

Celebrating THE MERIKINS

Our heritage, Our faith, Our future.

From 1815 to the 1820s, Trinidad became the home to over seven hundred formerly enslaved African-Americans and ex-soldiers of the British Colonial Marines. The ex-soldiers had fought in the War of 1812 in the United States and was granted their freedom and land on which to settle in Trinidad.

Known as the Merikins, an abbreviated version of the word "Americans," they settled mainly in six Company Villages in remote areas of virgin forest in south

Trinidad at a time when slavery was still practised.

Their journey from being enslaved in the USA to becoming soldiers and then landowners in Trinidad tells a compelling story of resistance, independence, resilience and communal survival.

We invite you to discover the rich history and heritage of the Merikin community, whose identity has been kept alive through oral history and discovery in various archives.



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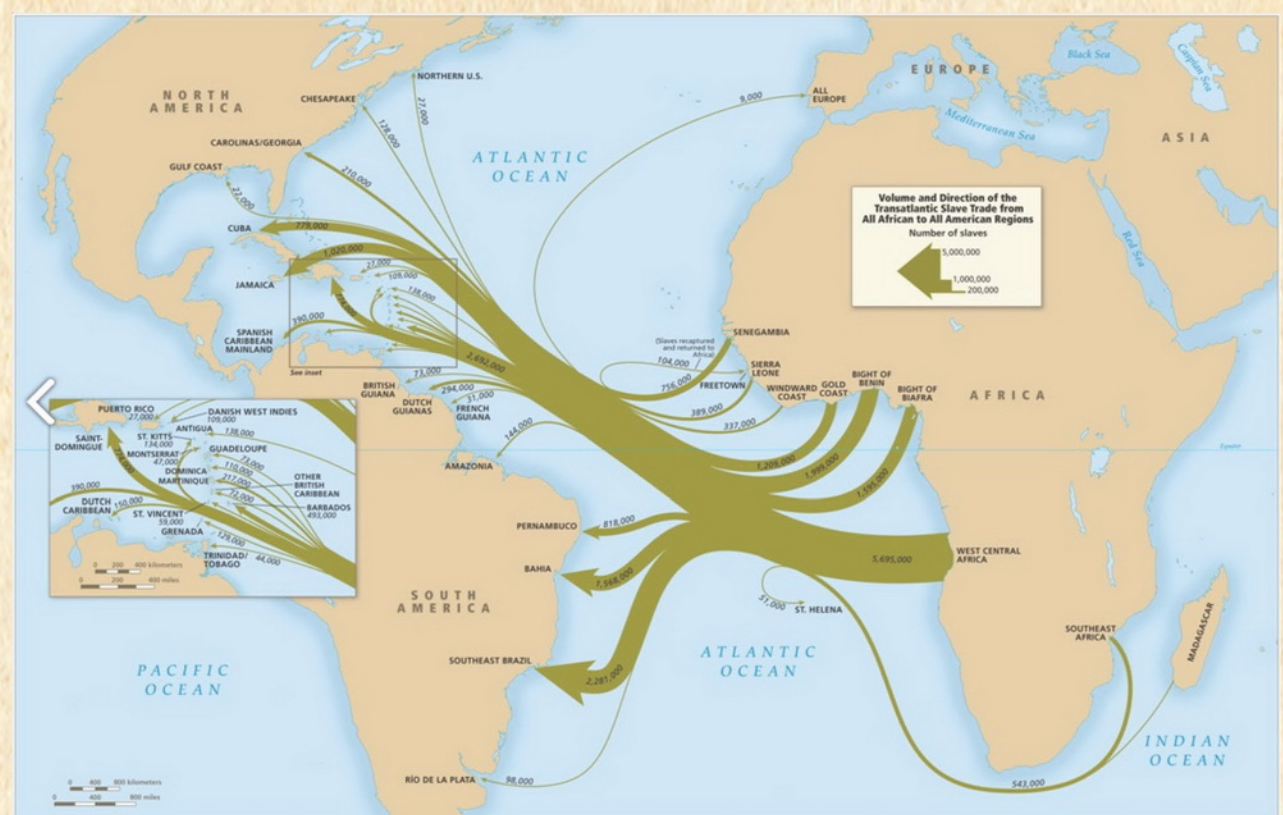
NORTH AMERICA AND THE SLAVE TRADE



The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade was responsible for the forced migration of over twelve million people from the African continent to the Western Hemisphere. This trade which involved all major European powers began in the mid fifteenth century and ended in the nineteenth. An estimated 472,000 enslaved Africans were shipped to the British North American colonies which later became the United States. Of that number only an estimated 388,000 enslaved Africans arrived as more than 83,000 died on

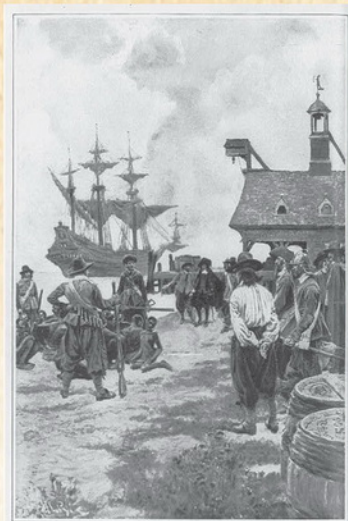
the barbarous Middle Passage. The year 1619 marks the arrival of the first enslaved Africans to the British North American colonies.

The enslaved Africans who came to the United States came from different regions of West Africa. Upon arrival, they were sent to three main regions where they would work mainly as agricultural labourers on plantations which grew indigo, rice, tobacco and later on cotton. Some also worked as



artisans, house servants, and labourers in cities and ports. The States which received the majority of enslaved Africans were the Carolinas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland and Virginia.

In 1808, the Act Prohibiting the Importation of Slaves was enacted by the United States but slavery continued until the end of the Civil War in 1865 when the 13th Amendment to the Constitution was adopted.



Sources:

(N.A.) The Transatlantic Slave Trade Data Base Voyages. Emory University et al. (N.A.) Web. 11th April, 2016.
Berlin, Ira. Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998.
Hall, Gwendolyn. African Ethnicities in the Americas: Restoring the Links. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.
Thornton, John. Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400—1800, 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1998.

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Philanthropy in America

FROM EARLY AMERICAN TO MODERN FOUNDATIONS

1790
The first American philanthropic organization, the American Bible Society, is founded in Philadelphia.



1800
The first American philanthropic organization, the American Bible Society, is founded in Philadelphia.

1813
The first American philanthropic organization, the American Bible Society, is founded in Philadelphia.



1824
The first American philanthropic organization, the American Bible Society, is founded in Philadelphia.



1837
The first American philanthropic organization, the American Bible Society, is founded in Philadelphia.



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FROM FREEDOM FIGHTERS TO LANDOWNERS

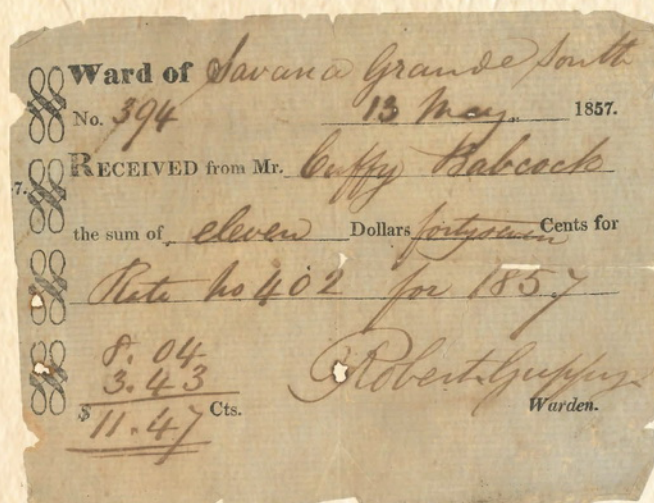


The largest group of Merikin settlers, the ex-Colonial Marines, were each granted 16-acre lots and settled in six Company Villages in the Naparima district of south Trinidad. They settled in areas according to the "companies" they had served in the Colonial Marines, and were placed under the unpaid supervision of their

respective sergeants and corporals. The Merikin community was placed under the general supervision of the Commandant, Robert Mitchell, who became their link with the authorities.

Each settler initially occupied land without any evidence of ownership but this was later petitioned by the settlers under Lord Harris. From 1847 to 1848, they were given deeds to their land with proper titles and were required to pay an annual quit rent.

The Merikins were initially engaged in subsistence agriculture and later sold their excess produce in the markets. Among the principal crops grown were corn, pumpkin, plantain and rice. As the Naparima settlements were located close to sugar estates, many undertook casual employment on the estates during crop time. As the need for housing and roads grew, some became carpenters, joiners, blacksmiths and the like. With the discovery and exploration of oil from the late nineteenth century, many settlers went to work on the oilfields or entered into land lease agreements with the oil companies.



Warden's receipt 1857



FIRST COMPANY

Originally called Grant, it was the first land granted to the first settlers. Later, after applications were made for more lands it became known as New Grant. The area also covers Hindustan and famous cane districts of La Cabe, La Retreat and La Resource. Dunmore Hill, Nagee Road, Jackson Block and Lewis Trace were named after the settlers.

SECOND COMPANY

This village was not named as such and was known as Petit Café and Matilda.

THIRD COMPANY

Usually referred to as "Indian Walk" as it was the road travelled on by the Guarajoon Indians, indigenous people from Venezuela, who on landing at Moruga, journeyed to Princes Town, then called the Mission. Streets named after settlers include Loney Road, Sampson Ridge and Lengua Road. The area includes an old fort, Fort George.

TRINIDAD

GRANTS TO AMERICAN SETTLERS

VICTORIA, by the Grace of God of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, Queen, defender of the Faith &c, &c, &c

KNOW YE, by these presents, that we, of our pure grace and motion have given and granted, and by these presents do give and grant unto Benjamin Burton American Settler and his heirs all and singular that certain piece or parcel of land, comprising sixteen Acres situate and being in the quarter of Savanna Grande in the island of Trinidad, and distinguished as Lot No 32 of Section B of the Diagram of American Settlements, deposited in the Office of the Surveyor General of the said Island, and abutting on the North on Lot No thirty one, section B, on the south on Land on section C, on the east on lot No twenty eight section B, and on the west on lot No thirty six, section B. To have and to hold the said piece or parcel hereby granted unto the said Benjamin Burton, his Heirs and Assigns forever. In Testimony where of we have caused our Letters to be made Patent, and our Great Seal appointed for the said Island of Trinidad to be fixed hereto. Witness our trusty and well beloved The Right Honourable GEORGE FRANCIS ROBERT LORD HARRIS, Governor and Commander in Chief, in and over our said Island of Trinidad, and Judge of our Crown lands at the Government House, in the town of Port Of Spain in the said Island, this eighth day of December in the Year of our Lord One Thousand and Eight hundred and Forty seven and in the eleventh Year of our Reign.

Charles William Wama
Attorney General

Before me
Martin Sorzano
Esq. of the Court of Intendent

Text of grant of land to Benjamin Burton, confirming absolute title in 1847

FOURTH COMPANY

This area includes Sherring Place, Hardbargain or Williamsville. Areas named after settlers include Jackson Hill and Dyer Village.

FIFTH COMPANY

The name was retained and was well-known for its rich agricultural land and oil bearing areas. Areas or streets named after settlers include Mitchell Block, Weston Road, Teesdale Road and Samuel Cooper Road.

SIXTH COMPANY

The name was also kept and was famous for its mixed farming and large virgin forest areas called Cata Hill.

Sources:

- Crawford, Lisa. Land tenure & Social Mobility in the Company Villages 1815/16 to the Present. Trinidad and Tobago, 2000. Thesis.
Huggins, A.B. The Saga of the Companies, Trinidad and Tobago: National Centre for persons with Disabilities, 2013. Print.
Laurence, K.O. "The settlement of free negroes in Trinidad before emancipation" Caribbean Quarterly. Vols. 1 and 2, 1963.
Weiss, John McNish. The Merikins: Free Black American Settlers in Trinidad 1815-16. London: McNish & Weiss, 2002. Print.



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ARRIVAL IN TRINIDAD



COLONIAL MARINE SETTLERS, TRINIDAD, 1816.

G.D.2. Copyright.

The formerly enslaved African-Americans and disbanded soldiers of the British Colonial Marines settled in Trinidad where they were promised their freedom and land. They came following instructions given by Lord Bathurst, Secretary for War and the Colonies to Trinidad's Governor Woodford in October 1814.

The first settlers arrived in Trinidad in May and July in 1815 and settled in Laventille and Caroni as preparations were not yet in place for their arrival.

By the time the third group arrived in November 1815, arrangements were in place for their accommodation. Land was cleared for distribution to them in the Naparima district in south Trinidad. The fourth and largest group of settlers, the disbanded soldiers of the Colonial Marines, arrived on 20th August 1816 and also settled in the Naparima district.

The settlers were provided with temporary accommodation for the first few weeks and with an outfit of clothes and blanket, tools to build their

own houses and agricultural implements and seedlings for cultivating their lands. In some cases, the First Peoples were used to clear the land. For the first six to eight months the settlers received a daily ration of food from the Government until they were able to subsist on their own food crops. Medical care was also provided for the sick.



In 1817, in response to the Governor's concern for the disproportion of the sexes in the area, 42 African women captured from a French slaver that had landed in Barbados, joined the Merikin settlements.

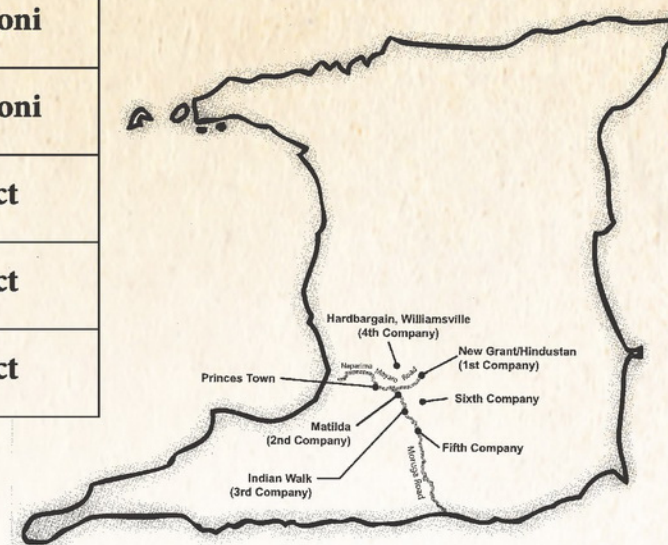
In 1821, another group of Merikin settlers arrived from Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada.

*for Your Lordships Information
that His Majesty's Ship Carron
... and here yesterday from Port-au-Pin
with a further Number of American
Refugees as stated in the Margin
and that at my Request they were
landed at Naparima, where two large
Sheds had been prepared for their
Reception and some Ground cleared.
I had destined this Spot for one of
the former Arrivals, but reserved it
in case of an additional Number
coming, so as to meet the Wishes*

*The two first Arrivals
in May & July of 1815, happened at a
most unfavorable Season, while I
was yet deliberating and in great
Doubt respecting the best Mode of
proceeding for them under Your Lordship's
Instructions; however as nearly all
preferred Lands, they were placed
near the Town and on the Company,*

Governor Woodford's account of the arrival of the American settlers in May and July 1815, and November 1815.

DATE OF ARRIVAL	SHIP	NUMBER ARRIVED ACCORDING TO COLONIAL DESPATCHES 1815-1816	LOCATION WHERE SETTLED
27 May 1815	HMS Levant	86	Laventille and Caroni
5 July 1815	H.M.S. Carron	58	Laventille and Caroni
27 November 1815	H.M.S. Carron	63	Naparima District
20 August 1816		574	Naparima District
1821	Schooner William	95 (based on ship muster)	Naparima District



Sources:

CO 295 /37: Woodford to Bathurst, 5 June 1815. No. 103, No. 113, No. 134

CO 295 /40: Woodford to Bathurst, 28 Aug. 1816. No. 189

Crawford, Lisa. Land tenure & Social Mobility in the Company Villages 1815/16 to the Present. Trinidad and Tobago, 2000. Thesis.

Huggins, A.B. The Saga of the Companies, Trinidad and Tobago: National Centre for persons with Disabilities, 2013. Print.

Laurence, K.O. "The settlement of free negroes in Trinidad before emancipation" Caribbean Quarterly. Vols. 1 and 2, 1963.

Weiss, John McNish. The Merikins: Free Black American Settlers in Trinidad 1815-16. London: McNish & Weiss, 2002. Print.



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OUR FAITH, OUR HERITAGE

Influence of the Baptist faith



The majority of the Merikins who settled in Trinidad were originally Baptists in the United States while others were Methodists and Muslims. Among the Baptists were preachers who kept the faith alive by gathering their following on 'camp-grounds' for worship, as was the practice in southern USA. William Hamilton and David Richardson are credited to be among the first village evangelists who struggled to establish their churches.

In 1843, the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS) of London, England, was encouraged to come to the assistance of

the local evangelists and thus began the association with the London Baptists. Rev. George Cowen was their first missionary.

Major disagreements regarding worship style, governance and education led eventually to a split from the London Baptists and the departing group adopted the name "Independent Baptists." The Independent Baptists themselves split into several other groups such as the Independent Baptist Missionary Union and the Independent International Baptist Church.

In the 1960s, the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention of the USA came to work with the London Baptists to establish churches in north and south of Trinidad and Tobago.

With its arrival into Trinidad, the Baptist religion came to dominate the spiritual and social life of the Merikins, and became one of their distinct ethnic markers. The various manifestations of the Baptist faith and their influences are still very much alive today and reflected in the presence of numerous churches and schools throughout Trinidad and Tobago.



200th Anniversary Thanksgiving Service - January 2016.

Our Heritage

Among the aspects of cultural heritage attributed to the Merikins include:

Macadam - Brought from the USA, it was the process of burning clay to produce a hard red substance for use as a road surface.

Gayap" or "each one help one" - the practice of helping each other as a necessity for survival, brought from the USA and observed in house building, cultivation and reaping of crops, and the burial of the dead.

Oral tradition / storytelling - many stories were passed from generation to generation, and through this medium, they were able to keep alive their history and folk traditions.

Food - their indigenous cuisine include "tum tum" or pound plantain, coo-coo, hill rice which was commonly grown, and benne.

Herbal remedies or "bush medicine" for various ailments.



Cowen Hamilton Secondary School - the only Baptist secondary school



Fifth Company Baptist Primary School



Benne



Bitter cup



Mortar and Pestle

Sources:

Gospel Baptist Association of Trinidad and Tobago, A Rich Heritage of Baptist Witness in Trinidad and Tobago (Brochure).2016
Huggins, A.B. The Saga of the Companies, Trinidad and Tobago: National Centre for persons with Disabilities, 2013. Print.
Laurence, K.O. "The settlement of free negroes in Trinidad before emancipation" Caribbean Quarterly. Vols. 1 and 2, 1963.



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