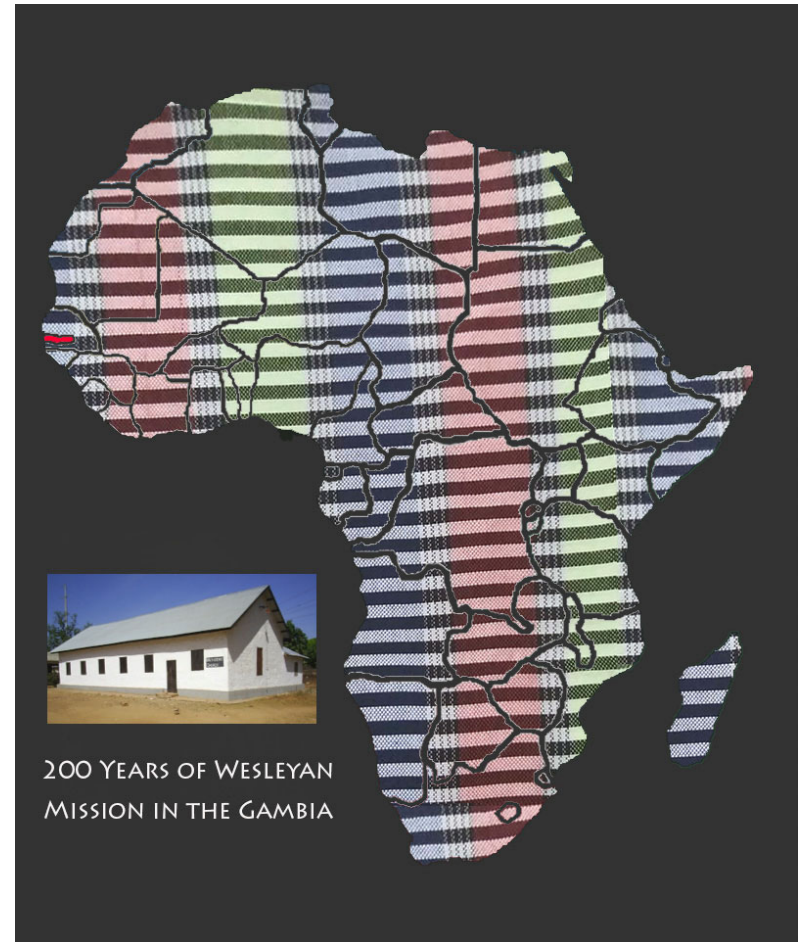


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AFRICAN  
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BIOGRAPHY

Vol. 6, No. 2 (April 2021)

Focus: The Gambia:  
200 Years of Wesleyan Methodist  
Missions; Morgan, Baker, Fox,  
Cupidon, Sallah



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# JOURNAL OF AFRICAN CHRISTIAN BIOGRAPHY

Vol. 6, No. 2 (April 2021)

for scriptural, African and Methodism. The researcher thus recommends that the Methodist Church The Gambia should consider inculturating the gospel cognizance of its African traditional and cultural practices with its Methodist heritage for a better expression of Church leadership in the Gambia in the practice of ministry through the rites of passages of its people.

Park, Matthew James. **Heart of Banjul: the history of Banjul, The Gambia, 1816-1965**. Ph.D. History, Michigan State University, 2016.

URL: <https://doi.org/doi:10.25335/M5ZN3F>

**Summary:** This dissertation is a history of Banjul (formerly Bathurst), the capital city of The Gambia during the period of colonial rule. It is the first dissertation-length history of the city. “Heart of Banjul” engages with the history of Banjul; the capital city of the Gambia. Based on a close reading of archival and primary sources, including government reports and correspondences, missionary letters, journals, and published accounts, travelers accounts, and autobiographical materials, the dissertation attempts to reconstruct the city and understand how various parts of the city came together out of necessity (though never harmoniously).

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Sanneh to convert from Islam to Christianity and to pursue a career in academia. Here he recounts the unusually varied life experiences that have made him who he is today.” ([Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com))

### Open Access – Journal Articles & Theses.

Prom, Rodney Louis. **The Inculturation of the Gospel: Implications for the Methodist Church. The Gambia’s Quest for Church Leadership.**

M.Phil. in Theology. The University of Manchester, UK; 2014.

URL: <https://www.escholar.manchester.ac.uk/item/?pid=uk-ac-man-scw:218516>

**Abstract:** The philosophy, traditional and cultural religion of the African laid the foundation for a people that had the structural requirements for assimilating the content of the gospel, not as uneducated natives but as people with a distorted content of the gospel message and distorted application of it within their social and customary realities.

Understanding the content of the gospel and its relevance for the African sets the tone for considering the various models of application that have been employed in mission in Africa. A similar quest is seen in Asian Christianity, where Western dualism and enlightenment thought governed the “heart,” while authentic Asian Christianity can only emerge when there is a dual recovery of confidence, in culture and in the gospel, within Asian Christianity. It is however, vital to note that the limitation of this missional approach is balanced by the availability of the gospel content in the language and within the reach of The Gambian. This should empower the Gambian and encourage attempts of inculturation that would produce a more relevant ministry fulfilling the existential purpose of the gospel. This therefore makes essential an understanding of leadership from the content of Scripture, Church history and Church traditions. For the Gambian Methodist Christian, this is supplemented with the additional consideration of the Methodist heritage that gives a sense of belonging to the tradition and defines its Christian orientation.

The major task of leadership is to explore the inculturational opportunities of the gospel within the African traditional and cultural beliefs and practices providing pillars that hold the worldview together for possible leadership application. This will solve the need for an inculturated gospel and ministry for the Methodist Church The Gambia. These pillars are presented as the rites of passage in the African Traditional and Cultural beliefs. Together with the Heritage of Methodism’s accommodative quality of a discipleship movement shaped for mission, a family base leadership community structure evolves catering

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Now published quarterly, with all issues available online, the intent of the *JACB* is to promote the research, publication, and use of African Christian biography within Africa by serving as an academically credible but publicly accessible source of information on Christianity across the continent. Content will always include biographies already available in the database itself, but original contributions related to African Christian biography or to African church history are also welcome. While the policy of the *DACB* itself has been to restrict biographical content to subjects who are deceased, the *JACB* plans to include interviews with select living African church leaders and academics.

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## Recent Print and Digital Resources Related to Christianity in Africa

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Senghor, Jeggan C. **The Very Reverend J. C. Faye: His Life and Times: A Biography.** AuthorHouse; Illustrated edition. ISBN-10 : 1491869534, ISBN-13 : 978-1491869536 [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com). \$31.99

The decolonization process in the Gambia raised up political leaders who in various ways contributed to the emancipation of the country. Regrettably, very limited efforts have been made to put on record the experiences of these personalities, not only as part of a process of knowledge generation and transfer but as a source of inspiration for those aspiring to leadership. This volume is a step in that direction.

It chronicles the life of The Very Reverend J. C. Faye, a man of many parts and an icon. Like other distinguished leaders of his day Faye's leadership instincts could not be contained in a single sphere of activity; they were a license to venture into different areas and to squarely confront the challenges therein. As the activist Faye could not be separated from his times, the narrative leads to a comprehensive examination of his involvement in the fields of education, the Church, and in the political system. We thus have a thorough discussion of political and constitutional development in the Gambia in the late decolonization and early post-independence period. Full treatment is also given to the linkages and overlaps in his engagement in these three fields of operation, resulting in a rich tapestry of commitment to service to his people and to his country. (Back cover)

Sanneh, Lamin. **Summoned from the Margin: Homecoming of an African.** Eerdmans Publishing Co.: Cambridge, UK, 2012. ISBN-10: 0802867421 ISBN-13: 978-0802867421, \$24.00. [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

“...The story of Lamin Sanneh's fascinating journey from his upbringing in an impoverished village in West Africa to education in the United States and Europe to a distinguished career teaching at the Universities of Yale, Harvard, Aberdeen, and Ghana.

He grew up in a polygamous household in The Gambia and attended a government-run Muslim boarding school. A chance encounter with Helen Keller's autobiography taught him that education and faith are the key to overcoming physical and personal hardship and inspired his journey. Burning theological questions about God's nature and human suffering eventually led

64 book announcements posted, and numerous opportunities for conferences and for online symposia. We also curate extensive topical biographies. The group is moderated to ensure quality content. Already the group has received lavish praise from many members:

- **Casely B. Essamuah** (from Ghana; Secretary of the Global Christian Forum): “Thanks for all your work – it is a real ministry to shepherd this very significant group of scholars in advance of Christ’s kingdom in Africa.”
- **Knut Holter** (Professor, VID Specialized University, Norway; editor of Peter Lang’s Bible and Theology in Africa series): “Many thanks for what you are doing in relation to African Theology!”
- **Stan Chu Ilo** (from Nigeria; Research Professor of World Christianity and African Studies, Center for World Catholicism and Intercultural Theology, DePaul University): “Thanks ... [for] helping to create a common forum for this kind of partnership and collaboration in furthering African theology and African Christian studies in general.”

Navigating the pandemic has been difficult and stressful, but the establishment and growth of the **African Christian Theology** group has definitely proven a silver lining. Come and join us! You can find us at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/AfricanChristianTheology/>. Note that you must have an active Facebook account to join and be sure to answer the membership questions so the moderators can process your request to join.

## The Beginnings, 1821-1848: 200 Years of the Wesleyan Methodist Mission in the Gambia

By Gabriel Leonard Allen

The April 2021 issue of the *Journal of African Christian Biography (JACB)* is dedicated to the genesis of the Wesleyan Methodist Mission in the Gambia of West Africa. Select biographies of agents who labored in this vineyard from 1821 to 1848 will serve to trace this history [see Table of First Generation of Wesleyan Methodist Missionaries in the Gambia (1821-1848)]. The focus will be on five out of the forty-six listed agents: John Morgan (served 1821-1825), John Baker (served 1821-1822), John Cupidon (served 1822-1848), Pierre Sallah (served 1831-1848), and William Fox (served 1833-1843).

On the one hand, European missionaries Morgan, Baker, and Fox came from the majority group of British commissioned reverend ministers, who worked in the Gambia for periods ranging from a few weeks to a maximum of ten years. On the other hand, the African missionaries Cupidon and Sallah represented the minority group of indigenous lay workers, most of whom were originally slaves, who generally did very long periods of service.

Our sources include the first-hand experiences of Morgan and Fox. Morgan, in his book, *Reminiscences of the Founding of a Christian Mission The Gambia (1864)*, describes vivid encounters and observations made during his travels from 1821 to 1825 while Fox compiled one of the most thorough and orderly records of Wesleyan Methodist Missions in Western Africa from 1810 to 1850, titled *A Brief History of The Wesleyan Missions on the Western Coast of Africa (1850)*. In this important literary work, Fox has catalogued reports, journals, and memorials of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (WMMS), on both the European agents sent out and the African agents recruited locally. It represents the most authoritative and acclaimed historical record of Wesleyan Methodist evangelical effort in West Africa up to 1850.

This introduction will give an account of the first twenty-seven years of the Gambia mission, including the historical context in which the mission was founded and the activities of the first two founding missionaries. The rest of the article will examine four critical areas of the mission: (1) Mother-tongue hermeneutics, education and fellowship; (2) Rehabilitation, work, and housing; (3) Evangelical diplomacy; and (4) A scandal at mission.

According to the agreement of April 23, 1816, between Brigadier General and Governor Sir Charles MacCarthy (active 1815-1825) of British West African Settlements, who was represented by Captain Alexander Grant, on the one part, and *Mansa* (King) Tomany Bojang of the Kingdom of Kombo, on the other part, the Island of Banjulo, renamed St. Mary's Island, was leased to the British. This island was strategically situated on the southern part of the estuary. Within six months, a garrison was built on the northern part of this strategic island. St. Mary's Island soon became a haven for liberated African settlers, recaptives, merchants, free-born Wolof artisans, runaway domestic slaves, and internally displaced persons (IDPs) from the interior. Yet, this settlement was founded principally to stop the slave trade, which was abolished in 1807 in British Dominions, and to encourage legitimate trade in the River Gambia and environs.

During his visits to Paris and London in 1818, MacCarthy visited several religious and philanthropic societies, notably the Society of Friends (Quakers), the Christian Missionary Society (CMS) of the Church of England, and the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (WMMS) of the Methodist Church Great Britain. Invitations were extended to assist the government in the burdensome tasks of settling and rehabilitating the liberated African settlers and recaptives throughout the West Coast of Africa. MacCarthy sought to concentrate effort and interest on the recently founded colonies at Freetown in Sierra Leone and Bathurst on St. Mary's Island.

By February-March 1821,<sup>1</sup> the WMMS had responded, effectively, to MacCarthy's request in the presence of the two founding missionaries: the Reverend John Morgan who arrived at St. Mary's Island in February 1821 from England, and the Reverend John Baker who joined him from Freetown a few

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<sup>1</sup> The exact dates of entry into the Gambia of Wesleyan Methodist missionaries John Morgan and John Baker have been difficult to ascertain. In his autobiography, John Morgan stated: "On the third day of February 1821, the Reverend John Morgan landed in the Island of St. Mary." Rev. John Morgan, *Reminiscences of the founding of A Christian Mission: The Gambia* (London: Wesleyan Mission House, 1864), 3. Meanwhile, other scholars have proposed two different dates: "8<sup>th</sup> February 1821" according to Arnold Hughes & David Perfect, *History Dictionaries of Africa, No. 109: History Dictionary of Gambia* (The Scarecrow Press Incorporation: Plymouth, 2008), xxxiii; and "8<sup>th</sup> March 1821" according to Frederiks, 194, citing William Moister. *Memorial of Missionary Labours*.

By Joshua Robert Barron

One day in early 2020, before we knew about the coming pandemic, my friend Wakakuholesanga Chisola and I were lamenting the lack of a forum for discussing the concerns of African theologizing and for networking with likeminded individuals. Existing groups on social media tended to be parochially and myopically Western in their outlook or limited to a single institution. Wakakuholesanga particularly mourned the lack, in his context, of contextual theologies that took the need for authentic Africanity in our Christianity seriously. I bemoaned how efforts of proselytization, instead of seeking Christian conversion, led many Africans, including many Christians, to consider Christianity to be *the white man's religion*. "Why don't we start something?" we asked each other. So he registered a group page on Facebook and together we worked to build something new. Wakakuholesanga articulated our purpose as being "for African Christian Theology and Afrikan theologies as a whole" and, at the end of April, we had a group of two.

Because of pandemic shutdowns, we had more time to work on building and resourcing the group. The group has now grown to about 2000 members. About 70% of these members are from or live in 35 different countries in Africa; the remaining are scattered throughout another 35 countries around the world. Our members include African pastors serving village churches deep in the bush and tenured full professors, and everything in between. Our largest concentrations of members are in Nigeria, the USA, South Africa, and Kenya.

Our leadership team has grown as well. Wakakuholesanga (Zambia; published writer, poet, and documentary filmmaker; MTh student at Akrofi-Christaller Institute of Theology, Mission and Culture in Ghana) and I (USA; in Kenya since 2007, career missionary and theological educator; PhD student at Africa International University, Nairobi) continue as the group administrators. Our moderators include nine men and women from various countries, professors, independent scholars with doctorates, and advanced graduate students—all with extensive experience in the study of African Christianity: Victor Bajah, Akua Bie, Wanjiru M. Gitau, Dave Jenkins, Stephanie Lowery, Fohle Lygunda Li-M, Elias Muhongya, and Tekletsadik Belachew Ngiru.

The group is private. We maintain a modest digital library for the use of members, many of whom are academically disadvantaged African scholars. Currently available are 650 articles, chapters, dissertations, and theses. In the eleven months of the group's existence, there have been 65 calls for papers and

hear more about Jesus, and believe in Him with all my heart. O my God, I praise Thee! and Thee only will I love.” W. Moister, *Missionary stories*, 173.

3. W. Moister, *Memorial of missionary labours in Western Africa, the West Indies and the Cape of Good Hope*, London: 1886 (third expanded edition), 139.

4. Marshall to WMMS, St. Mary’s February 26 1830, Box 293 H2709 mf. 831; Fox to “My dear brother” [someone in Sierra Leone] St. Mary’s June 10 1834, Box 294 H2709 mf. 841. Note: the Box numbers refer to the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society archives (now part of Methodist Missionary Society Archives) at SOAS in London; the H and mf. numbers reference the IDC microfiche edition.

5. Marshall to WMMS, St. Mary’s February 26 1830 Box 293 H2709 mf. 831. It is unclear how this community related to the Methodist fellowship in Goree visited by John Morgan in 1822, J. Morgan, *Reminiscences of the founding of a Christian mission on the Gambia*, London: 1864, 42.

6. W. Moister, *Missionary stories*, 174.

7. W. Moister, *Missionary stories*, 174.

8. Moister to WMMS, St. Mary’s August 14 1831, Box 293 H2709 mf. 832.

9. Dove to WMMS, St. Mary’s October 30 1833, Box 293 H2709 mf. 834.

10. Moister to WMMS, St. Mary’s May 14 1831, Box 293, H2709 mf. 832.

11. Leaders to WMMS, St. Mary’s October 29 1846, Box 295 H2709 mf. 879 and mf. 881.

12. Synod minutes 1846, Box 297 H2708 mf. 2 and Seymour Gay to WMMS, October 30 1846, Box 295 H2709 mf. 881; Special Synod minutes 1848, Box 297 H2708 mf. 3.

13. May to WMMS, MacCarthy Island Febr. 27 1853, Box 295 H2709 mf. 886.

14. W. Moister, *Memorial of missionary labours, \*138-141*; W. Moister, *\*Missionary Stories*, 172-175.

These articles, received in 2016, were researched and written by Martha Frederiks, Professor for the Study of World Christianity at Utrecht University, The Netherlands. Research foci include West African Christianity, Christian Muslim relations and religion and migration. Frederiks worked in the Gambia between 1993 and 1999 as adviser of the Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa.

weeks later, in February-March 1821.<sup>2</sup> Baker is credited with establishing the first Wesleyan Methodist Society among the Krio-speaking community of liberated African settlers and recaptives at Melville-Town on St. Mary’s Island (March 1821) (see Map 2). Together with Morgan, he had established a budding society among the Mandinka-speaking community at Bethesda Mission-Mandinary on the mainland kingdom of Kombo in May 1821. However, Morgan was responsible for the foundation of the other two early centers of mission at Jollof-Town Society on St. Mary’s Island in September-October 1821 among a Wolof-speaking multiracial and international community (see Map 2), and at Georgetown on MacCarthy Island (see Map 3) in the Kingdom of Kattaba (Niani) in March 1823, among a group of resettled Krio-speaking liberated African settlers and recaptives.

The table labelled “First Generation of Wesleyan Methodist Missionaries in The Gambia (1821-1848)” lists 46 workers, consisting of over 32 British agents and 14 African agents. Although it is uncertain whether three of the latter, namely Unnamed Mandinka Translator (#25), Fula Translator (#26) and Servant (#27), were baptized Christians, yet everyone listed was part of a missionary team which was “evangelical in spirit, in nature and in content.” Further, among the first-generation missionaries, there were amazing symbiotic relationships between the European missionary of the moment and place, and their respective African missionary partners. Indeed, in several instances where a European missionary was incapacitated by sickness or was absent from the station, the African colleague stepped in effectively. A case in point was the death in 1842 of Thomas Joiner who was a prominent liberated African merchant, ship-owner, mission collaborator, and Wesleyan Methodist member at St. Mary’s Island. In the absence of European missionaries, Cupidon intervened, conducted, preached and performed all requisite funeral rites.<sup>3</sup> It was in this light that Martha Frederiks emphasized the vital supporting role of indigenous missionaries in the first generation work:

(African missionaries) like John Cupidon, Pierre Sallah, and John Sallah, Robert McDonough, William Jouf (Joof), Amadi (Ngum), John (Ngum), and William Salleh, despite their often meagre education, have each in their own way contributed considerably to the establishment of the Methodist Church in the Gambia. (The

<sup>2</sup> “... for Mr. Baker being detained at Sierra Leone by affliction, he had to wait several weeks for his arrival.” Morgan, 3; “But, on the arrival of his colleague, Mr. Baker, about a month after this ...” Fox, 266.

<sup>3</sup> Asi Florence Mahoney, *Creole Saga: The Gambia’s Liberated African Community in the Nineteenth Century* (Banjul: Baobab Printers, 2006, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition 2017), 49.

Ngum brothers), Cupidon and Sallah rendered long periods of service to the Methodist Church. John Ngum was retired honorably after 24 years of service. Sallah was able to start a flourishing congregation at Goree. Cupidon was able to capably set up and organize the MacCarthy Island Mission within a year's time [1832-1833]. And in time of conflict, the Leaders' Meeting of 1846 chose to support Cupidon over and against [the European missionary] Matthew Godman. Therefore, the conclusion must be that though most details of [the contribution of the African missionaries] have been lost by history, these men were crucial in the earliest period of the Methodist Church. They knew the language. They knew the people. They were exceedingly loyal to the church, despite the fact that the relationship with the [European missionaries] who were supervising their work was not always smooth.<sup>4</sup>

As suggested here, African missionaries played key roles in surmounting the language barrier in order to spread the gospel and enable effective teaching and learning to take place. The language issue was a major hurdle to be overcome for mission to progress. Referring to the struggles encountered at Bethesda Mission Station-Mandinary, Baker issued a prophetic warning that has rung out through the years, that unless "we have learned the language" of Mandinka, there shall be no meaningful progress.

### **Mother-Tongue Hermeneutics, Education, and Fellowship**

Baker was the first to recognize the necessity of using Krio in his evangelization and teaching campaign among the liberated African settlers and recaptives who were settled at Melville-Town by Oyster Creek at the easternmost tip of St. Mary's Island.<sup>5</sup> He was convinced that Scripture was best interpreted and understood through the mother-tongue of the hearer. Baker's innovative use of both English and the Krio mother-tongue resulted in the planting of the very first Wesleyan Methodist Society in the Gambia in March 1821. With the exception of Baker on St. Mary's Island, the written records tell of one John Asar (1834 -

<sup>4</sup> Frederiks, 213.

<sup>5</sup> *Krio* is the lingua-franca of liberated African settlers and *recaptives*. It is a relatively recent language developed during the Slave Trade and Slavery. It has survived post slavery and is now *de facto* the international language of West Africa. Unlike the Gambia experience, Sierra Leonean missionaries seem to have paid greater attention to the grammar and vocabulary of Krio which eventually resulted in *The Bible in Krio – Krio Fos Oli Baybul*. Nairobi: The Bible Society in Sierra Leone, 1994 (copyright 2013).

Amadi Gum, William Salleh, Robert McDonough and William Jouf, formed the mainstay of the incipient Methodist Church of the Gambia. Few details about the life and work of this first generation of indigenous agents have been preserved. However, thanks to William Moister, contemporary and colleague to Sallah and Cupidon, who recorded an autobiographical text of Pierre Sallah and part of the life-story of John Cupidon in his publications, their lives and contributions were rescued from oblivion.[13]

### **Martha Frederiks**

#### **References:**

1. Sallah relates his captivity story in a letter to the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society [WMMS]: "Me was born in a heathen Jalloff country, called Bawald Lambey, near Senegal, West Africa; and brought up a shepherd's boy, as was my father before me. But one day my father wanted me to go from home with him on some business: I leave the flocks with one men till I come back; by my God, Who does everything for my good, not let me go home again. When my father and I get to the place, I went into the bush with some boys of that place to get some wild fruit. By and by I leave the boys in that bush, for I think my father he want me. But when me get a little way in the path, a bad man meet me in the way. O, that man have no pity for little black boy! He put something in my mouth, because I make too much cry; and then he take me to a dark bush, and he tie me there with a rope, and he leave me there alone till midnight. Many bad animals live in that bush. Then man come with two more men; they cut the rope: me then walk all night; me get no supper. Three days me walk without food, only me drink little water. Me think me must die for true that time; but at last me get to the main land near Gorée, and they sell me there for rum, tobacco, and many other things, which I see with my eyes." W. Moister, *Missionary Stories. Narratives, scenes and incidents*, London: 1889, 172-3.
2. Sallah narrates his conversion story as follows: "When I first hear the name of Jesus Christ, I ask the people who go to church what they mean; they tell me that He is the Son of God, and that He die for all the world. O, what mercy! When I know the Saviour's name, that time I no rest at night. I go to some friend every night to teach me to read, for I not able to read at the time, for every day I work; so then every night I get some friend to teach me in the way of the Lord Jesus. I go on little more in reading and praying to God. Every day my heart get a little nearer to God. I then ask the Minister to let me go to Class; he says yes. There I



from this precarious situation that Moister was able to ransom Sallah for the sum of three hundred dollars: “I thank the good Methodist people, who get me free from slavery and from the French Governor in Gorée.” [7] The money for his ransom had come from Ireland, after an appeal from The Gambia, probably made by Moister.[8]

The congregation started by Sallah was neither temporary nor of superficial nature. When missionary Thomas Dove visited Gorée in late 1833 to recuperate from illness, the members were still meeting. Dove was invited to preach but there seems to have been no follow-up after this, no doubt because Goree was French territory.[9]

Back in Bathurst Sallah was appointed as a non-stipendiary assistant missionary to the Methodist Church in The Gambia where he assisted Moister. It seems that he initially continued to work as a mason until 1831 when he was appointed to a paid position at MacCarthy island to work among the Fula.[10] From 1833 onwards Sallah mainly served at MacCarthy island. After the mission among the Fula proved a failure, Sallah served as assistant minister among the liberated Africans who had been relocated to MacCarthy Island. The Methodist Church also employed Sallah’s wife Mary and his son John Sallah, both of whom served as teachers at the school in Georgetown.

By the mid 1840 tensions began to surface. In 1846 the African members of the Leaders Meeting of the Bathurst church wrote several letters to Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society to complain about the conduct of the missionaries Benjamin Chapman and Matthew Godman. They asked WMMS to replace them – and especially Godman – with people who would make no difference “between a black man and a white man.”[11] Despite protests by the Leaders Meeting, the two longest-serving African assistant missionaries, both Pierre Sallah and his colleague John Cupidon were suspended. The Synod of 1848 changed the suspension into discharge of office, a decision re-affirmed at the Special Synod of 1949. Cupidon was said to suffer from “insanity” and Sallah was charged with “disobedience.”[11]

It seems that after his dismissal Pierre Sallah briefly worked for the trader and nemesis of the Methodist Church Richard Lloyd but died shortly afterwards. He had been a member of the church for about 25 years and had served as its assistant missionary for more than 17 years. His wife Mary, who had served the Methodist Church as a teacher, died in December 1852.[12]

Sallah was exemplary for a whole generation of men who were vital in the earliest decades of the Methodist Church in the Gambia. In an era when expatriate missionary service was frequently cut short by illness and death, indigenous agents such as Pierre Sallah, John Cupidon, the brothers John and

?), a teacher and local preacher at MacCarthy Island, and perhaps Abraham Goddard as well who may have been active English–Krio teachers among the first generation missionaries. There were probably many more unmentioned persons who used the Krio mother-tongue to evangelize and to educate liberated Africans, albeit without reducing the language to text. This seeming lack of interest to reduce the Krio *lingua franca* into text at St. Mary’s Island may have contributed to the initial marginalization of the liberated Africans in education and fellowship. In 1841, the British Government sent out Dr. Madden to the British settlements of Sierra Leone, Gold Coast and the Gambia to conduct a Commission of Enquiry into the state of liberated Africans. In particular, Madden made an assessment of the migrants on St. Mary’s Island and MacCarthy Island and noted that:

the Gambia settlement was a most unsuitable home for *Recaptives*, both for their moral development, and for fostering the habits of industry. [Dr. Madden] found 1,400 liberated Africans in a population of 3,514 on St. Mary’s Island; while there were 400 in a population of 1,200 on MacCarthy Island. Even after a decade of experimental projects for their rehabilitation, the process of adjustment was still difficult for many of them. Most of the immigrants still lacked the skills required for upward mobility. The channels by which they might improve their status were not only few, but virtually closed to them.<sup>6</sup>

Dr. Madden proceeded to draw the attention of the authorities to the ongoing “mischievous effect of excluding liberated African children” from the only school in Bathurst (The Wesleyan Methodist Mission Day School). This report became a wake-up call to the establishment and to mission on the need for urgent redress.

In contrast with the approach of the Wesleyan Methodist missionaries towards understanding the Krio language and the liberated Africans themselves, much effort was invested, beginning in the 1820s, to understanding the vocabulary and grammar of Wolof and the Wolof-speaking community in Bathurst. This process may have been encouraged by the intervention and brief stay (1823 December to June 1824) of a Quaker missionary team led by Hannah Kilham.

During the transition period of moving away from the Bethesda Mission – Mandinary (1821 Oct - March 1823) to settling in a rented facility at Jollof-Town on St. Mary’s Island, “Morgan set about organizing a school which

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<sup>6</sup> Mahoney, 69.

met in his house.”<sup>7</sup> Unlike the disappointment experienced at the previous station of Bethesda-Mandinary, the new school at Jollof-Town prospered. By 1822, there were 40 boys in the Juvenile Class, ranging from nine to thirteen years. School started at 6:30 a.m. daily and continued for the next six hours. The pupils were taught the basic three Rs of Reading, wRiting and aRithmetic. In the evenings, assistants gave some tuition to available young adults who would have been earning their living during the day as domestic slaves.<sup>8</sup> Two such Wolof domestic slaves were John Cupidon and Pierre Sallah. Cupidon was a carpenter-apprentice under the employ of contractor Charles Grant while Sallah was a mason. Cupidon “decided to join the night school (and) learnt to read and write the Scriptures.”<sup>9</sup> Through Morgan, both Cupidon and Sallah were converted to Christianity. They became Wolof-English interpreters, teachers, local preachers and eventually, under William Moister, were recruited as assistant missionaries. Also both wives, Mary Cupidon and Mary Sallah, were teachers of mission.

In this Wesleyan Methodist educational context Quaker missionary Hannah Kilham and her team of educationists began to introduce literacy by reading and writing in the vernacular, leading up to learning English. This technique was recognized as the novel Lancasterian system which advocated that early “education should be done in the vernacular mother-tongue.”<sup>10</sup> The Quaker team in the Gambia, which resided at Cape St. Mary’s, was comprised of educationists and agriculturists.<sup>11</sup> Kilham’s ground-breaking mother-tongue education work, initiated in the Gambia, placed her in league with the trail-blazers in mother-tongue hermeneutics in the whole of West Africa.<sup>12</sup> Kilham’s

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<sup>7</sup> Lamin Sanneh, *West African Christianity: The Religious Impact* (Orbis Books: Maryknoll, 1983), 140.

<sup>8</sup> Mahoney, 46.

<sup>9</sup> Mahoney, 46.

<sup>10</sup> Frederiks, 190. Kilham continued to Sierra Leone to implement this technique among the liberated Africans.

<sup>11</sup> The Quaker team of six persons was comprised of Kilham, the leader, two Gambian sailors/teaching assistants, Mahmadee and Sandanee, and three European agriculture/teaching assistants Richard Smith, John Thompson, and Ann Thompson. Frederiks, 191.

<sup>12</sup> Compare with trail-blazers: (a) Henry Brunton’s *Susu Grammar & Catechism* (1801), See Lamin Sanneh, 61. (b) the Gustavus Nylander’s *Bulom Grammar and Vocabulary* (1818) and a *Bulom* translation of the Gospel of Matthew. See Lamin Sanneh, 61. (c) Richard Marshall “compiled a Wolof vocabulary of 2000 words and translated the Conference Catechism and parts of the Gospel of John in Wolof.” See Frederiks, 200. (d) Robert MacBrair’s *Mandinka & Fula Grammar & Vocabulary* and a Mandinka translation of the Gospel of Matthew (1835-36). See Frederiks, 202, and (e) the initial *Ga-Adangbe*

textbook, titled *African Lessons*, was utilized by the Wesleyan Methodist missionary couples Robert and Jane Hawkins (1824-Feb. 1827) and John and Mary Cupidon at the Missionary Day School at St. Mary’s, and by William and Jane Moister (1831-1833). In a bid to extend this technique to MacCarthy Island, Moister accompanied the Cupidons and arrived there on March 16, 1832 to start them off in establishing a worship center and a school. The acquired mother-tongue technique was to be implemented in their evangelization program from then on. The records state that:

Mr. Moister immediately purchased a piece of land in a suitable situation, and a small place of worship was speedily erected. It was a humble sanctuary, built of cane-wattled work, and thatched with grass, with small apartments at the end, for the native teacher and his wife. But, humble as it was, when they collected the people together for Divine Worship, they realized the presence and blessing of the great Head of the Church. Having thus prepared a place, collected some of the children, commenced the school, introduced Mr. Cupidon as their teacher, and commended him and his work to God, Mr. Moister returned to St. Mary’s, which he reached on the 24<sup>th</sup> of (March 1832).<sup>13</sup>

Thus began a work of evangelization, education, and fellowship that reportedly bore great fruit.

Meanwhile, Baker’s warning on the importance of vernacular languages had been taken very seriously by the Wesleyan Mission. It sent out two linguists to reduce into text spoken Wolof, Mandinka and Fula. Richard Marshall (served 1828-1830) worked on Wolof at St. Mary’s Island and Goree Island; while Robert MacBrair (served 1834-1835) studied both Fula and Mandinka at MacCarthy Island.

By the late 1820s, Wolof was already *lingua franca* in the early Wesleyan Methodist Church life, liturgy and preaching at Jollof-Town on St. Mary’s Island. It was within this environment that Marshall published three works: *Wolof Dictionary* (1829), *Wolof Conference Catechism* (1829); and parts of *the Wolof*

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and *Twi* translation activities of the *Basel Missionary Society* in Accra and Akropong of the Gold Coast during the later period (1857 to 1881). See J. Kofi Agbeti, *West African Church History: Church Missions and Church Foundations: 1482-1919* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986), 16.

<sup>13</sup> Fox, 337.

10. Marshall to WMMS, St. Mary's February 26 1830, Box 293 H2709 mf. 831.
11. Moister to WMMS, St. Mary's August 14 1831, Box 293 H2709 mf. 832.
12. W. Moister, *Memorial of missionary labours*, 192. In several cases in the early decades of the Methodist Church in The Gambia not only the men but also the women were employed as indigenous agents. Couples working for the mission were John and Mary Cupidon, Pierre and Mary Sallah and John Gum and his wife.
13. W. Moister, *Memorial of missionary labours*, 180. This quotation also gives a good impression of what Moister considered criteria for "Christianity": proper clothing and neatness.
14. W. Moister, *Memorial of missionary labours*, 187.
15. W. Moister, *Memorial of missionary labours*, 191-2.
16. Dove to WMMS, MacCarthy March 14 1834, Box 293 H2709 mf. 835.
17. Wilkinson to WMMS, St. Mary's October 30 1835, Box 293 H2709 mf. 837.
18. Fox to "My dear brother" [someone in Sierra Leone], St. Mary's June 10 1834, Box 294 H2709 mf. 841. In the same letter Fox wrote that John Cupidon and Pierre Sallah were employed at £40 a year, which according to Fox was not enough to maintain a family.
19. W. Fox, *A brief history of the Wesleyan Missions*, London: 1851, 447, 471.
20. Leaders to WMMS, St. Mary's October 29 1846, Box 295 H2709 mf. 879 and mf. 881; Synod minutes 1846, Box 297 H2708 mf. 2.
21. Synod minutes 1846, Box 297 H2708 mf. 2 and Special Synod minutes 1848, Box 297 H2708 mf. 3. See also B. Prickett, *Island Base. A history of the Methodist Church in the Gambia 1821-1969*, Bo [SL]: s.a., 72, 77.
22. Synod minutes 1846, Box 297 H2708 mf. 2 and Seymour Gay to WMMS, October 30, 1846, Box 295 H2709 mf. 881; Special Synod minutes 1848, Box 297 H2708 mf. 3.
23. Meadows to WMMS, St. Mary's December 1853, Box 295 H2709 mf. 888.

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**Sallah, Pierre**  
**1796-1852**  
**Methodist**  
**Gambia**

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<sup>13</sup> Fox, 337.

*Gospel of John* (1829).<sup>14</sup> Given that healthy support relationships already existed between Marshalls and the Sallahs at St. Mary's Island and Goree Island; it stands to reason that, in all probability, the Sallahs contributed, immensely, to Marshall's published works. One of the many fruits of this effort we now enjoy in reading and interpreting the Wolof New Testament, *Téereb Injiil: di Kaddug Yälla* (2004).

MacBriar (served 1834-1835) was stationed at MacCarthy Island. This gifted Scotsman who was also an Arab linguist-translator from the Civilization Department, produced and published, through the British and Foreign Bible Societies, a string of seminal works in Mandinka and Fula. His two foundation books were: *Grammar and Vocabulary in Mandinka (c.1835-1836)*, and *Grammar and Vocabulary in Fula (c. 1835-1836)*.<sup>15</sup> These two books provided crucial access to the peoples and cultures of the Mandinka and the Fula. Before his abrupt departure in June-August 1836, MacBriar produced Scriptural works: the published *Mandinka Gospel of Matthew (c.1835-1836)*, and other unpublished works on the other Gospels.<sup>16</sup> MacBriar's Fula and Mandinka works were the first of their kind in the Senegambia region. These nascent Wesleyan Methodist contributions to mother-tongue studies and vernacular Scriptures were the foundations of present forms of the *New Testament in Mandinka – Kamben Kutoo* (1989),<sup>17</sup> the *Mandinka Bible – Kitaabu Senuno* (2013),<sup>18</sup> and the *New Testament in Fula Language or Le Nouveau Testament en Langue Pulaar*.<sup>19</sup> Again, it ought to be pointed out that the production of these vernacular works could not have been made possible without the direct assistance and involvement of African missionaries. In MacBriar's case, Fox has pointed to an "unnamed Mandinka translator," his servant Wassa, and Laming Buri, his Fula translator.

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<sup>14</sup> These three nascent works of Marshall may have been invaluable in the eventual formation of the Wolof New Testament, titled *Téereb Injiil: di Kaddug Yälla* (Dakar: Les Assemblées Evangéliques du Sénégal, 1987). The 12<sup>th</sup> edition was published in 2004.

<sup>15</sup> Frederiks, 202.

<sup>16</sup> Frederiks Note 113., 202

<sup>17</sup> MacBriar's grammar, vocabulary and Scriptural works in Mandinka were foundational materials which contributed to the present final form of the New Testament in Mandinka – *Kamben Kutoo*. Gerard's Cross: WEC Press & United Bible Societies, copyright 1989.

<sup>18</sup> MacBriar's grammar, vocabulary and Scriptural works in Mandinka were foundational materials which contributed to the present final form of the Mandinka Holy Bible – *Kitaabu Senuno*. Nairobi: Bible Society of The Gambia, 2013.

<sup>19</sup> MacBriar's *Grammar and Vocabulary in Fula* was foundational material which contributed to the present final forms of the Pulaar (Fouta Toro) Nouveau Testament or Fula New Testament – *Aadi Keso*. Dakar: L'Alliance Biblique au Senegal, 1997, New Edition. 2005.

3. W. Moister, *Memorial of missionary labours*, 137. Charles Grant was cousin to Captain Alexander Grant, one of the founders of the Bathurst settlement. For Charles and Alexander Grant: G. Brooks, *Western Africa and Cabo Verde 1790s-1830s. Symbioses of slave and legitimate trade*, Bloomington: 2010, p. 133.

4. W. Moister, *Memorial of missionary labours*, 137; W. Moister, *Missionary stories*, 168.

5. J. Morgan, *Reminiscences*, 65-66: "One evening a young man came to the lodgings of the Missionary, and seated himself in silence outside the door: seeing him a long time there, he went out to him, when he very modestly said, "Mansa, me want to speak to you; only you white gentleman and me poor black boy." "Well, young man, you know I am the black man's friend, and you can always speak freely to me." "You remember, Massa, when you preach under the tree over there?" "Yes." "Me live there that time and hear what you say; now my heart can't sit down to tell you what God do for my soul." "Say on, young man: that is what I want to hear above all things." "Me hear you speak of the great blessings what Massa Jesus can give to sinners who believe on Him. Me hungry for that blessing; but me can't catch Him. Me go again in the evening and think perhaps me catch Him there; but can't catch Him. Then me say, me sinner too big for that blessing: me better go back and live devil-fashion again. That time you go home, you go into my master's house; then me say, you can pray before you leave, and perhaps me catch Him there. Me go and sit down at the door a long time; but when my master call me, I go away; when I go back the door was shut; then me say, all over now, me go back to country fashion. But then me say, me pray all night first; and if I not get Him before morning, me then go back to country fashion. Me go in the yard and kneel down on the sand, and pray till garrison clock strike two; then come light all round me, and somebody say, 'My son thy sins be forgiven;' and me glad too much." "But what made you glad?" "Because my sins forgiven." "Are you sure that some one spoke to you?" "Not sure, -but," putting his hand to his heart, 'it make me so happy there. I know Massa Jesus pardon my sins'." For the date see: W. Moister, *Missionary stories*, 170; Marshall to WMMS, St. Mary's February 26 1830, Box 293 H2709 mf. 831. Note: the Box numbers refer to the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society archives (now part of Methodist Missionary Society Archives) at SOAS in London; the H and mf. numbers reference the IDC microfiche edition.

6. J. Morgan, *Reminiscences*, 66.

7. W. Moister, *Missionary stories*, 170.

8. J. Morgan, *Reminiscences*, 66.

9. J. Morgan, *Reminiscences*, 67.

argument that he suffered from a form of insanity.[21] The sources offer no insight as to why Cupidon had behaved so out of character.

The first generation of British missionaries had treated the African native agents as colleagues and counterparts. The attitude of the newer generation of missionaries towards the African assistant missionaries differed profoundly from that of their predecessors. Exceptions aside, they proved much more condescending towards Africans, were convinced of European superiority and hence not free from racism. This must have made work very difficult for the indigenous agents, especially for the ones who had served for many years.

The synod of 1848 that dismissed John Cupidon, also gave notice to Pierre Sallah after 17 years of service, charging him with disobedience. John Gum, who had served the church since 1835, was retired as well, albeit honorably and on medical grounds. A year earlier, Chapman and Godman had suspended Gum's wife.[22] Thus, in one year, three of the most experienced assistant missionaries were compulsorily retired; they and their wives had been pivotal for the first decades of the Methodist Church in The Gambia, serving the church in various capacities for 26 years, 17 years, and 22 years respectively.

There is no record as to what became of Cupidon after his dismissal. He died in 1853.[23]

## Martha Frederiks

### References:

1. John Morgan, *Reminiscences of the founding of a Christian mission on the Gambia*, London: 1864, p. 66; William Moister, *Memorial of missionary labours in Western Africa, the West Indies and the Cape of Good Hope*, London: 1886 (third expanded edition), 136. Though speculative, the fact that Cupidon was given a French name could indicate that Goree was still French possession at the time of his birth. Great Britain captured Goree in 1803 and Saint Louis in 1809; the possessions were returned to France in 1815. This would indicate a birth before 1803.

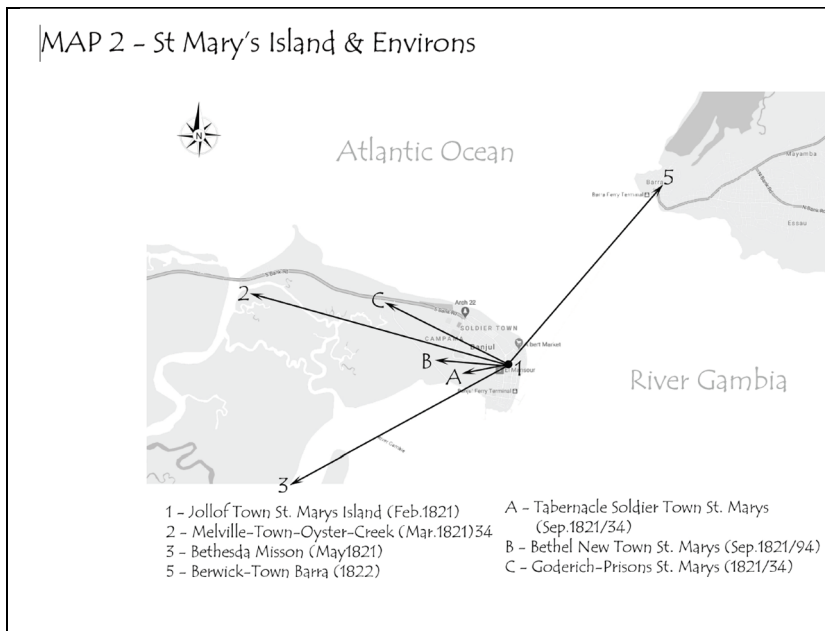
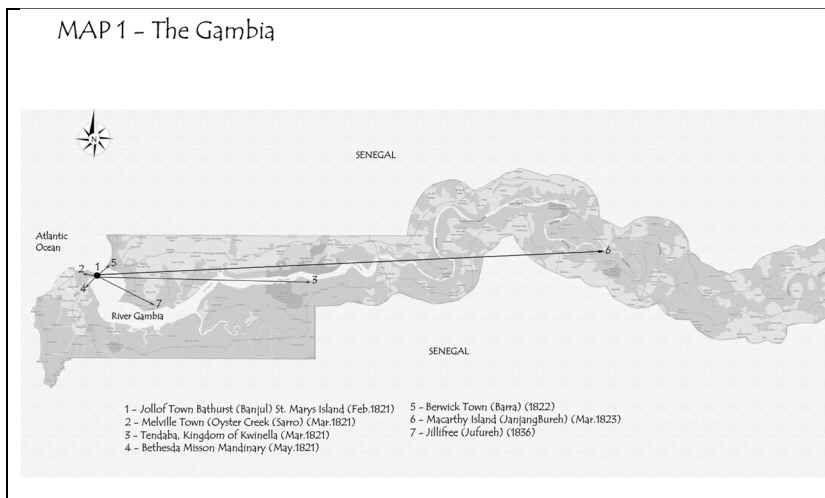
2. In his *Missionary stories* William Moister narrates the – rather trope-like - story how Cupidon, as a boy in England, for the first time experienced snow. Fascinated by this phenomenon of frozen water Cupidon decides to take some of it home to show his friends and relatives. Halfway the journey home, checking up his treasure, he discovers that the snow had melted and that the only thing left to show his friends were soaking wet clothes. W. Moister, *Missionary stories. Narratives, scenes and incidents*, London: 1889, 168-9.

Indeed, the latter two agents accompanied Fox during his evangelical-diplomatic missionary journeys.

Marshall's Wolof translated works were used in fellowships, churches and schools. This was hardly the case for MacBrair's Mandinka and Fula translation works. MacBrair's works did not receive much popular circulation and use because there were very few vibrant Mandinka and Fula churches. The initial Mandinka Bethesda Mission – Mandinary church failed to survive beyond 1825. However, by 1848, there were some hopeful signs of progress in education and fellowship with congregations at the MacCarthy Island station among the Mandinka and Fula societies at Ngahbantang and Fattota, and with the Fula and Mandinka societies at Brocko and Jamali. Unfortunately, the Soninke-Marabout War had begun in the River Valley, destabilizing these communities which became prime targets of attack. Nevertheless, MacBrair's works found enduring usefulness in subsequent Mandinka and Fula Bible translation works. The progress registered by the Wesleyan Methodist Mission in mother-tongue hermeneutics, education and fellowship in the beginning could best be assessed by the establishment of societies, chapels, and schools that were in existence in 1848.

### Maps 1 and 2 - First Generation Societies established at St. Mary's Island Station:

Melville- town (March 1821); Bethesda Mission-Mandinary (May 1821); Jollof-Town- Rented facility -Oct. 1821; Schoolroom below the Manse – 1825; New chapel (Wesley Cathedral) – July 1835; Soldier-Town – Grant Street (1822); Berwick-Town Chapel and School (Barra) (1826) across the estuary; Goderich Town (1831) – 3 km east of the Bathurst settlement; and Bethel –Stanley Street (1821, 1848, 1894); Wesley Mission Day School (1840).



**Map 3 - First Generation Societies established at MacCarthy Island Station:**

Georgetown (Temporary Facility) - March 1823; Georgetown (Temporary Facility) – April 1831; New Chapel – Georgetown Methodist Church & School

stationed as a minister in Southampton, funds were raised for a mission among the Fula; the money sufficed to pay a European missionary and two native agents for a period of 5 years. Cupidon became one of the native agents employed by this so-called Southampton Committee; Pierre Sallah became the other paid native agent.[16] Cupidon served at MacCarthy until 1835, when William Jouf took his place and Cupidon was stationed at the school in St. Mary's.[17]

From 1835 onwards Cupidon seems to have served at various Methodist stations, alternating between Barra, Nyobantang, Bathurst, MacCarthy Island etc. He had become one of the senior and most experienced indigenous agents and according to William Fox "respected by all who know him." [18] When in 1838 Fox embarked on his journey to the Fula kingdom of Bondu, he chose Cupidon as his companion; in his report he expressed approbation and respect for the way in which Cupidon had engaged in discussions with Muslim in Bondu about the superiority of Christianity over Islam.[19]

Cupidon's retirement in 1848 was not voluntary. He was suspended and later dismissed after several clashes with his much younger European colleagues Benjamin Chapman and Matthew Godman. It seems that tensions began to build up in 1846 when Cupidon and his colleague Pierre Sallah opposed Chapman and Godman in enforcing the rule that members should not marry unbelievers. Cupidon, possibly due to his experiences in the Eurafican world and his awareness of the harm that this enforcement might cause the church, profoundly disagreed with the directive and sent in his resignation. The African leaders of the Leaders' Meeting of the Bathurst Church, who supported Cupidon in the conflict, mediated and persuaded Cupidon to withdraw his resignation. In addition, they wrote several letters to Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society to complain about the conduct of Benjamin Chapman and Matthew Godman. They asked WMMS to replace them – and especially Godman – with people who would make no difference "between a black man and a white man." [20] The conflict with Godman deepened to a personal level when Godman flogged Cupidon's wife Mary, thinking she was a drunken school girl. As rejoinder, Cupidon assaulted Godman. Though Godman apologized, the relation between the two men continued to be strained and Cupidon asked to be transferred to work upriver at Nyanibantang, away from Godman. He was refused with the argument that he was needed as a teacher in the Bathurst school.

In 1848, after clashing with two African colleagues, Amadi Ngum and Abraham Goddard, both of whom worked as native agents for the church, Cupidon was suspended and then dismissed by the Leaders Meeting, with the

letter to WMMS, Marshall commended John Cupidon with the words: “He is deeply pious and has sustained an unblemished character in the society ever since its commencement on the Island. I believe all my predecessors could bear the same testimony... He has very correct views of the doctrines of the gospel.”[10]

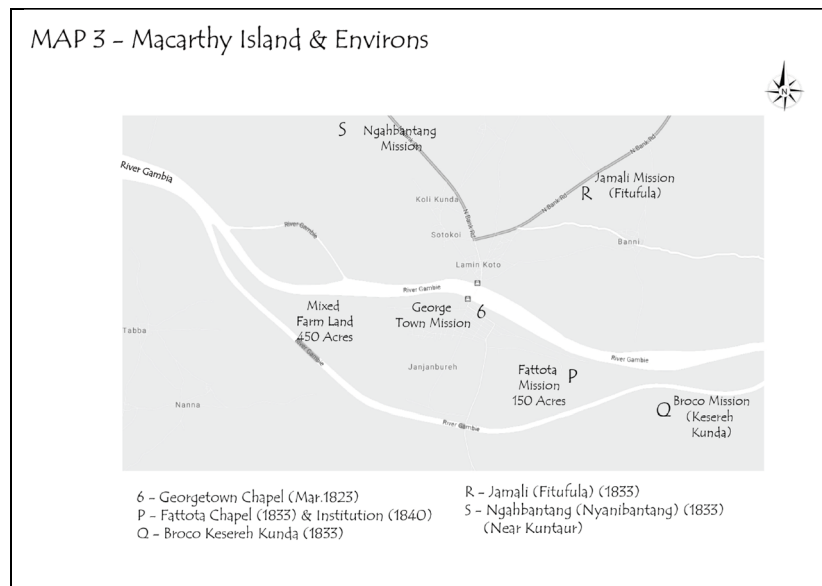
Cupidon was appointed an assistant missionary by the Methodist Conference in 1830, but due to Marshall’s untimely death, he was not informed of the appointment until 1831.[11] His first station was a position as a teacher in the school in Bathurst. In 1832 Cupidon and his wife Mary, who was also literate, were transferred to MacCarthy Island to nurture a Georgetown congregation and to start a school on the island. Moister in his memoirs writes that he paid Cupidon and his wife Mary for the work at MacCarthy from the stipend he received for temporary acting as army chaplain.[12]

Only a few months later Cupidon requested Moister “if possible to pay him a visit, as the work was becoming too big for him, and that several persons, both children and adults were waiting to be received into the church by Christian baptism. He moreover informed me that a number of couples were anxious to be lawfully married.”[13] On Moister’s third visit to MacCarthy, barely a year after the Cupidons had started work there, he stated:

I could not but observe the change which had taken place in the appearance and the manners of the people since I last addressed them. They presented themselves in the house of God clean and neat in their apparel, and conducted themselves with reverence and propriety becoming the solemnity of the occasion. I read prayers, and preached with freedom and comfort to a deeply attentive congregation; after which I baptised seven adults and sixteen children. The adults had been carefully instructed and prepared for this sacred ordinance by the Native Teacher. (...) This holy Sabbath was, indeed a day long to be remembered; and, had I not actually beheld it, I could scarcely have believed that such a change could have taken place in so short a time, through the simple teaching of a converted African.[14]

Moister’s conclusion was that “the work at MacCarthy having now become too weighty for a Native Assistant, I renewed the application for a European Missionary.”[15] The request for another European missionary however was turned down, and—on the grounds that there were more promising mission stations that required the scarce resources—WMMS refused to support the MacCarthy Mission. As also a new chaplain had arrived, Moister’s resources to pay the Cupidons had dried up. In 1832 however events took a turn for the better. Through the intervention of former missionary John Morgan, now

(1833); Brocko Chapel (1836); Jamali Chapel (1836); Ngahbantang School & Chapel (1838); Fattota Institution & Chapel (1840).



### Rehabilitation, Work, and Housing

Besides executing the prerequisite fundamental evangelizing ministries of mother-tongue translation works, education and fellowship, the predominant mandate of the WMMS in the Gambia included collaboration with the government to provide work and housing in the burdensome task of rehabilitating the detribalized class of peoples called liberated Africans – both settlers and *recaptives*.<sup>20</sup> Rehabilitation activities were generally limited to the four British settlement centers: at St. Mary’s Island (1821), MacCarthy Island (1823), the Ceded Mile (1826), and at Kombo St. Mary’s (1836)—but principally at the first two sites. Limited resources were placed at the disposal of the Wesleyan Methodists to achieve these onerous objectives.

First, missionaries used their discretion to seek private funding for the redemption from captivity of its members. Missionaries assumed the role of “intermediaries between members of their congregations and their masters (some

<sup>20</sup> Martha T. Frederiks, *Christianity in The Gambia (1456-2000): We Have Toiled All Night* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum Publishing House, 2003), 203.

of whom were resident at Goree); providing financial assistance towards redemption, with the understanding that the redeemed would engage in evangelistic work for the mission.”<sup>21</sup> We have two cases in point: (1) the redemption of Pierre Sallah from his master in Goree, by the Friends of Ireland, through the intervention of Moister; and (2) the manumission, through Fox, of Wolof local preacher William Juff (Joof). For his manumission, Rear Admiral Warren, commander-in-chief of Her Majesty’s fleet on the western coast of Africa offered to contribute “£20 towards the \$300 demanded by his master, Mr. Lloyd for his freedom.”<sup>22</sup>

Second, the Wesleyan Methodist Mission received limited subvention from government, through the office of the Civilization Department, towards the rehabilitation of the liberated Africans. For example, some of them at Melville-Town by Oyster Creek on St. Mary’s Island were given “free grants of land, and the provision of farming implements, the intention being that they should support themselves “by their own industry.”<sup>23</sup> By the 1830s many *recaptives* had arrived from Freetown with chronic illnesses and became liabilities to the citizens and residents of the colony. It was then that Lieutenant-Governor George Rendall ordered that new arrivals be sent directly to MacCarthy Island and other new areas. As was the case at St Mary’s Island, so it became at MacCarthy Island where:

Only the mercantile community and the Wesleyan mission were in any way equipped at the time to teach skills that might enable these immigrants to earn their own living eventually, and perhaps attain a modicum of independence.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, besides the merchants, the Wesleyan Methodist Mission at both St. Mary’s Island and MacCarthy Island were the most organized entities on the ground to collaborate with government in these humanitarian and rehabilitation ventures.

Third, there was one more independent source of funding towards the rehabilitation ministries of work and housing at MacCarthy Island. This funding came from the Southampton Committee which consisted of philanthropists, abolitionists, ministers, and laymen of the Church of England (Anglican Church) and some other Dissenters. It will be recalled that Morgan, during his travels in the Gambia, investigated ways and means to rescue the vulnerable nomadic Fula settlers around MacCarthy Island and beyond who were subjected to frequent marauding attacks by their neighbors. Many were captured as slaves or forced

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<sup>21</sup> Mahoney, 49.

<sup>22</sup> Fox, 366; Mahoney, 51.

<sup>23</sup> Mahoney, 53.

<sup>24</sup> Mahoney, 61.

impression on him.[2] When his proprietor retired to London, Cupidon - still a youth - was left behind in Goree in the care of the British merchant Charles Grant. When Grant and his Eurafrican family, like most British citizens, moved to Bathurst after Goree Island was returned to France in 1815, Bathurst also became Cupidon’s new place of residence.[3]

Charles Grant and his cousin and founder of the Bathurst settlement Captain Alexander Grant were strong supporters of Methodism. When the first Methodist missionary John Morgan arrived in Bathurst, he stayed with Grant for some time; Alexander Grant facilitated the Methodist settlement at MacCarthy Island. Because Grant and his family fellowshipped with the Methodists, Cupidon also visited Methodist gatherings.[4]

In 1822 Cupidon had a conversion experience. Morgan gives a detailed account of this event in his diary.[5] The new convert proved to be of great value to the nascent Methodist community. Morgan wrote: “In this Joloof was found the long wanted and much desired convert, to be an interpreter to the Joloofs, of which a large part of the population consisted, though but few of them knew the Negro English, in which alone, until then, the Gospel had been there preached.”[6] Cupidon proved quite willing to take on the task of interpreter. Fluent in his native Wolof as well as conversant with “a little broken English,” he became “an efficient translator and a valuable assistant in the Mission.”[7] Morgan describes how he and Cupidon preached in open air gatherings, sitting back to back, with Morgan facing the English-speaking congregation and Cupidon facing the Wolof present and Cupidon “energetically enforcing what he said by stamping his foot and other gestures which indicated the interest he felt in the good work.” Before long, Cupidon was able to preach independently.[8]

Cupidon had received no formal education but proved eager to improve and quick to grasp what he was taught. He attended the literacy classes of the Methodist evening school and it seems that Grant also made a personal effort to enhance Cupidon’s reading and writings skills. Grant had apprenticed Cupidon to a carpenter but later employed him as a storekeeper. With the aid of Grant, Cupidon was able to save enough money to ransom himself. The exact date of his emancipation is uncertain, but it seems that in March 1825, when Morgan left the Gambia and offered Cupidon some compensation for his voluntary assistance, he was already in a position to decline the offer of money. By that time Cupidon had become an accredited local preacher, served as a translator several times a week and regularly conducted pastoral visits to the sick, all on a voluntary basis.[9]

In 1828 Methodist missionary Richard Marshall proposed to WMMS that Cupidon and his colleague Pierre Sallah be employed as native agents. In his



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**Cupidon, John**  
**1700s-1853**  
**Methodist**  
**Gambia**

John Cupidon was one of the first indigenous agents of the Methodist Church in the Gambia. Between 1822 and 1848 he served the emerging church as a translator, local preacher, catechist, teacher and assistant missionary.

Archival material indicates that John Cupidon was a Wolof slave from Goree Island, born, it seems, to enslaved parents. Cupidon therefore grew up in a Eurafrican world, where European traders, *signoras*, their Eurafrican descent, their African partners and their African slaves intermingled. His African name is unknown as is his date of birth. He was named Cupidon in Goree; the name John, it seems, was given to him by the Methodist missionary John Morgan at baptism.[1] In his reminiscences of work on the Gambia river, missionary William Moister relates that in his childhood years Cupidon once accompanied his British master on a trip to England; the journey had made an indelible

into further internal displacement.<sup>25</sup> Upon his return to England, Morgan conceived and developed a “Plan” which is more fully called the “Plan of an Institution for Benefitting the Fula Tribe, and through their Instrumentality, the Interior of Africa.”<sup>26</sup> This was a special relief mission which was targeted, not to the liberated African community on the MacCarthy Island but to some expected groups of Fula refugees. Morgan’s proposed five-year Plan project (1833-1838) was validated and approved by the Southampton Committee which had no missionary agents. Instead, the Southampton Committee entrusted its funding to the WMMS who sent its own missionary agents to implement the proposed project.

This Plan project had specific objectives to acquire a tract of land in the interior of the country (600 acres), to procure the protection of the British Government for the creation of settlements that would be places of refuge and to enable evangelization to take place through the resettled Fulas and, hopefully, to the rest of the peoples of West Africa.<sup>27</sup> The ultimate aim was to ameliorate the temporal and spiritual conditions of the vulnerable and marginalized Fulas. The funding was substantial in those days and was principally managed by Wesleyan Methodist missionaries Dove and Fox.<sup>28</sup>

While Fox was stationed at St. Mary’s Island assisted by William Juff, the Plan project necessitated the stationing of rest of the missionaries Dove, Cupidon, Sallah, and their wives to MacCarthy Island. According to Dove, the MacCarthy Island team registered amazing revival and successes:

I have married thirty couples, who would no longer live in a state of concubinage, baptized ninety-two adults, and several children; and likewise admitted seventy-eight persons on trial, many of whom, I

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<sup>25</sup> Morgan was fascinated by their almost European features and generally fair complexion of the Fula. However, it is an irony of history to note that a fight-back of the Fula took place which was precipitated by the fall of the Mandinka Kaabu Empire led by the Fula warrior, Alpha Molloh in 1866. Between the late 1870s and 1890s, his son Musa Molloh Eggeh Baldeh took the throne and established the greatest ever Fula Empire, spanning Guinea Bissau Geba and Cacheo Rivers, Casamance- Senegal and Southern Gambia-Upper River and Central River regions. The remains of Musa Molloh Eggeh Baldeh and his mausoleum is at Kesere Kunda (Brocko), one of the first outreach stations of the Wesleyan Methodist Mission since 1833. [see “The Kindom of Fulladu” in Dawda Faal, *A History of The Gambia AD1000 -1965* (Latrikunda: Print Promotion, 1997),78-83.

<sup>26</sup> Fox, 345.

<sup>27</sup> Fox, 345.

<sup>28</sup> The Final Accounts for the 5-years Fula Mission Project, from January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1833 to December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1837, stated a Project sum of £3,886-2s.-3d. Fox, 446.

am happy to say, have experienced a knowledge of salvation for the remission of their sins, and are ornaments to their profession.<sup>29</sup>

Dove further reported that in addition to the work in the island, there were regular outreach missions, every Sunday “preaching at Brocko, at Fula Town, and at Jamela (Jamali), a Mandingo town” [see Map 3] in the hope that greater understanding of the gospel could be attained. There were already signs of an abundant harvest in the interior. Indeed, a school had been established at Brocko and “the children were making progress in their learning.”<sup>30</sup> In effect, therefore, the Plan injected new life into mission at MacCarthy Island Station. Robert MacBrair, the linguist, joined the Plan team in January 1836.

Dove and his wife departed MacCarthy Island April 1836 at the end of his tour.<sup>31</sup> About the end of May 1836, there were riots at Fattota resulting in the demolition of Cupidons’ house. The MacBrairs, Cupidon and his wife made a hasty retreat from MacCarthy Island in fear of their lives.<sup>32</sup> Fox then chose to displace himself from St. Mary’s Island and took the seat of the district chairman and general superintendent to MacCarthy Island.

Two months before these civil disturbances, while both Dove and MacBrair were at MacCarthy Island, Fox was there to witness the formal acquisition of the Wesleyan Methodist landed assets totaling 600 acres. Fox reported that:

On that occasion certificates of the two lots of ground on which the mission premises stand were obtained from the Lieutenant-Governor (George Rendall), who happened to be there at the time; and in a few days the six hundred acres of land granted to the Fula Mission by the parent Government were at length measured off; four hundred and forty (440 acres) towards the north-west of the Island, and the other one hundred and sixty (160 acres) in the opposite direction.<sup>33</sup>

The western plot of land of 440 acres of mixed farming land was cleared by December 1836 while the eastern plot of 160 acres was the Fattota Mission Station, near Fort Campbell. Here, by December 1836, construction was already in progress building a mission house, the Fattota Institution and a chapel.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Fox, 353.

<sup>30</sup> Fox, 363.

<sup>31</sup> Fox, 398.

<sup>32</sup> Fox, 400.

<sup>33</sup> Fox, 400.

<sup>34</sup> Elders at Janjangburah have identified that mixed farming site as the place they call “Two Shilling,” arising from the rental price one need to pay the authorities in order to

near his capital and sending his sons to MacCarthy Island. With time, however, particularly through the influence of the Crown Prince Sangieba, *Mansa* Naman yielded to the outstanding requests.

In the early 1840s, the Fattota Institution had been opened and was operational. For a brief period, Mandinka princes, Fula princes and the sons of liberated Africans were taught together and given western education. They learned reading, writing and arithmetic, innovative building techniques, and were exposed to mechanized agriculture, and modern animal husbandry. “Four sons of chiefs were enrolled in 1843. Among them were the two sons of the King of Kattaba and one of the sons of the King of Nyabantang. Also two promising liberated African boys joined the school. The boys, ages 8 to 14, ...”<sup>167</sup> They were taught variously by missionaries Swallow, Willam Joof, Samuel Symons, and George Parsonson, as well as the agriculturist William Fisher at the Fattota Institution.<sup>168</sup>

## Conclusion

The reverend-architect-builder William Fox was an efficient administrator of Gambia District, shuttling by boat between the twin circuits of St. Mary’s Island and MacCarthy Island, 300 kilometers apart. The physical legacies of the architect-builder remain—the Georgetown Methodist Church (1833), the Wesley Cathedral at St. Mary’s (1835), and the Wesley Day School at St. Mary’s (1840). Each surviving structures offers an enduring testimony to his name. Unfortunately, the Fattota Institution at MacCarthy Island, which was completed and opened in 1840, has not survived.

Perhaps the greater and most significant legacy was that of Fox as an architect–builder of missions, who, through his relentless evangelical–diplomatic offensives to the palaces of the kingdoms on the Gambia valley and beyond, propagated a gospel of peace, struck friendship with sovereigns, and invited princes to domicile with locals on MacCarthy Island at an institute for the triple purposes of education, acquisition of life-changing vocational skills, and hopefully, Christian conversion through the Holy Spirit.

## Gabriel Leonard Allen

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<sup>167</sup> Frederiks, 203.

<sup>168</sup> Fox was involved in repairs and rehabilitation works at the Mission’s Fattota Institution premises at the East of the Island which had a chapel and a house. Fox, 407.

*Fox*: (shaking hands) I may probably never see you anymore until we meet at the judgment of Jesus Christ. In the meantime, we beg to take our leave....<sup>166</sup>

Mission accomplished. The purpose of Fox's evangelical mission, from Georgetown to Boolibani, was to spread the good news of peace to the suspect perpetrators. It was time to return home.

### **Evangelical Outreach Mission 3: Kattaba (Niani) (1842-1843)**

After he took his seat at Georgetown on MacCarthy Island in June 1836, Fox preached and taught at several sites in the MacCarthy Island circuit: Georgetown Chapel, Fattota Chapel, Broco (Keseri Kunda) Chapel, Jamali Chapel and Ngahbantang (near Kuntaur) Chapel. He considered himself an "ambassador-general" for Jesus Christ initiating dialogues with petty-chiefs and kings of the surrounding kingdoms with the intention to discourage their involvement in slave trading and slavery and inviting victim refugees to settle on MacCarthy Island. Fox coordinated and implemented a holistic mission. Besides the fundamentals of preaching, building chapels, and teaching at schools, Fox pursued inter-faith dialogue, introduced innovative farming techniques, raised money for manumissions, and conducted vigorous anti-slave trading and anti-slavery campaigns even if he had to go to court.

*Mansa* Naman of the Kingdom of Kattaba, and his Crown Prince Sangieba were close friends of Fox. They came to him, often, in Georgetown. Sometimes to collect taxes, and at other times just to pay him consolatory visit, especially when he was down with fever, which happened frequently. Fox would sometimes reciprocate and travel about thirty kilometers away on horseback to the Kattaba and Ngahbantang palaces, or by boat to Yanimaroo, for social visits.

On other occasions, Fox paid purposeful visits to his "friend" at the Kattaba Palace. Fox requested four things from His Majesty *Mansa* Naman. First, permission to settle and build structures in his kingdom; second, to invite vulnerable Fula groups, threatened by marauders to settle on either MacCarthy Island and/or at Ngahbantang, near his palace; third, that Wesleyan Methodist missionaries may preach and teach in his territory; and fourth, to invite princes to come and stay at the Fattota Institution, located by Fort Campbell, Eastern MacCarthy Island.

*Mansa* Naman granted ready approvals to the first and third requests, but hesitated, and declared that he needed more time to consider settling Fulas

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<sup>166</sup> Fox, 468.

At the end of the project cycle time in 1838, it was indeed reported that "a mission-house, school-room, and a chapel at MacCarthy Island, is gathering a church of more than two hundred members..."<sup>35</sup> About thirty liberated Africans were "employed on the mission ground, clearing it of brushwood, ant-hills and clumps of trees."<sup>36</sup> In addition, nearly one hundred head of cattle had been purchased and more were expected to be acquired.<sup>37</sup> Although Fox reported the completion of the demarcation of the streets and plots at the Fattota Plot, the response from the vulnerable Fula community to settle on the prepared land remained minimal.<sup>38</sup>

Meanwhile, around February 1838, fire had consumed a total of over fifty huts in the villages of Brocko, Jamali, and Laming (Lamin Koto). This reported disaster represented a singular and major set-back to Wesleyan Methodist outreach mission in MacCarthy Island and reversal to the rehabilitation mission. It was suspected that the Kingdom of Bondou had issued directives to gangs who waged a campaign of marauding and destabilization.

### **Evangelical Diplomacy**

Given the instability brewing around MacCarthy Island, Fox resumed his evangelical *cum* diplomatic offensive to the palaces of the kingdoms surrounding the Gambia River on April 4, 1838. He was armed with royal presents comprised of clean linen, tobacco, cotton bafts, currency beads, and Arabic Bibles. The evangelical team, which consisted of Fox, Cupidon, an unnamed Mandinka Translator, Laming Buri, Wassa, and three laborers took off from MacCarthy Island by boat to Fattatenda, and then continued overland on horse-back to Madina Wuli. After their meeting, *Mansa* Koi of the Kingdom of Wuli granted the evangelical team royal permission and his blessings to proceed to the Kingdom of Bondou. It took them a little more than three weeks, after leaving Georgetown, to eventually meet the ruler of the Immamate, Almamy Saada, at the outskirts of Boolibana by the Faleme River [see Map 4]. There, in the presence of an army of 250 warriors and followers who were about to go into battle, Fox proclaimed the Gospel of God, advised respect for the Ten

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be allowed to farm on the land. Interview by telephone with Mr. Musa Sanneh, former Principal, Armitage Senior Secondary School, Janjangburay, MacCarthy Island, March 14th, 2021; Fox, 409.

<sup>35</sup> Fox, 444.

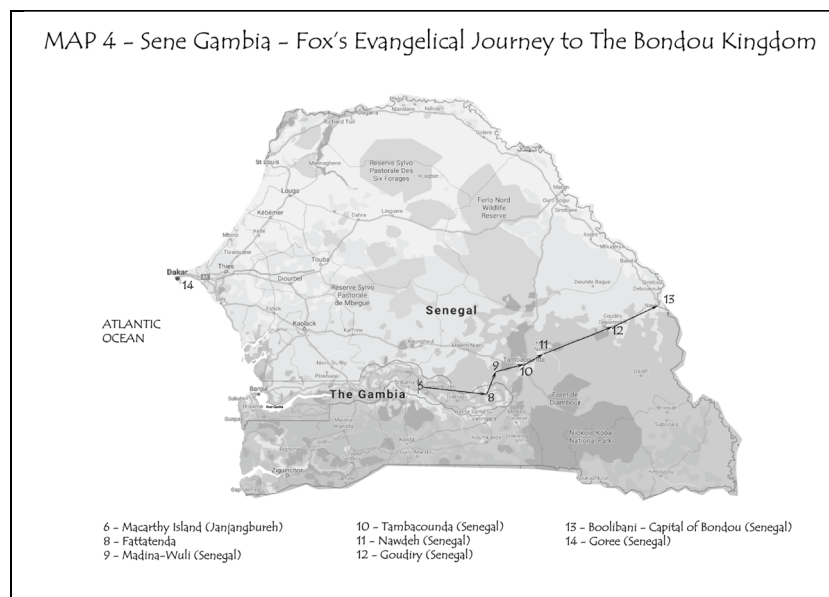
<sup>36</sup> Fox, 444.

<sup>37</sup> Fox, 444.

<sup>38</sup> Fox noted that just "two families came and fixed upon their lots." Fox, 444.

Commandments of Moses, and made a request for available land to set up a mission in the Kingdom of Bondou. Upon their return to MacCarthy Island after this evangelical-diplomatic mission, there was unfortunately little improvement in the region. In August 1838, Brocko and Jamali were plundered again, this time, the attacks were allegedly committed by Kemmingtan of Dunkaseen.

#### Map 4:



Undeterred by these reversals, Fox, Moss, and Parkinson left St. Mary's in February 1839 for another evangelical and diplomatic mission to the Palace of Berending in the Kingdom Barra, and shortly afterwards to that of the King of Kombo.<sup>39</sup> The primary objective of the visits was to enquire from the sovereigns whether they would allow their respective princes to be enrolled at the Fattato Institution on MacCarthy Island.<sup>40</sup> The responses were positive.

In February 1842, Fox shifted his evangelical-diplomatic offensives to the surrounding MacCarthy Island and the kingdoms to the east on the business

<sup>39</sup> The Mansa displayed his confidence by allowing his son, Kekouta Sonko, to be in his care and to even accompany Fox on furlough to England (1839 June – March 1840). Fox, 518.

<sup>40</sup> Fox, 506.

and let me know. But we cannot leave our religion – we must follow Muhammed!<sup>164</sup>

Within the given context and reactionary statement, it dawned upon Fox to press the point for peace, now or never! It was obvious that the adventurer army was preparing “to destroy, pillage, and burn villages, sell slaves, kill pagans, not for greed, but for the power and glory of God.”<sup>165</sup> Fox therefore decided to propose some restraint. This was a risk he was determined to make, even if he could be martyred, he was convinced that his spilt blood could be the seed of the first church in Bondou!

At this crucial moment of their meeting, first, Fox presented gifts to the Almamy, as required by custom. He offered: “pieces of baft, some tobacco, [and] a very handsome Morocco-bound gilt-edged Arabic Bible.” Next, he expressed his gratitude for the reception accorded them and “permission to commence a mission in his territories.” Finally, Fox initiated a dialogue:

*Fox:* Your Majesty, I have one request to make before I leave, which is this; having heard that the Almamy was preparing for war, he will very much oblige me, and I hope it will be pleasing to God, if he will abandon the idea, and return to his palace, and live in peace.

*Almamy Saada:* Why should we not go to war?

*Fox:* It is inconsistent with the laws of Moses - your proclaimed beliefs. “Thou shalt not steal,” and “Thou shalt not kill.” And now you are about to do both! Besides, it is sinful, not saying anything about the misery that must follow!

*Almamy Saada:* It is not the good people we should kill, it is only those who do not pray to Allah. And for doing these tasks, Allah would be well pleased with us and will reward us. Even if we should die in battle, we will go to heaven and share in the happiness in paradise...

<sup>164</sup> Fox, 467.

<sup>165</sup> This was the identical philosophy and results pursued by a future adventurer and Islamic militant, Maba Diahou Ba (Maba) (1860-1867) who launched his virulent jihad in the Baddibus in the North Bank Region of the Gambia, and reported that he “destroyed and pillaged, burned villages, sold slaves, killed pagans, not for greed, but for the power and glory of God.” Lamin Sanneh, *Beyond Jihad: The Pacifist Tradition in West African Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 206. Citing Martin A. Klein, *Islam and Imperialism in Senegal: Sine Saloum, 1837-1914* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1969), 73. and Martin A. Klein, “The Moslem Revolution in 19th Century Senegambia,” in *Boston Papers in African Studies*, edited by J. Butler (Boston: Boston University Publications, 1966).

(*Almamy Saada*: Your object appears very good. But what is it that you teach? Is it the same religion as Muhammed, peace be upon Him?

*Fox*: No, we teach differently. Besides, I did not find such a name in the Bible.

*Almamy Saada*: Do you face the East when you pray? How many years (has your religion been) since the birth of Moses? How many years was it since Muhammed wrote the Qur'an? Kindly tell us what you preach and teach.

*Fox*: (Holding a beautiful Arabic Bible in hand) It is the contents of this book which we preach and teach.)<sup>163</sup>

In a continuation of the last response, Fox launched his evangelical campaign to the "Saul of Tarsus" Islamic adventurers in front of him. He provided an outline of the beginnings and principles of Christianity, explained subjects like "universal depravity of human nature, necessity of a change of heart, God's love to men in the form of a Son, repentance, faith, holiness, future rewards, punishments, and the doctrine of atonement," and the identity and significance of the manifestation and mystery of the Son of God sent by God to die as an atonement for all humanity! This astounded the Almamy Saada who interjected forthwith: *Akodi? Allah ding sa? Wo ma tonyalemu!* (Mandinka) (What does he say? God's Son die? That cannot be true!)

Having acknowledged that Fox was a "man of God," Almamy Saada sought to extract divination from him to determine what God had in store for them with regards to their planned expedition, what "to do and what not to do." Fox chose this opportune moment to dwell on the truths of the Ten Commandments or *Decalogue* (Exodus 20:1-17/ Deuteronomy 5:6-21). He chose to emphasize the prohibitions against sabbath-breaking (fourth commandment), murder (sixth commandment), adultery (seventh commandment), theft (eighth commandment), lying (ninth commandment), and covetousness (tenth commandment).

Surrounded by a band of armed adventurers, with a spear in his right hand and a double-barrelled gun at his left, Almamy Saada took an intimidating and definitive posture by firmly asserting:

This is all very good. But we prefer our religion best. All the same, you may visit any part of the Kingdom of Bondou. Whenever you are ready to start your mission here, select the place and then come

of inviting princes to study at the Fattato Institution. Fox rode his horse almost 45 km on February 1, 1842 to meet his friend, *Mansa* Naman of the Kattaba Kingdom.<sup>41</sup> Three days later, accompanied by boat-owner Richard Lloyd, Fox sailed down river to Nianimaroo, disembarked, and rode to Ngahbantang (Nyabantang) to see Chief Santigeba of Lower Nyani of Kattaba.<sup>42</sup> In the end, *Mansa* Naman pledged to release two princes while Chief Santigeba agreed to offer one of his sons to be enrolled at the Fattota Institution.

About a fortnight later (February 17, 1842), Fox, together with Laming Buri, Wassa, and three laborers, embarked on yet another evangelical-diplomatic mission to the Madina Wuli Palace. The nature, the design, and the advantages of the Fattato Institution were repeated and explained. Having listened attentively, *Mansa* Koi concurred with the idea, saying: "It is very good indeed, and you shall have one or two of my younger sons."<sup>43</sup> On their return from Madina Wuli to Fattatenda, Fox crossed over the Sami Stream and rode on to the Dunkaseen Palace in Upper Nyani to fulfill a pre-arranged meeting with Kemmingtan on February 18 and 19, 1842. Despite his notoriety, Dunkaseen treated Fox with utmost civility, having found out that he was neither a military man, nor a trader, but the popular *toubabo-foday* (white priest). Kemmingtan's immediate response to Fox's request was non-committal.<sup>44</sup> Two days later, Fox undertook a similar mission to the Chief of Bodori (Badari), about 16 km away from Fattatenda. This latter visit proved unfruitful.<sup>45</sup> Nonetheless, most of the sovereigns responded positively and several royal pupils came to the Fattota Institution under tutors Swallow, Symons, and Parsonson. Most surprising of all, about eighteen months after the visit to the Dunkaseen Palace, one of Kemmingtan's son joined the Fattota Institution.

For several years, the Fattota Institute prospered as princes of different kingdoms lived together and studied innovative agricultural skills. A set-back occurred when small-pox broke out at the school. When some pupils succumbed to the disease, and their teacher, Samuel Symons, died on January 20, 1844, the effect was devastating. Despite the presence of George Parsonson, as replacement teacher, the parents lost confidence in the scheme and withdrew their children. The District Synod of 1846 recognized the situation and closed the Fattato Institute.

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<sup>41</sup> Fox, 545.

<sup>42</sup> Fox, 545.

<sup>43</sup> Fox, 547.

<sup>44</sup> Fox, 547.

<sup>45</sup> Fox, 548.

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<sup>163</sup> Fox, 466.

## A Scandal at the Mission

In October 1846 an ignoble act took place at the St. Mary's Island Station. One Sunday morning, Matthew Godman flogged Cupidon's wife, Mary, in broad daylight on the church premises. Cupidon then retaliated and assaulted Godman. Fox termed the episode "a misunderstanding ... between one of the resident missionaries and two of the native teachers."<sup>46</sup> The fall-out from this debacle had immediate, medium, and long-term repercussions.

In the short term, for the first time, European missionaries (Chapman and Godman) were pitched against partner African Missionaries (Cupidon and Sallah), and the congregation was split, supporting one side or the other.

In the medium term, the leaders meeting at St. Mary's Island sent an official letter to the WMMS–London, protesting the misconduct of both Godman and Chapman.<sup>47</sup> The class leaders demanded the immediate removal from the district of both Godman, for his alleged crime, and Chapman whom they accused of racism. Again, Fox reported that the "society was kept in an unsettled state for several months."<sup>48</sup>

The saddest long-term effect was that this event precipitated a drift of the Wolof-speaking community from the Wesleyan Methodist congregations in the Gambia. Cupidon and Sallah were icons and the African ancestors of Gambia Wesleyan Methodist mission and their humiliation was unacceptable. Frederiks has catalogued a chain of questionable decisions made during the year that we have now identified as a transition year—1848—the final year of the first generation of Wesleyan Methodist Missionaries in the Gambia. She noted that:

The synod of 1848 that dismissed John Cupidon, also gave notice to Pierre Sallah after 17 years of service, charging him with disobedience. John (Ngum), who had served the church since 1835, was retired as well, albeit honorably and on medical grounds. A year earlier, Chapman and Godman had suspended N'Gum's wife. Thus, in one year, three of the most experienced assistant missionaries were compulsorily retired; they and their wives had been pivotal for the first decades of the Methodist Church in the Gambia, serving the church in various capacities for 26 years, 17 years and 22 years respectively.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Fox, 589.

<sup>47</sup> Frederiks, 204, citing Synod Minutes 1848, Box 297, H2708.

<sup>48</sup> Fox, 589.

<sup>49</sup> Martha Frederiks, "John Cupidon" in *Dictionary of African Christian Biography*, <https://dacb.org/stories/gambia/cupidon-john/>. Accessed 2021/03/14.

reaffirmed his earlier invitation and his commitment to offer land. Then he granted the missionaries permission to proceed on the dangerous route to Bondou with a blessing: "I hope God will preserve you."<sup>160</sup>

Good Friday of 1838, Friday, April 13<sup>th</sup>, found the evangelical team at Barrakunda, a Maraboo town (Morrykunda) near Madina Wuli, where they spent the Easter weekend. Fox preached on the all-important subject of Jesus Christ crucified on Good Friday and the resurrected Jesus Christ on Easter Sunday. These proclamations elicited keen reactions from crowds.

A week later, at the large Serahuli Maraboo town of Julangel in Wuli, Fox engaged in an inter-faith debate with the Venerable Kabba, the Grand Maraboo of Julangel, in the presence of a large congregation. Having heard the mysteries of salvation in and through the crucified and resurrected Jesus Christ and the experiential religion which resulted, Grand Maraboo Kabba politely responded much like Pharisee Nicodemus did to Jesus Christ: "How can these things be?" [John 3:9]. An Arabic Bible was presented him as a parting gift.

On Sunday, April 29<sup>th</sup>, 1838, the team finally arrived at Boolibany, the capital of the Kingdom of Bondou [see Map 3]<sup>161</sup>. It was soon learned that the sitting ruler, who was also the Imam or Almamy, was encamped at a small town (the Morrykunda) about ten kilometers south, and was about to leave on an expedition. Immediately, the team proceeded thither to seek an audience. His Majesty Almamy Saada was found under a tent "with about two hundred and fifty of his principal counsellors, warriors, and priests within a large square yard surrounded by a wall."<sup>162</sup> Fox introduced himself as a Wesleyan Methodist missionary of the Gospel from England now stationed in the Gambia. He said he was in the process of seeking to know the lands and the languages around him, and, at the same time, investigating the possibilities of setting up missionary bases in them. Fox informed Almamy Saada that he has already gone to the palaces of kingdoms and paid his respects to the *mansas* of Barra, Kattaba or Nyani (Niani) and Wuli. And that each *mansa* visited had showed him a favorable disposition. Now that he had arrived at the Kingdom of Bondou, he was making the same request to settle a mission and preach and teach in Bondou.

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<sup>160</sup> Fox, 453.

<sup>161</sup> Boolibani was located in the vicinity of the present-day city of Kidira in Senegal Oriental on the west bank of the Faleme River, the westernmost tributary of the River Senegal. Boolibani, which was about 400 km from Fox's seat at MacCarthy Island, was reached after twenty six days of travel. The first leg of the three days journey to Fattatenda was by boat, and then the rest of the trek was overland on horseback.

<sup>162</sup> Fox, 466.

## Evangelical Outreach Mission 2: Madina Wuli and Boolibani Palaces (1837-1838)

Fox made fact-finding trips to the scenes of devastation and slave trading to obtain first-hand knowledge of destabilization. Specifically, he received intelligence information that Jamali (Fitu Fula) was ransacked in 1837 and Brocko in February 1838 [see Map 3]. These were said to be the handiwork of either “Bambara Warriors” from Wuli, or “Saul of Tarsus’ Tokolor Islamic adventurers” from Bondou, or Fula “Robin Hoods” from the Futa Jallon.<sup>155</sup> Having ascertained the perpetrators, Fox took the first step to meet these religious brigands in their dens.

On Wednesday, April 4<sup>th</sup>, 1838, [Fox] therefore embarked on board the cutter “Fox,” bound for Fattatenda, Mr. Swallow having accompanied him to Fattota. The writer had with him, on this journey, our valuable assistant, John Cupidon, and another member of the society, who was by birth, a [Tokolor] (Laming Buri),<sup>156</sup> though he had never been in the country; he could, however, speak the Fula language, and, having some knowledge of Divine things, was also of service.<sup>157</sup>

With Wollof translator Cupidon and Fula translator Buri, servant Wassa, and about three laborers, the peace-making and peace-building team embarked on a twenty-six-day journey to Boolibani in the Kingdom of Bondou [see Map 4]. The secondary objectives were to proclaim the Gospel of God and to seek permission to establish new mission bases. Fox was armed, not with the usual elements of the traders—namely rum, weapons and ammunitions—but instead with gifts of linen, pieces of cotton blue baft, tobacco, beads currency, and a large quantity of Arabic Bibles.<sup>158</sup>

At Madina –Wuli, the capital of Sonninke Kingdom of Wuli, Fox paid respects to His Majesty *Mansa* Koi (who started his reign in 1825), informing him that “It was upon the same business about which I came to see you last year (1837).”<sup>159</sup> Fox repeated his enquiry to His Majesty whether he was still desirous that a Christian missionary be sent to settle among his people? The *Mansa*

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<sup>155</sup> Fox, 443.

<sup>156</sup> Fox, 546-547.

<sup>157</sup> Fox, 447. The latter item may have been facilitated by MacBair who had served in Egypt before arriving in the Gambia.

<sup>158</sup> Fox, 452.

<sup>159</sup> Fox, 453.

It would seem that the Gambia District Synod of the Wesleyan Methodist Mission of 1848 had lost its divine direction.

## Conclusions

The first twenty-seven years of the Wesleyan Methodist Mission in the Gambia described here as “The Beginnings (1821-1848)” is the first part of the quest of a missionary enterprise. This initial period is perhaps the most significant segment of the life of the local church. It was during this first generation that Wesleyan Methodists made their distinguishing mark in the Gambia as evangelists, abolitionist-humanitarians, educationists, agriculturists, and disaster-relief workers in the mission of God (*missio dei*). Many in the Gambian Church of today are unaware of the fact that these were our characteristics. “The Beginnings” was also an epoch of innovative foundational work in mother-tongue hermeneutics during which Wolof, Mandinka and Fula were reduced into text form.<sup>50</sup> These nascent activities in translation works have given us today the fruits of the *Wolof New Testament - Téereb Injiil: di Kàddug Yàlla* (2004), *New Testament in Mandinka – Kamben Kutoo* (1989), *Mandinka Bible – Kitaabu Senuno* (2013), and *New Testament in Fula Language or Le Nouveau Testament en Langue Pulaar*, and indeed many more works of Scripture published in these Gambian mother-tongues. The Wesleyan Methodist missionaries were at the forefront of such literary endeavors.

This period has also taught us that the work of evangelism and outreach is a work of partnership, amply demonstrated by the symbiotic bonds which existed between the first European missionaries and their counterparts—the African missionaries—that is, before the shameful scandal of October 1846 rocked the church and had unimaginable consequences.

What was the legacy of this initial period of Wesleyan Methodist Missions between 1821 and 1848? Nothing existed before this time. However, by 1848 there were two principal mission stations at St. Mary’s Island and at MacCarthy Island, 300 km away upriver. Established between these two stations were five registered societies with chapels, 476 full members, and 751 scholars in the schools.<sup>51</sup>

With respect to the enduring physical legacies of this period, we have at Bathurst (now Banjul) on St. Mary’s Island the Wesley Mission House, manse and schoolroom (founded 1825), the Wesley Chapel, now Wesley Cathedral

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<sup>50</sup> The reduction of the Krio mother tongue into text was tackled by our missionary colleagues in Sierra Leone.

<sup>51</sup> Fox, 601

(fd.1835), the Tabernacle Grant Street Soldier-Town Church (fd.1835), the Bethel–Stanley Street Chapel (fd.1821, rebuilt 1848; rebuilt 1894) and the Wesley Mission Day School (fd.1840). At the same time, 300km away at MacCarthy Island Station, we have perhaps the oldest surviving and active Wesleyan Methodist Church in Africa south of the Sahara Desert, the Georgetown Wesleyan Methodist Church in Janjangburay (fd.1833). These are some of the worthy physical gifts and legacies from our ancestors of the “Beginnings” period (1821-1848).

The evangelical-diplomatic journeys were made to establish mission bases and to make peace by Morgan to the *Mansa* of Kwinella and the *Mansa* of Kombo, and by Fox to virtually all the kingdoms by the River Gambia and even as far as the Kingdom of Bondou, 400 km away from his base at MacCarthy Island, are indeed eye-openers to today’s often complacent Wesleyan Methodists in the Gambia. They teach us the importance of good leadership to break the cycles of conflict and war. Personal relationships were cultivated with the sovereigns to seek their permission and encourage interest in mission. And education was extended to all without exception.

Nevertheless, perhaps the highpoint of inspiration of the Beginnings period must lay with the tenacity of Fox’s team—consisting of Cupidon, Sallah and their contemporaries—to move beyond the confines of St. Mary’s Island and MacCarthy Island as they ventured on repeated visits to the palaces of the *mansas* and chiefs, even in the heat of Soninke–Marabout battles, in their determination to generate new Wesleyan Methodist Mission bases and invitation to fellowship. They preached the gospel, acted as peacemakers, and offered education and skills to a commonwealth of indigenes, liberated African settlers and recaptives and princes such that the kingdom of God on earth shall be present within, characterized by freedom, righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

### **The Reverend Gabriel Leonard Allen**

DACB Editorial Board member and *JACB* Contributing Editor  
March 2021, Banjul, The Gambia

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Frederiks, Martha. “John Cupidon” in *Dictionary of African Christian Biography*, <https://dacb.org/stories/gambia/cupidon-john/>. Accessed 20210314

It was this passion to end slave trading and slavery that prompted Fox to collaborate with the governors to pay state and official visits to the riverine kingdoms; and to pursue independent evangelical outreach missions to the palaces of surrounding kingdoms.

### **Evangelical Outreach Mission 1: Jillifree (1836)**

Fox purposely undertook at least four evangelical outreach missions: (1) to Berwick-Town, Berending, and Jillifree in the Kingdom of Barra in 1836 [see Map 1 & Map 2]; (2) to Fattota, Broco, and Ngabantang in the Kingdom of Kattaba in 1836 [see Map 3]; (3) to Fattatenda and Madina Wuli in the Kingdom of Wuli in 1838 [see Map 4]; and (4) to Bolibana in the Kingdom of Bondu in 1838 [see Map 4].

On January 21, 1836, Fox and Wilkinson left St. Mary’s Island to set out for Jillifree (Juffureh) near Albreda on the Ceded Mile of North Bank Region, by boat, on an evangelization outreach mission.<sup>151</sup> Some recent sources have revealed the widespread circulation of firearms at Jillifree within a Euro-African settled community, some of whom were Protestants.<sup>152</sup> The British Merchants had complained earlier about the encroachment of the French on the River Gambia, saying that the setting up of a *Comptoir* at Albreda was in defiance of the Treaty of Paris of 1814. There were credible indications that slaves were being obtained from Casamance and Guinea-Bissau factories, transported via the Bintang Bolong across the Gambia River to the *entrepot* of Albreda for onward overland transit to the Island of Goree.<sup>153</sup>

At Jillifree, Fox and Wilkinson started the meeting with a hymn and a prayer. Then they addressed the crux of their mission. Permission was requested that missionaries may come and to settle among them to build a school and to enable their children to read and write. Many exclaimed in agreement: *Alcoran bettiata! Alcoran bettiata!* (It is good to read and write!)<sup>154</sup> About two weeks later, the missionaries sought an audience with the *Mansa* of Barra at the Berending Palace, to request permission to settle and build structures at Berwick Town and at Jillifree. Copies of the Arabic New Testament were distributed at both Jillifree and Berending.

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<sup>151</sup> Fox, 394.

<sup>152</sup> See Coleen Kriger in Mariana P. Candido and Adam Jones. *African Women in the Atlantic World: Property, Vulnerability & Mobility, 1660-1880* (Suffolk, UK: Boydell & Brewer, 2021).

<sup>153</sup> Fox, 262-263.

<sup>154</sup> Fox, 394.



away, just four days after making a successful delivery of their baby daughter, Ann.

Below the sanctuary at Wesley Cathedral are buried the final remains of saints Ann Fox and her two children, the son who predeceased her on her right and the daughter who died in 1834 on her left. These seeds of death in the family represented excruciating symbols of personal sacrifice Fox paid in establishing mission in the Gambia.

### MacCarthy Island Station Base

Contingent matters necessitated the relocation of Fox to MacCarthy Island. First, Thomas Dove had just completed his three-year tour of mission (1833-1836) where he was the *de facto* project manager for the Fula Mission. He and his wife left MacCarthy Island in April 1836. Secondly, barely one month later, there was the hasty departure of both MacBrair (for good) and Cupidon (only temporarily). These significant absences required the immediate presence of Fox to investigate and resolve the causes of the departures. Consequently, Fox soon transferred the seat of the chairman and general superintendent to the interior mission base of Georgetown on MacCarthy Island, 300 km from the coast.

In this locale at MacCarthy Island, Fox was confronted with the realities of ongoing slave trading and slavery. Both activities had been forbidden in all British dominions since 1807 and 1833, respectively. In continuation with the crusades of earlier Wesleyan Methodist missionaries such as Morgan, Baker, Hawkins, Marshall, Moister, Dove, and now Swallow, Fox resolved to engage actively in the struggle against the slave trade and domestic slavery. He pressured Lieutenant-Governor Rendall of Bathurst, the Commandant at MacCarthy Island, the British Merchants, and the domestic slaveholders to implement the law in their respective vicinities and to release slaves.

When pressure alone was not enough, the missionaries endeavored to find money to buy the freedom of their members. It was this practice which brought men like Swallow and Fox into court several times. Slave owners, annoyed by the interference of Methodist missionaries, brought up court cases against them, accusing them of slave trading (because the missionaries bought the slave before they released them, slave owners accused the missionaries of slave trade).<sup>150</sup>

Frederiks, Martha T.. *Christianity in The Gambia (1456-2000): We Have Toiled All Night*. Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum Publishing House, 2003.

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<sup>150</sup> Frederiks, 199.

Table: **First Generation of Wesleyan Methodist Missionaries in the Gambia (1821–1848)**

#	BRITISH MISSIONARIES (BM)	BM	AFRICAN MISSIONARIES (AM)	AM
1	<b>John Morgan</b>	1821 Feb. – Mar. 1825		
2	<b>John Baker</b>	1821 Mar. – Jan. 1822		
3			<b>John Cupidon - Interpreter &amp; Local Preacher at St. Mary's</b>	<b>1822 - 1831</b>
4	William Bell stationed at Bethesda Mission - Mandinary	1822 Jan. – d. Mar. 1822		
5	George Lane – stationed at Bethesda Mission Mandinary	1822 May – Oct. 1822		
6	Hannah Kilham & team, Quaker missionaries, introduced mother-tongue education at the Wesleyan Methodist Mission School in Jollof-Town. Quaker agricultural mission at Cape St. Mary's provided agricultural implements to Wesleyan Methodist stations at Mandinary and MacCarthy Island.	1823 Dec. - 1824		
7	Robert & Jane Hawkins stationed at St. Mary's thus freeing Morgan to go to MacCarthy Island and beyond to as far as Kantalicunda	1824 – May 1827		
8	Mr. Dawson	Feb. - May 1827		
9	Richard & Mrs Marshall stationed at St. Mary's	1828 Nov.- d. Aug. 1830		

baptisms, marriages, sick to visit, and funerals to attend; and either prayer-meeting or preaching every evening in the week.<sup>146</sup>

In the midst of such a hectic schedule, the Fox couple lost their six-day-old daughter on September 19, 1834. The advent of replacement missionaries Reverend Henry and Mrs. Wilkinson in November 1834 provided an opportunity for respite for the Fox family to take a much needed vacation to the Cape Verde islands in March 1835.

Meanwhile, the GWMMS had granted approval to build a brand-new chapel at Jollof-Town. By October 1, 1834, site clearance had begun for construction at the acquired landed property from Francis Goré Ndiaye at the Dobson Street-Clarkson Street-Picton Street block.<sup>147</sup> And on Wednesday December 3, 1834, the foundation stone of a new chapel was laid by His Excellency, Lieutenant Governor George Rendall Esq. Quality aggregates were quarried and shipped in from Dog Island across the river. Being an architect and builder by profession, he had full responsibility over the supervision and management of the construction of Wesley Chapel, now Wesley Cathedral.<sup>148</sup> It was built in the record time of eight months (October 1834-July 1835).<sup>149</sup> At its opening and dedication ceremony, on July 5, 1835, Chairman and General Superintendent Fox delivered the sermon. Three weeks later, Fox and his sick wife, together with Charles Grant departed St. Mary's Island for England. Fox promised to return.

True to his word, Fox returned to St Mary's Island on December 15, 1835 for his second leg of travel (1835-1840). This time, he was accompanied, not by his wife, but by a linguist translator, the Reverend Robert M. MacBraith who was stationed at MacCarthy Island.

Ann Fox and their four-year-old son accompanied Fox on the third leg of his travel (March 15, 1840 – May 27, 1843) to St. Mary's Island. In the rainy season of 1840, a double tragedy struck the Fox family. Their son died on August 30, 1840 after barely two days of illness. Then, then eight days later, Ann passed

<sup>146</sup> Fox, 365.

<sup>147</sup> Source: Dr. Burang Goree Ndiaye is a great-great grand-son of ancestor Francis Goree-Ndiaye. This claim was received from his parents and supported by several of his siblings. This information has been passed down through the family. Interview with Dr. Burang Goree-Ndiaye, Kanifing, March 2020.

<sup>148</sup> Fox, 424. Fox supervised several construction projects. He has been credited with the rebuilding and expansion to 40 feet x 25 feet (12.2 m x 7.6 m) of the Grant Street Soldier Town Chapel (June 12, 1834) and the replacement of the Melville-Town Chapel (June 29, 1834). Fox. 358.

<sup>149</sup> The appointed contractor was Charles Grant.

been established and a small chapel had been built at Soldier-Town, without any expense from the GWMMS. Preaching was taking place at Goderich Village, located about 3 km east of Bathurst, where a considerable number of liberated Africans were located.

On Sunday, January 26, 1834, Fox reported preaching three times and baptizing forty-three persons at the Jollof-Town Chapel. Six months later, the small chapels at Soldier-Town and Melville-Town were expanded, completed, and opened.<sup>143</sup> It was about this time that Fox acknowledged the ransom money received from the Friends of Ireland which was sent for the freedom and redemption of assistant missionary Pierre Sallah.<sup>144</sup> Among the congregation, evangelists and local preachers were many Wollof domestic slaves. Fox raised an appeal to English congregations towards the manumission of some Wollof slave-bonded interpreters-preachers-assistant missionaries like William Juff (Joof), Amadi Ngum (Gum), and John Ngum.<sup>145</sup>

By September 1834, Fox had an extremely punishing preaching work schedule at St. Mary's. He reported this to justify his need to employ at least three more Wollof assistant missionaries, Joof and the Ngum brothers:

At five o'clock, prayer meeting at the (Mission-House) Chapel; at half-past seven, I read prayers to the soldiers at the barracks (at Government House); at ten, read prayers and preach in our own chapel, when the heat, from the lowness of the chapel, and the crowded congregation, is almost insufferable; at half-past eleven, perform duty at the church; at two PM, sail to Berwick-Town, Fort Bullen (in Barra), preach and meet the class, (or go to Melville-Town (Oyster Creek); and at six PM in the evening again preach here (at the Mission-House Chapel); at the close of which I either hold a prayer-meeting, meet the society, or administer the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. My weekdays also are fully employed: every morning at five o'clock we have a prayer-meeting in the chapel, (these I cannot always attend, from indisposition,) and at half past six AM the school commences. I have also considerable number of

<sup>143</sup> Fox, 356-357.

<sup>144</sup> Fox, 360.

<sup>145</sup> During a two week visit to Bathurst on St. Mary's Island at the beginning of October, 1834, Rear Admiral Frederick Warren, Commander-In-Chief of His Majesty's Fleet on the Western Coast of Africa, contributed Twenty Pounds ransom money towards the manumission of Amadi Ngum. Fox, 367; Fox, 360.

10			<b>Pierre Sallah - Interpreter &amp; Local Preacher at St. Mary's</b>	1828-1831
11			Robert MacDonough – Schoolmaster at St. Mary's	1828-1830
12	William & Jane Moister was stationed at St. Mary's Island.	1831 Mar. – June 1833		
13			<b>John &amp; Mary Cupidon – John employed as missionary, stationed in MacCarthy Island) –focussing on the Fula Community. Mary Cupidon “ran a girls’ school in Georgetown.”<sup>52</sup> Cupidon &amp; Mary were back at MacCarthy Island by Aug. 1836. John Cupidon “Dismissed” in 1848.</b>	1831 May - 1848
14			Pierre & Mary Sallah Pierre employed as missionary, stationed in St. Mary's Island – focussing on the liberated African community stationed in MacCarthy Island in 1838 May. <b>Mary Sallah</b> ”taught at the Methodist schools” <sup>53</sup>	1832 March - 1848

<sup>52</sup> Frederiks, 212.

<sup>53</sup> Frederiks, 212.

			Pierre was a teacher stationed at Ngahbantang 1843. <sup>54</sup> Pierre Sallah “Suspended” in 1847, and then “Discharged” in 1848,	
15	Thomas & Mrs. Dove (Accompanied with Mrs Dove and Pierre & Mary Sallah, took up residence at MacCarthy Island in c. Oct. 1833 to implement the Plan)	1833 April – Oct. 1836		
16			John Asar “a pious and intelligent young man belonging to the (liberated African Aku) tribe” <sup>55</sup> stationed at MacCarthy Island as teacher and local preacher.	1834
17	<b>William Fox &amp; Ann Fox 6 day old Baby Ann Fox I - d. Oct. 19<sup>th</sup> 1834; 4 yr old William Fox I - d. Aug. 30<sup>th</sup> 1840 Mum Ann Fox - d. Sept. 7<sup>th</sup> 1840; Baby Ann Fox II survived, and returned to England) 1833 April – June 1836 – based in St. Mary’s 1836 June – June 1839 - based at MacCarthy Island</b>	1833 April – 1843 May		

Fox, an architect and builder by profession, supervised the construction of several chapels and schools at both St. Mary’s Island and MacCarthy Island, 300 km away. The Georgetown Methodist Church (1833), Wesley Cathedral (1835) and Wesley School (1840) are enduring edifices to his name. As an evangelist of the Gospel, peacemaker, and recruiter of princes for education, Fox paid more visits to the palaces of the riverine kingdoms than any Wesleyan Methodist missionary of his time, establishing personal and trusting relationships with sitting sovereigns. As the chairman and general superintendent of the Gambia District for a decade (1833-1843) and the most senior missionary agent on the West Coast, Fox exercised some influence and limited oversight as well over the Districts in Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast, and the Slave Coast (Nigeria).

### St. Mary’s Island Station Base

For the first three years (1833-1836) of his travel in the Gambia, Fox was headquartered at the newly built school-chapel mission house station on Mary’s Island. He developed a preaching and teaching plan to cover at least the six active stations on St. Mary’s Island and vicinity [see Map 2] of Jollof-Town Ward, Soldier-Town Ward; the Goderich Station about 3 km east of the settlement, the displaced Melville-Town Station that was by Oyster Creek; the Bakau Cape St. Mary’s Station on the Kombo mainland across the creek, and the Berwick-Town Station at Barra on the Ceded Mile within present day North Bank Region, across the eleven kilometer estuary.

Initially, Fox and Dove and the assistant missionaries William Joof and Pierre Sallah worked together at St. Mary’s Island during the first six months after his arrival in April 1833. In October 1833, Dove, John and Mary Cupidon, and Pierre and Mary Sallah, left St. Mary’s Island to start their appointed tasks at MacCarthy Island.<sup>140</sup> Meanwhile Fox remained at St. Mary’s, assisted only by William Joof, a Wolof slave and English interpreter and local preacher.<sup>141</sup>

Divine services were held at the 37 feet x 17 feet Mission-House ground floor of Jollof-Town. It was “crowded, even at (5) o’clock in the morning. ... The chapel will not hold much more than half the regular congregation... number of members now at St. Mary’s is two hundred and four.”<sup>142</sup> It was the evident prosperity of the mission station observed in January 1834 that prompted Fox to seek the authority of the General Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (GWMMS) to construct a new chapel. At about the same time, a society had

<sup>54</sup> Symons wrote: “I think, from the foregoing letter, that Pierre is laboring among a people prepared for the Lord, and that we should be criminal were we to neglect them.” Fox, 570.

<sup>55</sup> Fox, 363.

<sup>140</sup> Fox, 350.

<sup>141</sup> With the assistance of Commander

<sup>142</sup> Fox, 352.

Baker is remembered as the first Apostle to the liberated Africans and *recaptives* on St. Mary's Island, The Gambia. He preached the gospel and taught in both English and Krio at St. Mary's Island, and attempted to evangelize in both English and Mandinka at Mandinary. Baker is regarded as one of the initiators of mother-tongue hermeneutics in West Africa.

Baker is credited to have founded the first Wesleyan Methodist Society on St. Mary's Island in March 1821 and was co-builder and co-founder of the Wesleyan Methodist Bethesda Mission Station-Mandinary which opened in August 1821.

### Gabriel Leonard Allen

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### Fox, William

c. 1780s-1845

### Wesleyan Methodist

### The Gambia

William Fox was commissioned a reverend minister in 1831<sup>139</sup> and sent out as a Wesleyan Methodist missionary to The Gambia a year later. With his newly wedded wife Ann, the Reverend Thomas, and Mary Dove, Fox sailed from Gravesend, London, and arrived at St. Mary's Island on April 23, 1833. This marked the beginning of a remarkable ten years of service in the Gambia (1833-1843) broken only by two vacations from August to December 1835 and July 1839 to March 1840, respectively.

<sup>139</sup> [www.mywesleyanmethodists.org.uk](http://www.mywesleyanmethodists.org.uk). Accessed 2021/03/08 at 12:10 hrs.

	<b>1840 March- April 1843 – based at MacCarthy Island</b>			
18			William Juff (Joof) stationed in MacCarthy Island in May 1838	1835 May -
19			Amadi Ngum (Gum) stationed in Berwick Town (Barra)	1835 May -
20			John Ngum (Gum) stationed in St. Mary's Island Retired in 1849.	1835 May - 1859
21			Abraham Goddard	?
22			John Sallah	?
23			William Salleh	?
24	Henry & Mrs. Wilkinson stationed at St. Mary's	1835 Feb. – d. Aug. 1837		
25	Robert MacBrair – Linguist. Stationed to MacCarthy Island (MacBrair, John & Mary Cupidon left MacCarthy in haste in June 2 <sup>nd</sup> 1836)	1835 Dec. - - Aug. 1836		
26			(Unnamed Mandinka Translator) - assisted MacBrair and then Fox's attempt to translate the Conference Catechism (Fox, 405)	1836 Oct.
27			Laming Buri – Tokolor and Fula translator who accompanied Fox in his journeys	1838
28			Wassa – was a faithful and invaluable servant to Fox who accompanied him on his journeys.	1838

29	William & Mrs Swallow stationed at MacCarthy Island Mrs. Swallow d. 1843 Dec.	1838 May – May. 1843		
30	Thomas Wall	1837 Dec. – d. Aug. 1838		
31			(Sach/ Zach/ Jack) M’Cumba -Local Preacher. Numbered among the liberated African class leaders who wrote a protest to the WMMS concerning the case of the alleged assault of the Reverend Godman on Mary Cupidon (1846). <sup>56</sup>	1838
32	Mr & Mrs. Moss stationed at MacCarthy Island Mrs. Moss d. 1839.	1838 Nov. – Mar. 1841		
33	James. & Mrs. Parkinson –stationed at St. Mary’s Island	1838 Nov. – both d. Sept. 1839		
34	Mr. & Mrs Spencer Mr. Spencer was a local preacher & agriculturist Mrs. Spencer assisted at the Day School.	1839 Feb. – May 1839		
35	William James & Mrs. James stationed at MacCarthy Island	1840 Mar. – d. July 1840		
36	William English	1840 Mar. - -Sept. 1841		
37	Walter Crawley – schoolmaster. Resigned and left for Sierra Leone	1840 Mar. - -Dec.1840		

<sup>56</sup> Mahoney, 81.

We go to St. Mary’s every Saturday afternoon in a canoe, and return (to Mandinary) on Monday morning: we meet our little class (at Melville-Town) early on Sunday morning, attend the chaplain’s preaching (at Government House in the Bathurst Settlement) at ten A.M; preach at two P.M to about one hundred people (at Melville-Town), and in the evening at six (P.M), to frequently more than double that number. Our intermediate time on the Sabbath is devoted to visiting the poor people; and on Monday we have opportunity to procure anything we want for ourselves or the (Mandinary) settlement. This, at present, is all our preaching, and must be, till the language is our own; and we hope by the end of the rains to have made considerable progress.<sup>136</sup>

While they continued to preach and teach in Krio and English at Melville-Town, the missionaries worked hard to improve their knowledge and proficiency of the Mandinka language in preparation for resuming active preaching-teaching at Mandinary. During this period, Baker reflected on their obstacles and expressed his frustration in desperation:

The Mohammedans seem to be shielded against Christianity as perfectly as the crocodiles in the river were against the spear and the bullet. Preaching and school-teaching were alike unsuccessful. The young men manifested great aptitude for learning; and persons further advanced in life readily attended; but in a few days they enquired how much they were to be paid for attendance. When informed they had put the boot on the wrong leg and that they should rather have asked how much they were expected to pay, though nothing was desired of them, they at once broke up the school. To the preaching, they generally refused to listen...<sup>137</sup>

In effect, up to the time of his departure in January 1822 from The Gambia; Baker was convinced that unless missionaries could master the Mandinka language little progress could take place at Mandinary. Indeed, Baker believed that for some headway to be made in the area, students will have to live with their teachers for close supervision and to earn their cost of living through farming.<sup>138</sup>

## Conclusion

<sup>136</sup> Fox, 268.

<sup>137</sup> Morgan, 46.

<sup>138</sup> Frederiks, 196. Citing Baker, Bethesda May 26, 1821, to GWMMS, Box 293 H2709 mf. 823.

signifying the “planting” of the Wesleyan Methodist Bethesda mission station at Mandinary. As a result of the heavy exertions made to build the edifice, Morgan took ill in July, a month later, and had to be evacuated to St. Mary’s for emergency treatment.<sup>129</sup> Meanwhile, Baker assumed full responsibility for the completion of the 12 m x 4.6 m, three compartment wooden building<sup>130</sup> and its formal opening ceremony as a mission station in August 1821.<sup>131</sup> In spite of the frequent attacks of ague that he sustained,<sup>132</sup> Baker summoned the “energy of his mind, and the vigorous remains of his constitution”<sup>133</sup> to endure up to January 1822 when he was finally transferred from Mandinary to a new station in the West Indies, via Freetown.

### Mission Activities

Baker was concerned that the core activities of preaching, teaching, and healing should be pursued without interruption. These activities were moderately achieved at Melville-Town by Oyster Creek Station on St. Mary’s Island. However, this was not the case for the Bethesda Mission Station in Mandinary where preaching and teaching stalled. Baker reasoned that unless “we have learned the language” of Mandinka,<sup>134</sup> there shall be no meaningful progress. Nevertheless, some public preaching was attempted, through the available Mandinka interpreters who were not yet converted to Christianity. It was soon discovered that their translations were unfaithful to the Gospel. Notwithstanding, Divine Service continued to be held in public, occasionally, under the shade of a tree in the village.<sup>135</sup>

In his report to the London Committee of the GWMMS, Baker stated the general itinerary followed by the missionary team, whenever they were not incapacitated by illness:

<sup>129</sup> “Mr. Baker appointed a black boy to attend upon (Morgan) at the hospital. There (Morgan) continued about two months in a deplorable condition, all hope of his recovery been given up.” Morgan, 36.

<sup>130</sup> Morgan, 31.

<sup>131</sup> Martha T. Frederiks, *We have toiled all night: Christianity in The Gambia 1456 – 2000* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum Publishing House, 2003), 196.

<sup>132</sup> “A fever such as malaria marked by paroxysms of chills, fever, and sweating that recur at regular intervals.” [www.merriam-webster.com](http://www.merriam-webster.com)

<sup>133</sup> Morgan, 34.

<sup>134</sup> Fox, 267.

<sup>135</sup> Morgan, 27.

38	(Dr. Madden-government commissioner tasked to report on the state of liberated Africans in Sierra Leone, Gold Coast and The Gambia)	1841 May -		
39	Samuel Symons stationed at MacCarthy Island – Fattota Institution	1841 Dec. - d. Jan. 1844		
40	Mr. Lynn – School master stationed at St. Mary’s Island	1843 Feb. – d. Mar. 1846		
41	Matthew Godman – stationed at MacCarthy Island.	1843 May - -Jan-Feb. 1847		
42	George Parsonson – Schoolmaster stationed at Fattota Institute, MacCarthy Island George & Mrs. Parsonson in MacCarthy Island in Dec. 1845.	1843 May – Sept. 1847		
43	Benjamin Chapman	1845 Mar. - -Jan.-Feb. 1847 -		
44	Mr. & Mrs. Davies Mr. Davies was appointed catechist at the school; Mrs. Davies was appointed teacher for the girls	1847 -Jan. – Feb. -		
45	George Meadows	1847 Dec. -		
46	Robert Lean He wrote: “I had a glorious time last Sunday afternoon (Covenant, January 3, 1848) in our little new chapel at New-Town (Bethel): Last night, on meeting the class, I had an	1847 Dec. – d. Mar. 1848		

overwhelming season... 'My head was water, and my eyes a fountain of tears,' I would rather be here than anywhere else in the world...." <sup>57</sup>			
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**Morgan, John**  
c.1790s - 1872  
Wesleyan Methodist  
The Gambia

John Morgan was the first Wesleyan Methodist Missionary to set foot in The Gambia valley. He was commissioned a reverend minister of the Methodist Church in 1820<sup>58</sup> and soon thereafter sent out with the Reverend John Baker<sup>59</sup> by the Committee of the General Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (GWMMS) of London to establish a new station in The Gambia.<sup>60</sup> According to his autobiography, Morgan wrote that "On the (3<sup>rd</sup>) day of February, 1821, (I) landed in the Island of St. Mary...."<sup>61</sup> Baker arrived about a month later in a medically unfit and emaciated state.<sup>62</sup>

Morgan was active in the formation and establishment of the first five Wesleyan Methodist societies in The Gambia. With the exception of the

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<sup>57</sup> Fox, 592.

<sup>58</sup> [www.mywesleyanmethodists.org.uk](http://www.mywesleyanmethodists.org.uk), accessed 2021/02/18, 09:00hrs.

<sup>59</sup> John Baker was a British Wesleyan Methodist Missionary then serving in Sierra Leone (1819-1821)

<sup>60</sup> William Fox, *A Brief History of the Wesleyan Missions on the Western Coast of Africa* (London: Aylott and Jones, 1850), 265.

<sup>61</sup> John Morgan, *Reminiscences of the Founding of A Christian Mission The Gambia* (London: Wesleyan Mission House, 1864), 3; One source stated that "Mr. Morgan landed at St. Mary's direct from England on the 8<sup>th</sup> of February, 1821; ..." Arnold Hughes and David Perfect, *History Dictionaries of Africa, No. 109: History Dictionary of Gambia* (The Scarecrow Press Incorporation: Plymouth, 2008), xxxiii; Another source puts it a month later: "On March 8, 1821 John Morgan arrived in St. Mary's as the first Methodist Missionary to The Gambia. Martha T. Frederiks, *We have toiled all night: Christianity in The Gambia 1456 – 2000* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum Publishing House, 2003), 194; The Quaker missionary, William Singleton, had arrived earlier on January 21, 1821, on an exploratory mission.

<sup>62</sup> Fox, 266.

they pursued the possibility of an alternate site in the Kingdom of Kombo, which was not too far from the already established spearhead mission base at Melville-Town on St. Mary's Island. To further explore this possibility, Baker, Morgan, and some merchants requested and obtained audience with His Majesty the *Mansa* of Kombo.<sup>125</sup> His Majesty granted the missionary's choice site of convenience. A cliff site facing the Atlantic Ocean was preferred, suggesting the Bakau-Fajara area. However, the residents of the small settlement found nearby did not welcome the missionaries.<sup>126</sup>

**Bethesda Society Station – Mandinary**

So Baker and his colleagues returned to report their experience on the cliff to the *Mansa*. His Majesty immediately redirected them in the opposite direction, to a location at the riverine Muslim-traditionalist settlement of Mandinaree (Mandinary) [see Map 2]. Given their previous experiences at both Tendaba and at the Bakau-Fajara cliff, Baker and Morgan were determined to have few or no consultations with the local leaders but rather to press on based upon the royal authority given. A suitable site on relatively high ground was identified about 500 m from the Mandinary settlement. With the tacit approval of the *Mansa's* messenger, who was present at site, the missionaries embarked upon the arduous task of clearing the brushland, excavating and cutting down trees for construction.<sup>127</sup> Some of the leading villagers vigorously objected to their presence and to their project activities. Complaints were lodged with the *Mansa* claiming that the white men even posed a threat to their wives and children in the community. When matters came to a head, a local court session was held in the village to resolve the conflict between the residents on the one hand and the strangers on the other hand. Having listened to both parties in the dispute, *Mansa* Bojang ruled in favor of the missionaries. This enabled the wooden building project to progress and to obtain provisional completion by June 14, 1821,<sup>128</sup>

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people attempt to injure you, you may jump into a canoe and get out of their reach. Some of my people have been trading, and have got rich, and I cannot govern them." Morgan, 15.

<sup>125</sup> This audience took place on May 3, 1821. Baker and Morgan took the opportunity to offer a scarlet cloth covered horse as present to the *Mansa* (King) of the Kombo Kingdom. Fox, 267.

<sup>126</sup> Morgan, 23-24.

<sup>127</sup> The lean construction team consisted of John Baker, John Morgan, George Lane, three liberated African couples from Melville-Town Society on St. Mary's Island.

<sup>128</sup> Fox, 268.



... not only reached their understandings, but their hearts also.

In several, anxious care for salvation was awakened, and expressed in words familiar to all Christians: "What must I do to be saved?"<sup>118</sup>

Clearly, Baker's preaching had a profound effect on his audience and led to conversions. The inquirers increased and large numbers of between 100 to 200 persons continued to be attracted to his preaching.<sup>119</sup> The thought occurred among the missionaries, then, that such success "might indicate the will of God respecting the place of their settlement..."<sup>120</sup> Indeed, it was soon discovered that during the temporary absence of the missionaries, "the members have been united and faithful; endeavoring to supply the lack of ministerial labor by prayer-meetings among themselves."<sup>121</sup> This engagement with the station continued until a tornado hit St. Mary's Island in the rainy-season of 1821, creating extensive destruction at Melville-Town, which included the collapse of the provisional chapel.<sup>122</sup> Some of these internally displaced liberated Africans were settled in the New-Town ward of Bathurst (1821), establishing the seed of the now existing Bethel Society and Station [see Map 2].<sup>123</sup> Some purchased land at Bakau-Kombo St. Mary's and settled there (1821). Others were moved to a newly acquired Island territory of MacCarthy Island (Janjanburay), 300 km from St. Mary's (1823) [see Map 1 & Map 3]. And still others were settled at Berwick-Town on the Ceded Mile in the Kingdom of Barra on the northeastern bank of the River Gambia (1826) [see Map 3].

### Exploratory Mission Attempts at Tendaba and Bakau-Fajara

Following the return of Morgan from his unsuccessful reconnaissance trip to investigate the prospect of Tendaba as a mission base, the missionaries, together with some well-informed merchants at St. Mary's Island reviewed the situation thoroughly. They concluded that in the absence of guarantee by the *Mansa* of Kwinella,<sup>124</sup> Tendaba ought to be ruled out as a potential mission base. Instead,

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<sup>118</sup> Morgan, 11.

<sup>119</sup> Fox, 268.

<sup>120</sup> Morgan, 11.

<sup>121</sup> Morgan, 56.

<sup>122</sup> Morgan, 56.

<sup>123</sup> The chapel in Melville Town (community from Goderich Village) was opened in 1834. (community moved again and settled in New Town)

<sup>124</sup> In response to Morgan's request to build a house for mission in his kingdom of Kwinella, the *Mansa* said: "That is very good, too good: take the land, as much as you want, and where you please; but I advise you to build your house near the river, that if my

Melville-Town Station at Oyster Creek, on St. Mary's Island, founded in March 1821 through the initiative of Baker, the founding leadership at the other four societies was directly credited to Morgan [see Map 2]. These were the Bethesda Mission Station at Mandinary in Kombo East mainland (May 1821); the Jollof-Town Station within the Bathurst Settlement on St. Mary's Island (September-October 1821); the Soldier-Town Station within the Bathurst Settlement on St. Mary's Island (before May 1823)<sup>63</sup>; and the Georgetown Station at MacCarthy Island (Janjangburay) (March-April 1823) about 300 km from St. Mary's [see Map 1]. Although the Tendaba settlement was visited in March-April 1821, Morgan never succeeded in "planting" the gospel mission there.

### Tendaba Mission Station Attempt

Morgan left Baker at St. Mary's Island and proceeded alone to their recommended work station of Tentabar (Tendaba), about 110 km up river, in the Kingdom of Queenella (Kwinella) in the present day Kiang West District of Lower River Region [see Map 1]. Before being introduced to the *Mansa* of Kwinella, Morgan was drilled to teach him the required customary protocols. Eventually he was granted audience with the *Mansa* and given an opportunity to state the purpose of his visit and the proclamation of the gospel at the Tendaba Palace:

MANSA: "I am glad to see you!... I want to see a plenty of white men in my country."

MORGAN: "I am not come to your country to trade, but I am sent by good men in my country, to whom the Great Creator of the world has given a book which makes known His will concerning them and you, and all men in every part of the world. That book tells us that all men, black and white, are brothers. It also informs us of the way to be happy in this life, and an everlasting life after death. The same book tells us that it is our duty to make that way known to all mankind. To make it known to you, I am come to learn your language, and to give you that book in your own language, that you and your children may be wise and happy as we are."

MANSA: "That is very good! But don't you want gold, slaves, wax, or hides?"

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<sup>63</sup> Fox, 280.

MORGAN: “I want nothing of that at all. I only want the King to give me a place to build my house, that myself and my brother, (at) Banjoul (Banjul), might live among you, and teach you and your children that good way.”

MANSA: “That is very good! Take the land, as much as you want, and where you please; but I advise you to build your house near the river, that if my people attempt to injure you, you may jump into a canoe and get out of their reach. Some of my people have been trading, and have got rich, and I cannot govern them.”<sup>64</sup>

Morgan concluded that The *Mansa* of Kwinella was not helpful in that he had not provided any guarantee of their protection in his kingdom. Morgan returned to St. Mary’s Island, disappointed, where they had stayed in the house of Methodist Merchant Charles Grant, before renting a house in Jollof Town. In consultation with merchants, Baker and Morgan decided to search for an alternate mainland mission base which would provide some opportunity to visit the “little church” at Melville-Town on St. Mary’s Island<sup>65</sup> which had already been established by Baker.

### Mandinary Mission Station

Accompanied by merchants from St. Mary’s Island, a meeting was held with the *Mansa* of Kombo. Complying with local custom, the missionaries brought along a royal gift of a horse draped in scarlet cloth from head to tail.<sup>66</sup> The *Mansa* was pleased with their respect for tradition and reciprocated, accordingly. He authorized his messenger-guide to accompany the missionaries to select a site for their convenience. Initially, Morgan and Baker chose a cliff facing the Atlantic Ocean,<sup>67</sup> which was quite probably on the Bakau-Fajara coastline. However, the small community nearby did not welcome them: “The opposition of the villagers, and the lack of population, made the Missionaries think that locality was not their place.” They returned to the *Mansa* to report the outcome. The *Mansa* proposed a site in the opposite direction, called Mandinaree (Mandinary), on the south bank of the River Gambia. This site was about nine miles (14 km) from St. Mary’s Island.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Morgan, 15.

<sup>65</sup> Morgan, 20.

<sup>66</sup> Fox, 267.

<sup>67</sup> Morgan, 23.

<sup>68</sup> Morgan, 23.

the GWMMS of London directed missionaries Baker and Morgan to establish a base at the south bank settlement of Tentabar (Tendaba) in the Kingdom of Queenella (Kwinella), about 110km from St. Mary’s Island [see Map 1]. Given Baker’s emaciated and medically unfit state at the time of arrival, it was therefore determined that Morgan should go alone to meet the *Mansa* of Kwinella to request permission to settle, build a base, and evangelize in the kingdom.<sup>112</sup>

### Melville-Town Society Station

Despite his poor condition upon arrival, Morgan observed that Baker was “ardently devoted to his work, (and) immediately commenced preaching to the natives”<sup>113</sup> at a liberated African village<sup>114</sup> by the (Oyster) Creek, since identified as Melville-Town [see Map 2].<sup>115</sup> At his inaugural preaching session with the community, Baker formed a Wesleyan Methodist society and station and encouraged them to erect a booth for the purpose of teaching, preaching, and healing. By the next Sunday, a provisional chapel had been erected, using mangrove and other plant branches, and the edifice was situated within the locality of the residential huts of the settlement. This particular liberated African community was found to be not so well-off but was self-sufficient and independent. They were engaged in a variety of legitimate services such as farming, burning lime from oyster shells, cutting mangrove firewood for sale, fishing, ferry-boating, and “making bricks for sale to the people of Bathurst.”<sup>116</sup> Here, it was reported that Baker “preached regularly in broken English [meaning *Krio*, the dialect of the liberated African community] and made many converts, some of whom had already made contact with missionaries in Sierra Leone.”<sup>117</sup> According to Morgan’s eyewitness testimony, as Baker delivered the gospel message the congregation:

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<sup>112</sup> Fox, 266.

<sup>113</sup> Morgan, 10.

<sup>114</sup> “The earliest liberated Africans located in The Gambia were pensioned soldiers of the Royal African Corps (which was disbanded in 1819) and of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> West India Regiments. About 1820, Governor MacCarthy sent the first batch of them to form settlement at a short distance from this town’ (Bathurst)... the small group of discharged soldiers located on the banks of Oyster Creek, which separated St. Mary’s Island from the south bank, was not so well off.” Asi Florence Mahoney, *Creole Saga: The Gambia’s Liberated African Community in the Nineteenth Century* (Banjul: Baobab Printers, Copyright 2006, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition 2017), 53.

<sup>115</sup> Mahoney, 54.

<sup>116</sup> Mahoney, 54.

<sup>117</sup> Mahoney, 54.

- Fox, William. *A Brief History of the Wesleyan Missions on the Western Coast of Africa*. London: Aylott and Jones, 1850.
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**Baker, John**  
**c. 1780s-1845**  
**Wesleyan Methodist**  
**The Gambia**

John Baker was one of the first two founding Wesleyan Methodist missionaries to the Gambia. He was commissioned a reverend minister of the Church in 1818 in England before being sent out by the General Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (GWMMS) to Sierra Leone (1819-1821).<sup>110</sup> Baker was redeployed to St. Mary's Island, The Gambia and was expected at his new station in January 1821. In the event, Baker fell ill, was delayed, and could only arrive in in March 1821, about a month after his younger colleague, the Reverend John Morgan, had landed.<sup>111</sup>

Baker was the first Apostle to the liberated African settlers and recaptives in St. Mary's Island. He evangelized in both English and Krio, the “created” language of the liberated Africans. In their outreach to the natives of the adjacent mainland at Mandinary in the Kingdom of Kombo, The Gambia, Baker attempted to preach and teach in English and Mandinka.

In accordance with the recommendation of Brigadier Sir Charles MacCarthy, Governor of British Settlements in West Africa, the Committee of

<sup>110</sup> [www.mywesleyanmethodists.org.uk](http://www.mywesleyanmethodists.org.uk), accessed 2021/02/18, 08:52hrs.

<sup>111</sup> Rev. John Morgan, *Reminiscences of the Founding of A Christian Mission The Gambia* (London: Wesleyan Mission House, 1864), 3; William Fox, *A Brief History of The Wesleyan Missions on the Western Coast of Africa* (London: Aylott and Jones, 1850), 266.

The people of Mandinary were predominantly Mandinka and a religious mix of Muslims and traditional religionists. Morgan and Baker anticipated the same type of opposition experienced at Tendaba and at the Bakau-Fajara cliff site. They therefore resolved to embark on their building project with minimum local consultation. An approved elevated site, located about 500 m from the village settlement, was selected. First, they rented accommodation at Mouji's<sup>69</sup> premises within the Mandinary settlement. Next, a lean construction team was recruited comprised of Morgan, Baker, and just three men and their wives.<sup>70</sup> The women were vital in the team in that they assisted in labor, they cooked, they laundered, and attended to other domestic matters. Thirdly, the team brought along imported construction tools and equipment from St. Mary's Island. No sooner had the clearing of the land started than local opposition mounted. At a court session which became necessary at Mandinary, and was presided over by *Mansa* Bojang himself, the “palaver” was brought into the open. The complainants asserted that:

they were born freemen on the land, therefore the land is theirs, that the white men were cutting down trees (acacia) which supplied them with food during the hungry season and have no other motive of coming there than to take their wives and children as slaves.<sup>71</sup>

Morgan refuted their claim and responded that they were not slavers, and that they represented “the King of England and good English people (who) have stopped the slave trade, and thus proved themselves friends of the black men.” Having heard both sides of the conflict, the *Mansa* gave a ruling in favor of the missionaries. His Majesty placated the unwarranted hostility of the residents against the strangers and gave a dire warning that there would be fatal consequences should there be further breach of his authority. This decision was a respite to the missionaries. They proceeded, forthwith, to continue their work felling trees, excavating, constructing, and doing evangelization among the local population. However, this royal ruling came with a price. Morgan and Baker were taxed a saddle, a bridle, and ringing bells for the displacement of the court! When Morgan protested, the *Mansa* reminded Morgan:

“Have you not given me a horse? (Now,) I want the *ta-lang* to tie to it when I ride, (so) that when the horse gallops, it may go *ta-lang, ta-lang*.” “O, I see,” said (Morgan): “it is a bell to fasten to (the) horse's head or tail, that the *Mansa* may make music in his rides!”<sup>72</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Fox, 268.

<sup>70</sup> Morgan, 26.

<sup>71</sup> Morgan, 27.

<sup>72</sup> Morgan, 29-30.

Works progressed, satisfactorily, at the Bethesda Mission Building in Mandinary. It was provisionally complete by June 14, 1821. The missionaries and their assistants vacated their temporary lodgings at Mouji's and moved into their newly constructed building. Morgan described the attractive oblong house of dimensions:

... about forty feet (12 m) by fifteen feet (4.6 m), which was divided into three apartments, - at each end a bedroom with a large chamber in the middle for ordinary purposes. The walls were formed of perpendicular posts sunk deep in the ground; and on these was nailed wattled bamboo cane, plastered with oyster shell lime, the floor was a compound of lime and sand. The roof was thatched with grass; and the whole was wind and water-tight. Hanging, unglazed shutters served for windows, which were as needful for the admission of air as for the entrance of light; these, except while the tornadoes were passing, were kept open night and day.<sup>73</sup>

Thus, a new mission station was "planted" at Mandinary for preaching the gospel, for teaching, and for healing. The cutting down of trees, excavations and heavy construction works had a devastating effect on the team, but especially on Morgan and Baker. The poor quality of the water and frequent attacks of malaria fever did not help the situation. On July 14, 1821, Morgan's sickness worsened and caused his immediate evacuation to St. Mary's Island for emergency medical attention. This was the beginning of a forced sick leave which lasted over two months. Surprisingly, Morgan was denied immediate admission to the only Government hospital at St. Mary's. During the wait, Charles Grant, the "Good Samaritan" Scotsman and building contractor, took care of him and held direct responsibility over him while continuing to make petition with the authorities for the admission of Morgan to the hospital. After almost six weeks at St. Mary's Island (July-August 1821),<sup>74</sup> Morgan sought further recuperation at Goree Island, about 150 km by sea, where he spent the next three weeks.<sup>75</sup>

When Morgan returned to Mandinary in September-October 1821, the Bethesda Mission Building had been completed. A "small Christian community (had been) formed ... (and the) chapel was opened (since) August 1821."<sup>76</sup> Upon his return, Morgan found Baker in a deteriorated state of health which

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<sup>73</sup> Morgan, 31-32.

<sup>74</sup> Fox, 268.

<sup>75</sup> Morgan, 42.

<sup>76</sup> Frederiks, 196.

Morgan "fixed a lot of land for his missionary establishment"<sup>106</sup> near Fort George and prayed in fervent hope that the assigned property will "prove a center from which the Sun of righteousness shall diffuse its ray through the dark shades..."<sup>107</sup> Besides the construction of a house to accommodate the mission base, in a few months, Morgan "initiated a small school for some liberated African children."<sup>108</sup>

During a meeting in April 1824 with the agricultural Quaker Mission at Cape St. Mary, Morgan investigated the use of ploughing machines with the intention of using the same for "cultivation further in the interior"<sup>109</sup> Morgan made procurement and distributed some of these agricultural plant and equipment to Georgetown where relics were available at the mission compound as late as the 1960s. Morgan left The Gambia, abruptly, on March 27, 1825, due to deteriorating health, after four years of arduous missionary travel (1821-1825).

## Conclusion

John Morgan was the first founding Wesleyan Methodist missionary to the Gambia. He was a sound preacher, an efficient teacher, and a pragmatic missionary. He possessed working knowledge of Krio, Wollof, and Mandinka. Morgan has been credited with planting at least four societies and chapels in The Gambia: Bethesda Mission Station – Mandinary (August 1821); Jollof-Town Station - St. Mary's Island (September-October 1821); Soldier-Town Station – St. Mary's Island (before May 1823); and the Fort George Mission Station on MacCarthy Island (Janjangburay) (March-April 1823). Morgan assisted Baker in the founding of the society at Melville-Town Station at the easternmost part of St Mary's Island (March 1823).

Morgan, assisted by his disciples Cupidon and Sallah, were the first apostles of the gospel to the Wollofs on St. Mary's Island. Morgan left legacies of theological dialogue with Muslim leaders, high standards to qualify for church membership, frequent evangelical outreach, thorough teaching and learning, and the construction of chapel-school-manse edifices in all mission stations.

## Gabriel Leonard Allen

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<sup>106</sup> Fox, 278.

<sup>107</sup> Fox, 279.

<sup>108</sup> Frederiks, 201.

<sup>109</sup> Fox, 289.

and respected by all who knew him.”<sup>99</sup> Within the said gifted property, Morgan supervised the erection of the original single-story mission house, with the dimensions of 37 feet by 17 feet (11.3 m x 5.2 m). Its purpose was to serve as a schoolroom and a place to hold Divine Services on the ground floor; and to provide a manse on the first floor.<sup>100</sup>

### MacCarthy Island Station

In its continued quest to suppress the slave trade and slavery in the Gambia River valley, Captain Alexander Grant, the founder and commandant of the British settlement on St. Mary’s Island, embarked on state visits to the riverine kingdoms<sup>101</sup> from the beginning March 1823. One of the dominant objectives of this tour was to search for suitable areas to accommodate liberated African migrants to the colony. Given that the priority objectives of the Wesleyan Methodist mission in the Gambia were to assist government in providing “housing, education, work, and fellowship” for recaptives, Morgan and Charles Grant were invited. Thomas Joiner, “the only (liberated) African merchant in a mercantile community of Europeans and Mulattoes”<sup>102</sup> at St. Mary’s Island hosted the tour party.

The cruising ship “proceeded without molestation as far as Cantalikunda, near the falls of Barrocunda, a distance of from five to six hundred miles (800 to 1000 km) from the Atlantic.”<sup>103</sup> It was on its return trip that the tour party decided upon Leman Island, or Janjanberry (also called “Janjangbureh” or “Land of Refuge”),<sup>104</sup> located about 200 miles (300km) upriver [see Map 3]. Captain Grant negotiated the lease of the island from its owner, the *Mansa* of Kattaba.<sup>105</sup> Fort George was promptly built by a detachment of thirteen Black soldiers of the West India 2<sup>nd</sup> Regiment, on the now renamed MacCarthy Island. With the approved authority of Captain Grant present,

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<sup>99</sup> Source: Contents from a Memorial Plaque erected on the walls of what was then called Wesley Chapel and is now Wesley Cathedral, in memory of Francis Goré Njie (AD 1815-1902).

<sup>100</sup> This mission house, in expanded and rehabilitated form, has remained the administrative headquarter base of the mission.

<sup>101</sup> Names of these kingdoms: Barra, Niani, Wuli, Kantalikunda, Tumana, Europina, Niamina, Jarra, Kwinella, Foni and Kombo.

<sup>102</sup> Mahoney, 38.

<sup>103</sup> Fox, 275.

<sup>104</sup> Fox, 278.

<sup>105</sup> Morgan, 101-102.

necessitated his immediate evacuation to St. Mary’s Island.<sup>77</sup> The GWMMS sent out two missionaries, in succession, to replace Baker, who was removed from the station, completely, “to save his life.” The first was William Bell, a reverend minister and agriculturist, who arrived on January 28, 1822 and was dead by March, 15, 1822.<sup>78</sup> The Reverend George Lane arrived from Freetown on May 11, 1822, “and found Mr. Morgan ‘very unwell’ and some weeks after this he was ‘feeble’.”<sup>79</sup> For the next five months, Lane became a valuable assistant to Morgan as they operated the stations of Bethesda Mission, Melville-Town, and Jollof-Town, together. By the end of October 1822, however, Lane had fallen ill, which necessitated his return to Freetown.<sup>80</sup> Again, besides the indigenous interpreters and local preachers, Cupidon and Sallah, Morgan became the lone European Wesleyan Methodist Missionary in The Gambia.

Notwithstanding the severe challenges confronting the missionaries and assistants, some preaching, teaching and healing took place at Bethesda Mission Station - Mandinary for at least two years (1821-1823). The unavailability of faithful Mandinka translators of the gospel coupled with the unwillingness of students to be taught at the school greatly undermined progress at the Bethesda Mission Station. With the forced absence of the principal missionaries due to sickness, the property was vandalized with repeated robberies.<sup>81</sup> Having expended much labor, sweat and tears at the Bethesda Mission Station with imperceptible fruits of mission, and plagued with illness, Morgan wrote, in resignation, to the GWMMS Committee in London requesting “directions respecting his removal from Mandinary.” When the response was inordinately delayed, Morgan unilaterally abandoned the Bethesda Mission station for St. Mary’s Island, leaving some liberated Africans in charge.

### St. Mary’s Island Mission Station

On the Sunday following his arrival at St. Mary’s in February 1821, Morgan was invited to preach at the Government House to an international and interracial congregation comprising settler merchants, soldiers, and “a great number of re-

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<sup>77</sup> Baker sailed briefly to the Cape Verde Islands for “fresh air,” and then was ordered to leave St. Mary’s altogether for the West Indies, via Sierra Leone. Morgan, 44.

<sup>78</sup> Fox, 270-271.

<sup>79</sup> Fox, 271.

<sup>80</sup> Fox, 272.

<sup>81</sup> Morgan, 46-54.

captured slaves.”<sup>82</sup> From then on, in the absence of the appointed chaplain, Morgan offered services to the troops.<sup>83</sup>

Throughout their stay at the Bethesda Mission Station – Mandinary (May 1821- c. March 1822), there were weekly contacts with the Melville Town station, termed “the little church at St. Mary’s Island (by Oyster Creek).” Since March-April, 1821, worship, prayer-meetings, and teaching took place at this “provisional chapel of branches.”<sup>84</sup> As early as May 12, 1821, Morgan recorded an encounter with a converted soul, whom he referenced as the “first-fruit” of mission.<sup>85</sup>

With the collapse of the Melville-Town Chapel as the result of a tornado and the departure of Baker, Morgan took the radical step of reorganizing mission. He relocated activities of mission to “another part of town” (Jollof Town), where he rented “a place of worship and schoolroom.”<sup>86</sup> Here at Jollof-Town, the twin priority languages of mission for teaching and learning were not Krio and English, but instead Wolof and English. A new formal school system was set up and it had six hours of formal tuition, beginning at 6:30 am, for the children who were “composed of boys from nine to thirteen years of age.”<sup>87</sup> Within six months from intake, “each boy could read a chapter in the New Testament and write a legible hand.”<sup>88</sup> In addition, there were non-formal evening classes for adults. The resource learning materials available were the Bell’s Alphabet Cards and the Lancaster’s sheets, which were pasted on the walls of the schoolroom.<sup>89</sup> The subjects were Reading, Writing, Arithmetic and English Grammar. However, the school excluded the children of liberated Africans.<sup>90</sup> Nonetheless, “some young men who were slaves,” determined to gain access to learning, came to the school in the evening and benefitted from the learning offered by Morgan’s assistants.<sup>91</sup> Within six months, a limited number of tutored slaves and liberated Africans could also read and write.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Fox, 265.

<sup>83</sup> This tradition was to continue with subsequent Wesleyan Methodist missionaries John Harkins, Richard Marshall, and William Moister (1830-1833).

<sup>84</sup> Morgan 11.

<sup>85</sup> Fox, 268.

<sup>86</sup> Morgan, 56.

<sup>87</sup> Morgan, 56.

<sup>88</sup> Morgan, 57.

<sup>89</sup> Morgan, 57.

<sup>90</sup> Mahoney, 81.

<sup>91</sup> Morgan, 57.

<sup>92</sup> Morgan, 57.

The first two years (1821-1822) of Morgan’s direct preaching and teaching at Jollof-Town on St. Mary’s Island bore noticeable fruits in the form of thirty-five registered conversions.<sup>93</sup> Among these, were two indigenous Wolof slaves who soon progressed to becoming outstanding interpreters, local preachers and assistant missionaries. These were John Cupidon,<sup>94</sup> and Pierre Sallah.<sup>95</sup> As disciples of Morgan, each had gone through the Jollof-Town Day School and Sunday School. Morgan demanded high standards before acceptance as members of the Wesleyan Methodist Society: “Neither men nor women were received into the Church, while living in a state of polygamy or cohabiting without Christian marriage. No boy was admitted to the school with *gregrees*.”<sup>96</sup> His insistence on the burning of amulets of scholars led to acts of revenge. His rented house in Jollof-Town was set on fire on October 9, 1822.<sup>97</sup>

After a period during which he was either given housing by Charles Grant or on rented property in Jollof-Town, the GWMMS eventually acquired substantial property within the settlement of Bathurst for the purposes of building a manse-school and a chapel. A Bathurst Family tradition has asserted that it was their ancestor Francis Goré Ndiaye who offered landed property within the triangular Dobson Street-Clarkson Street-Picton Street block to the mission.<sup>98</sup> Francis Goré Ndiaye was a free-Wolof and master mason who came from Goree Island [see Map 4]. (He was) connected with the Wesleyan Methodist Society and “rendered valuable and faithful services in the cause of Christianity for a period of fifty years, (exercising) great influence, both as a class-leader and (local) preacher among the Jollof Tribe ... and was highly esteemed

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<sup>93</sup> Morgan, 58.

<sup>94</sup> “Between 1822 to 1848, (John Cupidon) served the emerging church as translator, local preacher, catechist, teacher, and assistant missionary.” Martha Frederiks on John Cupidon. <https://dacb.org/stories/gambia/cupidon-john/>; “It was Cupidon who, in 1842, had to bury (liberated African merchant) Thomas Joiner (then aged about fifty-four years) in the absence of a minister.” Mahoney, 49.

<sup>95</sup> Pierre Sallah was an indigenous Wolof convert who rose to become an assistant minister in the Methodist Church with seventeen years of service (1831-1848). Martha Frederiks on Pierre Sallah. <https://dacb.org/stories/gambia/sallah-pierre/>.

<sup>96</sup> Morgan, 60.

<sup>97</sup> Frederiks,

<sup>98</sup> Source: Dr. Burang Goree Ndiaye is a great-great grand-son of ancestor Francis Goree-Ndiaye. This claim was received from his parents and supported by several of his siblings. This information has been passed down through the family. Interview with Dr. Burang Goree-Ndiaye, Kanifing, March 2020.