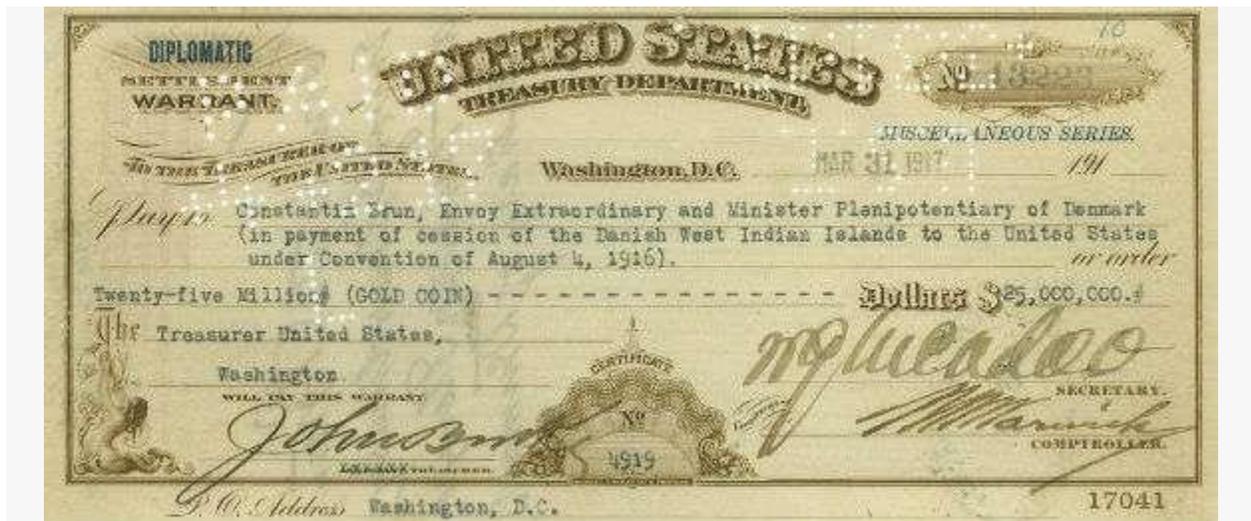


# A History of Transfer Day



Transfer Day refers to the day that the Danish West Indies were formally transferred to the United States, becoming the U.S. Virgin Islands. At 4:00pm on March 31, 1917, the United States purchased the Danish West Indies from Denmark for twenty-five million dollars. At that time, a formal ceremony was held here in the islands while simultaneously at the State Department in Washington, D.C., a warrant for twenty-five million dollars was given to Danish Minister Brun. While the transfer took place in 1917, the process of the U.S. obtaining the islands from Denmark had actually started over 50 years earlier during the American Civil War.



*U.S. Treasury Warrant in the amount of \$25M for the purchase of the D.W.I.*

During the American Civil War, some of the European maritime powers, including Great Britain and France, supported the Confederacy by closing their ports in the Caribbean to Union shipping. Luckily for the Union, Denmark sympathized with their cause and allowed the Union Navy access to the supply station on St. Thomas in the Danish

West Indies. Due to the unfriendly actions of the British Government during this time, Vice Admiral David Porter advised President Abraham Lincoln and Secretary of State William Seward of the strategic value of the Danish West Indies (D.W.I.) as a port for naval repairs and shipping.. The first negotiations between the U.S. and Denmark for the purchase of the D.W.I. began on January 7, 1865, and were conducted by Secretary Seward with the full support of President Lincoln. Negotiations stalled when President Lincoln was assassinated, but Secretary Seward was able to restart the negotiations with Denmark in 1866 after Andrew Johnson became president.



*Vice Admiral David Porter | President Abraham Lincoln | Secretary of State William Seward*

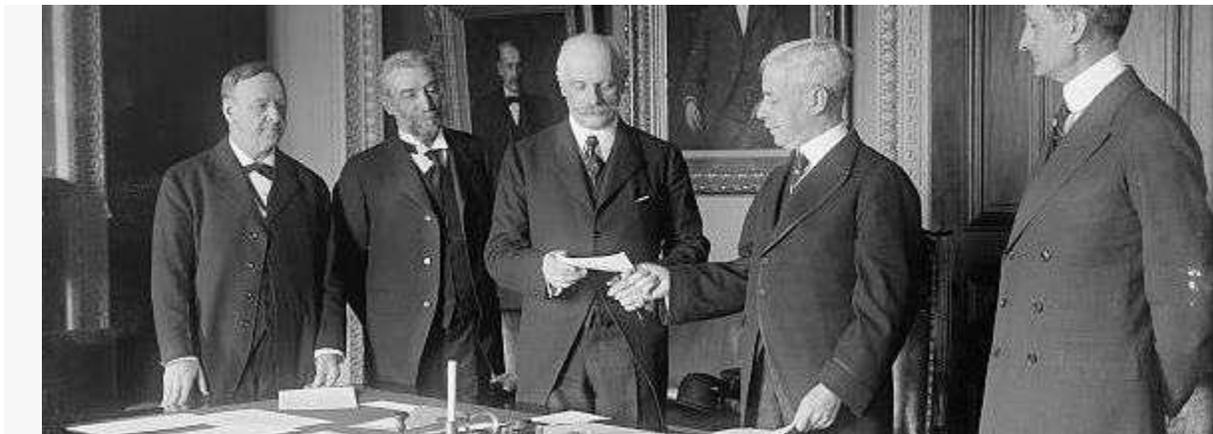
Over the following year, negotiations went back and forth between the two countries. During these discussions, Denmark disclosed that if they were to sell St. Croix then the sale would have to be approved by the French Government due to a stipulation of the 1733 sales agreement in which Denmark purchased St. Croix from France. The agreement stated that should Denmark choose to sell St. Croix, they must give France the first right of refusal to purchase back the island. Based on this information, the U.S. elected to purchase only St. Thomas and St. John for seven million five hundred thousand dollars. A treaty for the sale of St. Thomas and St. John was finally signed by both nations on October 24, 1867; however, the treaty still had to be ratified by the U.S. Congress, the people of St. Thomas and St. John, and both houses of the Danish Parliament. The treaty was passed by the people of St. Thomas and St. John, and in the Danish Parliament, where it was then signed by King Christian IX of Denmark on January 31, 1868. Unfortunately, it was voted against by the U.S. Congress due to a series of epidemics and natural disasters that had struck the islands between 1866 and 1867, including outbreaks of yellow fever, cholera and smallpox, a Category 3 hurricane, an earthquake and a tsunami.



*King Christian IX of Denmark | Lithograph of Christiansted, Danish West Indies, by Christian Sabroe (1839)*

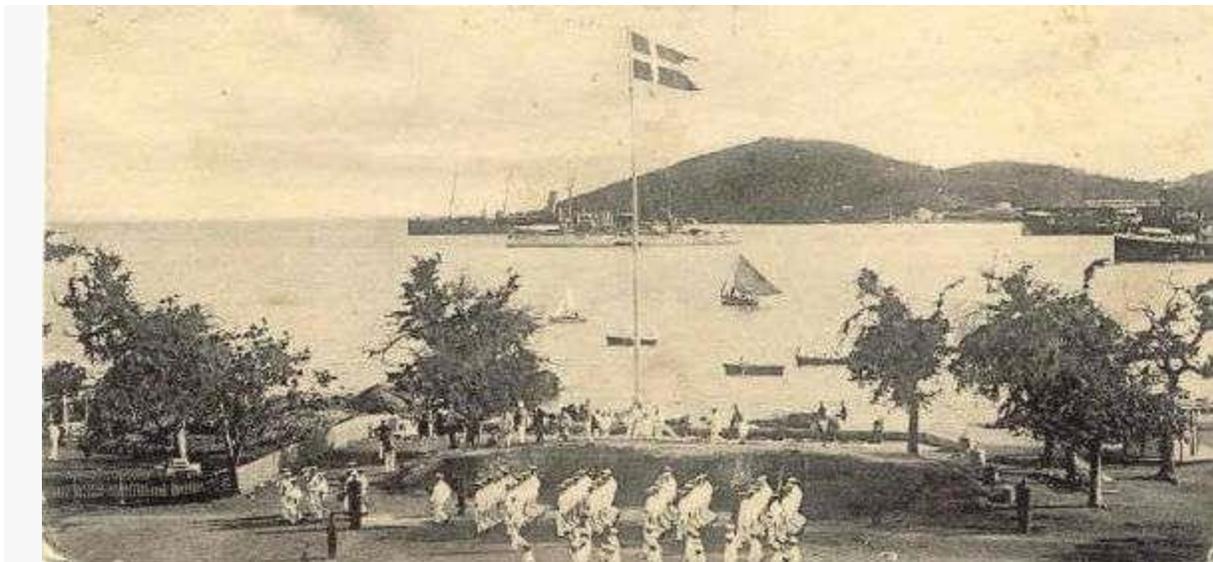
Although several attempts were later made by the U.S. to reopen negotiations with Denmark, it was not until 1900, under President McKinley and Secretary of State John Hay, that serious discussions began anew. A new treaty was signed in Washington, D.C. on January 24, 1902, to purchase all three of the D.W.I. for five million dollars. The Senate ratified this treaty on February 19, 1902, during President Theodore Roosevelt's administration. Unfortunately, the Danish Parliament voted against ratification on October 22, 1902 due to some lingering resentment in Denmark regarding the failed 1867 treaty.

It was World War I that finally led to the successful transfer of the D.W.I. to the United States because the dire economic conditions of the islands due to the war had become a financial drain on the Danish Government. Furthermore, the submarine campaign being waged by the Germans was causing serious concerns regarding the protection of the Panama Canal, so the U.S. had to prevent the islands from falling into German hands. Secretary of State Robert Lansing met with Danish Minister Constantin Brun and signed a treaty agreeing to the sale of the D.W.I. on March 4, 1916. This time around, the treaty was ratified by both countries governments and they were formally exchanged in Washington, D.C. on January 17, 1917.



*Secretary Lansing handing Danish Minister Constantin Brun a Treasury Warrant for \$25M*

On March 31, 1917 the transfer was officially made in Washington, D.C. when a U.S. Treasury warrant for twenty-five million dollars was presented to Danish Minister Constantin Brun by U.S. Secretary of State Robert Lansing. According to the St. Croix Landmarks Society: "The Secretary of the Treasury, William McAdoo had brought the warrant to the State Department and smilingly explained to the Danish Minister that he had brought the [money](#) in the form of a warrant because the actual gold coin would weigh nearly forty-eight tons." Once the warrant had been given to the Danish Minister, Commander Edwin T. Pollock of the USS Hancock, awaiting word on St. Thomas, was notified via cable and radio that the monies had been paid and he was instructed to receive the islands in the name of the United States. At the same time, a dispatch was sent to then-Governor Henri Konow, also in St. Thomas, that all conditions for the transfer of the D.W.I. to the U.S. had been fulfilled.



*Transfer Day ceremonies on St. Thomas were held as soon as the transfer occurred in Washington, D.C.*

As soon as the official transfer in Washington, D.C. had been completed, transfer ceremonies were held on St. Thomas and St. Croix. On St. Thomas, a Danish guard of honor from the Cruiser Valkyrien drew up in front of the barracks of Christiansfort and the American honor guard drew up opposite the Danish guard. When Commander Pollock left the USS Hancock, a fifteen gun salute was fired from the Cruiser Valkyrien, which was flying the US flag from her foremast. The same fifteen gun salute was fired from the fort upon the landing of Commander Pollock. After Governor Konow and Commander Pollock had signed the transfer documents, each returned to their respective honor guards and Governor Konow proclaimed the islands transferred to the United States. The honor guards then presented arms, and the Danish flag (known as the Dannebrog) was lowered while the Danish Royal Anthem was played. A twenty-one gun salute was fired from the fort and the three warships in the harbor. The honor guards then changed places and Commander Pollock proclaimed the islands taken into possession by the United States, and the

honor guards presented arms and raised the American Flag while the band from the USS Olympia played “Hail Columbia” and the twenty-one gun salute was then repeated.

On St. Croix, ceremonies were performed in both Christiansted and Frederiksted. In Christiansted, at 3:30pm, half a company of Danish Gendarmes, under the command of Captain F.N.C. Fuglede, marched from their barracks on Hospital Street to the wharf and lined up facing Fort Christiansvaern. The Marines, commanded by First Lieutenant Edward A. Willing, then marched up to face the Gendarmes. Each group saluted the other by presenting arms, as the Danish Captain and the American Lieutenant greeted each other with drawn swords. Just before 4:00pm, Government Secretary Will Jacobsen, Police Master Andresen, and the Colonial Council of St. Croix arrived as a group. At the first of four strokes from the Steeple Building clock, the Governor Secretary read the following Royal Act: “By Order of His Majesty the King of Denmark, Commodore Konow, Governor ad-interim of the Danish West Indies, delivers at this moment these islands to the representatives of the United States of America. In conformity with the act the Danish Flag is now taken down from all public buildings.” With this, Captain Fuglede gave the command to present arms and lower the Danish flag. As the Danish flag was slowly lowered, the Christiansted Industrial Band played the Danish Royal Anthem. The Gendarmes and Marines shouldered arms and changed places so the American detachment now faced the fort. Lieutenant Willing then ordered the American flag to be raised. Arms were again presented and the American flag was raised while the band played “Hail Columbia”.



*Crowds waiting at Fort Christiansvaern on St. Croix for word that the official transfer was complete*

In Frederiksted, the USS Olympia, under command of Captain Bion B. Bierer, arrived around noon. The vessel could not enter Christiansted harbor due to her large draft, so a detachment of Marines were sent to Christiansted by motor vehicles. As the steeple struck 4:00pm, the Police Master read the Royal Proclamation aloud to the Marine and the Gendarmes present in Frederiksted. The Lutheran Minister John Faber then conducted a prayer for the old flag. He

gave thanks to God for what good had been accomplished under the Danish flag during the centuries it had waved over the islands. Minister Faber also prayed that shortcomings and mistakes made under the flag be forgotten, and asked God to bless the Danish King, and the Danish nation under the Danish flag in the coming days. He also prayed that in the future God would bestow his blessings upon the islands and their people under the American flag. A twenty-one gun salute was fired, the Danish flag was lowered, and the American flag was hoisted under another twenty-one gun salute.

Now an official territory holiday, Transfer Day is commemorated annually with a military parade and various ceremonies and cultural events across all of the islands. During the commemoration of Transfer Day, please remember the history that shaped the U.S. Virgin Islands and the unique relationship these islands share with the people of Denmark. Let us all come together as one people, not just on Transfer Day, but everyday, to celebrate the past, present and future of our U.S. Virgin Islands.

– ***Jennie Ogden, Editor***

***Compliments of the Friends of Denmark, St. Croix***

<http://friendsofdenmarkstx.org/>