

Celebrating Jamaica's National Heroes

In Kingston, Jamaica, National Heroes Park contains a series of statues devoted to key figures in the country's history, including independence leader Alexander Bustamante and pan-African crusader Marcus Garvey. As a way to honor the figures commemorated in this park, the Jamaican government has established National Heroes Day. The holiday officially replaced the celebration for Queen Elizabeth's birthday, although she still receives military honors during ceremonies.

The first group of national heroes was designated in 1965, the year of the centenary celebration of the 1865 Morant Bay Rebellion, a pivotal moment in the quest for independence from Great Britain. The first commemoration took place in 1968. As more heroes were added to the official list over subsequent years, National Heroes Day expanded to become National Heritage Week .

Our heroes are Marcus Mosiah Garvey, Paul Bogle, George William Gordon, Norman Washington Manley and William Alexander Bustamante. Samuel "Sam" Sharpe was designated a national Hero in 1975, and the sole female heroine, Nanny of the Maroons, also known as Granny Nanny, was given the honour in 1976.

The first National Hero is perhaps the best known. Marcus Mosiah Garvey took his message not only to the Jamaican people but to others across the globe. The only person to be named a National Hero while still alive was the Right Excellent Sir William Alexander Bustamante. Paul Bogle and George William Gordon were hung for their alleged part in what is known as the Morant Bay Rebellion.

Samuel Sharpe a Baptist preacher is remembered not only for his leadership in the Christmas rebellion of 1831, but also for his dying words, "I would rather die on yonder gallows than live in slavery."

Nanny of the Maroons is best known for her leadership skills. This in part resulted in the Maroons gaining their independence long before slavery ended. She used her tactical skills to help her people outwit the British soldiers who tried to capture them. A typical ceremony held on the Monday that concludes Heritage Week is the National Heroes Day salute. Local parishes all over the island hold award ceremonies to honor community figures, while at National Heroes Park a main ceremony takes place that features a speech by a national leader, typically the prime minister.

Most of the National Heroes are depicted on various Jamaican coins and banknotes: \$500.00 (Bank note) - Nanny of the Maroons \$50.00 (Bank note) - Samuel Sharpe \$20.00 (Coin) - Marcus Mosiah Garvey \$10.00 (Coin) - George William Gordon \$5.00 (Coin) - Norman Washington Manley \$1.00 (Coin) - William Alexander Bustamante 10 cents (Coin) - Paul Bogle 25 cents (Coin) - Marcus Mosiah Garvey