

Haiti - Past and Present

I have known about the poverty in Haiti for several decades, mostly from mission groups that served there. But some of the past history of Haiti had been forgotten by me or never learned. European contact started with the visit by Columbus in 1492. Diseases brought by the Europeans essentially wiped out the native people. So slaves from Africa were brought in to manage the agricultural fields and do other labor. There were struggles between the Spanish, French, and English over possession of the entire island of Hispaniola. In 1697 Spain ceded the western third of the island to France. That part became the richest area in the Caribbean, providing exports of sugarcane, coffee, cocoa, cotton, indigo, and forest products.



Inspired by the French Revolution in 1789, the slaves rebelled against the plantations, and in 1793 slavery was abolished. The people succeeded in resisting European control and eventually declared independence from France in 1804. Meanwhile, Napoleon in a secret treaty obtained the Louisiana territory from Spain in 1800. In 1802 he sent military forces to Haiti to regain control, with the ultimate destination of New Orleans to take control of his new territory there. However, the Haitians destroyed Napoleon's forces, and Napoleon had to change plans. With the new French control to the west, American president Jefferson became worried about the loss of a free trade agreement by which American goods shipped along the Mississippi River were duty-free at the New Orleans

port. So in April 1803 the Americans proposed to purchase the Louisiana Territory. Napoleon needed money for his European war effort and quickly agreed to the sale and to the exit of the French from most of the Western Hemisphere. So it was the defeat of the French forces by the Haitians that led to the Louisiana Purchase and the nearly doubling of the size of the United States.

In subsequent years various periods of political turmoil in Haiti ruined the prosperity of that country, leading it to eventually become the poorest nation in the Americas. Deforestation and the natural disasters of hurricanes and earthquakes have also taken their toll.

Over the recent decades I have made occasional donations to the charitable group Missionary Flights International (MFI), based in southern Florida, to upgrade their small fleet of DC-3 aircraft that provide vital flights to Haiti and the Bahamas for various mission groups. Their newsletters informed me of the needs in Haiti.

At 4:53 PM, 12 January 2010, the major (7.0) earthquake struck the capital area of southern Haiti, causing much destruction and loss of life. I again sent some donations to MFI for their relief effort. Later that year they sent me a hard-bound book, *Shaking Ground Unshakable Faith*,



MFI turbo DC-3

documenting the many relief efforts in Haiti (and supplying two of these photos). In addition, the DigitalGlobe company provided free access to their detailed satellite imagery of Haiti, supplying before and after pictures from which damage assessments could be made. I collected some of that imagery and included it in my graduate course, Remote Sensing, taught at the University of Denver, to show the power of such imagery for disaster assessment. So I became knowledgeable about some of the damage details in the capital area of Port-au-Prince: the National Palace, the Notre Dame de l'Assomption cathedral, the airport, the seaport, and refugee settlements.

In Moments...Buildings were Destroyed

The National Palace was designed by Haiti's own George Bausson. It was built between 1912-1920. Architects from both Haiti and France submitted plans for the royal building. Bausson's plan received second place. The first-place drawing was rejected because it was thought to be too expensive. For many, it was a beloved national symbol.

The building, which is twice as big as the White House, housed Haiti's Presidents and their families in the south wing. There are three wings extending back from the central front with staircases running to the second floor from either side of the main hall.

Today, after sustaining considerable damage, especially the central rotunda, the future of the building remains undecided.



Photo by Michelle Walz Eriksson

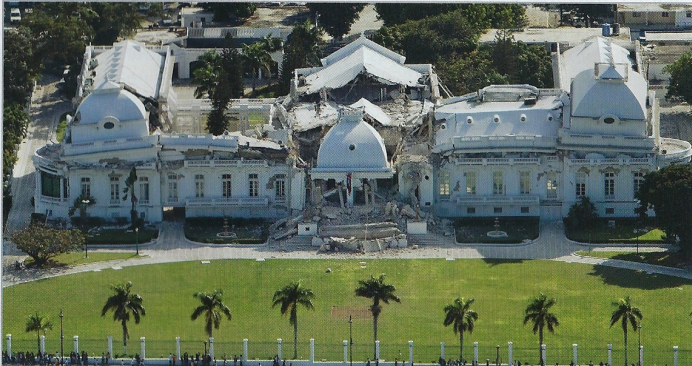


Photo by Logan Abassi

This image is from page 14 of that MFI book, showing the National Palace and its ruins. Below are before and after satellite images of the palace. At the bottom is a portion of my own photo taken from the mountaintop Observatoire overlooking Port-au-Prince.

On the next page are satellite images of the cathedral, and my own photo extract taken from that same mountaintop. Those ruins have not been removed nor replaced.

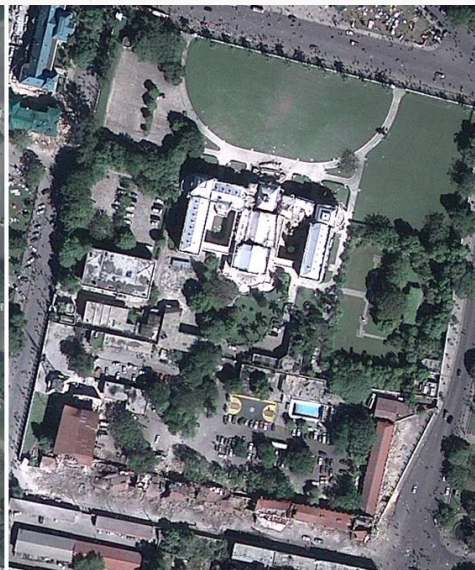
When being driven around Port-au-Prince I was only able to spot one building that seemed to retain obvious earthquake damage.

Having studied daily satellite photos of activities at the airport after the earthquake, I was familiar with its layout in advance of our arrival there. On this trip I even photographed two junk aircraft at the east end that I knew might still be there.



View of hilltop Observatoire

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Presidential building (white): before, WorldView-2, 7 Jan. 2010. after, GeoEye-1, 13 Jan. 2010.



My photo of 29 April 2017. The National Palace ruins were removed from the left side during the Summer of 2012.

WorldView-2, 7 Jan. 2010

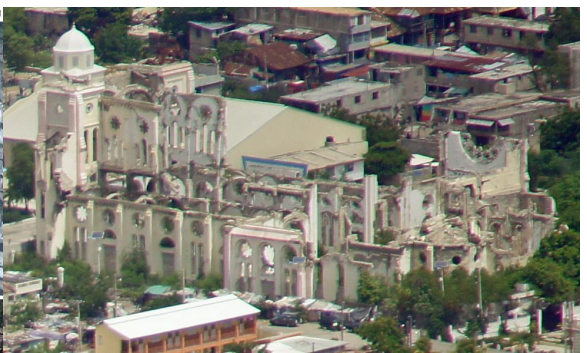
WorldView-2, 18 Jan. 2010



GeoEye-1, 13 Jan. 2010

GeoEye-1, 16 Jan. 2010

Satellite views of the cathedral. Before in upper left



My photo, from Observatoire, of the Notre Dame de l'Assomption cathedral

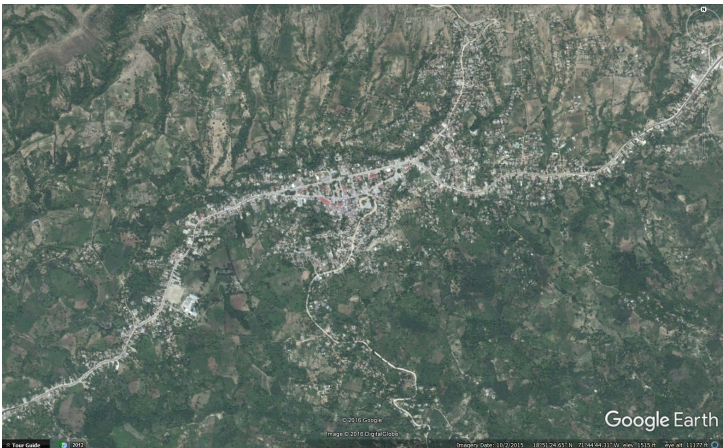
Our 22 to 30 April 2017 trip to Haiti was organized by Project C.U.R.E. (www.projectcure.org) as a CURE Clinic to supply limited medical care to needy people

there. After an overnight stay near the airport, we drove to Belladere, near the border with the Dominican Republic. We did two clinics in that region and visited the local hospital.

Then we went to Mirebalais, visiting the major new hospital there and doing two clinics at a village west of there. Our last days were at the capital, Port-au-Prince. A year ago I visited the northern resort of Labadee for a day, thereby contributing to the important tourism economy, but this time I



visited the real Haiti. (see www.edholroyd.info/TripReports/2016%20Caribbean/CaribCruiseHaiti.pdf)



Buildings (white) near Belladere are mostly close to the main highway in this satellite view.



Mirebalais is a larger city near muddy (tan) rivers. The large white patch on the left is the new hospital.

More details about our CURE Clinic to Haiti are in other reports of this series.

Dr. Ed Holroyd, 8 May 2017