

EMEMBERING SIEGFRIED LAMPE

It is impossible to write this year's first Way Back When without paying tribute to Siegfried Lampe and commemorating the loss of one of Statia's "National Treasures," as some residents referred to him. Early afternoon on Saturday, December 27, I received a phone call from a good friend to tell me that Siegfried had just passed away. I had visited him only a few days before in the Auxiliary Home. He had great difficulty speaking, but he still referred to three topics of Statia's history – information that he wanted to share with me.

He had brought it up during my previous visit to him when he still occasionally left his bed and still had hopes he could browse through his beloved books and papers at home again. However, he felt it necessary to add: "But you better not travel too far and stay away too long..." Un-

fortunately, the last physical attack he had to endure – in his own home and one that followed equally violent previous ones – proved to be one too many and the resulting internal injuries were too much for him. So we never got round to sitting down together again so I could listen to what it is he wanted to share with me this time. However, he had mentioned one of the three topics to me before, so I will try to cover that one in a later article.

Envy

It typified Siegfried. He was an unlimited source of knowledge about Statia's history and always ready to share his information with people who could bring it to the attention of wider circles so that Statia's great past and unique role on the world stage in the 18th century could be publicized to the max. He was a fervent patriot, the embodiment of pride in one's own local history, always eager to emphasize how proud all Stadians should be to be born on

such a special island.

In fact, as much as I envied him for his eventful life and for having been eyewitness and part of a distant and different time that we only know from books and stories, I always had the impression that he was jealous of me for one thing: I was actually born on Statia and he missed that by just a couple of years. He would always emphasize to me how important that was and that it should not just be a place name in my passport but actually gave me a kind of responsibility towards the island of my birth. "St. Eustatius? A little rock in the Caribbean? No way!" And that is what he was hoping I would do: make that clear to everyone by highlighting Statia's extraordinary history.

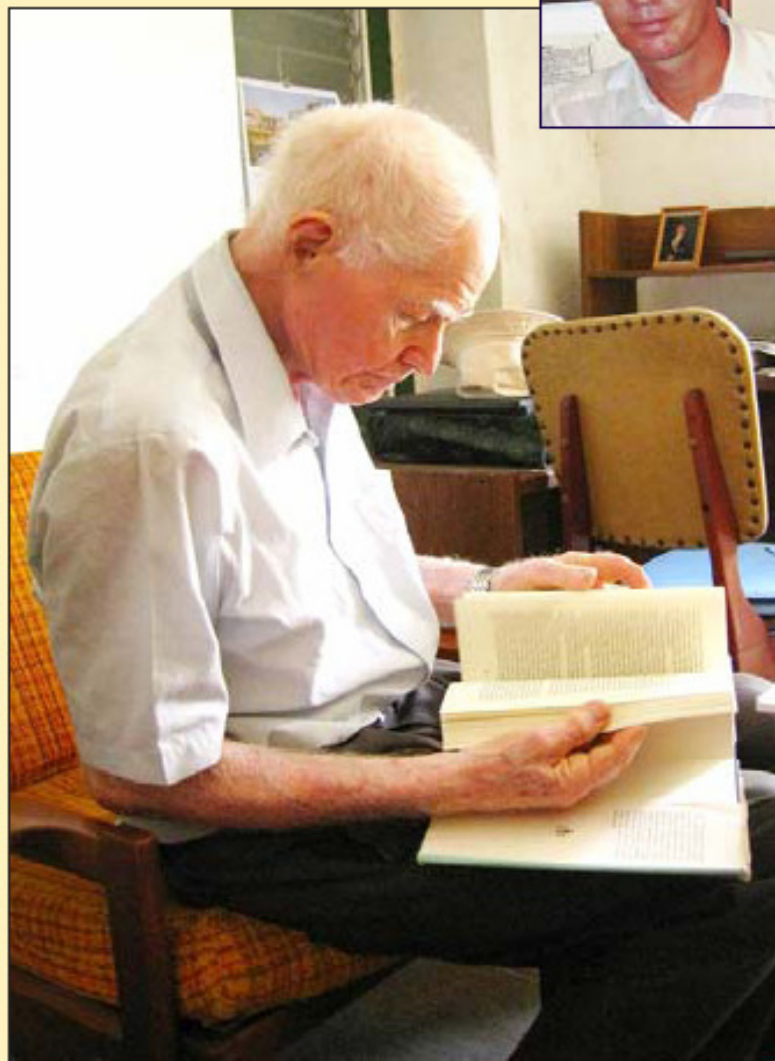
Hidden fortifications

Siegfried was fortunate to profit from a combination of blessings: a bright mind that stayed with him till the end, a lively interest in the world around him and a sturdy

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- Glimpses of our islands' past -

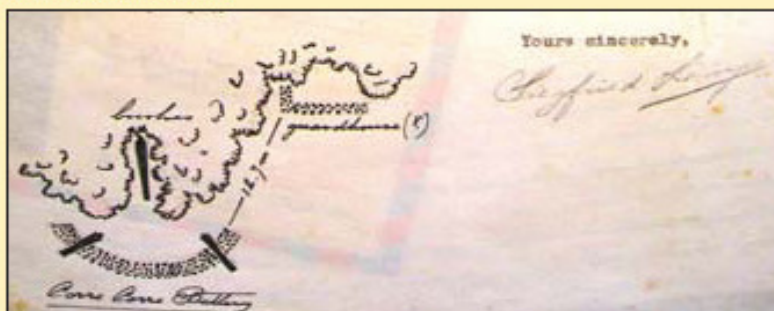
By Statia-born Historian Walter Th. Hollebrand



Siegfried Lampe shortly before his 95th birthday, surrounded by the things he loved, doing what he loved most.



One of the many old photographs from Siegfried's collection, this one giving 'moving house' a more 'profound' meaning



and healthy constitution. It meant that he could devote the decades after his retirement to one of his favourite past times: the study of Statia's history. And he was not one to stick to books and documents. He would go out into the country side – no matter how difficult the terrain – to look for the things he found mentioned in tomes and articles.

He was therefore able to help many researchers with his observations in the field – for example when it came to Statia's many fortifications. A lot of the former batteries have fallen into ruins and have almost disappeared through erosion and subsidence and whatever is left is hidden beneath aggressive shrubs such as the coralita. But Siegfried would go out (walking of course!) on a search until he found the remains. And thanks to the combination of his mathematical training and

and situation sketches. They would later appear in books and publications.

The 'Mudian connection'

His reputation as Statia's "Mr. History" meant that all historic matters had a way of landing on his desk – whether it was people asking for information or visitors bringing information. Statia's population dropped from more than 8,000 during its heydays in the late 18th century to only 2,668 in 1816. It was not only the adventurers who had come to Statia to make a "quick buck" who left, but also members of long established families. This means that descendants of Statian residents of the 18th and 19th centuries now live in Europe or the US and when delving into their family history may come across all sorts of documents and objects relating to Statia's past. Some of them have been curious enough to seek contact with

and meant that he was able to assemble a large collection of historical material relating to Statia, from copies of documents and articles to old photographs.

I will give an example of his involvement and use it – in Siegfried's spirit – to illustrate a part of Statia's history: the "Mudian Connection." It also shows how his own role is often linked up to that of his ancestors. During the same period that Dutch held neutral Statia was enjoying its greatest commercial successes – the years of the War of Independence of England's North-American colonies – Bermuda was suffering because the Americans established an effective blockade of this English island, severely restricting its trade and causing widespread hardships for its people. Many of them moved to the beckoning "Golden Rock"

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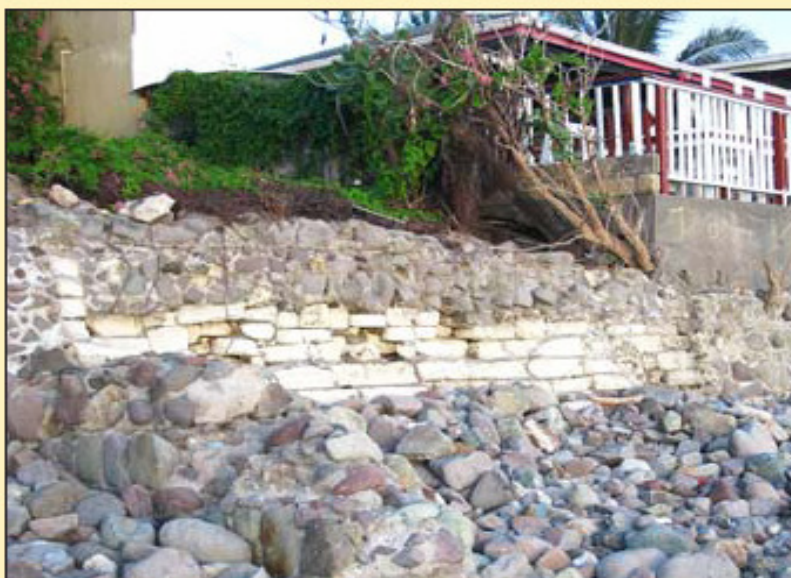
cause of their intensive trading contacts. As a result, many stories about the Statia-Bermuda connection can be found in the issues of the Bermuda Historical Quarterly.

Bermuda stone

Bermuda stone was popular building material across the Caribbean and Muidian ships would also take it to Statia where many buildings were constructed with this soft, white limestone formed primarily of broken shells and coral. The ships would fly a white flag with a red cross, known as the "Sawed Stone Jack," which signalled to awaiting islanders: a ship from Bermuda with a cargo of sawn stone and lime will be unloading soon.

The population lists that Admiral Rodney had made after he took Statia for the British crown in February 1781, illustrate the influx of Bermudians. Of the 163 people who were registered as new "burghers" (chartered citizens) in the six months leading up to Rodney's raid, most came from Europe but twelve per cent originated in Bermuda. The Anglican Cemetery in Oranjestad also bears witness to this immigration wave, with tomb inscriptions such as "Here lies the body of Henry Jennings, Born Bermuda, August 4, 1743," or "In this Vault lie interred the Bodies of John Packood and Mary his wife, the First born in Bermuda Oct. 18, 1711."

Firing canons off Tumbledown Dick
So-called "force traders" continued the commu-



Blocks of Bermuda stone were used extensively for Statia's 18th century buildings

nication between the two islands, forcing their way through both the American blockade of Bermuda and the English blockade of Statia. They were not always lucky. A certain Captain W. H. Peniston from Bermuda who wrote about his visits to Statia in the 1850s recounted the story of Captain Trott. Just married, he agreed to sail to Statia on an armed vessel and took his gunner, a coloured man called Harry Hilton, "a good shot." When they arrived off Tumbledown Dick, a brig of the English marine spotted them and went after them. The boat overhauled Trott's vessel and fired into her. Trott answered with a broadside from his own ship. A fierce fight ensued until Trott fell mortally wounded. His gunner "then jumped on a gun, gave three cheers, fired a broadside into the

English brig, hauled down the flag and surrendered."

The first time Captain Peniston came to Statia was in 1853. Getting to shore was a little adventure in itself. "When a visitor jumped from the boat on the dark, sandy beach, there was a slave boy holding a pony, saddled and neatly caparisoned, ready for you to mount. The moment you were in the saddle, it was off - through the Lower Town on the beach, then up the wide, steep street to the Upper Town. Meanwhile, the black boy, clothed in a single garment of coarse material with a girdle around his waist, was there behind the pony, hanging on to its long tail and you may gallop as fast as you like, but that the swift footed boy was there at the journey's end, ready to take your pony's bridle

Jennings Peniston, a relative of her husband was a rich merchant on Statia when Rodney arrived. Rodney's men took away everything of value they could find from him and destroyed his immense liquor stock by setting the taps running. His wife Rebecca had seen it all coming and many days before had sewn a large amount of doubloons and Johannes dollars inside the cushions of her Bermuda cedar chairs. When the Penistons were finally allowed to leave the island to return to Bermuda, they were able to take the chairs with them.... Captain Peniston was shown the remains of the immense warehouses of Richard Jennings Peniston with their heavy iron bars and hinges in Lower Town.

Hoisting ponies on board

dian with Statia ancestry (through Jacobus Love who married a Bermudian girl around 1736) came to the island to visualize this part of his family history, he was advised to contact Carl Buncamper (whose wife was my sister's Godmother) and of course Siegfried Lampe, the great-grandson of James Hill, one of Captain Peniston's guides more than a century earlier. These two gentlemen would be the best ones to help him with retracing his ancestors' steps. They showed him the ruins of the Governor's residence that Captain Peniston visited in 1853 (The Mansion) and took him to the Old Church Cemetery nearby. There, he was also shown the tomb of Mary Peniston, born in St. Kitts in 1719, who died in Statia



Most Bermudians who died on Statia were buried on the Anglican cemetery in Oranjestad

when you dismounted."

Hidden cash

Peniston was struck with the style of the old buildings in Upper Town as he recognized the Bermuda stone that was brought there from his island in the previous century and was used in most of the buildings. He also found many descendants of old Bermuda families, "who vied with each other in extending hospitality to me." He visited the Governor (Johannes de Veer, the only person he met who did not speak English) in "his fine Mansion with its beautiful marble halls."

He spent a lot of time with the brothers James and John Hill, the first one being Siegfried Lampe's great-grandfather. He heard many stories about Rodney's raid, then seventy-two years ago and they brought back to memory an anecdote often told by his own grandmother, Elizabeth Peniston. Richard

Captain Peniston would return regularly to Statia to buy yams and potatoes to take back to Bermuda. On one such visit, in 1857, he was "induced by the low price to buy a few ponies." However, once he had bought them, he was at a loss as to how to get them on board. It was John Hill who came to the rescue: "We never have any trouble shipping them. Bring your boat ashore and a light rope to throw them with on the beach. Then tie their hoofs together, turn them on their backs and my slaves will lift them up and put 'em in your boat, cane tops being first put in the bottom. When you get alongside, hoist them up as you would a pig. They will be perfectly quiet. You can tie them on deck as they wear no shoes they won't injure the deck." His directions were followed and the ponies arrived on board in perfect condition.

When in 1979 another Mu-

in 1780.

Lampe's legacy

Siegfried also took him on a walk to Schotshoek (then still in good maintenance) and to the remains of Benner's Plantation where they saw the Benner's cemetery. I wonder if the Bermudian visitor expected to walk so much with his then 66-year-old guide...

Siegfried Lampe is no longer there to guide us. Fortunately, research facilities are much more accessible these days, but the sharp memory of those who actually observed buildings, structures and customs now (almost) gone are also immensely valuable. And the inspiring patriotic pride in the history of this special island has enlightened many hearts where it will remain as bright as ever.



Going to the remains of Benner's Plantation requires more than a gentle stroll, 30 years after 1979.