

CHAPTER 15

SETTLING ST CROIX

Dr Samuel B Jones was the resident doctor, Magistrate and Warden of Anguilla in the 1930's.¹ He read the deeds and Wills in the Registry while he waited for court to open and in between seeing patients in his clinic. He wrote and published the first and best-known history of Anguilla.² In his Annals of Anguilla, he quotes the 1740 Will of John Richardson.³ Richardson lived from 1679 to 1742. He was one of the third generation of Anguillians and was deputy governor of Anguilla from 1735 to 1741. Dr Jones was interested in the bequest in the Will that reads:

Item. I give unto my son William Richardson and my two grandsons John and William Richardson sons of my deceased son John Richardson my small sloop called the Sea Flour, to attend and go forward with the settlement at St Croix, and my will and desire is that Samuel Red shall have the liberty in going and carrying what he has an occasion of towards the settling of his plantation in St Croix but my son William is to have the one moiety of said sloop.

Dr Jones expressed the hope that, “*at some later date it may be possible to discover to what extent the wishes of*

¹ See Chapter 3: The Carib Raid.

² Dr SB Jones: Annals of Anguilla (1936).

³ Anguilla Archives: John Richardson's Will of 9 January 1740. See also Chapter 18: Sugar Arrives.

Governor Richardson were carried out in regard to his colonization scheme for St Croix.” It is with something of a challenge from Dr Jones that one picks through the Anguilla Archives and the Colonial Office records in London, looking for some clue as to the connection between Anguilla and St Croix in the first half of the eighteenth century.

The first useful document is Governor Walter Hamilton’s dispatch of April 1716.⁴ He enclosed the Account of the Virgin Islands, written by Abraham Howell and Thomas Hornby, the deputy governor of Tortola.⁵ The purpose of the Account was to try to persuade the Governor-in-Chief to give his official seal of approval to the settlement of either Crab Island or of St Croix. The first was claimed by the Danes and the Spaniards. The second was claimed by the French. This is what they wrote:

Captain Howell has been at Crab Island, and I have also been there some years ago, and now give your Excellency the description as follows -

The land is extraordinary good, and all of it except some rocky points near the sea manurable, the soil very rich and level and is to the best our judgment in length about eight leagues and in breadth about eight miles, very well timbered.

⁴ CO.152/11, No 6: Hamilton to the Committee on 10 April 1716.

⁵ Enclosure No 5 to dispatch No 6.

As to the roads, there is two good roads, that is to say, Sound Bay and Sandy Point at the west end. But for harbours there is but two, Great Harbour and Portafairo, the first one ten foot water upon the bar but water enough within, the latter is eleven foot on the bar, water within for great ships; this is all that we know of Crab Island.

The next island of consideration is Santa Crux which we have no knowledge of, having not been there, but the inhabitants of these islands are, one or other of them, continually there, and we have the following description from them: the length of the island is 12 leagues, the breadth about eight or nine miles, the soil extraordinary good, very well timbered, but one good road and that very good, that a hundred sail of ships may ride.

Next is St John, about a league in diameter, but very ordinary land not capable of settling many inhabitants, viz, mountainous and difficult manuring, so that it is of consequence only for an extraordinary good harbour for any shipping and good timber.

Next is Tortola of about 14 or 15 miles long and not above 2 miles broad, very mountainous, not capable of making many sugar works; the land [. . .] is very good, but not much of it manurable; there is but one good harbour for ships but several for small sloops.

As for the rest of the small Islands or keys rather, they are good for nothing but to feed goats on, being rocky, barren land having nothing but scrubby bushes thereon, except one called Joss Van Dicks which has some good house timber on it. The names:

*First, Norman's Island
Chymanes little and great*

*St James's
Scrub
Thatch Islands little and great
The Dogs
St Peters Island
Prickle Pear
Salt Island
Mosquito
Coopers Island
Necker Island
Ginger Island
Little Statia
Jerusalem
The Anegadoes a stock island belonging to
Thomas Hornbe
Guana Island
Beef Island*

*Testes
(sd) Thomas Hornbe
(sd) Abraham Howell*

Governor Hamilton noted that the two deputy governors themselves confessed that Tortola was good for little. As for the people of Virgin Gorda, though it possessed the most inhabitants of the British Virgin Islands, they lived very meanly. It was, he wrote, a very ordinary little island, of no profit to the Crown. As for Beef Island, it was hardly worth mentioning.

The two deputy governors, he wrote, reported to him that St Croix was frequently visited by the sloops of Anguilla and of the Virgin Islands. The information was that the soil was particularly good. It was also well timbered, and it possessed one good roadstead. The

harbour was so large that one hundred ships might safely ride at anchor in it. This part of the dispatch tells us that the Anguillians were familiar with St Croix and considered it a very desirable destination for immigration.

There was a downside to occupying St Croix. As Hamilton explained, the reason why these two experienced and accomplished captains did not have the most recent information on St Croix was that a Spanish pirate frequented its waters. This pirate only recently took an English turtling sloop, probably from Anguilla or the Virgins. Despite this, Hamilton reported that he received a petition from the Anguillians to remove from Anguilla to settle on St Croix. The Anguillians pleaded that their island was so extremely poor and barren that it could not sustain them. In a short time, they must leave it or inevitably perish. What the Anguillians wanted of the Governor were his patents to parcels of land on St Croix to allow them to make their settlement there. Hamilton, however, prudently deferred to the decision of the Council on whether he might assist them in this way.

The petition of 1716 to settle St Croix is unsigned but bears all the hallmark of Abraham Howell's style. The Petition reads (see illus 1):⁶

⁶ CO.152/11, No 6: Hamilton to the Committee on 10 April 1716, enclosure No 4: The 1716 Anguillian petition for permission to settle St Croix.

*To His Excellency Walter Hamilton Esq, Captain
General and Commander in Chief of all His Majesty's
Leeward Caribbee Islands in America and Vice Admiral
of the Same*

*The Humble Petition of Abraham Howell Governor of the
Island of Anguilla for himself and in behalf of the rest of
the Inhabitants of said Island –*

SHEWETH –

*Unto your Excellency that your Petitioner does for
himself and the rest of the Inhabitants of Anguilla most
humbly take leave to represent unto your Excellency that
the island they now inhabit is so very poor and barren
that it will not produce subsistence for the Inhabitants, so
that in a very short time they must leave the same or
inevitably perish for want of land to cultivate and
manure. Now, may it please your Excellency, your
petitioner most humbly takes leave further to represent
unto your Excellency that there is a very large island
called St Croix that is uninhabited and withal of a very
fertile soil and commodious, with good roads for
shipping and trade.*

*Your Petitioner most humbly prays your Excellency to
take the premises unto your mature consideration and
grant Patents to the several Inhabitants of Anguilla for
the settlement of St Croix which in few years would be a
place of trade that would raise a considerable revenue
per annum to the Crown of Great Britain.*

And your Petitioner as in duty bound shall ever pray, etc.

6 (10)

To His Excellency Walter Hamilton Esquire
Captain Generall and Commander in Chief of
all His Majesties Leeward Caribbee Islands in
America and Vice Admirall of the same

The humble Petition of Abraham Howell Governour of the
Island of Anguilla for him self and in Behalf of the rest
of the Inhabitants of said Island

Sheweth

Unto Your Excellency that your Petitioner
doe for him self and the rest of the Inhabitants of Anguilla Most
humbly take Leave to Represent unto Your Excellency that
the Island they now Inhabit is soe very poor and Barren that it
will not produce Subsistence for the Inhabitants, soe that in every
short time they must Leave the same or Inevitably Perish for
want of Land to Cultivate and Manure. NOW May it Please
Your Excellency Your Petitioner Most Humbly takes Leave further
to Represent unto Your Excellency that there is every Large Island
Call'd S. Croix that is Uninhabited and withall of every fertile
Soil and Commodious with good Roads for Shipping and Trade

Your Petitioner Most Humbly prays Your
Excellency to take the premises into Your Matre-
Consideration and Grant Patents to the severall
Inhabitants of Anguilla for the Settlement of
S. Croix which in few Years Would be a place
of Trade that would raise a Considerable Revenue
Yearly to the Crown of Great Britain

And Your Petitioner as in Duty
Bound shall ever pray &c

1. The Anguillian petition to settle St Croix. CO.152/11, No 6, enclosure 4. (UK National Archives®)

This petition is expressed to be made by the author as ‘governor of the island of Anguilla for himself and on behalf of the rest of the inhabitants’ of Anguilla. Although Howell was not deputy governor of Anguilla since 1689, he was still in 1716, twenty-seven years later, carrying the honorary title. If Howell was still calling himself deputy governor then it is hardly surprising to see Hamilton referring to him similarly. He urged the Board of Trade to allow the Anguillians to leave Anguilla and to settle St Croix. He described St Croix as being uninhabited.

We learn from Governor Mathew in 1734 the history of the settlement of St Croix. He wrote that the island was first settled by a group of homesteaders from St Kitts in about the year 1640.⁷ Sir Thomas Warner appointed one Johnson to be the first deputy governor of St Croix. The settlement did not last long. It proved very unhealthy, and the settlers were also afraid of the Spanish from Puerto Rico. They abandoned the settlement after several years. Johnson was tried for desertion after he returned to St Kitts. The French finding the island deserted undertook its settlement. But, after several years, they too abandoned the island and all the French moved to Saint Domingue. The English log cutters and dye wood cutters resumed their activities on the unclaimed island. At the time of this report in 1733, there

⁷ CO.152/20, folio 109: Mathew to the Committee on 19 March 1733.

were, he wrote, about 100 English log cutters on the island. They lived there with no form of government or organised society.

What was the point of this 1716 petition? Why did the Anguillians not do as on Crab Island and just go off and settle the place without permission? There was a legal purpose to this petition. Howell was now aware that to ensure success he needed the protection of the British flag. This he could secure only by getting the permission of the Governor-in-Chief to the proposed settlement. If Howell could persuade the Governor to accept St Croix as part of his Colony of the Leeward Islands, the Anguillians would be able to receive grants of land and estates by way of patents. Without the support and protection of the Governor and such forces as he commanded in Antigua, there was no defence against the Danish or Spanish coast guards and militias. With the Governor behind them, they hoped they would not only enjoy the protection of the British men-of-war in the area, but also have legal title to the lands they occupied and worked. This was preferable to merely sneaking away to settle on a foreign island, furtively and against the law of the time. They tried that approach on Crab Island and failed.

Hamilton's protestations in his dispatch of April 1716 do not hide the axe he was busily grinding away at.

He claimed indifference as to whether the Lords of the Council gave permission for the settlement of St Croix. He referred to the urgings of one Captain Walton. Walton was the deputy governor of the British Virgin Islands. He agitated for a separate government for the Virgin Islands.

It will be remembered that at this time Anguilla was classed as one of the Virgin Islands, although with its own deputy governor. The Virgin Islands were the northern half of the colony of the Leeward Islands. Walton lobbied to be made the first Governor of his proposed separate colony. Hamilton, therefore, had an interest in playing down the value of the Virgin Islands. What Hamilton wanted was more, not fewer, people in the four chief islands of the Leeward Islands. It was not in the interest of the Leeward Islands for the northern half to be taken away and made into a separate colony. In the event, Walton's bid was unsuccessful. The Virgin Islands, like Anguilla, remained forgotten outposts of the Leeward Islands. Prosperity was not to come to the Virgin Islands and Anguilla until the development of the tourist and financial services industries of the last quarter of the twentieth century. We can only speculate that, with their own government and a separate administration, Anguilla and the Virgin Islands might have gone on to develop their economies in the eighteenth century, instead of having to wait for the twentieth.

By July 1717, no action was yet taken by the Committee for Trade and Foreign Plantations on the petition of the Anguillians. Hamilton wrote again urging the acceptance of his original suggestion that those Anguillians that needed land be resettled in the formerly French part of St Kitts.⁸ He explained that they again sent him a delegation renewing their request that they be given patents for land on St Croix. He feared that otherwise he would soon begin to lose them to other neighbouring foreign islands. He was informed that some of the Anguillians planned to settle on the Dutch part of St Marten and would in consequence be lost to the British Crown. His prophetic warning about the determination of the people to emigrate arrived too late to be of any effect, as we saw in the previous chapter.

In November of that year Governor Hamilton visited all the Virgin Islands, including Anguilla and Crab Island. In his dispatch back to London, written in January 1718, he proposed an alternative to settlement in St Kitts for the remainder of the Anguillians.⁹ He was now persuaded by Abraham Howell of the advantages of settling the Anguillians on St Croix. He recommended that if the Anguillians were moved all at once to St Croix, with tracts of land allotted to them by patent, they might in time become a profitable colony and be able to defend

⁸ CO.152/12/1, No 47: Hamilton to the Committee on 15 July 1717.

⁹ CO.152/12/1, No 67: Hamilton to the Committee on 6 January 1718.

themselves. St Croix was his choice over Crab Island for three reasons. First because it was larger, second because its hills more frequently drew rain, and third because it was further to windward from Puerto Rico. He hoped this would make it more secure from the sailing vessels of the Spanish coast guard. This was the first time that Hamilton urged that the Anguillians be allowed to settle St Croix.

In March 1718, Governor Hamilton reported that the inevitable destruction of the unlawful settlement on Crab Island took place.¹⁰ Many of the settlers, including Abraham Howell, were taken away by the Spaniards to Puerto Rico. The people who remained in Anguilla were still agitating to be allowed to go to St Croix. As Hamilton wrote in his March dispatch, they still pressed him to allow them to remove to St Croix. He prevailed upon them, he wrote, to await their Lordships' directions. However, he cautioned that unless he received these directions soon, it would be impossible to keep the Anguillians together. They were at that point, he wrote, almost famished because of the long spell of dry weather which lasted longer than any previously known on the island.

By 1719, Governor Hamilton lost all hope of the Anguillians being allotted land in St Kitts. He made no more mention of it after that date. The Anguillians, in the

¹⁰ CO.152/12/3, No 87: Hamilton to the Committee on 15 March 1718.

meantime, ceased waiting for permission to leave Anguilla, if they ever allowed this technicality to stand in their way in the first place. Some of the settlers from Crab Island escaped capture by the Spaniards in 1717. They settled in the other Virgin Islands. Others that returned to Anguilla after their release saw no reason to remain there. Some of them moved on to other Virgin Islands. There was even talk of going to the Bahamas. Some, including deputy governor George Leonard, moved to Antigua at least until the drought ended in about the year 1725.

At this point, some of the more persuasive Anguillians were able to force Governor Hamilton's hand, and he issued them with short grants for land in Tortola. As he explained to the Committee in June 1720, the drought lasted in all the islands for five months.¹¹ Perhaps it lasted for five months in Antigua with its mountains and regular rainfall. We know that the drought in Anguilla endured for the entire period 1680-1725. Governor Hamilton reported that the drought was particularly severe in Anguilla, which was abandoned by several of its inhabitants and with more expected to follow. He expressed his fear that unless provision was made for them, they would settle on the Dutch islands. To prevent this, he gave them grants in Tortola. He wrote

¹¹ CO.152/13, folio 77: Hamilton to the Committee on 14 June 1720.

that he was convinced that this measure at least would keep them from scattering and settling in foreign islands.

The drought in Anguilla eased after 1725. Either that, or by that time the Anguillians simply ceased complaining about the weather. They gave up trying to find an excuse for their determination to settle in foreign-owned islands. They proceeded to do as always, that is, as they thought best for themselves. Not quibbling whether they received either patents or mere grants from the Governor, numbers of them that were without land in Anguilla moved not only to Tortola, but also to St Martin, which was Dutch, and St Croix, which was Danish.

It was not until 1734 that St Croix is again associated in the Colonial Office records with Anguilla. This was just six years before deputy governor Richardson made his last Will. A new twist enters the story. In March of that year, Governor Mathew wrote from Montserrat to the Committee.¹² He confirmed the report that the French sold their interest in St Croix to the Danes. One Beverode, the new Danish governor, sailed through the islands on his way to St Croix. He held a commission to dispose of forty or more estates to settlers by patent or grant from the Danish Crown. This windfall, Mathew feared, would prove irresistible to a great many of the poorer inhabitants in Anguilla, Spanish Town, and

¹² CO.152/20, folio 109: Mathew to the Committee on 19 March 1734.

Tortola. He warned again that these persons seemed determined to remove to St Croix and become Danes.

Then again on 31 August Governor Mathew wrote to Mr Popple enclosing a report on the state of the Leeward Islands. He apologises for not being able to give a detailed account of Anguilla, Virgin Gorda or Tortola. These he says are not sugar islands, at least not for export. Their chief produce is cotton and provisions. Anguilla has not more than one hundred effective men in it. About sixty had recently left the island and “*gone to settle in St Martins where they are become Dutch, and on St Croix to cut timber, where they are turning Dane.*”¹³

In November 1734 he again wrote the Committee repeating his fears about the new Danish settlement in St Croix.¹⁴ In their new project, he wrote, the chief means they propose to settle it was by debauching His Majesty’s subjects in the Leeward Islands to become settlers and Danish subjects there. He feared the Danes’ success in enticing away his people would be fatal for the Leeward Islands. The presence of neutral ports at our nose, as he put it, meant that in time of war with the French, Denmark remaining neutral, there would be free ports that the French privateers could take their prizes to, recruit fresh

¹³ CO.152/20, unnumbered dispatch, folio 142, Mathew of 31 August 1734 to Popple, enclosing A State of His Majesty’s Leeward Caribbee Islands in America, 31 August 1734.

¹⁴ CO.152/21, No 58: Mathew to the Committee on 26 November 1734.

crews, and re-provision with food and ammunition, which he would not be able to stop.

Having read these dispatches, our suspicions are raised. Dr Jones was mistaken in his assessment of St Croix? Deputy governor John Richardson's son, William Richardson, and his grandchildren, John and William Richardson, and his partner Samuel Reid, were not joining a British settlement on St Croix.¹⁵ They were committing the unforgivable colonial sin of going to live in a foreign colony. The Anguillian deputy governor was encouraging his family and others to leave the British territory of Anguilla to settle illegally among the Danes. His grandsons John and William were among the Anguillians enticed away by Governor Beverode's offer of patents to land.

From this 1734 dispatch, we learn that Anguillians by this time were openly emigrating to St Martin and St Croix. There is other evidence relating to St Martin. In 1775, the heirs of Phillip Driscall and his wife, the widow Joan Glading, went to court in Anguilla. As a result, there is preserved in the Anguilla Archives a part of their marriage contract of 1720 made in St Martin. By this contract, Joan agreed that if Phillip should die before her, she should enjoy as dower one third of his whole estate during her life. In exchange, she renounced all her right

¹⁵ Although the Will spells the name 'Red', we can assume this was an error for Reid as that spelling does not reappear in any of the records.

to the rest of his estate. This document is as rare as it is special. It is one of the few legal documents preserved in the Anguillian Archives relating to the affairs of the Anguillians who settled St Martin in this early period. Fifty-five years later, George Gordon and George Patterson were married to the granddaughters of Phillip Driscoll, by now deceased. On behalf of their wives, they claimed the whole of the estate. The Anguilla Council, acting in its judicial capacity, delivered its judgment. One of the exhibits was a settlement of the estate of Phillip Driscoll by of the Governor and Council of St Martin dated 16th February 1734. This judgment fully discharged any further claim by Joan Driscoll or her heirs. The Anguilla Council accepted that finding as binding on them. The document is incomplete, but the effect of the contract and of the judgment is clear. Anguillians were emigrating to the neighbouring half-French, half-Dutch island of St Martin and acquiring estates there.

Governor Mathew continues to refer to the problem of the Anguillians dispersing to foreign islands. In his dispatch to the Committee of 31 May 1736, he reminded them of his previous fear that his colony of the Leeward Islands would suffer damage from the Danes settling St Croix.¹⁶ The islands now began to feel some of the effects of that settlement. The Danes were not interested

¹⁶ CO.152/22, folio 121: Mathew to the Committee on 31 May 1736.

in settling it themselves. Their Governor Moth was continually pestering the Leeward Islanders with offers and encouragement. Lately, no fewer than seventeen members of Lieutenant Colonel Gilbert's militia company in Antigua ran off to St Croix in a boat. Just three days previously he intercepted another vessel with six British families attempting to emigrate there. Even though they died as fast as they got to St Croix, as he claimed, there was little he could do to prevent them going if they were really determined. As a result, his colony was daily weakening.

When the Committee replied on 8 October, they offered no solution.¹⁷ They made the usual request that he do all he could to restrain the population. As they put it, since the unhealthiness of St Croix did not prevent his Majesty's subjects under his government from going to that island, they could only recommend to him that he use his best endeavours to keep them at home. This was small support for the effort he was making.

After October 1736, the Colonial Office records make no further mention of the problem of the dispersal of the Leeward Islanders to St Croix. The picture that emerged so far is clear. It was in 1735 that Governor Mathew appointed John Richardson to be deputy governor in Anguilla, in succession to George Leonard.

¹⁷ CO.153/16, folio 45: Committee to Mathew on 8 October 1736.

The settlement in St Croix by members of his family and other Anguillians was illegal. The 1740 Will tells us that they moved to St Croix with Richardson's encouragement and support, probably both before and after he became deputy governor. Subsequently, as deputy governor, he was able to encourage and assist the settlement on St Croix. He also possessed the means to do so. As one of the earliest successful sugar planters on the island, he was the wealthiest Anguillian of his time. That is why he was appointed deputy governor. As an inter-island trader and sloop owner, he had the means of transportation needed to encourage and assist the emigration to and settlement of St Croix.

As the century progressed, Anguillian sloops continued, under the aegis of the local deputy governor and Council, to connect Anguilla with St Croix, Tortola, and other Virgin Islands, where so many of the population had family and business connections. The Anguillian sloops of this time traded from one island to the other, regardless of the Navigation Acts and customs duties and prohibitions against trade with foreign islands. In the beginning, the sloops brought valuable dye wood and building timber from the forests of Crab and St Croix to the merchants of the Leewards. Later in the century, they traded as far as New York and London.

The Sea Flower was eventually lost in 1768. Her captain, Boaz Bell, sold her and her cargo of salt to the Spaniards in Puerto Rico, when she became so leaky that her crew were unable to continue their voyage. Anguilla's sloop owners and captains built the foundations of the present tradition of complete irreverence for all national boundaries and customs barriers that characterize the best Anguillian schooner captains and businessmen of today.

The documents we looked at show us that the Anguillians reciprocated the abandonment the authorities showed them. They freely moved between the Dutch and Danish territories as if these were mere extensions of Anguilla. They made their own laws and elected their own governors. They were polite enough, but they did not blindly obey the instructions of a distant governor. When his instructions ran contrary to their obvious vital interests, they ignored them without hesitation. Deputy governor John Richardson was an archetypal Anguillian. It was in his mould that following generations of successful Anguillian boat captains, merchants, and traders and our many immigrants to Curacao, New Jersey, and Slough, were cast.