

## Introduction

The islands of the Caribbean have a long and fascinating history, but the history of printing within those islands does not begin until the early years of the eighteenth century. At that time, the islands' strategic and economic importance to the European powers that controlled them was immense. More than two hundred years of exploration and colonization, of dealing with piracy, of the continuing development of the sugar industry and its associated trade in slaves, had by then led to several stable or relatively stable settlements in which timely communication was becoming increasingly necessary.

Up through the end of the seventeenth century, West Indian printing needs had been met by centers in Europe or mainland America. For example, the first collection of Jamaican laws was printed in London in 1683, and in 1696 an act of the General Assembly in Barbados was sent to William Bradford in New York to be printed.<sup>1</sup> Yet, while it was possible to have work sent overseas, the lack of local options was a continuing concern. In 1678 the governor of Barbados explained to officials in England that "the delay in transmitting copies of laws passed by the Legislature [resulted from] there being no printing press or any clerks here to transcribe the laws,"<sup>2</sup> and in 1715, "in a message from [Jamaica's] Council to the Assembly ... it was stated that 'they heartily wish that their house will join with them in establishing a printing press for publishing the Minutes of both bodies.'"<sup>3</sup> Despite such statements, there is no indisputable record of any West Indian press until 1718, when a printer, Robert Baldwin, was allowed to operate in Kingston, Jamaica.<sup>4</sup>

The year 1718, then, is generally seen to mark the beginning of Caribbean printing, and it was not long before islands other than Jamaica became centers of printing as well. For example, a press was set up in Cuba no later than the early 1720s,<sup>5</sup> in Barbados by 1730,<sup>6</sup> and in Antigua by 1748.<sup>7</sup> By the second half of the eighteenth century, printing had further spread throughout the Caribbean, to such islands as Guadeloupe, where the first printer arrived in 1765,<sup>8</sup> Dominica, where printing can also be traced to 1765,<sup>9</sup> and Trinidad, which is known to have had a press by 1786.<sup>10</sup>

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1. E. M. Shilstone, "Some Notes on Early Printing Presses and Newspapers in Barbados," *Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society* 26 (November 1958): 19.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Roderick Cave, "Printing Comes to Jamaica," *Jamaica Journal* 9 (June 1975): 13.

4. *Ibid.* But for speculation regarding Baldwin's work in Jamaica beginning as early as 1716, see Ilse Sternberg, "Early Caribbean Imprints," *Factotum*, no. 22 (October 1986): [9].

5. Hensley C. Woodbridge and Lawrence S. Thompson, *Printing in Colonial Spanish America* (Troy, N.Y.: Whitston Publishing Co., 1976), 115.

6. Shilstone, "Some Notes on Early Printing Presses," 19.

7. Douglas C. McMurtrie, *Early Printing on the Island of Antigua ... with a Facsimile of a Hitherto Unrecorded Broadside of 1753, Preserved in the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., and a Report on Two Pamphlets Printed at St. John's* (Evanston, Ill.: Privately printed, 1943), 3.

8. John A. Lent, "The Press of the French Antilles: A History and Listing of Periodicals," *Publishing History* 8 (1980): 46-47.

The role of the West Indies in printing history has largely been overshadowed by interest in the history of printing on the American mainland, where printing can be traced back to the 1530s in Mexico<sup>11</sup> and to 1638 in the British colonies.<sup>12</sup> Yet West Indian printing is worthy of study not only in its own right, but also for its connections with printing in other parts of the world. Many of the first printers in the British Caribbean islands, not surprisingly, had begun their careers in England or Scotland, and many of those in the French islands likewise had started out in France. The close relationship between the island and mainland American colonies, in particular, is illustrated by the fact that the first printer in Barbados, David Harry, had worked for several years in Philadelphia,<sup>13</sup> and that the first press in Antigua was set up with the assistance of Benjamin Franklin.<sup>14</sup> One of Australia's first printers, George Howe, was born in Saint Christopher (more commonly known today as Saint Kitts), where he "learned the rudiments of the craft in his father's house."<sup>15</sup>

Printing began in each island in response to various needs, but ultimately the types of material printed were the same across the region. A newspaper was at the heart of almost any printer's business, but not all newspapers proved successful. Those printers who were also responsible for printing laws, proclamations, and other official documents found the greatest security. Almanacs, as well as blank legal forms, sales announcements, bills of lading, and other business-related documents were produced to meet local demand, and these contributed toward a printer's steady income. Books of poetry, histories, medical treatises, agricultural handbooks, political works, sermons, plays, literary magazines, and several other types of publications appeared at different times and places during the first century of printing in the West Indies, but these were by no means produced in a steady stream and were more likely to be issued in the larger population centers of Jamaica or Barbados than in smaller outposts.

Generally, less is known about early printing in the islands in which developments began later than is known regarding those islands which have longer printing histories. Indeed, there are many gaps in our knowledge of early West Indian printing. In an essay in the *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science*, Roderick Cave indicates where some of these gaps lie. His comments, such as "No study of printing in Grenada has been published," "A full bibliographical study of Trinidadian imprints is required," and "No study of Vincentian printing has been made," show the need for further research.<sup>16</sup>

The purpose of this study is to begin to fill in one of these gaps, that relating to the island of Saint Vincent.

Saint Vincent, today part of the independent nation of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, is one of the Caribbean islands that came under European domination

9. Douglas C. McMurtrie, *The First Printing in Dominica* (London: Privately printed, 1932), 5.

10. Douglas C. McMurtrie, *Notes on the Beginning of Printing on the Island of Trinidad* (Fort Worth: National Association for Printing Education, 1943), 3.

11. Woodbridge and Thompson, *Printing in Colonial Spanish America*, [1]-7.

12. Joseph Blumenthal, *The Printed Book in America* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England for the Dartmouth College Library, 1989), 1-2.

13. Shilstone, "Some Notes on Early Printing Presses," 19-21.

14. McMurtrie, *Early Printing on the Island of Antigua*, 3-5.

15. D. H. Borchartd, *Australia, The Spread of Printing* (New York: Abner Schram, 1969), 16.

16. See Roderick Cave, "West Indian Printing," in *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science* (New York: Marcel Dekker, 1982).

relatively late. One of the Windward Islands, Saint Vincent is believed to have been sighted by Columbus on January 22, 1498, on his third voyage, and named in honor of the saint whose feast day fell on that date. Despite this early recognition, the island was bypassed by the Spanish in favor of richer lands. In fact, nearly two centuries went by before there was much European interest in Saint Vincent.

Contributing to the delay in interest were the island's rugged terrain, its difficult accessibility, and the fierce reputation of its inhabitants, the Caribs, who had first arrived in Saint Vincent, which they knew as Hairoun,<sup>17</sup> not long before Columbus, displacing the earlier Arawaks.<sup>18</sup> During the seventeenth century, however, both Britain and France eventually came to feel they had legitimate claims to the island.<sup>19</sup> Even then, Saint Vincent for the most part continued to be left to the Caribs, who strongly resisted any attempts at European settlement. While avoiding interaction with Europeans, however, the Caribs were beginning to have close contact with another group of foreigners: Africans.

The Caribs, of course, are the American Indian people for whom the Caribbean Sea is named. Sometime in the mid-1600s a number of African slaves made their way to Saint Vincent, possibly as survivors of shipwreck, as escapees from other islands, or by escaping from slavery at the hands of the small numbers of European settlers who were attempting to gain a foothold in Saint Vincent. Through intermarriage between the original Caribs and some of these Africans, there arose the "Black Caribs," a group who soon differentiated themselves from and began to outnumber the original Indians.<sup>20</sup> Conflicts between the two groups drove the Indians, who came to be known as "Yellow Caribs" or "Red Caribs," to ask the French of nearby Martinique to intercede.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, although Britain's and France's inability to come to terms over ownership of Saint Vincent had led to its designation as neutral territory,<sup>22</sup> the French began to exert more and more influence there, and increasing numbers of French settlers established themselves on the island, ultimately allying themselves more closely with the Black Caribs than with the others. Only after the Seven Years' War did Saint Vincent firmly come under European control, however, when it was ceded to Britain under the Treaty of Paris in 1763. At that time, according to one source, the number of Black Caribs was "computed at two thousand; whereas, of the red or native Charaibes, there were not left ... more than one hundred families."<sup>23</sup>

It was during the early years as a British colony that printing probably first took place in Saint Vincent, but exactly when a press was set up and who the first printers were has been uncertain. Suggested dates have ranged from, for the establishment of the first press, "perhaps as early as 1784,"<sup>24</sup> to, for the introduction of the first newspaper, as late as

17. See Sir Alan Burns, *History of the British West Indies*, rev. 2nd ed. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1965), 722.

18. Details of this period are not fully understood. See Nancie L. González, *Sojourners of the Caribbean: Ethnogenesis and Ethnohistory of the Garifuna* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 7.

19. See Burns, *History of the British West Indies*, 354–55, 454–56.

20. Nancie L. González sees this distinction as a "figment of the European imagination." See her *Próspero, Calibán and Black Sambo: Colonial Views of the Other in the Caribbean*, 1992 Lecture Series, Working Papers, no. 11 (College Park: Dept. of Spanish and Portuguese, University of Maryland, 1991), 25.

21. For more information, see I. E. Kirby and C. I. Martin, *The Rise and Fall of the Black Caribs* (St. Vincent, 1972).

22. See Burns, *History of the British West Indies*, 454–56, 484.

23. Bryan Edwards, *The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies* (Philadelphia: James Humphreys, 1806), 2:105.

24. Cave, "West Indian Printing."

1817<sup>25</sup> or 1826.<sup>26</sup> Pushing the date back even further, the current Saint Vincent and the Grenadines government Web site claims that “Mr. John Drape ... introduced printing in St. Vincent around 1844.”<sup>27</sup> Yet all these dates are incorrect.<sup>28</sup>

In *An Account of the Black Charaibs*, compiled by his son from the papers of the Sir William Young who had been “Governor of Dominica and one of the biggest landowners in St Vincent,”<sup>29</sup> it is mentioned that on May 25, 1768, instructions detailing how the Black Caribs were to be treated “were proclaimed and published in English and in French, throughout the island of St. Vincent’s.”<sup>30</sup> The *Account* also reproduces the terms of a treaty between the English and the Black Caribs, indicating as the source of information the February 27, 1773, issue of *St. Vincent’s Gazette*.<sup>31</sup> Thus, not only does it appear that printing was carried out as early as 1768, but a newspaper clearly was being published in Saint Vincent several decades earlier than some current researchers have stated.

That there has been confusion over when printing began on the island is certainly understandable, however, considering the rarity of early Caribbean printed materials today. Hurricanes, fires, war, insects, and the humidity and heat of the tropics have all contributed to the destruction of countless documents of the West Indies, including those of Saint Vincent. Yet enough have survived that a more focused picture ought to be possible.

This study attempts to produce such a picture, to provide better information than has previously been available about what was printed in Saint Vincent, when, and by whom. It looks only at early printing, which, for the purposes of the study may be defined as that which was done up through 1834, the year when slavery was officially abolished in the British Caribbean,<sup>32</sup> and thus a major turning point in West Indian society.

All types of printed materials have been considered: books, newspapers, broadsides, forms, etc. The study has of course been limited by what materials have actually survived, though discovered references to documents of which no copies are known to exist have in many cases proved helpful. It has also been limited by the accessibility of surviving documents; generally those held by libraries or other institutions have been more readily available for study than those in private hands.

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25. John A. Lent, *Third World Mass Media and Their Search for Modernity: The Case of Commonwealth Caribbean, 1717–1976* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1977), 23. This date is also mentioned in a secondary-school textbook: Ebenezer Duncan, *A Brief History of Saint Vincent, with Studies in Citizenship*, 5th ed. (Kingstown, 1970), 28.

26. Bradford F. Swan, *The Caribbean Area, The Spread of Printing* (New York: Abner Schram, 1970), 14.

27. “Prime Minister’s Office-Government Printery,” *The Official Website of the Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines*, <http://www.gov.vc/Govt/Government/Executive/Ministries/PMOffice/GovernmentPrintery/GovernmentPrintery.asp?z=545&a=3738> (accessed February 15, 2009).

28. Only quite recently, however, a genealogical Web site devoted to Saint Vincent has shown an awareness that at least one newspaper began much earlier. See “St. Vincent Newspapers,” *St. Vincent & the Grenadines Genealogy Research*, <http://svganecstry.com/index.php/newspaper-records-for-st-vincent/> (accessed February 15, 2009).

29. Peter Hulme and Neil L. Whitehead, eds. *Wild Majesty: Encounters with Caribs from Columbus to the Present Day: An Anthology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 189.

30. [Sir William Young], *An Account of the Black Charaibs in the Island of St. Vincent’s; with the Charaib Treaty of 1773, and Other Original Documents* (London: For J. Sewell and Knight & Triphook, 1795; reprint, Cass Library of West Indian Studies, no. 18, London: Frank Cass & Co., 1971), 37.

31. *Ibid.*, 89–97.

32. Though full emancipation was not achieved until 1838. For more information, see Burns, *History of the British West Indies*, 626–32.



“Pacification with the Maroon Negroes” (1801) shows British officials and Black Caribs in 1773 negotiating the terms of the treaty of “peace and friendship” that came to be recorded in a Saint Vincent newspaper that same year

*Illustration provided by author*