

Remembrance of the Great Earthquake

On the morning of June 7, 1692, the city of Port Royal experienced a massive earthquake that claimed the lives of approximately 2000 people and caused 33 acres (66 percent) of the city to sink into the Caribbean Sea. Adding to the obvious catastrophe of destroyed buildings and loss of lives there was a public sanitation emergency as the quakes uprooted dead bodies and bones from graves which covered the harbour.

The magnitude of this quake created a rippling effect as a tsunami swept the city's floor taking with it ships from shorelines and causing more destruction to the remaining buildings. Infrastructures such as the "Storehouse and Treasury of the West Indies" sank into the harbour as well as fortifications and other naval, merchant and fishing fleets.



Area in red shows the 1692 land mass and sunken city

After the earthquake, an Act was passed in the Assembly to have a Perpetual Anniversary Fast on the Seventh of June:

‘Forasmuch as it hath pleased the Almighty God, the great Creator and Judge of Heaven and Earth, on the seventh day of June, one thousand six hundred and ninety two, justly to punish the inhabitants of this land for the manifold sins and wickedness committed against His divine majesty, by a most terrible and dreadful earthquake, which not only laid waste our estates and places of habitation in general, but also destroyed many hundreds of people; which tremendous judgement was succeeded by a raging sickness and mortality, that few or no families escaped: Now, that so signal a visitation may be had in perpetual remembrance...’

The Underwater City

The 33 acres of land that sank below the earth's surface in Port Royal has proven to be the most fascinating to the world's population. It is one of only a few such catastrophic archaeological sites known in the Americas. Archaeologists through the method of underwater archaeological excavations have set out to find the gems that lie within the waters of Port Royal. Their efforts have led to the uncovering of many artefacts which were once used by the occupants of Port Royal as well as gold and expensive jewelry which also indicates to the wealth that this city once possessed.

Geologists have attributed much of the destruction of Port Royal to a process known as "liquefaction". This process occurred because of the vibrations from the earthquake that passed through the sedimentary deposits underlying Port Royal. The sand grains failed to stick together, thus, creating a treacherous fluid. Buildings were swallowed up, with brick structures suffering the most. The walls of some of these structures toppled downward and inward on to the rooms and floors, sealing the contents.



View of brick floor still intact underwater

Other Places in Jamaica affected by the 1692 Earthquake

Liguanea Plains:

Several houses were destroyed in this vicinity. Wells were ejected up to 40 feet deep. At Liguanea and at Yallahs (Yallahs) the sea withdrew several hundred yards and then returned to flood the shore.

St. Jago (Spanish Town)

Some houses were damaged.

Salt Pond Hills (St. Catherine)

Water was issued in 20 or 30 places and flowed until dawn the next day.

Clarendon

In Clarendon precinct, over 12 miles from the sea, water spouted from fissures in the ground.

Sixteen-Mile-Walk

Landslides dammed up the river for a day. Many landslides occurred in the mountains.

Yellows (Yallahs)

Several settlements were overwhelmed by a landslide that killed nineteen people and displaced Mr. Hopkins' plantation, by a half a mile.

Passage Fort

Hardly a planter's house was left standing.

Port Morant

Reports are cited that a large high mountain near Port Morant had been swallowed-up, and in its place was a great lake over four or five leagues.

Northside

On the northside (another report says at the north) a lake of 1,000 acres was said to cover the former area of houses and fields.

Judgement Cliff (St. Thomas)

Judgement Cliff, which is situated across the Yallahs River near Easington in St. Thomas, was created as a result of the 1692 Earthquake. In the earthquake a large part of the hillside slipped and buried beneath it a plantation and its inhabitants in the valley below.

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