

Heritage Backup



Our Chance to Make St. Martin's History

Part One:
Your Personal Heritage Inventory
Learning from Family Photos



Heritage Backup

On St. Martin, history and heritage have been lost over and over during disasters. Fires, floods and hurricanes have destroyed public archives, private collections and personal photo albums. It is normal for a crisis to happen quickly and perhaps to separate people from their homes. In the aftermath of a hurricane, preserving heritage is well down the list of urgent needs.



Part of St. Martin's history is sitting in your closet.

The current global coronavirus pandemic is a bit different. Most of us are at home. We may suddenly have more time than usual. Perhaps it is the perfect time to conduct an island-wide heritage backup.

The past is the past, and we can't change it. But we can change history. History is a record of past events, and it is never complete. Every home on St. Martin holds a bit of the island's history. That bit can either be saved and shared, or lost forever. The history of the island and its people will be determined by each person's decision.

In your home, there may be a photo album. It may hold the best or only existing photo of a relative. It may hold photos of homes and or businesses that don't exist anymore. It may hold images of landscapes that have been changed forever. It may hold moments in time like the finish of a race or a wedding.

You may have journals or letters. You may have documents that trace your family tree. You may have film, video or tape recordings. All of these items should be treated as if they were unique and irreplaceable historical artifacts. Because they are.

Your history, and the history of your family and friends is important. It is valuable and it is something that should be passed on to future generations. Why not take the time we have now to start the process of recording, preserving and cataloging your part of the island's history.



The first step is to see what you have. You may be at home with other members of your family who can help you identify these treasures. This can be a chance to discover your shared history together.

Make a list of your personal historical collection: photos, videos, letters, journals, newspaper clippings, event programs and documents. Find all these materials and make sure they are in a safe place. Write a description of each item. What is it? A photo album, or box of letters. Who did it come from? What years does it cover?

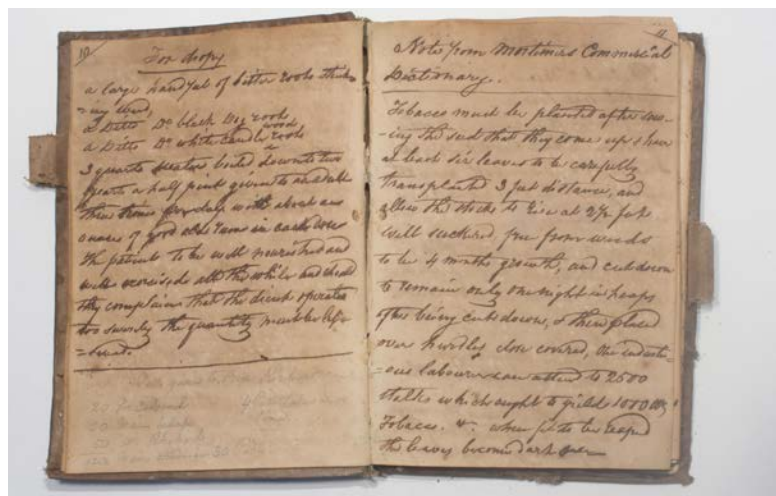
This inventory of your collection will help you in the coming weeks as you work to explore and preserve your history. You can do this project at home with whatever tools you have available: your phone, your computer, or just a pencil and a piece of paper.

Are you ready to change history?

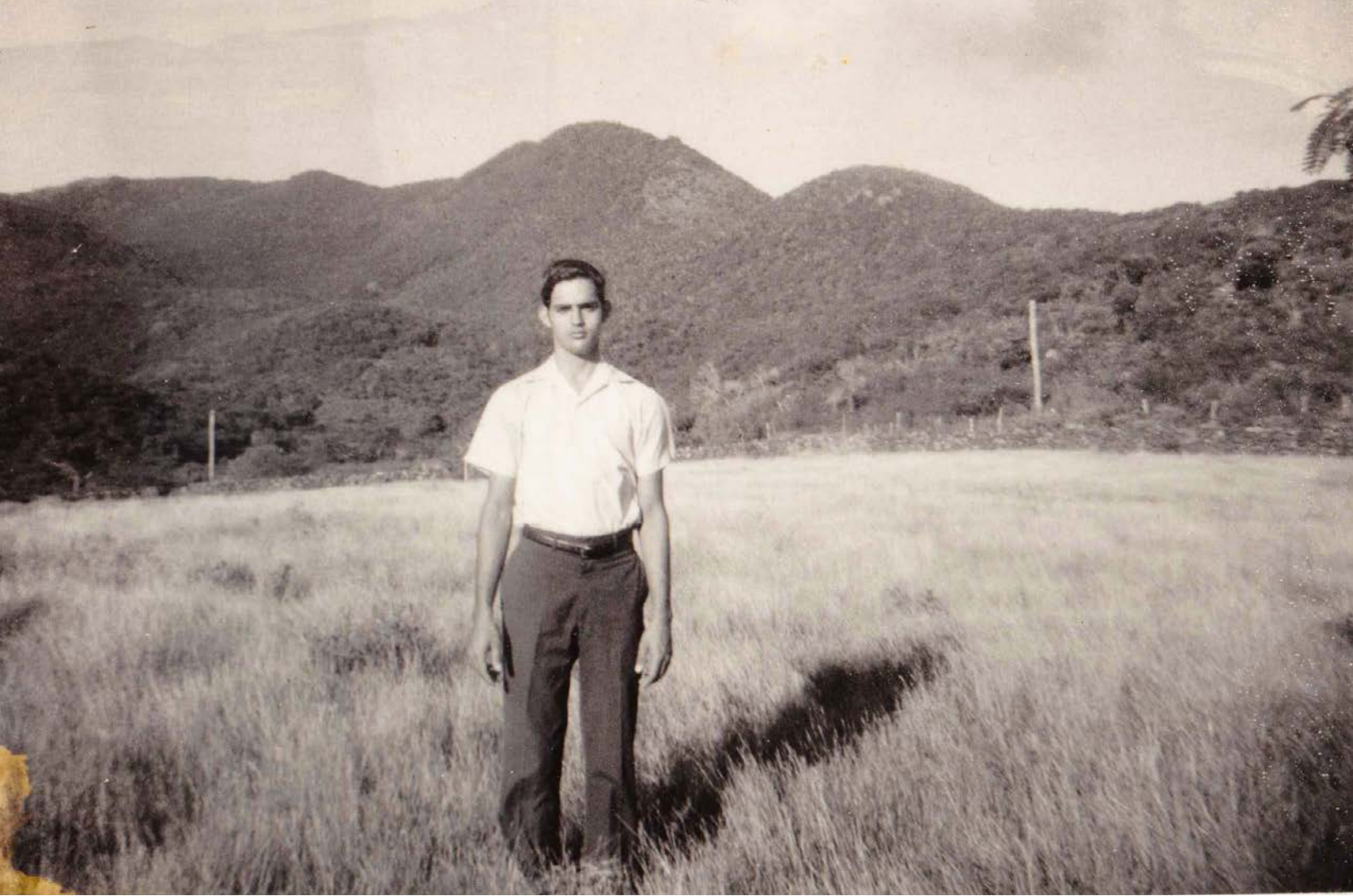


Photos can document local traditions, like boat building and racing. They can also reveal landscapes that have changed over the years.

Journals and letters often capture everyday events. But as the times change, those everyday events become a fascinating look at how life was in the past.







Precious Memories

Every photo tells a story

Photos are a window into our lives. They show who we are and how we lived. They are a record of heritage, history and culture.

Some histories only record the lives of rich or powerful people. But most families have photos, so photos can tell the story of almost anyone. With photos, we can all be part of history.



Photos tell us so much. They reveal heritage and culture in many ways:

Photos document culture. We can see how people dressed and the houses they lived in. They show us events and places that were important to people.

Photos are art. The photographer was expressing their vision. Their creative choices are captured in the photo.

Photos capture emotion. The look on a face, or the way someone holds their body can show us what they were feeling.

Every picture is important! Old photos and photo albums are precious family memories. But they are also important historical archives.



Be part of history! When we preserve photos, we build a richer history of the island. We make sure everyone's story is part of the story of St. Martin.

Interpreting Photography: Cultural Heritage

Photos capture cultural heritage. They show traditions that built up over time that make this island unique. When families took photos at parties, events and jollifications, they were making a historical record—even if they didn't think of it that way at the time.

These photos show us people's expressions and what they were doing. They show us how people interacted with each other. They also show material culture. We can see what people were wearing and the objects around them.

Photos are a window into the past. We can use them to learn what life was like. But they also show us where our traditions came from. We can see the roots of today's culture in the photos of yesterday.





Photos taken outdoors show us the cultural landscape. We can see architecture and nature, and how people are interacting with the island. On St. Martin we often see how much the island has changed in a very short period of time.



Family portraits were made with care. Each detail reflects a choice: how the people were grouped, what they wore, where the photo was taken and how they posed. These choices have symbolic meanings we can study, telling us about the family and their culture.

Precious Memories was written by Cesar Escalona and Mark Yokoyama.





This booklet was developed as a companion to the heritage preservation work done by Les Fruits de Mer at Amusem Naturalis, St. Martin's free museum of nature, heritage and culture.

Les Fruits de Mer is a non-profit association based in St. Martin whose core mission is to raise awareness about nature, culture, and heritage. The organization carries out this mission through a free museum, publications, films, and public events. Learn more at lesfruitsdemer.com and amuseumnaturalis.com.

