

Timeline of the Virgin Islands with emphasis on linguistics, compiled by Sara Smollett, 2011.

Sources: Hall, *Slave Society in the Danish West Indies*, 1992; Dookhan, *A History of the Virgin Islands of the United States*, 1994; Westergaard, *The Danish West Indies under Company Rule (1671 – 1754)*, 1917; Oldendorp, *Historie der caribischen Inseln Sanct Thomas*, 1777; Highfield, *The French Dialect of St Thomas*, 1979; Boyer, *America's Virgin Islands*, 2010; de Albuquerque and McElroy in Glazier, *Caribbean Ethnicity Revisited*, 1985; <http://en.wikipedia.org/>; <http://www.waterislandhistory.com>; <http://www.northamericanforts.com/>; US census data

I've used modern names throughout for consistency. However, at various previous points in time: St Croix was Santa Cruz, Christiansted was Bassin; Charlotte Amalie was Taphus; Vieques was Crab Island; St Kitts was St Christopher.

### **Pre-Columbus**

.... first Ciboneys, then later Tainos and Island Caribs settle the Virgin Islands

### **Early European exploration**

1471 Portuguese arrive on the Gold Coast of Africa  
1493 Columbus sails past and names the islands, likely lands at Salt River on St Croix and meets natives  
1494 Spain and Portugal define the Line of Demarcation  
1502 African slaves are first brought to Hispanola  
1508 Ponce de León settles Puerto Rico  
1553 English arrive on the Gold Coast of Africa  
1585 Sir Francis Drake likely anchors at Virgin Gorda  
1588 Defeat of the Spanish Armada  
1593 Dutch arrive on the Gold Coast of Africa  
1607 John Smith stopped at St Thomas on his way to Jamestown, Virginia

### **Pre-Danish settlement**

1615 Dutch settlement on Tortola recorded by Spanish  
1621 Dutch West India Company formed  
1625 Dutch Virgin Islands established  
1625 St Croix noted as being already settled by the Zeeland Dutch and some French Protestants from St Kitts (Christiansted and east) and English (Frederiksted and west)  
1625 Spanish attack Dutch settlement on Tortola, some Dutch move to Jost van Dyke  
1628 English make unsettled claim to Tortola  
1631 Dutch settle Virgin Gorda  
1641 Dutch conquer last remaining Portuguese forts on the Gold Coast  
1643 Dutch build Fort Flamandor (Sale) on St Croix, English build St James around this time  
1645 Dutch Governor of St Croix kills English Governor, fighting ensues and many Dutch and French Protestants leave (for St Martin/St Eustatius and Guadeloupe, respectively)  
1646 Spanish destroy English colony on Tortola  
1649 First Danish ship sent to Guinea  
1650 Spanish attack and gain control of St Croix, French (de Poincy) subsequently gain control from Spanish  
1652 First ship sails from Copenhagen to the West Indies and returns  
1653 St Croix deeded to the Knights of Malta, French still effectively ruling, French bonded laborers imported  
1657-1660 Dutch establish post and church on St Thomas  
1658 Danes capture Fort Christiansborg (Osu, Accra, Ghana) and Fort Carlsborg (Cape Coast, Ghana) from the Swedes and begin trading with the Accra  
1664 English capture Fort Carlsborg  
1665 French West India Company controls St Croix  
1665 English privateer attacks and occupies Tortola, noted to have captured 67 slaves and brought them to Bermuda

### **Danish settlement of St Thomas**

1665-1666 Danish West India and Guinea Company arrive on St Thomas, some English, French, and Dutch settlers join (some from St Eustatius), Danes abandon settlements  
1672 Danes return to St Thomas, find it recently abandoned by the English but still inhabited by the Dutch, and seed a colony of about 100 (including bondmen and convicts), begin building Fort Christian  
1672 Tortola and JVD come under English control, part of colony of Leeward Islands as part of Antigua (Third Anglo-Dutch War)  
1672-1678 Franco-Dutch War, Third Anglo-Dutch War  
1673-1674 103 Africans (likely of the Kwa language family) brought to St Thomas

1675 Danes first attempt to settle St John, rejected by English  
1678-1679 Danes build Skytsborg Tower (Blackbeard's Castle) and Tower Fort (Bluebeard's Castle) on St Thomas  
1680 English control Virgin Gorda and Anegada  
1680-1682 Portuguese occupy Fort Christiansborg  
1683 Danes join English settlers on St John  
1683 English from Anguilla attempt to settle Vieques, but are repelled by the Danes; Scottish settle Vieques later in the 1680s and are overthrown by the Spanish  
1685 Brandenburg-Prussia (Brandenburgisch-Africanische Compagnie) settle treaty with Denmark allowing Brandenburg to settle and trade on St Thomas  
1686 Demographics of St Thomas: of the adult whites: 54 non-Danish Creoles, 37 Dutch, 13 Danish, 12 English, 10 French, 5 German, 2 Swedish, 1 Flemish, 1 Portuguese  
1688 Demographics of St Thomas: 422 blacks (maybe including 1 Carib), 317 whites; of the 148 (adult male) white planters: 66 Dutch, 31 English, 17 Danish, 17 French, 4 Irish, 4 Flemish, 3 German, 3 Swedish, 1 Portuguese, 1 Brazilian, 1 Scottish  
1689 Brandenburg-Prussia annexes Peter Island  
1691 Demographics of St Thomas: 555 blacks, 383 free whites not employed by the DWI Company; of the whites: 268 Creoles (109 Dutch Creoles, 94 Danish Creoles, 65 other Creoles) and 115 Europeans (36 Dutch, 24 Danish, 19 English, 14 French, 7 German, 7 Flemish, 2 Swedish, 1 Portuguese, 5 others)  
1693-1694 Fort Christiansborg captured by the Akwamu (aka Amini, Twi speakers of Akan language family) who hold it and sell it back to the Danish  
1695 French effectively abandon St Croix (for Haiti)  
1697 Danish West Indian Company begins slave trade in earnest  
1698 Danish governor sends expedition to Vieques to protest Scottish occupation  
1715 Demographics of St Thomas: 3042 blacks, 547 whites

#### **Danish settlement of St John, St Croix, Moravian missionaries**

1716-1718 Danes and British dispute over possession of St John, British relinquish to Danes  
1717 British from Anguilla settle Vieques (census suggests 46 whites and 62 blacks)  
1718 Earliest documentation of Water Island settlement  
1718 Spanish destroy British settlement on Vieques  
1725-1726 Drought and famine on St Thomas  
1727-1768 Quaker settlement in BVI, notable Quakers included John C Lettsome (Royal Society fellow, founded Medical Society of London), William Thornton (designed US Capitol)  
1728 Demographics of St John: 677 blacks, 123 whites  
1731-1738 Brandenburg Company leaves St Thomas  
1732 First Moravian missionaries (from Herrnhut Saxony, eastern Germany) arrive on St Thomas, they begin learning Negerhollands shortly  
1733 Hurricane  
1733 Demographics of St John: blacks 1087, whites 208  
1733 St John slave revolt by Akwamu slaves, not resolved until 1734  
1733 Danish West India and Guinea Company purchases St Croix from France, begin building Fort Christiansvaern shortly after  
1734 Danish Company gives up slave trade, open trade up to private Danes  
1734 Danish founded Fort Fredensborg (Old Ningo, Ghana)  
1736 First known mention in print of the creole language spoken in the Danish West Indies  
1752-1760 Danes build Fort Frederik on St Croix  
1740 (approx) Moravians translate Church songs to Negerhollands  
1741 Demographics of St Croix: English outnumber Danish 5:1  
1742 Demographics of St Croix: 1900 slaves  
1742 Danish-British treaty expires, Danish-French treaty established  
1745 Danish make claim to Spanish regarding 300 slaves that had escaped to Puerto Rico  
1752 Moravians first use Church liturgy in Negerhollands  
1754 St Thomas, St John, and St Croix become royal Danish colonies  
1754 Demographics of St Croix: 7566 blacks  
1755 Demographics of St Thomas: Slaves outnumber whites 12:1  
1755-1757 Danish Lutheran Church establishes missions on St Thomas and St Croix  
1761 Moravians print first Church booklet in Negerhollands  
1756-1763 Seven Years' War (French and Indian War)  
1760 Dutch-based language noted in West Africa

1764 St Thomas proclaimed a free port  
1765 Moravians print first hymnbook in Negerhollands  
1767 Denmark Vessey (plotted 1822 Charleston slave insurrection) may have been born on St Thomas  
1769 A free mulatto (who owns slaves) owns Water Island  
1770 Demographics of St John: slaves outnumber whites 19:1  
1770 Joackim Melchior Magens produces Negerhollands grammar  
1770-1802 *Royal Danish American Gazette* newspaper is published in English and Danish (masthead and ads are English-only)  
1772 Hurricane, recorded by 17-year-old Nevis-born St Croix resident Alexander Hamilton  
1774 Moravian missionary Auerbach writes letter referencing a Negro-English on St Croix  
1775-1783 American Revolutionary War  
1777 Oldendorp publishes a history of the Moravian mission in St Thomas, including a section on Negerhollands, also notes that English is used much more in St Croix  
1779 Danes build Frederik's Battery (Fort Willoughby) on St Thomas  
1780-1787 Danes founded Forts Prinsensten, Kongensten, and Augustaborg (Ghana)  
1781 Magens' Negerhollands New Testament published  
1781 British expelled many (mostly Jewish) merchants from St Eustatius, many move to St Thomas  
1782-1785 Fort Christiansborg (Ghana) occupied by British  
1784 Moravians on St Croix translate Bible to VI English Creole  
1785 Hurricane  
1790 Four public schools for slaves opened in St Croix and St Thomas  
1792 Danish Royal Ordinance announces abolition of slave trade, following 10+ year transition period

### **End of slave trade to end of slavery, Napoleonic Wars, decline of Negerhollands**

1796 Sephardic Jewish congregation established on St Thomas  
1797 Demographics: St Croix 2223 whites, 1164 freedmen, 25452 slaves; St Thomas 726 whites, 239 freedmen, 4769 slaves; St John 113 whites, 15 freedmen, 1992 slaves  
1801 Achard opens first sugar beet refinery in Prussia, threatening future of the sugar cane economy  
1801-1802 First British occupation of the Danish West Indies (Napoleonic wars), English noted as most common language in St Thomas around this time  
1802-1803 Danish slave trade abolished, some illegal trade likely continued until the 1820s  
1803 (approx) Half of Water Island owned by the Captain of the Free Negro Corps, half owned by a free black from Martinique  
1804 Fire on St Thomas  
1807-1815 Second British occupation of the Danish West Indies (Napoleonic wars)  
1811 Last Dutch-speaking pastor leaves the Dutch Reformed Church of St Thomas  
1811 Judah P Benjamin (Cabinet member of the US Confederacy) was born on St Croix  
1815 Demographics: St Croix 1840 whites, 2480 freedmen, 24330 slaves; St Thomas 2122 whites, 2284 freedmen, 4393 slaves; St John 157 whites, 271 freedmen, 2306 slaves (freed blacks outnumber whites)  
1819 Hurricane  
1830 Camille Pissarro (French Impressionist) born on St Thomas  
1832 Edward Wilmot Blyden (Pan-Africanist, involved in the development of Liberia and Freetown Sierra Leon) was born on St Thomas  
1833 Synagogue built on St Thomas  
1833-1834 Last Moravian and Danish Lutheran texts in Negerhollands are published  
1834 Emancipation in the BVI  
1835 Demographics: Peak total population recorded of 43178 on St Thomas, St John, and St Croix  
1835 Freedmen in Danish VI obtained civil liberties  
1837 Hurricane and fire on St Thomas  
1839 Demographics of St Thomas: 41 large importing houses recorded; 13 English, 11 French, 6 German, 4 Italian and Spanish, 4 American, 3 Danish and Danish West Indian  
1839 School ordinance calls for 17 new schools with instruction in English  
1839 Moravians switch to English sermons  
1840s St Thomas (Creque) Marine Railway Company founded, steam engine built by Hamburg-based Boulton Company  
1844 Danish Lutherans switch to English for religious services  
1848 Slave revolt on St Croix leads to emancipation in the Danish West Indies

### **Post slavery until US transfer**

1850s Demographics of St Thomas: Jewish population peaks at around 400, a sizeable percentage of the white

population

1850 All Danish Gold Coast Settlements sold to Britain

1850-1870s Hassel Island split from St Thomas, Royal Mail Steam Packet Company, Hamburg America Line coaling station

1867 Hurricane, earthquake, and tsunami, RMS Rhone sinks

1868 First attempted purchase by US

1869 Addison Van Name publishes on Negerhollands

1870 (approx) Immigrants from French St Barts settle on St Thomas, speaking a French Creole in Frenchtown and a French dialect on the Northside

1870 (approx) Immigrants from British Anguilla work as indentured laborers on St Croix

1871 Hurricane

1878 Labor revolt on St Croix

1881 Erik Pontoppidan publishes on Negerhollands, noting that creole is nearly gone from St Croix and town in St Thomas, but is still spoken by some older speakers in the missions in rural St Thomas and also on St John

1887 Hugo Schuchardt publishes on Negerhollands

1899 Hurricane

1902 Second attempted purchase by US

1904 US construction of Panama Canal begins

1905 Dirk Hesseling publishes on Negerhollands, citing 1904 letter from Moravian Bishop Greider that the younger generation speaks an Anglicized creole and the pure creole is only spoken by a few old people in the country

1914 Hugo Schuchardt publishes on Negerhollands

1916 Hurricane

### **US Virgin Islands**

1917 US purchases the Danish West Indies from Denmark, renamed US Virgin Islands

1921 Prohibition (of alcohol) extended to the USVI

1926 JPB de Josselin de Jong publishes on Negerhollands, saying that pure Negerhollands is only spoken by a few old people on St John

1927 End of 10-year transfer transition period; US citizenship granted to former Danish citizens; easy migration from PR now possible

1928 Hurricane

1931 End of US Naval rule, islands transferred to Department of the Interior

1932 US citizenship extended to many Virgin Islanders

1936 Organic Act

1936 FG Nelson collects words and short texts in Negerhollands on St Thomas

1939 US Navy establishes submarine base on St Thomas

1940 Demographics: PR population increased to 8% from 3.3% 10-years earlier (migration was largely from Vieques to St Croix)

1944 US DoD acquires Water Island

1947 US plans to relocate Vieques population to St Croix (plan rejected)

1950 Demographics: French population on St Thomas estimated at peak as over 1000

1954 Revised Organic Act

1956 "Bonded aliens" migrate from the BVI to the USVI for employment

1956 National Park established on St John

1959 US Embargo against Cuba; US tourism increases

1959 "Bonded alien" program extended to the British, French, and Netherlands West Indies

1962 Direct jet service from New York to St Croix

1966 Direct jet service from New York to St Thomas

1966 Hess Oil Virgin Island Corporation constructs oil refinery on St Croix

1968 Demographics: 45% of the USVI labor force were nonimmigrant aliens

1970 First elected governor

1970 Temporary workers' spouses and children allowed to join them

1971 Large-scale deportation of aliens (est 7000 – 15000)

1975 (approx) Palestinian (via PR and NY) and East Indian (via Canary Islands, NY, Jamaica, Curacao) immigrants noted

1987 Alice Stevens, last known speaker of Negerhollands, dies

1989 Hurricane Hugo

1995 Hurricane Marilyn

1996 Water Island transferred to territorial government