

Material Relating to the West Indies from the Senhouse Papers: 1762-1831

MIC-Loyalist FC LFR .S4J6P3

Transcription, reel 1, no. 5, "Memoirs of Dominica, an Island in the British West Indies," by Joseph Senhouse, 1772

p. 1

Dominica, one of the Caribbee Island, was discovered by the Great Columbus, on a Sunday Nov'r 3'd 1493. [crossed out] being the first Land he made during His second voyage to America, from this circumstance it takes its name, which was all the Spanish bestowd upon it, excepting a few [crossed out] Hogs.

On Monday may the 22'd 1598 We find the famous Navigator the Earl of Cumberland in pursuance of a Commission granted Him by Queen Elizabeth against the Spaniards came to an anchor at the Harbour of Dominica, in his way to the reduction of Puerto Rico; upon which, the [4]th of June following, being Whitsunday he mustered his men upon the Island, and left it, so far as we can perceive without meeting with the least opposition from the Inhabitants. After this, Mr. George Percy, Brother to the earl of Northumberland, touchd here with some recruits, which he was conducting to [the] relief of the Colony of Virginia. Those facts seem to establish the preoccupancy of this [underlined] Island entirely in favor of the English, at least preferable to the French, who at that time had no knowledge of these parts; and if the earl of Cumberland did not actually make a settlement here, it was owing to an oversight in his commission, into which

p. 2

which no clause for that purpose was inserted.

Charles the first however made no scruple to insert Dominica in the earl of Carlisle's original Patent, and it has ever since stood as one of the Islands included in the commission of the Governor of Barbados, until the last treaty of peace.

It has been generally allowed that the Island of Dominica was the rendezvous or forttruss of the Caribbean when expelled from the other Islands; and that the natives of this excelld all the other Caribbeans, not only in strength, courage, and activity, but also in a form of Government which they retaind, introduced (as the French pretend) by one Baron a Frenchman, who liv'd upon the Island and conform'd himself to the manners and customs of the natives. It is certain that the French, notwithstanding their endeavours on every occasion to depreciate this Island as much as they possibly could in the Eyes of the England; were so thoroughly [crossed out] sensible of the value and importance of Dominica, that they endeavoured to mingle their accounts of the Inhabitants with many strains of the Marvellous, particularly of its containing [a most] immense hill, which was stor'd with all kinds of

Poisonous/ venomous animals, and was the residence of a most monstrous Dragon. Those ridiculous & absurd reports, perhaps had

p. 3

had their effect, and the [rather] as the English who had been upon the Island, appear to have neglected it, because they could find no Harbour on its Coast. It must not, however, be denied, that many of the English Freebooters, and even some planter of no inconsiderable rank, used to decoy those Natives and carry them into captivity; & that this gave them an invincible hatred to all the English which was on every opportunity [cherish'd] by the French. The latter are said to have concluded a peace with those Islanders in the year 1640 about which time, Baron made several expeditions at the head of the Dominican Caribbeans, against the English upon the other Islands. When Lord Willoughby of Parham was appointed Governor of Barbados by Charles the 2^d he paid no regard to the French proceedings, and sent a number of men to settle Dominica under the authority of a Lieut' Governor of his own nomination. The French upon the Island pretended that this settlement should not take effect, because it was in prejudice to their allies the Caribbeans; and in consequence they produced a sham Treaty suppos'd to have been concluded with them in 1640. The English in return produc'd other Treaties, perhaps of the same kind, in support of their settlement; and matters remained pretty quiet for some years after between the two nations

p. 4

nations, till 1668, Lord Willoughby was necessitated to support his settlement by an arm'd force from Barbados against the Injuries done it by the French. This vigorous measure produc'd so good an effect, that the natives, by a solemn ~~Treaty~~ [Instrument] made a surrender of their Isl'd to the English, which Instrument according to a well inform'd author (of the Candid and impartial considerations on the nature of the Sugar Trade, page 83) was lodg'd in the hand of Mr. Littleton, His Lordships Secretary. In 1672, the French by virtue/ under the Title of the above mentioned sham treaty, openly disputed with the English, the possession of this Island. but the Council of Trade and Plantations in London, upon the 11th of December the same year, inform'd the Governor of Barbados, that no such Treaty ever existed. Coll'l Thomas Warner, the son of Sir Thomas Warner, by a Caribbean Lady, whom the French Missioner Latest saw alive in 1700 aged at that time above 100 years, was then Lieut' Governor their Island, by Commission from the Governor of Barbados, and continued in that Post till his death which happened in 1674.

After this little or no mention is made of Dominica, till the time of the shameful treaty of neutrality between James the 2^d and the French King. Coll'l Stede (afterwards Sir Edward) was

p. 5

was then Lieut't Governor of B'dos; but he was so far from considering Dominica even as a neutral Island, that he ~~ordered~~ the said Treaty to be proclaimed in it, as comprehended in his Commission. The next year he set fire to some French Hutts that had been [run] up upon the Coast, and seiz'd one of their ships for having [presess'd] to wood and water upon the Island, without his permission. Another

commission for the purpose of settling all disputed matters in the West Indies, was afterwards signed by James the 2^d in consequence of the same Coll^l Stede had orders from London to transmit to the Ministers, all the documents and proofs in favor of the English right [underlined] to the Island. This order was complied with but so late as the 23^d of Sept^r 1688, when the Revolution was upon the point of taking place. In this report, however, Coll^l Stede is said to have made out, beyond all dispute, not only the right of the English to Dominica; but likewise to all the Islands in his Commission as Gov^r of B^dos. During the war between the English and French, which succeeded, this Island could not properly have been said to be settled by either Nation; but when the English resumed their claim after the peace of Ryswick, they burnt the French huts & oblig^d them to abandon the Island.

p. 6

Thus, by an unaccountable concurrence of causes this Island, through its great value, remained no consequence to any European power. In times of ward, between the French and English, both were driven from it in their turn, and upon the conclusion of a peace, each nation knew the importance of it too well to suffer the other to become masters of it; and both agreed that it was of too little consequence to be made the object of a new War. In this state of neutrality it continued by a kind of tacit consent on both sides, till by the treaty of Aix la Chappelle in 1648, it was formally declar^d to be neutral. The French, however, observ^d a most insidious neutrality; for when towards the close of the late War, it was [reduc^d] by Lord Rollo for the crown of Great Britain, he found almost the whole sea Coast settled by the French. The definitive treaty of 1763 fixt the property of Dominica unalterably in His Majesty and his successors, and next to the cession of Canada and Louisiana, it is by many considered as one of the most valuable acquisitions we have obtained by that peace. When all circumstances are considered, especially the industry of the French in settling the Island the cession of it may be deem^d as an actual conquest from them.

p. 7

Climate

The Salubrity of this Island may be guessed at from the vast age to which the above Mr. Warner liv^d upon it, and from its being far better peopl^d when first discovered, [~~crossed out~~] and the Inhabitants of a stouter and healthier race/ make [underlined] then were to be found in any other of the Carribbee Islands. Nor can it be doubted if we may be allow^d to Judge from the constant purification of the air the more the Land become clear^d, that when the Island has undergone a thorough cultivation it will of course [~~crossed out~~] prove one of the healthiest of all the lesser Antilles.

Soil and Produce

The Soil in general consists of a dark Brown or Black mould, and is extremely fertile, the whole surface of the Country, excepting the Savannahs or Meadow, and where it is already settled, from the sea shore to the highest Mountains, abounds with all the different sorts of valuable Timber that are to be met with in any of the West India Islands, and all of those are large, straight, and excellent in their respective kinds; which the French very well know from experience, having supplied most of their

Plantations in Martinique from hence during the state of neutrality. here is also to be found the Latin Tree

p. 8

Tree, which F. Labat [Jean-Baptiste Labat] erroneously Judg'd peculiar to the Island of Grenada. Fruit of all kinds to be found between the Tropicks arrive here at great perfection, which the French [crossed out] [engenuously] confess to exceed those of Martinica & Guadaloup. Pine Apples, & Oranges in particular are large, and of the finest flavour. [Grown] Provisions, such as Bananas, Manioc, [Eddows, endive?], & so [essentially] [necessary] in every Plantation, are here produced in the greatest perfection, the same may also be said of Tobacco which has been cultivated here with success. In short the soil in general is equal to every purpose of West Indian agriculture, and thence very highly commended for its fertility by the Spanish, Eng'h and French writers/ authors, who have had occasion and leisure to examine it more minutely, and upon whose concurrent testimonies we may therefore the more safely rely.

Since this, together with other Neutral Isl's of St. Vincents and Tobago have been aided and guaranteed in full right forever to the Crown of Great Brittain, by the ninth article of the last Treaty of Peace; and encouragement given to settlers by His Majestys Royal Proclamation, induc'd with the hope of improving their fortunes, numbers of Gentlemen from different parts

p. 9

parts of the British Empire, have become purchasers of Lotts of Land from the Crown; and Dominica tho' the last of the all the Carribbee Islands in commencing a regular Cultivation by the English, begins now to flourish in a very rapid, & eminent degree, and the Planters have the sensible pleasure to find, as a [seand] to their merit and Industry; that the Sugar Cane, Coffee, Cacao, etc. attains to a great perfection here, as in any Island in the British Dominions; nor can it be doubted [crossed out] considering its situation and other circumstances, that this valuable spot will in due time prove as considerable and acquisition to the Crown as any island of its size in the West Indies.

The face of the Country is in general rough and Mountains towards the Sea, more especially upon the So:ern Extremity, & upon certain parts of the West or Leward Coast, where we must confess, it presents no very inviting prospect to Strangers; but within the Land, and upon most of the Windward Coast there are many rich & Succulent Vallies and some large and fair Plains. the [dreloiority] of the Hills are for the most part gentle so as to felicitate there cultivation, and from the happy disposition of the numerous running Streams & Springs, it is render'd every where habitable, the slopes [crossed out] in general [crossed out] being so easy and regular, that there are scarsely any

p. 10

any Marshes or Stagnant Water in the Island.

No Island in the Universe of its dimensions, can boast a greater variety of Rivers, and Brookes, all of the best & most wholesome quality, some of the former, which are suppos'd to flow from a Lake

upon the Summit of a Mountain in the middle of the Island, are for a considerable distance up the Country, navigable for Boats & small Craft from this great abundance of running Streams, it is rendered exceedingly commodious for all the purposes of Cultivation, such as the turning of Mills etc. etc.

Roseau

The Metropolis, or Capital of Dominica, is also the Seat of Government. This Town stands upon the Banks of the River of the same name, on the Sea Shore, about 4 Miles from the [sermost] point of the Island and upon the [Leinscrd] Coast; which, added to the adjoining New Town, or Charlotte Ville, forms one continued street of more than half a mile long, intersected at right angles by several smaller ones in the old Town, and may upon the whole contain upwards of [blank] Houses.

p. 11

Prince Ruperts Bay

Is situate upon the New part of the Island, formed by round Point on the South, and Prince Ruperts Head on the No. it is deep, sandy, and spacious, and equal in Excellence, if not superior to any Bay in the West Indies, being secured by the adjacent Mountains from most Winds. The passage in and out by season of the constant & regular Trade Wind, may be always depended upon, & where the whole Royal Navy of England [~~crossed out~~] may lay in the greatest safety. The entrance, being about a League wide, & something more in depth, the soundings decreasing gradually on all sides as you approach the Shore; none is there any, the least dangers to be apprehended in the working into this Bay, provided you observe to give a good Berth to the so'ern or Round Point, off which lies some Rocks to the distance of about half a Mile. It was here the Squadron under the Earl of Cumberland anchored; as did that Commanded by the Hon'ble Mr. Percy; and from Prince Ruperts visiting it when in these parts, it has received his name.

Here the armament/ Squadron [underlined] under Lord [Cathcart], [~~destined against~~] Carthangena, lay securely for some time; as did Commodore Moor's Fleet during [most] part of the Siege of Guadaloupe and

p. 12

and by reason of the facility with which wood & water etc. may be here obtained, it has occasionally been resorted to by all His Majesty's Ships upon the Leeward Island station.

Portsmouth

An inconsiderable Town at the bottom of Prince Ruperts Bay, consists of about a dozen Houses, rendered basely habitable, on account of the Pestilential Vapours exhaling from a Marsh or Swamp, situate immediately to windward, and which the Inhabitants must [~~crossed out~~] constantly respire/ breath; however, we apprehend, that with [dire] attention to their Interest and constitutions, the Gentlemen of property in their Neighbourhood, but causing the Trees to be clear'd away, & draining the Swamp, or by pursuing such other measures as people better acquainted with these matters should

suggest, the Air of prince Ruperts Bay might in a short time be rendered as pure & wholesome to European Constitutions, as that of any other part of the Island.

In this Town is erected a Monument in memory of the Gallant Lord Cathcart, [Charles Cathcart, 8th Lord Cathcart] who died of the Flux & was here intir'd; from this circumstance the Armament already mentioned in particular, and the Nation in general suffered an [incomparable] loss (for had he liv'd, it is more than probably that the

p. 13

the many, fruitless attempts against the Spanish settlements in the West Indies under Vernon, and Wentworth, would not only have been attended with better success, but also with less mortality.)

In the year [blank] The Legislature of Dominica [prefer'd, presen'd] a Memorial to the King in Council, setting forth the grievances, & hardships, they consequently lay bound under, in being so remote from the Seat of Government , - (being then dependent upon the Legislature of Grenada) and that in case His Majesty would grant them relief, by erecting their Island into an independent Government, they would in their part, settle a permanent salary of x £2,000 [Cass'?] upon such Governor, as should be so appointed. In consequence of which, and as an instance of His Paternal care, & affection, for this Infant Colony, His Majesty was most graciously pleas'd to constitute & appoint, His Excellency Sir Wm. Young [inserted] Bar't [Baronet] over Present Government. His representative in this [crossed out] Colony under whose Wise, Generous, & Humane Administration the Inhabitants of this Island entertain the most flattering hope of Prosperity.

X equal to £1212''2''6 Sterling

On

p. 14

On the [blank] of [blank]The first Assembly agreeable to their Engagement, and [fromer] express'd in the aforesaid Memorial, and to manifest their gratitude for the benefits receive'd from having a Governor of their own, settled the annual term of £2,000 [Cuse'?] to be paid as a Salary to the present, & every future Governor, during their actual residence in the Island.

The Government of Dominica, as it is now established, resembles that of Barbados & the other English Islands in this Neighbourhood and consists of a Governor, Lieut't Governor (who is President of His Majestys Council) a Council of 8 Gentle Men app'd by Letter of Mandamus, and an Assembly of 18 chosen annually out of the several Parishes, two for each Parish, by a majority of votes. The members of the Council sit in the Court of Chancery with the Governor, and are by virtue of their Posts stil'd Hon'ble His Majestys attorney Gen'l of the Island is instilled to a seat in Council, as also the Surveyor Genl. of the Customs, who by virtue of that office has the same privilege in every other

p. 15

& besides His Salary; he is not instilled to any requisite except on their of Seizures; and is restrained from accepting any gift or present from the Assembly or others, unless it be granted [crossed out] as a Settlement by the first Assembly He meets after His arrival in the Island.

The Lieut' Governor, on whom the administration of affairs consequently devolve in the absence of the Gov'r, or after His death till the arrival of another, is intitled to [one half of the salary crossed out] the emoluments allotted to the Gov'r for the time being. He cannot pass any acts, but what are immediately necessary for the Peace & Welfare of the Island; nor dissolve the Assembly then in being; nor remove, or suspend any Officer civil or military, without the consent of a majority of the members of Council.

The Attorney General & Judge of the Admiralty, are Patent Officers.

The Surveyor General of the Customs, with the other officers of that department, are appointed by the Lords of the Treasury; and upon any vacancy, they Surveyor Genl. Who under the Commiss'n has the sole direction of all matters relative to the Revenue, is authoris'd to nominate till His appointment is either supplied, or confirmed from England.

The Naval Office is granted by Patent & executed by a Deputy.

p. 16

[blank]

p. 17

As it may possibly be surmis'd that this Colony by reason of its vicinity to the French Islands (being situated as it were in the very Bosom/centre of their Sugar Colonies) is rather a circumstance more liable to some objection; than any object of commendation, as great danger and difficulty may be from thence apprehended in the settling of Dominica; we think it therefore necessary to offer some candid, and impartial [crossed out] thoughts upon that [Head], being the more encourag'd [as] to do, from having the sanction of the very [inges'] & intelligent author of the Sugar Trade.

Upon a strict review we apprehend these dangers and difficulties, which some have thought alarming, will not appear so very great; x for even should a War be near at hand, which some timorous people fright themselves, this new acquisition would undoubtedly be as secure if not more so, then any of our other possessions in this part of the World, for so long as we maintain our superiority at Sea, a respectable Squadron of Men of War, [crossed out] upon the first appearance of a rupture, might be dispatch'd to Prince Ruperts Bay, which, joind to those already upon this station, would be fully sufficient to quiet the minds of the Inhabitants against any attempts the French could possibly make against them, But

p. 18

But if, as is much more probable, such an event be at a great distance, the Island by that time will in all probability be fully settled, and from its extent & fortifications, & a regular disciplined Militia, out of all Jeopardy from any sudden invasion. In this state it would most conveniently serve as a place of Arms, and the rendezvous of our forces from all parts of the West Indies, when the whole of the French Commerce must immediately become precarious, and all their settlements in a very short time fall entirely at our mercy; a circumstance which the French in this Country; who in this respect must be allow'd the best Judges, have always foreseen, [&] therefore very justly dreaded, more particularly according to F. Labat the French Missionary who after having agreeable to customs reduc'd this Island to as low and contemptible a light as He possibly could, proceeds then, as Though after all, this is an Isle of very little importance; the English have notwithstanding made many attempts to establish themselves therein, founded upon certain pretensions which the French have always oppos'd, not only because they were in themselves void of any reasonable foundation, but the rather, because if this Island should be once in their hands it would serve to cut off the communication between Martinica & Guadaloup in time of ward, and reduce the Inhabitants of both Isles to

p. 19

to the last extremity." It is certain the French had very good reason for insisting so peremptorily upon having this Island in their possession, as they did during the negotiation for the late peace of Paris; for if they had it not neither Martinique or Guadaloup could be secure, as they are on account of the advantageous situation of Dominica in a manner block'd upon according to their Sea Phrase, Mettre, ou, tenir nous cleft; on, en prison; which in other words is to hold under lock & key, or in a prison; and in this sense they said that St. Lucia, or as they call it [Almerie?] was the [boucle] of Martinique, that is, the latter as [shirt] in and cover'd by the former. The selection of Dom:a in such, that with a sufficient naval force, the communication between the aforementioned Islands may be entirely cut off. But they probably might have other reasons [crossed out] they certainly knew the real value of this Island much better than we possibly could. They drew from it most of their Timber and provisions for their other Isl:s and had a strong persuasion that there was a Gold mine in it.

The proportion between the property, and consequences between the power of the two Nations in the West Indies, is now extremely alterd. for not to [crossed out] mention their being despoiled of those Plantations they (the French) had surreptitiously made on the Island of Dominica & St. Vincent which

p. 20

which we apprehend might however with great Justice be taken into the account, we will confine ourselves to the Islands in the actual possession of the two Crowns, before, and since the Peace of Paris. Our property in the former period, compar'd to theirs (according to the aforementioned author of the Candid and impartial considerations of the nature of the Sugar Trade) was no more than as one to five; whereas it is now almost as ten to fifteen, or nearly as two to three. If therefore, when we were in so much a weaker state, we were still able to protect even the smallest of our Islands, during all the late Wars between the two Crowns, from being even so much as insulted, and in a condition in the very last ,

to conquer almost all theirs; shall we have any reason to fear what may hereafter happen, when in consequence of settling over new acquisitions, we shall have acquir'd, as we necessarily must, as large an [crossed out] [acception] of force?

p. 21

Dominica lies as it were at the very center of all the French Carribbee Islands, being situated about half way between Martinica and Guadaloup, having the small Islands call'd the Saints bearing NNW, distance 3 or 4 Leag's and Marragalant [Marie-Galante] NE, about 5 Leag's . This Island laying in No. Latt'd from [blank] to [blank] and West Long'd at the Center about [blank] is stretched out from No. to So. Somewhat in the form of a bent Bow, of which the Leeward or Western Coast may be considered as the string. It is a large fine Island containing by actual survey, upwards of two hundred thousand acres of land, is at least 15 Leagues in length & something more then 7 Leagues over in its extreme breadth, being upwards of 120 Miles in circumference, and from its not being so intersected by large inlets of the Seas, as [crossed out] many of the other Islands in this Neighbourhood are, it must of course contain the more ground.

Indeed we hope we shall not be deem'd guilty of exaggeration or partiality, if we [crossed out] suppose it in consequence in point of size, to any one of the C[har]ribbee Islands, Guadaloup only excepted, (which is in fact divided into two by a small arm of the Sea.)

p. 22

The infinite number of Rivers, & the vicinity of the sea supply This Island with plenty of all the different kinds of excellent Fish to be found in this Climate; where may be had abundance of both Land and waterfowl, and one species in particular, which F. Labat Judges peculiar to this & the Neighbouring Island of Guadaloup, called the Devil Bird, being about the size of a young pullet, its Plumage black & white, something resembling a Sea Gull, which according to the aforementioned author, is a Bird of passage living upon the Fish it catches by night in the Sea, and in the morning repairs to the mountains where they lodge by pairs in holes like Rabbits.

Near the So:ern Extremity of the Island there is a Sulphur Mountain, like that in Martinica, from which flow several hott springs, one in particular upon the Estate of Mr. Belligmy, [runs] within a fathom of a cold transparent stream, which some have reported to be as salutary in [their] effects as those of Bath. It is said that there are rich Mines of Gold & Silver in the Bowels of the Mountains of the Island; but infact/indeed, the most valuable Mines are rais'd by the industry of the Inhabitants, upon the surface of the Ground.

Upon the whole, this Island is [crossed out] certainly a most important acquisition to the Empire of Great Britain, whether we consider it on account of its internal advantages, or from its

p. 23

its situation. The prodigious quantities which, when fully settled, it will produce Sugar, Rum, Coffee, [Cresa], and other valuable West India commodities, and the Manufactures & other good which it will

consume in return, must be a great improvement to the riches, Trade, & Navigation of the Mother Country. Then by its situation (as We have already observ'd) in case of a rupture with the French it will be of infinite advantage to the British nation, by totally stopping all intercourse between their Islands, and greatly interrupting their commerce with France.

In 1766, The two Ports of Roseau, & Prince Ruperts Bay, were declar'd free, by an Act of Parliament of

Dominica, (as we have already mentioned) was originally a member of the Government of Grenada; but has lately been erected into a separate Government, very judiciously in our opinion, both on account of its own importance; and its remote situation from all the other Islands in the Grenada district.

Dominica in length from Cape Melvill to Crab point

In a direct line--- Leag:s 10

Savanna in a direct line---4"2 Miles

Dist: from Roseau to Portsmouth—7"

Dist: of Cachacrou from Roseau---2"

Dist of the Lake from Roseau in a direct line—2"

Circumference of the Island ---25"

Breadth of Prince Ruperts Bay ---" 2 ½

Depth of Do. ---- " 1 ½

Latitude of Roseau-----15""25 No.

Longitude from London-----61""12 West.

According to the [crossed out] Author of the New West India Atlas, great quantities of Rose Wood so highly esteemed by Cabinet makers, may be found in this Island.

Appendix: Of the Cultivation and Manufacture of Indigo