EIGHTEENTH CENTURY: SETTLEMENT FROM JAMAICA & UNDER SPANISH ADMINISTRATION

The resettlement of the islands came from Jamaica sometime in the early eighteenth century with reports from the 1680s of Jamaicans visiting the islands in search of special woods, such as cedar. In any event these new settlers were agriculturists, fishermen and woodcutters and not needing fortifications, occupied San Andrés rather than Providence.

The first documented evidence of re-occupation came from a proposal by the Spanish Governor of Costa Rica in 1738 to settle fifty Canary Island families on the Miskito Shore and twenty more "on the island of San Andrés" (Parsons 1965, 14). In the same correspondence the Governor mentions "a few English which inhabit it today" but how long they had been there and where they had come from are uncertain. It is unclear whether his request for settlers came to anything and the next mention of the islands is in 1780 when a British troopship sailing along the Miskito coast to Bluefields with convalescents was blown off course. The commander reported finding about twelve families of mulattos tending livestock and farming but without any formal authority over them.

Providence is not mentioned in any of these documents but may have been used as a base from which the British could launch attacks on the Miskito coast. The British were attempting to turn this sector of the Caribbean into a private British sea with its centre in Jamaica and had a keen interest on the San Juan river which provided an easy inter-oceanic route to the Pacific. The fort at its mouth on was attacked on several occasions. British influence stretched from Belize and the Grand Cayman Islands in the north, down the coast through Ruatán, Cape Gracias, Bluefields, the Corn Islands and across to San Andrés and Providence.

The Treaty of Versailles of 1783 and the clarifying amendments of 1786 required the British to evacuate the Miskito Shore and its offshore islands. Although, San Andrés and

Providence were not specifically mentioned, they must have been intended to be included and in fact ships sent as part of this agreement called in San Andrés and removed some white settlers to Jamaica and Grand Cayman.

However, not all went and those remaining petitioned the Governor of Cartagena and the Spanish Viceroy of Nueva Granada (Colombia) to be allowed to stay in return for a pledge of loyalty to Spain. This request was supported in Bogotá and in 1788 Islanders were given permission to land produce, mainly cotton and coconuts, in Cartagena but this was no real substitute for trade with Jamaica. The request was however refused by Madrid and a ship was sent to expel the British inhabitants in December 1789. On board was Thomas O'Neille, an Irishman raised in the Canaries, later to become Governor of the islands. He came as interpreter for the expedition led by Juan Gastelú. In 1790, O'Neille was made Governor and for the first time the Islanders had someone who could speak their language over them. He did useful work as Governor, reinforcing island communications with Central America, nominating Mayors and building good relations with the Miskito Indians. This penetration by O'Neille from the Viceroyalty of Nueva Granada into Central America worried the Viceroyalty of Guatemala who considered the area their jurisdiction.

A second petition to remain on the islands met with a positive response but on three conditions: loyalty to Spain, conversion to Catholicism, and an end to trading with Jamaica. The conditions were accepted but enforcing them was another matter. Many Islanders went through the formalities of conversion, accepting baptism to strengthen their case for being allowed to remain on the islands. The first conversion came as early as 1789 during the expedition led by Gastelú to evacuate the islands. "Para refrendar sus promesas de conversión al catolicismo y dar muestras de su voluntad de vasallaje al rey español, dos prestantes colonos solicitaron el bautismo católico para sus respectivos hijos: el sacramento fue administrado por el capuchino capellán de la nave" ["To fulfill their promises of conversion to Catholicism and show goodwill and homage to the King of Spain, two Protestant colonists requested a Catholic baptism for their children. The

sacrament was carried out by the Capuchin Father assigned to the expedition."] (Clemente 1991,38).

Their acceptance was confirmed from Spain in the Royal Order of May 20, 1792 and included the instruction to give San Andrés the rank of minor port and freedom from all import and export duties. In theory, it was now more difficult for Islanders to continue their historic trade with the Central American coast, but contraband continued to flourish. The Order also requested the sending of a priest and a primary teacher to the islands.

The logic behind this Order was that it was more convenient to have the islands populated by a peaceful Englishmen under Spanish rule than unoccupied altogether but for a disgruntled garrison. O'Neille did take action to try and introduce the Catholic religion to the island following up on the promise made by the Islanders. He requested the continental authorities to send priests, including a request to Spain to send English-speaking priests like those already sent to other parts of Central America. Although nothing initially came of these moves, in 1803, a parish priest was appointed at a salary of 30 pesos a month and with funds from the Royal Treasury and Royal Coffers in Cartagena a church was constructed. The first priest was a Frenchman who had arrived via Santo Domingo and Cartagena.

The population on San Andrés according to the census of 1793 was 391; 281 of whom were slaves, mostly working on the cotton plantations. By 1806 the population had risen to 1,150; 850 of whom were slaves (de Friedemann 1991, 149). Some of these were Miskito women brought as consorts. The economy was based around the production of cotton of the highest quality on plantations worked by slaves, together with the hunting of turtle and the growing of provision crops. There was a slave revolt in 1799 which only failed due to the opportune arrival of a Spanish warship. The island continued to be a centre for the contraband trade of the Miskito coast, distributing English manufactures bought in Jamaica.

In 1787, a land grant on Providence was made to Francis Archbold, captain of an English slave ship. This led to the island's resettlement on a permanent basis. He arrived with family and slaves, and from them half of the present native population on Providence is descended (Petersen 1991, 122). Archbold had a daughter, Mary, who was to become the mother of the most influential Islander of the nineteenth century, Philip Beekman Livingston. By 1789 there were ten residents and in 1793 some 32, including 21 slaves cultivating cotton on Archbold's plantations. O'Neille does not seem to have paid attention to what was happening on Providence, which suggests they were largely autonomous. As Providence was not particularly suitable for large cotton plantations, the slave population was not as great as on San Andrés. Turtling was a major economic activity in Providence and frequent visits were paid by turtle boats from the Caymans and centres on the Miskito coast.

The Spanish thought of evacuating the Islanders to the continent following reports on the contraband trade sent in 1793, and an order to do so was finally sent in 1795. O'Neille intervened, championing the cause of the Islanders, and succeeded in getting the order withdrawn.

A further change came in 1793 when the Spanish Crown passed administrative control of the islands from Nueva Granada to the Viceroy of Guatemala. With Britain and Spain once more at war, the Viceroy of Guatemala recalled O'Neille to the continent on the grounds that the islands were indefensible. However, in 1801, with peace restored, O'Neille returned to the islands and continued as Governor through the next turbulent years in the islands' history. The islands were once more placed under the administrative control of Cartagena in Nueva Granada by the Royal Orders of November 20 and 30 1803, much to the annoyance of Guatemala. O'Neille may have engineered this as control was more distant and difficult from Cartagena, and this autonomy suited both himself and the Islanders who were able to take advantage of the opportunities for contraband provided by renewed war between Britain and Spain. The Royal Order which effected this transfer

became the basis of Colombia's successful claim to the islands and until 1928, its claim over the Miskito coast and Corn Islands.

In order to promote settlement on the Miskito coast, the Royal Order of 20 November 1803 also removed all import and export taxes, set aside the collection of the 'diezmos' tax for twenty years, and promised it would be levied at half the rate thereafter. Although the order referred to the coast, the islands were taken to be included in the measure.

O'Neille continued to encourage immigration by making land grants to settlers from Jamaica and by 1806 there were some 1200 people on San Andrés, of whom 800 were slaves. Of these, the only Spanish were O'Neille and the force of 30 soldiers under his brother. The language was English and although there was no formal church, informers of the time (Francisco Díaz Catalán and O'Neille) refer to the Islanders as being Protestant without specifying of what denomination. Most inhabitants had arrived via Jamaica where, until the nineteenth century at least, the Anglican church was dominant.

San Andrés served as a staging post for others who moved on to the Corn Islands, also administered by O'Neille, and the Miskito coast where the contraband trade was flourishing. Migrations from the islands focused on Pearl Lagoon and sites north of Bluefields where plantations of cotton and sugar were established. It has been suggested that O'Neille not only turned a blind eye to this trade but was himself involved. In reports to Cartagena O'Neille admitted that some 50% of the only export crop, the excellent long-fibred cotton, was lost to contraband in years of disruption caused by war. The cotton crop in 1802-03 was estimated at 400,000 lbs. and was probably more in subsequent years. In theory, trade could only be conducted with the Spanish ports of Cartagena and Trujillo in Honduras.

In 1806, San Andrés again briefly came under British control when Captain Bligh in H.M.S. Surveillante accepted the joyful surrender of the inhabitants, who claimed to be British subjects. Although the islands were recognised as important within the strategic plans

of the British in this part of the Caribbean, political events in Europe complicated the picture. Also, the fact that Spanish control over the islands was, and had always been, tenuous, and that the population was English-speaking with close family and commercial ties to the other British colonies and settlements in the region (Jamaica, Cayman Islands, Belize, Miskito coast), meant that there was no real need to gain official authority over the islands. The inhabitants pleaded with Bligh that if the island was to be left undefended, to evacuate them to Jamaica or the Caymans. What they really wanted however was the British protection to which they felt themselves entitled. They feared retribution from the Spanish for their disloyalty in appealing to the British to take them over.

However, two months later Bligh left taking O'Neille, the Catholic priest, Campoblanco, and the prisoner-soldiers to Cartagena, leaving the Islanders unprotected but well-armed in case of further slave uprisings.

Before the end of the year, O'Neille had returned and Britain and Spain suddenly found themselves allies against Napoleon. Proceedings were begun by O'Neille against those Islanders most clearly identified with the British, particularly Torquil Bowie who had been Mayor of San Andrés in O'Neille's first governorship. However, retaliatory action against the Islanders for their disloyalty to Spain did not materialise as the Islanders had feared.

In O'Neille's opinion, loyalty to the Spanish crown and acceptance of Catholicism was strongest amongst the 'mestizos' born on the island and among the working class. The planters he felt remained loyal to Britain, English and Protestantism. O'Neille was the first to suggest that the reason for the poor take up of Catholicism was English: "la lengua inglesa se consideraba indisolublemente ligada al pensiamento protestante y un obstáculo para la difusión del catolicismo" ["The English language is considered to be completely tied to Protestant thinking and is an obstacle to the spread of Catholicism."] (Clemente 1991, 39). On his return to the islands as Governor, O'Neille once more requested the sending of a priest, even suggesting various names, but the events in Spain in 1808 and

the outbreak of the wars of Independence in the Spanish colonies brought a halt to this first series of attempts to Catholicise the Islanders and turn them into Spanish speakers.

O'Neille had adopted a gentle approach to these issues preferring to have the Islanders as "buenos herejes y no como malos católicos" ["good heretics and not bad Catholics."] (Clemente 1991, 43). Rather than push the matter with the adult population, the emphasis was on baptising the children which would, in the course of time, lead to the general conversion of the population.

O'Neille remained as Governor until 1810 when ill health forced his retirement. The good relations he had built up with the Miskito King led to the signing of a "treaty of peace and commerce" between King Stephen and his successor as Governor, Luis Garcia. In the same year, Nueva Granada entered into turmoil with the start of the war of Independence from Spain and in 1811 the Governor was replaced by a locally elected Council as stipulated by the Constitution of Cadiz. This was a last-ditch attempt by the Spanish crown to placate the growing revolutionary fervour in the Americas by allowing more local control. It was difficult to implement on the islands because there were so few inhabitants who spoke Spanish and were Catholic; the conditions for holding public office. On San Andrés, this remained the ruling authority until the establishment of independence from Spain by Bolívar's forces in 1821.

On Providence, the days of freelance piracy had returned with the arrival of Luis Aury, a French adventurer ostensibly fighting on behalf of Simón Bolívar and his revolutionary forces and operating under the flag of the Republics of Buenos Aires and Chile. He occupied it in July 1818, arriving with 14 ships and a motley crew from many parts having for years marauded the Caribbean from his base in Texas. He had taken the islands in support of Bolívar's revolutionary forces as part of the War of Independence against Spain, the idea being to use the island as a base from which to support the troops and war effort on the continent.

Aury, with the help of his assistant Nicholas Joly, another Frenchman, established a functioning government on Providence but in reality, for the next three years, the islands were once again turned into fortified bases from which Spanish and other passing ships were attacked and looted. Attacks were not confined to the sea, however. The Spanish ports of Trujillo and Santa Ysabel were plundered, greatly swelling the coffers, eighteen percent of which was levied as 'tax' by Aury's officials. The success of Aury's operations out of Providence drew in sailors and settlers from all over the Caribbean, especially from Jamaica, increasing the population markedly.

One mistake that was made was the capture of too many US ships, and the islands were occupied by an American force in 1817 (Clemente 1989, 72). The British government, supporting the revolutionary forces against Spain, accepted the legality of the privateering operations of the likes such as Aury and commercial relations with Jamaica flourished.

With the drawing to a close of the War of Independence, Aury, whose offers of support to Bolívar had never been taken up, was in 1821 ordered to leave Republican waters. He did not immediately comply with the order but shortly after died in a riding accident.

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