

RECRUITING COLONISTS FOR JAMAICA

Daniel Gookin (1612–1687)

to John Thurloe (1616–1668), Secretary of State

Oliver Cromwell desired godly men to settle Jamaica, and to that end dispatched Daniel Gookin to recruit among the New England Puritans. Cromwell asserted “the people of New England had as clear a call to transport themselves from thence to Jamaica as they had from England to New England, in order to their bettering their outward condition, God having promised His people should be the head, and not the tail.” The Protector offered free transportation, cheap land, immunity from taxation, and local self-government as inducements for re-location.

Cambridge, New England, 10 May 1656

Since my arrival in New England, which was 20 January last, I wrote two letters by way of Barbados, and this 3^d also the same way, being destitute of a direct conveyance from hence. The sum of the two first were to inform your honour of my arrival here and of a little motion that I had then made in His Highness' affaires, but the sharpness of the winter prevented my travel into other colonies.

But I procured a meeting of the council of this colony 7 March, being the soonest they met, although the Governor called them a month before. But in the interval between my arrival and the council's meeting, I endeavoured to make known, as far as I could, the sum of His Highness' desires. But there was little done during that season for the fore-mentioned reason, but after the council of this colony met, and I had delivered His Highness' letters and declared the cause of my coming, they thankfully accepted and readily made an order for the promotion thereof, requiring their officers to attend my motions in the publishing the same.

Whereupon I did forthwith cause a short declaration to be printed and published unto all the towns and plantations of the English, not only in this, but other colonies, (the copies of which printed paper and order I have enclosed) and together therewith I procured and employed persons of trust in several parts (where I could not be in person) to promote the business and take subscriptions. Shortly after this was done, in mid-April (as soon as the ways were well passable), I took my journey to the colonies of Connecticut and New Haven (about 150 miles, for the most part through the woods) and unto the magistrates of those colonies declared my business, delivering His Highness' letters to Mr. Eaton, etc.

They all thankfully accepted his great love, manifesting themselves very ready to further the work in the West Indies, which they trust is of God. But as for this place of Jamaica now tendered, the minds of most were averse at present, for as much as at that very season their came diverse letters from thence signifying the sore afflicting hand of God in the mortality of the English upon the island, in so much that of 8000 and upward that landed there, there was not living above one-half; and those very weak and low, and many of them dying daily, wherein also was related the death of Major-General Fortescue, Mr. Gage, and divers others. These tidings are a very great discouragement unto the most and best persons, which otherwise would have engaged to remove. Only some few families have subscribed, but not considerable. If the Lord please to give the state either Hispaniola, Cuba, or any other healthful place, I have good reason to believe that sundry persons of worth, yea and some whole churches, would remove from hence into those parts....

But as for this island, though through God's mercy late intelligence of 7 March from the commissioners give great hope that the good Lord is returning to visit the remnant that is left with health and cure; and also they give great encouragement of the fertility of the said island, all which tidings I have endeavoured to publish with my best skill. And what the effects may be towards the drawing in of more persons, I cannot yet determine, but this island, through many bad reports of it, is not of such esteem here as in several respects I conceive it deserves.

For the present there are some few godly discrete persons that intend to pass thither in a ship of the States called the HOPE, whereof one Martin is commander, which is now here lading masts for the fleet. These persons leave their family here; and if it shall please God to carry them safe and that the island be liked by them (as I hope it may), then upon their return and intelligence 'tis probable that many will remove. And in the interim if the Lord's purposes be to plant the said island with any people from hence, 'tis possible upon this last news I may hear of greater motion then formerly among the people.

There is one thing that I desire to mention to your honour, that is an objection I met with from some principal persons that incline to transplant, and indeed the motions of such will draw or hinder many. If His Highness see cause to remove it, 'tis probable it may further the work. They say there is no encouragement in the propositions for ministers or men of place but what is equal with other men. Now if a minister and people remove, the people will not be in a capacity, until they are settled, to maintain their ministers for as much as they cannot carry their estates from hence, being it principally consists in land and cattle. Now if there were some annual allowance made unto such persons for a few years until the people recruit, or other ways be contrived, it would then take of that hindrance.

Thus I have, as briefly as I may, particularly signified unto your honour the sum of what is hitherto done. I am heartily sorry that my service has been hitherunto so unprofitable to His Highness and the state... but yet I am not of hope that His Highness' pious intentions and motions in this great work, both in the West Indies and elsewhere, shall be owned and crowned with the Lord's blessing in His best season.

Thus with my most humble service presented, and earnest prayers to Him on whose shoulders the government is, to give His gracious presence and assistance to His Highness and your honour in all emergencies, I remain desirous to be, sir, His Highness' and your honour's most humble and faithful servant.

Thomas Birch, ed. *A Collection of the State Papers of John Thurloe* (London: Thomas Woodward, 1742), V:6-7. [modernized]