

Leapers' Hill

*Student Activity Handout:
1660s Anonymous History*



Field Trip Guide

*Grenada National Museum: Teacher Kit
Adventures Outside the Museum*

1660s Anonymous History of the Island of Grenada in America, 1649-59

The French settled Grenada in March 1649. Within eight months of settlement, they became embroiled in what would be a decade-long battle against the Island Caribs for control of the island. Following repeated clashes with the Island Caribs that resulted in the deaths of many colonists, the French sought ways to rid the island of its natives, or at least kill as many as they could. That chance came in 1650.

The story of Leapers' Hill begins with the Island Carib called "Thomas," who wanted to marry the daughter of "Captain Duquesne" (the chief). His love's brother (the chief's son), however, rejected the offer. Thomas tried to convince him to give in, but the man refused and in a fit of rage, Thomas killed him! Realizing what would happen to him when the Chief found out, Thomas ran away to Martinique. While in Martinique, he approached Governor Duparquet (governor of all the French colonies) and told him that if he wanted to rid Grenada of the Island Caribs, Thomas could "deliver" them. He said he knew of a place in the north of the island where many of them get together to drink. Believing God had sent him this favor, Du Parquet takes the Amerindian's advice and travels to Grenada. In the afternoon of Monday, 30 May 1650 a force of 60 men, including Thomas, sailed from Port Louis, along the west coast of the island, and on to the northern tip.

"They dropped anchor that evening near a hill called "aux Sauteurs" for the reason that I will tell, across from the bay Duquesne, where everybody landed under cover of night. But before going any further they sent the Savage [Thomas] with two Frenchmen to check if the Savages were there, what they were doing; in other words: the situation. They came back quickly, as if carried by the wings of the wind, and reported that it could never be better, but that they had to hurry to surround them all so no one could escape. They were drinking their wine and feasting, not thinking what might happen to them. This was done, and since they were all in their greatest gaiety, they [the French] discharged their muskets on them. This troubled their wine, and suddenly changed their joy into sadness. Who moved was lying on the ground, who stayed received no better treatment; any way they turned there was nothing but fire and slashing sword. Only one way was open to flee, but it ended on a high cliff that stopped them. What will they do? There is no quarter, they must die, and rather than by sword or by firing weapon, they jumped from the top to the bottom of this very steep hill, into the sea where they died by water while avoiding steel and fire. This is why it was given the name of "Morne aux Sauteurs" [Hill of the Jumpers]. Only eight or nine were killed on the spot; all the others jumped [about 40], and none escaped. None of ours were hurt, because when they were surprised their confusion was so great that they did not think at all about running to their weapons; they thought only about saving their lives by fleeing, since everything was lost. Then everything was destroyed and set on fire, although we preserved what could be of use to us."

Rather than offer an inglorious surrender, the Island Caribs committed an act that today is seen as a symbol of resistance to European domination. A number of writers have said this bloody attack against the Island Caribs represented the total destruction of their population in Grenada. It wasn't, and the Island Carib's survived into the mid-1700s, living on the fringes of colonial, plantation society. Symbolically, however, the Leapers' Hill incident was a turning point in their losing struggle against the French.