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THE OTHER  
WEST INDIAN  
PAINTER –  
FREDERIK  
VISBY  
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## EDITORIAL

# ABOUT REMOVAL OF A SIGN!

It is not only in USVI that historical artefacts are being removed. In the most prominent cemetery in Copenhagen – Assistens – where the burial chapel of former general governor Peter von Scholten is located, some political parties want a memorial plate removed, because it, in their interpretation, justifies Danish colonization and slavery in the then Danish West Indies. The story is the following:

One of the objects of Danish West Indian Society is to inform about and support interest in Denmark for USVI and its history. Of many initiatives – besides publishing Magasinet, organizing festivals, arrange lectures and many other things – the Society has also been party to furnishing our surroundings with various installations. Our recent co-organising the installation of the statue "Freedom" in front of the Danish Foreign Office in Copenhagen is one example. Another example is – and this is what this article is about – the placement in 1973 of a memorial plate in front of Peter von Scholtens burial chapel. The memorial plate – a picture of which can be seen in connection with this article – is in Danish, but reads in translation:

"PETER VON SCHOLTEN  
1784-1854

General Governor over the Danish West Indies from 1827 till 1848.

Honorably, by his proclamation on July 3 1848, he brought slavery in our tropical colony to an end.

On July 3 1973 this chapel was declared by the municipality of Copenhagen a historical burial place, as a monument over Peter von Scholten and his humanitarian efforts in the Danish West Indies.

The chapel has been renovated in 1973 by Danish West Indian Society with support from the Fonden til Fædrelandets Vel (translation: the Foundation for the Well of the Realm)."

This memorial plate has lately – in the wake of disturbances following Black Lives Matter etc. – called critical attention, also from some left-wing political parties in the Municipality of Copenhagen, where a motion proposed by them for its removal is now under debate; the main argument presented is, that "a unilateral



highlighting of “honorable” and “humanitarian” in connection with Peter von Scholtens long period of service as governor over the Danish West Indies plays down his role as enforcer of colonial repression, that made it possible to maintain Danish slavery in the West Indies”.

It is my view, that we are now in matter dealing with a detail in our understanding of Peter von Scholtens history, but in an overall historical context having a problem, that questions the way we are now and in the future conveying and marking historical events.

No way can a memorial plate (which the proposers call a “sign”) near enough give a full and balanced recollection of a history of colonization and slavery. That calls for other media and education as well as activities of museums etc. to relay that important history.

The memorial plate in situ is part of the history – for better or worse -, not the history telling in itself. Therefore we cannot continuously remove, reshape or rewrite the artefacts themselves. And particularly in a cemetery there must be a liberty, when it comes to shaping and texting tombstones, no matter who is buried there.

The problem with the proposal for the removal of the memorial plate is that the proposers interpret the words “honourful” and “humanitarian” wrongly. The memorial plate does NOT say, that Peter von Scholtens service as General Governor was honourful.

On the contrary, it states that it was his declaration of emancipation on July 3 1848 – in direct disobedience of the Danish King and Government – that was honourful, because he took on responsibility – without authority – at great risk to himself. You may suggest, that he showed civil courage.

Peter von Scholtens humanitarian actions were not his administration of a colonial regime; but that he – often in opposition to Government policies and interests of and under protests from the planters – established schools for the enslaved population, and he also improved health care. Seen with today's eyes it was not very humane or progressive – because we have now a welfare state (in Denmark, which includes Greenland and Faroe Islands), and we take it for granted, that we are offered excellent schools

and top quality health care! But von Scholtens made a difference – positive – which another general governor may not have had character or energy to carry out.

Secondly, removal of the memorial plate will give cause to consider, whether removal of artefacts offers us an opportunity to present a more varied and balanced history telling.

The Danish Government has now decided to finance and allow the permanent placement in front of West India Warehouse in Copenhagen of the very large statue “I am Queen Mary”, which the artists Jeanette Ehlers and Vaughn La Belle have created – first in a poly styrene version. It is generally accepted, that the erection of this statue is more a political than an artistic statement.

I am not in opposition to this project, but I have noted, that there are different views of the character and record of Mary Roberts life and her part in Fireburn, and as a symbol it can be disputed whether she really represents those qualities and political aspects, that – no doubt – the artists and a lot of people in USVI want to emphasize through this statue, which will be located a few yards from the Royal Palace in Copenhagen. But, if Peter von Scholtens participation during a terrible period in the history of man is regarded as unacceptable, something of the same could apply for Queen Mary?

Even if it - following George Floyds tragic death last year – once more has been justified to raise a serious debate over racism, one form of injustice and distortion shall not be replaced by another in its essence being of the same roots. We must be able to discuss as well Peter von Scholtens as Mary Roberts behavior and efforts no matter how we decorate or have decorated our landscape!

Thirdly, the application by the proposers of the word “sign” and not “memorial plate” indicates what we are dealing with. Is the text on this copper plate purely an information sign – the same as road and bus signs - or is the plate a carrier of more than information – an integrated part of the historical context.



If you remove the name of a deceased from the tomb stone – what do you have then? A burial site or just a stone? Such actions may be very far reaching and carry in them the risk of manipulation and distortion.

However, Danish West Indian Society has decided to enter into a dialogue with the municipality about the future of the memorial plate. The Society has not been formed with the purpose of protecting or laundering Peter von Scholtens name – but to contribute to as diverse distribution of the history in and about the three islands in the Carribean.



Michael Keldsen  
*Editor*

The Danish version of Magasinet June 2021 also contained articles about “Surveying of St. Croix from 1733 to 1755”; a review of “Svart Babel” the fifth and last novel in Norwegian author Fartein Horgars series from the Norwegian-Danish West Indies” and a 7 page article by Kåre Lauring titled “The slaves in Copenhagen.

These 12 pages contain some of the articles from Magasinet, June 2021. The articles are translated – by a native Danish speaker - into English (probably rather British English than American English) and powered(!) no doubt with Danisms. Please bear with us.

Any complaints or suggestions should be addressed to [medlemsbladet@dwis.dk](mailto:medlemsbladet@dwis.dk); the same address will welcome articles, news etc. that you may deem to be of interest for the readers of these 12 pages. And mailaddresses of anybody, who wants to subscribe to the English version of Magasinet for free, can be forwarded to this mail.

# THE OTHER WEST INDIAN PAINTER (1)

*By Michael Keldsen*

**When you talk about the West Indian painter (Vestindienmaleren) most of us mentions Hugo Larsen, who from 1904-07 spent time on the three islands and during this stay contributed with a vast amount of paintings, which today can be found in numerous Danish homes and art museums. But there is another Danish painter, who a quarter of a century earlier delivered a number of paintings from the islands, which have also contributed to a picture of life in the Danish colony. His name was FREDERIK VISBY (1839-1926). This article will spread some light on this remarkable person.**

Some years ago Danish West Indian Society was donated a small painting with a motive from St. Croix ( see box). There is no signature by the painter, but on the back of the painting it is stated: "Visby, St. Croix – Danish West Indies 1880-90". The motive is a relaxed, Caribbean atmosphere on a gravel road with a view to the sea and a sugar plantation – possibly – with a smoking chimney. A Cruzian woman walks along the road with a load on her head and in the background a cart. But most remarkable are the two gigantic palm trees, which are flanking the road – here the artist really has spotted the exotic surroundings, that he for a time worked in during his stay in St. Croix and St.Thomas from 1880-82. In her book "St.Thomas – tropical memories from The West Indian Islands" Frederik Visbys daughter, Thora Visby-Petersen writes, that the motive of the painting is "Upper part of Craykid St. Croix".

But it was not the first time Frederik Visby had come to the Danish West Indies. Visby was born and baptized Hans Frederik Meyer Visby in the placid and beautiful town of Tikøb in the Northern part of Zealand in Denmark in 1839, and in 1844 he moved with his parents to the Eastern part of Jutland, where his father served as parson in a parish near Randers – an area of vast moors and only sparsely cultivated. As early as 1851 Frederik Visby moved on his own to Aarhus where he graduated in 1858. Then on to

Copenhagen where he peeped into various crafts, before he was admitted to the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts. Shortly after he was called up to serve his military duty, as an

officer; a career which however was abruptly halted due to a shooting accident, that left him partly deaf the rest of his life. However, he finished his curriculum at the Academy, which unfortunately also meant that he had to put his artistic ambitions on hold. Under pressure – not least from his parents – he went into commercial painting, which gave him an economical security, but did not satisfy his artistic ambitions.



*"Frederik Visby – Upper part of Craykid – St. Croix; 1880-82. Belongs to Danish West Indian Society"*

(1) When you translate the word Vestindienmaleren into English as "The West Indian painter", you may get the impression, that this is a bred and born St. Thomian, St. Cruzian or St. Johnian. This is however not the case. It refers to – with the exception of Camille Pissarro – Danish artists, who went to the islands in the Caribbean, and stayed there for a while to paint.

In 1865 he went to the Danish West Indies – made his way through by miscellaneous jobs – and on to Guatemala, Mexico and finally San Francisco, before he – in 1870, 5 years later, returned to Denmark, where he established a painters` firm in Aarhus, was married in 1871 to a woman from Holstein in Prussia, Laura Loria, and from then on made his living as a house painter, but he also had artistic ambitions in regard to decoration of churches, renovation of altar pieces and decoration of public and private premises. He also engaged himself in the new art of photography.

And then his life once again turned in a new direction. He graduated from Copenhagen Dental School in 1878 – after a years study– as a dentist and immediately established a clinic. But the wheel turned again. In 1880 he returned to the Danish West Indies. The family, that is Laura and their 4 children, born to them over a short span of years – followed him in 1881. This was a very productive period for Frederik Visby – he painted constantly and with great concentration.

But, 1882 the family moved to New York, where they stayed for the next 2 years, until they returned to Denmark in 1884 – at first residing in Copenhagen, but after Lauras premature death in 1886, to Aarhus. Frederik Visby remained in the city, that genuinely believes, that he was the Aarhus painter. He managed to establish a large dental clinic in the city, while the artistic side of him was invested in a large production of water colours and paintings with motives from old Aarhus.

After Lauras death he married again in 1886, with Anna Cathinka, like himself from North Zealand; a marriage that lasted until her death in 1909. The rest of his life – until he died in 1926 at 85 – was spent in activity, also with painting, and new motives f.inst. from Skagen, a fishing and artistic town in the northern part of Jutland.

### **HIS ARTISTIC LEGACY**

Frederik Visbys artistic contribution can be divided into 2 groups; his paintings from the Danish West Indies and his water colours from Aarhus. A substantial part of

the Aarhus water colours are today exhibited in The Old Town (Den Gamle By) in Aarhus, that acquired most of the water colours directly from the artist. But a substantial part of his paintings from the Danish West Indies belongs to the Maritime Museum of Denmark (M/S Museet for Søfart) in Elsinore, based on a donation from Frederik Visbys grand children. The museum owns 39 of his paintings; of which 16 can be seen on the museums website– <http://billedarkiv.mfs.dk/fotoweb/archives/5001-Billedarkiv/?q=Frederik+Visby>.

The remainder of the paintings owned by the museum are stored up awaiting the day the museum can afford photographing and digitalization. All other Frederik Visbys paintings from the Danish West Indies are privately owned. And one of them - recently and very



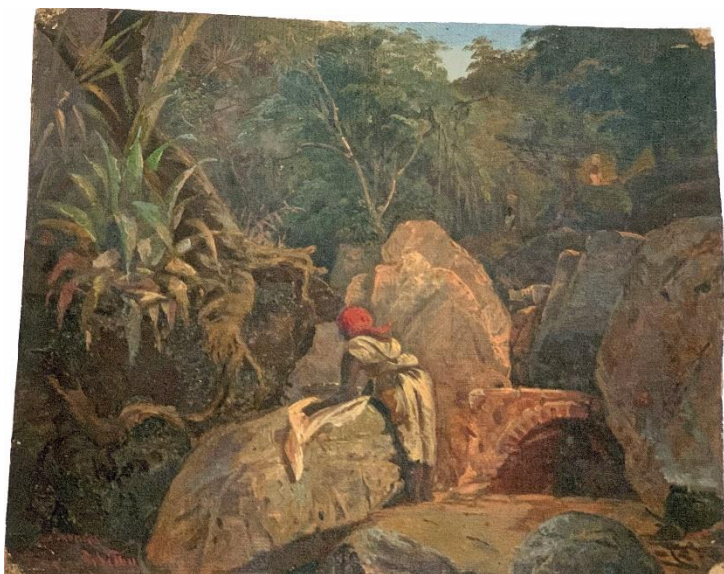
*"Camille Pissaro – Portrait of a Boy.  
Painted in St. Thomas 1852-55"*



rarely for Visby paintings – was auctioneered in Denmark; the motive from the garden of a prominent Danish St. Thomas family, Hjernoë.

The painting is the cover of this issue of *Magasinet* (2). Provenance of this painting is not known. A couple of his paintings from the Danish West Indies have been reproduced in the book "Our Ancient Tropical Colonies (Vore Gamle Tropekolonier) from 1951, and 8 of them in the new version of that book, that was published in 1967.

If you want to get an impression of the Danish West Indies from an artistic perspective, you need to count Frederik Visby in, even if he may not be as great an artist as other painters like Hugo Larsen, Riis Carstensen, Fritz Melbye, and not least the impressionist Camille Pissaro. The latter was born in St. Thomas, and painted only a few pictures, while he was still living on the islands.



The great career – in Paris - was still lying ahead of him. But one of his West Indian paintings, which was sold a few years ago at an auction of Bruun Rasmussen in Copenhagen, was called "Portrait of a Boy", and was painted 1852-55. Pissaro donated this painting to Hermann Meier Hjernoë; the Hjernoë and his family, with whom Frederik Visby was acquainted during his stay in the islands, and whose garden offered the motive for the front piece to this issue of *Magasinet*.

*A ring may have been closed.*



*Examples of 2 Frederik Visby paintings – stored in the Maritime Museum, but not recorded on the website or on exhibition of the museum. Motives from St. Thomas.*

(2) *The painting by Frederik Visby – on the front page – has the motive: "The garden of the family Hjernoë". There is some uncertainty about when the painting was produced. Was it during Visbys first visit (1865) or his second visit (1880-82) to the Danish West Indies. One suggestion is, that the painting dates back to 1865, partly due to the fashion of the dresses of the women on the painting, partly because the Hjernoë family may not have lived in the house, during Visbys second stay in the Danish West Indies.*

# DETHRONIZATION OF KING CHRISTIAN IX IN CHARLOTTE AMALIE

By Henrik Døssing

**The bust of Christian IX in Emancipation Park in Charlotte Amalie has been removed and is now located in a room in Fort Christian. Here are some thoughts given to this event**

Thursday April 1, 2021 you could read in the Danish newspaper POLITIKEN the following; "Christian IX banished from park in St. Thomas". Accompanied by photos of the wellknown bust with a rope around the neck. The immediate impression was almost, that this was the hangman`s job.

However, it wasn`t as dramatic as that. It did not take place in the gloom and darkness of the night. On the contrary, there was music from a brass band, participation of citizens, senators and civil servants, and speeches by former senator Myron D. Jackson, who has been one of the initiators for the removal of the bust from Emancipation Park to Fort Christian. Jackson mentioned, that the brass band honours the demands for solemnity, that must be required at the removal of a monarch, with whom the present queen of Denmark, Margrethe II is a descendant in direct line. The removal of the bust is maybe not a full stop, but a semicolon for a debate on the location of the bust in Charlotte Amalie. The bust has had its home in Emancipation Park since 1909 – now it is part of the museum in the fort. Perhaps we may show satisfaction, that the bust did not end up in the harbor – like the bust of King Frederik V – the predecessor of Christian IX - back in January 2021 in Copenhagen.

In The Virgin Islands Daily News of 31st March 2021 there is an interesting article, which describes the feelings behind the detronization. According to the article the primary purpose of the removal is to make room for the statue "Freedom", which is a depiction of an enslaved man, who blows a conch. It is the statue, we know from all three islands, and which a few

years ago was placed outside the Danish Foreign Office in Copenhagen.

For more than 20 years discussions and debate have been ongoing about the location of the bust of Christian IX and its prominence and symbolic meaning for the people in the islands. By removing the bust it is generally assumed, that now the people have taken back their own history. The bust has been regarded as a monument over colonialism and white supremacy. The bust has also been regarded as a symbol of a period with repression, slavery and colonialism. A speaker said at the occasion: "Now it is time to tell our history and honour and respect our forfathers".

Which feelings can removal of the bust trigger in us as Danes and members of Danish West Indian Society?

You may say, that first and foremost its previous location was a charming feature during a visit to Charlotte Amalie. Countless are the photos taken in front of the bust of visitors to the islands. When reading the motivation for removal of the bust, you may agree or disagree. But as a Dane you wonder how the people in the islands can consider King Christian IX as a symbol of oppression, slavery and colonialism. Because slavery had been abolished, when Christian IX was king. But maybe we should not think like that. The removal may rather be the answer to a need to do something, which can mark a change and confrontation with the past. This has happened before, f.inst. when statues of Stalin were removed in the collapsing Soviet





Union, and when the same happened a few years ago to statues of generals in the South. It has also in Greenland been debated, but where a local referendum decided to maintain the statue in Nuuk of Hans Egede, the Danish-Norwegian parson, who in 1721 reintroduced Danish rule in Greenland.

It goes without saying, that it must be the feelings of the local population, that is decisive.

As a Dane it is not difficult to agree, that it is more relevant to erect the statue of "Freedom" in the park. You can't help consider why on earth did King Christian IX get a bust in Charlotte Amalie in 1909 – three years after his death, when you consider, that at that point of time several attempts had been made to sell the islands?

Why are Danes still attracted to the islands, and why are we members of Danish West Indian Society? Because, the Danish period is nothing

to brag about! And it is no use to argue, that other countries also used slaves.

For some members of the Society there is a kinship with ancestors from the islands, for others it is historical or architectural interest, and for some there has been established close friendships in the islands, with people, who care about the Danish past. The detronization of King Christian IX will hardly change that.

Can we expect any kind of veneration in the local population in the islands for Denmark? Hardly! But this shall not keep us away from liking the islands, visit them and respect the view on us by the locals. What may the future bring? Will the Danish names in the road signs also one day disappear?

And, will Danes then loose interest in the islands?

Only future can tell, but we – as Danes – have to face the fact, that we have no influence on what may come.



# REGINE AND THE DANISH WEST INDIES

*By Axel Kierkegaard*

**Axel Kierkegaard, attorney, in this article adds further aspects to the life of Regine Olsen during her time in the Danish West Indies from 1855 to 1860 as married to the Governor Frits Schlegel. Regines relationship with the famous Danish philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard, was the subject of an article in Magasinet, no. 2, April 2021.**

Regine Olsen is one of the few women from the 19th century, who has attracted much attention up to this day. Hence, this article that will focus on her stay in the Danish West Indies. The sources of this story is exclusively the letters she sent to her sister in Copenhagen, and which were not made widely known until 1996.

Regine was born in 1822, was married in 1847 with the civil servant Frits Schlegel, and was thus 33 years old, when she arrived with him in the islands. During most of Schlegels reign she spent life in St. Croix, and most of the official commitments during the time took place in the recently renovated Government House in Christianssted, but the Schlegels preferred to live in rural settings, and therefore spent most of the time in Cane Garden,

Regine had not much liking for official sociability, the highlight of which was the annual celebration on King Frederik VII`s birthday, where the couple hosted a grand ball. Making and receiving visits from female socialites fell on her shoulders, and she found many of her visitors – mostly English or Dutch – as ignorant and gossiping. About the many dinner parties she writes, that there was only “around 130 invitables” available in the small community.





It fell to her to put together the menus for those dinner parties, and it was often difficult to get the necessary ingredients.

However, rarely the guests left the table empty bellied. In a letter she describes the menu at one of the dinners: "Turtle soup; thereafter lamb with capers, fish with tomato sauce, poulard stuffed with truffles and ditto sauce; chicken in rice, ham with peas, cabbage etc. Thereafter asparagus in between cooked and fried beef roast, boeuf du turtle, hare with gooseberry porridge etc, plum pudding, 2 wine jellies with cream sauce, Wiener Torte, a Pound cake, all sorts of biscuits, confectionary and fruit and to drink with those 9 different wines."

Daily life at Cane Garden was generally monotonous. She was bored, and she did a lot of reading. Her husband went every day to Christianssted, and when there was representative duties, she joined him. However, she preferred to stay at Cane Garden, and she wrote in a letter, that "We feel there less the monotony, than in the middle of town where we are surrounded by people, who had nothing else to ask for than the couple should spend their emoluments on them."



*"The resting place in Copenhagen of Johan Frederik Schlegel and Regina Schlegel – nee Regine Olsen"*

The climate regularly created health problems. In the autumn of 1855 she writes about a large abscess, which had been a nuisance for several days, and had now "grown so big and hard that I had to put a porridgelike ointment on the abscess; and this is no good place to have such porridge" When the couple had moved to Cane Garden flies were a problem. They "are aggressive out here, you won't believe it; they always manage to find on poor me the abscesses; today I have removed the plaster from an abscess on my arm, and now I move my hand in order to write, but cannot then chase them away, and they settle in the abscess as if I was already a carrion." The same year she mentions in a letter, that now "I will mention to you a number of abscesses, small and large and embarrassing, and diarrhea etc."

A dreaded disease was the yellow fever, which could be fatal, and was common particularly in St. Thomas; but the Schlegel couple did not contract this. Cholera took its toll during those years, particularly in St. Thomas and St. John, and many people died.

Regine contracted cups and writes about this in a letter in 1856, that she – who was vain when it came to her appearance – was now "scar faced", but that "all the scars were now almost gone".

Health was not only a matter for Regine. Also her husband struggled with health problems, and shortly before his 5-year term as governor expired, he had to file an application for his resignation. It was granted in May 1860, and in September same year the couple, who had no children, was back in Copenhagen.

Regine survived Frits Schlegel for many years, and lived in Copenhagen, where she died in 1904.





St. Croix  
X-mas Festival  
2019-20.

Photo Torben Jerø