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A Guide to the **The Merikin Collection**

TT-NA-IM-MKN

**NATIONAL
ARCHIVES**
OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

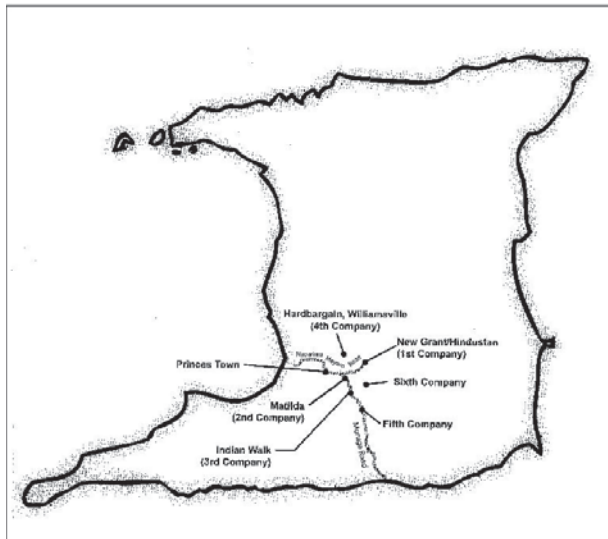
About the Merikins

The Merikins comprised a group of over seven hundred immigrants who came to settle in Trinidad from 1815. They were formerly enslaved African-Americans who were among those who joined the ranks of the British naval service as Colonial Marines, in the War of 1812 against the United States.

At the end of the war, the men of the Colonial Marines were sent to Bermuda where they were involved in manning the garrison and continued construction of the Royal Naval Dockyard. Whilst in Bermuda, these men were offered a choice of either serving in the British West India Regiment or being settled as free men in a British colony. They vehemently refused to join the British West India Regiment and as such the Colonial Marines was formally disbanded on August 20th, 1816. These men and their families were subsequently settled in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and Trinidad.

The African-Americans who came to settle in Trinidad comprised refugees and former soldiers of the Third Battalion of the British Colonial Marines, the latter being the majority group. They came following instructions given by Lord Bathurst, Secretary for War and the Colonies to Trinidad's Governor Woodford in October 1814. They were each granted 16 acres of land in south Trinidad on which to settle.

The first settlers arrived in Trinidad in May and July in 1815. As preparations were not yet in place for their arrival, they were settled in Laventille and Caroni. 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 group of settlers, the disbanded soldiers of the Third Battalion of the Colonial Marines, arrived on 20th August 1816 and also settled in the Naparima district. 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. At the onset, Governor Woodford had planned the location of the settlements for economic advantage and improved communication on the island as south Trinidad at that time was severely underdeveloped.

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 for cultivating their lands. 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. In 1821, another group of settlers arrived from Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada.

| Date of arrival | Ship | Number arrived according to ship muster | Location where settled |
|------------------|------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| 27 May 1815 | HMS Levant | 88 | Laventille and Caroni |
| 5 July 1815 | H.M.S. Carron | 58 | Laventille and Caroni |
| 27 November 1815 | H.M.S. Carron | 65 | Naparima district |
| 20 August 1816 | | 411 men of the 3 rd Battalion Colonial Marines (Colonial Marines records) | Naparima district |
| 1821 | William Schooner | 95 | Naparima district |

Table showing the arrival of the Merikins, 1815-1821

The settlers eventually became known as the Merikins, an abbreviated version of the word “Americans,” and quickly became a thriving community by selling produce to nearby estates. The crops they grew were akin to those they cultivated in the American south such as corn, sweet potato, tannia, benne, and upland bearded rice or “hill rice” which is believed to be derived from West Africa. 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.

The Merikins established their own schools and churches based on their Baptist faith. Despite the passage of time, the Merikins have been able to maintain their unique community identity and rich African-inspired heritage.

About the Merikin Collection

On the occasion of the 200th anniversary of the arrival of the former Colonial Marines in 2016, and in commemoration of the International Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024), the National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago collaborated with the Merikin Heritage Foundation, to host a commemorative activity and exhibition to promote the history of the little-known Merikin community. In an effort to safeguard the memory of this unique community and build a more inclusive national archives, the National Archives committed to building a Merikin Collection as part of its national collection.

This Merikin Collection is an artificial collection drawn from diverse sources and comprise archival records, unpublished and published works, video recordings, photographs and ephemera documenting the Merikin community. Information on the Merikins' experience in the United States prior to their arrival, as well as linkages with the Gullah-Geechee community, descendants of enslaved Africans who lived in the US states of Georgia and South Carolina, areas where some of the Merikins were formerly enslaved, are included.

The Collection is arranged into six series:

1. Colonial Records
2. Published and unpublished works on the Merikins
3. Merikin Organizations
4. Pre-1815 History
5. Photographs
6. Audio/Video recordings

Efforts to expand the collection are ongoing as more information becomes available.

The Merikin Collection - TT-NA-IM-MKN

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|-------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Colonial Records - | TT-NA-IM-MKN-1 |
| Bermuda Colonial Correspondence | TT-NA-IM-MKN-1A |
| Trinidad Colonial Correspondence | TT-NA-IM-MKN-1B |
| Ship Musters and Muster Rolls | TT-NA-IM-MKN-1C |
| 2. Published and unpublished works on the Merikins - | TT-NA-IM-MKN-2 |
| Published Works | TT-NA-IM-MKN-2A |
| Unpublished Works | TT-NA-IM-MKN-2B |
| 3. Merikin Organizations - | TT-NA-IM-MKN-3 |
| 4. Pre-1815 History | TT-NA-IM-MKN-4 |
| 5. Photographs - | TT-NA-IM-MKN-5 |
| Maria Nunes' Photo Essay | TT-NA-IM-MKN-5A |
| National Archives photographs | TT-NA-IM-MKN-5B |
| 6. Audio/Video recordings | TT-NA-IM-MKN-6 |
| Documentaries | TT-NA-IM-MKN-6A |
| National Archives' video recordings of events | TT-NA-IM-MKN-6B |
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1. Colonial Records - TT-NA-IM-MKN1

Contains copies of records from the Bermuda and Trinidad Colonial Correspondence collections, Ship Musters and Muster Rolls, some of which were acquired from the UK National Archives. The Trinidad Colonial Correspondence is also available on microfilm.

Bermuda Colonial Correspondence - TT-NA-IM-MKN-1A

1. **Source: CO 37/73/22 Folios 52-59** (each folio is a double page)

Comments on the management of the Black Corps of Colonial Marines formed of American refugees who had joined the British during the war with the United States. Gives views on the plan to incorporate them into the West India Regiment. Encloses letters from Commodore Andrew Evans and Major A Kinsman concerning the matter.

Date: 1815 Aug 23

2. **Source: CO 37/74 Folios 9- 12** (each folio is a double page)

Despatch from Governor Sir James Cockburn on matters relating to the Colonial Marines requesting that the men of the Colonial Marines may not work in the Dockyard and highlighting their desire to be discharged and settled in Trinidad.

Date: February 1816

Trinidad Colonial Correspondence - TT-NA-IM-MKN-1B

1. **Source: CO 295**

Despatches from Governor Ralph Woodford to Lord Bathurst, Secretary for War and the Colonies concerning the arrival and settlement of the American Refugees.

Folio 51 (2 pgs): 6 June 1815

Folio 139 (2 pgs): 5 August 1815

Folio (2 pgs) : 9 November 1815

No. 134 (2pgs): 30 November 1815

Folio 173 (2pgs): June 1816

Folio 104 -110 (14pgs): 28 August 1816

2. Source: CO 295 / 205 Folios 169 – 182 (27 pgs) / Folio 200 (2 pgs)

Despatch from Governor Ralph Woodford to Lord Bathurst, Secretary for War and the Colonies concerning the petition of the white and free coloured inhabitants of the Quarter of North and South Naparima.

10 November 1816

3. Source: CO 295 / 258 Folios 114-123 (22pgs)

Despatch from Governor Ralph Woodford to Lord Bathurst, Secretary for War and the Colonies concerning the Report of the State of the American Refugees settled at Naparima, from Robert Mitchell, Commandant of that Quarter under whose supervision they were placed.

Date: 10 August 1817

4. Source: CO 295 / 481 Folios 57-72

Despatch from Governor Ralph Woodford to Lord Bathurst, Secretary for War and the Colonies on the report and biennial Return of the State of the American Refugees settled at Naparima, from Robert Mitchell, Commandant of that Quarter under whose supervision they were placed.

Date: 30 April 1823

5. Source: CO 295 Folios 15-25

Extracts of the Minutes of Evidence taken by the Committee on 14 December 1824 from Robert Mitchell – Hon. William Burnley in the Chair.

14 December 1824

6. Source: CO 295 /29 Folio 53-56

Despatch from Governor Ralph Woodford to Lord Bathurst, Secretary for War and the Colonies on the expenses incurred by His Majesty's Government from 1815 to 1825 on account of the free Americans settling in Trinidad.

Date: 27 April 1826

Ship Musters and Muster Rolls - TT-NA-IM-MKN1C

1. Levant Ship Muster – March 1814 –November 1815
2. Carron Ship Muster – March 1814 – November 1815
3. Muster Roll of the Royal Marines, Ireland Island, Bermuda, 1816

2. Published and unpublished works on the Merikins - TT-NA-IM-MKN2

Contains published and unpublished works on the Merikins - books, magazine articles, exhibitions, thesis, signage and other materials.

Published Works - TT-NA-IM-MKN2a

1. **The Merikens: Free Black American Settlers in Trinidad 1815-16 by John McNish Weiss, 2002.** Traces the journey of the Merikins from being enslaved, to becoming Colonial Marines and then as settlers in the Company Villages in south Trinidad.
2. **The Merikins - Forgotten Freedom Fighters in the War of 1812, by Tina Maria Dunkley, 2015** - A colourful publication which tells the story of the Merikins, using photographs, paintings, archival documents and maps. It especially targets schoolchildren.
3. **The Merikin Baptists of the Companies by Lesley Saunders,** - A photocopy of the now out-of-print publication which gives an insight into the history of the Baptist faith as practised by the Merikins. It traces the faith's origins from the Revivalist religious tradition in the USA, the beginnings of the Baptist churches in the Company Villages and the work of the Baptist Missionary Society. Its bibliography provides a comprehensive list of archival records as well as secondary sources.
4. **The Saga of the Companies by A.B. Huggins, 2013-** This book covers the history, sociology, religion, and culture of the Merikin community resident in the Company Villages. This edition was revised and is also available in the National Archives' library collection.
5. **Two Among Many – the Genealogy of Bashana Evins and Amphy Jackson, by John Milton Hackshaw, 1993.** A photocopy of the out-of-print publication which traces the genealogy of Bashana Evins and Amphy Jackson, an African-American couple who was among the formerly enslaved refugees, brought to Trinidad by the British authorities between May 1815 and August 1816.
6. **Caribbean Quarterly article – “The Settlement of Free Negroes in Trinidad Before Emancipation” by K.O. Laurence, 1963.** One of the earliest research papers on the Merikins. The paper also covers the settlement of the disbanded soldiers of the Sixth West India Regiment on the east coast of Trinidad.
7. **Caribbean Quarterly article – “Memory Spirituals of the Liberated American Soldiers in Trinidad’s “Company Villages”by Lorna McDaniel, 1994.**

8. **The Corps of Colonial Marines: Black freedom fighters of the War of 1812 by John McNish Weiss.** Information downloaded from the website: www.mcnishandweiss.co.uk.
9. **Heroes of the Forgotten War**, article in the Caribbean Beat, the inflight magazine of Caribbean Airways, July/August 2016. (2 copies)
10. **“Celebrating the Merikins: Our Heritage, Our Faith, Our Future” an exhibition by the National Archives’** commemorating the 200th anniversary of the arrival of the Merikins in Trinidad, at an event held on 28 April 2016 at the National Archives.
11. **Merikins signage installed in the six Company Villages (2017)** through the collaborative efforts of the Tourism Development Company, the Merikin Commission, Merikin Heritage Foundation, Merikin Inc., the Gospel Baptists Association of Trinidad and Tobago, the Princes Town Regional Corporation and the National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago. Copies of the artwork of the seven signs and their locations are provided.

Unpublished Works - TT-NA-IM-MKN2b

1. **Land Tenure and Social Mobility in the Company Villages, 1815-16 to the present**, a UWI BA. Thesis, by Lisa Crawford (now Atwater).
Abstract: Crawford examines the pre-emancipation era, post-emancipation setting, and contemporary issues to understand the major characteristics influencing land tenure and social mobility of descendants of the Merikins in the Company Villages.
2. **Compilation of archival documents by Tina Dunkley**, descendant of Ezekiel and Nelly Loney, for their family assembly on Tangier Island, USA, on June 19-21, 2009.
3. **Merikins Bibliography** – a compilation of books and articles on the Merikins.
4. **Thumbnails of the Visual Essay on the Merikins, photographed and presented by Maria Nunes**, as part of the launch of the 5th Annual Archives Awareness Week under the theme, “Our African Legacy: Roots and Routes,” on Monday 21st November 2016.

3. Merikin Organizations - TT-NA-IM-MKN3

Several organizations have evolved over the years to promote the history and memory of the Merikin community. These include the Amply and Bashana Jackson Fraternity, the Merikin Inc, the Merikin Heritage Foundation, and the Merikin Commission. This collection includes documentation of their events, programmes, brochures, etc. donated by the organizations, when available.

- 1. Amphy and Bashana Jackson Fraternity**
- 2. Merikin Heritage Foundation**
- 3. Merikin Inc.**
- 4. Merikin Commission**

4. Pre-1815 History - TT-NA-IM-MKN4

This collection of works covers the US history of the Colonial Marines and refugees prior to their arrival in Trinidad. It covers their life as enslaved African-Americans in the USA and their experiences as colonial marines in the wars. It also includes publications on the Gullah Geechee community, descendants of the formerly enslaved African-Americans who lived in the US states of Georgia and South Carolina, some of the areas where Merikins were once enslaved. Some of their traditions, such as the cultivation of hill rice, have been found to be similar to the Merikin's traditions.

Copies of published works / extracts of published works - TT-NA-IM-MKN5a

Copies of these documents provided through the kind courtesy of Frances Morean, who hosted the first International Hill Rice Symposium and Exhibition at the National Archives on 7 December 2016.

- 1. Black Loyalists – Southern Settlers of Nova Scotia's First Free Black Communities**
- 2. Soldiers of Freedom – An Illustrated History of African Americans in the Armed Forces**
- 3. The Black Loyalists – The Search for a Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone, 1783-1870**
- 4. War of 1812 Genealogy**
- 5. The Gullah**

6. Blacks on the Border – The Black Refugees in British North America, 1815-1860
7. The Loyalty and Devotion of Colored Americans in the Revolution and War of 1812
8. The Slaves' Gamble – Choosing Sides in the War of 1812
9. Sea Island Roots: African Presence in the Carolinas and Georgia
10. The African Contribution to Rice Cultivation in the Americas

Published works donated by the Gullah Geechee community - TT-NA-IM-MKN5b

These publications were donated by Queen Quet, Marquetta L. Goodwine, of the Gullah/Geechee community, on her visit to the National Archives on the occasion of the Inaugural Trinidad and Tobago International Hill Rice Symposium and Festival held in commemoration of the 200th anniversary of the arrival of the Merikins to Trinidad, in December 2016.

1. Gullah/Geechee: Africa's Seeds in the Winds of the Diaspora 365-366 by Queen Quet Marquetta L. Goodwine, 2005
2. Gullah/Geechee: Africa's Seeds in the Winds of the Diaspora. Vol. I – St. Helena's Serenity by Q
3. Gullah/Geechee: Africa's Seeds in the Winds of the Diaspora. Vol. II – Gawd Dun Smile Pun We Beaufort Isles, by Queen Quet Marquetta L. Goodwine, 2009.
4. Gullah/Geechee: Africa's Seeds in the Winds of the Diaspora – Vol. III - Frum Wi Soul Tuh De Soil: The Cash Crops of the Sea Islands – Cotton, Rice and Indigo, by Queen Quet Marquetta L. Goodwine, 1998.
5. Gullah/Geechee: Africa's Seeds in the Winds of the Diaspora. Vol. V: Cha'stun an E Islandts, by Queen Quet Marquetta L. Goodwine, 2006.
6. Preparing for Purpose Filled Prosperity by Queen Quet Marquetta L. Goodwine, 2012.
7. Webe Gullah/Geechee – Cultural Capital and Collaboration Anthology, compiled and edited by Queen Quet Marquetta L. Goodwine, 2015.
8. The Legacy of the Ibo Landing – Gullah Roots of African American Culture, Marquetta L. Goodwine and the Clarity Press Gullah Project, 1998.
9. Wha Mama Dem Say, by Queen Quet Marquetta L. Goodwine, 2016.
10. Nat Fuller 1812-1866 From Slavery to Artistry – the Life and Work of the “Presiding Genius” of Charleston Cuisine, by David S. Shields and Kevin Mitchell, 2015.
11. Southern Provisions – the Creation and Revival of a Cuisine, by David Shields, 2015.
12. Lowcountry Time and Tide – the Fall of the South Carolina Rice Kingdom, by James H. Tuten, 2010.
13. Seekin' Purpose, by Queen Quet Marquetta L. Goodwine, 2009.

5. Photographs - TT-NA-IM-MKN5

This collection contains photographs of Maria Nunes, Cultural Heritage Photographer and photographs taken by the staff of the National Archives on their visits to the Company Villages and at various events related to the Merikins.

Maria Nunes' Visual Essay (Microsoft powerpoint presentation) - TT-NA-IM-MKN-5A on the Merikin community of the Company Villages, commissioned by the National Archives for the launch of the 5th Annual Archives Awareness Week, on Monday 21 November 2016 under the theme "Our African Legacy: Roots and Routes." Thumbnails available. Digital copies are available upon request.

National Archives photographs - TT-NA-IM-MKN-5B

Photographs of various Merikin events, taken by Deborah Best and Roma Wong Sang of the National Archives. Digital copies of photographs on DVD, are available upon request.

6. Audio/Video recordings - TT-NA-IM-MKN6

This collection comprises audio and video recordings on the Merikins from various sources, including oral history recordings of Merikin descendants and National Archives' recordings of various Merikin events. It also covers recordings of the Gullah Geechee community, in the USA.

Documentaries - TT-NA-IM-MKN-6A

- "The Merikins – The Forgotten Freedom Fighters", a production of JCD and Associates, in collaboration with the British, Canadian and United States Embassies in Trinidad, 2012.

National Archives' video recordings of events - TT-NA-IM-MKN-6B

- Celebrating the Merikins' 200th Anniversary and the Re-publication of the seminal work by Dr. Maureen Warner-Lewis "Guinea's Other Suns"
April 28, 2016, National Archives.

Oral History recordings - TT-NA-IM-MKN-6C

Recorded interviews of Merikin descendants done by Tina Maria Dunkley, Independent Researcher and Visual Artist in August 2006. Persons interviewed were:

1. Marva Sandy
2. Rheal Thomas
3. Carl Hoi Pong
4. Wilfred Cleophas Burton
5. Sheila Sandy

Gullah/Geechee Video recordings - TT-NA-IM-MKN-6D

- Stay in de Boat (2 copies)
- Gullah
- Low Country Rice Culture Forum (Session 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8), Charleston, South Carolina, Sept 13, 2013

Miscellaneous - TT-NA-IM-MKN5

- Reproduction of painting titled "Memory Jug Series" (lithograph 30" x 22") by Tina Dunkley, Merikin descendant, 2016 donated to the National Archives.