

Important dates in the History of Jamaica

Jamaica has a rich and vibrant history, which inspires us to move forward as a nation. Our history speaks to experiences of hardships and prosperity; and the growth and determination of a people.

1655 - The British captured Jamaica

In May 1655 the British invaded Jamaica, a poorly defended and thinly populated Spanish colony. There followed over 300 years of British rule, which saw the following:

the Spanish being expelled by 1670 after 5 years of guerilla warfare the emergence of the Maroons, escaped slaves who banded together to become a major deterrent in Britain's quest to control the island the establishment of large sugar plantations the growth of a huge African slave workforce to satisfy the needs of the sugar plantations the establishment of the Church of England as the state church the rise of Port Royal as the richest and "wickedest city" and its literal fall into the sea in 1692 the arrival of Moravian, Baptist and Methodist missionaries seeking to convert the slaves the name "Xamayca" anglicised as "Jamaica"

1807 - The ending of the slave trade

Slavery conditions in Jamaica were among the harshest in the New World. This led to many brutal slave revolts, which were crushed with equal brutality. The British slave trade was abolished in 1807, but slavery continued for another 30 years before being fully abolished on August 1, 1838.

1823 - The introduction of the Amelioration proposals

In 1823 the House of Assembly refused to accept the British Government's instructions for making easier the condition of the slaves. The House of Assembly declared that the code under which the slaves were governed was calculated "to render the slave population as happy and comfortable, in every respect, as the labouring class in any part of the world." The planters objected to any interference on the part of the British Government with themselves or their slaves.

1831 - The Christmas rebellion or the Sam Sharpe revolt The 1831 Christmas Rebellion as it became known, started in St. James and spread throughout the entire island. The Rebellion began on December 28 and lasted for eight days. The events started when the Kensington Estate Great House was burnt down, and over the following days, more estates were burnt down, crops destroyed, and a number of whites were killed.

1832 - May 23, 1832 Sam Sharpe was hanged

The retribution that followed, was swift, up to 500 slaves were executed after trial. Sam Sharpe named as the instigator, was eventually captured and hung at the Parade in Montego Bay, now renamed Sam Sharpe Square.

1834 - Apprenticeship

The Christmas Rebellion of 1831, was a key event in the fight for the abolishment of slavery. Just a few years later, the beginnings of Sharpe's dream would be realised, when in 1834 slavery would be abolished, and the System of Apprenticeship instituted.

1838 - Emancipation

On August 1, 1838 the Apprenticeship System ended granting full freedom to the slaves.

There were demonstrations throughout the island to celebrate the first day of complete freedom. In Spanish Town, the capital, a hearse containing the chains and shackles that were sometimes put on rebellious slaves was driven through the streets, and these symbols of slavery were solemnly buried. There were bonfires and feasting every-where. Queen Victoria, who had lately ascended the throne, was blessed as the author of the people's freedom.

1865 - Morant Bay rebellion

1944 - Universal Adult Suffrage

Universal Adult Suffrage by which all persons (originally 21 years old) now 18 years old and over were allowed to vote in elections was first granted in 1944 in Jamaica. Jamaica was the first British Colony to be granted Adult Suffrage.

1962 - August 6th 1962 Jamaica became independent

In February 1962, a new Constitution was approved by the Legislature and the Premier Norman Manley called General Elections.

Alexander Bustamente was elected in April and became the first Prime Minister of Jamaica. On August 6, 1962, Jamaica became an Independent Nation and a member of the British Commonwealth.

Jamaica becoming an Independent Nation, now meant that Britain, no longer controlled the affairs of the country. It was now the responsibility of the newly elected Prime Minister and the locally elected Cabinet.

Independence also meant that a Constitution, symbols, emblems, an army, Jamaican currency and passports had to be developed for the country.