

A B S T R A C TTHE HISTORY OF POINT FORTIN,  
1900 TO THE 1930s

by

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This paper investigated the history of Point Fortin in the period 1900 to the 1930s. Secondary material in the form of books, theses, journals, newspapers, government reports and papers, as well as oral interviews with knowledgeable people on the topic suggested that the oil industry played a central role in the development of Point Fortin in most of the period covered in this research paper. This view was further substantiated by documents and the 'in-house' magazine of the oil company based in Point Fortin.

The evidence shows that the activities of the oil company had a great impact on the social and economic development of Point Fortin. The Company succeeded in setting up a social structure based on categories and grades related to employment. Senior Staff workers represented the upper class, Junior Staff workers became the middle class, and the labouring class represented the lower class. The policy of the Company was

to make living conditions of the upper class as comfortable as possible, to provide some semblance of comfort for the middle class, and the labouring class was left to fend for themselves. Yet, the activities of the company in Point Fortin led to a growth in its population, the promotion of business activity, and an improvement in communication links with the rest of the world. These results indicate that in the period 1900 to the 1930s, the oil company in Point Fortin was, to a great extent, responsible for the shaping and development of Point Fortin as a distinct oil-town.

The intention of this paper is to show how the workers in one oil company were exploited by the expatriates who managed the company and, at the same time, to show how the company played an important role in the development of an oil town. To do this, the history of Point Fortin between the years 1900 and 1937 was traced.

Research has been done on the history of the oil industry in Trinidad by the historians Vernon Malsbenden and Bridget Brereton. Malsbenden's 'Origins, Growth and Development of the Oil Industry in Trinidad' and Brereton's History of Modern Trinidad both offer valuable insights into the development of the oil industry in Point Fortin prior to 1937 but neither of these works