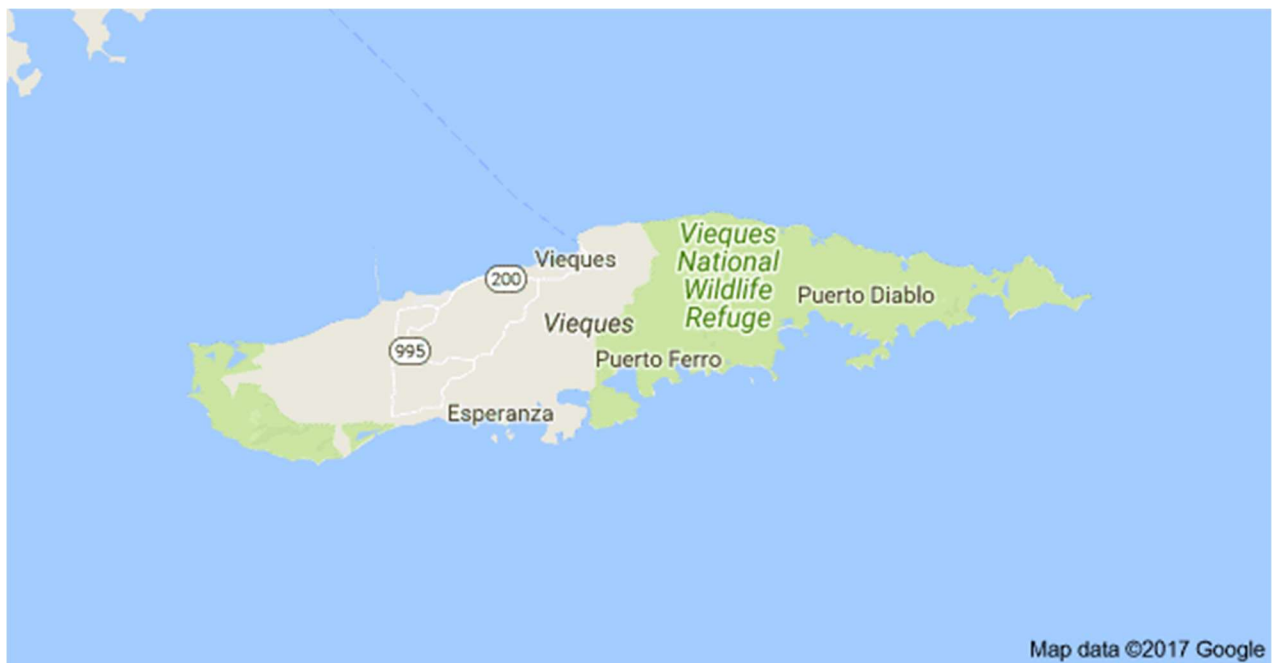


CHAPTER 10

CRAB ISLAND REVISITED

We have seen how in the year 1683 the first deputy governor of Anguilla, Abraham Howell, led a party of Anguillians in an unsuccessful attempt to claim and to settle Crab Island.¹ It will be remembered that at the time Crab Island was considered one of the Virgin Islands and was contended for among the English, Danes and Spanish. It was eventually settled that it was a Spanish territory under the Amerindian name of Vieques. The Danes first called it Crab Island, and that was the preferred name among the English. It lies about seven miles off the east coast of Puerto Rico (see illus 1).



1. Modern map of Vieques

¹ See Chapter 9. The Lure of Crab.

That attempted 1683 settlement of Crab Island was not authorized by the Governor-in-Chief Sir William Stapleton, and it was short-lived. The following year, his signature appears on John Lake's patent to land at Statia Valley, so we know that he returned to his duties at home.

We also saw that in five years later, in 1688, the visiting Scotsman from Nevis, William Pellett, apparently with Abraham Howell's support, drew away some of the Anguillian settlers in a second attempt to settle and hold Crab Island. Howell did not go with them. Governor-in-Chief Christopher Codrington Sr held Howell responsible for failing to restrain his people from sailing off to Crab Island. Whether for this reason or some other, Howell fell out of favour with him. Codrington revoked Howell's commission as deputy governor in 1689 and appointed George Leonard to be deputy governor of Anguilla in his place. Howell, in the meantime, as we shall see, continued to enjoy considerable local support.

As the long drought persisted into the eighteenth century, Anguillians continued to migrate westwards to the Virgin Islands. We have seen that Chief Justice George Suckling of Tortola has credited Anguillians with being the first settlers in the Virgin Islands.

Southey records for the year 1694 that

About this time some Englishmen with their families removed from Anguilla to the Virgin Islands, where they

*made considerable improvements: they were governed by a deputy governor and Council, nominated from among themselves. There were no taxes. Money, when wanted for public purposes, was raised by voluntary subscription.*²

Howell, despite his repulse from Crab by the Danes in 1683, and the destruction by the Spaniards of the subsequent Scottish settlement in 1688, still set his eyes on the wooded valleys of Crab, lush in comparison to Anguilla. Some of the Anguillians who trickled into the English Virgin Islands also chose to move on with him to Crab Island to settle it. These movements into the Danish Virgin Islands continued to be unauthorised and exposed the settlers to attack from the Spanish and the Danes. They were desperate men to choose such a dangerous course of action.

In April 1716, Governor Walter Hamilton passed on to the Privy Council Committee for Foreign Plantations an Account of the Virgin Islands sent to him by the deputy governors of Anguilla and Spanish Town or Virgin Gorda,³ Abraham Howell and Thomas Hornby.⁴ In their Account of the Virgin Islands we see Abraham Howell at his best.⁵ Howell and Hornby described each of the Virgin Islands,

² Thomas Southey, A Chronological History of the West Indies (3 vols, 1827) Vol 2, p.3-4.

³ Spanish Town was the original name of Virgin Gorda, being the name of the main settlement on that island, and still the name of the town on its north-west coast. For consistency, and to avoid confusion, wherever a dispatch refers to Spanish Town, it is rendered as Virgin Gorda in this work.

⁴ Chapter 15: The Settlement of St Croix.

⁵⁵ The Account is enclosure 5 to dispatch No 6.

starting with Crab Island, in terms of its agricultural potential, the value of its harbours to both trade and to the navy, and the quality of its timber for building and for export. The old patriarch showed himself to be not only literate, but an explorer, geographer, mariner, and military strategist. His purpose in writing the Account was to try to persuade the authorities to extend the protection of the Crown to the English settlers on Crab Island by declaring it to be a part of the colony of the Leeward Islands. He was by this time an old man. He was probably an infant among the first settlers of 1650. Sixteen years later, in 1666, they elected him to be their governor. In 1716, now about the age of eighty years, he was still a visionary and a leader of men. He continued in the dispatches and deeds to land to carry the courtesy titles of 'Captain' and 'deputy governor'.

Howell and Hornby described Crab Island as the best of the Virgins. The land, they wrote, was extraordinarily good, nearly all of it being cultivatable. The soil was extraordinarily rich, and the land was level. There were two good roadsteads, and two better harbours. They played down the attributes of the remainder of the Virgin Islands. The soil of Tortola and Virgin Gorda, they wrote, was poor, and their harbours inadequate. This Account may be considered a sort of brief for their main argument, which was that the

Governor ought to permit the starving Anguillian settlers to emigrate to Crab Island.

Governor Hamilton commented on this aspect of the Account in his 1716 dispatch to the Committee for Trade and Foreign Plantations.⁶ He noted that though the land of Crab Island as they said was very good for agriculture, yet it came with the disadvantage that it was very close to Puerto Rico. The Spanish claimed sovereignty over it. They considered the West Indian homesteaders to be trespassers. As Hamilton observed, the result was that no settler would be safe in his property on Crab. He reminded the Committee of the earlier incident of 1688 when the settlement under the command of William Pellet was destroyed by the Spaniards. He put forward an alternative solution on the Committee. He urged that consideration be given to the need of the Anguillians to be resettled elsewhere. His proposal was to allot them small plantations from the late French half of St Kitts. The French lands were captured by the British in Queen Anne's War, and confirmed as entirely British by the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713.

Hamilton reported that the Anguillians petitioned him to permit them to go and settle Crab Island.⁷ From this, it is clear that the Anguillians under Howell did, at

⁶ CO.152/11, No 6: Hamilton to the Committee on 10 April 1716: Account of the Virgin Islands.

⁷ CO.152/12/1: Hamilton to the Committee on 6 January 1718; enclosure 5: The Humble Address of the People of Anguilla.

least, seek the Governor's consent before they decided to take action. They were not ignorant of the legal consequences of an unauthorized settlement on foreign soil. Hamilton enclosed a copy of the Anguilla petition with his dispatch (see illus 2).



2. An extract from the 1716 Anguilla petition to settle Crab Island. CO.152/11. (UK National Archives®)

This petition was the formal application of the Anguillians for a commission from the Governor in Chief to establish the settlement on Crab Island. From the style of its writing, it was almost certainly written by Abraham Howell himself. Such a commission would legalise the settlement and bring it under the full protection of the Crown, or at least of the man-of-war stationed in Antigua. The original is very faint and difficult to read. With some effort, you can just discern that this is what he wrote:

*To his Excellency Walter Hamilton Esq, Captain General
and Governor in Chief in and over all His Majesty's
Leeward Caribbee Islands in America*

The humble address of His Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the inhabitants of His Majesty's Island of Anguilla

HUMBLY SHEWETH unto your Excellency that for several years last past the Island of Anguilla hath been attended with insupportable droughts, that the land of the same being very poor and barren by means whereof not capable of production sufficient for the inhabitants thereof to subsist on; many of them ready to perish and starve for want of food, which we the said inhabitants desire to remove to the island commonly called Crab Island and there to endeavour to cultivate the same in planting necessary food for our relief and sustenance rather than utterly perish;

WHEREFORE we the said inhabitants, His Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, in most humble manner commend the premises to your Excellency's mature consideration and pray that your Excellency would please of your abundant goodness and compassion to protect us in the quiet and peaceable enjoyment of the said island, otherwise we must inevitably perish.

And in duty bound we shall ever pray for your Excellency's long life in health and prosperity long to reign -

Christopher Hodge

Thomas Hodge Sr

Benjamin Hodge

Arthur Hodge

Peter Hodge

Nehemiah Richardson

Jeremiah Richardson

George Richardson

John Richardson

William Chalwill Sr

William Chalwill Jr

Benjamin Arrindell

Isaac Arrindell

Andrew Watson

Samuel Floyd

Samuel Lloyd

John Richardson

William Richardson

Joseph Mason

Daniel Bryant

Rowland Williams

Henry Osborne

*Abraham Challwill
William Gumbs
Thomas Gumbs
Thomas Coakley
Ceasar Coakley
Edward Coakley
John Richardson
Abraham Wingood
Thomas Lake
John Lake*

*Thomas Allen
George Garner
David Derrick
William Smith
Cornelius Harrigan
Peter Harrigan
William Beal
Bezaiel Howell
Abraham Howell
Joseph Lake*

The petition is signed by forty-two of the leading citizens in Anguilla. The petition recites that for the past several years Anguilla was suffering from a severe drought. As a result, the land became exhausted and barren and was incapable of producing the minimum of crops for the people to subsist on. Many Anguillians were on the verge of dying from starvation. They therefore craved the Governor-in-Chief's consent to their removing themselves to Crab Island.

Governor Hamilton however refused their pleas. He understood the wholesale settlement of the Anguillians on the small Puerto Rican dependency of Crab Island would start an international incident. Crab Island was as he well knew claimed both by the Danes and the Spanish. There was no way that he was going to risk being the cause of an embarrassing diplomatic incident between Britain and either Spain or the Denmark without direct and explicit instructions from London.

While he waited for word from London, in October 1716 Governor Hamilton produced a list of the names of the free male inhabitants of Anguilla.⁸ Together with the signatures to the Petition, this is the first detailed and accurate census of Anguilla. In the style of the time, it names the free white men, the numbers of adult white women and white children in their households, the total number of slaves, and out of these the numbers of slaves able to work:

Men's names	White Men	White Women	White Children	Negroes	Working Negroes
Capt George Leonard	1	1	5	33	20
Capt Abraham Howell	1	1	2	15	10
Arthur Hodge	1	1	7	13	8
John Rogers	1	1	5	26	16
Dar. Downing, Wid	0	1	7	12	10
Isaac Thibou	1	1	0	4	3
Isaac Aderly	1	1	1	6	4
Charles Kagen [ie, Keagan]	1	1	1	2	2
Peter Rogers	1	1	0	10	4
John Chapman	1	1	1	3	3
Elli. Connor, Widow	0	1	3	3	1
Paul Rowan [ie, Ruan]	1	2	0	13	7
Timothy Connor	1	1	5	0	0
Joshua Newton	1	2	4	9	4
Peter Downing	1	1	1	7	4
Jeremiah Spencer	1	1	1	6	2
Catherine Downing, Widow	0	1	1	14	10
Deborah Gumbs, Widow	1	1	5	27	17
William Chalwill [ie, Chalville]	1	1	5	21	13
John Pain [ie, Payne]	1	1	2	7	5
John Haragin [ie, Harrigan]	1	1	1	6	3
Jeremiah Martin	1	1	5	3	4
George Leonard	1	1	5	5	4
Sarah Leonard, Widow	0	1	3	1	1
Bezaliel Howell	1	1	6	22	10
Thomas Flanders	1	2	0	7	4
Richard Downing	1	1	2	9	5
David Darick [ie, Derrick]	1	1	6	9	4
Charles Kagen [ie, Keagan]	1	1	5	5	4
Cornelius Harragan [ie, Harrigan]	1	1	10	3	3
Briant Makdonaha [ie, MacDonough]	1	1	8	2	2
And. Tellies	1	1	2	0	0
Samuel Flويد [ie, Lloyd]	1	1	4	9	4

⁸ CO.152/11, No 56: Hamilton to the Committee on 3 October 1716; unnumbered enclosure: List of the Inhabitants of Anguilla.

William Gumbes [ie, Gumbs]	1	1	3	7	7
Edward Leake [ie, Lake]	1	1	6	19	10
Doriv. Py, Widow	0	1	0	3	2
Thomas Loyde [ie, Lloyd]	1	1	5	6	6
John Richards	1	1	6	4	2
Thomas Howell	1	2	7	24	17
Daniel Briant [ie, Bryant]	1	1	4	13	7
John Leake [ie, Lake]	1	1	4	8	5
Abraham Arundell [ie, Arrindell]	1	1	4	4	2
William Roberts	1	1	6	1	1
John Bryant	1	1	3	7	5
Richard Roberts	1	1	5	5	1
Thomas Leake [ie, Lake]	1	1	5	5	5
Rowland Williams	1	1	1	4	2
Ann Williams, Widow	0	1	1	3	2
Micl. Rowan [ie, Ruan]	1	1	1	12	7
Bazaliell Rogers	1	1	1	2	1
Jone Leake [ie, Joan Lake]	0	1	0	4	3
Jane Leake [ie, Lake]	0	1	0	0	0
John Welch	1	0	0	1	1
William Farrington	1	1	8	7	4
Alice Flight, Widow	0	1	1	2	1
Richard Arthur	1	1	6	5	5
Richard Richardson	1	1	2	10	5
Thomas Rumny [ie, Romney]	1	1	2	8	4
William Long	1	1	0	4	1
Darby Carty	1	0	4	3	3
William Howell	1	1	3	11	6
Abednigo Pickren [ie, Pickering]	1	1	3	10	5
Edward Coakley	1	1	0	4	3
John Rumny [ie, Romney]	1	1	4	5	4
John Downing	1	1	0	2	1
Grace Leonard	0	1	2	7	3
John Morgan	1	1	4	4	3
John Powell	1	1	7	3	1
Peter Frare	1	1	2	5	3
Samuel Vincent	1	1	1	4	1
Thomas Hughes	1	1	7	4	4
Robert Lockrum	1	1	5	3	3
Thomas Rumny [ie, Romney]	1	1	7	0	0
Thomas Coakley	1	1	9	22	9
Edward Coakley	1	1	5	12	9
John Thomas	1	1	3	11	6
James Richardson	1	1	2	2	2
Thomas Richardson	1	1	5	7	5
Jacob Howell	1	1	2	17	12
Thomas Hodge	1	1	8	18	12
Christopher Hodge	1	1	6	21	13
Peter Hodge	1	1	2	3	2
Benjamin Rogers	1	1	0	6	4
Henry Hodge	1	0	0	9	7
Susannah Manning	0	1	0	1	1
Oliver Downing	1	1	3	8	6
William Bale [ie, Beal]	1	1	0	1	1
Thomas Rogers	1	1	7	28	16
Bezaleel Rogers	1	1	1	11	8
Jeremiah Richardson	1	1	9	13	11
Nehemiah Richardson	1	1	2	15	9
Edward Welch	1	1	2	6	3

Ann Arrindell	0	1	2	3	1
Mary Watson	0	1	5	0	0
Joan Gladden [ie, Gladding]	0	1	0	1	1
Benjamin Arrindell	1	1	0	5	5
Thomas Hancock	1	1	7	1	1
Samuel Kentish	1	0	0	1	1
John Richardson	1	1	9	32	22
Abraham Wingood	1	1	0	3	2
Henry Leonard	1	1	2	11	7
Totals	89	103	342	820	514

Table 2: Anguilla's first census. Governor Hamilton's 1716 Anguilla Census: CO.152/11.

We observe that he lists in the first column the names of the free white men who are the heads of households. There are 101 named men. The second column shows that 89 of them are alive and present on the island. If they have died, or are absent, or the head of the household is a woman, no number appears in this second column. In the third column appears the number of adult white women in the household, of whom there are 103. We are not given their names, nor any indication whether they are a spouse or an adult daughter. Most probably they are the spouses. In the remaining columns appear the numbers of white children, 342, and the numbers of African slaves, 820, showing those of working age, 514, meaning that there were 306 who were children or infirm persons.

Howell's enthusiasm for the attractions of Crab Island was not confined to his written Account. He was modest when describing his personal accomplishments. But he was ready to lead his desperate people in their search for improved living conditions when both their own

deputy governor, George Leonard, and the Governor-in-Chief refused them permission to chance their luck on Crab Island. After nearly forty years of the long drought, the Anguillians were desperate men. Under the leadership of Abraham Howell, without waiting for a response from the Governor, half of the men of Anguilla moved in their sloops to Crab Island.

Deputy governor George Leonard immediately reported the exodus to Governor Hamilton.⁹ His letter of 12 August recounted that Howell went off to Crab Island, taking with him some 40 white men and between 20 and 30 black men, and without consulting him (see illus 3). He wrote:

May it please your Excellency,

In your last to me, your Excellency's desire was that I should use all endeavours to keep the people of this island together until your Excellency had an answer from home, which accordingly I did use all arguments with them that I could produce, and I showed them what a fatherly care your Excellency had taken for them and your Excellency's promise in continuing your care over them until your Excellency had orders to settle them to their content. But all would not do with sinking men, for having no orders to restrain them, they laid hold of any twig.

What orders Captain Abraham Howell brought from your Excellency I know not, neither was he so civil

⁹ CO.152/12/1, No 54: Hamilton to the Committee on 24 August 1717: Enclosure 1: Leonard's letter of 12 August 1717.

to inform me. I sent and signified your Excellency's instructions to me to him, but I don't understand he had any regard for it, but went away to Crab Island and carried away forty odd white men and between twenty and thirty Negroes with him.

I wish them well, but the success of such rash actions are always to be doubted.

As for Mr Merine of Spanish Town, he proceeded from Dutch extraction and was born at Statia and of a Protestant religion.

So, concluding with humble thankfulness for ye sorrow your Excellency was pleased to express for the death of my son, I beg leave to subscribe myself your Excellency's most humble and obedient servant.

Anguilla. August the 12th 1717.

(sd) George Leonard

*To his Excellency Walter Hamilton Esq,
Captain General and Commander in
Chief over all his Majesty's Leeward
Carribbee Islands in America*

As he wrote, he used every argument to keep the people of the island together until the Governor received an answer from London on the question of giving them land in St Kitts. But, he explained, nothing worked with desperate men. They held on to the one small chance they saw of survival. They left Anguilla for Crab Island despite the Governor's specific instructions to the contrary. Their attempt to occupy Crab Island was, as he observed, a desperate move, driven by drought and starvation in Anguilla. As they saw it, their only chance of

survival was to take and hold an alternative place of settlement. He wished them well, but as he wrote, the success of such a rash action was to be doubted.

For an old sloop captain and cotton farmer, Leonard shows himself in his letter to have a way with words almost to match Abraham Howell. These were not uneducated men. Leonard's letter shows a use of graphic metaphor, couched in the most dignified terms, describing what was an exceedingly difficult time for his island and its people. The events that were unfolding would tear apart life on the island. One half of his little settlement was falling away from under his feet. Family and business relationships on the island were disintegrating due to the impossibly harsh living conditions.

People would die because of this desperate adventure. Yet, there is hardly a bitter word against Howell in his dispatch. He makes no attempt to place any of the blame for the crisis in his little island government on his predecessor. The two men were not rivals for authority in Anguilla. When called upon, each tried in his own way to perform his duties to his people as he saw them.

In his subsequent dispatch of 26 August, Governor Hamilton explained to the Committee that nothing that he or Leonard said to the poor people of Anguilla succeeded

in restraining them.¹⁰ He was apprehensive that the mischief of this unauthorised settlement on Crab would not stop with the Anguillians. He learned that several of the poor inhabitants of the other islands were talking of also removing themselves and their families to Crab Island. This he feared would weaken the military strength of the British islands in case war broke out.

The populations of Nevis, St Kitts and Montserrat were greatly reduced because of the devastations of the French in the just ended war. Hamilton's main concern as the head Leeward Island administrator was to keep the four main islands as well settled as possible so that there would be enough men to serve in the militia in time of war. Any leeching away of the populations of Antigua, Montserrat, Nevis, or St Kitts to Crab Island would only serve to weaken their defences.

¹⁰ CO.152/12/1, No 54: Hamilton to the Committee on 26 August 1717.

54(1)

Handwritten letter in cursive script. The text discusses diplomatic relations and the actions of Abraham Howell. It includes a signature 'George Leonard' and a date 'August 12 1717'.

3. Leonard's letter to Governor Hamilton of 12 August 1717: CO.152/12/1. (UK National Archives®)

Meanwhile, Abraham Howell's 1717 action, though he would never know it, was the cause of a diplomatic crisis between London and Copenhagen. Whitehall reacted, even though very sluggishly, to the pressure

being brought from Anguilla to permit settlers to go to the other less inhabited Virgins claimed by Denmark.

In August 1717, the Board of Trade asked the Danes for an explanation as to their settlement on the island of St John.¹¹ Baron Sohlenthal, the Danish Ambassador, responded in July 1718. He reminded the Privy Council of the instructions given since September 1672 by the Committee for Foreign Plantations to Governor Stapleton. They told him then to exercise every mark of friendship towards the Danes in St Thomas and the other Danish Virgin Islands. Baron Sohlenthal objected to the pretended claim of the Anguillians to Crab Island since that time. The Danes were, he wrote, the first nation to take possession of those islands, and always successfully opposed the attempts of the British settlers to establish themselves there. He made a pointed dig at his readers in Whitehall, which could not have failed to influence the eventual attitude of the authorities in London as they dwelt with the Anguillian request to be granted patents to land in the Virgins. The British, he wrote, previously thought the Virgin Islands not worthwhile settling for a nation which possessed such vast and fertile lands in America. The Danes, he claimed, were satisfied with the crumbs left over for them in the West Indies. This, he suggested, made even less

¹¹ CO.152/12/3, No 101: Craggs of 3 July 1718.

justifiable the 1717 landing by the Anguillians on Crab. Therefore, on behalf of his King, he insisted in the strongest possible terms that they should be immediately ordered to leave the island.

This was not the first nor would it be the last time developments in Europe, about which the Anguillians were not aware, would decisively influence their fate.

As soon as Governor Hamilton received word from Deputy Governor Leonard of Abraham Howell's action, he arranged to visit Anguilla and Crab Island. He arrived in Anguilla on 11 November 1717 and was able to see for himself the hardships suffered by the islanders. He described the island as long and narrow, and the soil so worn out that the people could hardly feed their families. He took what was the second census of the people of Anguilla. It revealed the following names of the free white men, the numbers of adult white women and white children in their households, and the numbers of their slaves:¹²

	Men	Women	Children	Negroes
Captain George Leonard	1	1	4	41
Arthur Hodge	2	1		4
John Wignall	1	2		16
Isaac Thibou	1	1	1	3
Samuel Downing	1	2	6	11
Peter Rogers	1	1	1	12
John Rogers	1	1	6	29
Charles Kagen Sr [ie, Keagan]]	3	3		5
Jeremiah Martin	1	1	5	5
Patrick Young	1			1

¹² CO.152/12/2, enclosure 4: Hamilton to the Committee on 6 January 1718: List of the Inhabitants of Anguilla taken on 22 November 1717.

Timothy Connor	1	1	5	1
Paul Rowan [ie, Ruan]	1	2		15
William Beal		1		1
Joseph Newton		1	4	11
Peter Downing		3	3	20
Thomas Gumbs		2	4	25
William Chalwill		2	2	18
John Paine [ie, Payne]	1	1	3	6
Charles Kagen Jr [ie, Keagan]	1	1	2	3
John Harragan [ie, Harrigan]	1	1	1	8
Cornelius Harragan [ie, Harrigan]	2	2	6	4
John Chapman	1	1	2	4
William Howell	1	1	4	13
Abednigo Pickering	1	1	4	10
John Morgan	1	1	4	5
John Rumney [ie, Romney]	1	1	4	7
Edward Coakley Jr		1	3	5
Bryant Monoha [ie, Monahan]	2	3	5	3
Richard Roberts	1	1	6	6
William Roberts	1	1	7	1
John Bryant	1	1	3	6
Rowland Williams		3	1	6
Thomas Lake	1	1	5	6
Richard Richardson	1	1	1	7
William Gumbs		1	3	7
Thomas Howell	1	3	6	25
Michael Rowan [ie, Ruan]	1	2	1	15
John Richardson Sr	1	2	1	1
Thomas Lloyd	1	1	3	4
Benjamin Lake	1	2	1	14
Samuel Floyd [ie, Lloyd]		2	2	6
David Derrick	1	3	2	7
Abraham Howell		1	1	10
Abraham Downing	1	1	2	11
Richard Downing	1	1	3	7
Bezalel Howell		2	4	20
Thomas Flanders	1	2		
Edward Leonard	2	1	1	1
George Leonard	2	2	5	2
Isaac Adderly	1	1	2	5
John Connor	4	4		3
Henry Hodge Jr	1	1	3	18
John Hodge	1	1		1
Peter Hodge		1	3	3
John Downing	1	1	1	3
Thomas Knight	2	2	5	6
Robert Lockrum	3	1	3	3
Jacob Howell	1	3		16
Thomas Richardson	1	2	2	3
James Richardson	1	1	2	3
John Thomas	1	1	3	14
Peter Frare	1			5
Hugh Flemming [ie, Fleming]	1			8
Phillip Leonard	2	1		2

Darby Carty	3	2	1	6
William Coakley	1	1	6	18
John Powell	2	2	5	4
Thomas Rumney [ie, Romney]	1	2		8
Thomas Rumney Jr [ie, Romney]		1	3	5
Thomas Hodge		3	5	16
James Glass			1	1
Thomas Rogers	2	3	4	30
Oliver Downing	3	2		8
Benjamin Rogers	1	1		6
Henry Hodge Sr				6
Susan Manning		1		1
Edward Welch	2	2		6
Henry Leonard	2	1	3	14
Jacob Arundell [ie, Arrindell]	1	3		3
Mary Watson		1	4	1
Benjamin Arundell [ie, Arrindell]		1	1	3
Samuel Kentish	1			1
John Lake Sr	1	5		9
John Lake		2		4
Abraham Arrundell [ie, Arrindell]	1	2	5	5
Daniel Bryant	1	2	2	10
Jeremiah Richardson	1	2	5	12
Nehemiah Richardson		1	3	13
John Richardson	1	2	7	27
William Farrington	1	3	5	6
Alice Hoyet		2		2
Abraham Wingood		1	1	4
Totals	96	97	154	824

Table 3: Governor Hamilton's 1717 Anguilla Census:
CO.152/12.

This reveals that there were a total of 1,171 blacks, whites, and children present in Anguilla, including 96 free white men. The gaps in the second column listing the numbers of men indicates those that were not present at the time he took the census. They were among those who emigrated from Anguilla and Tortola to Crab Island.

After inspecting Anguilla and taking the list of the male names, he sailed for Crab Island, where he disembarked on 18 November 1717. Of this island he wrote,

This is a long and very level island, but one mountain in it at the south west end, not high, well timbered and an excellent soil. It is about nine leagues¹³ long and in most parts about six or seven miles broad except at the east end where it is not above two or three miles broad for about seven or eight miles. It has a good harbour at the south side about a third down from the east end when once ships are in, but the passage in is very narrow and ships must warp not again except they have the wind far northerly.

This island seems to be very fertile and excellent land but then it is attended with this inconveniency that it lies so near to the island of St John de Porto Rico that slaves upon the least disgust may easily escape over in either canoes or bark logs it being just to the eastward of the center of that island, the channel shallow and not above three leagues over. . .

While on Crab, he also made a list of the white and black inhabitants. This Crab Island census shows that 46 white men and 62 black men immigrated in a desperate attempt to find improved agricultural land.¹⁴ The census contains no columns for women or children (see illus 4). This says the men did not move to Crab with all their families and possessions but left them at home in Anguilla until they were sure that it was safe for them to join the men. Several wives and children, as we shall see, later joined the men on Crab Island before the settlement was finally destroyed.

¹³ A league was a now obsolete unit of measurement of 3 miles.

¹⁴ CO.152/12/2, No 67, enclosure 9: Hamilton to the Committee on 6 January 1718: List of the Inhabitants of Crab Island.



4. An extract from the Crab Island census of 1718.
CO.152/12/2. (UK National Archives®)

The 'Complete list of the men able to bear arms and of negroes on Crab Island' reads as follows:

White Men	Negroes
Henry Osborne	0
Thomas Allen	2
George Garner	1
Nehemiah Richardson	5
George Richardson	0
Jeremiah Richardson	0
John Richardson	0
Christopher Hodge	2
Thomas Hodge	3
Arthur Hodge	0
Benjamin Hodge	0
Abraham Chalwill Sr	4
William Chalwill Jr	0
Abram Chalwill	0
Abraham Wingood	7
Edward Coakley	0
John Richardson	0
Thomas Lake	4

John Lake	0
Benjamin Lake	0
David Derrick	1
Peter Downing	2
William Beal	1
Peter Hodge	1
John Richardson	0
William Richardson	1
Samuel Lloyd	3
Samuel Lloyd Jr	2
Benjamin Arrindell	1
William Gumbs	2
Thomas Gumbs	3
Joseph Mason	0
Isaac Arrindell	0
Andrew Watson	0
William Smith	0
Daniel Bryant	1
Rowland Williams	1
Cornelius Harrigan	1
Joseph Harrigan	0
Peter Harrigan	0
Bezalel Howell	4
Thomas Howell	2
Abraham Howell	5
Thomas Coakley	3
Ceasar Coakley	0
Peter Downing	0
Total	46
Total	62

Table 4: List of Men able to bear arms at Crab:
CO.152/12.

At the time of Governor Hamilton’s visit there were a total of 108 men on Crab. These names on the list show that support for the new settlement ran the length of Anguilla. The principal families from each of the three Divisions were all represented. They included the Richardsons, Hodges, Chalvilles, Coakleys, Lakes, Gumbses, Lloyds, Arrindells, Harrigans, Howells, and Downings.

In March 1718, Governor Hamilton was back at St Kitts when he received word of the Spanish destruction of the settlement at Crab Island. He wrote to the Committee to tell them that just what he dreaded came pass.¹⁵ On 10 February 1718, the Spanish coast guard from Puerto Rico arrived at Crab Island with one man-of-war and six sloops. They were in such force that they went immediately on shore and demanded the surrender of the island. The Anguillians resisted but were overwhelmed. They suffered several men killed. Some, with their wives and children and black and white servants, were taken as prisoners to Puerto Rico. Many others, apparently the majority, were able to save themselves by flight to the eastern side of Crab. They were subsequently rescued by several Leeward Island sloops that luckily came upon them. The Spaniards destroyed the fledgling settlement, including a large store of dyewood, before they carried off their prisoners.

The Spanish history books record that 300 soldiers arrived from Puerto Rico. They destroyed the fort on Crab Island and burned the town. They put the fields of corn, cotton, sugar, and tobacco to the torch. The cannon were taken to Puerto Rico and installed in the Castillo de San Geronimo. By contrast, there is no contemporary Anguillian account of the disaster. Abraham Howell was

¹⁵ CO.152/12/3, No 87: Hamilton to the Committee on 15 March 1718.

among those taken prisoner, and it would be several months before he could make his escape and find his way back to Anguilla.

Fortunately, Governor Hamilton did not intend to leave the captured Anguillians to their fate. In the same dispatch to the Committee in London, he explained the steps he took to obtain their safe return. The man-of-war HMS Scarborough from the Barbados station was away in St Kitts at the time on another mission. It was on its way to Puerto Rico with orders from the Admiralty to demand the return of a ship seized by the Spaniards after peace was declared at the end of the previous war. The Governor's plan was, at the same time, to have the man-of-war demand the return of the settlers from Crab. He sent HMS Scarborough on to Puerto Rico with these new instructions.

Hamilton raised again the question of offering the remaining Anguillians parcels of land in St Kitts. He also suggested, for the first time, the possibility of acceding to their request that they be granted patents to land in St Croix. He described the advantages of that island over Crab. As usual, he was careful not to overstep his authority and authorise their resettlement in St Croix. Instead, he awaited the Committee's directions on that matter. He hoped it would be very soon, as the people of Anguilla and Virgin Gorda were in a starving condition

and were only restrained with difficulty from scattering to foreign islands.

He pointed out again that if only the poor people of Anguilla were provided for out of the conquered land of St Kitts, they would long since have contributed to the strengthening of the defences of the main islands of his colony. As they were now dispersed to foreign islands, they were altogether useless and so many men lost. If the Committee was minded to authorise the settling of another colony, he preferred St Croix over Crab Island. His moderate and deferential language was designed to placate the Privy Council in London, not to place any great pressure on it. Then as now, pressure on London was the last thing that a colonial Governor would apply, if he valued his career. He was not to know that London had long ago decided that there was no merit in any claim to St Croix.

On 13 June 1718, Hamilton's proclamation arrived in Anguilla.¹⁶ It was read and exhibited there as it was in each of the Leeward Islands. In it, he forbade any more colonists to go and settle Crab Island. It read:

Whereas by a letter which I received the other day from the Right Honourable the Lords Commissioners for Trade and Plantations bearing date at Whitehall the 28th day of January last I am directed to use my utmost

¹⁶ CO.152/12/3, No 118, unnumbered enclosure: Hamilton to the Committee on 10 September 1718: Governor Hamilton's Proclamation of 13 June 1718.

endeavours to hinder the inhabitants of Anguilla as well as of St Christopher and other the islands under my government from depleting themselves and settling in Crab Island by giving them assurances that they will be provided for as soon as ever the French part of St Christopher's is disposed of by public authority which their Lordships are pleased to acquaint me they hope will very soon be done I do therefore in obedience to their Lordships' commands hereby not only make known to all and every the inhabitants of the islands within my government this their Lordships intentions but do assure all and every the poor inhabitants of each of the said islands that my utmost endeavours shall be employed to procure proper parcels of land (in the French part of St Christopher's when it comes to be disposed of) for such of them as shall endeavour to answer this their Lordships good intentions.

And I do hereby forbid any of the inhabitants belonging to the islands under my government to go and settle on the aforesaid Crab Island under any pretence whatsoever as they will answer the contrary at their utmost peril, and on the other hand I do hereby signify and make known to all person and persons whatsoever who have gone from the aforesaid islands of Anguilla, St Christopher's or any other of the islands under my government to the aforesaid Crab Island that if they will return to the said islands of Anguilla and St Christopher's or to the islands of Antigua, Nevis or Montserrat they shall have all the encouragement and protection that is in my power to afford or give them, and if any of them can inform me of any waste land belonging to His Majesty in any of the said islands (excepting the French part of St Christopher's) I will immediately give them grants or patents for the same under the great seal

of these islands without fee or reward, and to the end it may duly and truly appear what numbers do return to any of the said islands in pursuance of this proclamation I do hereby in His Majesty's name will and require each party so returning to any of the said islands to appear before myself, or in my absence before the Lieutenant Governor or President of the island where he shall so arrive, within three days after his coming to any of the said islands, and there to make known his arrival with the number of whites or blacks that he shall bring with him, of all which he is to take a certificate under the hand and seal of myself, or in my absence from the said Lieutenant Governor or President of the island where he so makes known his arrival, and afterwards is to carry the said certificate to the Secretary of the island where it is granted who is hereby ordered and required to enter the same in his office in a distinct book to be kept for that purpose and then to return it to the party concerned, and all Lieutenant Governors, Presidents and other officers are hereby required to be very diligent in doing and performing without fee or reward what to them belongs or appertains.

Given under my Hand and Seal the 13th day of June 1718. In the fourth year of the reign of Our Sovereign Lord George by the Grace of God of Great Britain, France and Ireland, King, Defender of the Faith, etc.

(sd) W Hamilton

God Save the King

This proclamation promised that all those that returned to their homes would be offered all the protection and encouragement in his power, and free grants of waste

land. As usual, in his proclamation, he expressed the hope that he would be able to obtain for them parcels of land in the former French part of St Kitts when it was disposed of. This proclamation was a classic case of closing the stable door after the horse bolted. At least, it served the purpose of making it clear to the Anguillians that those that returned would not be penalized. As such, it influenced subsequent events.

In December 1718, Hamilton was at St Kitts. He wrote to the Committee with good news.¹⁷ Nine months after the debacle on Crab Island, Abraham Howell arrived in St Kitts. Hamilton learned from him that the prisoners were dragged through all the Spanish ports at Puerto Rico, Hispaniola, and Cuba. He and the two or three others that were captured with him were released on the intercession of the Agent of the Royal Asiento Company. A ship of the company took them to Jamaica from where they got passage to St Kitts.

While it is unlikely that any of the captured black slaves were released, at least 22 of Howell's hardy band of whites survived to sign the 1727 Anguilla Proclamation on the accession to the throne of King George II. In the custom of the period, the Spanish would not have treated the slaves in the same manner as they treated free white

¹⁷ CO.152/12/3, No 136: Hamilton to the Committee for Trade and Foreign Plantations on 10 December 1718.

men. Slaves would have been counted as prize won in battle and shared out among the Spanish victors.

Many of the Anguillians on Crab Island appear to have saved themselves by flight when the Spanish attacked. Howell was taken, he claimed, with only two or three other Anguillians. If this means that most of them were able to make their escape while their fearless captain remained with the rear-guard, one is justified in speculating that the old captain successfully organised the escape of his people. The likelihood is that on the Spanish attack he mounted a successful rear-guard action before giving himself up. Unfortunately, we do not know the names of the other men who survived this action with him. We only know that seven or eight of them were killed in resisting the Spanish landing. Included among those killed was Bezaliel Howell, the old man's son. The captured Anguillians organised their own escape from Puerto Rico on a British slaver from Jamaica engaged in the Asiento trade. The evidence is that the Anguillians received no assistance either from London or from Hamilton in making their way back to Anguilla via Nevis. As Hamilton wrote five months later, the Governor of Puerto Rico never gave any answer to the demand that was sent with HMS Scarborough.¹⁸

¹⁸ CO.152/12.4, No 152: Hamilton to the Committee in May 1719.

The settlement on Crab Island was destroyed, never to be attempted again by Anguillians, though there were sporadic attempts by other Leeward Islanders for another hundred years. All the Anguillians' property was confiscated. While most of the settlers on Crab returned to Anguilla, they lost all their personal belongings. The loss of life and property for the struggling colony in Anguilla was devastating.

In trying to peer through the mists of time to that distant past to understand what happened to the Anguillians after the destruction of their settlement on Crab, we turn to the Proclamation of 1727 to glean what little information we can from it.¹⁹ The signatures interest us (see illus 5).



5. The signatories to the 1727 proclamation: CO.152/16.
(UK National Archives®)

¹⁹ CO.152/16, enclosed with an unnumbered dispatch: Mathew to the Committee on 12 October 1727: The 1727 Anguilla Proclamation of King George II.

This Proclamation was not an initiative of the Anguillian planters. It was a legal requirement of the day that the planters subscribe and append their names proclaiming the accession of the new king. The English were still concerned about the acceptance of the new German Protestant monarchy. The threat of the Roman Catholic Stuart dynasty was still present. Each householder in the colonies, including Anguilla, was required to join in signing the proclamation declaring the accession of King George II on the death of his father, King George I. This is what the proclamation said:

WHEREAS it hath pleased Almighty God to call to His mercy our late sovereign lord, King George of blessed memory by whose decease the Imperial Crown of Great Britain, France and Ireland, as also the supreme dominion and sovereign right of the islands of Nevis, St Christopher, Montserrat, Antigua, Barbuda, Anguilla and the rest of His late Majesty's Caribbee Islands lying to Leeward from Guadeloupe to the island of St John de Porto Rico and all other His late Majesty's dominions in America are solely and rightfully come to the high and mighty prince George Prince of Wales;

We therefore the Deputy Governor with numbers of the principal planters and inhabitants of this Island do now hereby publish and proclaim that the high and mighty prince George Prince of Wales, is now by the death of our late Sovereign of happy memory become our only lawful and rightful liege lord George the Second by the Grace of God King of Great Britain, France and Ireland, as also the supreme dominion and sovereign right of the islands of Nevis, St Christopher, Montserrat, Antigua,

*Barbuda, Anguilla and the rest of His late Majesty's
Caribbee Islands lying to Leeward from Guadeloupe to
the island of St John de Porto Rico and all other His late
Majesty's dominions in America To whom we do
acknowledge all faith and constant obedience with all
heartly and humble affection, beseeching God by whom
Kings reign and Queens do reign, to bless the Royal King
George the Second with long and happy years to reign
over us.*

*Given at the Valley Division in this our Island of
Anguilla the seventh day of October in the year of Our
Lord God one thousand seven hundred and twenty seven.*

God Save the King.

<i>George Leonard</i>	<i>Thomas Lake, Jr</i>
<i>John Rogers</i>	<i>Joseph Keagan</i>
<i>Thomas Howell</i>	<i>John Godden</i>
<i>Jacob Howell</i>	<i>Benjamin Lake</i>
<i>Bezaliel Rogers</i>	<i>Thomas Coakley</i>
<i>Peter Rogers</i>	<i>David Derrick</i>
<i>Abraham Downing</i>	<i>Edward Gumbs</i>
<i>Abraham Howell, Jr</i>	<i>George Dobbony</i>
<i>Thomas Hodge</i>	<i>Thomas Rogers</i>
<i>James King</i>	<i>Richard Richardson</i>
<i>John Payne</i>	<i>Henry Hodge</i>
<i>Edward Coakley</i>	<i>Thomas Gumbs</i>
<i>Arthur Hodge, Sr</i>	<i>John Bryant, Jr</i>
<i>Arthur Hodge, 2nd</i>	<i>Abraham Chalwill</i>
<i>David Derrick, Jr</i>	<i>John Connor</i>
<i>Benjamin Rogers</i>	<i>Rowland Williams</i>
<i>Samuel Lloyd</i>	<i>Ceasar Coakley</i>
<i>John Bryant</i>	<i>George Leonard, 2nd</i>
<i>John Keagan</i>	<i>John Lake</i>
<i>Henry Leonard</i>	<i>Jeremiah Richardson</i>
<i>John Floyd</i>	<i>Jacob Richardson</i>
<i>John Gumbs</i>	<i>Edward Lake</i>
<i>John Hughes</i>	<i>Thomas Lake</i>
<i>Thomas Richardson</i>	<i>Edward Rogers</i>

<i>Thomas Coakley, Sr</i>	<i>William Bryan</i>
<i>Francis Goldsly</i>	<i>Henry Rumney</i>
<i>Josiah Blake</i>	<i>Benjamin Downing</i>
<i>John Derrick</i>	<i>Thomas Hodge, Jr</i>
<i>William Richardson</i>	<i>John Rowan</i>
<i>George Leonard, Jr</i>	<i>William Farrington, Sr</i>
<i>Jacob Gumbs</i>	<i>William Rich'dson, 2nd</i>
<i>Thomas Call</i>	<i>John Harrigan</i>
<i>Samuel Downing</i>	<i>Thomas Flanders</i>
<i>Tim Connor</i>	<i>Derby Carty, Jr</i>
<i>Michael Rowan</i>	<i>William Gumbs</i>
<i>Paul Rowan</i>	<i>Edward Bartlett</i>
<i>William Howell</i>	<i>Richard Roberts</i>
<i>Thomas Farrington</i>	<i>Joseph Richardson</i>

Governor Mathew reported to the Board of Trade in 1727 that King George II was proclaimed by the people of Anguilla on 7 October at The Valley.²⁰ It was signed by only 76 of the free Anguillian men. The planters, he wrote, came together to join in the signing of the Proclamation. He claimed that the Anguillians proclaimed the new king in the most solemn, decent, and cheerful manner that they were capable of. This was not quite true. Governor Mathew glossed over what really happened at the signing to reassure the Committee that his colony was working smoothly.

The following year, he gave a more truthful version about what happened at the signing.²¹ The event, he now wrote, was characterized by the misbehaviour of some of the planters. He does not explain what he meant

²⁰ CO.152/16, folio 56: Mathew to the Committee on 12 October 1727.

²¹ CO.152/16 folio 251: Mathew to the Committee on 20 January 1728.

by 'misbehaviour'. Clearly, there were problems in Anguilla over the signing of this oath of loyalty. He writes that the signing was not unanimous. There were disturbances and instances of rowdy behaviour at the time. We can be certain that not all the planters joined in the proclamation as there are only 76 signatures to it. It is noticeable that Abraham Howell does sign it. If he did sign it, his name would appear as 'Abraham Howell Sr', but that signature is missing.

It was not that any of the Anguillians supported the Stuarts. They had no interest in supporting the Roman Catholic Stuart dynasty in its struggle to reclaim the throne of England. They were not concerned about the Stuart or any other dynasty. No Governor-in-Chief showed any interest in the condition and affairs of this the third generation of Anguillians. Why should they on their part care about the coronation of King George II? With old deputy governor Leonard now almost permanently resident in Antigua, such little form of organized government as there was in Anguilla broke down. One can imagine the outrage and indignation that was felt by the sturdy, self-reliant islanders when they were called together, not for some act of government relevant to their condition, but to join in what for them was a completely meaningless and irrelevant ritual of signing a proclamation in honour of an unknown, distant and

uncaring King. Deputy governor Leonard was able to persuade only 75 of them to sign the proclamation. It appears Abraham Howell was leading a significant minority of discontented Anguillians who refused to sign the declaration of loyalty to King George II.

It is one of the characteristics of the Anguillians that they did not then, and still do not now, rely on expressions of official concern. They have always sought their own solutions to national problems. There is no record of their receiving compensation for their destroyed property. There is no evidence even of the authorities demanding such compensation. How could they? The settlement on Crab was illegal, so that compensation was not to be expected. The destruction by the Spaniards of the settlement on Crab also relieved the pressure on London from Denmark. From Whitehall's point of view, the violence of the Spanish action was a neat solution to the diplomatic crisis. Their preference was to let the Danes struggle with Spain for ownership of Crab Island.

Crab Island was to remain Spanish despite the competing claims of the Anguillians and the Danes of St Thomas and St John. It was, eventually, accepted by both the Danes and the British that Vieques, to give the island its proper modern name, was a dependency of Puerto Rico, and not politically a part of the Virgin Islands. It remains attached to Puerto Rico to this day.

The earliest English map of Crab Island is a very faded one of 1818 drawn for Governor Thomas Probyn and submitted by him in a dispatch to the Earl of Bathurst (see illus 6).²² This dispatch related to an attempt by a group of Kittitians to revive the British claim to Vieques. The Anguillians never again showed any interest in settling Vieques.



6. Crab Island in 1818. (UK National Archives®)

Abraham Howell fades from the scene after this venture. If he was about twenty-five years of age at the

²² CO.239/4, No 68: Probyn to Bathurst on 16 March 1818.

time of his election in 1666 to be deputy governor of Anguilla, he was at least eighty six years of age at the time of the signing of the 1727 Proclamation, a very advanced age for that time.

At the time of the 1717 census, the Howell and Leonard families were at the peak of their social and economic importance in Anguilla. There are five Leonard men recorded as being then in Anguilla, Captain George Leonard and his four sons, Edward Leonard, another George Leonard, Phillip Leonard, and Henry Leonard. They are all recorded as being present in Anguilla indicating they did not go on the adventure to Crab Island. The Crab Island Census shows that Abraham Howell was present with five slaves. He left behind in Anguilla his wife, a child, and ten slaves. His sons, Bezaliel Howell and Thomas Howell, were with him on Crab Island with four and two slaves, respectively. Left behind in Anguilla were William Howell, another Thomas Howell, and Jacob Howell. Within a few years the two cotton growing families ceased to dominate the little island. The sugar planter families of the Gumbses and Richardsons came to dominate social life in the 1740s and afterwards.

Crab Island was not to affect Anguillians for nearly another 300 years, and then only in a very tangential way. In the late 1970's the US navy were using a part of Vieques as a bombing range. Forced by pressure from

local fishermen, environmentalists, and Puerto Rican nationalists to consider vacating their naval facility on Vieques, they looked around for an alternative site. Dog Island, a small uninhabited cay several miles off the north coast of and a part of Anguillian territory, was found appealing by certain US navy consultants. They wrote that they thought that its situation was ideal for use as a practice range. The pros and cons of such a development were hotly debated in Anguilla. The sound of low-flying jets approaching on their bombing run and subsequently the detonating of high explosives just a few miles of Anguilla's northern tourist beaches would not be conducive to the happiness and welfare of visitors or residents. It was several years before the British government turned down the proposal. The US Navy eventually in the year 2003 abandoned their bombing range in Vieques and turned the property over to be a National Park, which it remains.

And so, we end the tragic story of Captain Abraham Howell's efforts to settle the Anguillians on Crab Island. He may have failed in his attempt to find land for the dispossessed of Anguilla and the Leewards who flocked to his standard, but the Anguillians still had outlets open to them. As Governor Hamilton warned as early as July of 1719, the survivors of Crab Island were scattered among the various islands of the colony. They and others

were discontented. For want of land in the better islands, the Anguillians were obliged to consider moving to the smaller Virgin Islands. As we shall see, they were to have more luck on St Croix and Tortola, and others of the Virgin Islands, than on Crab.