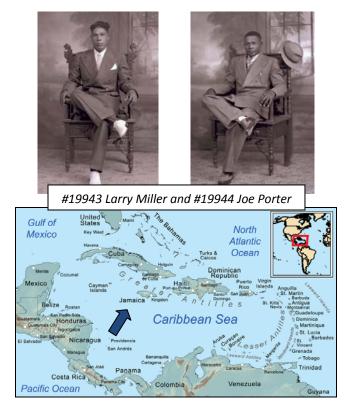
World War II, Sibley County, and Jamaican Workers

By Steve & Becky Briggs, SCHS members and volunteers

How were the fields tended during World War II when 16 million American men and women were defending our country? Even after recruiting every available American worker, we needed to "import" workers from foreign lands. Some of the workers who came to Sibley County were from Jamaica and other islands of the West Indies.



Why Jamaicans to the US?

It's not often we hear about the role of Jamaicans and our other Caribbean neighbors during WWII. Many Jamaicans fought with Britain. There were aliens who fought with the US and its allies; but some contributions, such as farm labor, were less noted as they were overshadowed by war activities.

In the midst of WWII, the U.S. Department of Agriculture authorized temporary importation of 75,000 Bahamians and Jamaicans to work as farm laborers due to a shortage of needed workers. It was a win-win situation. Our Jamaican neighbors were able to earn better wages, and we were able to harvest and process our crops.

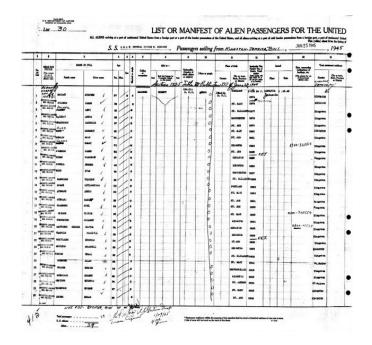
Two Farm Help Programs Bring In 4,000 Workers

Results Given In Effort To Get War Prisoners-Nationals Winthrop News June 15, 1944 Page 4

Manifest of Alien Passengers for the United States

The United States was in such dire need of laborers, they even provided transport to the workplace.

This manifest is dated January 25, 1945. In the column provided to list the name of the relative the passenger was going to visit, it says "War Manpower Commission, Washington, D. C." The United States was importing laborers from Jamaica on this manifest.



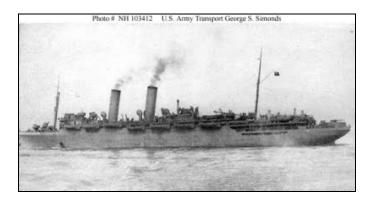




#19947 Joslyn & Franklin Gayle & #19950 Reginald Wynter

Transported by US Ships to Work in Fields

From August 1944 until early 1946, the US Army Transport George S. Simonds served between the Caribbean and the east coast of the US, mainly transporting Jamaican workers.



US Army Transport (USAT) George S. Simonds

Trial Runs For Canning Plant, Friday-Saturday

208 Factory Hånds Will Be Employed

The August 10, 1944 edition of the Winthrop News reported that the Minnesota Valley Canning Company's plant in Winthrop got underway for the season's pack at an early date. There were 208 factory hands. In the field the pickers numbered about 48 from Jamaica and another dozen from Mexico. These workers were housed and fed at the plant grounds. They had recently worked at the factory in LeSueur for the pea pack.

Canning Factory Closes Down; Operated 25 Days

Pack This Year Totals 101,245 Cases

<u>Winthrop News</u>, September 21, 1944 reported the canning plant closed down after operating 25 days. There were 208 employees on the payroll, including the 48 Jamaicans joining in on the corn pick.

During the workers' stay in America they found time to visit the C.J. Ostrom Studio in Winthrop

As SCHS volunteer Becky Briggs continues to scan the thousands of Ostrom negatives donated to the Sibley County Historical Society, she has run across numerous photographs taken of these Jamaican workers. Some of the photos were published on the Society's website in January 2011:

http://sibleycountyhistoricalmuseum.com/Theme - Jamaica.html

The photos seemed to stir website visitors' curiosity regarding these men who traveled the 2,000-plus miles from their homeland to Minnesota.

Ostrom Photograph Studio Register

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We find several of the workers' names on page 176 of an Ostrom Studio Register dated September 22, 1944. The price for these photos ranged from \$1.75 to \$2.00. We have matched some of the names to their photos in this article.





#19955 Arthur Daniels & #19936 Sidney Ebanks

If you are interested in reading WWII-vintage local newspaper articles regarding this topic, they can be found using the web address above.