

MARTINIQUE – The Best Kept Secret in the Caribbean

St. Pierre : Up to May 8th 1902 it was Paris in the Caribbean

Compagnie des Antilles. — Propriétaire de la marque **Rhum Chauvet**.



23. — Vue d'ensemble de Saint-Pierre (côté sud).

« A town of a thousand and one nights » - Lafcadio Hearn
(Irish travelling journalist & chronicler)

Photograph taken at the end of the 19th century



Hartmann phot.

Imp. Lemercier, Paris.

Eug. Cicéri lith.

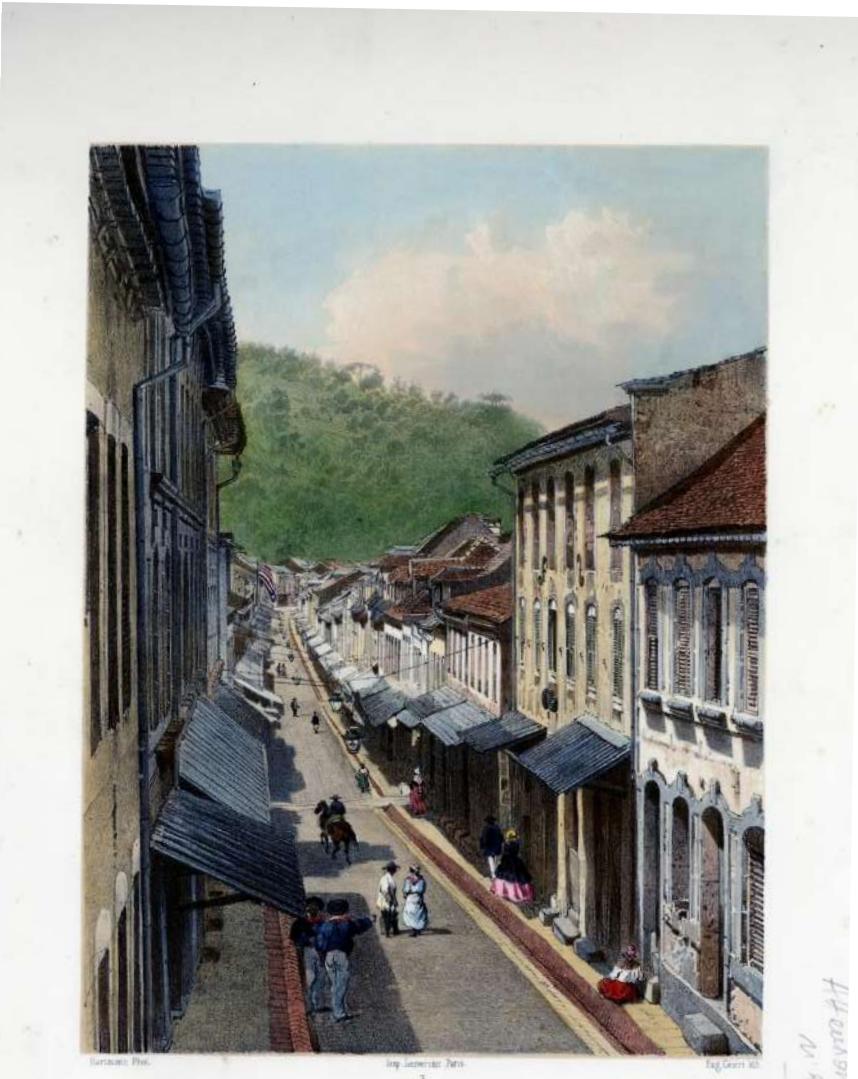
VUE DE LA PLACE BERTIN PRISE DU QUAI LAROUCERIE
St. Pierre Martinique.

Place Bertin on the waterfront - Lithography made from a photograph taken ~1860.
Barrels were the “containers” of the day and the measure of a ship’s cargo capacity.

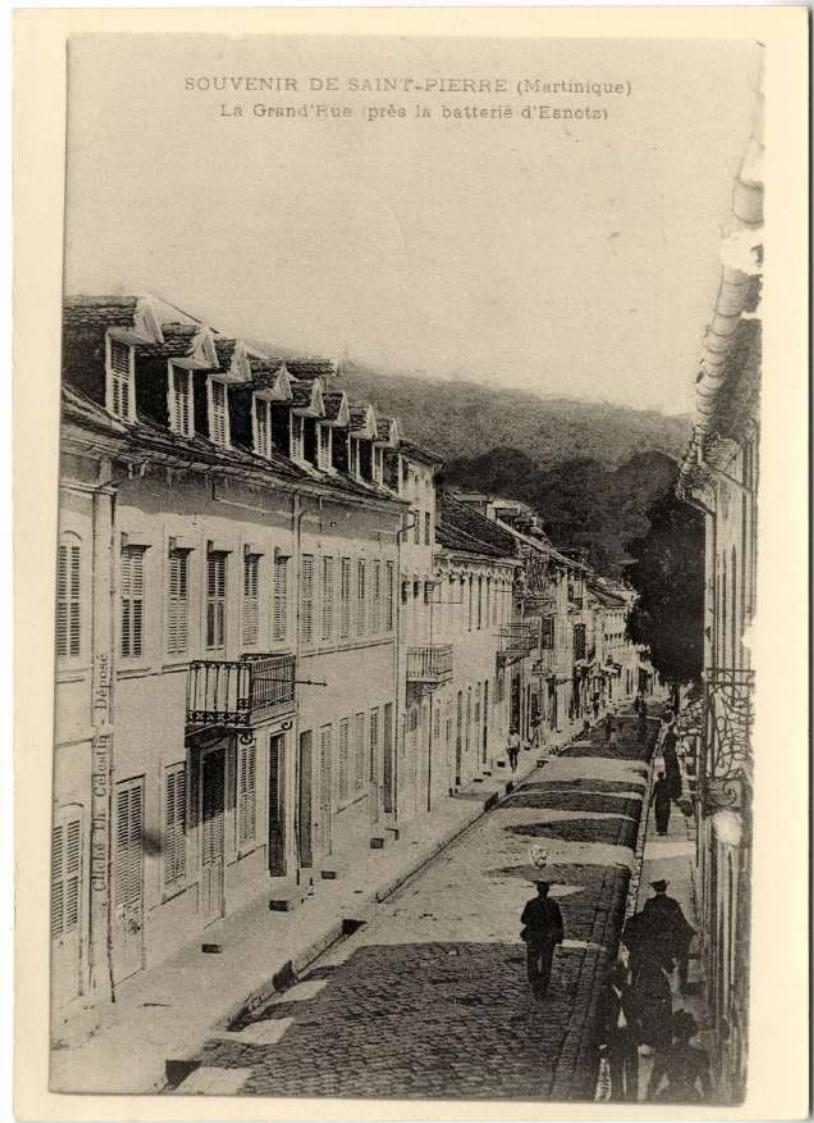
KEY FACTS

- Established in 1635 by the French buccaneer Pierre Belain d'Esnyambuc.
- Success due to being on the sailing routes between Europe & the New World ; the depth of the bay so close to shore ; relatively protected harbor from the Atlantic swell & permitting easy access by sail. A success sustained by its extensive business structures, port administration and its life style.
 - Steamships later preferred Fort de France as a base (safety from storms, naval & port infrastructures, space,..) but St. Pierre was an obligatory stop for all vessels.
- A large industrial base was established :
 - 16 rum distilleries (principally industrial rum from molasses but also the traditional French rum made from the cane juice consumed locally).
 - Manufacturer of fertilizer; Steel foundry; Wood factory; Ice making factory; Modern centralized sugar factory (usine Guerin).
 - Running water everywhere in the town
- Buildings made of stone delivered a strong impression of rock-solidity.

TYPICAL STREETS OF THE TOWN CENTER



VUE DE LA GRANDE RUE DU MOUILLAGE PRISSE DU BALCON VIVÉ
View of the main street of the port seen from the balcony of Vivé family



Main Street: Left - Lithography from photo ~1860 ; Right photo late 19th century

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE REBUILT TO THE ORIGINAL



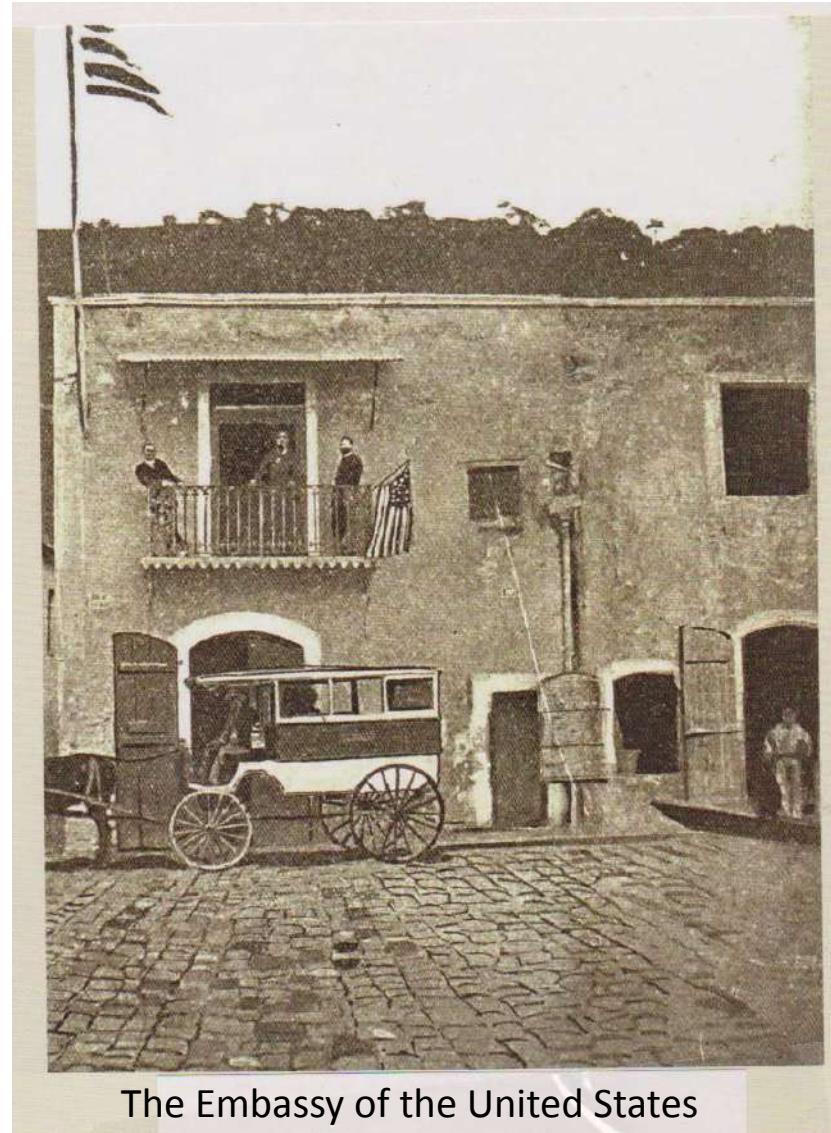
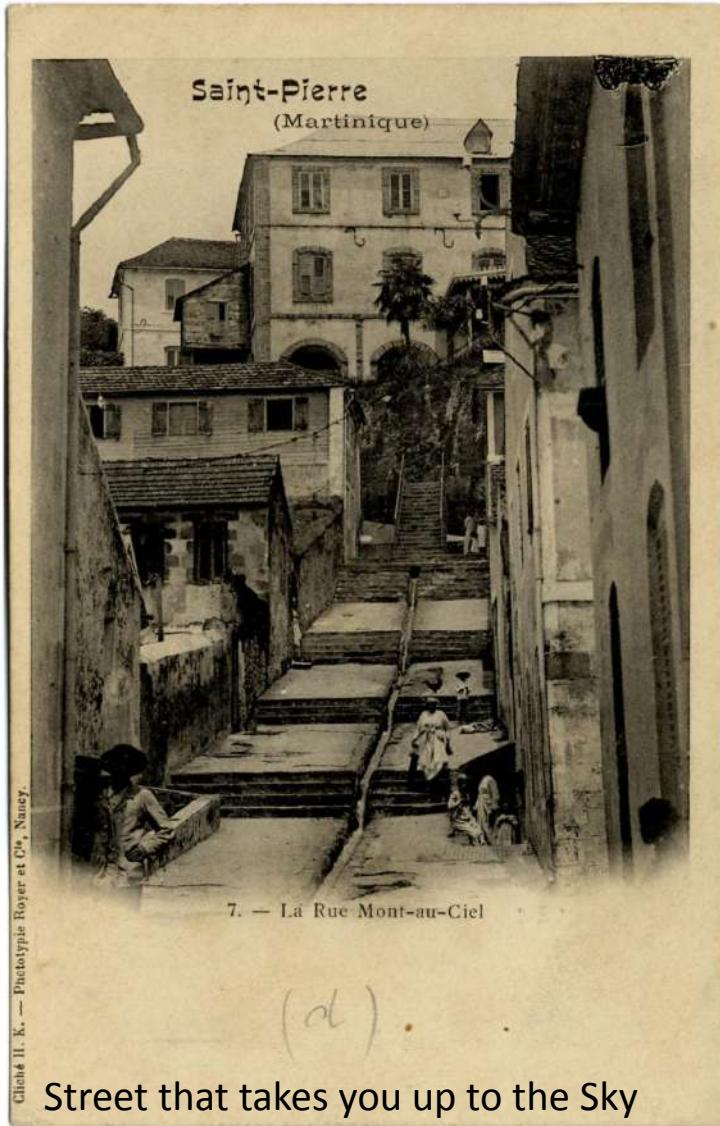
Chamber of Commerce or "Stock" Market; Since restored.

Note: To the left is the Horse drawn tramway which went from North to South of the town.

MARTINIQUE – The Best Kept Secret in the Caribbean

St. PIERRE - KEY FACTS

- Houses of 2 – 3 stories built in stone established by plateaus rising from the shore line up to the hills, painted in clair yellow with shutters in striking green or grey-blue - a paradise for an aquarelle artist.
- 26.000 inhabitants + 7.000 people in the surrounding countryside representing ~20% of the population of Martinique.
- Contained ~70% of Martinique's elite; merchants, industrials, intellectuals,... its cathedral,..
- 3 newspapers; several banks; Lloyds insurance agency..; 6 consulates including the USA; 800 seat theatre created by 4 wealthy businessmen; an active Astronomical society; a horse driven tramway..
- Its renowned carnival brought visitors from the USA and the rest of the Caribbean who were a significant source of revenue for the town





Hartmann Phot.

Imp. Lemercier Paris.

Eug. Cicéri lith.

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VUE DE LA MAISON DE SANTÉ ET HABITATION PECOUD PRISE DU BOULEVARD DE LA COMÉDIE

Lithograph from 1860. View of the nursing home and the Pecoud house, taken from the Boulevard de la Comédie.

KEY FACTS

- Principal port and distribution center for the Caribbean islands (lesser antilles) with ~440 hundreds of vessels / year.
 - In number English vessels were in the lead in 1897, followed by French, Italian, American, and Dutch flags.
 - The lungs of the colony : ~100% of imports and exports for Martinique distributed by small craft along the coast (eg. Fort de France) & to the surrounding islands.
 - By comparison, Fort de France was the administrative center of Martinique due to its naval base with its defense infrastructures & security from hurricanes was increasingly attracting the new steamships. But its population was only ~7.000 people with a water supply & general living conditions of poor quality.
 - St. Pierre was accessible principally by sea & with difficulty by land via only two roads that were not paved. A massive evacuation of the population was as such not conceivable nor was it conceived as this kind of volcanic eruption was not yet understood.

12. - Collect. A. Benoit (Martinique)
Vue générale de SAINT-PIERRE (Martinique) avant la Catastrophe du 8 Mai 1902



Bay of St. Pierre looking toward Mt Pelé - Vessels were tied by their stern to the waterfront



MARTINIQUE. — Rade de Saint-Pierre.

Looking to the South - A busy Harbor with the Vessels tied by their stern to the shore

The Bertin square at St Pierre before the catastrophe



North side of the waterfront – Lighthouse seen above & partially hidden by the trees.
Barrels were the “containers” of the day and were used as the measure of a ship’s cargo capacity.



SAINTE-PIERRE DE LA MARTINIQUE — LA PLACE BERTIN --- FONTAINE AGNÈS

Water Fountain Agnès, Place Bertin on the waterfront (near the existing dock).
Note the electric street lamps and the electric pole.

**Docks & cranes used for the transfer of goods from the ocean vessels to the shore
and onward to other ports along the coast and to neighbouring islands.**



Left: Small steamer to take the goods to the coastal towns. Note: Wooden "cranes" on the docks to transfer barrels from /to the boats

KEY FACTS

- St. Pierre built its society on the basis of being at the leading end of ideas, industrial & medical techniques; hard working ethic; dignity & elegance; & the vibrancy found in a totally mixed population.
 - 6 different clubs or circles for men and 2 for women; 3 maçonic loges
 - 10 charitable organizations; Leading edge Sanitary hospital for ~250 people
- World-class Botanical Garden & laboratory established in 1803
- Running water in the houses, on the streets; many water fountains all providing a clean cool environment & constant sound of flowing water.
- Electric light and telephones in use.
- And all of this in a melting pot : Separation of the Church & State with the public school system open to everyone; Conflict and violence of the transition from a slave society ended in 1848; The arrival of democratic voting; The sugar price crises with the rebound to produce rum – St. Pierre became known as the capital of rum with some 16 refineries.

Compagnie des Antilles. — Propriétaire de la marque **Rhum Chauvet.**



24. — Élections municipales à Saint-Pierre (Martinique).

Municipal elections in St. Pierre

SAINT PIERRE, MARTINIQUE – The Paris & Venice of the Caribbean

Héliogravure R. Lé. Demare. Paris.



SAINT-PIERRE-LA-MARTINIQUE. — Fête nautique du 14 Juillet.

14th of July - National Day – Nautical Festivities



SAINT-PIERRE-LA-MARTINIQUE. — Place du Marché.

The Market Square



Harmann, phot.

Imp. Lemercier, Paris

Eug. Cicéri, lith.

4.

VUE DE LA RIVIÈRE DU FORT, PRISE DU PONT DE PIERRE
St Pierre Martinique .

~1860's - Washing clothes in the river: A hotbed of gossip between the women washing & the spectators on the bridge. The quality of the washing (whiteness of the linen) was known even in Paris.

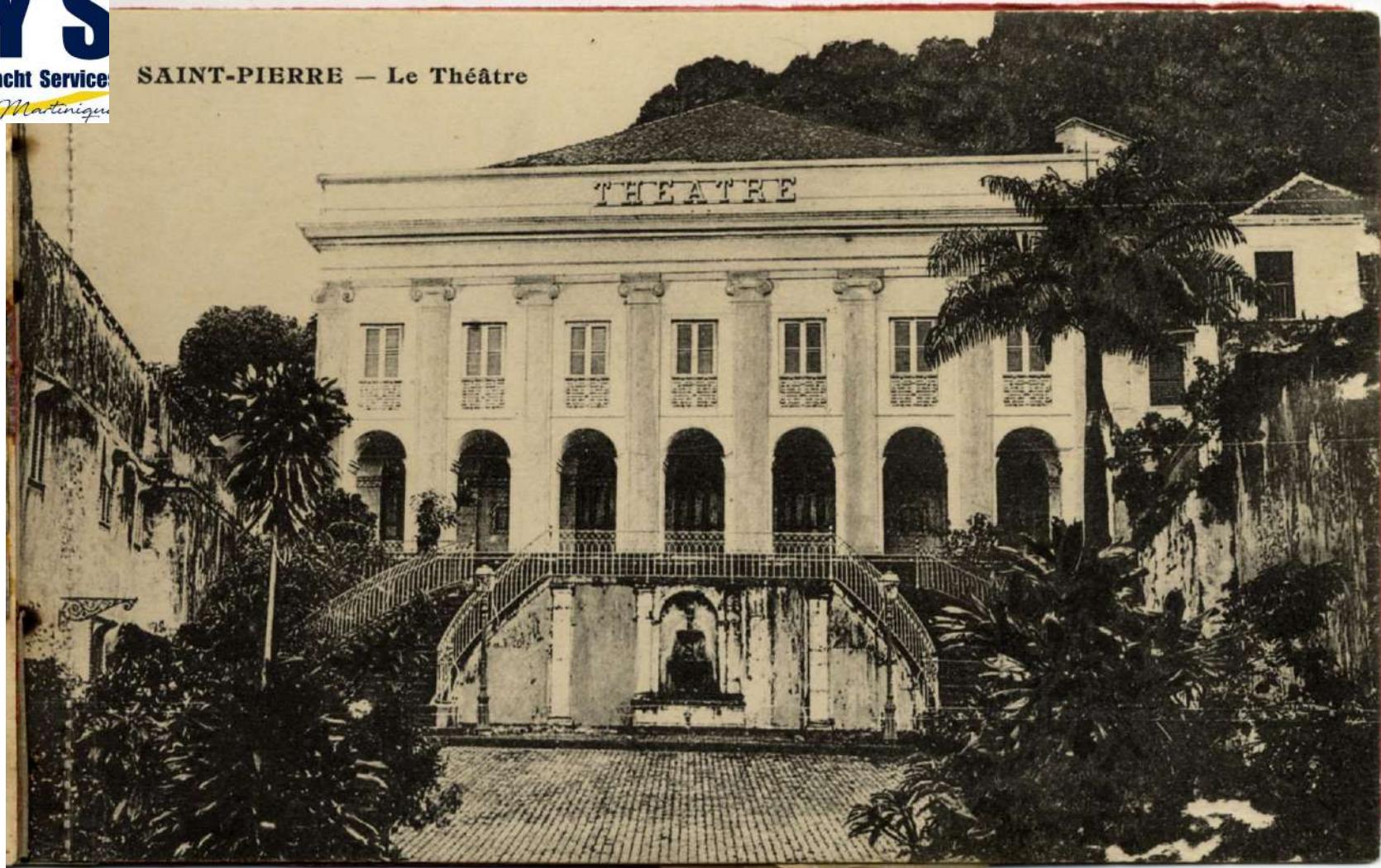
ST. PIERRE'S CARNAVAL – Renowned far & wide

- The Créole songs (« Chansons Créoles ») were extremely popular and of the same nature as the « Calypso's » also very popular in Trinidad & the English islands:
 - Made fun of events: political, people, sexual transgressions with very vivid & pertinent descriptions that were never shaken off!
 - Ex. An American – Colby – came to show off he could fly in a balloon to 5.000 ft. Balloon flew but split & he ended up in the bay of St. Pierre. “Colby monté, Colby désann ..” For several years any such event became a Colby story.
 - All sung to dance catching rhythms of the biguine, mazurka and polka with the women swinging their hips...
- St. Pierre saying “We do not become artists; we are born artists”

ST. PIERRE'S CARNAVAL – Renowned far & wide

- Carnaval began one month before Ash Wednesday
- Floats were in mid Lent
 - The float « The Honeybee » won the last one
- The Theatre was the centre of cultural and societal events in St. Pierre:
 - Visiting Opera troupes enriched the music scene as their classical music was converted into popular dance rythms:
 - Le Trouvère by Verdi gave birth to the Mazurka dance song « Ô ma patrie, Ô chère Espagne »
 - La Favorite by Donezitti brought forth « Tjé mwen ka fé mwen mal » (My heart hurts me).
 - It was a hotbed of carnaval dancing and encounters; in its lodges many virtues were lost....

SAINT-PIERRE — Le Théâtre



The 800 seat theatre, initially private then later owned by the town, occupied a central place in the life of St. Pierre. Visiting groups from Paris came with a reduced number of artists which were completed with local actors and musicians. This induced the transfer of skills to the local population generating new musical creations. The place for the giving school prizes, local theatrical performances & dancing parties, to the bacchanal of carnival & lost virtues in its lodges.

ST. PIERRE'S CARNAVAL – Renowned far & wide

Sunday gras, those with masks started to collect together by lunchtime, quickly joined by all and sundry and in a variety of costumes from the sophisticated to the bare minimum. Three competing musical groups appeared and the dancing and bacchanal went on late into the night.

- Monday was in red devoted to the devils & witches, all dominated by « Le Vieux » devil covered in mirrors and followed by a witch dragging a cooking pot attached to her leg – beware of being seduced by her as you risk to lose your life ! Followed by a horde of children and adults dancing and making frightening guttural cries.
- Mardi Gras by 2 PM everyone appeared in their most beautiful or simplest of costumes & masks, all expressing themselves in the folly of carnaval...
- Wednesday everyone was in black & white and the « Bois-Bois » was carried and burned at midnight ending carnaval and the return of order.



Typical Crôle Costumes

“BIGUINE” - A MUSICAL RYTHME CREATED IN ST. PIERRE

This musical rhythm & dance was created in St. Pierre and underlies many of the carnival songs “Chanson Créoles” for which St. Pierre became renowned. These songs made fun of life, its people, events, and the most pertinent ones lasted many years.

Captured on film during the 100th anniversary of St. Pierre in 2002 the film covers the encounter of the country “bélé” music based on the flute and the drum with the classical music emanating from St. Pierre’s theatre and its wealthy homes. The visiting opera & theatre troops came with a reduced set of actors & musicians incorporating local people to complete the performance troop so setting the stage for a transfer of these artistic talents.

Over time the very adept but illiterate musicians using their musically attuned ears first started using these European instruments to play the classical music & dance that the wealthy wanted. Then when gathered with their own people these classical rhythms were blended with their traditional “belé” music adding the sounds of the clarinet, trombone & trumpet instruments creating the Biguine dance music for which St. Pierre is renowned.

Moutbèlhard. - Imp. et Lith. Victor BARNIER.



PLACE DE SAINT-PIERRE DE LA MARTINIQUE
Dernière fête avant la catastrophe du 8 Mai 1902.

300 état

Souvenir
de Port

Last public party on the waterfront in St. Pierre

February - May 1902 – The region trembles

- February: Earthquakes start in Central America ; volcanoes follow.
- March: sesimic activity started in St. Vincent in the Soufrière volcano. The Caribs in the North recalling the impact of the explosion of 1812 want to move their village.
- 24th April Mt Pelé begins to emit vapor from its summit
- 27th April – first round of elections for Martinique's representation in the French House of Representatives in Paris
- 30th April – St. Pierre trembles in a strong earthquake
- 2nd May – Huge black cloud obscures the sun over St. Pierre; ash & sulphurous gases descend on the area
- 3rd May – Volcanic activity gets stronger; first wave of ash & water descends
- 5th May – Sugar factory (Usine Guerin) to the North of the town is pushed into the sea – 30 lives lost
- 6th - 7th, pyrotechnic displays, violent thunderstorms denote the impending disaster. The authorities remain convinced that lava flows will not reach St. Pierre. The Governor of the island & his wife arrive in St. Pierre to show his confidence. People from the countryside continue to arrive seeking the perceived protection of St. Pierre.
- 7th May ~15:00 – St. Vincent - Soufrière mountain erupts with ~2.000 victims.



H. Rauwens, éditeur, Gand.

Panorama de St-Pierre (Martinique) avec le Mont Pelé, qui fit éruption le 7 Mai 1902.

7 May : Mont Pelé smoking prior to the eruption – St. Pierre built in “stone” and far from the expected lava flows was felt to be a place of refuge.

8th May 1902 – Ascension Day – A tale of fact & fiction

- The ceremony of Communion maintained at 08:00 despite all the volcanic activity.
- Louise (who lost her husband in the Guerin factory on May 5th) is up at 5 AM as usual to go to work carrying her tray of goods to sell. She prepares all the beautiful clothes for her daughter Julciane's communion - her grandmother will supervise her dressing.
- At ~7:45, Julciane, her father, his wife, her grandmother with the other families enter the cathedral.
- ~08:00, Mont Pelé explodes sending in the direction of the town a high speed cloud of heated gas, ash & stones annihilating all that is in its path. ~28.000 people die instantly.
- Louise is knocked out near the beach in the neighboring village of the Carbet; Her husband's best friend finds her alive and carries her to his home.
- Days later they enter the remnants of the cathedral and find her daughter, her father, his wife and her grandmother in a protective embrace – their bodies were spared the direct consequences of the blast ; the overheated gas had destroyed their lungs.
- They later marry and re-start a family to replace those that they both lost at St Pierre.

Source: "Le bonheur l'attendait ailleurs" (Happiness was waiting for her elsewhere), a novel by Leo Ursulet, historian and organizer of the scientific conference of the 100th anniversary of St. Pierre.

D Y S
louglas Yacht Service
La Martinique

MARTINIQUE St PIERRE
Rue Lucy Photographie prise le 10. Mai 1902



CUNGE Photographe Fort-de-France,

Lucy Street on the 10th of May, 1902

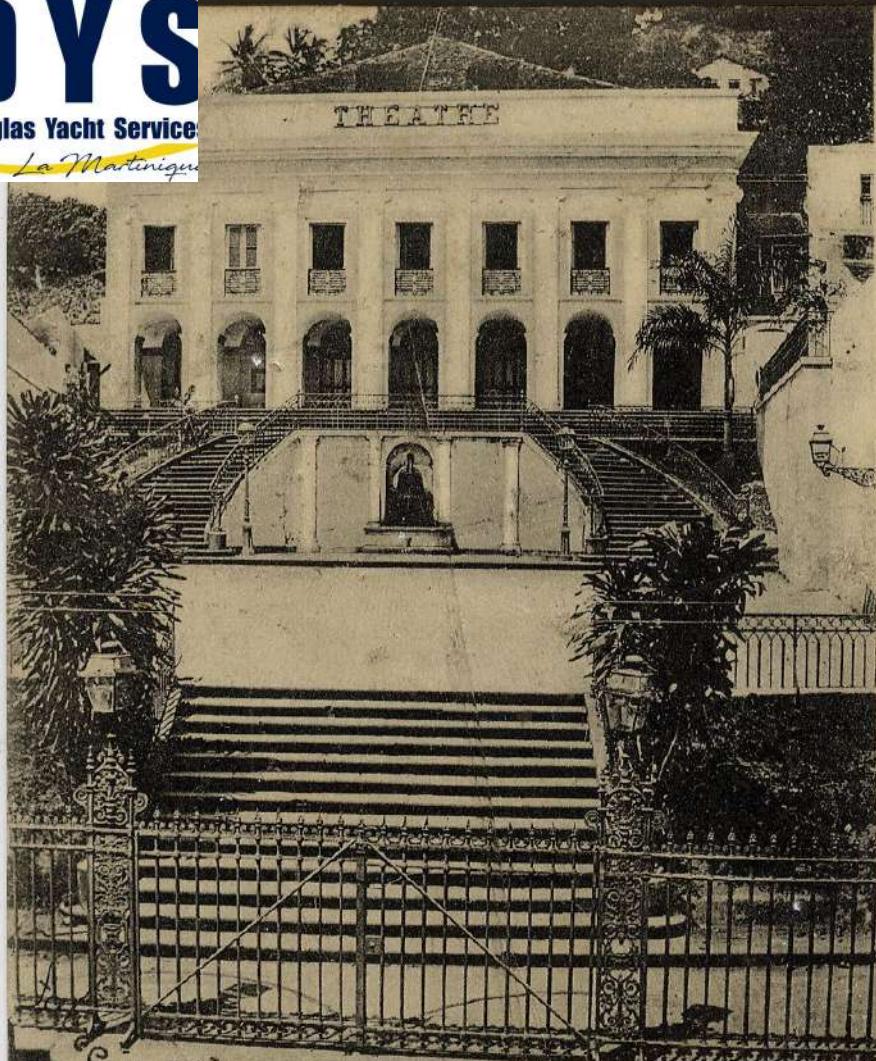


Photo. Fabre

MARTINIQUE — Le Théâtre de SAINT-PIERRE

Avant le 8 Mai 1902

Leboullanger, éditeur, Fort de France

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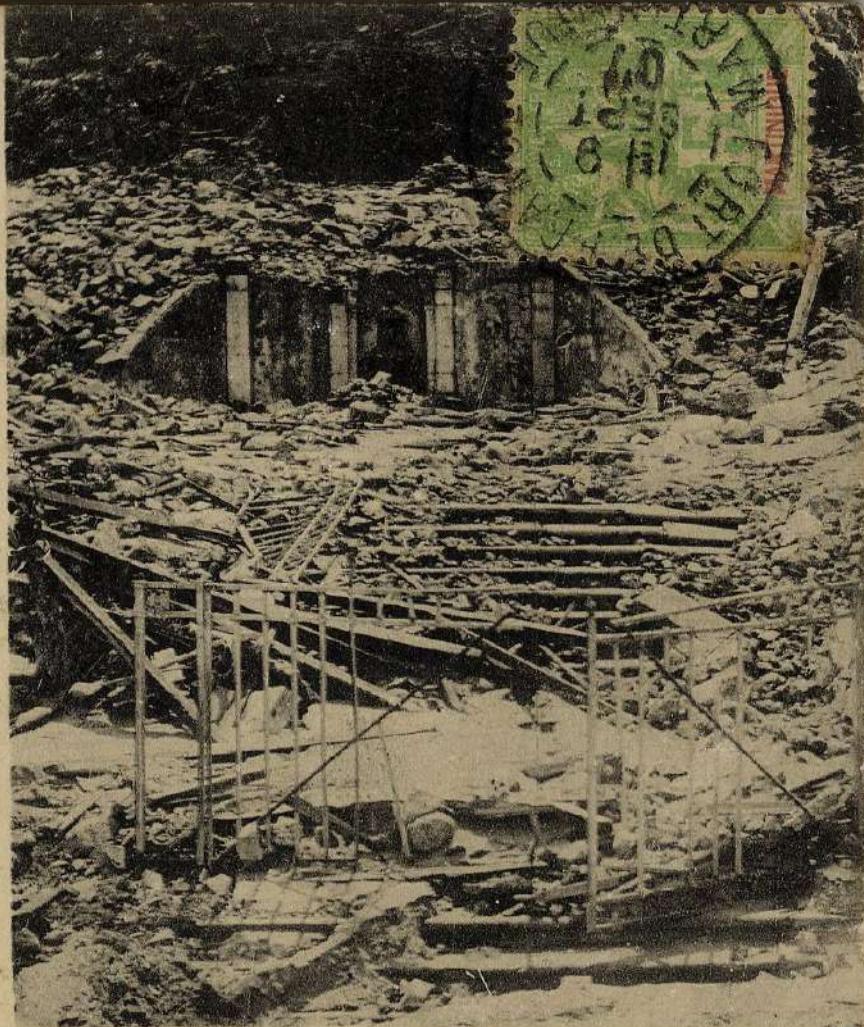


Photo. Symphorien

MARTINIQUE — Le Théâtre de SAINT-PIERRE

Après le 8 Mai 1902

The Theatre — Before and after the 8th of May, 1902

Pelé Mountain (height 1.400m) – View from the North
Dormant since 1932; under scientific surveillance

