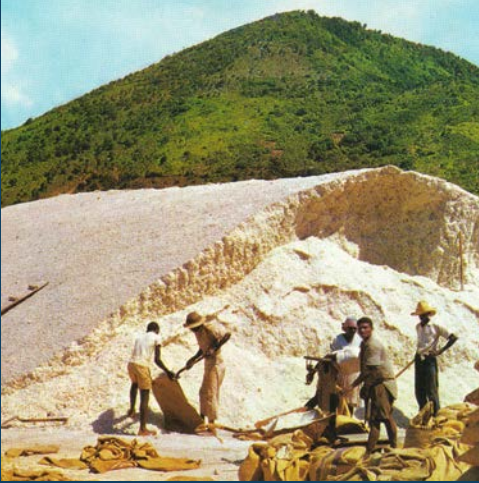


Heritage Backup



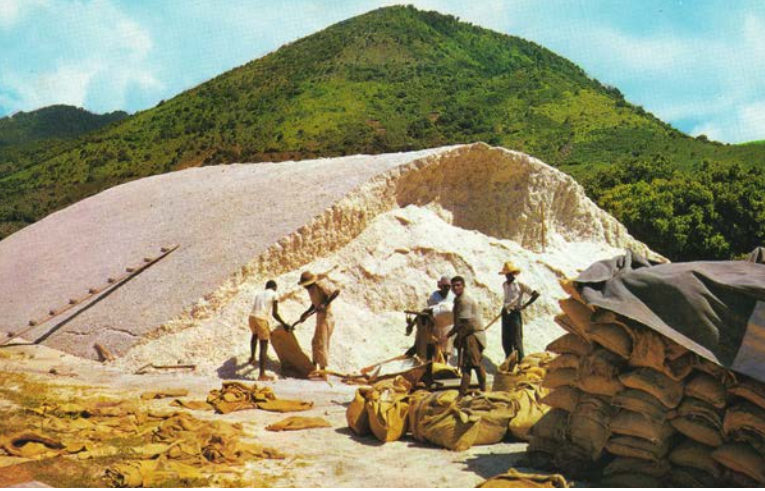
Our Chance to Make St. Martin's History

Part Three:
Heritage Jollification,
What is Jollification? & Intangible Inspiration



Heritage Jollification

For thousands of years, history has been written by the few, for the few and about the few. St. Martin is a perfect example. During the colonial period, most records were written for and by the colonial powers that ruled the island. During the modern period, most published writing about the island and its people was done by academics from other places.



St. Martin has traditions that go back centuries. Many lasted well into living memory, forming an unbroken link to the island's past. (Images courtesy of Barbara Cannegieter Postcard Collection)

Thankfully, there are some exceptions. There are history books by the late Daniella Jeffry, a wealth of literature, poetry and nonfiction published locally by House of Nehesi Publishers and the early issues of Discover Magazine edited by Sir Roland Richardson. Books and articles by St. Martiners are surely the most important works about St. Martin. They are the work of talented authors and dedicated publishers. But this small group of people can't record and publish hundreds of years of St. Martin's undocumented history and culture.

On St. Martin, history and culture have been passed down through the spoken word. These oral traditions are every bit as important as any written history. But a written history can live on forever, especially if thousands of copies are printed. In the past, oral traditions were vulnerable.

That doesn't have to be the case today. Most people have a tool to record oral traditions right in our pocket: our phone. Just as importantly, we have the ability to share and preserve those recordings online. Today it is possible to build a lasting history of the people, by the people, for the people. And it we can do it in a way that embraces St. Martin's oral tradition.



Right now, many of us have time to do this work. As we stay at home, we can tell the stories of our lives. We can reach out to our elders and preserve their experiences. It is a perfect time to connect with family and reflect on where we come from.

Preserving the stories of those who lived during St. Martin's traditional period, before the rise of tourism, is the most urgent task. But everyone has stories worth saving. What was the island like during the huge changes of the 80s and 90s? What was it like to survive hurricanes Luis and Irma? What is your personal experience as a St. Martin on a changing island? Or as an immigrant making a home here?

Preserving heritage is important work, and it is time to come together to do it. It is time for a heritage jollification. Every voice matters. Every story matters. Start recording today and encourage your friends and family to do it, too.

The Les Fruits de Mer association is working to help people document their stories, and to create an archive where those stories can be saved. They hope to share many of these stories as well, but only when permission is given to do so. Get tools and learn more at: <http://www.lesfruitsdemer.com/projects/heritage-backup/>. Let's make this the legacy of our time of confinement.



*What was the market like 30, 50 or 100 years ago?
(Barbara Cannegieter Postcard Collection)*

*Even scenes from St. Martin's modern era can seem
distant today. (Barbara Cannegieter Postcard
Collection)*







What is Jollification?

In the first National Intangible Cultural Heritage Inventory of St. Maarten, jollification has a modest entry: A traditional gathering of people to help build a house, well, or fence and at which food is served as compensation.

To most of the world, and even most of the Caribbean, a jollification is just a party. Parties are great and jollification is a great word for party. But the meaning of the word on St. Martin is more complex. It also tells us a lot about local culture.



Generation New Status band at Arrowroot Jollification in Colombier. Music, friendship, food and drink are all part of a traditional jollification.

It would not be surprising if the roots of jollification stretch back to the time of slavery. Enslaved people were forced to work long hours. They typically worked six days a week. But they were also growing their own food and taking care of their basic needs during the little time they had left. It is hard to imagine how they could have survived without helping each other.

Today, the tradition of jollification is in decline. People are busy with their jobs. There are companies that build houses and replace roofs. Most St. Martiners aren't digging wells or reaping provision grounds. Thankfully, the tradition is kept alive by events like the Arrowroot Jollification in Columbier.

Jollification is a key part of local culture, but it also has a place in today's society. When people come together to volunteer, the spirit of jollification lives on. Especially when there are food and drinks. After all, volunteering isn't really a jollification unless you also have a party.

On St. Martin, neighbors had to come together to help each other. Some tasks, like fixing a roof or digging a well couldn't happen any other way. Before the modern era most labor was done by hand. People had to lift and dig and carry together.

St. Martin was a small island and it was a poor island. But the people of the island provided for themselves by combining their talents and labor. There was not just an idea of community. People truly depended on each other.

Working together also makes sense in St. Martin's climate. Crops had to be planted in time for the wet season. A well can only be dug during the dry season. People used jollification to do things when they needed to be done.





Intangible Inspiration

What is St. Martin culture? It is hard to put a finger on it. Local culture is the way things are said, or a proverb or a story. It is the way a food is cooked and on what occasions it is served. It is stories, crafts, games, songs, dances and much more. It can be hard to point to something and say “That is St. Martin culture.” But at the same time, it is all around us.



Intangible heritage is everywhere in the kitchen and the kitchen garden. Local foods and bush medicine are a big part of St. Martin's intangible cultural heritage. These traditions have been passed down on this island for generations. Often, they also have roots to African and Amerindian traditions that go back even further.

Over the last few years, the Sint Maarten National Commission for UNESCO has worked with the Department of Culture to write down the things that make local culture special. They created a survey and collected over 230 responses. The resulting list is the first *National Intangible Cultural Heritage Inventory of St. Maarten*.

The inventory is focused on five areas: oral traditions; performing arts; social practices; rituals and festive events; knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; and traditional craftsmanship knowledge and techniques. The list includes over 200 different entries across these categories.

The list is rich. It includes jumbie stories and songs like *Mama Make Yo' Johnny Cakes Christmas Comin'*. It includes carnival, boat racing and dominoes. Foods like locri, conkie and guava cheese are there. Skills like making coconut oil and cooking on a coal pot made the list. You can also find crafts like making a fish pot or dry stone wall.

The inventory also notes which aspects of local culture are thriving or declining. Bull foot soup isn't going to die out any time soon, but jollifications and horse races are less common than they were.





The intangible cultural heritage inventory is rich with things that make St. Martin special. There are also many things that still need to be added. The childhood game of rubbing a nickernut on a rock and then pressing the hot seed into a friend's arm should probably be there. Also, the skill of making a noose from a blade of grass to catch a lizard.

The inventory is both a resource and an inspiration to those who have things to add to it. It is ready for your contributions. Perhaps you remember a tradition that hasn't been included yet. Or perhaps your knowledge can deepen our understanding of one of the entries already included.

You can find it online at <http://www.unesco.sx>.





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.

