

Mary Thomas

There is not much physical evidence left that tells us about Mary Thomas – the labor riot leader who is also known as Queen Mary. One of the places, we can find her in the archives, is in the prison records from the Christianshavn Prison in Copenhagen. The prison was situated between *Prinsessegade* and *Torvegade*.

The records contain information about Mary Thomas' family, health, and belongings at her arrival. Furthermore, they contain information about what she had been sentenced for earlier: Theft and abuse of her child. Both can be understood literally, but to achieve a more complex understanding it is important to know the historical context. In the 1870s, the European-Caribbean view was that African-Caribbean women treated their children with brutality, and that European-Caribbeans had to "teach" African-Caribbeans how to raise their children properly.

In the book "Leaflets from the Danish West Indies" by C.E. Taylor from 1888, two drawings can be seen of black women hitting their children. In the text below the drawings, it says: Much good has been accomplished already among the lower order towards the prevention of cruelty to children [...] and such scenes as we have endeavored to depict in our sketches are now comparatively rare." (p. 52). In an article from 2017, historians Albert Scherfig and Nicklas Damkjær argue that it is not unthinkable that European ideas of "true" motherhood and femininity were used against strong African-Caribbean women who weren't afraid to speak up against authorities. In any case, it is interesting that authorities were so concerned about African-Caribbean mothers' childrearing when the same authorities ignored the fact that child mortality was enormous and that famine, disease and orphanity ravaged the Danish West Indies. It is also relevant to remember that many European-Caribbean parents hired African-Caribbean nannies to care for their children.



A GOOD SLAP.



RECOMMENDED TO THE NOTICE OF THE HUMANE SOCIETY OF ST. THOMAS.

ARBEJDERMUSEET
& ARBEJDERBEVÆGELSENS BIBLIOTEK OG ARKIV

Transcript and translation by Rikke Lie Halberg (2019):

Mary "Thomas"

Verdict No: 70 / 1882

Prisoner No: 12 (Fp 628)

According to The highest rescript of Sept. 3 1881 which conveys the Verdict **of November 23 1881 sentenced to**

Hard labor in *the Christianshavn's Prison*

for Life

Sentenced by the Court of first Instance by *The Commission Verdict of September 2 1880*

The sentence expires

Handed over to Christianshavn's Prison on *July 19 1882*

Initiated the sentence in St. Croix

Arrest September 20 1881

Straffetiden udløber den

~~departed~~ shipped to the Chief of Police on St. Croix: December 15 1887

Signalement	Height: Limbs: Eyes: Hue: Special features:	Figure: Hair: Nose: Speech:	Conscripted or enrolled in the Navy
Generalia	Place of maintenance: Last place of residence:	Previously punished:	

	Livelihood: Age: 40 years Religion: The English Confirmation: Can read: Can write: Is unmarried and has 3 children, is separated: Health status at arrival:		<i>For abuse of her child against 10 x 48 hours of Water and Bread (1872) Theft with 4 Days of prison</i>			
The crime of which the prison is convicted,: <i>Participation in looting and arson during the revolt on St. Croix in 1878.</i>		Information about the prisoners former way of life:				
Brought to the prison	Money or valuables: <i>1 ring 1 pair of earrings</i>		Clothes and suchlike:			
Behavior	Punishment	Been on the list of laziness	Earned overtime	Been to the hospital		Remarks
				Date	Illness	
				1882		
				From 20/7 1882 To 24/7 1882	<i>Fever</i>	
From 11/11 82 To 11/11 82	<i>Scurvy</i>					
From 17/1 83 To 27/1 83	<i>Fever</i>					

				From 12/2 83 To 16/2 83 From 9/4 83 To 14/4 83	<i>Menstruation pains Heart cramps</i>	
				From 12/7 32 To 30/7 83	<i>Catarrh</i>	
				From 15/10 83 To 27/10 83	<i>UTI</i>	
				From 14/1 84 To 28/1 84	<i>?</i>	
				From 10/11 84 To 15/11 84	<i>Colic?</i>	
				From 21/11 84 To 1/12 84	<i>Catarrh</i>	

Mary "Thomas"

During the Revolt in St. Croix called "the queen"

Unmarried, 3 children, approx. 40 years old, born in Antigua; Came to St. Croix in 1864.

Arrived from Christiansted on 19. July 1882 on life sentence according to Royal Resolution: September 3 1881. According to Commission sentence of 2 Septbr 1880 and Supreme Court sentence of 23 Mai 1881, she was sentenced from life for participating in pillage and arson during the riot on St. Croix in 1878.

(She was one of the most violent in leading the men on to [participate in the] destruction).

Previously punished in 1872 with 10x 48 hours of water and bread for abusing her child and in 1875 with 4 days of prison for theft.

Began to serve the sentence in St. Croix jail on Sept. 20 1881.

Belongs to the Church of England.

Tvangsstadiet¹: 3 o'clock

4 o'clock 19/4 83

3 o'clock 25/6 85

4 o'clock 25/8 84

18/12 1887 sent to Christiansted to

serve the remaining part of the sentence there.

Signed by the warden 31/10 87

¹ *Tvangsstadiet* is a form of short term pardon, where the prisoner gets to e.g. read a book, go for a walk.