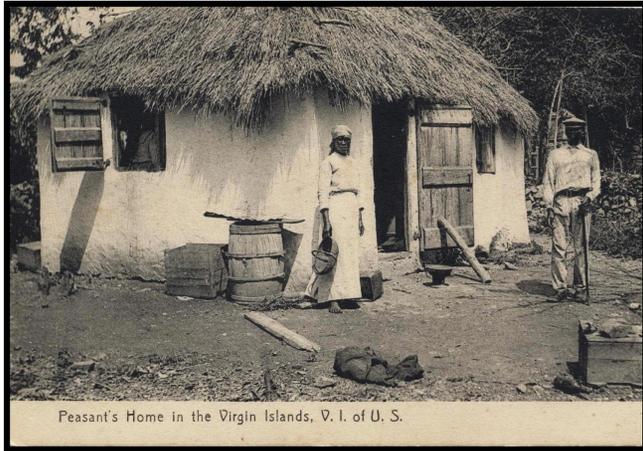
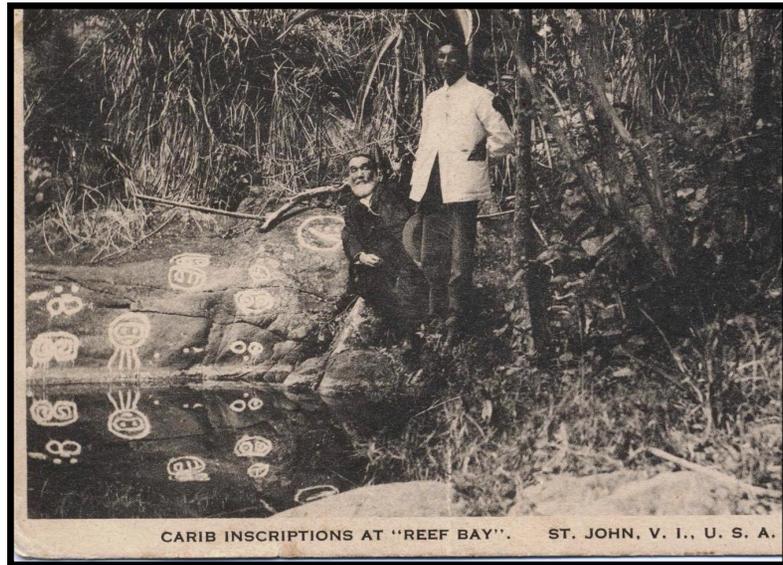


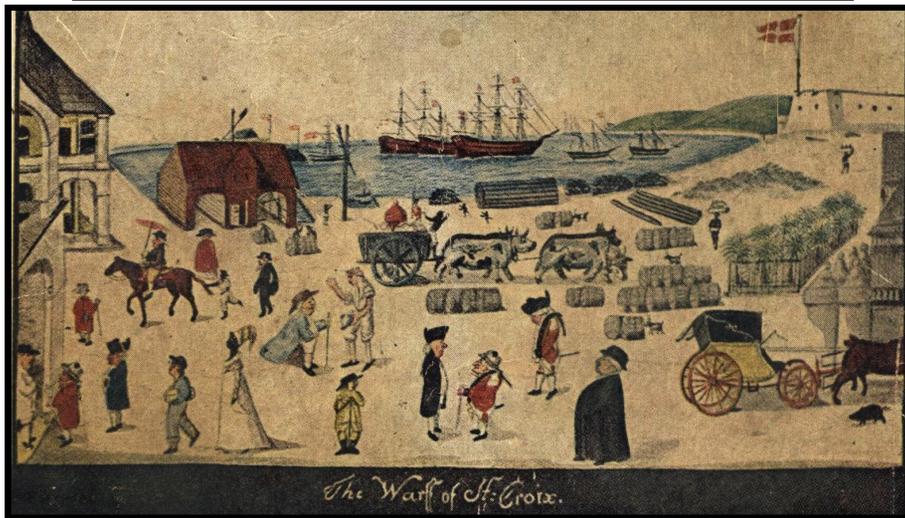
Postcards from the Danish West Indies owned by Josepha.



Peasant's Home in the Virgin Islands, V. I. of U. S.



CARIB INSCRIPTIONS AT "REEF BAY". ST. JOHN, V. I., U. S. A.



The Wharf of St. Croix.



Spirits of St. Croix

*Unraveling the mystery of my
great-grandmother's West Indian past.*

By Samuel M. Lemon, Ed.D., January 6, 2012



Josepha Constancia Hall Philips Rid-
1858 - 1950



~ Spirits of St. Croix ~

I became interested in genealogy as a child, spending countless hours with my grandmother Maud at her dining room table, questioning her endlessly about the pantheon of faces gazing at me from sepia-toned photographs. I yearned to know who we were, where we came from, and how we came to be. But one mystery haunted me for decades, which I was only able to solve with the help of Rob Upson of the Caribbean Genealogy Library.

My maternal great-grandmother – Josepha Constancia Philips – was born in the Danish West Indies in the mid-19th century, and sailed to America on the S.S. Advance, arriving at Ellis Island on July 19, 1887.

Josepha (sometimes spelled *Josefa* or *Josephia*) was a beautiful and mysterious woman – the illegitimate daughter of George A. F. Philips (1831-1885), a wealthy New York merchant who resided on St. Thomas, circa 1858 to 1881, and served as a member of the Colonial Council. His *New York Times* obituary dated February 27, 1885, reported he was a personal friend of Venezuelan President Antonio Guzman Blanco (1829-1899). As an “agent of the Revolution,” Philips was appointed Consul General to the United States by Blanco, who stayed at Philips’ home on Government Hill in Charlotte Amalie during the Venezuelan Revolution (1877-1878).

Philips led a colorful life. His first wife, Ubaldina Consorla Nelson (1837-1876) from Aspinwall (renamed, *Colón*) Panama, was in a New York City convent, when they eloped and married on June 6, 1856. Their daughter – Dolores Philips – was born on St. Thomas in February 1857. Ubaldina died there on July 16, 1876. It’s unclear what became of their daughter Dolores.

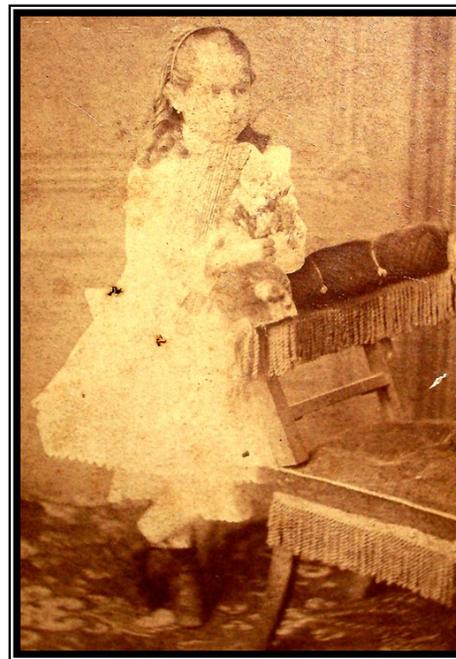
Josepha attended Lomar Van Brakle’s School, West End, St. Croix, between 1865 and 1880. A letter written by George Philips addressed to “Miss Josepha Philips” at school, dated August 23, 1878, included \$20. In his letter, George scolded her for her spendthrift ways and wrote:

At right: Josepha’s 1887 passport from St. Thomas to the United States.

Part of an undated letter from George Philips to Josepha about her birthday presents, including a barrel of ice. Above: front of the envelope for his letter of Aug. 23, 1878.

13	Mathilda Rosalina Abbott	1860 August 21	1861 Septbr 1
14	Amelia		1848 Juni 29
15	Axelina Blyden		
16	Ernesta Olivia Boyesen	1858 Octbr 31	1859 Juni 5
17	Catharina Fryer		
18	Mathilda Christiana Fryer	1862 April 14	1862 Novbr 23
19	Josepha Constantia Hall	1858 Septbr 25	1859 April 25
20	Maria Christophina Johannes (Kaldes sig Josepha i Bort. 3. h. 5)	1842 Decr 11	1843 Marts 11

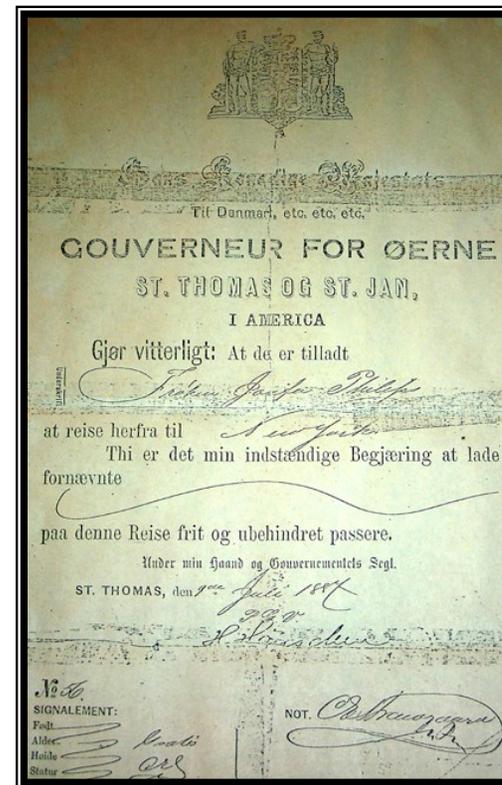
Page from Frederick Evangelical Lutheran Church archives, noting (#19) Josepha's 1858 birth and 1859 baptism. St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands. Courtesy of Robert Upson, President of the Caribbean Genealogy Library.



Josepha about 6 yrs. old, circa 1864. Doll sent to her daughter, Maud (below, about age 12, circa 1902) by Josepha's governess, Helena Hoyer in Denmark.



Baby picture of George Philips' nephew, Capt. Tom Philips (1852 - 1922) circa 1853.



"I cannot see what a young lady makes of so much money in St. Croix." When George was away on business, his nephew, Captain Tom Philips, delivered his letters and gifts to Josepha and provided supervision. In another, undated, letter regarding her birthday, George wrote: "I have sent you a bbl (barrel) of ice by Capt. Tom for your party." A barrel of ice equals 42 gallons – an extravagant birthday present on a tropical island before refrigeration was widely available.

In a letter dated June 13, 1879 from St. Thomas, Capt. Tom Philips, reminded Josepha that he and Mrs. Weiss were responsible for her "in the absence of your father." He also wrote of heavy rains that week and an earthquake the night before. Mrs. Weiss may have been the wife of Inspector F. C. W. Weiss, in charge of the Richmond Jail/Arrest House. Other Crucians mentioned in these letters were Irene Cummings, a seamstress, and Tilly (*Sobotker*, possibly) – a "washer" (laundress, perhaps).

Josepha's early life was difficult to trace because she periodically changed her birth year and assumed her father's surname, "Philips," replacing her original surname, "Hall." Interestingly, she never altered her birth day – September 25th. On her 1887 passport, her stated age was 19 years, indicating she was born about 1868. On the 1910 Census in Pennsylvania she is listed as 38, and born in 1872. On the 1920 Census she stated she was 45, and born in 1875. And on the 1930 Census she reported she was 45 and born in 1885 – which suggests she was two years old when she sailed to America alone!

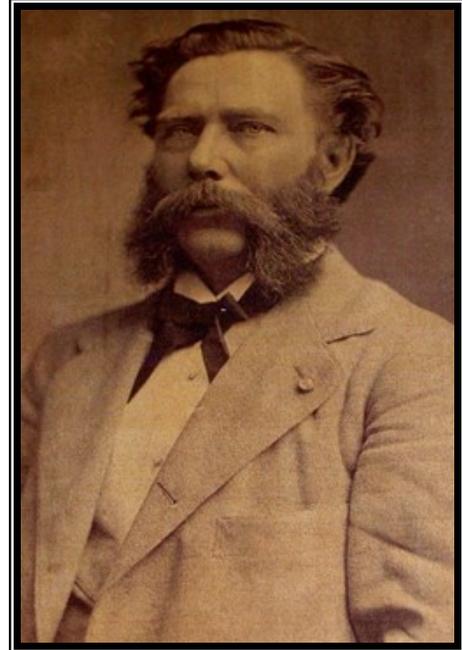
In St. Thomas' Frederick Evangelical Lutheran Church archives, Mr. Upson found a page listing: "Josephia Constantia Hall," born September 25, 1858, baptized April 25, 1859. Parent: Mary Amelia Hall. No father was mentioned. Josephia's maternal grandmother appears in the Danish census as Caroline Drivenen or Drewesen, who had likely been born a mulatto slave on St. Croix in 1817. Both Mary and Caroline are buried in the Lutheran Evangelical Church graveyard in Christiansted.

Mary Hall, an unmarried free woman of color, and seamstress born in 1810, appears on several St. Croix censuses. Mary had two children besides Josepha – John Hubert Brunn (b.1844) and Albert Brunn (b.1860). In 1846, she was living in a house owned by Nicholas Brunn (b.1782). On the 1870 Census, at age 60, she was living in Christiansted at #58 East Street.

OBITUARY.

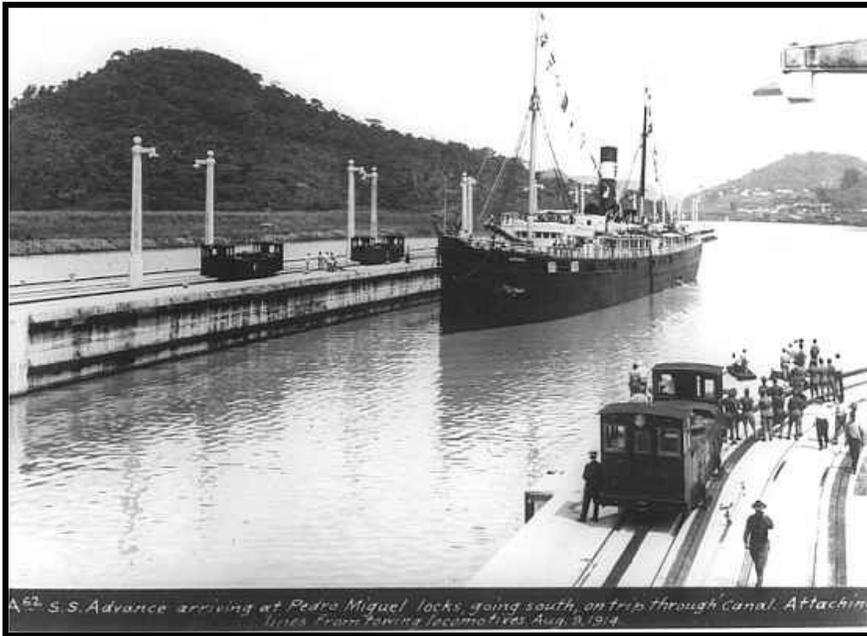
GEORGE A. PHILIPS.

George A. Philips, Venezuelan Consul-General to the United States, died at his residence, No. 1,285 Lexington-avenue, at 7 o'clock yesterday morning. Though he had been ailing for some time from a complication of disorders, his death was quite sudden, and was attributed to heart disease. Mr. Philips was a native of this city. He removed from New-York to the island of St. Thomas, in the West Indies, in 1853. Then he went into the mercantile business, and in a few years became one of the leading merchants of the island. In 1863 he was appointed Consul there from Venezuela. He afterward was elected a member of the Colonial Council, the local Legislature of the island. He held this position when the revolution in Venezuela broke out, in 1877 and 1878. Mr. Philips was a warm personal friend of Guzman Blanco, and sympathizing with him politically became the agent of the revolution in St. Thomas. When Blanco entered the Venezuelan Government as President Mr. Philips was appointed Consul-General to the United States. He leaves a wife, a son, and a daughter by a former wife. The funeral will be held Sunday, at 1:30 P. M., at the Church of the Beloved Disciple, Eighty-ninth-street and Madison-avenue, and the body will be interred at Greenwood.



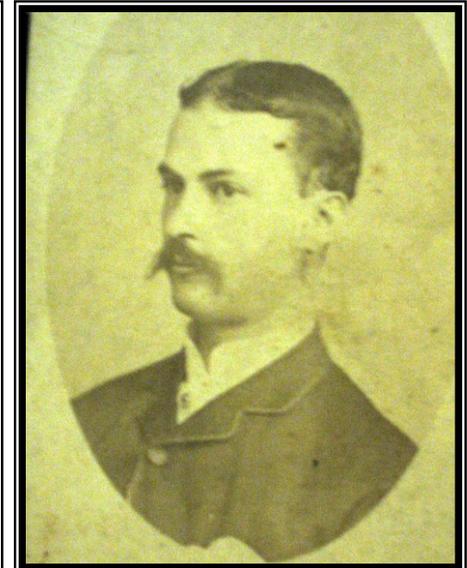
HYB-2000B-610M-5-19		COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA		DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH		BUREAU OF VITAL STATISTICS		File No. 175965		
Primary Dist. No. 23-08-21		340		Registered No. 246						
1. PLACE OF DEATH a. COUNTY MELANORE		2. USUAL RESIDENCE (Where deceased lived. If institution: residence before admission). a. STATE Penna. b. COUNTY HALL		c. CITY (If outside corporate limits, write RURAL and give township) Media		d. STREET ADDRESS (If rural, give location) 423 N. Olive				
b. CITY (If outside corporate limits, write RURAL and give township) Media		c. LENGTH OF STAY (In this place) 50 Yrs.		d. FULL NAME OF HOSPITAL OR INSTITUTION		e. DATE OF DEATH (Month) (Day) (Year) Aug. 22 50				
3. NAME OF DECEASED (Type or Print) Josephia C. Ridley		a. (First) Josephia		b. (Middle) C.		c. (Last) Ridley				
5. SEX Fem.		6. COLOR OR RACE Col.		7. MARRIED, NEVER MARRIED, WIDOWED, DIVORCED (Specify) Widow.		8. DATE OF BIRTH (Month) (Day) (Year) Sept. 26 81		9. AGE (In years last birthday) 49 Yrs.		10. If under 1 year: Months Days
10a. USUAL OCCUPATION (Give kind of work, or principal part of working life, even if deceased)		10b. KIND OF BUSINESS OR INDUSTRY At Home		11. BIRTHPLACE (Also give State or foreign country) St. Virgin Islands, W.I., U.S.A.		12. CITIZEN OF WHAT COUNTRY? U.S.A.				
13. FATHER'S NAME George Phillips		14. MOTHER'S MAIDEN NAME Mary Hall		17. INFORMANT'S OWN SIGNATURE Mary Amelia Hall		ADDRESS 305 N. Olive St. Media Pa.				
15. WAS DECEASED EVER IN U. S. ARMED FORCES? (If yes, complete reverse side of certificate)		16. SOCIAL SECURITY NO. 110		18. CAUSE OF DEATH (Enter only one cause per line for (a), (b), and (c))		1. DISEASE OR CONDITION DIRECTLY LEADING TO DEATH* (a) Acute Dilatation of the Heart		MEDICAL CERTIFICATION		INTERVAL BETWEEN ONSET AND DEATH 48 hrs
*This does not mean the mode of dying, such as heart failure, asthma, etc. It means the disease, injury, or complication which caused death.		ANTECEDENT CAUSES		DUE TO (b) Arterio-sclerosis		DUE TO (c) Senility		OTHER SIGNIFICANT CONDITIONS		450.0
19a. DATE OF OPERATION		19b. MAJOR FINDINGS OF OPERATION None		20. AUTOPSY? YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>		21a. ACCIDENT (Specify) None		21b. PLACE OF INJURY (e.g., in or about home, farm, factory, street, office bldg., etc.)		21c. (CITY, TOWN AND TOWNSHIP) (COUNTY) (STATE)
21d. TIME (Month) (Day) (Year) (Hour) None		21e. INJURY OCCURRED While at Work <input type="checkbox"/> Not While at Work <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		21f. HOW DID INJURY OCCUR?		22. I hereby certify that I attended the deceased from Aug. 22, 1950 , to Aug. 22, 1950 , that I last saw the deceased alive on Aug. 22, 1950 , and that death occurred at 7:40 a.m. E.S.T. , from the causes and on the date stated above.		23a. SIGNATURE Robert G. Hall		23b. ADDRESS Media, Pa.
24. SIGNATURE Robert G. Hall		24b. DATE Aug. 26, 50		24c. NAME OF CEMETERY OR CREMATORY Eden		24d. LOCATION (Town, township and county) (State) Barby Pa.		24e. SIGNATURE OF FUNERAL DIRECTOR Wm. H. B. Belling		ADDRESS Media Pa.

S.S. Advance, built in 1883 at John Roach & Sons shipyard, Chester, PA.

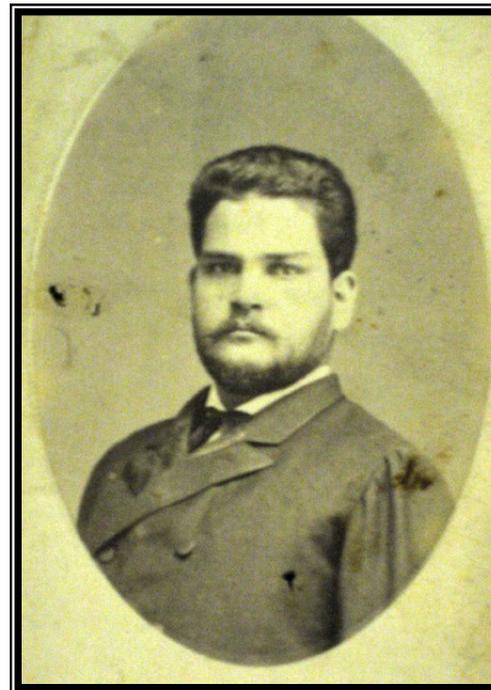


A-52 S.S. Advance arriving at Pedro Miguel locks, going south, on trip through Canal. Attaching lines from towing locomotive Aug. 3, 1914

Ellen and Daniel Henrique, reportedly "cousins" of Josepha, circa 1900. How they were related to Josepha, and what became of them is not known.



Josepha, about 90 years old, at Eden Cemetery in Collingdale, PA, circa 1948. At right is great-granddaughter Joyce Brady. Opposite: Josepha's death certificate.



Above: unidentified friend or relative of Josepha's. At right: Josepha's governess, Helena Hoyer who retired to Denmark.



Josepha never discussed her mother or siblings. However, she mentioned two cousins – Ellen and Daniel Henrique, of whom I have photographs and two letters they wrote around 1900. Josepha kept in contact with another “relative” – Aneta Chase (maiden name unknown) of Washington, D.C. – who was born on St. Thomas in December 1870. Aneta arrived in U.S. in 1876, under circumstances not explained. Precisely how they were related is unclear.

Josepha also spoke fondly of her former governess, Helena Hoyer, who retired to Copenhagen, Denmark. She sent my grandmother Maud an elegant hand-made porcelain doll from Denmark, which remains in my family. Ms. Hoyer corresponded with Maud until 1933, when she presumably died.

On the 1911 St. Croix Census is an infant named Nene Helena Schelde Bang Hoyer, living with her parents, 1st Lieutenant Niels Jurgen Henrik Nielsen Hoyer and Marie Elisabeth Hoyer, at the Gendarme Barracks on Hospital Street. They may be related to the elder Ms. Hoyer.

Josepha was a study in contrasts: a devout Lutheran who held strong West Indian folk beliefs akin to Obeah. She sometimes sprinkled red brick dust across doorways and window sills to keep out evil spirits. She was clairvoyant, and had a favorite spirit friend named “Charlie,” who had a special living room chair reserved just for him. Josepha had a knack for nursing sick children back to health; but held a perpetual fear of being poisoned; yet believed that death was simply a part of life.

Fiery and fearless, she spoke of once lashing herself to a tree to survive a Caribbean hurricane. She loved fried plantains and bananas. And conversed freely and frankly with her grand-children but was mute about her mother.

Josepha married my great-grandfather, William Henry Ridley, Esquire, July 19, 1887 in Washington, D.C. She died August 22, 1950, in Media, Pennsylvania. My search to uncover our past continues.

(end)

Charcoal sketches of William H. Ridley, Esq., and Josepha Philips about the time of their marriage on July 19, 1887. The name of the sketch artist and where the drawings were done is not known.

