

The Nineteenth-century historians of Trinidad

by

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Three significant histories of Trinidad were published in the nineteenth century, by E.L. Joseph, P.G.L. Borde and L.M. Fraser.

Borde was a white Creole, from the island's influential French Creole community; Joseph and Fraser were Englishmen who had settled in the island. These men were part of the small circle of educated whites with literary, scientific and historical interests which Port of Spain (like all the larger colonial Caribbean capitals) possessed at this period. Such men established the Port of Spain Library in 1841 and the nucleus of a museum in 1893. Their work undoubtedly reflected a real pride in the island and a genuine (if inevitably limited) enthusiasm for historical and scientific research. Moreover, the "Creole" orientation of these three early histories – as opposed to the "Imperial" trend so influential in the historiography of the British Caribbean in this period – was certainly encouraged by the prominent French Creole community, whose members were far from being uncritical admirers of British imperialism. It is significant that the most important writer of the three, Borde, chose to write in French and to publish in Paris; Fraser, though English by birth, was allied by marriage and interest to the French Creoles and wrote as an "adopted" Creole.

The first history of Trinidad appeared in 1838, the year marked by the final end of slavery in the British Caribbean. Its author, E.L. Joseph, was apparently Anglo-Jewish; he settled in Trinidad around 1818, working as a journalist and newspaper editor until his death in the island in 1838¹. In 1876 and 1883, P.L.G. Borde published an ambitious two-volume work,

1. E.L. Joseph, *History of Trinidad* (Port of Spain, London, Glasgow, 1838; reprinted London, 1971). The re-issue is a facsimile reprint. He also published a novel, *Warner Arundell The Adventures of a Creole* (London 1838), which is set in Trinidad, Venezuela and the Eastern Caribbean and is of a considerable historical interest. His Jewish ethnicity is attested to in the diary of a contemporary, Friedrich Urich, who describes him as "the Jew": A. de Verteuil, ed., *The Urich Diary Trinidad 1830-1832*, trans. M. de Verteuil (Port of Spain, 1995), pp. 114-115, entry for 11 March 1832.