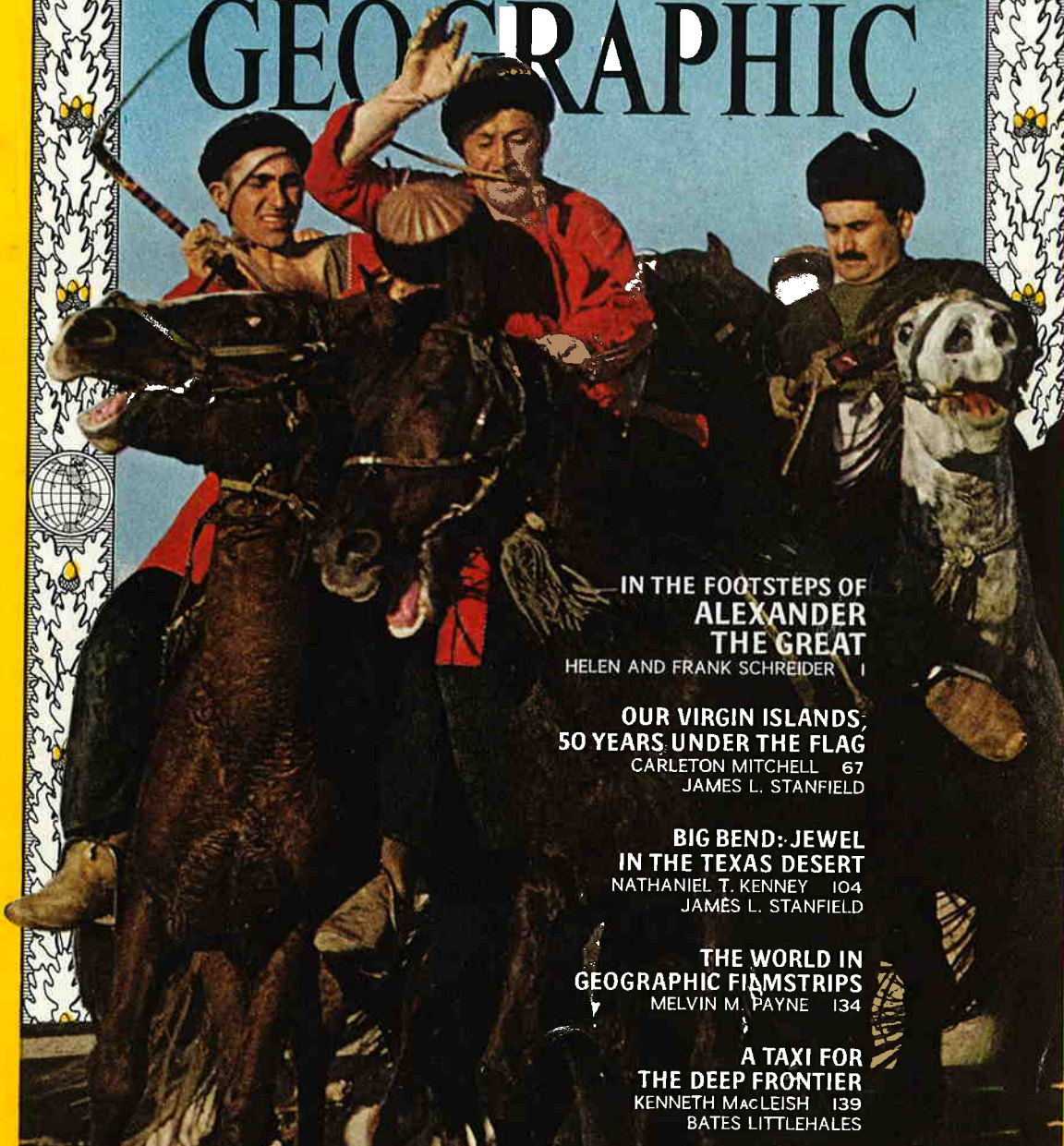


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other things visitors seek in the islands. I could not help reflecting that if Project Rainstart is successful, the scientists might have complaints from irate tourists!

One thing the weather can't change is the delightful colonial atmosphere of St. Croix. The island reached the peak of its opulence about 1796, when 114 windmills and 144 mule- or ox-powered treadmills ground the cane that was the basis of prosperity.

Steadily rising production costs finally ended the making of sugar. During my visit, the last steam mill was being dismantled for shipment to Venezuela. Yet nowhere in my voyaging among the Caribbean islands have I encountered so many reminders of the West Indies that was.

On both sides of Centerline Road, the main thoroughfare of St. Croix, windmill towers still stand, close to the remains of great houses. Not only are St. Croix's ruins being protected but several are being remade into charming residences. I could easily picture life as it must have been during the 18th century. Then a waving green sea of sugar stalks ran down to melt into the blue of the Caribbean, and many families enjoyed a life comparable to that of Europe's aristocracy.

Old prints show teams of six oxen pulling huge, high-wheeled wagons loaded with hogsheads of muscovado—raw sugar still smelling of molasses—to sailing ships waiting off King's Wharf in Christiansted. Carriages bore ladies along the road in the shade of palms, while planters and overseers on prancing horses reined in to exchange greetings.

Past Lives On in Restored Mansion

I came to the end of my stay in St. Croix feeling that it was a fascinating balance between the old West Indies of planter days and modern America. On my last night, I sat on the terrace of a great house that had been restored by Lee Platt. Lee is an old sailing friend from New England who "swallowed the anchor" when he discovered St. Croix.

While I sipped a fragrant cocktail of locally distilled rum and juices of fruit grown on the island, Lee showed me pictures of the house before he came on it—a shell of stone fashioned by skilled slave masons, but little else. The roof had fallen in; floors and other woodwork had rotted away. Through Lee's loving care, it had blossomed anew into a design for living, as it had once been for a long-departed planter family.

Curious, I asked Lee why he had chosen to make St. Croix his home. He made an eloquent





Deep-piled pastures fatten livestock on a St. Croix ranch. The island, unlike St. John and St. Thomas, is endowed with flatlands suitable for raising cattle. Farms flourish and industrial complexes rise where sugar plantations once thrived.

Casual elegance flavors the spacious home of Mr. and Mrs. Wendy Hilty, which rose from an abandoned St. Croix sugar mill. The Hiltys' pet macaw, perched on a chair back at right, roams the house untethered.

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