

Getting To Know Sam Sharpe

When Sam Sharpe was made a National Hero in 1975, not many Jamaicans knew about him. After 33 years he still remains an enigma.

Next week, historian Fred Kennedy will shed new light on Sharpe's last days with the launch of his book, *Daddy Sharpe: A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Samuel Sharpe A West Indian Slave Written By Himself, 1832*. Kennedy, a former headmaster at St George's College, said Sharpe's contribution to the emancipation of slavery has been largely overlooked. Sharpe, the enslaved person/turned preacher is responsible for masterminding the Kensington Estate rebellion in St. James in 1831. "Sam Sharpe was a freedom fighter who had a lot to do with the Emancipation Act passed two years after his death. He never meant for a bloody rebellion but things turned wrong with the burning of Kensington Estate," Kennedy said last week. Started research 10 years ago The Canada-based Kennedy said he started research for the book 10 years ago. Sharpe's words are mostly his (Kennedy's), based on court transcripts from Sharpe's trial in 1832, parliamentary papers on the case and the writings of Henry Bleby, a British clergyman, who spoke with Sharpe shortly before his execution. "I started off writing a history book but it was too dry, so I did a book using his 'voice'. At the same time, I didn't want to lose his integrity and sense of who he is," Kennedy explained. To this day, the average Jamaican is in the dark as to who Sam Sharpe was. He was born in St James and is described by the Jamaicaway.com website as 'an educated town slave, preacher and spokesman', who read widely on the abolition movement that gathered steam throughout the British Caribbean territories in the early 19th Century. He became a 'Daddy' (or leader) of the Baptist Church and, through frequent meetings, influenced slaves to demand, in a non-violent way, better treatment from plantation owners. Rebellion Sharpe's message went beyond St James, spreading to neighbouring Trelawny, Westmoreland and Manchester. It sparked the eight-day Kensington Estate Rebellion, which began on December 27, 1831, resulting in the deaths of more than 500 slaves and 14 whites - many of the slaves were executed following trials. Sharpe was hanged on May 23, 1832, in the circle which now bears his name (Sam Sharpe Square) in Montego Bay. The following year, on August 28, slavery was abolished through the passing of the Slavery Abolition Act in the British Parliament. Although he was bestowed with Jamaica's highest honour, Sam Sharpe's story has never received the mass attention of Paul Bogle and George William Gordon, two other 19th Century Jamaican freedom fighters, who are also National Heroes. Fred Kennedy is banking on his first book, to be launched at the Alhambra Inn in St Andrew, to change that. "I hope it will bring to life who he was: a man of courage who wanted to break from slavery in a peaceful way," Kennedy said. Source: Jamaica Gleaner