

Awakening Jamaica

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The abolition of slavery and the development of European beet sugar eventually caused the collapse of Jamaica's previously lucrative sugar industry. By the late 1800s, Jamaica's economy was suffering. In 1889, the Governor of Jamaica, Sir Henry Blake, brought together a group of local businessmen and wealthy landowners to form what would later be named the "Awakening Jamaica" committee. The committee organized the 1891 Jamaican Exhibition, in Kingston, to promote commerce and tourism. As part of the project, they hired the internationally recognized Scottish firm of Valentine & Sons to create promotional photographs of the island.

In business since 1851, Valentine & Sons was a prominent maker of landscape photographs and travel views. At a time when capturing photographs was not easily done, the studio specialized in providing tourists with scenic views of European locations. The firm had an international reputation and an extensive marketing network, which is probably why the Awakening Jamaica committee chose them over one of the many competent local photography studios. While in Jamaica, the photographer produced hundreds of large-format collodion negatives, which they brought back to Scotland. The photographs cover typical subjects used for "scenic" views, including the island's major cities, smaller villages, and rural areas.

Jamaican colonial officials presented prints made from these negatives at the 1893 Worlds Fair in Chicago. The images were published in the book *Worlds Fair, Jamaica at Chicago, An Account Descriptive of the Colony of Jamaica*. Valentine & Sons also sold copies of these photographs to its European and American clientele.

The original negatives from 1891 trip to Jamaica were destroyed in 1961, but the Caribbean Photo Archive, a private collection based in New York and owned by Patrick Montgomery, has acquired more than 70 prints made from those negatives. These displayed images, reproduced from the Caribbean Photo Archives collection, represent not only the unspoiled beauty of one of the Caribbean's major islands during a period of economic transition, but also the efforts of its local leaders to bring the islands valuable resources to be tension of the outside world.

Special Thanks to:

Patrick Montgomery

