

A Merchant of Old Main Street

Success in a bustling port town like Charlotte Amalie requires shrewd business savvy and a strong sense of community.



Photo courtesy of MAPEs MONDe

Danish artist, Fritz Melbey (1826-1896) captured St. Thomas harbor in this 1850 print (above). Both the McDougal building and Quarters B are identifiable.

By Christian Williamson

A glimpse into the history of St. Thomas reveals colorful entrepreneurs who journeyed to the island to make both a name and a fortune. Young Scotsman Duncan McDougal came to St. Thomas in the early 1830s at age 19. Within fifteen years he had established D. McDougal & Co., became an important member of the Dutch Reformed Church, married Anna Maria Juliette Weinmar, daughter of a prominent planter, and partnered with William Briscoe of Wolverhampton, England to form Briscoe, McDougal & Co.

McDougal's hardware and trading business owned several of the major warehouses on Dronningens Gade and Kronprindsens Gade, today's Main Street and Lower Main Street. Briscoe, McDougal & Co. would eventually create an international shipping network connecting England, St. Thomas, Jamaica, Argentina, Australia and New Zealand.

Like any modern businessman, McDougal worked to balance the

interests of family, employees, customers and community. As his family grew, he bought the home at 32/33 Kongens Gade, now known as "Quarters B." Records show that McDougal served on the boards of the Bank of St. Thomas, the Marine and Strangers Asylum, the Marine Slip Repairing Company and represented Scottish and English merchants as an attorney. Briscoe, McDougal & Co. also contributed to disaster relief and charitable causes at home and aboard.

When Duncan passed away in 1883, his sons, James and Herman carried on the family name and business. As the executive officer of McDougal & Co., James established warehouses in Frederiksted and Christiansted on St. Croix. Herman, an attorney, became the British Consul for St. Thomas and St. Croix in 1888. McDougal & Co. continued until 1908, but the brothers left no heirs. After more than seventy-five years of success on St. Thomas, the door was opened for new entrepreneurs to make their fortunes on Charlotte Amalie's waterfront.



The internationally recognized ROLEX logo graces the historical warehouse on St. Thomas' waterfront that once served as the headquarters for Briscoe, McDougal & Co. Duncan McDougal acquired the property in 1874 for £5000 pounds sterling. The building served as a commercial warehouse, retail store and the British consulate during Herman Wilhelm McDougal's term as Royal Consul for St. Croix and St. Thomas.