



SAMUEL SHARPE
1801-1832

Sam Sharpe, or 'Daddy' Sam Sharpe, as he was also known, is remembered for his leading role in the Christmas revolution of 1831.

Sharpe, a Creole slave, was born in Montego Bay, Jamaica in 1801. He learnt to read and write, and continued to educate himself, reading newspapers and books. He followed the developments of the abolition movement by reading discarded local and foreign papers and was able to advise his followers. As his ideas took shape, Sharpe, joined the church and became a Baptist minister, and spokesman for the abolition movement.

Sharpe was tired of slavery, spent months in strategic planning, by spreading his message educating the slaves and travelling from estate to estate in secret meetings at nights, igniting the slaves with inspiring messages of hope of freedom and inspiring peaceful resistance. His message quickly spread to other parishes including Saint James, Trelawny, Westmoreland, Manchester and Saint Elizabeth.

His plan of passive resistance, where the slaves would refuse to work on Christmas Day, unless their grievances about their working conditions were acknowledged by the plantation owners, accelerated into a full scale rebellion.

The 1831 Christmas Rebellion as it became known, started in St. James and spread throughout the entire island. The Rebellion began on December 28 and lasted for eight days. The events started when the Kensington Estate Great House was burnt down, and over the following days, more estates were burnt down, crops destroyed, and a number of whites were killed.

The retribution that followed, was swift, up to 500 slaves were executed after trial. Sam Sharpe named as the instigator, was eventually captured and hung at the Parade in Montego Bay, now renamed Sam Sharpe Square.

The Christmas Rebellion of 1831 was a key event in the fight for the abolishment of slavery. Just a few years later, the beginnings of Sharpe's dream would be realised, when in 1834 slavery would be abolished, and the System of Apprenticeship instituted. On August 1, 1838 the Apprenticeship System ended granting full freedom to the slaves.