



## Learn about BVI's his Pickering publishes millennium edition

By LYNDA LOHR  
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**"E**arly History of the British Virgin Islands: From Columbus to Emancipation" is filled with nuggets of information about the British territory's past. It's a must-read that you'll browse through repeatedly to learn more about a particular facet of BVI history from 1493 to 1834.



Vernon  
Pickering

The author, Island Sun editor Vernon W. Pickering, recently released the millennium edition of his book first published in 1983. A second edition followed in 1997.

"There's been a demand for it," Pickering said, explaining why he launched a third edition.

Chapters cover many topics including the arrival of Columbus, the establishment of the Quakers and Methodists, the history of slavery, and a history of BVI stamps. It includes copies of old maps, photographs and documents.

The most riveting chapter centers on the trial of Arthur Hodge, a planter and member of the government who, in 1811, so badly beat his slaves that some of them died.

"Margaret and Else died after boiling water had been sadistically poured down their throats. Jupiter, a slave of 19 years, died from severe cart whipping. He was also burnt in the mouth with a hot iron," writes Pickering.

Hodge doesn't stop there. He beats his slaves with a short whip that cuts as it goes round the body. He holds children upside down in water, nearly drowning them before stringing them up in a tree for a whipping. He kicks in the head a child said to be the offspring of his union with a slave named Peggy.

The straw that broke the camel's back came when Hodge beat to death one of his slaves, Prosper, because he couldn't pay for a mango that had dropped off a tree.

When Stephen M'Keough, who sometimes worked at Hodge's estate as an inspector, came forward with tales of these horrid events, Hodge went to trial. After a jury found him guilty, Hodge was hanged in Road Town near the prison. Pickering writes that this marks the first time a white man was proven guilty of the murder of a black man.

Around this time, Quakers and others began to question the practice of owning slaves. While the British government abolished the slave trade in 1807, it wasn't until Aug. 1, 1834, that slavery was abolished. BVI residents celebrate this event every year with their August Monday carnival.

Pickering also discusses the contributions of his distant ancestor, Abednego Pickering, who became a Quaker after hearing Joshua Fielding preach on a trip through the islands in 1727. His son, John Pickering, became the first lieutenant governor of the British Virgin Islands in 1741. He later became governor.

While Vernon Pickering is best known here for his role as Island Sun editor, he returned home after a lengthy career in the recording industry, ballet and the theater.

He is also the author of a companion volume to "Early History of the British Virgin Islands," entitled "Concise History of the BVI — from the Amerindians to 1896." Pickering is currently working on a third book of BVI history, which he expects to publish by the end of 2000.

"Early History of the British Virgin Islands," published by Falcon Publications International, is available at shops and bookstores in Road Town, Virgin Gorda and Peter Island. The price is \$39.95. While it's not yet available in the U.S. Virgin Islands, Pickering expects to soon find an outlet.

To mail order a copy, e-mail [hthompson@cbstevens.com](mailto:hthompson@cbstevens.com).

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OF THE  
BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS**  
From Columbus to Emancipation  
by  
**VERNON W. PICKERING**

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