



RIGSARKIVET

THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

Search guide to the records of the Danish West Indies

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General search guide

Welcome to a world of knowledge about 250 years of Danish colonial history. About people and power, slavery, shipping and the lives of rich and poor in the Danish West Indies. Previously, it has been difficult to access and search for the documents. Now the documents have been digitized and are accessible to all.

Delving into the documents from Denmark and the Danish West Indies is fascinating work. However, it is unfortunately not straightforward. Because even though digitization opens up completely new possibilities, there are still many limitations. There are more than 5 million documents and by no means all have been tagged with relevant search words.

One has to know what one is looking for, how the archives are organized and the information they can contain. At the same time, many of the documents were written in Gothic script and older Danish or English that can be difficult to understand. In addition, only a handful of the documents will be translated into English in the first instance as translation is dependent on voluntary work through crowdsourcing.

In other words: Finding the information you are looking for requires knowledge, language skills, technical competencies and not least patience, drive and energy.

Therefore, here are five pieces of advice for you who are looking for information about the Danish colonial era in the West Indies.

Five pieces of advice

1. Get to know the archives

You will never find all the information about a person or an institution collected in one place. Every item of information must be looked for in the archive according to the person or institution that has created the information. An archive can contain many archive series dealing with different topics. Even though the majority of the Danish-West Indian archives are stored in the Danish National Archives, you will have to search for them one by one.

Start by getting an overview of the archives and what each one contains. The Danish National Archives have prepared special guides to the most relevant archive series in five areas:

- Personal history (the history of individuals)
- Slavery
- Property ownership
- Colonial power
- Trade and shipping

You will also find information on how important archive series are organized and structured, what they contain and how you can use them to find what you are looking for.

2. Be clear about what you are looking for

The archives contain millions of documents. So, before you plunge into them, you should consider the type of knowledge that can take you further in your search:

Where did the person live? The person's conditions of employment? Religion? Marriage and children? Legal disputes? Involvement in rebellion or other major events? Each of these types of information must be found in different archives and archive collections.

Two examples:

- [Maria Elizabeth Yard](#)

The life story of Maria Elizabeth Yard, which you find elsewhere on this website, is based on information from a number of different records. Here are some examples:

- Maria's year of birth is documented by the census of 1841 for the Danish West Indies (Chamber of Revenue, Danish Department, The Table Commission, archive no. 303, Census of 1841, Danish West Indies, Croix, box no. 1, Christiansted free inhabitants)
- Maria's letter of manumission, dated 23rd May 1800, is recorded in a list of free colored men, women and children in Christiansted in 1816 (The West India and Guinea Company, archive no. 678, Subject files: Social and cultural matters, Free colored men, women and children in the jurisdiction of Christiansted 1816, box no. 3.81.564, case no. 24)
- Maria's residence in 1805 in a house owned by Sheriff Johannes Woldbye Mouritzen, i.e. no. 1&2 Fisherstreet, is recorded in the land register of St. Croix 1805-1806. (Audited Accounts, West Indian Accounts, archive no. 571, land register for St. Croix 1758-1915, 1805-1806, box no. 86.40)
- That Maria inherited the properties no. 1, 2 and 3 Fisherstreet in 1839 from Johannes Mouritzen is recorded in the Sheriff of Christiansted's registers of mortgages (Sheriff of Christiansted, archive no. 684, Registers of mortgages 1736-1844, box no. 38.26.41, 1838-1841, page 71-72)

- [Moses Elias Williams](#)

The life story of Moses Elias Williams, which you find elsewhere on this website, is based on information from a number of different records. Here are some examples:

- That Moses' mother Cathrine lived on the plantation Castle Nugent is recorded in the census of 1841 for the Danish West Indies

- (Chamber of Revenue, Danish Department, The Table Commission, archive no. 303, Census of 1841, Danish West Indies, box no. 4, St. Croix country districts)
- That in 1850 the Williams family lived in no. 7 Company Street in Christiansted is recorded in the census of 1850 for the Danish West Indies
(Statistics Denmark, archive no. 1308, census 1850, Danish West Indies, box no. 2, St. Croix, Christiansted, King Street – East Street)
 - That Moses received his burgher certificates as a butcher in Christiansted in 1865 is recorded in the lists of individuals having been granted citizenship
(The West India and Guinea Company, archive no. 678, Subject files: Social and cultural matters, Lists of individuals having been granted citizenship 1799 – 1911, box no. 3.81.588, 27th July, 1865)
 - That Moses bought a number of properties in Christiansted during the years 1878-1888 is recorded in the land registers for these years
(Audited Accounts, West Indian Accounts, archive no. 571, land register for St. Croix 1868-1894, box no. 86.95-96 – 86.121-122)
 - That Moses in the 1880s was entitled to vote for the elections for the Colonial Council, the supreme authority on St. Croix, is recorded in the West Indian Government's files concerning The Colonial Council
(West Indian Government, archive no. 678, Subject files: Local authorities: cases concerning the Colonial Council, 1883-1894, box no. 3.81.70)

3. Make use of aids in your search

Searching the archives is now easier than ever before. Five million documents have been scanned and are digitally available, and the National Archives are in the process of tagging relevant search words for every archive series. Some documents have been transcribed at the same time from Gothic handwriting to searchable text.

Therefore, you can begin your search with the [search function](#) on this web page.

If the digital search does not help you, you can examine lists of relevant literature and continue your search from there. The National Archives have compiled [a list of relevant literature](#).

4. Ask for advice and guidance

The Danish National Archives find it important that everybody should benefit from the cultural heritage contained in the archives. This includes users without extensive experience of searching archives and conducting research.

We have produced a number of guides and tools that you can use during the process. See for example:

- [Danish-English translations of archival terms](#)
- [List of Institutions related to the Danish West Indies](#) (1600 - 1917)
- [Overview of the most important archives from the Danish West Indies](#) in the Danish National Archives and how they are structured.

5. Be patient – and persist

Finding precisely the documents that tell your story among five million can be a confusing process. At the same time, most of the documents are in Gothic handwriting and an older Danish that at times is incomprehensible.

Nevertheless, the documents are the gateway to our common past and their stories make us wiser about who we were – and why the world is what it is today. Every story counts.

Our best advice for everyone searching the archives is: be patient – and persist!

Sources concerning individuals (personal history)

The population of the Danish West Indies was different in many ways from the population in Denmark. The enslaved laborers and later free workers were either Africans or descendants of Africans from many places in Africa, but also the European part of the population came from many countries.

The largest group was the enslaved and later free laborers. There is less information about them in the archives than many other groups in the community, but if you want to find a specific enslaved or farm laborer, censuses, parish registers, reports from religious congregations and slave lists are a good place to start. They contain the most basic personal data, e.g. name, place of residence, age, civil status and affiliation with a religious community. The second largest group in colonial society was the free, civilian European population, i.e. plantation owners, merchants and employees in the colonial administration and their families. Personal data about them can also be found in censuses, parish registers and reports from religious congregations. In addition to these two large groups, a middle group existed during the time of slavery, namely the free colored population, called "de frikulørte" (the free colored). This group consisted of former enslaved laborers who had purchased their freedom or had been freed, and of colored people who were born free. Personal data about this group can also be found in censuses, parish registers and reports from religious congregations but also in special lists of free colored persons where their free status is documented. Finally, military personnel constitute a smaller and special part of the European population. There is a great deal of personal data about them in payrolls, muster rolls and service records, while there is less to be found in censuses, parish registers and reports from religious congregations.

An example of how to use archives with personal data to find information about a specific person could be the plantation owner Moses Elias Williams (1841-1895), who was born into slavery. His story is described [here](#). It is possible to follow Moses's life in the censuses from 1850, 1855, 1857, 1860, 1870 and 1890 from boy to family man, butcher and later plantation owner on St. Croix. The censuses establish a framework for his life where other information can be filled in, e.g. from the land registers, where it can be seen that he bought the plantation called The Sight and several properties in Christiansted (cf. the article on sources for the history of property).

The most important groups of sources

- Censuses, 1835-1911
 - *You will find the following in the censuses*

The censuses can help you to find out where a person lived at a given point in time and inform you about the person's age, civil status, title and status in the household, occupation, place of birth and religion. The censuses from before 1848 also tell whether a person was enslaved or free and about the person's physical condition and moral character. Twelve censuses were conducted and each of them provides a snapshot of every household in the colony in a given year.

○ *This is how the censuses are structured and organized*

There are censuses for the following years: 1835, 1841, 1846, 1850, 1855, 1857, 1860, 1870, 1880, 1890, 1901 and 1911, but the censuses for 1835 and 1890 are not complete. The censuses are organized according to each of the three islands and by town and rural areas on each island:

- Town: The censuses are divided by street name and organized by house number.
- Rural areas: The censuses are divided by quarters (districts) and by name of plantation within the districts. The quarters on the three islands were:
 - **St. Croix:** Kompagniets quarter (Company quarter), Dronningens quarter (Queens quarter), Kongens quarter (Kings quarter), Prinsens quarter (Princes quarter), Westende quarter (West End quarter), Ostende quarter A (East end quarter A), Ostende quarter B (East end Quarter B), Nordside quarter A (North side quarter A), Nordside quarter B (North Side quarter B).
 - **St. Thomas:** Oost Ende quarter (East end quarter), Røde Huck quarter (Red Huck quarter), Frenchman's Bay quarter (Frenchman's Bay quarter), Nye quarter (New quarter), Store Nord Side quarter (Great north side quarter), Lille Nord Side quarter (Little north side quarter), Syd Side quarter (South side quarter), Vestende quarter (West end quarter).
 - **St. John:** Cruz Bay quarter, Maho Bay quarter, Reef Bay quarter, Coral Bay quarter, Oost Ende quarter (East end quarter).

Some of the censuses from before 1848 are also subdivided according to free persons or enslaved laborers. The censuses are written in Danish (Gothic) or in English (Latin).

○ *What you should know when using the censuses*

- **When:** You should know approximately when the person lived.
- **Where:** You should know where the person lived, and preferably as precisely as possible: on which island and in which town and street or on which plantation.
- **Who:** You should know the person's name. In the case of censuses before 1848, you should also know whether the person was an enslaved individual or free. Enslaved laborers will be registered by first name (or names) only because they did not usually have official surnames.

○ *The censuses are archived here*

The censuses are archived under the archives of two authorities:

- The censuses from 1841 and 1846 are archived under the Chamber of Revenue (archive no. 303), Danish Department, The Table Commission, West Indian census 1841 and West Indian census 1846
- The censuses from 1850, 1855, 1857, 1860, 1870, 1880, 1890, 1901 and 1911 are archived under Statistics Denmark (archive no. 1308), West Indian census 1850 - 1911

- Parish registers, 1691-1920

- *You will find the following in the parish registers*

Parish registers are important sources of knowledge of life, death, religion and personal relations in the colony. They contain not only information about baptisms, confirmations, marriages and funerals, but often also about family relations, status as enslaved or free, age and occupation:

- Baptismal records often state the date, the name of the person who was baptized, names of parents, whether the person was enslaved or free, and the names of the godmothers and godfathers.
- Confirmation records often state the date and the name of the confirmand. They were often adult enslaved individuals in their twenties.
- Marriage records often state the date, the status of the couple as enslaved or free and the names of the witnesses. Marriage across different Christian communities was not unusual. In the decades before 1848, some enslaved persons were also married to free persons.
- Funeral lists often state the date, the person's status as enslaved or free, age and occupation.

Unlike Denmark, there was no state church in the Danish colony in the West Indies, but several large religious communities. The Danish National Archives keep parish registers from three of these:

- The Evangelical Church.
- The Black Lutheran Mission Church.
- The Dutch Reformed Church.

- *This is how the parish registers are structured and organized*

Parish registers exist for the period 1691-1920, but many have been lost and therefore there are none for all communities for the whole of this period. The books are written in Danish (Gothic or Latin), German (Gothic), Dutch (Latin) or English (Latin).

The Danish National Archives' collection of parish registers is organized according to the three religious communities and under this geographically by island. The structure of the parish registers vary widely according to the point in time and the religious community. Some were kept chronologically with columns for every church ceremony, while others are structured by each ceremony: baptism, confirmation, marriage and funerals.

- *What you should know when using the parish registers*

- **Which religious community:** You should know to which religious community the person belonged.
- **Where:** You should know which island the person lived on.

- **When:** You should know approximately the year the event took place.
 - **Which ceremony:** It is advantage to know which ceremony (baptism, confirmation, marriage, funeral) you are looking for.
- *The parish registers are archived here*
The parish registers from the three religious communities are archived according to the community they came from:
- **st. Croix**
 - **The Evangelical Church, St. Croix, Parish Register 1740-1860** (nos. 1/770-1 - 6)
 - **The Evangelical Church, Christiansted, Duplicate of Parish Register 1861-1920** (nos. 3/772-1 - 7)
 - **The Evangelical Church, Frederiksted, Duplicate of Parish Register 1834-1917** (nos. 3/773-1 - 4)
 - **The Black Lutheran Mission Church, St. Croix, Parish Register 1788-1818** (nos. 1/771-1 - 2)
 - **The Dutch Reformed Church, St. Croix, Parish Register 1764-1814** (nos. 1/774-1 - 3)
 - **St. Thomas and St. John**
 - **The Evangelical Church, St. Thomas and St. John, Parish Register 1691-1870** (nos. 1/775-1 - 6)
 - **The Evangelical Church, St. Thomas and St. John, Duplicate of Parish Register 1861-1918** (nos. 3/775-7 - 12)
 - **The Black Lutheran Missionary Church, St. Thomas and St. John, Parish Register 1788-1849** (nos. 1/776-1 - 4)
- Reports from religious congregations, 1805-1918
- *You will find the following in the reports from religious congregations*
The reports from religious congregations can supplement the information you find in the parish registers. They were reports to the local administration from the religious communities on the islands. Here you will also find information about names, dates and status as enslaved or free and other valuable information:
- Baptismal reports state the name of the father and mother, place of residence, religion and the names of godmothers and godfathers.
 - Confirmation reports state name, age and place of residence.
 - Marriage reports state the names of the bride and the groom and witnesses to the marriage.
 - Funeral reports state place of residence, cause of death and civil status, whether the person was enslaved or free and if enslaved who the owner was.

The reports are excerpts from the religious communities' parish registers and therefore could cover any holes there. Reports exist for 1805-1918. At the same time, the reports cover the Roman Catholic Church, from which there are no church records in the Danish National Archives' collection. Thus, there are reports from five religious communities:

- The Danish Lutheran (Evangelical) Church.
- The English Evangelical (Anglican) Church.
- The Dutch Reformed Church.
- The Missionary Society (Moravian Church, Brødremenigheden, Herrnhut).
- The Roman Catholic Church.

The reports are written in Danish (Gothic or Latin), German (Gothic) or English (Latin).

- *This is how the reports from religious congregations are structured and organized*
In general, the reports from religious congregations are organized according to ceremony (baptism, confirmation, marriage and funeral). They are then first organized chronologically in intervals of varying lengths (from 5 to 40 years), then geographically by island and finally according to religious community.
- *What you should know when using the reports from religious congregations*
 - **Which ceremony:** You should know the ceremony you are looking for (baptism, confirmation, marriage, funeral).
 - **When:** You should know the period in which the event took place.
 - **Where:** You should know the island the person lived on.
 - **Which religious community:** It is an advantage if you know which religious community the person belonged to.
- *The reports from religious congregations are archived here*
The reports from religious congregations are archived under the archives of two authorities according to their island of origin:
 - **St. Croix**
 - The West Indian Government (archive no. 678), Reports of births, St. Croix, 1841-1909 (nos. 53.1.1-6)
 - The West Indian Government (archive no. 678), Reports of deaths, St. Croix, 1805-1909 (nos. 53.4.1-5)
 - The West Indian Government (archive no. 678), Reports of confirmations, St. Croix, 1830-1860 (no. 53.2.1)
 - The West Indian Government (archive no. 678), Reports of marriages, St. Croix, 1828-1907 (nos. 53.3.1-5)
 - **St. Thomas and St. John:**
 - St. Thomas and St. John Government (archive no. 693), Reports of births, St. Thomas and St. John, 1859-1918 (nos. 30.1.1-6)

- St. Thomas and St. John Government (archive no. 693), Reports of marriages, St. Thomas and St. John, 1828-1918 (nos. 30.2.1-7)
 - St. Thomas and St. John Government (archive no. 693), Reports of deaths, St. Thomas and St. John, 1859-1918 (nos. 30.3.1-2)
- Slave lists (Land tax register forms for plantations) 1772-1821
 - *You will find the following in the slave lists*

Each year, every free citizen in the colony had to make a list of the persons residing on his or her property, both free and enslaved persons. You can use these lists to look for information about the enslaved individual and their conditions and about life in the country and the town and life on large and small plantations. The slave lists are very different but often state the enslaved laborers’:

 - Name, gender and place of birth
 - Work function (“field slave”, “house slave”)
 - Religion
 - State of health
 - Status (able-bodied, partly unfit for work, newly arrived adult or adolescent or child)

The enslaved are usually only listed with one first name, but can be listed with two (“Jack James”) or a first name and a nickname (“John Bomba”).
 - *This is how the slave lists are structured and organized*

The lists were drawn up annually between 1772 and 1821. They are very different – from pre-printed forms to handwritten forms and lists in a continuous text. They are written in Danish (Gothic) or English or Dutch (both Latin).

The lists mainly cover St. Croix, and very few have been preserved from St. Thomas and St. John. The collection of slave lists is organized according to town and country district, including:

 - For town: Divided chronologically and then alphabetically by the name of the owner of the enslaved laborer.
 - For country: Divided chronologically and then by quarter (district).
 - *What you should know when using the slave lists*
 - **Country or town:** You should know whether the person lived in the town or the country.
 - **Where:** You should know where the person lived: which island and in which town/on which plantation. *Please note: the lists mainly cover St. Croix.*
 - **When:** You should know the period when the person lived.

- **Owner:** Your search will be easier if you know the name of the owner of the enslaved laborer.

- *The slave lists are archived here*
The slave lists are archived under the West Indian Government (archive no. 678), Subject files: Land tax register forms for plantations, 1772-1821 (nos. 3.81.482 - 559)

- Lists of free colored persons 1744-1831
 - *You will find the following in the lists of free colored persons*
If a person has disappeared from one slave list to the next, it may be because the person has been sold or is dead – or that his or her freedom has been purchased. You can investigate the latter through the lists of free colored persons (in Danish ‘frikulørte’ or ‘frie farvede’). The lists are a sort of census of free Afro-Caribbean men, women and children in the jurisdiction of Christiansted on St. Croix (i.e. the Kompagniets, Dronningens and Kongens quarters as well as Ostende quarters A and B). The lists can provide you with information about persons whose freedom had been bought and those who were born free and of the life they lived. They state, *inter alia*, name, place of birth, the name of the owner, if any, who had set the person free, the number of years the person had lived in Christiansted, occupation and religion.

 - *This is how the lists of free colored persons are structured and organized*
Lists exist for 1744-1783, 1791, 1794-1798, 1800, 1802, 1805, 1811, 1816, 1826 and 1831. After 1834, free colored persons were no longer registered as a special group, but included in the group of free persons together with the Euro-Caribbean population.

In general, the collection of lists of free colored persons is organized chronologically. Then each list is organized after sequence number only – neither geographically nor alphabetically after the person’s name. The lists are written in Danish (Gothic) and English (Latin).

 - *What you should know when using the lists of free colored persons*
 - **When:** You should know when the person lived.
 - **Who:** You should know the person’s name.
 - **Where:** The lists only cover persons living in the jurisdiction of Christiansted at the given time.

 - *The lists of free colored persons are archived here*
The lists of free colored persons are archived under:

- The West India and Guinea Company (archive no. 678), Subject files: Social and cultural matters, Lists of free colored men, women and children in the jurisdiction of Christiansted, 1744-1811 (no. 3.81.563)
 - The West India and Guinea Company (archive no. 678), Census of free colored men and women in Christiansted, 1816 (no. 3.81.564)
 - Government-General (archive no. 678), Census of free colored children under the age of 16 in Christiansted, 1826 (no. 3.81.565)
 - Government-General (archive no. 678), Census of free colored men, women and children in the jurisdiction of Christiansted, 1831 (no. 3.81.566)
-
- Payrolls of the military forces in the West Indies, 1762-1770
 - *You will find the following in the payrolls*

A payroll (*zahlrulle*) is an annual list of soldiers in the West Indian military. In the payrolls you can find information about each soldier's name, rank, number in the roll and any events that took place during the year (e.g. if the person was promoted, resigned, dismissed, deserted or died).
 - *This is how the payrolls are structured and organized*

The payrolls cover the period between 1762 and 1770. After 1770, they were called *mandtalsruller*. The collection of payrolls is divided chronologically. Each roll is also organized after rank with the officers first. The payrolls are written in German (Gothic).
 - *What you should know when using the payrolls*
 - **Who:** You should know the person's name.
 - **When:** You should know when the person lived.
 - *The payrolls are archived here*

The payrolls are archived under the Chamber of Customs, (archive no. 365), West India and Guinea Office, Payrolls of the military forces in the West Indies, 1762-1770 (nos. 458-463)
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- Muster rolls of the West Indian Military Forces, 1771-1860
 - *You will find the following in the muster rolls*

A muster roll (*mandtalsrulle*) is an annual list of soldiers in the West Indian military. In the muster rolls you can find information about each soldier's name, rank, number in the roll and any events that took place during the year (e.g. if the person was promoted, resigned, dismissed, deserted or died).

- *This is how the muster rolls are structured and organized*

The muster rolls cover the period between 1771 and 1860. They were called payrolls from 1762 to 1770. The Danish National Archives' collection of muster rolls is divided chronologically. Each roll is also organized after rank with the officers first. In the 1770s the muster rolls were mainly written in German (Gothic). From 1780 all were written in Danish (Gothic).
- *What you should know when using the muster rolls*
 - **Who:** You should know the person's name.
 - **When:** You should know when the person lived.
- *The muster rolls are archived here*

The muster rolls are archived under Audited Accounts (archive no. 571), West Indian Accounts, Muster rolls of the West Indian Military Forces, 1771-1860 (nos. 126.1 – 52)
- Service records 1799-1916
 - *You will find the following in the service records*

The service records are overviews of soldiers recruited in Denmark for the military force in the West Indian colony between 1799 and 1916. They contain information about every soldier including name, rank, date of recruitment or posting, whether he came from a Danish regiment, which ship the person sailed on to the West Indies and when and how he left the service again.
 - *This is how the service records are structured and organized*

The collection is organized chronologically in two periods: 1799-1872 and 1873-1916. The records are then in alphabetical order after the soldier's surname. As soldiers were often given their name after the area they came from as an extra surname, the soldiers are often entered twice: e.g. under the surname (fx "Andersen") and under the place name (fx "Allindemagle").
 - *What you should know when using the service records*
 - **Who:** You should know the person's name.
 - **When:** You should know when the person lived.
 - *The service records are archived here*

The service records are archived under The West Indian Recruitment Office (archive no. 2540), service records, 1799-1916 (nos. 81-85)

Get help from

- <http://www.dkconsulateusvi.com/Inhabitants/Inhabitants07052002.pdf>
This is a list of inhabitants in the Danish West Indies approx. 1650-1825 collected by the genealogist Hugo Ryberg and edited by Rigmor de Vicq in 1945 (A list of the names of inhabitants: The Danish West Indian Islands (The VIRGIN ISLANDS) from 1650-c. 1825). It contains a long list of persons who mainly appear in different West Indian documents in the Danish National Archives but also in books about the Danish West Indies and newspapers from the islands. The list is drawn up alphabetically by surname, although there are a number of inconsistencies, and it has an index at the back (pp. 602-682). Unfortunately, the references to which documents the information comes from are not very precise (cf. list of sources used pp. 594-601). Therefore, the list can only be used to provide inspiration and a guide to searching the Danish National Archives, and not as a source of fully credible information.

Sources concerning ownership of property

The structure of property ownership in the Danish West Indies was in principle very similar to that which existed in Denmark at the same time. Most of the land and anything else of value was owned by a small upper class, which in the West Indies mainly consisted of plantation owners and merchants.

The rest of the population did not own very much and the enslaved laborers even less. The greatest difference from Danish conditions was that during slavery one also could own people and thus bequeath them to one's heirs or take out a loan against their value in the same way as with other property.

Property in land, houses and enslaved laborers was registered for tax purposes in tax records and land registers. That way you can follow the successive owners of a particular property. It was recorded in mortgage books and records if an owner took out loans in his or her property, whether it was a plantation, a ship or an enslaved laborer. Thus you can get an insight into not only the land (with plantations and houses) a person owned, but also other types of property. Finally, information about the property and possessions of deceased individuals was registered in the probate documents, where you often get an even more detailed insight into personal belongings, such as teaspoons, shirts and books.

An example of how to use archives containing information on property matters in relation to genealogical research could be the story of the free colored businesswoman Maria Elizabeth Yard (c. 1789-1851), as described [here](#). The tax records for St. Croix 1805-1806 show that Maria lived at Fisher Street (Fiskergade) nos. 1 & 2 in Christiansted and owned five enslaved individuals: a woman, a boy and three girls under the age of 12. Similarly, it appears from the mortgage records of the town bailiff of Christiansted for the years 1838-1841 that in 1839 Maria inherited the properties nos. 1, 2 and 3 in Fisher Street and a considerable annual pension of 1,100 rix-dollars. Other information about Mary's life is found in censuses and the like (cf. the article on the sources of personal history)

The most important groups of sources

- Land lists and land registers, 1688-1915
 - *You will find the following in land lists and land registers*

Land lists (called land registers from 1755) were the annual tax returns from the islands' property owners for calculating personal and land tax. They can help you investigate the ownership of property in the city or in the country in a given year. They also state the number of people who lived on the property: men, women, children, employees and enslaved laborers. Free persons are usually listed by name and perhaps with other personal data. The names of the enslaved are not stated (these can be found in the land tax register forms/slave lists). The location, size and type of crops and production of the plantations are also stated.

○ *This is how land lists and land registers are structured and organized*

The land lists and land registers are archived separately. Both are organized geographically by island and then chronologically. The following volumes have been preserved:

- Land lists:
 - **St. Thomas:** 1688-1694, 1697-1749, 1751-1752, 1754.
 - **St. Jan:** 1728-1739.
 - **St. Croix:** 1742-1754.
- Land registers:
 - **St. Thomas:** 1755-1915.
 - **St. Jan:** 1755-1915.
 - **St. Croix:** 1758-1775, 1780-1783, 1786-1806, 1814-1915.

Land lists and land registers are divided geographically by quarters, (rural areas) and towns, respectively, under each year. The sequence is different under every geographical area, e.g. from east to west or from west to east, but the order is usually the same for long periods. From about 1718, the land lists have an alphabetical index arranged by the owner's first name – in the land registers after the owner's surname. From about 1800, the plantations in each district are listed under their owner's name. After this, the name of the plantation also appears with the owner's name. Please note that some plantations change name, new ones are established and some disappear through mergers and parceling out. The land lists are written in Dutch (Latin) or Danish (Gothic), while the land registers are written in Danish (Gothic). A detailed list of plantations on St. Croix is available here:

<http://www.visharoots.org/estates.html> .

○ *What you should know when using land lists and land registers*

- **When:** You should know the period you are interested in.
- **Where:** You should know the location of the property you want to find, i.e. on which island and in which quarter or town.
- **Owner:** It will make your search easier if you know the name of the property owner.

○ *Land lists and land registers are archived here*

Land lists and land registers are archived under two different authorities.

- Land lists:
 - **St. Thomas:** The West India and Guinea Company, Accounts from St. Thomas and St. John: The Bookkeeper (archive no. 446), Land lists for St. Thomas 1688-1754 (nos. 731-749)

- **St. Jan:** The West India and Guinea Company, Accounts from St. Thomas and St. John: The Bookkeeper (archive no. 446), Land lists for St. Jan 1728-1739 (nos. 750-754)
- **St. Croix:** The West India and Guinea Company, Accounts from St. Croix: The Bookkeeper (archive no. 446), Land lists for St. Croix 1742-1754 (nos. 849-861)
- Land registers:
 - **St. Thomas & St. Jan:** Audited Accounts 1700-1920 (archive no. 571), West Indian Accounts, Land register of St. Thomas and St. John 1755-1915 (nos. 63.83.1-119)
 - **St. Croix:** Audited Accounts 1700-1920 (archive no. 571), West Indian Accounts, Land register of St. Croix 1758 -1915 (nos. 63.86.1-142)
- Probate documents, 1671-1903
 - *You will find the following in the probate documents*

The probate documents were the legal documents that were drawn up when a free person on the islands died. You will find information in these documents about the deceased person's property and heirs. The information about property can be very detailed and can include everything from whole plantations with enslaved laborers and buildings down to pots and pans.
 - *This is how the probate documents are structured and organized*

It is not easy to work with the West Indian probate documents. They consist of different types of probate records that were written at different points during the processing of a probate case, and they also change over time. The following guideline is divided into two periods:

 1. Probate documents before 1755.
 2. Probate documents after 1755.

Probate documents before 1755 are not subdivided by type of document but only according to whether the deceased was employed in the West India and Guinea Company or was a private citizen, respectively, and then chronologically. In the following, probate documents after 1755 are subdivided into the three most important groups of probate documents in prioritized order, as well as a fourth group that could also be usable. These four groups are first subdivided geographically by island and then chronologically.

Subdivision into types of records **after 1755:**

1. Registers of inventories and appraisals

- You should start by examining these records, which register the beginning of a probate case, i.e. the death and the assets in the estate of the

deceased. In addition to the sequence of cases, some records contain an alphabetical index by the name of the deceased. Each probate case was assigned a number that is repeated in the types of documents described below.

2. Probate Court records of proceedings

- These records register the court sessions in the probate proceedings in chronological order. The court sessions dealt with paying off debts in the estate and the recovery of outstanding debts.

3. Registers of probate letters

- The probate letter was the final document in the administration of the estate. It documents the winding up of the estate and distribution among the heirs.

4. Case papers of the Probate Court, individuals

- This group contains documents that were presented or used when the probate case was processed, e.g. bills, loan certificates and deeds. Unlike the three records above, the case papers concerning individuals are organized in four sub-groups, sub-groups I, III and IV of which are alphabetical by the name of the deceased. Sub-group II is not organized.

○ *What you should know when using the probate documents*

- **When:** You should know the date of death of the person whose property you want to investigate.
- **Who:** You should know the name of the person whose property you want to investigate.

○ *The probate documents are archived here*

The probate documents from the period **before 1755** are archived under the Board of Directors of the West India and Guinea Company. As a rule, the probate documents from the period **after 1755** are archived under the Sheriff, one of whose tasks was to enforce the law in a specific geographical area. In addition, some special probate cases are archived under the West Indian Government:

▪ **Before 1755**

The West India and Guinea Company, Board of Directors 1671-1755 (archive no. 446):

- Letters and documents concerning inheritance and settlement of estates left by persons who had died in the West Indies 1671-1754 (no. 230)
- Administration of the decedent estates of Company functionaries at St. Thomas and St. John 1705-1754 (nos. 231-234)
- Regarding Governor Jørgen Iversen's estate 1679-1684 (no. 235)

- Governor Michel Crone and his half-brother Knud Helmer's decedent estates 1713-1737 (nos. 236-237)
 - Administration of decedent estates of Company functionaries at St. Croix 1734-1751 (nos. 238-239)
 - Administration of decedent estates of inhabitants of St. Thomas 1689-1701 (no. 240)
 - Letters of administration and other documents concerning deceased inhabitants of St. Thomas 1726-1751 (no. 241)
 - Letter of administration in the estate of planter Willem Vessup at St. Thomas 1732-1740 (no. 242)
 - Notices concerning the administration of West Indian decedent estates 1733-1739, 1736-1740 (no. 243)
- **After 1755**
- Sheriff of St. Thomas 1755-1909** (archive no. 697):
- Registers of inventories and appraisals 1736-1891 (nos. 13.26.1 - 16)
 - Probate Court records of proceedings 1736-1893 (nos. 13.23.1 - 15)
 - Files relating to the Probate Court records of proceedings 1815-1893 (nos. 13.24.1 - 159)
 - Registers of probate letters concerning inhabitants 1717-1766 (nos. 13.27.1 - 13)
 - Registers of probate letters concerning planters 1724-1763 (nos. 13.28.1 - 6)
 - Registers of probate letters concerning civil servants and inhabitants 1800-1814 (no. 13.29)
- Sheriff of St. John 1741-1910** (archive no. 712, 446):
- Registers of inventories and appraisals 1763-1882 (nos. 35.37.1 - 4)
 - Registers of inventories, appraisals, proceedings, wills, etc. 1807-1836 (nos. 35.38.1 - 2)
 - Probate Court records of proceedings 1758-1799 (nos. 35.36.1 - 3)
 - Probate Court records of wills and proceedings 1836-1859 (nos. 35.39.1 - 2)
 - Records of the Probate Court 1741-1823 (nos. 35.40.1 - 10)
 - Probate files 1778-1859 (nos. 35.41.1 - 14)
 - Probate letters 1783-1806 (nos. 35.42.1 - 2)
- Sheriff of Christiansted 1734-1901** (archive no. 684):
- Registers of inventories and appraisals:
 - Registers of inventories and valuations concerning burghers and planters 1747-1799 (nos. 38.41.1 - 11)

- Registers of inventories and valuations concerning civil servants 1755-1800 (nos. 38.42.1 - 2)
- Registers of probate letters concerning non-commissioned officers, private soldiers, servants, unemployed persons, and free blacks 1782-1798 (no. 38.43)
- Registers of inventories and valuations concerning all ranks and classes 1800-1878 (nos. 38.44.1 - 12)
- Probate Court records of proceedings:
 - Probate Court records of proceedings concerning burghers and planters 1747-1883 (nos. 38.38.1 - 27)
 - Probate Court records of proceedings concerning civil servants 1759-1863 (nos. 38.39.1 - 10)
 - Probate Court records of proceedings concerning non-commissioned officers, private soldiers, servants, unemployed persons, and free blacks 1781-1833 (nos. 38.40.1 - 4)
- Registers of probate letters:
 - Registers of probate letters concerning burghers and planters 1736-1790 (nos. 38.46.1 - 36)
 - Registers of probate letters concerning civil servants 1734-1792 (nos. 38.47.1 - 7)
 - Registers of probate letters concerning non-commissioned officers, private soldiers, servants, unemployed persons, and free blacks 1786-1792 (no. 38.48)
- Probate cases for individuals:
 - Case papers of the Probate Court, individuals I 1790-1857 (nos. 38.60.1 - 59)
 - Case papers of the Probate Court, individuals II 1759-1850 (nos. 38.61.1 - 262)
 - Case papers of the Probate Court, individuals III 1748-1854 (nos. 38.62.1 - 37)
 - Case papers of the Probate Court, individuals IV 1751-1840 (nos. 38.63.1 - 60)

Sheriff of Frederiksted 1745-1903 (archive no. 717):

- Registers of inventories:
 - Registers of inventories 1848-1876 (nos. 39.19.1 - 2)
- Probate Court records of proceedings:
 - Probate Court records of proceedings concerning burghers and planters 1760-1793 (nos. 39.13.1 - 4)
 - Probate Court records of proceedings concerning civil servants 1781-1801 (no. 39.14)

- Probate Court records of proceedings concerning non-commissioned officers, private soldiers, servants, and unemployed persons 1781-1801 (no. 39.15)
- Probate Court records of proceedings concerning the estate of manager Thomas Clarke (no. 39.16)
- Probate Court records of proceedings concerning all ranks and classes 1844-1881 (nos. 39.17.1 - 5)
- Registers of probate letters:
 - Registers of probate letters concerning burghers and planters 1760-1794 (nos. 39.21.1 - 6)
 - Register of probate letters concerning civil servants 1776-1792 (no. 39.22)
 - Register of probate letters concerning non-commissioned officers, private soldiers, servants, and unemployed persons 1781-1800 (no. 39.23)
- Miscellaneous old case papers of the Probate Court 1761-1832 (no. 39.25)
- Case papers of the Probate Court 1859-1903 (nos. 39.26.1 - 29)

The West Indian government 1773-1849 (Archive nos. 678, 699, 686):

- Subject files: The judicial system (e.g. nos. 3.81.176 - 209)

- Registers of mortgages, 1736-1907

- *You will find the following in the registers of mortgages*

You will find information about mortgaging of property on the islands in the registers of mortgages. They give you an insight into what a person owned during his or her lifetime. The mortgaged property can be anything from whole plantations and ships to individual enslaved individuals. Enslaved laborers were regarded as property and could thus be used as collateral.

- *This is how the registers of mortgages are structured and organized*

There are two types of mortgage records:

- Registers of mortgages.
- Documents recorded in court.

Both are chronological. Alphabetical indices are preserved for some of them, organized by name of person and/or place name.

- *What you should know when using the registers of mortgages*

- **Who:** You should know the name of the mortgaged property (plantation) or the person whose property you want to investigate.
- **When:** You should know the year(s) you are interested in.

○ *The registers of mortgages are archived here*

The mortgage records in the Danish National Archives are not complete. This is partly because some of the material is kept in the US National Archives in Washington DC and the Recorder of Deeds Office on the US Virgin Islands, and partly because much of the material from Frederiksted was burned during the workers' rebellion in 1878.

The material in the Danish National Archives is archived under two different authorities. There are mortgage records for St. Croix under the Sheriff of Christiansted. In the case of St. Thomas and St. Jan, there are Documents recorded in court under the West Indian Superior Court.

- **The West India and Guinea Company, Sheriff of St. Thomas** (archive nos. 446, 697):
 - Registers of mortgages 1741-1754 (nos. 1.18.1 - 2)
- **Sheriff of Christiansted** 1734-1901 (archive no. 684):
 - Registers of mortgages 1736-1844 (nos. 38.26.1 - 42)
 - Indexes to the registers of mortgages 1765-1855 (nos. 38.27.1 - 14)
 - Separate index to registers of mortgages, letters H-W 1801-1801 (no. 38.28)
 - Abstract of indexes to registers of mortgage 1788-1795 (no. 38.29)
- **West Indian Superior Court** 1805-1907 (archive no. 680):
 - Documents recorded in court 1807-1907 (nos. 5.9.1 - 15)

Sources concerning slavery

Until the abolition of slavery in the Danish West Indies in 1848, enslaved individuals and slavery were a fundamental part of life on the islands. Therefore, there is information about enslaved individuals and slavery in almost all records from that time.

This makes it difficult to select the most important groups of sources because it depends on the aspect of slavery one is interested in. The groups of sources in these guidelines have been selected to demonstrate the breadth of slavery-related topics in documents in the Danish National Archives. Thus, the calculations of slaves sold at St. Thomas show how they were sold at public auctions, while the reports on the work of company slaves provide an insight into the different kinds of work the enslaved had to perform. Reports from the plantations and the statistics of enslaved laborers from 1804 illustrate conditions on the plantations, e.g. the number of enslaved individuals, housing conditions, health conditions and work tasks. Finally, the records of the court martial in Frederik's Fort 1848 demonstrate how the Danish colonial power reacted to slave rebellions, while the certificates of freedom document which enslaved laborers achieved or bought their freedom.

An example of how to use archives containing information about slavery could be in relation to the health of the enslaved, which is described [here](#). The monthly hospital reports from the royal plantations on St. Croix show which enslaved laborers were ill, when, for how long and the illness they had.

The most important groups of sources

- Calculations of slaves sold at St. Thomas 1724-1739
 - *You will find the following in Calculations of slaves sold at St. Thomas*
The calculations consist of forms written during the slave auctions. They contain information about, *inter alia*, the buyers' names, how many enslaved persons they bought, the enslaved persons' gender, age (adults or children), physical condition (healthy or sick), and price. The reports can provide you with an insight into the slave trade that took place when the ships of the Danish West India and Guinea Company arrived at St. Thomas from Africa.
 - *This is how the calculations of slaves sold at St. Thomas are structured and organized*
The calculations are organized chronologically, but have not been preserved for all years between 1724 and 1739. Nor can it be assumed that the registered enslaved individuals include all enslaved that arrived at the islands in the years in question. Even though the Danish West India and Guinea Company had a monopoly on importing enslaved laborers, some were also imported illegally. These enslaved laborers are not registered here. The accounts are written in Danish (Gothic).

- *What you should know when using the calculations of slaves sold at St. Thomas*
 - **The slave-owners' names:** As the names of the enslaved are not stated, it is not possible to find a specific enslaved person in this way. However, if you know the owner's name, you can investigate whether he or she bought enslaved laborers from the company on St. Thomas between 1724 and 1739.

- *Calculations of slaves sold at St. Thomas are archived here*

The West India and Guinea Company, Board of Directors (archive no. 446), Calculations of slaves sold at St. Thomas (no. 118)

- Reports on the work of field and skilled Company slaves 1751-1754
 - *You will find the following in reports on the work of the company slaves*

The reports can help you to gain an insight into everyday working life for the field slaves and artisan slaves who were owned by the Danish West India and Guinea Company. The reports, in the shape of forms, provide information about the work of enslaved laborers in the field, day by day, on the company's plantations on St. Thomas and St. Croix, and about the work of the enslaved working as artisans in the company's buildings on St. Thomas. They state, *inter alia*, how many enslaved laborers performed what work and for how long, what the enslaved were called, and absence due to illness or running away (marronage). The work of the artisan slaves in particular is very precisely described. For example, that two carpenter slaves spent Thursday March 9, 1752 planing boards for the floor of the magazine at Fort Christian in Charlotte Amalie.

 - *This is how reports on the work of the company slaves are structured and organized*

The reports are divided into two: field slaves and artisan slaves. Each report is written chronologically in Danish (Gothic).

 - *What you should know when using reports on the work of the company slaves*
 - **Work function:** You should decide whether you are interested in field slaves or artisan slaves.

 - *Reports on the work of the company slaves are archived here*

The West India and Guinea Company, Board of Directors (archive no. 446), Reports on the work of field and skilled Company slaves (no. 119)

- Reports from the plantations 1787-1847
 - *You will find the following in reports from the plantations*

The reports from the plantations can help you to gain an insight into the living conditions of the enslaved laborers on a number of plantations on St. Croix in particular between 1787 and 1847. There are three types of reports that provide different types of information:

- **Weekly reports:** Weekly reports on the labor force of enslaved laborers that worked, which enslaved were ill with what, which enslaved had been punished and for what, and the supplies of food etc. on each plantation.
- **Police reports:** Monthly reports on which enslaved laborers had been punished for what and what the punishment was.
- **Hospital reports:** Monthly reports on which enslaved laborers were ill, when, for how long and with what.

Reports from the plantations come from estates that owed money to the Danish state, and the purpose was to provide the state with ongoing information on operations. The reason that so many plantations owed money is that in 1786 the Danish state took over a number of big loans that plantation owners had taken out in the Netherlands.

- *This is how reports from the plantations are structured and organized*

The collection of plantation reports is organized geographically by island. However, the great majority of reports are from St. Croix. The reports are then organized alphabetically according to the name of the plantation, and finally chronologically. Each report usually consists of a pre-printed form that is filled in in Danish (Gothic), but some forms are filled in in handwriting only. The series of forms for each individual plantation does not cover the whole of the period 1787-1847, but shorter periods. The period that is best covered is the 1830s-40s.
- *What you should know when using reports from the plantations*
 - **The name of the plantation:** You should know the name of the plantation you want to investigate.
- *Reports from the plantations are archived here*

Reports from the plantations are archived under the West Indian Debt Liquidation Commission on St. Croix and Thomas/St. John, respectively:

 - **St. Croix**
 - The West Indian Debt Liquidation Commission on St. Croix (archive no. 681), Files and reports concerning individual plantations on St. Croix 1787-1847 (nos. 46.17.1 - 76)
 - **St. Thomas and St. John**
 - West Indian Debt Liquidation Commission on St. Thomas and St. John (archive no. 534).
 - Files concerning estate Flamingo Pannen and the widow van der Pool 1780-1787 (no. 20.6)

- Files concerning estates Adrian and Herman Farm 1828-1847 (no. 20.7)

- The statistics of enslaved laborers from 1804
 - *You will find the following in the statistics of enslaved laborers from 1804*

The statistics of enslaved laborers from 1804 can help you to gain an overview of the composition of the enslaved population in 1804. The statistics contain information about gender, age, civil status, place of birth, occupation, religion and how many enslaved persons lived on each plantation, how many slave houses there were and how much land was laid out for the cultivation of food for the enslaved. However, the statistics only cover 1804 and the plantations on the three islands. The towns are not included.

When the ten-year grace period up to the abolition of the Danish trans-Atlantic slave trade had expired (1793-1803), many plantation owners still thought that it was impossible to maintain the number of enslaved laborers without importing new ones. Therefore a questionnaire was launched in 1804 to clarify whether it was necessary to prolong the transition period. The statistics are based on data from this questionnaire. The result was that it was decided not to prolong the period.
 - *This is how the statistics of enslaved laborers from 1804 are structured and organized*

The statistics consist of forms that are filed together with other documents from the "Commission for Improvement of the Slave Trade". The collection of forms is organized geographically by island and then by quarter. Likewise, each form is organized geographically by quarter, and each plantation is listed by land registry number. There are also special forms that sum up all data from each island and the entire colony. The forms are written in Danish (Gothic).
 - *What you should know when using the statistics of enslaved laborers from 1804*
 - **The location and name of the plantation:** In order to find data from a specific plantation, you should know the island and the quarter it was in and what it was called.
 - *The statistics of enslaved laborers from 1804 are archived here*

Chamber of Customs, West India and Guinea Office (archive no. 365), Documents concerning the Commission for Improvement of the Slave Trade (no. 424)

- Certificates of freedom c. 1757-1832
 - *You will find the following in the certificates of freedom*

Certificates of freedom can help you to find out if an enslaved laborer succeeded in gaining his or her freedom during the course of the person's life and when this took place. The certificate of freedom is either a page with pre-printed text with the name and the date of issue filled in, or the whole text is handwritten. The certificate always contains the name of the freed person and usually the former owner's name. In addition, there can be information such as the value of the freed person and who paid for the person to be freed if it was not the owner.

The certificate of freedom was issued by the government and was to be carried by the freed person at all times as proof of his or her free status. Some of the certificates of freedom only exist in copy form as the original was issued to the freed person. The series of certificates of freedom is not complete and one cannot be sure of finding the names of all freed persons.

○ *This is how the certificates of freedom are structured and organized*

The collection of certificates of freedom is organized geographically by island and then chronologically. The certificates of freedom are often not in an organized order in the individual box, but in some cases they are ordered alphabetically or chronologically. The certificates of freedom are written in Danish (Gothic) and English (Latin).

○ *What you should know when using the certificates of freedom*

- **Where:** You should know on which island the enslaved person/freed person you want to investigate lived.
- **When:** You should know the period you are interested in.
- **The name of the enslaved person/freed person:** You should know the name of the person you are looking for.

○ *The certificates of freedom are archived here*

The certificates of freedom are archived in the archives of the West Indian Government and the St. Thomas and St. John Government, respectively:

▪ **St. Croix**

- The West Indian Government (archive no. 678), Subject files: Social and cultural matters
 - Certificates of freedom for enslaved laborers on St. Croix 1769-1807 (no. 3.81.577)
 - Certificates of freedom for enslaved laborers on St. Croix 1808-1832 (no. 3.81.578)
 - Certificates of freedom for enslaved laborers on St. Croix, A-Ø 1800-1810 (no. 3.81.579)

- **St. Thomas and St. John**
 - The West Indian Government (archive no. 678), Subject files: Social and cultural matters, Register of certificates of freedom for St. Thomas 1816-1830 (no. 3.81.576)
 - St. Thomas and St. John Government (archive no. 693), Subject files: Social and cultural matters, Copies of certificates of freedom issued etc. 1757-1800 (no. 11.53.180)

- Records of the court martial in Frederik's Fort 1848
 - *You will find the following in the records of the court martial*

The records are from the court martial that was established after the slave rebellion in 1848, which led to the abolition of slavery in the Danish West Indies. The court was set up to judge persons who had broken the law and caused damage to persons and property during the rebellion. It was primarily former enslaved laborers who were convicted.

The court records can provide you with insight into what took place during the crucial rebellion up to the abolition of slavery and what the Danish colonial power subsequently did to restore law and order. It contains information about the interrogations, the proceedings and the sentences that were pronounced.

 - *This is how the records of the court martial are structured and organized*

The records are organized chronologically after the date of the interrogations, and the proceedings in court and are concluded with the pronouncement of sentence. The records are written in Danish (Gothic).

 - *What you should know when using the records of the court martial*
 - **Name:** Knowing the name of the accused can make it easier to find your way around the material. The records do not have an index, but the names are underlined and thus easier to find by skimming the text.

 - *The records of the records of the court martial are archived here*

The West Indian Government (archive no. 678), Subject files: The judicial system, records of the court martial in Frederik's Fort 1848 (no. 3.81.223)

Sources concerning colonial power

The Danish colonial power played a part in many aspects of life in the Danish West Indies. The following groups of sources have been selected as examples of the areas in which the colonial power controlled life in the colonies – in court, at the barracks and the hospital or at school.

Proclamation books, police journals, records of the Police Court and records of the Military Court provide an insight into how the civilian and military legal system functioned, but simultaneously witness testimonies reflect everyday life for good or for bad. Medical records tell about health and sickness among the population – from harmless cases of coughing to epidemics that killed hundreds. Finally, cases from the school system open a window on how schooling was structured, from timetables to complaints by civil servants about the lack of understanding for the importance of schooling on the part of children and parents.

Court cases are an example of how one can use archives with information about the colonial power. For example, the story of the enslaved worker Stephan and the damaged rum. The case is described [here](#). Details of the case appear in the proceedings from the Sheriff in Christiansted in 1781 e.g. that Stephan tried to commit suicide.

The most important groups of sources

- Proclamation books, 1733-1882
 - *You will find the following in the proclamation books*

A proclamation book is a collection of local legislation. The proclamation books can help you to examine local legislation in the Danish colony for a specific subject at a specific time between approximately 1733 and 1882. As well as local legislation, there was also central legislation issued by the central power in Copenhagen. The two types of legislation supplement each other, but normally the proclamation books contain the most detail about conditions locally.
 - *This is how the proclamation books are structured and organized*

Each of the eight proclamation books is organized chronologically, but there are big overlaps in the periods of time they cover and therefore the same legislation can appear in several books. Nor is it certain that a proclamation book contains all the legislation from the period it states it covers. One must examine all eight proclamation books to find all local legislation concerning a specific topic in a given period. Some of the proclamation books have an alphabetically organized subject index at the back, which makes it possible to find proclamations on a specific topic even if one does not know when they were issued. This applies to, for example, nos. 2.1.4, 2.1.5 or 2.1.6. A chronological index can also be found in the same place. The books were written in either Danish (Gothic) or Dutch (Latin) until about 1800, and after 1800 in Danish (Gothic) or English (Latin).

- *What you should know when using the poster books*
 - **What:** You should know which topic you are looking for legislation on.
 - **When:** You should know the period of time that contains the legislation in which you are interested.

- *The proclamation books are archived here*

The Government-General (archive no. 677), Proclamation books 1733-1882 (nos. 2.1.1-8)

- Police journals and Records of the Police Court, 1756-1904
 - *This is what you can find in the police journals and records of the Police Court*

Police journals and records of the Police Court are two different but related types of documents from the police authorities in the colony. The police journals are a kind of daily report listing all events at a police station – e.g. enslaved laborers who complained about bad treatment or reports of fights at public houses or about dead dogs somewhere in the town. The police records can help you to gain an insight into everyday life, especially in the towns, and what people in general thought was illegal, or cases where the authorities had to intervene.

The records of the Police Court are the next step in the legal process. They are minutes of what was said in the Police Court during questioning. The records of the Police Court can help you to gain an insight into what both free men and women and enslaved laborers said when they were charged or testified in a court case. They also show how local and central legislation was interpreted and applied. For example, a case about mistreatment that an enslaved laborer had reported to the police station and that had been registered in the police records could become a case in the Police Court.

 - *This is how the police journals and records of the Police Court are structured and organized*

The police journals and records of the Police Court are separately organized but in the same way. They are organized geographically by island and then chronologically. Each single police journal and volume of the records of the Police Court was also kept chronologically. In addition, every case in the records of the Police Court has a case number, which makes it possible to follow the case when the investigations took place over a long period of time. The registers were written in Danish (Gothic or Latin).

 - *What you should know when using the police journals and records of the Police Court*
 - **Where:** You should know which island and which town you want to investigate.
 - **When:** You should know the period you want to investigate.

- **Case number:** If you want to investigate a specific case, it will make your search easier if you know the case number.
- *The police journals and records of the Police Court are archived here*

The police authority was under the town or country sheriff, and therefore both police journals and records of the Police Court are usually archived under this authority. The records of the Police Court from Frederiksted form an exception as they were destroyed when the police station was destroyed during the rebellion of 1848. However, weekly transcripts of the police records for Frederiksted for the years following 1827 are preserved in the West Indian Government.
- **St. Thomas**
 - Sheriff of St. Thomas (archive no. 698), St. Thomas Police Office, Police journals 1804-1891 (nos. 14.8.1-19)
 - Sheriff of St. Thomas (archive no. 698), St. Thomas Police Office, Police court registers 1788-1896 (nos. 14.1.1-83)
- **St. John**
 - St. Thomas and St. John Government (archive no. 712), Sheriff of St. John, Police journals 1829-1892 (nos. 35.23.1-7)
 - St. Thomas and St. John Government (archive no. 712), Sheriff of St. John, Records of the Police Court 1818-1904 (nos. 35.17.1-19)
- **St. Croix**
 - *Christiansted*
 - Sheriff in Christiansted (archive no. 684), Police journals 1798-1846 (nos. 38.31.1- 15)
 - Sheriff in Christiansted (archive no. 684), Records of the Police Court 1756-1841 (nos. 38.9.1- 24)
 - *Frederiksted*
 - The government of the West Indies (archive no. 678), Files relating to register of correspondence, series B, 1827-1880 (nos. 3.64.22-270)
- Records of the Military Court, 1769-1914
 - *This is what you can find in the records of the Military Court*

The military had its own court. Cases at this court were reported in the records of the military jurisdictions on St. Thomas and St. Croix (Christiansted and Frederiksted), respectively. Therefore, the records of the Military Court can provide insight into the offences committed by people employed in the military and thus the problems that had an impact on their everyday lives. The proceedings also contain the verdicts pronounced and the sentences given.

- *This is how the records of the Military Court are structured and organized*
The records of the Military Court are organized geographically by island and town and then chronologically. Each volume of records is kept chronologically and in Danish (Gothic or Latin).
- *This is what you should know when using the records of the Military Court*
 - **Where:** You should know which island and which town you want to investigate.
 - **When:** If you want to find a specific case, you should know when it was dealt with at the military court.
- *The records of the Military Court are archived here*
 - **St. Thomas**
 - St. Thomas Military Jurisdiction (archive no. 710), Court records concerning St. Thomas and St. John, 1769-1914 (nos. 16.1.1-17)
 - **St. Croix**
 - St. Croix Military Jurisdiction (archive no. 687), Court records of the Military Court on St. Croix, 1817-1904 (nos. 42.1.1-10)
 - St. Croix Military Jurisdiction (archive no. 687), Court records of the Military Court in Christiansted, 1876-1898 (nos. 42.2.1-3)
 - St. Croix Military Jurisdiction (archive no. 687), Court records of the Military Court in Frederiksted, 1872-1892 (no. 42.3.1)
- Medical reports, 1823-1910
 - *This is what you can find in the medical reports*
The medical reports were annual reports from the royal district physician (*landfysikus*) and all doctors in the colony to the *Sundhedskollegium* (Board of Health) in Copenhagen. The reports can provide you with insight into sickness, health and the health system. For example, which diseases were prevalent on the islands among both enslaved laborers and free men and women and what was done to fight them, the military doctors and doctors with private practices, the hospitals, the midwife system, the pharmacies, vaccination against smallpox and the quarantine system in the harbors.
 - *This is how the medical reports are structured and organized*
The medical reports are organized chronologically by year and then geographically by island. Each report contains a general report from the *landfysikus*, with appended reports from all doctors on the islands, both those in private practice and from the military. The reports are written in either Danish (Gothic or Latin) or English (Latin).

- *What you should know when using the medical reports*
 - **When:** You should the period you want to investigate.
 - **Where:** You should know which island you want to investigate.
 - **Who/What:** If you know which institution (e.g. hospital) or person (e.g. doctor) you are looking for it will make your search easier.

- *The medical reports are archived here*
 - Board of Health (archive no. 1252), West Indian medical reports, 1823-1910 (nos. 1-8)

- Cases concerning the school system, 1852-1907
 - *This is what you can find in cases concerning the school system*

Cases concerning the schools can provide insight into children's schooling in the country and the town during the period from the abolition of slavery in 1848 to the sale of the islands to the USA in 1917. The cases consist of different types of material, among other things reports by head teachers, reports from local school commissions, material concerning work with local school legislation, and administrative cases between the schools and the West Indian Government. There is a wide range of information, from the number of children in the classes, to curricula and timetables and to farmhand mothers who did not make sure that their children attended the country school. The cases are written in Danish (Gothic or Latin) and English (Latin).

 - *This is how cases concerning the school system are structured and organized*

Cases concerning the school system are organized geographically under St. Croix and St. Thomas with St. John, respectively, and then chronologically. The contents of each box are not bound but loosely organized in covers (also called 'læg') according to subject areas. Each case has a case number referring to the West Indian Government's registers of correspondence, series A, and cases for these registers. This means that there may be more information about the same cases in these registers.

 - *This is what you should know when using the cases concerning the school system*
 - **Where:** You should know which island you want to investigate.
 - **When:** You should know which period you want to investigate.
 - **Who/What:** Your search will be easier if you know which topic you are interested in – e.g. legislation concerning schools, number of pupils, curriculum or personnel matters.

 - *Cases concerning the school system are archived here*
 - **St. Thomas & St. John**

- The West Indian Government (archive no. 678), Subject files: Social and cultural matters, Cases concerning the schools on St. Thomas 1852-1861 (no. 3.81.616)
- **St. Croix**
 - The West Indian Government (archive no. 678), Subject files: Social and cultural matters, Cases concerning the schools on St. Croix 1852-1907 (nos. 3.81.617-621)

Sources concerning trade and shipping

Trade and shipping were decisive for the colony in the Danish West Indies. Easy access to the sea and ocean-going sailing ships made it possible for the islands in the Caribbean to develop into a huge economic success.

Shipping made it possible to procure enslaved laborers as workforce in one continent (Africa), produce foodstuffs that were much in demand in another continent (the West Indies, South America) and consume them in a third continent (Europe).

St. Thomas was a center for shipping and trade from the beginning. This was because the island's big natural harbor is one of the best in the northern part of the Caribbean. The town developed into a regional center for long-distance trade, freight, transporting passengers, financial and practical services for the shipping industry and trade as well as being a center for the post and telegraph system.

The selected groups of sources below show different aspects of trade and shipping. The documents concerning the voyages of the Danish West India and Guinea Company's ships to the Danish West Indies and Guinea and the books kept on the ships of the Guinea Company show conditions on board. The merchant books show how the ships' cargoes of goods were sold on St. Thomas, while the auction books of the company's bookkeeper in Copenhagen record the sale of West Indian goods there. The Pilot journals of incoming and outward bound vessels provide an insight into where the ships in the harbor of St. Thomas came from and were going to, while the burgher certificates tell about the businesses that existed in the town and where the business community came from. Finally, the records of licenses for rum shops and public houses document the many public houses and rum shops that served sailors and others in the busy harbor.

One example of how the archives containing information about trade and shipping can be used is the kind of clothes that were given to the enslaved laborers. It appears from the merchant book from 1734-1736 that 9 blue and white shirts had been bought for the company's enslaved laborers who worked in the warehouse (called "pakhuuss Negere", i.e. warehouse negroes). Likewise, the merchant book for 1737-1740 shows that 2 female enslaved from the company's sugar plantation each got 3 *alen* (one *alen* was about two feet) of Osnabrück linen (rough linen) to wrap their new-born babies in.

The most important groups of sources

- Documents concerning voyages to the West Indies and Guinea 1671-1754
 - *You will find the following in documents concerning voyages*

When one of the West India and Guinea Company's big trading ships sailed from Denmark to the West Indies between 1671 and 1754, it carried with it a number of documents that can provide an insight into life on board. For example, where the ship was heading to, who

was on board (mariners and passengers), what they ate, goods in the hold, provisioning *en route*, shipwreck, damage to the ship etc.

- *This is how documents concerning voyages are structured and organized*

The documents are gathered in covers (also called 'læg') after the name of the ship and the year of the expedition in question. The covers are then organized chronologically, and each box contains several covers. Covers marked with (V) show expeditions that went to the West Indies, while covers marked with (G) show expeditions to Guinea. However, ships to Guinea almost always sailed home via the West Indies. The covers contain a varied collection of documents, e.g. sea letters, instructions, rations, muster rolls, invoices and inventories. The documents are most frequently written in Danish (Gothic), German (Gothic) or Dutch (Latin).
- *What you should know when using documents concerning voyages*
 - **When:** You should know which year or period you want to investigate.
 - **Where to:** You should know whether you want to investigate ships to the West Indies or ships to Guinea.
 - **The name of the ship:** It will make your search easier if you know the name of the ship.
- *Documents concerning voyages are archived here*

The West India and Guinea Company, Board of Directors (archive no. 446), Documents concerning voyages to the West Indies and Guinea 1671-1754 (nos. 191-216)
- Books kept on board the ships of the Guinea Company 1766-1778
 - *You will find the following in books kept on board the ships of the Guinea Company*

Each officer on board the company ships kept their own books. There is nautical and navigation-related information in the logbooks of the captain and mate. The ship's assistant kept the ship's registers (*inter alia* with letter copies), the pay book (account of each man's pay), the consumption book (account of equipment and fittings, provisions and commodities) and the trade book. Finally, the ship's doctor kept the medical journal (with an overview of patients and their treatment). All journeys took the triangular route from Copenhagen to the Gold Coast, further to the West Indies and home to Denmark.
 - *This is how documents kept on board the ships of the Guinea Company are structured and organized*

The books are organized according to type and then after the name of the ship and its voyages in chronological order. The documents are most frequently written in Danish (Gothic) and some in German (Gothic).

- *You should know the following when using books kept on board the ships of the Guinea Company*
 - **When:** You should know the year or period you want to investigate.
 - **The name of the ship:** It will make your search easier if you know the name of the ship.

- *The books kept on board the ships of the Guinea Company are archived here*
 - Guinea Company (archive no. 447), Ship's logs 1766-1777 (nos. 88-108)
 - Guinea Company (archive no. 447), Ship's registers 1766-1778 (nos. 109-122)
 - Guinea Company (archive no. 447), Pay book 1767-1777 (nos. 123-130)
 - Guinea Company (archive no. 447), Consumption book 1767-1775 (nos. 131-133)
 - Guinea Company (archive no. 447), Trade book 1769-1773 (nos. 134-135)
 - Guinea Company (archive no. 447), Medical journal 1767-1775 (nos. 136-141)

- Pilot journals of incoming vessels 1821-1865
 - *You will find the following in the pilot journals of incoming vessels*

Pilot journals of incoming vessels were kept by the Harbor Master in Charlotte Amalie on St. Thomas between 1821 and 1865. They provide a picture of the traffic of trading ships that sailed to St. Thomas in the heyday of the island as a center of trade. They can *inter alia* help you to discover where the ships came from, their number, their nationality, how big they were and the cargo they carried. The Harbor Master kept a corresponding record of outward-bound vessels. The records of incoming vessels 1865-1918 are in the US National Archives in Washington DC.

 - *This is how the pilot journals of incoming vessels are structured and organized*

The series of records are organized chronologically. Each record is also chronologically structured. They are written in Danish (Gothic).

 - *You should know the following when using pilot journals of incoming vessels*
 - **When:** You should know period you want to investigate.

 - *The pilot journals of incoming vessels are archived here*

The Government-General, St. Thomas Harbour Master (archive no. 701), Pilot journals of incoming vessels 1821-1865 (nos. 25.4.1-17)

- Pilot journals of outgoing vessels 1821-1865
 - *You will find the following in the pilot journals of outgoing vessels*

The pilot journals of outgoing vessels were kept by the Harbor Master in Charlotte Amalie on St. Thomas between 1821 and 1865. They provide a picture of the traffic of trading ships

that sailed from St. Thomas in the heyday of the island as center of trade. They can *inter alia* help you to discover where the ships from St. Thomas were going, their nationality, number, size and the contents and weight of the cargo etc. The Harbor Master kept a corresponding record of incoming vessels. The records of outward-bound vessels 1865-1922 are in the US National Archives in Washington DC.

- *This is how the records of the pilot journals of outgoing vessels are structured and organized*
The series of records are organized chronologically. Each record is also chronologically structured. They are written in Danish (Gothic).
- *You should know the following when using the pilot journals of outgoing vessels*
 - **When:** You should know the period you want to investigate.
- *The pilot journals of outgoing vessels are archived here*

Government-General, St. Thomas Harbour Master (archive no. 701), Pilot journals of outgoing vessels 1821-1865 (nos. 25.5.1-16)

- Merchant books 1734-1755

- *You will find the following in the merchant books*
The merchant books were kept by the merchant of the Danish West India and Guinea Company on St. Thomas 1734-1755. They contain information about the goods the merchant sold to and bought from which plantation owners and other persons on the island. The trade registers can help you to gain an insight into the goods used in running the plantations and for private consumption. There was a wide range of goods, from linen for the clothes of the enslaved laborers to luxury goods such as china and tea.
- *This is how the merchant books are structured and organized*
The series of merchant books is organized chronologically. Each volume is divided into different types of goods with one account for each type. Each account is chronological and with debit and credit. Most of the volumes have an alphabetical goods index. The books are written in Danish (Gothic).
- *You should know the following when using the trade registers*
 - **When:** You should know which year you want to investigate.
 - **What:** You should know which goods you want to investigate.
- *The merchant books are archived here*

The West India and Guinea Company, the Treasurer and the Merchant, St. Thomas and St. John (archive no. 446), *Merchant book 1734-1755* (nos. 760-765)

- Auction books 1673-1754

- *You will find the following in the auction books*

- The Danish West India and Guinea Company kept detailed accounts of which goods brought to Denmark were sold at the Company's auctions in Copenhagen, who bought them and their price. Every single barrel of raw sugar, every bale of cotton, every roll of tobacco, every sack of coffee beans, every elephant tusk etc. was noted.

- *This is how the auction books are structured and organized*

- The auction books are fair copies of notes kept during the auctions themselves. The auctions are entered in chronological order, and each auction is divided into types of goods. In many cases there are also statements of each buyer's total purchases at the auction. The records are written in Danish (Gothic).

- *You should know the following when using the auction books*

- **When:** You should know the year you want to investigate.
 - **What:** You should know the goods you want to investigate.
 - **Who:** You should know which purchaser you want to investigate.

- *The auction books are archived here*

- The West India and Guinea Company (archive no. 446), Bookkeeper and treasurer, Auction book 1673-1689 (no. 407)
 - The West India and Guinea Company (archive no. 446), Bookkeeper and treasurer, Auction books, kept by the bookkeeper 1697-1754 (nos. 408-413)

- Burgher certificates 1755-1909

- *You will find the following in the burgher certificates*

- The burgher certificate was proof that a person had been granted citizenship in the colony of the Danish West Indies. Citizenship came with certain privileges and rights, including the right to conduct business in the colony and the obligation to perform different public duties, e.g. the militia and the fire service. The registers of burgher certificates contain information about who had received a burgher certificate, the birth date of the person in question and the trade by which he or she lived. Thus, they can provide information about the businesses that existed in the colony at a certain point in time and where the tradesmen and -women came from. They are most frequently artisans, retailers, and small-scale traders, many of whom were connected to trade and shipping, e.g. merchants, skippers, ship's mates etc.

- *This is how the burgher certificates are structured and organized*

The series of burgher certificates is organized chronologically. Each volume in the series is also chronologically structured, but with an alphabetic index of names organized by surname. However, it should be noted that the first volume in the series that covers 1755-1788 (no. 11.53.171) has no information about occupation.
- *You should know the following when using the burgher certificates*
 - **When:** You should know the year or period you want to investigate.
 - **Who:** If you are looking for a specific person, you should know the surname of the person in question.
- *The burgher certificates are archived here*
- St. Thomas and St. John Government (archive no. 693), Subject files: Social and cultural matters, burgher certificates 1755-1788, 1816-1909 (nos. 11.53.171-173)
- License records for rum shops and public houses 1834-1903
 - *You will find the following in license records for rum shops and public houses*

The license records for rum shops and public houses contain information about who had a license to operate this special type of retail trade on St. Thomas between 1834 and 1903, and who had permission to have a public billiard saloon. Sometimes there also is information about the location of the rum shop, public house or billiard saloon. The license records can provide information about how many public houses served the many sailors, skippers and tradesmen in the busy harbor of St. Thomas, who owned them and where they were.
 - *This is how the license records for rum shops and public houses are structured and organized*

The series of license records are organized chronologically, while each volume is structured alphabetically after the name of the licensee.
 - *You should know the following when using the license records for rum shops and public houses*
 - **When:** You should know which year or period you want to investigate.
 - **Who:** If you are looking for a specific person, you should know the surname of the person in question.
 - *The license records for rum shops and public houses are archived here*

St. Thomas and St. John Government (archive no. 693), Subject files: Trade, License records for rum shops & public houses, 1834-1903 (nos. 11.53.220-223)

