
Three Residents' Perspectives

St Joseph, Trinidad and Tobago, in the First Half of the Twentieth Century

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Abstract

This essay in local history examines St Joseph in the first half of the twentieth century. It draws on the testimonies of three long-term residents: the author's mother, who committed to paper recollections of her early life; his godmother with whom he recorded oral interviews; and the Catholic parish priest, from 1903 to 1940, who left behind two untitled notebooks containing censuses of the parish undertaken in 1911 and 1940–1941. Resting on these four sources, the study offers a partial history of St Joseph, with rich, colourful details expected of local history, and framed within the context of Trinidad and Tobago's history.

This essay in local history examines St Joseph, in the British West Indian colony of Trinidad and Tobago (hereafter Trinidad), in the first half of the twentieth century. St Joseph holds a unique place in the history of Trinidad. Located in the north of Trinidad, it is the oldest town in the island, having been established by the Spanish in 1592; it also served as the first capital of Spanish Trinidad. The Spanish, who had claimed Trinidad since 1498, only effectively occupied the island a century later when they brought into being the rudimentary town of St Joseph (then known as San José de Oruña). St Joseph ceased being the capital when the governor and then the *Cabildo* or town council moved to Port of Spain in 1757 and 1784, respectively.

The oral and written testimonies of three residents of St Joseph have been used as the foundation for this study. Between 2009 and 2013, Tilma Andrews-Taitt, committed to paper, recollections of her early life in St Joseph. In 2010, oral interviews with Beryl Marcellin-Welsh were conducted and the transcripts of these oral testimonies were prepared. Born in 1929 and 1927, respectively, these women have always lived in St Joseph, and within the extended family they were known as racon-