MNT News

MNT and St Patrick’s Week Events

MNT hosted a function at its headquarters in Olveston on March 12, 2014 to officially open the St Patrick’s Exhibition depicting this year’s theme, “Our Heritage: A Potpourri of Cultures.” Reverend Dr Joan Delsol Meade, wife of the Premier, Hon. Rueben T. Meade, was the guest speaker at this event that attracted dozens of people. H.E. the Governor, Adrian Davis and Hon. Colin Riley gave remarks. The Governor’s wife, Sujue Davis, and other government officials also attended. Lady Eudora Fergus, former MNT Director, cut the ribbon to declare the exhibition open.

The audience was treated to an African themed fashion show with some garments sponsored by Africana Fashions and other outfits provided by well wishers on the MNT team. Models included Montserratians, Ghanaians, Nigerians, Zimbabweans, and North Americans, who were all delighted to walk down the ramp in front of an appreciative crowd. The guests were treated to snacks and to what is now a tradition at all Trust events, bush teas from the MNT herbal garden.

The focus of this year’s St Patrick’s Exhibition was on national symbols and the national song, highlighting the work of Sir Howard Fergus, the author, and Dr George Irish, the musical arranger of the song—“Motherland”. A collection of their literary work was also showcased in the exhibition. On display were over 50 books written by both distinguished sons of Montserrat.

The national symbols (Flag, National Bird, National Tree, the National Crest, the Shamrock) and other displays highlighted the contributions of various cultures (African, Irish, British, North American and Montserratians) to Montserrat’s music, dance, cuisine, and economic development.

The exhibition remained open until June and visitors were able to appreciate the richness of the cultural diversity Montserrat enjoys. Montserratians living abroad and visitors from the neighbouring islands, Canada, United States of America and the United Kingdom were on Montserrat to enjoy the week-long Festival which included the 2nd Montserrat African Music Festival.
ST PATRICK’S HIKES AND EXHIBITIONS

ST PATRICK’S FREEDOM HIKE

During the week of St Patrick’s Day, the MNT hosted its Annual Freedom Hike and Breakfast. It was a tremendous opportunity for residents and visitors to enjoy an early morning walk through the Centre Hills. James ‘Scriber’ Daley, renowned for his incredible knowledge of Montserrat’s trails, led the enthusiastic participants from the MNT Offices to Friths and then up the hill to the MVO. The walk continued to Spring Ghaut, Hope Mountain, then to Duck Pond and finally back to the Montserrat National Trust Office.

Around 80 persons enjoyed the exercise and at the end were treated to a healthy breakfast donated by friends and members of the Trust. It included duckna, saltfish and Johnny cakes, chicken, vegetables and salads, bush teas and a wide range of locally-made fruit juices. Hikers used the opportunity to re-connect or to meet first-time visitors to the island. They also had the chance to view the Exhibition at the Trust Headquarters and visit the Gift shop.

PLYMOUTH DISPLAY

Many people still find it difficult to visit the ruins of the capital city Plymouth after the volcanic crisis of 1997. However, the Trust, whose core objectives are to preserve the past, and protect our present heritage eventually enriching the future for generations, mounted a pictorial exhibition of Plymouth’s famous buildings, pre- and post-volcano.

The exhibition helps both residents and visitors to understand the devastation of Montserrat’s only town and appreciate the mammoth task being undertaken to rebuild Montserrat. Local students also made regular visits for a glimpse of what is part of their geography and history experience.

Over 50 students from Jennings Secondary School in Antigua and 35 students from Antigua Junior Wesleyan School visited the Trust as part of their field trip to Montserrat. They were able to appreciate the extent of the damage caused by the volcano. They also had the opportunity to look at the tanks holding the mountain chickens and gain knowledge of the conservation work involved in the Mountain Chicken Release Programme.

IN DE YARD and OTHER DISPLAYS

In addition to material described on the first page about national symbols and the national song, there were several displays at the MNT History Center. A replica of the typical backyard of a 1960’s Montserratian home showed breadfruit roasting in a coal pot and duckna cooking on a wood fire. There was information on making cassava bread on a cassava griddle over the fire hearth. Also in the reconstructed yard, tea bush or medicinal herbs could be seen drying, items that were often sent abroad to relatives.

On display was the contribution real estate development made to the island from the 1960s and the contribution of Sir George Martin and his involvement in promoting Montserrat through Music Recordings at Air Studios.

Musical instruments from Africa, the Marimba, Hosho and Mbira, were loaned to the Exhibition by Ephraim Magosha from Zimbabwe and one could trace the influence of these on the string band instruments currently used on Montserrat.
The Montserrat National Trust collaborated with the Department of Environment and other stakeholders during this year’s release of captive bred mountain chickens from Jersey and London Zoos in the UK into the forests of Montserrat. This was the fourth release of mountain chickens (frogs) (*leptodactylus fallax*) into their former habitat. The frogs, on arrival from the UK by airplane, were initially housed at a temporary holding facility at the Montserrat National Trust premises for a period of 4 days. This allowed them to recover from the long journey, and also enabled experts to assess their health and ensure they were in the best possible condition prior to the release.

During the eruption of the Soufriere Hills volcano, large areas of forest habitat were being destroyed, and in 1999 a set of 13 frogs were sent to Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust in Jersey, U.K. for safe keeping. More disaster struck in 2009 when there was the discovery of the deadly chytrid fungus which started to threaten the lives of many frogs on island, and so a second set of frogs was captured and sent to Jersey.

Various awareness and conservation education activities were conducted around the release, with the aim of informing the public about project activities, raising awareness about the mountain chicken and chytrid fungus, and fostering a sense of ownership and pride in the mountain chicken frog.

Originally from South America, the mountain chicken can now only be found on the islands of Dominica and Montserrat. It thrives best in wet areas that are heavily forested and reaches an elevation of 1000 feet but can sometimes be found lying around just below that level near ghauts and streams. They are one of the largest native frogs found in the Lesser Antilles.

The mountain chicken has been a very important species for Montserrat. In the past the frog legs were hunted and served as a delicacy in many local restaurants.

An exhibition was mounted in one of the rooms at the MNT with a dual purpose: -

- to introduce the mountain chicken frog to visitors and tell the story of this frog in Montserrat
- to introduce the work of the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust and the Department of Environment together with international partners to save the mountain chicken frog from extinction.

**MNT GIFT SHOPS**

For finely crafted gifts, a visit to the Trust’s gift shops at Olveston and Little Bay is a must. Items include: t-shirts, sea island cotton products, key rings, fabric necklaces, woolen dolls, books by locally celebrated authors, colorful summer dresses, hot sauces and chutneys, plus much more.
MNT RECEIVES ENDANGERED ARCHIVES GRANT

MNT has been awarded a grant from the British Library to address endangered archives on Montserrat. This grant is normally issued where the archives are under threat of rapid deterioration.

Montserrat’s archives have suffered from harsh environmental conditions, natural disasters and a general indifference to preserving the country’s documents. Some of these documents and photographs have information on family history and important historical events. There are newspapers and legal documents such as deeds, court cases, and reports which would assist researchers in putting together information on the island’s history.

The Public Library, National Trust, government departments, churches and families possessing documents that are deteriorating rapidly can benefit from this initiative. The Pilot Project will firstly identify the archives, their location and condition of storage. Some of the materials will be selected and the visiting archivist, Nigel Sadler, will then train at least two persons to properly handle, scan and record these digitally. This will ensure easier access for documentation and research.

SAMPLE DOCUMENTS IN MNT’S ARCHIVES

From set of manuscripts written by T. Savage English around 1930

ROOFING REPAIRS COMPLETE

The Trust is delighted to report that our roof at headquarters in Olveston no longer leaks. We are indebted to the individuals and organizations who contributed to the project. Work commenced in February and continued into early March. Many thanks to: Ryan Investments Ltd, Johnny Wyke, Ashoks, Jacque Ryan Enterprises, Ryan’s Construction, and all other donors who were mentioned in our last edition of the Newsletter. We are continuing our fund raising to put a new coat of paint on the building.

MNT BOTANICAL GARDEN

The Orchid House is home to local and hybrid orchids. Montserrat has over 24 different types of orchids, of both epiphytic and terrestrial varieties. Many thanks to the Trinidad and Tobago Orchid Society, Daphne Cassell, Sarita Francis, Linda Green, Brigitte Beatty, Donna Henry and Coreen from Boston for donating to the Orchids House.

Montserrat has an endemic orchid known as the epidendrum montserratense which blooms between December and March. The orchid can be seen growing in the Orchid House along with many more orchids found on island such as the epidendrum ciliare (eyelash orchid), cyclopogon elatus, spathoglottis spicata and the tetracamara elegans. Other orchids in the house include tohumnia urrophylla, the “dancing lady” and the brassavola cuclata (pencil orchid).

MNT HERITAGE RADIO SHOW

The Trust is exploring more avenues to make the public aware of the Trust’s programs including a new 30-minute radio show that started in March. Its main objective is to inform and entertain through a well-researched template of music and information that explores Montserrat’s history. Some interesting live interviews are held with prominent contributors to Montserrat’s socio-cultural development.

This initiative has been well received with many people taking part in our quiz segment each week. Tune in to ZJB Radio every Thursday at 3:30 pm to join hosts, Bridget Gavanga from the Trust and DJ, Leonard Wade.

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