

**A CONCISE HISTORY OF THE
COMMENCEMENT, PROGRESS
AND PRESENT CONDITION OF THE
AMERICAN COLONIES IN LIBERIA**

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P R E F A C E .

The subject of American Colonization in Africa has become one of interesting inquiry and discussion, but those who have not carefully watched its progress are placed in an unfavorable situation for forming correct opinions as to its merits. Exaggerated statements of zealous partizans can only mislead those who seek for facts, on which to make up their own judgments.

The official documents of the Colonization Societies, and the communications from colonists, and distinguished individuals who have visited the Colonies, which have been published in the newspapers and periodicals, have either not been preserved, or are not accessible to the thousands who are calling loudly for information on the subject.

With the design of supplying, in some measure, this demand, the following pages have been prepared. Most of the facts have been derived from published documents and communications, and are often given in the words of the writer. But it was thought unnecessary to name, in every instance, the original sources of information, in a work that professes to be little more than a compilation.

As it was the writer's design to give the work a pamphlet form, for distribution by mail, he has aimed to bring it into the smallest compass. This necessarily excluded many interesting facts, especially in relation to the recently established Colonies, as well as all notice of the proceedings of the Colonization Societies in the United States, except as these were immediately connected with their operations in Liberia.

No statement in relation to the country, the health or condition of the colonists has been admitted that was not considered by the writer as entitled to credit; and if important facts have been omitted, his apology for this as well as for imperfections of arrangement, is the very little time which his other engagements allowed him to devote to this.

SAMUEL WILKESON,

WASHINGTON, *April 15, 1839.*

HISTORY OF LIBERIA.

The first emigration of colored people from the United States to Africa, was conducted by the celebrated Paul Cuffee, in 1815. This remarkable man was born at New Bedford, Massachusetts in 1759, of an African father and an aboriginal mother. His early years were spent in poverty and obscurity, but possessing a vigorous mind, by industry and perseverance, guided by practical good sense, he rose to wealth and respectability. He was largely engaged in navigation, and in many voyages to foreign countries commanded his own vessel. His desire to raise his colored brethren of this country to civil and religious liberty in the land of their forefathers, induced him to offer some of the free people of color a passage to the western coast of Africa. About forty embarked with him at Boston, and landed at Sierra Leone where they were kindly received. Only eight of these were able to pay their passage, the whole expense of the remainder, amounting to nearly \$4,000, was defrayed by the noble minded Paul Cuffee. Had he possessed the means, he might in 1816 have taken 2000 people from New England to Africa, but he died the following year.

The American Colonization Society was founded in the City of Washington in December 1816, by patriotic and benevolent gentlemen from various parts of the country, for the purpose of colonizing the free people of color of the United States.

In 1818, Messrs Samuel J. Mills and Ebenezer Burgess were commissioned by this Society to proceed by the way of England to the English settlements and other ports of the western coast of Africa, to acquire information and ascertain whether a suitable territory could be obtained for the establishment of a colony. They visited all the ports from Sierra Leone to Sherbro, a distance of about 120 miles. At this last place they found a small but prosperous colony of colored people settled by John Kizzel. This man had been brought from Africa when very young, and sold as a slave in South Carolina; during the revolutionary war he joined the British, and at its close was taken to Nova Scotia, from whence, about the close of the last century, he sailed with a number of

other colored persons to Africa. Here he was prospered in trade, built a church and preached the gospel to his countrymen. By Kizzel and his people the agents were kindly received and hospitably entertained. After having fulfilled their arduous duties, they embarked for the United States, but Mr. Mills died on the passage.

The missionary character and efforts of this man were thus referred to in a public discourse by the Rev. Leonard Bacon.

“A young minister of the gospel once said to an intimate friend ‘my brother, you and I are little men, but before we die our influence must be felt on the other side of the world.’

Not many years after, a ship, returning from a distant quarter of the globe, paused on her passage across the deep. There stood on her deck a man of God, who wept over the dead body of his friend. He prayed, and the sailors wept with him—and they consigned that body to the ocean. It was the body of the man, who, in the ardor of youthful benevolence, had aspired to extend his influence through the world. He died in youth, but he had redeemed his pledge; and at this hour his influence is felt in Asia, in Africa, in the islands of the sea, and in every corner of his native country.

This man was Samuel John Mills, and all who know his history will say, that I have exaggerated neither the grandeur of his aspirations, nor the results of his efforts. He traversed our land, like a ministering spirit, silently and yet effectually from the hill country of the pilgrims to the valley of the Mississippi.

He wandered on his errands of benevolence from city to city, pleading now with the patriot, for a country growing up to an immensity of power, and now with the Christian for a world lying in wickedness. He explored in person the desolations of the west, and in person he stirred up to enterprise and to effort the churches of the East. He lived for India and Owhyhee, [Hawaii] and died in the service of Africa.”

Mr. Burgess gave so satisfactory a report of his mission, that the society, was encouraged to proceed in its enterprise.

By an Act of Congress of the 3d of March, 1819, the President of the United States was authorized to restore to their own country, any Africans captured from American or foreign vessels, attempting to introduce them into the United States, in violation of law, and to provide by the establishment of a suitable agency on the African coast, for their reception, subsistence and comfort, until they could return to their relatives, or derive support from their own exertions. It was determined to make the station of the Government Agency, on the coast of Africa, the site of the colonial settlement; and to incorporate in the settlement, all the blacks delivered over by our ships of war, to the American Agent as soon as the requisite preparations should be completed for their accommodations.

1820.

In February of this year the Rev. Samuel Bacon went to Africa as

principal agent of the United States. He embarked at New York in the ship *Elizabeth*, chartered by Government, and was accompanied by John P. Bankson, assistant, Dr. Samuel A. Crozer, agent of the American Colonization Society, and 88 emigrants, who, in consideration of their passage and other aid from government, agreed to prepare suitable accommodations for the reception of the Africans who might be delivered over to the protection of the agent.

This expedition proceeded by way of Sierra Leone to the Island of Sherbro; and the emigrants landed at Campelar, the place which had been chosen for the site of the proposed settlement, while the sloop of war *Cyane*, which sailed from New York in company with the *Elizabeth*, was ordered to cruise on the coast for the prevention of the slave trade.

Mr. Bacon after encountering great fatigue and many vexatious delays in fruitless negotiations with the natives, for the purchase of lands, found himself obliged to turn his whole attention to the care of the emigrants. Campelar proved to be very unhealthy on account of the low marshy ground and bad water. These, with the total absence of accommodations, the want of proper regulations, and the continued fatigue and exposure, incident to their situation, soon spread disease in a frightful form among the people. Almost the whole care of the sick, as well as of those in health, finally devolved on Mr. Bacon. But, notwithstanding he labored more, was more exposed to heat and wet, hunger and thirst than any one, yet he continued in health until all the rest, except six or eight, had become sick. At length he was attacked by the fever, when there was no one to administer medicine, or allay his sufferings by the kind and assiduous attentions which he had, for weeks, bestowed on others; and after an illness of about a fortnight, he expired, a worthy martyr to the glorious cause of African regeneration.

A short time before his death he wrote in his journal, after describing his own labors and the sufferings of the people, "Is it asked do I yet say colonize Africa? I reply, yes. He that has seen ninety naked Africans landed together in America, and remarked the effects of the change of climate through the first year, has seen them as sickly as these. Every sudden and unnatural transition produces illness. The surpassing fertility of the African soil, the mildness of the climate during a great part of the year, the numerous commercial advantages, the stores of fish and herds of animals to be found here, invite her scattered children home. As regards myself, I counted the cost of engaging in this service, before I left America. I came to these shores *to die*, and any thing better than death, is better than I expect."

All the agents and more than twenty of the emigrants died; the remainder regained their health in a few weeks.

1821.

Early in this year four new agents were sent out with supplies and a small number of emigrants. These, with the survivors of the Elizabeth, were established at Sierra Leone, until a more eligible site than Sherbro could be selected.

Messrs. Andrews and E. Bacon visited different points on the coast, but returned to Sierra Leone without having made permanent arrangements, where during the summer, two of the new agents died, and one returned sick to the United States.

The total failure of their first effort to establish a colony in Africa, attended as it was with the sacrifice of so many valuable lives, and other discouraging circumstances, only tended to arouse the energies of the society to more vigorous and determined action.

In November another agent, Dr. Ayres, was instructed to visit Sierra Leone, and after ascertaining the condition of the surviving emigrants, to proceed down the coast in search of a suitable place for a settlement.

Capt. Stockton, with the United States schooner Alligator, was also ordered to the coast of Africa with instructions to assist Dr. Ayres in making proper arrangements for the emigrants. These gentlemen proceeded to Cape Montserado, about 250 miles from Sierra Leone to obtain, if possible, territory for the colony. They urged negotiations for several days with the chiefs of the country, and by the address and firmness of Capt. Stockton they finally succeeded in obtaining a valuable tract of land including Cape Montserado.

1822.

After the purchase of this territory was effected, Dr. Ayres employed two small schooners belonging to the colony in removing the emigrants from Sierra Leone to their new settlement. In the mean time the Dey people, of whom the purchase had been made, began to show signs of hostility and of the insincerity of their engagements.

On the arrival of the first division of emigrants, consisting chiefly of single men, the natives forbade their landing. The smallest of the two islands at the mouth of the Montserado, had been obtained by special purchase of John S. Mills, at that time the occupant and proprietor; on which the people and property were safely debarked, without any actual opposition.

Dr. Ayres attempted in vain to conciliate the natives, (who seemed bent on expelling the colonists,) and was so far deceived by their imposing offers of accommodation as to trust himself in their power, when they took him prisoner and detained him several days for the purpose of compelling him to annul the bargain.

The island on which the people had landed, was entirely desti-

tate of fresh water and fire wood, and afforded no shelter, except the decayed thatch of half a dozen diminutive huts; thus exposed in an insalubrious situation, several were again attacked by intermittent fever, from which they had but a few months before recovered at Sierra Leone.

Happily, a secret *exparte* arrangement was, at this critical period, settled with King George, (who resided on the Cape, and claimed a sort of jurisdiction over the northern district of the peninsula of Montserado) in virtue of which the settlers were permitted to pass across the river, and commence the laborious task of clearing away the heavy forest which covered the site of their intended town. They pursued their labor with animated exertions, had made considerable progress in the erection of 22 buildings, when a circumstance occurred which obscured their brightening prospects and kindled around them the flame of war.

A small vessel, prize to an English cruiser, bound to Sierra Leone, with about 30 liberated Africans, put into the roads for a supply of water, and had the misfortune to part her cable and come ashore within a short distance of Perseverance Island. The natives pretend to a prescriptive right, which interest never fails to enforce in its utmost extent, to seize and appropriate the wrecks and cargoes of vessels stranded, under whatever circumstances, on their coast. The English schooner having drifted upon the main land about one mile from the extremity of the cape, and a small distance below George's town, was immediately claimed as his property. His people rushed to the beach with their arms, to sustain this claim; and attempting to board the wreck, were fired upon by the prize master and compelled to desist. In the mean time the aid of the settlers was sent for, which, from an opinion of the extreme danger of their English visitants, they immediately afforded. A boat was manned, and despatched to their relief; and a brass field piece, stationed on the island, discharged upon the assailants, when they hastily retired to their town, with the loss of two of their number killed, and several disabled. The English officer, his crew, and the Africans, were brought off in safety; but suffered the total loss of their vessel, with most of the stores and other property on board of her.

By some accident in discharging the cannon, fire was communicated to the store house of the colony, and most of the provisions, ammunition and utensils were destroyed.

The exasperated natives, but for their dread of the big guns, would have attacked the settlers and destroyed them at once; as it was, they threw down the frames of their houses and continued to fire occasional shots at individuals who exposed themselves. This confined the settlers to the island until they were obliged to go up the river after wood and water. On their return, their boat, though strongly manned and armed, was fired upon by the natives who lay concealed; two of their men were mortally wounded and two slightly. Their situation was now most alarming; compelled to