

316th Anniversary of 1692 Port Royal Quake

On Tuesday June 7, 316 years ago, the landscape of Port Royal changed dramatically when an earthquake hit, submerging almost two thirds of its land mass.

Today the underwater city at Port Royal is ranked by marine archaeologists as the most well preserved of its kind in the western hemisphere.

At a few minutes before midday June 7, 1692, an earthquake struck the city of Port Royal. A huge tidal wave destroyed ships in the harbour and carried one of the ships into the middle of the town. Many of the buildings were destroyed and most of the city disappeared into the sea. Over 2,000 people died and more than 3,000 had serious injuries. Many of the victims were swallowed up by the earth.

One of the most famous stories about the Port Royal earthquake was the story of Lewis Galdy who was swallowed up by the earth and shortly thereafter, spat out by the earth. He lived for decades after, establishing the main church which now exists in Port Royal. In commemoration of the 1692 earthquake, the Jamaica National Heritage Trust, the government agency entrusted with the care and keep of Jamaica's tangible heritage will on Friday June 6 stage an Open Day at Fort Charles, Port Royal.

The Open Day will be held under the theme Facing The Earthquake: The Port Royal Experience and will begin at 10:00 a.m. The JNHT is using the opportunity to remind Jamaicans of the potentially devastating effect of an earthquake and the importance of being prepared so as to minimize this effect.

The organisation will be facilitating tours to its Fort Charles heritage site, offering students and visitors a first hand view of the destructive nature of an earthquake. There will also be exhibitions from the Jamaica Red Cross, Ministry of Health, NEPA, Office of Disaster Preparedness (ODPEM) among others. In addition there will be film screenings, earthquake drills, panel discussions, cultural performances and live radio broadcast from the site.

Fort Charles in its heyday was almost completely surrounded by water. It was constructed like a ship with a 17th century floating castle at the bow. However in the 1692 earthquake, the fort sank 31/2 feet into the ground. In the 1907 earthquake there was further damage when the structure of the Giddy House was shifted to its present angle which accounts for the giddy sensation that is felt when one enters the building.

Source : <http://www.jnht.com>