

## The African Presence at Seville

The first Africans came to Jamaica with the Spanish. Juan de Esquivel (the first Spanish governor), along with 60 to 80 colonists, established the first Spanish settlement at Sevilla la Nueva in 1509. By 1512, the Taino population had significantly declined due to the labour regime under the *encomienda* and the *repartimento* systems and disease (Aarons 1983). In 1513, the Esquivel family was permitted to import three enslaved Africans (Ibid). The importation of enslaved Africans increased, and by 1523, the Jamaican colonists were granted permission to import 500 enslaved Africans per year (JIS).

After the English capture of Jamaica from the Spanish in 1655, Sevilla la Nueva became a sugar plantation owned by Captain Richard Hemmings. Under the English, many more Africans were forcibly transported to Jamaica in the Trans-Atlantic Trade in Enslaved Africans. During enslavement, thousands of Africans lived and died at Seville. Enslaved Africans were an integral part of the economy and the most important part of the labour force. Each estate had an area designated for the residence of the enslaved population. This area was usually referred to as the ‘slave village’.



**Figure 1: Seville Great House**

From archaeological excavations of the Enslaved African Village at Seville conducted from 1987 to 1991, in a collaborative agreement between Syracuse University and the Jamaica National Heritage Trust (JNHT), two African settlements were identified on the present 300-acre property. The date for the earliest village is around 1670 to 1760 and this was located southwest of the planter’s house (great house). The second village dates from about 1760 to 1880 and is located west of the great house (Armstrong, 1989). Twenty-four houses and their associated yards were examined. The excavations revealed the spatial layout, construction techniques and the cultural practices of the occupants. The early enslaved African houses at Seville were constructed in tight

linear rows and were located immediately behind and up slope from the great house. The African houses in the later village are loosely clustered in an area northwest of the early village and due west of the great house (Armstrong & Kelly, 2000). The houses that were excavated were of wattle and daub construction with earthen floors that had been marled. Only one house had a board floor. Roofs were thatched (Armstrong, 1999).

Soon after, or associated with the abandonment of the early village, house areas in the early village were reused to bury the dead. Four burials were located within the house-yard compounds of the early village. They consisted of three males and one female. Two of the males were in their early twenties, the third in his mid-forties, and the female in her late teens. They were buried within separate yards with unique sets of artefacts. All were buried in wooden caskets. Only one burial, number four, had a surface marker (Ibid).

<b>Table 1 – Burials located within the house-yard compound of the Early Village</b>				
<b>Burial</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Approximate Age</b>	<b>Illness</b>	<b>Artefacts found within burial pits</b>
One	Male	20-25	Kidney stone	Padlock
Two	Male	20-25	Chronic anemia	Knife in left hand, white clay smoking pipe
Three	Female	17-19	Severe chronic anemia	Pecked crystal stopper, bone buttons
Four	Male	40+	Infection of the feet that had become septic and had spread to the lower limbs. (osteomyelitis) This infection not only affected mobility but could also have contributed to his death.	Calibrated carpenter's spacer, large sheet of thin iron sheet metal, bone buttons.

With emancipation in 1838, most of the African houses on Seville Estate were abandoned. Many of the freed Africans moved off of the estate and onto to free villages or other vacant lands to escape the location of their previous enslavement and also the exploitative pattern of being charged rents and being forced to work for the estates. Those who remained on the estate continued to live in the area of the later village. Several houses from this era face an open grassy area referred to today as 'the commons' (Armstrong & Kelly, 2000).

In 1997, to commemorate the re-establishment of Emancipation Day, the JNHT held its first Emancipation Jubilee on the grounds on the Seville Heritage Park. The first Jubilee was a three-day event which paid tribute to the four enslaved Africans whose remains were excavated from

the African Village at Seville. Three of the remains (the males) were reburied on the grounds of Seville on Emancipation Day 1997.



Figure 2: Reburial Ceremony (first Emancipation Jubilee) at Seville in 1997

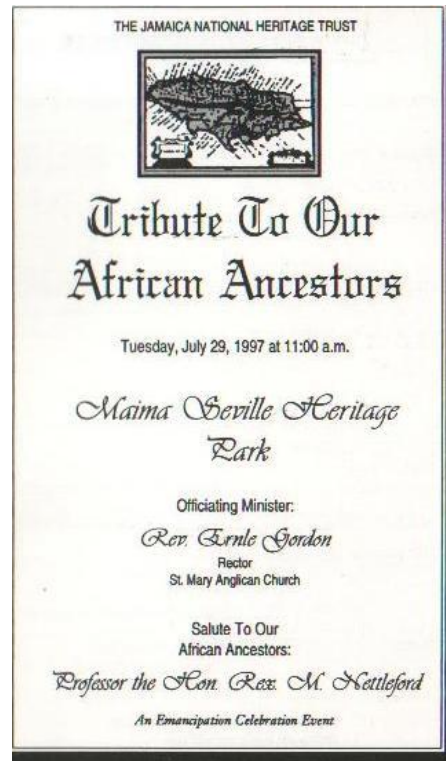


Figure 3: Programme of the ceremony held in 1997



**Figure 4: View of the African Tomb at Seville**

The following year (1998), the remains of Crystal was taken back to Ghana. “The Great Home Coming” as it was labelled was held during July and August 1998 in recognition of the first Emancipation Day commemoration to be held on the African continent. Crystal and the remains of Samuel Carson of the United States of America travelled through the notorious “Door of No Return” at Cape Coast Castle in Ghana. The Ghanaian Castle was where many enslaved Africans were held against their will before their journey on the Middle Passage to the West Indies. The remains of the repatriated enslaved Africans were later buried on African soil.

### **References**

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