to grow cultural heritage tourism in Coral Bay and East End, St. John," stated Sharon Coldren, president of the Coral Bay Community Council. "Many people in the community envision future uses of these buildings that would showcase our local St. John heritage and culture, while providing gathering places for small events both for locals and visitors."

"We are excited to take this step in protecting these important cultural and historical sites and look forward to engaging with the community to learn more about and to share the history associated with each of the schools that have served Coral Bay and the East End over time," said Jane Israel, CBCC community programs associate.

Anyone who has information or early photos to share about these schoolhouses should contact CBCC at 340-776-2099 or email cbcc@CoralBayCommunityCouncil.org.

Individuals with a strong interest in Virgin Islands history, and with good research, writing and interpersonal skills, are encouraged to apply for the Project Associate position. The Project Associate job posting, along with more information about CBCC, can be found on our website at:

