

ACIJ/JMB MOUNTS ONLINE EXHIBITION - RETURN TO ROOTS: MEDICINAL PLANTS IN EVERYDAY LIFE

On October 20, 2021, the African Caribbean Institute of Jamaica/ Jamaica Memory Bank (ACIJ/JMB) mounted its first exhibition on the ACIJ/JMB's website - Return to Roots: Medicinal Plants in Everyday Life. The exhibition script was produced by Mrs. Marcella Phillips-Grizzle, Research Fellow, ACIJ/JMB.

The exhibition is mainly concerned with medicinal plants - particularly herbs and spices - for dietary and wellness purposes, and it highlights how herbs and spices are taken internally (consumed and digested) for health benefits.



Black Mint Bush

Jamaicans' use of medicinal plants in everyday life has its roots in tradition. Much of our knowledge is from our African forebears and is steeped in our colonial past. For generations, medicinal plants have been used for a wide array of purposes, such as for healing and to speed recovery from illness, for general wellness and mental well-being, for aesthetic purposes, and for culinary needs.

Much like many parts of rural Africa (continent-wide), Jamaica has seen its reliance on traditional healers (especially throughout its colonial history) who prescribe medicinal plants for the poor, the remote, the desperate, the curious, and importantly, the believers, in need of physical and oftentimes psychosomatic care.

Whether used as a preventative measure or for treatment and healing, plants revered for their nutritional and medicinal properties have been traditionally used, and continue to be used, in Jamaica.

The exhibition can be viewed on ACIJ/JMB's website at the following link: <https://acij-ioj.org.jm/return-to-roots-medicnal-plants-in-everyday-life/>

STORYTELLING: A VEHICLE FOR CULTURAL PRESERVATION

Storytelling is an important cultural thread that makes up the colourful fabric of Jamaican society. Louise Bennett Coverley, Ranny Williams, Charles Hyatt, Dr. Amina Blackwood Meeks, and many others, have played an integral role in promoting and protecting this aspect of Jamaica's heritage.



Louise Bennett Coverley

Jamaican folktales are not just for entertainment; they showcase our language as well as provide a vehicle to impart important lessons. Whenever pen and paper are absent, storytelling has been used as a tool to pass down information from one generation to the next. It is the social and cultural activity of sharing stories, sometimes accompanied by drama and embellishments, which enrich the listeners' entertainment.



Ranny Williams

Every culture has its own stories, riddles or narratives which are shared as a means of education, cultural preservation, teaching proverbial lessons, and instilling moral values. In any specific culture,

stories can have its own purpose depending on the occasion, audience, performer, and even current events. As one of the world's oldest art forms, storytelling is not just the act of telling a story which features a particular character, but can also include individuals having conversations about the happenings in their daily lives. Today, storytelling has cemented itself as an infallible part of Jamaica's intangible cultural heritage.

WEST AFRICAN INFLUENCE

Much of Jamaica's storytelling heritage comes from our West African ancestors. Stories and storytelling are a major aspect of culture and, as a large proportion of Jamaica's population is descended from West Africa, it is no surprise that we have retained this feature as part of our culture as well. In West Africa, storytelling is not just reserved as a form of entertainment, but is also used as a tool to preserve the history of the people. In West African societies, there are storytellers and oral historians, called 'griots', who hold the social memory of the community. They are also keepers of facts and the important events of the time. The profession is passed down from one family member to another and, from an early age, children of griots begin their own training to become griots. Griots have impressive memories and are historians, genealogists, musicians, advisors to

nobility, storytellers, advocates, messengers, and ambassadors. Their importance to West African societies is immeasurable.

ANANCY STORIES

In Jamaica, Anancy stories are a popular example of tales that entertain, while having a moral connotation at the end of the tale.

Originating in West Africa, Anancy (Ananse or Anansi) is a very prominent character in many West African epics and is featured heavily along with other animal tricksters. A wily spider, Anancy is often featured with a cast of other animals. Anancy stories are used to teach different lessons and, for every situation, there is an Anancy story. For example, in the story of Anancy and Turtle, Anancy tried to outsmart Turtle because he did not want to share his meal and ended up being outsmarted himself.

Anancy stories were brought to Jamaica and other parts of the New World by the enslaved members of the Ashanti tribe. Books were not the basis of traditional West African life, particularly before the transatlantic slave trade and the subsequent colonisation of countries by the Europeans. In indigenous societies, all forms of communication, including education, was done orally. Through the oral tradition, the indigenous population learned history, their role in society, speaking skills, as well as the traditional myths and legends of the people. With

stories passed on from generation to generation, the African identity has been preserved to be enjoyed by future generations, despite the slave masters' attempt to destroy it.

NATIONAL STORYTELLING DAY

In 2014, Governor-General Sir Patrick Allen proclaimed November 20 as National Storytelling Day. This yearly recognition of the storytelling tradition is a way to safeguard this aspect of Jamaica's cultural heritage, especially among youths, as well as to promote positive values.

The Jamaica Cultural Development Commission (JCDC) plays a key role in the safeguarding and retention of storytelling, especially among the youth, through their Festival of Arts Speech Competitions. Students perform at these competitions and are judged on their elocution, execution of Standard English or patois prose, recitation of poems, and storytelling skills, etc. Many of Jamaica's most recognizable actors, broadcasters, orators, and politicians received exposure through the JCDC's speech competition.

The African Caribbean Institute of Jamaica/Jamaica Memory Bank (ACIJ/JMB) also champions the retention of aspects of Jamaica's cultural heritage, including storytelling. The interviews conducted by the Jamaica Memory Bank paint a picture of Jamaican society and are largely based on storytelling. Individuals from many walks of life are

interviewed and the information they provide is invaluable and enlightening on past events and traditional practices.

Whether it is an Anancy story, a poem by Louise Bennett Coverley, an anecdote or a tale from everyday life, storytelling in its various forms is an important aspect of Jamaica's cultural identity.

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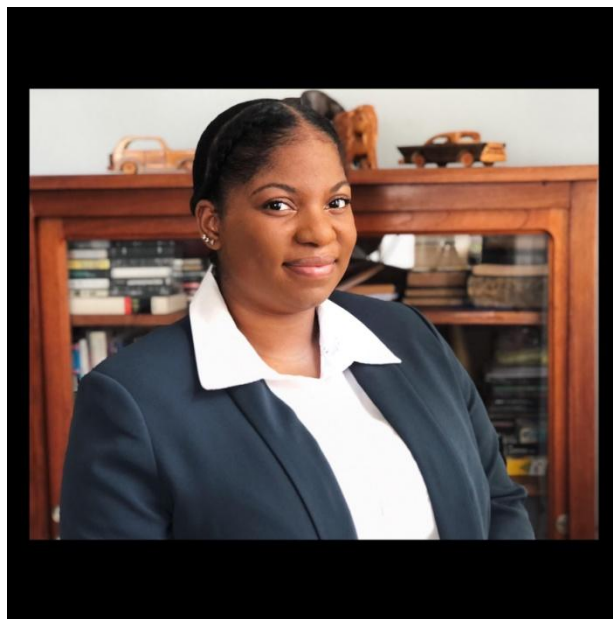
(Contributor: Chelsea Stephenson, Research Officer, ACIJ/JMB)

ACIJ/JMB HOSTS PUBLIC LECTURE - RETURN TO ROOTS: HERBS AND HEALING IN JAMAICA

The African Caribbean Institute of Jamaica/ Jamaica Memory Bank (ACIJ/JMB) hosted a public lecture titled "Return to Roots: Herbs and Healing in Jamaica", presented by Ms. Chelsea Stephenson, Research Officer, ACIJ/JMB. The lecture was aired on December 9, 2021 at 10:00 a.m. on the ACIJ/JMB's YouTube platform.

The lecture explored the traditional medicine practised by our West African ancestors, the herbal medicine that is practised today, as well as the common herbs that exist in Jamaica and their medicinal uses.

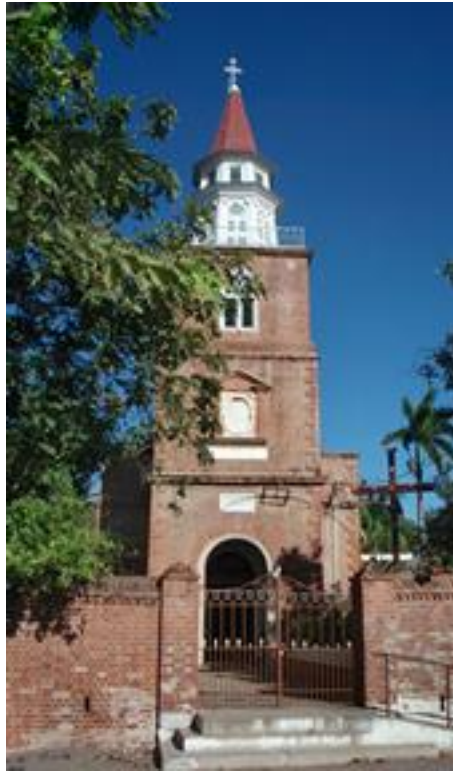
Ms. Stephenson noted that, for centuries, herbal medicine has been a major part of the health care system of both rural and urban populations in Jamaica, and that the knowledge of which plants are good for what ailments has been passed down through generations. She mentioned that the enslaved Africans brought this knowledge with them to Jamaica and, with the lack of a proper health care system provided by their masters, they had to rely on herbal medicine during the harsh conditions of enslavement. Ms. Stephenson stated that these medical practices have persisted to contemporary times and have adapted with new environments around the world.



Ms. Chelsea Stephenson

A HISTORY OF THE SPANISH TOWN CATHEDRAL

The Spanish Town Cathedral, (also called the Cathedral of St. Jago de La Vega), in Spanish Town, St. Catherine, was erected on the grounds of the Spanish Chapel of the Red Cross, which was built by the Spaniards around 1525. The Spanish Chapel of the Red Cross was one of the first Roman Catholic cathedrals established in the New World.



The Spanish Town Cathedral

When the British captured the island, the soldiers, under the direction of Oliver Cromwell, English general and statesman, destroyed the Spanish Chapel of the Red Cross. However, the chapel was soon rebuilt in 1666 on the original foundations and with much of the old materials, but as an Anglican church for the parish of St. Catherine.

The new Anglican church was shattered by a hurricane of 1712, but within two years (in 1714), it was substantially rebuilt. It later fell into disrepair and was restored in 1901. In 1907, it was again destroyed, this time by an earthquake, and was restored in 1908.

Despite turbulent times, and centuries of weathering of its rose-red brick, the church became the cathedral of the Jamaican diocese in 1843. The church is dedicated to St. James, the patron saint of Spain, and is the first Anglican cathedral outside of England and the oldest cathedral in the former British colonies. After Fort Charles, the Spanish Town Cathedral is the oldest English foundation in Jamaica.

GLORY DAYS

For centuries, many of the famous people of Spanish Town worshipped at the Spanish Town Cathedral. The cathedral was intimately associated with all the events and personalities in the early history of the island. Many residents of the town were baptised, married, and laid to rest there. The cathedral's baptismal and marriage registers date

back to 1668 and the burial register dates from 1671. Many of the well-known personalities of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were buried in the churchyard.

The Spanish Town Cathedral is a storehouse of elaborate marble monuments dedicated to several governors of the island and their wives. Lavish monuments grace the walls of the cathedral, which were executed by the best sculptors of the time. Those employed included the famous English sculptor, John Bacon. Of the Bacon monuments, that to the Earl of Effingham, a former governor, and his countess, adorns the cathedral. There is also a monument to the Countess of Elgin whose husband was once the governor of Jamaica. The monument to the Countess of Elgin was the work of Scottish sculptor, Sir John Steell.

The Spanish Town Cathedral has, undoubtedly, stood the test of time. Its glorious history, coupled with its antiquated, red, brick architecture, has made it one of the significant and outstanding landmarks which have remained in the capital of Spanish Town throughout the years.



Side view of the Spanish Town Cathedral

SOURCE

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