

WATER GUT AS AN INDUSTRIAL PARK OF CHRISTIANSTED, FORMER DANISH WEST INDIES 1756-1813

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In a plantation society, larger estates could afford their own craftsmen: coopers to craft the wooden barrels for muscavado and rum export; blacksmiths to repair wagon axels, window hinges, field equipment, cutlasses, hoes, and bills and to make shoes for horses and mules; and carpenters to build and renovate structures. Smaller estates, on the other hand, pooled their repair work in order to share these craftsmen between two or more properties within a district. Some estates bordering the towns, however, utilized the shops of tradesmen in the towns. Repairs of existing and damaged pieces and the replication of iron parts was their main business. The focus of these shops was on repair of manufactured goods, which had been originally crafted in the metropolis. In Christiansted on Saint Croix in the Danish West Indies, such an area of industrial activity became known as Water Gut. The area was downwind of the town, thus keeping furnace soot and smoke away from the main streets.

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Water Gut sits on the coast to the northwest of Christiansted. This is an area reclaimed from the water from Recovery Hill in the southern range of hills which ran in a natural gut to the sea.¹ A small grouping of buildings grew up along the coast, and the settlement was known by this same name (West: 194, 223). Unlike Free Gut, to the south of town, there was no ordinance establishing the Water Gut area. Perhaps the first establishment created in Water Gut was the King's Lumberyard, or the King's Yard, at 1A Water Gut Street.² At this location, auctions were conducted of property (including goods and enslaved Africans) seized because of their owners' non-payment of taxes or being in financial arrears. Situating a governmental entity, such as this lumberyard, on the shoreline provided an administrative presence in an area where illegal inbound and outbound smuggling of goods might have taken place. Thus,

¹ Otherwise in the records known as "Water Gottet" or "Vand Gottet"

² *Dansk Regierings Avis*, 1801.

Water Gut started as an industrial area as shown by the 1758 matricules, the first set of tax lists after the initial 25 year tax incentive period ended.³

This paper will trace the transformation of Water Gut businesses from 1758 to 1813, during which time the originally Danish-owned properties were purchased by Scots. Scots emigrated in large numbers during this period to the newly formed colonies of North America and to the Virgin Islands, seeking work and professions which were closed to them in Britain either because there were no vacancies or because of the primogenitor inheritance system. The primogenitor system left many second sons with neither money nor a family-generated occupation in the British Isles. Sheridan notes that for Jamaica, “No sooner was one Scotsman established in the island than he began to send for his relatives, friends and former neighbors” (Sheridan: 96). By migrating to the West Indies, these artisans had the opportunity first to work with an individual already established and then, if they had accumulated some money, they could expand to their own trade shops, manned with enslaved labor. The Scotsmen were known for their diligence and industriousness. Long, a historian of Jamaica quoted by Sheridan, notes the Scots “thrived better than the European English because of their sounder constitutional and an ethic patronage system that provided employment and friendly protection” (Sheridan: 99).

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The assessment made in this paper of these trades and businesses is based on records of the sale of both real and enslaved property found in the liens and mortgages in one set of records called *panteprotokoller*.⁴ The paper will show that the dynamics of artisan business in the towns was different from that of the plantations, allowing the enslaved who worked in these tradesmen’s shops greater social and economic freedom. The social agency of some of the workers of such businesses will be traced.

18 Strand Street

The property at 18 Strand Street has a long history of being a tradesmen’s shop. Starting in 1756, Captain William Glass⁵, a Scottish captain and owner of a schooner which carried both cargo and passengers to and from Boston, established a blacksmith shop at that address. By 1783 Glass was in a partnership with Andrew Monro & Co. Monro was a Scottish blacksmith, who in 1778 had taken over the smithing business

³ The 1758 matricules were the first (tax) records as the settlers were allowed a 25 year exemption (1733-1758) from paying property tax.

⁴ The African Roots project, a large data base of Danish records pertaining to the enslaved population of St. Croix from 1733-1917, was created in 2009 by the Virgin Islands Social History Associates under the direction of George Tyson and Svend Holsoe. Among the records that are included, the creators have translated and recorded the transactions of mortgages, sales, and liens recorded in the Paneprotokoller between the years 1747-1806. In this paper, the records from the database will be denoted as Virgin Islands Social History Associates (VISHA).

⁵ The 1759 matricules show that he lived at 18 King Street with 8 enslaved males.

at 18b Strand Street, originally owned by John Watson.⁶ Monro and Glass continued the blacksmithing trade at this property. Looking at a map of Christiansted, the lot at 18 Strand Street actually physically fronts itself on West Street, which leads directly to the waterfront for easy on loading and off loading of goods. In 1789, Andrew Munro purchased Kingsdale, a Negro blacksmith for 400 pieces of eight.⁷ Munro had sold two other slaves, Cecile and her daughter Sally, presumably to pay a portion of the price for the adult blacksmith which he then acquired. Adam Zacharias Kingsdale was manumitted by purchasing his freedom from a P. de Nully in 1810, when he was 51 years old. In 1831, at age 71, he was retired from the mandatory free corps which provided the nightly town watch and gathered in units to capture runaway slaves.⁸ The record of sale for Sally and her mother notes that Andrew Monro was the father of Sally. No Sally Monro, if she used his surname, was found in succeeding records.⁹

A year later in 1790, William Glass purchased five African descended blacksmiths¹⁰ (Caesar, Goodluck, Branford, David, and Peter) from Andrew Monro and Co.¹¹ These same enslaved blacksmiths became a part of a partnership formed by Grant and Glass, where Grant's share was fully paid but where Glass's share was financed by a mortgage. William Glass may have had to mortgage his property in order to raise money for his merchant shipping business. He had to raise the capital to buy cargo to sell to agents in distant ports. On his return, he may have employed, as other ship's captains did, a number of enslaved women as market women to sell goods brought back from his travels. In fact, between 1795-1797, Glass had sold several sets of mothers with their children, and these women may have served him in this capacity. Some of these enslaved women he sold outright; while others purchased their freedom from him.¹² One example of his giving freedom to an individual was the case of Nancy Glass, born in Africa in 1770. She was originally owned by George Gordon and freed by William Glass in 1816 when she was 40 years old.¹³ After her

⁶ A head tax record for the enslaved Jacob, a blacksmith at John Watson's was recorded by William Glass in 1778.

⁷ VISHA Panteprotokoller 1789. St. Croix Landmarks Society (SCLS) Kingsdale was also enumerated in *The Reorganization of the Free Colored Class 1831-32*. This census is commonly referred to as the 1831 Free Colored Census.

⁸ SCLS. Free Colored Census of Christiansted 1831-32. An ordinance for Free Coloreds to search for runaway enslaved Africans was mandated by the Ordinance of 1760. See Hall: 154.

⁹ Sally may not have used the surname "Munroe" or "Munroo" as she is not found in the *Liste over Christiansteds Jurisdictioners Frie Neger, Shambotier, Mulatter, Musticer and Casticer. Paa Aaret, 1791*, commonly known as the Free Colored Census of 1791.

¹⁰ Head Tax records 1796. The enslaved were: Caesar, Jacob, Goodluck, Branford, David, Peter, Chaley, William, John, and Johannes.

¹¹ VISHA. Panteprotokoller, 1790.

¹² VISHA .Panteprotokoller, 1795. Chemmina and three children 875 rdl; Judith and her daughter Anne Elizabeth purchased themselves for 500 p/s; and in 1800 Penteny and her two children by John Simon, purchased their freedom.

¹³ SCLS. *Mandtal over friefarvede som opholdt sig udi Christiansteds Jurisdiction paa St. Croix, Aaret 1816*. (microfilm). Commonly referred to as the Free Colored Census of 1816.

manumission, she moved from the Water Gut area to 42 King Street and supported herself there as a seamstress until the age of 65 after which her daughter supported her.¹⁴ Later she also received money from the poor fund.¹⁵

In 1796, William Glass sold the five above-named enslaved African blacksmiths to Thomas Grant & Co. with Glass holding the mortgage. Grant had come to St. Croix in 1793 and ended up managing Peter Heyliger's property at 1 West Street and working as a coppersmith.¹⁶ Heyliger was a planter from the Dutch island of St. Eustatius. Thomas Grant also became a joint owner of 18 Strand Street.¹⁷ In 1797 Glass and Grant sold Moses, an African descended adult, for 300 pieces of eight.¹⁸ In 1799, Glass may have been divesting some of his assets in order to establish a new partnership with John Henderson and Andrew Monro.¹⁹

What this constant buying and selling of enslaved Africans shows, is that the sugar plantation economy business situation of the time was very volatile. Glass was busy raising money in order to continue carrying both cargo and passengers while at the same time holding down a business partnership. Manumission of his slaves helped Glass to satisfy his constant need of cash. Meanwhile Grant, as recorded in the 1796 list of slaves, acquired three young male slaves: Charly, William and John.²⁰

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The youngest of this group was John Grant, a mulatto, who was born in 1788 and is listed as a wheelwright in the 1796 head tax records along with nine other tradesmen owned by Thomas Grant. John Grant went on to purchase his freedom in 1803 at the age of 15 and was a member of the Presbyterian Church.²¹ At the age of 24, he himself purchased two enslaved men, William and Jim, at an auction with the assistance of a curator.²² He married Elizabeth Moller, another free person of color, and they resided at 22 King Cross Street outside of the Water Gut area with their daughter Sarah Jane.

The Presbyterian Church is regarded by some as the "Scotch Presbyterian Church" (Larsen: 96) and by others as the English Presbyterian Church (West: 35).²³

¹⁴ VISHA. 1835 Census.

¹⁵ VISHA. Poor Fund 1829. Her pension was from the Anglican Church.

¹⁶ SCLS. 1793 matricules.

¹⁷ VISHA. Panteprotokoller, 1796.

¹⁸ VISHA. Panteprotokoller, 1797.

¹⁹ Rigsarkivet. Vest Indien Lokalkiver (hereafter cited as RA.VL.). Panteprotokoller Vol. N, 1799.

²⁰ Florence Williams Public Library, hereafter indicated as (FWPL) Head Tax records, 1796.microfilm.

²¹ SCLS. Free Colored Census 1831-32.

²² RA. VI. CB. Auktionprotokoller 1811-12. 38.37.34. William cost 375 p/8 and Jim 350.

²³ Listed as the "Scotch" by Jens Larsen. *Virgin Islands Story*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1950. 96. Listed as the "English" Presbyterian Church by Hans West, 35. The church was located in this area because of the number of Scot artisans residing in the Water Gut.

Established in Christiansted in 1772 by Dr. Hugh Knox, who had come to St. Croix from Saba, this religious institution was housed in a dwelling on 1 North Street. By 1819 its congregation had dwindled in size and when the church was disbanding, members contributed to the poor funds of both their church and that of the Anglican Church (Sheridan: 99, 100).

African Peter, a coppersmith owned under the Grant/Glass partnership, apparently did not have as fortunate a life as John Grant. He is also listed in the 1796 records and was still enslaved in 1806, when he ran away. Thomas Grant had to place an ad in the newspaper stating that 4 dollars would be paid for the apprehension of Peter: “He is a middle-sized Negro, stutters in speech and is well known in town and country.”²⁴ Peter was listed in 1803 as worth 80 rdl.²⁵

Some of slaves manumitted by the Scots were able to fare well on their own. Patterson as reported by Sheridan states that: “White artisans were assisted and not infrequently supplanted by their mulatto and black apprentices. . . . (Sheridan: 95)” and that: “the free colored and many of the Creole slaves who consciously sought to assimilate the culture of the whites tended to imbibe Scottish customs. . . . (Sheridan: 100).”

With this Glass/Grant example, we can begin to discern a pattern which can be found repeatedly in the lives of the inhabitants of the Water Gut industrial area. A Scottish tradesman who found it difficult to prosper in Britain is forced to seek wealth elsewhere, in St. Croix. Depending on his industriousness, the migrant Scot works for a while with another artisan. Later, as he raises funds, he either purchases a lot and establishes a business with his own enslaved Africans or buys an existing operation which is failing, along with its workers and slaves. Several years later, the new owner then falls into debt and has to mortgage his slaves to a wealthier business man. When he becomes further indebted he raises cash by selling his enslaved women and children or allows them to purchase their own freedom at prices established by the government.

As a result of all of this buying, selling and mortgaging, enslaved Africans suffer the hardship of being shuffled from one owner to another. Those enslaved tradesmen whose circumstances allow them to secure odd jobs in their free time and thus to accumulate savings equal to the price of their listed worth are able to purchase their own freedom. As seen in the case of the mulatto John Grant, some of these manumitted persons quickly accumulated more money in sufficient quantity to buy their own slaves and start their own businesses.

²⁴ SCLS. *Dansk Vestindisk Regerings Avis*, June 16, 1806, microfilm.

²⁵ FWPL. Head Tax Records, 1803.

Even though this set of records allows us to trace the financial dealings of Europeans and those enslaved Africans who were able to purchase their freedom, little information is afforded by the records regarding the fortunes of those who remained enslaved. While this particular set of records does document the buying, selling and mortgaging of real and enslaved property, these records do provide much information about the quality of life of these tradesmen and their families.

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Census, 1835

Poor Fund, 1829

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Matricules (on microfilm) 1758, 1759, 1793

Reorganization of the Free Colored Class, Christiansted 1831-1832.

Liste over Christiansteds Jurisdictions Frie Neger, Shambotier, Mulatter, and Casticer.

Paa Aaret 1791

Mandtal over Friefarvede som opholdt sig udi Christiansteds Jurisdictions paa St. Croix. Aaret 1816. Microfilm.

Dansk Vestindisk Regerings Avis, 1801, June 16, 1804. Microfilm.

Florence William Public Library (FWPL), Christiansted, St. Croix

Head Tax records (on microfilm) 1778, 1796, 1803

PLURI-CULTURALISM, LITERATURE, MUSIC AND EXPRESSION

