

“Dickey Dick’s House”

By: Will Johnson

Of the remaining old mansions in Philipsburg few of them have an interesting history like the one formerly known as “Dickey Dick’s House.”

The house was called so after its former owner Mr. Richard Robinson Richardson who built it as a “Town House” shortly after the great hurricane of 1819. That particular hurricane is described by the historian M.D. Teenstra. He visited St. Martin ten years later and bore witness to the many houses which had been destroyed. Many of them had not been rebuilt at the time of Teenstra’s visit. The town house of Mr. Richardson is one of the oldest surviving buildings on Dutch St. Martin. It is located across the alley from the Anglican Church on the Backstreet. There used to be a restaurant upstairs and also the Department of Education was housed there at one time.

Mr. Richard Robinson Richardson (his mother must have liked the sound of the letter R.), was a member of the Court of Policy (Raad van Policie) and also a prominent planter. He is remembered by historians for his research on the Treaty of Concordia. In particular, the history of the salt pans in which he took an active part as exploiter of a concession to reap salt. The treaty of Concordia divided the island between the Dutch and the French in 1648, and this situation still exists today as neither side of the island has opted to seek independence. His report on this and other matters is quite extensive and is dated December 10th, 1839. The report was written while he resided in this very same building.

Mr. Richardson as we can read was himself involved in the exploitation of the “Great Salt Pond.” In the report made by him concerning the salt industry on St. Martin we can read:

“Richard Robinson Richardson, whose concession is entirely on the northern shore of the salt pond, and along the plantation called “Madams” belonging to him, has not yet been entirely enclosed, the work already done by him is Eight hundred feet into the pond, and he proposes, as soon as possible to close in the grant with that breadth into the pond.” Mr. Richardson also had a son who became a famous Methodist Minister. In his book “Memories of Saint Martin (N.P.) 1852 -1926 Mr. J.C. Waymouth writes: Other sons of our soil there are, of whom mention must be made. The son of ‘Dickie Dickie’ – (Richard Robinson Richardson) was one of these. He entered himself as a candidate for the Ministry under Rev. George Sargeant who succeeded the writer’s father at this island in 1854. That Son of our Soil was Jonathan Cadman Richardson, for thirty three years one of our best known West Indian Missionaries who labored with acceptance and success in some of the best circuits in the West Indies and Bahamas. He died in January 1889. Mr. Waymouth goes on to write: “The Wesleyan Establishment was served at this time by the Revs. Denham, already mentioned, and Samuel J. Johnson, who came in 1887. This was also the year of Mr. Denham’s departure for England via Barbados; at which island he left one who has been mentioned before as one of St. Martin ancestry who became after a Ministry of 32 years seriously unwell and who died the following year. This gent Rev. Jonathan Cadman Richardson wrote in a letter to the writer under date of 20th April 1887:- “Mr. and Mrs. Denham spent a fortnight

with us and left on Monday for England. I asked him lots about St. Martin and the dear ones of whom I still think tenderly. I got a kind letter from Gussie (Mrs. Eldredge) which brought back the past to me with great freshness. Mr. Leslie is now my colleague. He has the finest congregation in the West Indies to preach to." Mr. Bertie Leslie by the way was also a son of the soil who became famous in his own right in the Methodist circuit of the West Indies.

The house on Backstreet later came into the possession of the wife of Diederick Johannes van Romondt. He owned among others the estates Belvedere and Belle Plain which were working sugar cane plantations.

Before that it belonged to Clemence Ann Carter of Anguilla origin. At the time many of the wealthy propertied white people *intermarried among the other white families on the neighboring islands. In a last will and testament of 1908 we read:*

"I, Clemence Ann Carter, declare to bequeath to my sister Marion Octavio Carter spouse of Diederick Johannes van Romondt, to whom she is married out of all community, the property known as "Dickey Dicks" and situated in the above named town of Philipsburg."

Clemence Ann Carter was from the well known Anguilla family who also married into the Rey family of that same island and the name later became Carter-Rey in popular usage. If I remember correctly the Carter Rey family also owned the 900 acre estate the "Hope" on the French side which now belongs to the Petit family. Clemence's father was William Gumbs Carter and her mother was Louisa Ann Rebecca Rogers. She also willed to her aunt on Anguilla the property known as "Roaches" and to the children of her brothers William Arthur Carter and Joshua Edgar Carter, and to her niece Judith Charlotte Inez van Romondt, the island known as "Prickly Pear."

Irene van Romondt, a daughter of Johannes, who lived in this house in the very early nineteen hundreds, tells us in a letter "A Time to Remember", the following:

"I remember! Joy, oh Joy. I was out in the garden at grandmother's playing all by myself, chopping up some "cacti" and playing to feed it to my doll, when the news came. Pack up your clothes and get ready to go to your Auntie Clem, who is setting up housekeeping in "Dickey Dick's." This was a town house owned by my father which was built going on 200 years ago on a poured concrete first floor foundation to withstand earthquakes and hurricanes."

Irene experienced a severe earthquake there on Christmas Eve, 1910, and tells us; "The concrete walls of the old house were cracked, but otherwise no harm was done to anyone." She later moved to the Front Street and reports: " I remember leaving the old house "Dickey Dick's House", as it was called, and moving to a rented house on the Front Street, right across from the Governor's House and in the Center of everything social, such as it was."

Marion Octavia Carter born on Anguilla on September 29th, 1869 was the second wife of Diederick Johannes van Romondt whom she married on August 24th, 1899. He was 53 years old then (born on St .Martin on August 25th, 1846.) Together they had three children. Of course he being from the old St

.Martin fresh food stock had quite a number of children outside of the marriage. One of those children "Taby" had 68 children I was told. However one of his sons told me "Lord Johnson don't exaggerate, he only had Fifty Five."

After Johannes died on St .Kitts on August 9th, 1918 Marion and the three children moved to New York where they suffered many financial reverses. Mrs. Zillah Richardson who had known the family was also living in New York at the time. Miss Zillah was an aunt of the well known Lionel Bernard Scott.

On September 20th, 1930, a deed was passed in New Jersey whereby Mrs. Zillah Richardson bought from Mrs. M.O. van Romondt –Carter" the unmortgaged property of a lot, on which a house is built known as "Dickey Dick's House," situated on the Back Street, on the island of Saint Martin, Dutch West Indies, bound on the South by the Back Street, on the east by a lot owned by Mr. Stuart, on the west by "The Alley" and on the north by the "Great Salt Pond" which premises according to first appearer were inherited by her from her sister Miss Clememce Ann Carter. The house was purchased by Miss Zillah for twelve hundred and fifty American dollars.

"Miss Zillah" as she was popularly known turned the house into a Guesthouse and also took in school going children from the islands of Saba and Statia. Among those who lived in her guesthouse were the late Mr. Wellington Brooks, former Chief Warden of the prison on St Martin. Wellington was from Anguilla and sort of adopted by Miss Zillah. Also former Minister Leo Chance of Saba, former State Secretary Max Nicholson of Saba, also Senator Kenneth van Putten of Statia as well as former Major Osmar R. Simmons of Saba. Also the Every brothers, former Judge Henry and his brother the teacher Floyd Every of Saba, all of whom spoke well of Miss Zillah. The Anglican priests from the neighbouring islands always lodged there as well. Happy memories from the beautiful and quiet town of Philipsburg where the rest and quiet was only occasionally disturbed by the arrival of the monthly cargo ship from Curacao.

Miss Zillah had three children. She died in 1970 and is buried in the Methodist Cemetery in Philipsburg. Her children now own the property historically known as "Dickey Dicks."

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