

St Ann more than just the Garden Parish

St Ann is the home to world-renowned Dunn's River Falls, and with places such as Enchanted Gardens, Fern Gully, Shaw Park Gardens, Chukka Caribbean Adventures at Cranbrook, and Columbus Park, its moniker as Jamaica's Garden Parish is so apt.

It has some of the island's most beautiful natural scenery, and important watersheds. And, it is perhaps the parish in which one of Jamaica's most significant historical watersheds took place. Amid the enchanting sights are ruins that tell the story of how this country came to be where it is now.

When Christopher Columbus returned to Jamaica in 1503, on his fourth trip to the West Indies, he was stranded at St Ann's Bay after his remaining two ships, battered and sea-worn, ran aground. He remained in the island for one year. The living conditions for Columbus were gross and unbearable. Eventually, with the assistance of Taino paddlers, Columbus and two of his crewmen fled to Hispaniola en route to Spain.

In 1510, his son Diego returned to the island with the first group of Spanish colonists. Near St Ann's Bay, they established the first Spanish settlement in the country and called it Sevilla la Nueva (New Seville). That was a turning-point in Jamaica's social and political history, for the Spaniards and their Columbian diseases were to eventually wipe out the indigenous peoples, the Tainos, and govern the island for decades.

Central point

The central point of Spanish colonisation in Jamaica shifted to Spanish Town after the Spaniards found the swampy conditions at New Seville unhealthy. However, Sevilla la Nueva remained a major Spanish settlement. With the annihilation of the Tainos, a source of cheap labour for Jamaica's tobacco plantations had to be found.

African slaves were transported across the Atlantic to replace the Tainos. Sugar cane overtook tobacco as the major commercial crop, and its cultivation and the making of sugar demanded more slaves. Africans were ripped from the bosom of their homeland to fuel European metropolitan aggrandisement. Jamaica then was an unimportant jewel in Spain's crown, and that's perhaps why Spain did not give her colonisers much support when they fought in futility to stave off the English who were challenging Spain's hegemony in the 'New World'.

Overseas possessions

Admiral Penn and General Venables, failing to capture Hispaniola, arrived in Jamaica on May 10, 1655, to appease Oliver Cromwell, Lord Protector and de facto ruler of Britain, who had sent them to capture Spanish overseas possessions. The Spanish who fled to the north of the island resisted the English encroachment. The resistance climaxed in the Battle of Rio Nuevo in 1658. The Spaniards were defeated. They fled to Cuba in 1660, but it was not until 1670 that Spain officially ceded Jamaica to England.

Sevilla la Nueva, where Jamaica's evolution as a nation started, is an important landmark on Jamaica's heritage landscape. Four cultures collided there - the Tainos, Spanish, African and British - and the area is rich with artefacts from those cultures. Seville Heritage Park, where Seville Great House is located, is a national heritage site managed by the Jamaica National Heritage Trust.

Others historical sites and places of interest in the birth parish of National Hero Marcus Garvey and reggae icon Bob Marley, and where a rich heritage mingles with an abundance of nature's beauty, are Orange Valley Estate, Cardiff Hall, Edinburgh Castle, Bob Marley Mausoleum, Green Grotto Caves, Harmony Hall, James Bond Beach, Mystic Mountain, Prospect Plantation Tour, Strawberry Fields, Sun Valley Plantation, White River Valley and Wilderness Tour.