

# PLANTATION LIFE IN THE CARIBBEAN

Part 1: Jamaica, c.1765-1848: The Taylor and Vanneck-Arcedeckne Papers from  
Cambridge University Library and the Institute of Commonwealth Studies,  
University of London



*Adam Matthew Publications*

*“Simon Taylor's letters from Jamaica form the richest correspondence I know of bearing on politics and society - black and white - in the British Atlantic world of the late eighteenth century. His observations on slave life in Jamaica - especially when one considers the limits of his perspective - are often keen. In his time, Taylor frequently meant his correspondence to provoke, and many of his letters still do just that.”*

**Professor Alexander Byrd**  
Department of History, Rice University

This project brings together two sets of excellent archival materials for the study of plantation life and slavery in Jamaica. Both feature a significant body of documents covering the career of Simon Taylor (1740-1813). Born in Jamaica, he was the eldest son of a Kingston merchant. Simon Taylor began working life as an attorney for absentee planters and went on to play a full role in Jamaican politics. He gradually gained control of six sugar plantations (Lyssons, Holland, Llanrhumney, Houghton Court, Albion and Golden Grove) and three cattle ranches (Prospect Pen, Burrowfield Pen and Montrose Pen).

**The Vanneck-Arcedeckne Papers from Cambridge University Library** reproduced here provide the Jamaican Estate Papers relating to Golden Grove Plantation, Batchelors Hall, Spanish Town and Swamps Plantation. These comprise:

- The Correspondence and Papers of West Indian Agents covering the period 1765-1848 (especially Simon Taylor, J Shand, Thomas McCornock and William Winton) relating to the Arcedeckne family estates in Jamaica.
- Correspondence and Accounts of London Agents
- Correspondence from John Renwick concerning the management of shipping
- Letters from Robert Taylor to Chaloner Arcedeckne on the disagreement between John Renwick and Simon Taylor, leading to Renwick's giving up of the management of shipping in 1803.
- Legal Papers on the Jamaican Business.
- Pamphlets with observations on plantation life, negro slaves in Jamaica and property in the West Indies, c1761-1799.

The Simon Taylor Correspondence and Papers in the Vanneck-Arcedeckne collection feature very detailed and often highly picturesque accounts of plantation life, offer useful insights into the political history of Jamaica and the imperial connection with Britain, as well as providing the researcher



with numerous slave lists, management assessments, crop statistics and information on livestock, overseers, storm damage, shipping and trade networks.

The material from Cambridge University Library is combined with the **Taylor Family Papers from the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London** which include the correspondence and letter books of Simon Taylor (1740-1813), as well as documents by his friends and associates and other family members. The material is excellent for the history of slavery - it contains fascinating detail with many records about the slaves on different plantations, the slave ships, the sugar trade and the fight for abolition.

- The letters cover the Maroon and French wars, slave revolts, the treatment of colonists by the British government, births, deaths, marriages, inheritances, debts and family quarrels.
- Many documents provide information on Jamaican politics and society, including Simon Taylor's role on the Jamaican Assembly and as Chief Justice of the Court of Common Pleas and Lieutenant Governor of the militia.
- Shipments of sugar and rum, the condition of the estates, problems of droughts and hurricanes, accommodation for the slaves and business affairs feature throughout the correspondence.
- Scholars can use this material to trace the career of Simon Taylor, from agent and attorney for absentee planters, to sugar planter and the richest proprietor on the island at the time of his death.

There are several different sections within this archive, including:

- Simon Taylor's letter books, July 1779 - May 1812, with lists (at the back of the last volume) of cattle on Golden Grove Estate and stock at Batchelor Hall for 1809-1810.
- Sir John Taylor's letter books
- Letters from Lady Elizabeth Houghton Taylor (wife of Sir John Taylor, daughter of Philip Houghton and Mary Brissett, whose families were old Jamaican settlers)
- Letters from Neil Malcolm (merchant in Jamaica)
- Correspondence with Richard Brissett (Jamaican planter and brother of Lady Taylor's mother), Charles Mitchell and William Mitchell (Jamaican planters who borrowed money from Simon Taylor).
- Letters from Simon Taylor to Anna Susanna Taylor (daughter of Sir John Taylor), 1787-1810, John Cooper's reports in 1835 to her about her estates, especially Holland, Lyssons, Burrowfield Pen
- A significant body of correspondence between Simon Taylor and Robert Taylor, December 1791 - June 1813, dealing with the sugar plantations and Simon Taylor's main agents in London.
- Correspondence between Simon Taylor and John Taylor his agent in Kingston, Jamaica), June 1781 - February 1810, including material on shipping, Bristol and Liverpool merchants, the demand for sugar and rum, the state of the plantations, the Maroon War, family news, the threat of war, business transactions and the sale of slaves.
- Letters from George Hibbert (leading West Indian merchant in London, the first Chairman of the West India Dock Company, agent for Jamaica and Chairman of the West India Merchants until 1831) to Simon Taylor, 1791-1809.

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