

ABSTRACT

Settlement of St. Thomas in
The Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries

RALPH EGBERT WILLIAMS

This study looks at the settlement of the parish St. Thomas in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century. It brings together St. Thomas in the East and St. David which today make up the modern parish of St. Thomas.

The occupation by the Spaniards in 1510 far from inducing settlement resulted in decline. The Spaniards quickly subdued and enslaved the Indians and by the beginning of the seventeenth century only a few of the original Arawak Indian population remained. The capture of Jamaica in 1655 did not lead to any large scale settlement. Conditions remained the same in the parish for some time. Guerilla warfare against the Spanish remnants continued for some time until the Spaniards were finally driven from the island in May, 1660.

Early English settlement in St. Thomas was difficult. Not only did many die of diseases, as was the case of the Nevis settlers, but there was conspiracy among the soldiers with little food and nothing to drink but water. Then there were the Negroes who lived in the hills who tried to procure by force or theft from the English by carrying out raids on the plantations, so much that they had to be hunted. In addition to all these was the threat of

Spaniards who wanted to retake the island. St. Thomas being on the Coast was exposed to attacks and suffered greatly at the hands of the French in 1694.

By the end of the seventeenth century conditions in St. Thomas had improved to such an extent that the settlements were growing, especially with the establishment of Civil government, and the decline in privateering. Sugar was assured an important position in the parish with the demise of the small planters and growth of large estates.