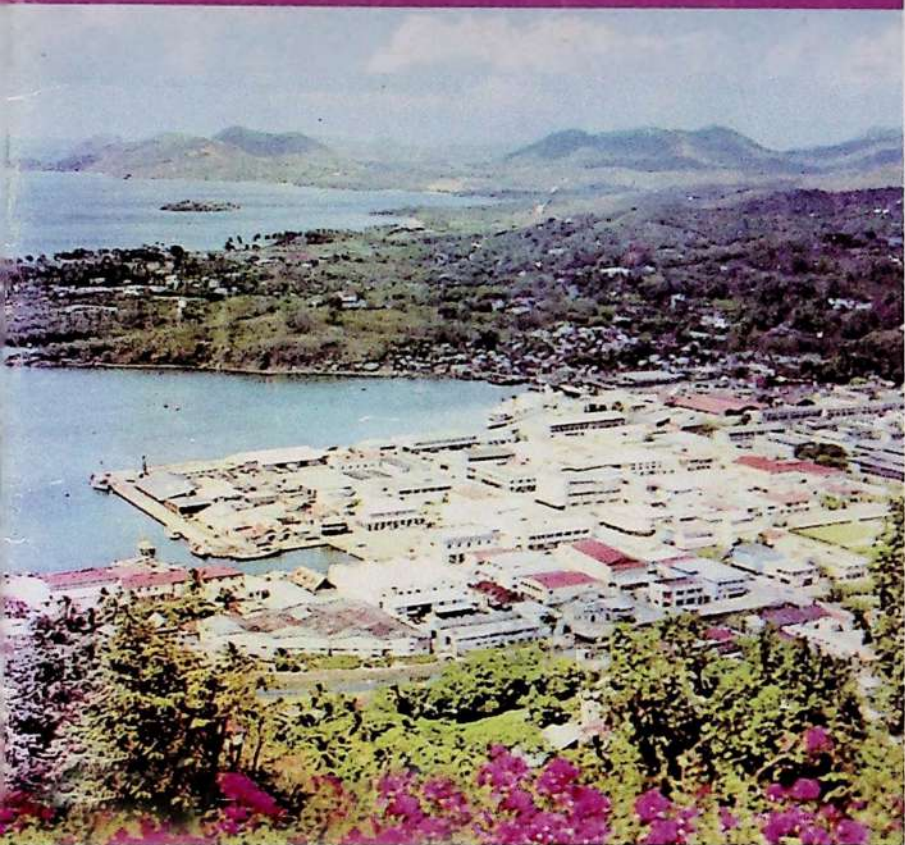


# *Mount Pleasant Estate*



Robert J. Devaux, OBE

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Folk Research Centre  
Castries, Saint Lucia

2010

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Cover photo: Town and Harbour of Castries looking north and showing Mount Pleasant Ridge in the background. Source: SRC post card c1960.

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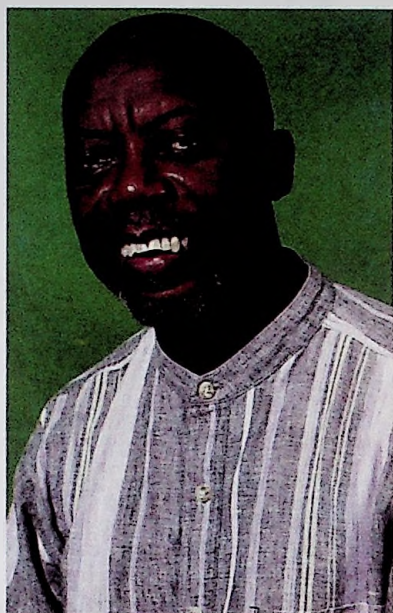
Dedicated to:  
Msg. Patrick A. B. Anthony, PhD., SLC.

This little History of Mount Pleasant would not be complete without first highlighting the work of the Founding Director of the Folk Research Centre, which is presently housed in this magnificent building. Therefore, it is my great pleasure to dedicate this publication to Hon. Msgr. Patrick A. B. Anthony, PhD., SLC.

PABA as he is more affectionately known among his friends has greatly influenced my writing career. As Director of the St. Lucia National Trust, he was influential in creating a new post entitled Resident Researcher, which allowed me the opportunity to carry out Historical Research for two years before my retirement from the Trust.

PABA has numerous tentacles that reach out into almost every sphere of life in St. Lucia. He is Editor of the Catholic Chronicle Newspaper, official organ of the Church in St. Lucia. He founded St. Lucy's Home for the Homeless and is the Director of the Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre.

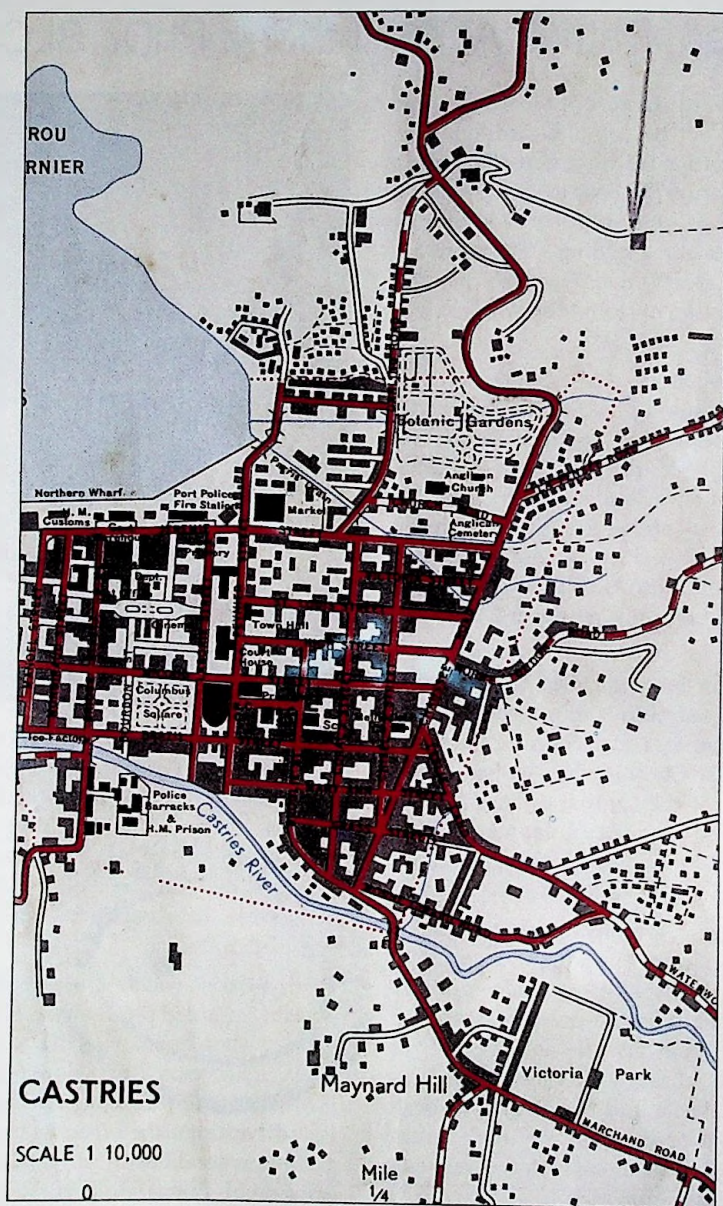
Msgr. Anthony plays a leading role in many important institutions both locally and regionally, and has lectured at several universities abroad. Apart from his role as a Theologian he specializes in the Cultural Heritage of St. Lucia and is a strong advocate for the protection of the natural environment, along with the wellbeing of the common man.



As a Catholic Priest, PABA's work load is huge, yet he makes the time to officiate at special events and is a welcome "fixture" at all important ceremonies; often, he is selected as Guest Speaker at official functions, never one to disappoint with his powerful oratory.

His work is widely recognized and he was awarded St. Lucia's highest honour when he received the St. Lucia Cross in February 2000. More recently PABA was identified as one of the Island's distinguished Icons. May God grant him good health and long life to carry on his outstanding work.

"Map of Castries showing Mount Pleasant House (see arrow)"



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Grateful appreciation is hereby extended to the following persons without whose help this project may have never seen the light of day:

The Folk Research Centre

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The St. Lucia National Archives

The St. Lucia Research Centre

The Harold Devaux Family especially Harold Devaux (deceased),  
his son Fred and his daughter Pam

The National Printing Corporation

Sunshine Book Shop

Special thanks are extended to Rev. Fr. Charles Jesse, FMI (deceased), whose several publications have been freely drawn upon because of the wealth of information therein contained and for the exhaustive research that this historian/priest undertook over a lifetime of service to the island and people of Saint Lucia.



## FOREWORD

By Dr. Kentry D. InPierre, Executive Director, FRC

In a society in which little real value seems to be put on our literature, culture and history, the work of Robert Devaux continues to be a pioneering one. He has published several full length works and monographs on various aspects of St. Lucia's rich history. He already has in manuscript form many more publications that document our journey through the decades.

It is a pleasure to partner with our premier historian on this project to document the story of Mount Pleasant, the present home of the Folk Research Centre. The FRC moved into these premises on August 15th 1993. The dream ever since has been that we would be joined eventually at Mount Pleasant by other educational and arts and cultural centres. We still wait. In the meantime visitors to the FRC and anyone interested in the history of St. Lucia and in particular this area overlooking Castries, now have an illustrated book that will fill in the gaps in their knowledge.

We are already discussing with Robert Devaux some other publishing projects and should soon be announcing some other publications with this author and others. We thank those like the Sunshine Bookshop who have contributed financially to making this venture possible. Publications like these are a fulfillment of our mandate to provide cultural education to our people through lectures series, classes and the published writings of our researchers. Our collaboration with Robert Devaux is part of our ongoing work. We recommend his work and writings to our readers.

## — Introduction —

The Folk Research Centre (FRC) was established in 1973 by Rev Fr. Patrick A. B. Anthony as a non-governmental organization to preserve and promote the cultural heritage of St. Lucia. The Centre was registered as a non-profit company in 1985. FRC has sought to promote the role of folk art as a vehicle for change and to illustrate the development potential of cultural heritage particularly in the field of education and economic development.

The main objectives of the Folk Research Centre are:

- To promote research into St. Lucian culture.
- To explore and clarify the role of culture in development
- To contribute to the development of St. Lucia

The major work thrust of the Centre is to feed vital information on the traditional aspects of the socio-economic, political and cultural landscapes into the development process. Amidst the euphoria of foreign values and tastes invited into the country through the acceptance and adoption of modern communication technology, the Centre is pre-occupied with research and promotion of St. Lucian folk life to ensure its preservation and sustainability.

The philosophy guiding the work is the belief that indigenous economic development must be influenced by a strong cultural foundation. As it attempts to replace the growing trend towards modern plastic trivia, the Centre's work continues as a response to the constant threat of global cultural synchronization. One of the greatest tasks of the Centre thus, has been the molding of a St. Lucian identity, and the attempt to internationalise what it means to be a quintessential St. Lucian. In 1993, when FRC acquired the Mount Pleasant property, it assumed a much bigger responsibility than research and preservation; one that will utilize and transform the cultural destiny of the country. It has since pursued a dynamic perception of culture, recognizing that folk culture is alive in a contemporary context of time and space and political reality. In this current mode, it seeks to bridge the apparent chasm between generations; to recognize the folk prototype not as a fossil, but as a living bone and to recognize that people are at a confluence and intersection of several possibilities. Its supreme function, in this sophisticated world therefore, is to serve as a cultural renaissance, re-working St. Lucian culture into an expression of who we are today.



## MOUNT PLEASANT ESTATE

Located off Calvary Road with a panoramic view of Castries City and Harbour, set on the crest of the Mount Pleasant Ridge just below the point where it joins with the Morne Dudon Ridge, the Folk Research Centre is a splendid property. The first house was built in the mid-1800's; and is one of the few preserved, though modified, mid to late 19th Century structures on the island. The attractive red cut-stone façade that was used in the construction of the second floor was quarried locally from an andesitic lava seam of ancient volcanic rock to match the stone work of the existing ground floor.

While the building is clearly Victorian, one can detect elements of Georgian Architecture, particularly in the way the corners were laid out. This building is a prime example of the Euro-Caribbean hybrid architecture. The original building was a bungalow; the second story was added about 1950, completely matching the original lines of the earlier architecture.

The stately approach to the property provides an instant historic experience as the natural ambience is enhanced by grounds surrounded with grass lawns, flowering plants and majestic trees including, Ficus, Flamboyant, Cedar, Mahogany and other trees like different varieties of Mango, various fruit and flowering trees and palms. There was

once a clay tennis court at the back, on the second leveled tier.

The original Mount Pleasant house pre-dates the 1863 map (see page 5), which is the earliest map showing houses at that spot. The earliest ownership of this estate dates after the Treaty of Paris in 1763, when St. Lucia was assigned to France and many French planters obtained land grants and settled in the island. M. Benoit owned the ridge and surrounding lands about 1768. This was followed by M. Lannus about 1771 and Marie Therese about 1782. In 1784 M. Chambon was the owner. Was there an estate house at that time? We have no evidence of this. At any rate, the Great Hurricane of October 1780 destroyed almost every building in the island, killing an estimated 800 people in St. Lucia alone.

Widow Hamm nee Solange Boyer, acquired ownership of Mount Pleasant Estate in the early 1800's. Her son George R. Hamm inherited the estate in the 1820's. In the 1830's Widow Alexander acquired ownership. She is either George's sister or daughter. She lost the estate for debt at a judicial sale in 1837, after the property had been seized by Marryat Brothers. H. J. Piet acquired ownership at the judicial sale or later from an intermediate purchaser. His Widow (nee Deterville) inherited the estate and lost it at a judicial sale in 1867.

Mount Pleasant Ridge (upper left)



Drawn by James Caddy RA, 1834

THE TOWN OF CASTRIES

Engraved by J. F. Smith

Aquatint by Lt. Caddy RA, 1834

Cools, Clavier & Lartigue acquired the estate either at the judicial sale or later from an intermediate purchaser. They sold to Samuel Renshaw in 1893 who was an accountant with Barnard, Peter & Co. In November 1900, Renshaw sold to Duncan Ferguson the bungalow along with several acres of land with an attractive lane, lined with flowering shrubs and flanked with green landscaped verges. This fine property soon became known simply as Mount Pleasant, one of the most attractive homes overlooking Castries Town and Harbour. Duncan Ferguson died in November 1918. The Ferguson heirs sold Mount Pleasant Estate to a former member of the Legislative Council, the Hon George Williams in

1922. Williams sold to Harold Devaux at the end of the year 1943.

An old iron canon was found near the ruins of the old Morne Dudon Battery, a few hundred yards along the Morne Dudon Ridge and is an indication of the strategic position of such sites from a military perspective, as the following incident suggests.

In December 1778, Mount Pleasant figured in one of the most important French/English battles of the period. The British decided to invade French-held St. Lucia in a determined effort to recover the lost islands of the Antilles and break the French dominance in the Caribbean Sea. Admiral Barrington, with a fleet of 11 warships and

numerous transports and 5,000 British soldiers landed in Cul de Sac Bay, He immediately sent off several companies to capture the poorly armed defensive positions at Ciceron, la Toc and Vigie. Within 24 hours this surprise attack was successfully carried out, including the capture of the French Citadel on Morne Fortune, after Governor de Micoud and his small army of less than 200 soldiers retreated to safer ground near Morne Paix Bouche about seven miles away to await the help he knew was on its way from nearby Martinique.

All the defended positions of the very weak French force around Carenage were captured by the following evening and were quickly strengthened by the British captors to prepare for the arrival of the French fleet from Martinique. The captured French forts were turned against Admiral d'Estaing's fleet of 12 warships and a relieving force of 9,000

French soldiers. D'Estaing made two attempts to engage the British fleet with the intention of recovering the island; both failed. D'Estaing then disembarked 3,000 of his troops at Choc and prepared to attack and re-take Vigie from the British. Beginning on 18th December, three bloody battles followed with the French receiving heavy cannon fire from the British held forts, especially from the heavy 24-pounder guns on Morne Fortune, as well as a bayonet counter-attack from the 5th Regiment under Gen. Meadows on Vigie.

The casualties were so great, a factor of over ten French to each British soldier wounded, that the French troops retreated to "Morne Pleasant"<sup>1</sup> under a moratorium to attend the wounded and dying soldiers in makeshift field hospitals. Many French soldiers were buried near the base of Mount Pleasant Ridge. It seems d'Estaing was

<sup>1</sup> Note the spelling found in official accounts of this battle



The Battle of Vigie as seen from Mount Pleasant in December 1778



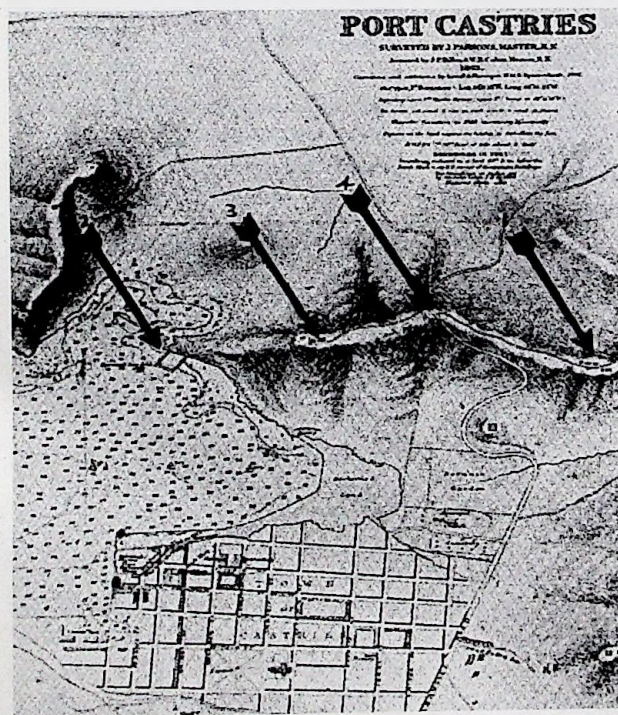
so demoralized by his miscalculations that he re-embarked his troops on 29th December and returned to Martinique leaving Governor de Micoud with no other option but to surrender the Island to the British the following day. The French burial ground eventually became the grazing pasture for cattle destined for the slaughter house in Castries.

Much later, on 1 Nov 1862 most of the British troops left St. Lucia for Jamaica on board the SS Megaera,

followed by the Military Labourers. This fact would have greatly affected the local economy and it is unlikely that the present Mount Pleasant House was built at that time. Yet, on a Marine Chart dated 1863 (see Chart below) we find houses marking that spot on the map.

We have concluded that the present house must have been built either during better times before the military left the island about 1863, or more likely after they returned about 1888.

Admiralty Map of Port Castries showing The Harbour Improvements of 1863



Note: Mount Pleasant Ridge is along the upper right of the map and shows several houses in the location (1) of the present house (extreme right). The little wharf below Barnard Ville at the base of Mount Pleasant Ridge (2) was used for coaling by Barnard, Peter & Co from 1879. Also note the cluster of houses (3) where Barnard Ville was built by Samuel Barnard. Half way up is the important Mount Pleasant Junction (4) clockwise with Calvary Road, Darling Road, Barnard's private road and l'Anse Road.

The British Garrison in St. Lucia was closed in late 1862 when the soldiers vacated the island. This was a grave loss to the economy of the island when many St. Lucians employed at the garrison were thrown out of work. St. Lucia gradually slipped into economic depression especially after the German subsidized beet sugar at low prices caused the collapse of the West Indian Cane sugar market in the 1880's. The ruin of a windmill near Mount Pleasant is reminiscent of the sugar era when the bordering la Clery Estate was once planted in sugar cane.

In response to the hard times being experienced in the West Indies, a Royal Commission was established in 1882 to look at ways and means of improving the economic situation in the region. Prompted mainly by deteriorating relations between Great Britain and France, the Report of the Royal Commission on the Defence of British Possessions was completed in July 1882. It made strong recommendations for improving the defence of the important Coaling Depot in Port Castries. It also made recommendations for moving the Garrison Headquarters to St. Lucia and for making Castries a Protected Naval Coaling Station, with a defensive network of heavy gun batteries, manned by a British Garrison to protect the proposed Coaling depot within the spacious Castries Harbour.

Debates took place in the British Parliament and in the islands, particularly in Barbados, where the loss of the garrison was feared, and in St. Lucia, where a large military

presence would probably boost the economy. The British Parliament took the decision in 1884 to spend, initially, half-a-million pounds on a new Defence Scheme for the proposed Coaling Port at Castries, also the controversial decision to transfer most of the troops from Barbados to the new garrison to be constructed in St. Lucia. The Royal Commission justified this action in the report, which stated: "The policy adopted by Her Majesty's Government is based upon the broad principle that the protection of the West Indies, as a whole, must depend upon the Navy operating in sufficient force, and that the Imperial defences on shore should be such only as will facilitate the operations of the Navy in keeping the sea clear of the enemy's vessels". This was a mouthful saying in essence that a defended Naval Coaling Station was necessary to support the British Fleet in its task of keeping the enemy out of the Caribbean Sea.

Jamaica and St. Lucia were chosen as the most strategically placed islands for the protection of the British West Indies. St. Lucia became the indirect beneficiary of a small fortune ultimately spent upon that defence scheme. This scheme required dredging to deepen the bay and additional berthing facilities to commence in 1885. This was followed with simultaneous construction of the new garrison around Castries at Vigie, la Toc, Ciceron and the Morne to accommodate the removal of the troops from Barbados to St. Lucia by December 1888.

These large construction projects

gave employment to many and within a year the economy had recovered. As confidence grew along with salaries and wages, house construction became active in and around Castries in 1886. In December 1888, the British Army returned to garrison Port Castries. This proved to be a major economic boon to the impoverished island. The wealthier elements of the community began to move to the suburbs of Castries, especially to the heights with grand views of the surrounding scenery. Journalist Robert McHugh in his *Handbook of 1890*<sup>2</sup> made this comment: "On the hillsides around Castries are many pretty villas, and the tendency is increasing to live outside the town". Undoubtedly Mount Pleasant was one of those houses that, if not already there, was rebuilt at this lucrative time.

As always, politics and diplomacy change as quickly and as often as the wind and lessons learned during the Boer conflict in South Africa at the turn of the century, made everything in St. Lucia obsolete almost overnight. The new 'enemy' was no longer perceived as France, but Germany. Barely two decades and five million pounds later, an abandoned British Military Complex laid derelict upon Morne Fortuné, Ciceron, la Toc and Vigie. By the end of 1905, 1000 labourers were without employment and a lucrative source of additional revenue into the Colony's Treasury was cut off. This was history repeating itself with St. Lucia

once again being the pawn in a global game of political chess.

In January 1906, shipping slipped to an all-time low. Only one British and one foreign warship came for coal in January. The coaling trade in Port Castries was beginning to suffer a marked decline since the removal of the troops... Trade in general was already depressed as a result of the gradual curtailment of all but a mere handful of local labour.

A few British artillery officers remained in St. Lucia to wind up military affairs in the island. After literally closing the book on St. Lucia, they too finally left in May 1907 on the only warship to visit the island that month and the last British naval vessel for the year. Shipping activity in Port Castries was at its lowest in a quarter-century. One Italian warship came for coal in June. Two foreign warships visited the Port in October and again in November. The Admiralty Coal Shed on the corner lot of St. Louis and Bourbon Streets, measuring 70' x 60' was dismantled and put up for sale in December 1907, thus ended a two-decade period of military presence on the island with all the benefits and woes of a garrison town. Added to this were the uncertainties of a Flag Station with its unpredictable movement of naval vessels. In the final analysis, outside of the temporary injection of a small fortune into the local economy, the long-term potential

<sup>2</sup> Robert F. McHugh, *Handbook of St. Lucia*, 1890





A gun captured in 1918 by the British West Indies Regiment, 1st Batt. in Turkey was presented to St. Lucia and brought back to the island with the returning veterans. It was mounted in front of Stonecliff House on the road leading up to Mount Pleasant.

benefits to St. Lucia had been wasted at worst, or underutilized at best.

Capt. Fredrick Swaby, WIR died in Jamaica on 27 Jul 1907, age 35 yrs. His mother owned the house just above Stonecliff on the corner of the road leading up to Mount Pleasant House; the ruins of this once prominent home are still visible just off the road to Mount Pleasant.

Samuel Barnard, born in Scotland in 1832, came to St. Lucia via Antigua as an enterprising 30-year old man. He was the original owner of Barnard Ville, which was located on a plateau at the lower end of the Mount Pleasant Ridge. He built one of the first houses on this ridge sometime before 1863. He died in 1912. Samuel had a private coaling wharf constructed on the shore below Barnard Ville probably when the first major harbor works were undertaken about 1862 (See chart above). He later founded Barnard, Peter and Company one of the earliest coaling companies in St. Lucia.

A house or houses were built on the upper plateau of Mount Pleasant Ridge, also about 1863; but by whom, is yet to be discovered. The fine architectural lines of the building as we know it today are testimony to the professionalism and imagination of a good Architect.

It is alleged that a reddish volcanic rock outcrop was found on the north side of the ridge and was mined to make an attractive reddish coloured aggregate stone to line the driveway to the house. This was intended to match and enhance the attractive red stone walls of the house that was constructed from volcanic andesitic stone brought all the way from Soufriere. This is an indication that the builder of Mount Pleasant House was a person of wealth and willing to go to the extreme to make his home an outstanding example of good taste. This is reflected in the attractive layout of the building with a rather grand entranceway flanked by two matching alcoves.

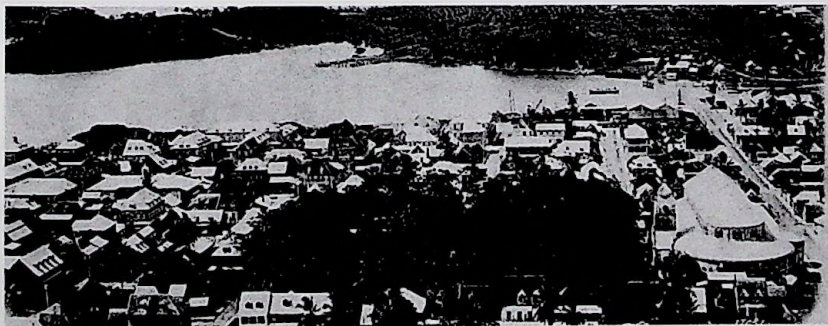
The building originally consisted of a bungalow over a full size basement, measuring 52' x 56' overall. The ground floor consisted of at least two bedrooms, a large parlour or living room, and a dining room and pantry. The basement consisted of a large spare room, a bathroom with built-in concrete bath, and a built-in cooking and laundry facility. Both levels were interconnected with a small, sturdy spiral staircase built against the outside wall with concrete and iron. In addition there was a full-length veranda across the eastern wall. There were separate out houses composed of kitchen, storage, maid or janitor facilities and a water tank. Measuring about 18' x 56' overall. There was also a three-carriage garage at the top of the driveway.

The grounds were landscaped with various levels for lawns and a tennis court. Many beds of flowers and shrubs were surrounded with a variety of flowering and shade trees, making the area one of the most attractive of its day. The location of the house near the top of Mount Pleasant Ridge gave

it a command of the northern part of St. Lucia with Martinique in the distance and a grand view of Castries Town to the south with the greenery of historic Morne Fortune as a dramatic backdrop.

That was the scene then; now it may be the only green open space around Castries. Many areas are slowly declining in quality as a growing population demands more housing space causing fragmentation as families expand. Mount Pleasant House with one acre of land was acquired by the management of the Folk Research Centre and became the Headquarters of FRC in 1993. It has flourished as a repository of Folk literature and related paraphernalia, with a small exhibit of artifacts reminiscent of the island's folk-culture. The Centre is used by researchers in such fields as Sociology, Ethnology, Anthropology, and other related disciplines, including students conducting school research projects on the island's diverse culture. Visitors are welcome during opening hours.

#### Castries Town And Inner Harbour Taken About 1898

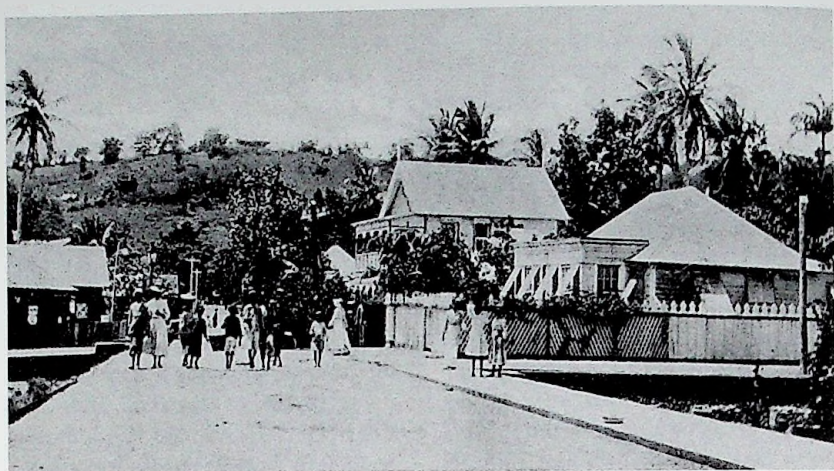


Note: the wharf belonging to Barnard, Peter and Company at the base of Mount Pleasant Ridge on the north side of the harbour. Barnard Ville is at the top right. Mount Pleasant House is much further up the ridge and out of sight.



## **Chaussee Road, Castries Looking North Taken About 1910**

Note: Mount Pleasant Bungalow is visible on the ridge directly above the centre of the road.



## **Similar Photo Taken One Hundred Years Later**

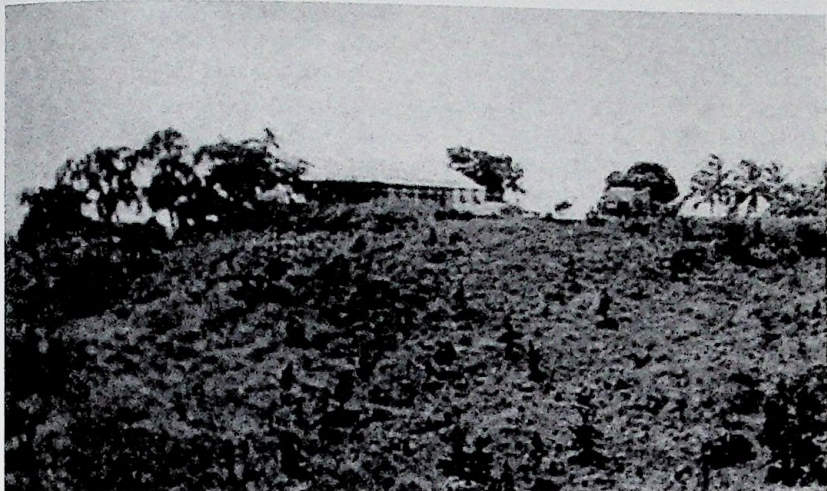
Photo taken from the far end of the Chaussee Road looking north in 2010





**Mount Pleasant Bungalow looking NW from Morne Dudon about 1910**

This is the only known picture of the bungalow before a second story was added in 1951



**Similar photo taken 100 years later**

Mount Pleasant House with the upper floor added, taken in April 2010



Harold Devaux became interested in Mount Pleasant about 1942 and was looking into purchasing the estate. He and his family were still living in the former Officers Mess on the Morne, because a Rum Punch Party to raise funds in aid of the Red Cross was hosted in May 1942 at his residence on the Morne.

Harvey L. Milbourne arrived in the island on 15 Jan 1942 to establish an American Consulate in St. Lucia. This was opened on 19 May 1942 at Mount Pleasant, the finest property at the time, where Mr. & Mrs. Milbourne resided, having obtained from Williams an annual lease to the property. According to Government Notice No. 277 of 1943, the American Consulate at St. Lucia was officially closed the following year on 20 Nov 1943.

In March 1943, Harold was still

living on the Morne and was listed in the Preliminary Voters List prepared in 1943 for the year 1944, as residing on the Morne. In late-November 1943, Harold, having purchased Mount Pleasant from George Williams, moved into the house with his family shortly after the American Consul vacated the premises.

Harold began renovating Mount Pleasant House after the Castries Fire of June 1948, when he added a second story. This was delayed because of the scarcity of building supplies after the fire and was only completed in 1951. In the mean time Harold and his family lived in the lowest of three military barracks at Vigie. That building was later pulled down to make way for the extension of Vigie Runway. Harold Devaux died in 1988; all the children were then grown up and independent, so the house at Mount Pleasant became vacant.

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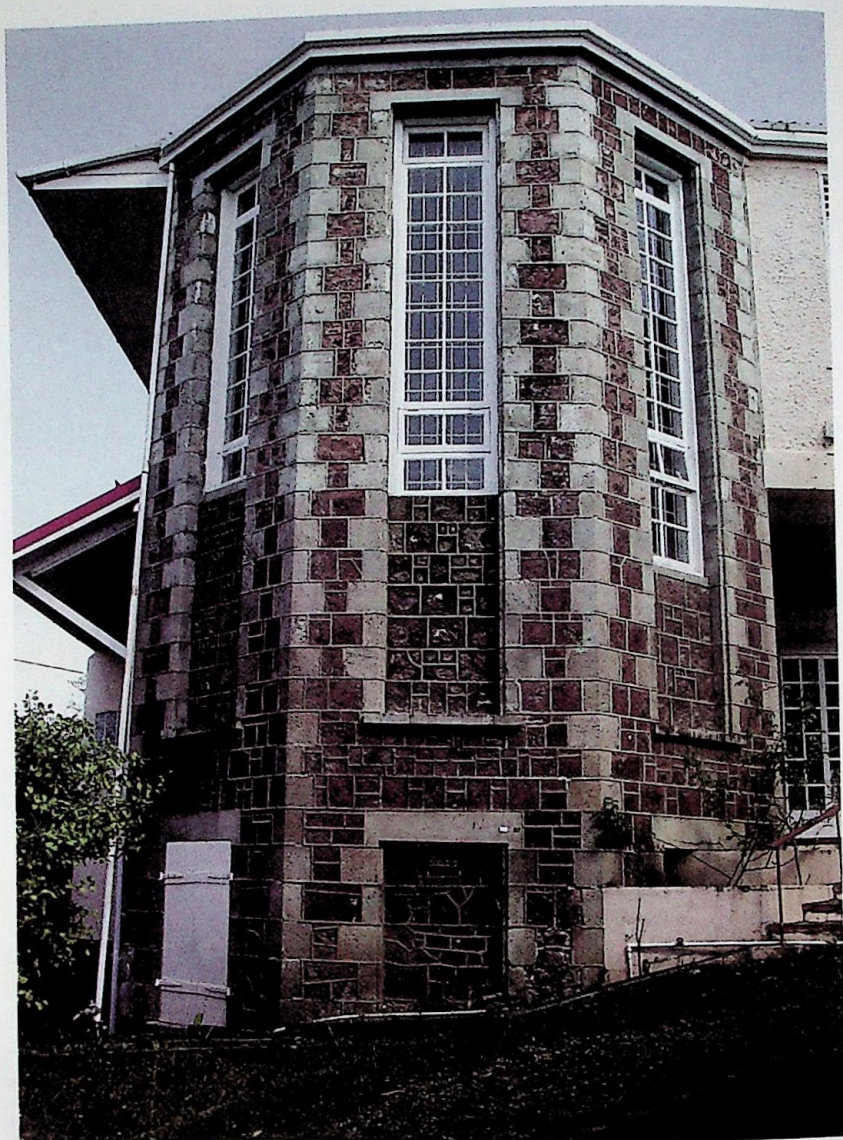
**Mount Pleasant Front Elevation Facing West**



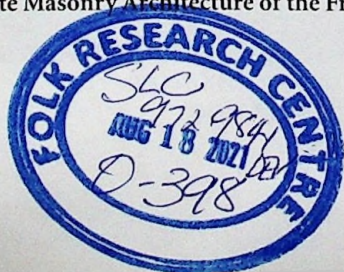
**Mount Pleasant Back Elevation Facing East**







Intricate Masonry Architecture of the Front Alcove



*d230*



#### BIOGRAPHY OF AUTHOR

Robert J. Devaux was born in St. Lucia on 23 Jan 1934.  
Married on 29 October 1960 to Pamela Harding. Four Children:  
Stephen, Tracey, Gayle and Richard.  
Founding Director of the St. Lucia National Trust in 1975, now retired.

#### Books and articles include:

St. Lucia Historic Sites, Letchworth Press, Barbados, 1975.  
A Century of Coaling in St. Lucia, Spink & Sons, London, 1975.  
History and Analysis of Coastal Processes at Pigeon Island, St. Lucia  
Research Centre, Castries, 1993.  
They Called Us Brigands, Optimum Printers, Castries, 1 August 1997.  
Co-authored: A General History of Saint Lucia,  
Lighthouse Road Publishers, Vieux Fort (forthcoming).

#### Some awards include:

Officer of the Order of the British Empire, OBE in 1991.  
Paul Harris Fellowship Award in 1993.  
Pigeon Island Museum Dedication in 1994.  
Inducted into the Tourism Hall of Fame in 1996.  
M & C Fine Arts Award for literature in 1998

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