

ERA OF CHANGE AND TRANSFORMATION – 1955 to 1989

The Barracks stands as a backdrop to the lives of the people, who occupy and use the space – it started as a military barracks in the Danish sugar colony, a place from which the island population of mostly enslaved and descendent people were policed – after the Transfer, it housed the U.S. Marines during Naval occupation of the islands, later it was transformed into a structure from which the people of St. Croix and their descendants evolved and took responsibility for themselves and their future generations, acquiring education and implementing education policy, community policing and labor policies that affected the lives of a growing, diverse community.

ERA OF TRANSFORMATION – 1955 to 1990

Nineteen fifty-five to 1990 is a 40-year period of profound change and transformation. Several key events, internal and external will transform the Barracks, the town, the island, and the territory from a sleepy post-colonial outpost of the United States into a thriving American territory in the Caribbean.

In the 1950s, the people of the Virgin Islands who have been advocating for greater self-governance and fuller integration into the American system of liberty and justice, gain the benefits of the **Revised Organic Act of 1954** - fuller voting rights and civil rights. They begin to affect changes to improve their socioeconomic conditions. In 1959, there is a revolution in Cuba and American tourists change their destination of choice to Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands creating an economic boom in both territories governed by the United States.

In the 1960s, With more money flowing into the territory from increased economic activity, students educated at the Old Barracks either leave for the military, attend college in Puerto Rico or at HBCUs such as Lincoln, Howard and Hampton or they remain on island and fill the growing number of jobs available in government, the tourism industry or at the new industrial giants, the Hess Oil Refinery and the Harvey Alumina plant on the south shore of St. Croix.

My father and aunts are part of this generation. He and his classmates leave to fight in the Korean War. My aunts leave for New York and get jobs in the garment district utilizing skills learned at Christiansted High School. All three would return to raise their families and contribute to the St. Croix community. My father as a teacher and later as a Customs Inspector, my aunt as an entrepreneur

dressmaker/hairdresser and later as a teacher and assistant principal and my other aunt as a successful businesswoman on St. Thomas.

The **need for labor for Hess and Harvey oil and aluminum** manufacturing plants would bring a **wave of immigration from across the Caribbean**, mostly from the Eastern Caribbean islands of St. Kitts/Nevis, Antigua/Barbuda, Dominica, and St. Lucia, but also from the southern Caribbean islands of Trinidad, Grenada, Aruba and Curacao and from Jamaica in the west. This immigration quadrupled the population, bringing not only prosperity and upward mobility, but also conflict and confrontation as the community transformed to absorb the social, political, and economic needs of a diverse population who now call St. Croix their home and Christiansted their town and Hospital Street and the Old Barracks their neighborhood.

In the 1960s, two other key events, the **1968 Elective Governor's Act and the creation of the College of the Virgin Islands have an impact**. Residents born in the Virgin Islands and those with American citizenship now gain the right to elect their own governor and delegate to congress bringing more self-government to the islands. Students who can't afford to leave the islands for higher education now have the option of the College of the Virgin Islands. Dr. Melvin Evans becomes the first elected governor gaining praise for improving and extending the

system of roads, and suffering backlash for presiding over a “round-up and deportation” of immigrant workers from the Caribbean that left deep divisions in the community that resonate today.

The **Barracks is now the home of the Departments of Education, Labor, and Public Safety.** Decision making and policy on the need for more and better schools, that uplift workers from all backgrounds and on the policing of the islands keeping them safe and mitigating and managing the conflicts that arose from too much growth, too fast, come from those who work at the Old Barracks Building. Two such community leaders are Gloria Canegata Waterman who served as District Superintendent of Schools from 1970 to 1986 and who oversaw the expansion of schools necessitated by the population surge and Elton Lewis who began his career as a patrolman at the Barracks and rose to become Police Commissioner. He also created the Police Museum with information that will become one of the exhibits at VIAC.

In the 1970s, young men drafted to fight in Vietnam in the 60s are now returning home and serving as police officers and working at the Barracks. Students educated at the Barracks are now serving in the Departments of Education, Labor and Public Safety and are creating, instituting, and implementing governing policy from these departments.

The 1980s, brings the **Non-Immigrant Alien Adjustment Act** which creates a path for citizenship for residents from the Eastern Caribbean who have worked to build and become a part of the community. It is a period where the diverse community is coming together through the amelioration of marriage, church affiliation, and working and going to school together. Schools come off double sessions and can accommodate the population of students. The decade ends with **Hurricane Hugo, the first major storm in 60 years**, which destroys 90 percent of structures on St. Croix. It does major damage to Building One of the Old Barracks, which housed the Department of Public Safety and leaves several dilapidated structures across the town.