



ST. ANNE'S CHAPEL HISTORY

ST. ANNE'S CHAPEL – CARENAGE A COMMUNITY PROJECT

St. Anne's Chapel stands out prominently at the top of Gallows Hill as one of Carenage's finest accomplishment, built in large by its community. The history of this picturesque little Chapel speaks volumes for the hard work and dedication of the French Settlers of Carenage, our ancestors. But, lest we forget, many of our parents have shared their experiences with us with the aim of passing its history on to our children and future generations.

After the United States purchased the Danish West Indies in 1917, the American priests from the Baltimore Province replaced the Redemptorist Fathers of the Belgium Province.

In 1918, Father John Guillo came to the Virgin Islands and devoted most of his time to the French settlers of Carenage, since he himself, spoke their language fluently. His association with the people soon revealed that they were in fact, non-practicing Catholics. It also became apparent to him that the primary reason for their religious indifference was due to socio-economic conditions. These French settlers lived in isolation from the town of Charlotte Amalie, as they were very conscious of their poverty and personal appearances. They were shunned by the town community because of the clothing they wore, their lack of shoes, and their overall appearance. Thus they avoided the Main Church in the town area.

Recognizing the need to provide a place of worship for these French settlers, Father Guillo wrote to the Very Reverend Joseph Schneider, the Redemptorist Provincial of the Baltimore Province for permission to build a Chapel in Carenage. Not only was permission granted, but an initial contribution was made for this purpose.

In the heart of the Village of Carenage stood a hill known as Gallows Hill. This name originated from the fact that on this very hill many pirates and criminals were hung. The crest of Gallows Hill was selected as an appropriate location for the Chapel. Father Guillo made his plans publicly known on April 21, 1919. Almost immediately, Mr. J. Boschulte donated the land on which the Chapel could be built. Mr. Pettigrew, a skilled architect, drew the blueprints, and supervised the entire work, which began in 1920, but he would accept no remuneration whatsoever. Meanwhile, Father Guillo said mass occasionally in a small wooden framed house, which was being used as a school.

To make room for the church on Gallows Hill, it was necessary to cut down the top by approximately twelve feet. This proved to be a most difficult job since the hill was very rocky. The Naval authorities on the island proved most cooperative and directed the blasting of the hard rocks that first had to be removed. They also loaned the picks, shovels, crowbars and other implements that were needed, while the men of the village donated their services generously and assumed the task with a great amount of determination. By January 10, 1921, the blasting and digging of the foundation were completed.

On March 1, 1921, Mr. Emmanuel John, the contractor, and Mr. Hennessy, the mason, began the actual construction of the chapel. Work progressed at a rapid pace and by the end of April; Mr. John had almost completed the erection of the crossbeams of the roof.

On April 29, 1921, Father Guillo had been transferred to Boston and Father Paul Dugal had been assigned to Carenage.

The chapel was indeed a community project for it was mainly due to the strenuous labor of these French settlers that it was completed shortly thereafter. Now that the structure was ready, Father Dugal, a capable carpenter himself, assisted in the task of making the altar and the benches. At last, the first mass was offered in 1921 on Christmas morning at 9 a.m.

The Chapel was blessed at a later date and dedicated in honor of St. Anne, patron saint of fishermen. The presence of St. Anne's Chapel brought about a spiritual revival among the villagers. The new spirituality was soon publicly demonstrated.

Rev. Leo Harkins came to St. Anne's after Father Dugal, and he commenced the outdoor procession on the feast of St. Anne. A growth in the faith of the Parishioners became evident.

Father John Guillo returned to St. Anne's from 1923 to 1929 and was then replaced by Father John Shields who was instrumental in starting St. Anne's Society. The response was overwhelming.

Father Leo St. Lawrence was assigned to St. Anne's Chapel in 1931. In continuing the devotion to the patron saint of the Chapel, he purchased a life-sized statue of St. Anne and placed it in its present prominent location at the Chapel in an outdoor shrine at the top of the stairs, visible to everyone. He also expanded the Chapel by adding the side altar of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, and weekly novena services in her honor were started. Father St. Lawrence also added a new sacristy and a new entrance, which lengthened the Chapel. This was all completed in 1934. Again, the contributions of the people of Carenage in time, labor and other assistance were instrumental in this expansion project.

In 1935, Father Arthur Finn was assigned to Carenage and was instrumental in organizing an all boys choir in the community. This choir so amazed the congregation with their musical abilities that they were also utilized for special occasion concerts in the school and become the pride of the Carenage.

In the years that followed, the Redemptorist Fathers continued their work in the Carenage. The parishioners' faith continued to grow stronger and this spiritual unity resulted in the congregation's greater participation in all religious activities. Miss Anatelia Magras and Phillip and Alma Baptiste were individuals who were well known for their dedication to the Chapel. They worked faithfully for the betterment of the Chapel. For 30 years until her death, Anatelia accompanied the Priest as he visited the sick and brought them the sacraments. She also assisted in training

the altar boys and along with Mrs. Alma Baptiste; she cleaned the church, took care of the altar, cleaned the priest's vestments and generally kept up the everyday needs of the Chapel.

Mr. Phillip Baptiste, a carpenter by profession, began his work in the Chapel during the tenure of Father Leo St. Lawrence. After completing the Chapel's expansion in 1934, Mr. Baptiste continue his service to St. Anne's Chapel until his death. In recognition for his many years of dedicated service to the Chapel, Mr. Baptiste was made an Oblate of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer on July 25, 1967.

From 1934 to 1988, the Chapel remained much the same with routine maintenance, painting and general improvements including the installation of the galvanized roof, but leaking problems continued, and the Chapel was in desperate in need of a full new roof.

Accordingly, during 1988, a new community group was organized to look into the problems that developed over the years with particular emphasis on solving the roof problem. Based on the findings of this group, in December 1988, The Reverend Bishop O'Malley authorized the construction of a new roof for the St. Anne's Chapel. Immediately, a committee was formed to coordinate the solicitation of funds for this major project and to seek donations of services to help defray the costs, which were estimated to be \$80,000. Individuals involved in this committee included, among other, Pierre Ledee, Louis Greaux, Frank Quetel, Anthony Olive and Charles Magras.

Mr. Pedro Lopez, architect, donated his expertise and services in the development off plans and in supervising the project. Mr. Joe Restle agreed to remove the old roof and construct the new one. Collectively, all the people of the community worked hard to complete the construction and to solicit support from the business community. The goal of the St. Anne's Chapel committee was to complete the roof in time to celebrate Easter Services in 1989 at the renovated Chapel. In the interim, religious services were held at the Frenchtown Community Center.

The new roof also has a secular purpose, namely protection for hurricanes. St. Anne's Chapel has been designated as a hurricane shelter by VITEMA for the residents of Frenchtown.

Construction of the new roof was one of three major improvements undertaken at St. Anne's Chapel. Next, the road leading to the Chapel was improved to provide access for the aged and handicapped who could not climb the steep stairway to attend mass and other services. The final step in the Chapel's expansion process was to construct a clubhouse on the adjacent Church property to provide much needed facilities for church meetings and social functions. This latter program is now underway.

To raise funds for the projects undertaken, a number of functions were carried out. Special softball games were held at the Frenchtown Ball Park where the proceeds from the sales of tickets and items such as pates, chicken legs, cakes and drinks for hungry spectators went to fund the Chapel's work.

Funds are also raised through the activities to celebrate Mother's Day, Father's Day and Bastille Day, held in Carenage – Frenchtown.

Throughout the years, many members of St. Anne's community have given the continue to give much of their time and service assisting St. Anne's Chapel in many important ways. These include from cleaning and decorating the Chapel, ensuring the priests vestments and altar dressings are always cleaned and pressed, scheduling and serving as lectors, ushers, altar servers, organists, opening and closing bulletins, scheduling masses, handling the finances of the chapel, arranging for choir activities, and many other activities too many to mention. Your many contributions are appreciated. We thank you for your dedication and service to St. Anne's Chapel, and we pray for your continued support.

St. Anne's Chapel celebrated its 80th Anniversary at Christmas 2001. As the community continues to grow the eventual goal would be for St. Anne's Chapel to become a full Parish as opposed to its current status as a sub-chapel of the Main Church in town. This would be a distinguished honor, but would also result in many added responsibilities and challenges for the community of St. Anne's.

The community is currently embarked on a continuing building project to establish a residence for its assigned priest. This is being built on top of the recently completed clubhouse. As usual, the community fully supports this project not only financially, but also by donating their time and hard labor.

Contributions are being accepted toward the completion of this project and can be mailed to St. Anne's Chapel Building Fund, P. O. Box 306610, St. Thomas, Virgin Islands 00803.

Thank you, in advance, for your support.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

- St. Anne's Chapel Semi-Centennial 1921-1971
- A History of St. Anne's Chapel - 1971 by Frank Quetel and Anthony Olive
- A New Roof for History St. Anne's Chapel - 1989 by Marjorie Roberts
- History of St. Anne's Chapel - 2001 by Irene Greaux
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