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The Darien Scheme: Debunking the Myth of Scotland's Ill-Fated American Colonization Attempt

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THE DARIEN SCHEME
DEBUNKING THE MYTH OF SCOTLAND'S ILL-FATED AMERICAN COLONIZATION ATTEMPT

A thesis submitted in partial
fulfillment of the requirements of the
degree of Master of Arts

By

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I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY
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ABSTRACT

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The Darien Scheme: Debunking the Myth of Scotland's Ill-Fated American Colonization Attempt.

In this analysis, a critical eye will counter many previously held claims of Scottish ineptitude and ill-preparation for the nationally important, Darien Scheme, colonial venture. In the hopes of establishing a trading post on the Isthmus of Panama, and eventually a colony, the Scots set out to change their economic and political fortunes. Through a series of events and sabotage, the mission failed miserably. Much of the historiography blames this on the Scots' inability to plan and execute a mission of this scale. To counter previous scholarship, the subsequent investigation counters those claims and argues that the Scots used foresight and had a large potential for success, if it were not for the bad luck and English interference.

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Part I: Historiography of the Darien Scheme

Situated on the northern outskirts of one of history's most successful empires sits the rugged nation of Scotland. It has evolved from a once loose collection of clans to an official nation, although one forever seen as inferior to its more powerful neighbor, England. Scotland is typically generalized as a nation of whisky and kilts, rather than a global influence. Expansionist England consistently overshadowed and suppressed the Scottish while domestic struggles within led to a perpetual conflict when attempting to reach even terms with the other European countries. Often looming over Scotland is the perception, or misconception, of ineptitude and backwardness.

This thesis will focus on one of the most epic of Scottish failures, that of the ill-fated Darien Scheme of the late seventeenth century.¹ In this storied attempt to broaden trade, Scottish nationalists, merchants, politicians, and the vast majority of ordinary citizens set their aspirations on a well-known, but little understood, area on the Isthmus of Panama in Central America. Their ambition was to establish a colony with trading potential throughout the Caribbean and Americas that would act as an entrepôt for further trade and exploration in Asia. The dream was large but the failure even larger when Darien was abandoned in 1700. The question of success is not debated. Most scholars condemn the Scots involved in the scheme for their unpreparedness in taking on such a

¹ The term Darien Scheme stems from the location of the proposed colony near the Darien jungle of Panama. Throughout historiography, and in this piece, the scheme's name may also be shortened to the commonly used, "Darien."

daunting project. However, I intend to argue that, in fact, the Scots were well-prepared and diligent in their efforts to execute such a plan. Sources from those involved in the scheme and even bystanders provide a substantial amount of support to contradict the claims made by so many historians. Without question, mistakes were made and numerous errors are present when looking through the annals of history; this is accepted. The area in question lies solely in the unjust accusations of Scottish incompetency. Those involved did not botch the task that their entire nation relied so much upon.

“We have had many misfortunes both at home and abroad, and there are many causes as signed for the miscarriage of our Colony.”²

² *The Darien Papers: Being a Selection of Original Letters and Official Documents Relating to the Establishment of a Colony at Darien by the Company of Scotland Sailing to Africa and the Indies, 1695-1700*: Unknown Author, “To Major John Lindsay,” Feb. 10, 1700, 273.

Scotland's Historical and Cultural Background

The bitter rivalry between Scotland and England stemmed from an early polarizing cultural and religious conflict. Since the twelfth century, Scotland had formed its own legal system, local and national government, education system, national church, and even its own unique way of speaking English.³ Scots' way of life did not assimilate into the more powerful English culture and was a source of contention for many years.

Scottish tensions with the English remained heightened for centuries. The fear of English domination was ever-present and displayed itself consistently in anti-English rhetoric and borderline paranoia.⁴ Edward I's attempted conquest in the mid-thirteenth century provoked resistance and more than 300 years of war. Scottish nationalism remained strong; one soldier declared amidst the Edwardian campaign, "As long as a hundred of us remain alive we will never be subjected to the English King; because it is not for riches, or honors or glory that we fight, but for liberty alone, which no worthy man loses save with his life."⁵ The nature of one powerful nation seeking to control an inferior one meant that England sought to strengthen its position over the Scots by implementing restrictive laws when possible and applying economic and political pressure. The English would find ways to limit trade opportunities and political maneuverings that would have benefitted the Scots. As a means to control, the English suppressed the freedoms of the Scottish people in various ways to ensure their own

³ H. J. Hanham, *Scottish Nationalism* (Harvard University Press, 1969), 15.

⁴ Hanham, 64.

⁵ Gordon Donaldson, *The Scots Overseas* (London: Hale, 1966), 17.

supremacy. The climate surrounding the Darien Scheme was no different. The sources from the time give proof of English resistance through their numerous attempts to sabotage one of Scotland's upstart trading operations.

Resisting assimilation, the Scottish unwillingness to kowtow to English domination produced numerous political struggles for centuries. In 1603, the Scottish, English, and Irish parliaments united under one crown. The Union of Crowns, as it came to be known, placed James VI on the throne of all three nations. This effectively brought England, Scotland, and Ireland under one authority allowing one diplomacy directive to transcend through the nations. In spite of this new alliance, Scotland still retained its sovereignty and the parliament made decisions for its own constituents. One hundred and four years later in 1707, some say as a result of the failed Darien Scheme, Scotland and England entered into a stronger union which further connected the governments and the authority over a Great Britain.

After years of oppression and increasing English political control, Scotland sought ways to become autonomous. After the Union of the Crowns, Scotland was able to maintain many of its previously held systems, but the sentiment of feeling underrepresented became more pronounced among the Scottish people. By the time of the "Glorious Revolution" in 1688, Scotland found itself in a better religious and political state, and was then able to focus its attention on trade. With this newly invigorated enthusiasm, a spirit of adventure began to rise among the Scottish people.⁶

⁶ James Samuel Barbour, *A History of William Paterson and the Darien Company* (Edinburgh: W. Blackwood and Sons, 1907), 5.

Scottish historians like Gordon Donaldson characterize Scotland as having a reputation as a nation of wanderers. Through necessity, the people looked elsewhere to capitalize on better educational options or advanced professional opportunities. It was not uncommon for many Scots to leave their homeland on quests for careers, personal development, or other opportunities.⁷ This restlessness is rooted in Scottish culture and provides one explanation for why they were not content to stay within the confines of their borders. Although the average Scottish citizen was quite poor, some had the financial means to seek advancement by traveling to the continent in search of opportunity.

By the mid-seventeenth century, the nation's elites openly observed what the more advanced European nations could offer by journeying across the continent to visit and learn from the other countries.⁸ They aspired to elevate Scotland to one of the great nations of Europe. Although it had a number of national institutions, Scotland still was not taken seriously by other members of the European community. Historian Christopher Whatley states, "this was an age of national state building, and collectively the Scots were failing to cut it."⁹

Some concessions should be allowed for the Scots. They were not simply backwards people made up of lawless clans across an unforgiving landscape. Other circumstances out of their control were the root of their struggle. Steady economic decline ensued as a result of continued civil and religious wars orchestrated by the English, English occupation over their land, and the Anglo wars with their French trading

⁷ Donaldson, 23.

⁸ Christopher Whatley, *The Scots and the Union: Then and Now*, 2nd edition (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 5.

⁹ Whatley, 5.

partners.¹⁰ Coupled with the effects of war-related destruction, a series of droughts stunted food production. As a nation almost entirely reliant on agriculture, when the crops failed, widespread famine caused devastation. It is estimated that nearly “a quarter of Scotland’s population of about 1.25 million” people died as a result of the bad harvest toward the end of the seventeenth century.¹¹

Scotland found itself in a position that would require drastic measures to rectify. The poor harvest coupled with trade restrictions and rising tariffs left the Scots with few options. The only hope for increasing domestic production and finding a source of income lay with increasing their foreign markets.¹² Scottish-born financier William Paterson had a vision of a trading post and colonial settlement on the Isthmus of Panama and he found traction in his native country. Paterson spent a number of years in the Caribbean and his business experience solidified the foundation for such a proposal. Within a short span of time he was able to turn his vision into reality.

The Darien Scheme was Scotland’s most famous colonial project. The founders of the venture intended to establish a trading company that would rival England’s East India Company by forming their own version, which would trade with Africa and the West Indies. Bigger dreams of an overland or manmade water route to Asia inflamed Scottish excitement and the small nation set its sights on active participation in global trade. To help facilitate such a venture, Scotland would set up a settlement in uninhabited land on the coast of Panama. There, the Scots hoped to create a bustling trading port and become a presence in a region that was already saturated with a number

¹⁰ P. H. Scott, *The Union of 1707: Why and How* (Berlin: Birlinn, 2013), 15.

¹¹ Plantagenet Somerset and Fiona Somerset Fry, *The History of Scotland* (London; Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), 183.

¹² T. C. Smout, *Scottish Trade on the Eve of Union, 1660-1707* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1963), 23.

of European colonies. Scotland saw this opportunity as a necessary means to improve their economy from the oppressive restrictions placed on them by England. A byproduct of this trade success would mean a strong reputation among the global powers, something the Scots so badly craved. To help facilitate this vision, The Company Trading to Africa and the Indies was formed.

Darien was not the only expansion effort made by the Scots. The earliest ventures were pursued within the borders of Scotland on the outlying islands of the Orkneys and Shetlands.¹³ Once that proved successful, they then set their eyes on America with a series of other attempts in Nova Scotia, East New Jersey, and South Carolina. None of these holdings would be touted as a success story and for various reasons did not remain operational. The ability to settle and establish colonies, however short, does prove that the Scots possessed some maritime experience, and an understanding of how to participate in European expansion.

Despite the unsuccessful previous attempts, Scotland recognized the wealth that could be gained from establishing territories and trade across the Atlantic. Spain controlled the largest landholdings in the Americas and was immensely wealthy. England was also incredibly powerful due in large part to the colonial territories and trading ports it commanded. Scotland wanted to reap the same rewards by setting up its own trade routes similar to those of the English.

Sheer ambition was not enough to propel Scotland forward as a leading trade authority. Road blocks placed by the English held them back from achieving success. Global wars in the seventeenth century added to the difficulty of Scottish advancement.

¹³ Donaldson, 28.

England's continual conflicts with France and Holland impacted Scotland even though they were not directly involved.¹⁴ France was Scotland's biggest trading partner, but also England's fiercest rival. As a result of the Union of the Crowns, England revoked all trading privileges between the Scottish and the French, effectively cutting the largest component of Scottish income.

Followed closely behind the prohibited trade with France came the Navigation Act of 1660. This single act of legislation now barred Scotland from any participation in trade with the American colonies.¹⁵ It is true some Scots openly violated this law, but locating another, legal trading outlet would have been preferable to many. The only feasible location left for trade was with Holland, but due to the conflicts with England, the possibilities for trade were severely diminished. It became imperative for the Scots to seek commercial opportunities outside of their current trading sphere if they were to become a self-sufficient economic power.¹⁶

Leading Scottish historian of the Darien Scheme, George Pratt Insh, noted the merchants' desire to have a colony of their own and to establish markets for ease in buying and selling goods. The independent attitudes began to escalate in the final decades of the seventeenth century. Scottish merchants sought an avenue for their trade and a positive outlet in which to invest their money. Insh describes the "eagerness with which Scottish investors entrusted their carefully garnered savings to the Directors of the Company of Scotland Trading to Africa and the Indies," the name of the company that

¹⁴ The seventeenth century saw numerous conflicts with William III at the head. From 1628-1629 England was at war with France in the Anglo-French Wars and again 1672-1678 in the Nine Years War. Placed between these conflicts (and others with the Portuguese), the English also conducted two wars with the Dutch, known as the First and Second Anglo-Dutch wars from 1652-1654 and 1655-1657 respectively.

¹⁵ Scott, 15.

¹⁶ Fry, 184.

would lead the colonization on the Isthmus.¹⁷ This interest rose more out of the concern for the development of Scottish trade than for the formation of a settlement, although that would have certainly been a positive side effect.¹⁸ The decision among the population was clear; the conscious choice to put into action a national movement for economic advancement was of the utmost priority.¹⁹ If they could secure license to trade in Africa and the Americas, the Scots would find themselves in a far better economic position. Establishing a colony in the region would support those energies and also validate Scotland as a colonial power.

As news began to circulate throughout Scotland about the formation of a colonial enterprise, the excitement continued to build. Specific plans for the final destination were kept secret, but that did not derail Scottish excitement. Many were also already aware of the Darien region through travelers' tales and published books. "For many Scots, the word 'Darien' carried connotations of exoticism, adventure, buccaneers, and wealth."²⁰ The ubiquitous sentiment propelled the nation into a nearly universally-backed effort to expand trade and Scottish reach to the other side of the Atlantic.

¹⁷ George Pratt Insh, "Scottish Colonial Schemes," 1922, 4.

¹⁸ Donaldson, 42.

¹⁹ Christopher Harvie, *Scotland and Nationalism: Scottish Society and Politics 1707 to the Present*, (New York: Routledge, 2004), 15.

²⁰ Douglas Watt, *The Price of Scotland: Darien, Union and The Wealth of Nations* (Edinburgh: Luath, 2007), 15.

The Formation and Preparation of the Company of Scotland

In June 1693, after years of economic devastation and an increasing national desire for prosperity, the Parliament of Scotland passed legislation to form a joint-stock company. The members would be allowed to colonize in addition to implementing commercial operations. Limitations were placed so as to not adversely affect the English, by conceding to not trade with any nation at war against the British crown.²¹ Just shy of one year later, on June 14, 1693, the Scottish Estates passed an “Act for Encouraging of Forraign Trade” to companies that would participate in this commerce. The contributors would be given letters of patent with outlined rights and vague privileges under the larger corporation.²²

The Scottish went through every legal means to establish their colonial efforts. For years they met with the appropriate members in government to move forward in obtaining rights to trade and colonize in the West Indies. The “Act of Encouraging of Forraign Trade” later became known as “The Act in Favor of the Scots Company Trading to Africa and the Indies.” In the Act declaring the formation of the Company, it stated that, “For 31 years the Company was to have exclusive privilege of trade between Scotland and America: of the trade with Asia and Africa it was to enjoy a perpetual

²¹ Francis Russell Hart, *The Disaster of Darien: the Story of the Scots Settlement and the Causes of Its Failure, 1699-1701* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1929), 21.

²² George Pratt Insh and Historical Association (Great Britain), “The Darien Scheme,” 1947, 8.

monopoly to arm and equip its ships as it saw fit.”²³ Granting such privileges to the Company for trade provided an extraordinary amount of freedom that had not been experienced previously. It should be noted, however, that King William III did not directly oversee this session. He was away on one of his many continental campaigns and came back to England, “a little surprised at the sweeping nature of the concession which his Scottish Parliament had granted to the Company.”²⁴ His lack of personal approval would eventually come back to derail the Company’s efforts once their energies began.

The Directors of the Company of Scotland worked to clear all legal channels by addressing the Parliament and King whenever necessary.²⁵ When they began efforts to procure subscriptions and financial backing from financiers in Holland, the Company addressed the King directly by entreating:

We therefore, do make our most Humble Earnest Request to your Majesty, that you would be Graciously please to grant us such Declaration, as in your Royal Wisdom you shall think fit to render the Senate and Inhabitants of the said City of Hamburg, and all others that are or may be concern'd, secure from the Threatenings and other Suggestions contain'd in the said Memorial, as well as to render us secure under your Majesty's Protection, in the full prosecution of our Trade, and free enjoyment of our lawful Rights, Priviledges and Immunities, contain'd in your Majesty's Acts of Parliament and Letters Patent above-mentioned.²⁶

²³ Scotland, “Act for a Company Tradeing to Affrica and the Indies. June 26, 1695,” 1695.

²⁴ Insh, “The Darien Scheme,” 6.

²⁵ Rather than using the full terminology of the Company of Scotland Trading to Africa and the Indies, many Scots referred to it as “the Company” or “our Company.” I will continue in the effort by also delineating it with capitalization.

²⁶ Company of Scotland Trading to Africa and the Indies, “A Full and Exact Collection of All the Considerable Addresses, Memorials, Petitions, Answers, Proclamations, Declarations, Letters, and Other Public Papers Relating to the Company of Scotland Trading to Africa and the Indies since the Passing of the Act of Parliament, by Which the Said Company Was Established in June 1695, till November 1700 : Together with a Short Preface (including the Act Itself) as Also a Table of Whole Contents, “To the Kings

The language of the Company shows respect and requests for permission. Formal declarations like this one demonstrate the Company's desire to seek approval for their endeavor. It also validates that the King was more than aware of their intentions and could have stopped them from moving forward.

In each step of their process, the Directors of the Company delineated their intentions and sought approval from the government. Undoubtedly this was to cover themselves legally, but their motivations to establish a colony and to trade were transparent. By creating a colony, Scotland would elevate itself among other nations in the world as a colonial power. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, the Company was steadfast in its aims to develop trade across the globe. This commerce would allow for markets to sell the merchants' woolen products, and would also usher in a greater variety of import options. The creation of an entrepôt in the Caribbean might then enable Scotland to gain the economic power to be able to rival other European nations like Holland, who at this point had the best market potential for trade to the East with their famed Dutch East India Company.²⁷

Long before the completed construction of the Panama Canal in 1914, it was the Scots who envisioned a sea route to connect the East and the West. The location for their colony was specifically selected to be "established for the purpose of trafficking in the Indian and China Seas."²⁸ At a time when many Scots searched for a strong investment option, the creation of the Company of Scotland provided a safe place to invest while tempting backers with the opportunity for vast wealth if all was to go as planned.

Most Excellent Majesty, The Humble Address of the Council-General of the Company of Scotland Trading to Africa and the Indies," 1700, 9-10.

²⁷ Barbour, 40.

²⁸ George Pratt Insh, "The Company of Scotland Trading to Africa and the Indies," 1932, 27-28.

The lure of trade and fortune, combined with the promise of fifty acres of arable land in the colony, created overwhelming excitement among those in England and Scotland who joined the Company's endeavor.²⁹ The rising Scottish enthusiasm caused nervousness throughout the English government, for fear that new competition might diminish English trade opportunities. Darien scholar Francis Russel Hart describes the turn of events for the Company when obtaining financial subscriptions: "The London subscription books opened on the 13th Nov 1695, and closed on the 22nd. The whole English allotment of £300,000 was subscribed and £75,000 paid down by subscribers."³⁰ English investors were plentiful, but members of Parliament intervened to discourage them, and many suddenly withdrew. The Company was now forced to raise subscriptions all over again, first attempting to call on Holland and ultimately, almost entirely through Scottish investors.

The abandonment of subscriptions in England left the Company without financial support. Refusing to be thwarted, the Scots turned to their allies and trading partners, the Dutch. Subscription books opened once more in Holland, although the investors later faced the same intimidation tactics as in England. Once more, the subscribers either did not pledge their financial support out of fear, or withdrew it after much pressure. It became apparent to the Scots that this would have to be an entirely national effort.

In the 1690s, Scotland was still reeling from famine and recovering from years of conflict. The majority of the population had very limited means and in most cases, just enough to care for their families and their property. Despite the lack of affluence,

²⁹ Frank Cundall, *The Darien Venture, Hispanic Notes & Monographs; Essays, Studies, and Brief Biographies*, [Hispanic American Series] (New York: Printed by order of the trustees, 1926), 17.

³⁰ Hart, 32.

subscriptions were levied quickly and en masse. “To make up for the withdrawal of English capital the Scottish capital was now increased by £100,000. This [total] capital of £400,000, equivalent to half the total capital at the time available in Scotland is a striking indication of the scale on which the Directors had resolved to work.”³¹ To gain further perspective, “£17,000 equaled the entire amount the Scots had invested in manufacturing over the fourteen years from 1681-1695, a period during which the Scottish government and its ruling class actively promoted indigenous industries.”³² An immense amount of faith and optimism was placed in the Company and it appeared that the overwhelming majority of the nation backed them in spirit as well as in financial contributions regardless of limitations.

Within one week of the subscription books closing in Scotland, the Directors had a proposal for a quick departure of ships to the East Indies.³³ Using the capital market to their advantage, the Scots went to Holland to obtain many of the provisions and ships necessary where they could be acquired at a much cheaper rate.³⁴ Once some of the Darien vessels were purchased in Holland, Scotland’s foreign-tonnage was nearly doubled.³⁵ The Scots also began to see an uptick in fortunes due to the economic boom in the previous years under William III, when thrifty Scots were able to save a substantial amount of capital for adventures such as this one.³⁶ In a relatively short amount of time,

³¹ Insh, “The Darien Scheme,” 12.

³² Ignacio Gallup-Diaz, *The Door of the Seas and Key to the Universe: Indian Politics and Imperial Rivalry in the Darién, 1640-1750* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 84.

³³ Insh, “The Darien Scheme,” 10.

³⁴ Barbour, 43.

³⁵ Eric J. Graham, “In Defence of the Scottish Maritime Interest, 1681-1713,” *The Scottish Historical Review* 71, no. 191/192 (1992): 88–109,

<http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.libraries.wright.edu/stable/25530535>, 89.

³⁶ Gerstle Mack, *The Land Divided; A History of the Panama Canal and Other Isthmian Canal Projects* (New York: Octagon Books, 1974), 84.

only three years from inception to disembarkation, the Darien Scheme was established and executed.

Settling the Darien Colony

On July 14, 1698, the first of three ships sailed from Leith Road on the River Forth in Edinburgh for a secret destination. In an effort to ensure secrecy and to prevent other nations from sabotaging their efforts, neither the captains of the ships nor the passengers knew where their ship would be taking them. A series of sealed envelopes were to be opened at various points along the trip. After sailing northward among the Orkneys, the ships turned south to the island of Madeira where they purchased additional provisions. Once safely anchored in Madeira, the captains opened their respective envelopes to receive directions to sail westward to Crab Island (off the coast of modern day St. Thomas) where they received the second envelope with further instructions. After docking off the coast of Crab Island, the ships obtained their final secret sailing orders to make way to their final stop on the Isthmus of Panama, more specifically at Darien. The location of the settlement serves as the nickname and the most common way of referencing this enterprise, “The Darien Scheme.”

After a few days anchored in the bay in Panama, the settlers took possession of the land and shortly thereafter met with the chiefs of the indigenous tribes.³⁷ The colonists first met with the Tulé people and later other tribes, like the Darien. The Scots promised that their intentions were pure and that they were not pirates seeking to seize vast lands and plunder. The “Tule leader pledged himself amenable to sponsoring the

³⁷ Barbour, 58.

settlement, and asked to be taken under the Scottish protection and government.”³⁸ The relationship between the two parties, as noted by the primary accounts of the time, was peaceful. The Indians went aboard the Scottish ships and both sides discussed the settlement and future trade relations. Positive interactions between the natives and the settlers provided a sense of safety that allowed for the Scots to begin construction on their new colony, which they would name New Caledonia.

For months, the colony flourished. They had not heard from their counterparts in Scotland for some time, but that delay was rather typical of the slow communication of the day. Relations with the Indians remained positive and the abundance of flora and fauna meant the settlers did not go without. The threat of Spanish attack was minimal and they monitored activities from a distance. The Spanish settled in various places along the coast stretching from Mexico to the tip of South America. They controlled prosperous areas like Cartagena, Porto Bello, and many others. Although they had a large presence, the Spanish were traditionally defeated in the region by small parties because they were so spread out. Due to this, the Scots felt confident they would be able to defeat the Spanish should that situation occur.

Letters of the colony’s success reached Scotland and additional ships of provisions and settlers were stocked and set to sail. But just as quickly as the colony coalesced and proved successful, it encountered a series of issues threatening its survival. The slow speed of communication in the seventeenth century exacerbated issues for the Darien colonists. In that critical time between sending positive stories of the settlement’s success and when the resupply ships arrived, disaster struck, changing the fortunes of the

³⁸ Gallup-Diaz, 110.

colony. Intense rains, bad harvests, disease, and the casualty rate began to increase. None of this was known by those in Scotland as the second wave of ships left with provisions and to add more residents to the community. Unbeknownst to the Darien-bound ships, by the time they arrived in New Caledonia, the colony would be abandoned and there would be virtually no signs of a Scottish settlement.

The many struggles on the ground were intensified by the efforts of England to stop any Scottish trade within the Caribbean. King William III did not provide any assistance because he felt the scheme had been initiated without his approval. As noted earlier, while the King was away overseeing his continental wars, the Scottish Parliament made the decision to approve the formation of the Company of Scotland. Scholar Hiram Bingham noted:

It was undoubtedly true that the King had known nothing of the Act until sometime after it had been touched with the sceptre by his Commissioner and had become law. As only two weeks had elapsed between the time when the Act was first presented to the Scots Parliament and the date when it became law, there was small chance that the King, then on the Continent conducting the war against the French, could have heard of it. He had particularly instructed his Commissioner, when directing him to promote trade, to forward any act that might be passed for this purpose, before giving it the royal assent.³⁹

Perhaps the English King would not have been so upset by the Scottish venture if he did not feel threatened by its economic and political potential. Through public requests and decrees, the Company sought royal approval. The public excitement and intentions of the Company were well known throughout England and Scotland. One could suspect that the King either did not believe the Scots were capable of organizing such an effort or that

³⁹ “The Early History of the Scots Darien Company: Investigation by the English Parliament,” *JSTOR*, accessed February 5, 2016, http://www.jstor.org/stable/25517765?&seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents, 442.

they would be able to position themselves globally as future trade competition. It was not until the funds were successfully raised and the colony's location known, that the king began to enact a series of acts to quell Scottish success.

William's resistance to the Scottish trading scheme reverberated in his speeches as well as through acts of Parliament. The King felt betrayed by the Parliament and he was unhappy that permission was given without his approval, although no previous actions to suppress the Company's advancement were made throughout the course of actions leading up to the ships' departures. Even though the Scots were part of his empire, William was threatened by their prospective profits, endangering his position within the Caribbean. He also feared disrupting any alliances that he held with Spain. The King recognized the perceived threat the Spanish might feel with the Scottish settling in the middle of their empire. To not upset the balance of power, William openly denounced the acts of the Scottish settlers. In an excerpt from a meeting of the House of Lords, the Council of Trade and Plantations declared "unequivocally that the Scottish settlement constituted a breach of the treaties between Spain and England, and threatened open rupture with Spain: in the matter of trade they declared that the successful settlement of a Scottish colony in Darien would be 'highly mischievous' to the plantations, and chiefly to the Island of Jamaica 'by alluring away the inhabitants with the hopes of mines and treasure, and diverting the present course of trade."⁴⁰ Not only did the King disapprove of the scheme, he actively set out to halt it from succeeding.

Once the Scots became aware of such proclamations from the Parliament, they attributed the collapse of the colony to the English, meaning that William III and his

⁴⁰ Insh, "The Company of Scotland Trading to Africa and the Indies," 215-216.

ministers were seen as culpable through Scottish eyes. The feeling of betrayal awoke mass discontent against the English for the suppression of Scotland's political and economic autonomy.⁴¹ Those favoring the English will point to Company mismanagement and ill-prepared plans. Scottish supporters firmly believe some bad luck, but more importantly, the English betrayal cost them the vision of a colony in the West that would allow them to fulfill their national destiny of economic greatness.

⁴¹ Smout, *Scottish Trade*, 253.

Historiography on the Scottish Failure

It is important to provide the complex backstory of the Scots, their national identity, their relationship with the English, and their standing in the world to fully understand the series of events that unfolded. Without question, a series of errors aided in the demise of New Caledonia. The phrase the “disaster of Darien” is used repeatedly in scholarship, becoming the standard and accepted view of the scheme. Historians appear all too eager to paint this endeavor with a broad brush, assigning blame squarely on the Scottish planners and weighing that more heavily than other parties’ contribution to the downfall. The previously outlined events are widely accepted without contention. What will be debated, however, are the following, most commonly ascribed failures of the Scots in their attempt at colonial expansion.

Historians cite a plethora of reasons for the disaster at Darien. Lack of provisions is often noted as the primary cause for the Company’s failure. Original inspections before the ships’ departures proved the provisions were adequate, but severe delays vastly changed the adequacy of the items on board. Records indicate that the ships had been purchased and outfitted with provisions before the fall of 1697. The decision was made to postpone the departure until the following year and for months a committee continued to purchase provisions and to inspect the storehouse.⁴² After many months of setbacks and delays, the ships finally sailed out of Edinburgh on July 14. An inspection

⁴² Hart, 48.

of the ships once in transit displayed a serious shortage of the necessary items argues George Insh.⁴³ Criticism is also directed at the items included in the shipping lists such as wigs, pipes, and barrels of wine, indicating that those in charge of provisioning were ill-equipped to make such decisions.

A particularly negative portrayal of the Company comes with the story of the Smyth Scandal. William Paterson, the man credited with the creation of the Company, commissioned £17,000 of the Company's money to build ships and purchase provisions in Holland. Over half of that money was embezzled by Paterson's friend and fellow Company director, James Smyth.⁴⁴ The funds illegally taken by Smyth were a substantial amount of money for the time, an equivalent to 10 percent of the total capital raised.⁴⁵ Paterson's trust in his colleague and friend is commonly deemed a serious example of mismanagement and how Scots, generally, were not suited for such an undertaking. The argument seems unfair to assume that one business-savvy man is absolutely foolish for delegating portions of the preparation to a trusted friend and a successful businessman. Hindsight is always a helpful critic, but at the time, Smyth had a strong reputation and the trust of a man who was revered for his decision-making. The Smyth Scandal was certainly a low moment in the Company's preparations, but one that should not be used to discredit the management skills of its Directors.

Next, historians weigh in on the utter disorganization of the colony once it was established. Much of the scholarship pays minimal attention to the early months of the settlement that were incredibly successful and positive for the colonists. Instead, a very

⁴³ Insh, "The Company of Scotland Trading to Africa and the Indies," 120-121.

⁴⁴ Insh, "The Darien Scheme," 17.

⁴⁵ Watt, 115.

different image of drunken Scottish settlers who continually disagreed takes precedent. It is true that many imbibed in the wines they brought with them as well as some of the local liquors, but this is not much different than in London or Virginia.

Questions are raised about the perceived disorganization of the committee in New Caledonia. The settlers decided to have a rotating system whereby one of the seven committee members would be leader for a month and then authority would move to the next individual. The changing leadership is criticized as demonstrating instability and lack of management skills. Additional accusations of faltering morale and the fear of imminent Spanish attack are used as evidence of the inability of the Scots to adapt to their surroundings.

Further arguments are made that the Scots were unable to appreciate the magnitude of their plan and how that could potentially unsettle the greater powers around them. An attempt to settle an area in the middle of the Spanish empire was always going to threaten the Spanish claim to the region. Whether Scotland's actions were justifiable or not, Spain would simply not allow another nation, no matter how small or unassuming, to plant itself directly in between its land holdings. Scholar Francis Hart notes, "its faults were not those made by the ordinary [who were] promoted; they were rather his [William Paterson's] failure properly to weigh the strength of the opposition his projects would evoke. He treated too casually the claims of Spain to Darien and his geographical concepts of the Pacific were distorted."⁴⁶ Along with the Scots misinterpreting their own importance, another scholar of Scottish history, T.C. Smout, argues that "foreign trade was intensely important to the Scots, but Scottish trade was of very little significance to

⁴⁶ Hart, 45.

the foreigner.”⁴⁷ The Scots may have been enthusiastic about their potential but they underestimated their relevance on the global scene, and the rest of the European powers paid very little attention to them.

Surely the Scots were not the first to think of a passage through Panama to connect the Eastern trading lines with the West. Even if the Scots successfully settled the area, were they equipped enough to build the infrastructure for such an undertaking? -- Probably not. It would not be fair to point the finger solely at the project’s mastermind, William Paterson, for this miscalculation however. Although his vision of a trade route through Panama drove the Darien Scheme, he obtained his information from those who had been on site and made recommendations to the Company. Perhaps Paterson should have visited Darien himself before promoting the mission, but one is not capable of predicting the unknown and unforeseen.⁴⁸ The inability to cross the Darien jungle was a setback, but one that cannot rest solely on Paterson. Scholars point to this example as evidentiary proof of the short-sided nature and immaturity the Scots (and Paterson) possessed when dreaming on such a large scale. Taking the advice of explorers who knew the area well and also using native knowledge of the area, the Company believed these difficulties could be overcome with some ingenuity.

George Insh and Gordon Donaldson both point to the instability of Scotland itself as the main cause of failure. Insh claims, “It is a fundamental axiom of colonial history that no state can engage effectively in colonizing activities until it has developed

⁴⁷ Smout, *Scottish Trade*, 29.

⁴⁸ Paterson is not the first colonial booster that had not previously visited the area in which he promoted. Other famous examples include Richard Hakluyt who championed the settlement of North America without having gone himself.

harmony and security within its own borders.”⁴⁹ To corroborate that stance, Donaldson argues, “The whole episode was a lesson in the inability of Scotland to take effective action overseas in a constitutional situation where she lacked the political independence and the power to carry out the decisions of her parliament.”⁵⁰ There is certainly some weight to these arguments, but as will be stated, the settlement of Darien was not a failure because of Scottish ineptitude or instability, but mainly through English intervention and a series of unfortunate events that have no tie to the stability of the Scottish political system. One could argue that without a few of the unforeseen setbacks and the English supporting rather than sabotaging the attempt, the Scots had a very real chance at creating a successful colony.

The active involvement of the English in undermining the Scottish enterprise is noted by every scholar on the subject. There is no avoiding the fact that England openly condemned the Company once its locations and intentions were known. What proves interesting is that despite the Scots going through all the legal channels, and their proposals being passed by the Parliament, many historians offer justifications on behalf of the English. Many provide concessions for the King’s behavior and why it was acceptable for him to act the way he did, rather than taking the stance that the Scottish were legally, politically, and economically granted permission to embark on such a task. Claims such as William being away and that the parliament acted without his approval, the Scots were disrupting the balance of power and trade in the Caribbean, and that the Spanish alliance was more important than a colony that was surely going to implode are found much more readily than any that come to the defense of the Scots. Each of those

⁴⁹ Insh, “Scottish Colonial Schemes,” 22.

⁵⁰ Donaldson, 43.

points is certainly true in the grand scheme of global relations, but the right of the Scottish people to establish a colony like other European powers and their desire to get involved in the trade system is not held to the same level of importance as that of the superpower, England. The Scottish were not as inept as it may appear in initial reports and, in fact, they did a great deal of planning and may have achieved success, had sabotage, betrayal, and a little bad luck not gotten in their way.

Part II: Refuting the Historiography

The “disaster of Darien” is an overused term that has become an unofficial title of the failed colonial expedition. The words seem to be linked and where “Darien” goes, so too does the word “disaster.” Such labeling fits nicely into the perceived pre-Union decline of Scotland which constantly reinforces Scottish inadequacy and weakness during these years before Union in 1707.⁵¹

It may be more convenient to stick to the narrative of English supremacy and Scottish inferiority, but small errors or circumstances out of one’s control should not be used to inflate evidence as a way to circle back to the expedient storyline. Leading Scottish nationalist Andrew Fletcher stated, “Success must necessarily depend on a great many unforeseen accidents,” and the Scots did anticipate some potential challenges.⁵² What they could not predict was that sabotage, betrayal, and extenuating circumstances would combine with poor reactionary decisions, eventually culminating in the perfect storm, leading to an unsuccessful outcome in this most important national mission. The Scots recognized the shortcomings, but also pointed to the unforeseen actions taken against them in their quest for advancement. “All this zeal for Caledonia had some ill design under it against the Government, which no sensible Man can give a Name unto:

⁵¹ W. Douglas Jones, “The Bold Adventurers’: A Quantitative Analysis of the Darien Subscription List (1696),” *Scottish Economic & Social History* 21, no. 1 (May 2001): 22, <http://ezproxy.libraries.wright.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bth&AN=7562687&site=eds-live>, 22.

⁵² Andrew Fletcher, “A Short and Impartial View of the Manner and Occasion of the Scots Colony’s Coming Away from Darien in a Letter to a Person of Quality,” *Early English Books*, 1641-1700 / 960:25 ([Edinburgh : s.n.], 1699., 1699), 18.

And which is plainly contrary to the very nature of the thing, those wicked, but weak and silly surmises had discouraged many.”⁵³ Some challenges the Scots could plan for, but the betrayal of their own government was not one of them. The lack of provisions or the bad luck could have been overcome, but once England stepped in to undermine the Scottish effort, they were not in a position to be successful despite the best of intentions and diligence in the planning stages.

⁵³Philo-Caledon, “Scotland’s Present Duty, Or, A Call to the Nobility, Gentry, Ministry and Commonalty of This Land to Be Duely Affected With, and Vigorously to Act For, Our Common Concern in Caledonia, as a Mean to Enlarge Christ’s Kingdom, to Benefit Our Selves, and Do Good to All Protestant Churches.” ed. George Ridpath, *Early English Books*, 1641-1700 / 1149:18 ([Edinburgh? : s.n.], 1700), 10.

The Backing of a Nation

To condemn the inadequacy of the Company of Scotland's preparation for the voyage to Darien would also be to indict the near entirety of the Scottish population. It would need to be assumed that the majority of the people were ill-informed and invested substantial sums of money in a cause they knew little about and were willing to entrust with their financial livelihood. Not enough credit is given to the Company or the Scottish people for the foresight of such a project. Desperation and optimism are not enough to explain the sheer volume of those willing to subscribe funds. More factors were necessary to gain trust and confidence in order for those people to invest capital in the project to meet its financial goals in an exceedingly short period of time. Far more preparation and promotion of the scheme occurred than is typically accounted for.

The fervor surrounding the formation of the Company is remarkable. Darien historian Frank Cundall states, "The people of Scotland had contributed for the colonization of Darien a larger proportion of their substance than any other people ever, in the same space of time, voluntarily contributed to any commercial undertaking."⁵⁴ Nationalism was surely a driving force behind the rapidity of subscriptions. Propaganda tactics were used to promote national pride along with the resentment against the English. The Darien Scheme offered the Scottish people a financial outlet to invest their money,

⁵⁴ Cundall, 14.

while ultimately bolstering Scotland's place on the world stage and simultaneously opening up trade opportunities with Europe, Africa, America, and eventually Asia.

The Company of Scotland was not the only option in which Scots could invest their money in 1696.⁵⁵ The Bank of Scotland was newly formed and the myriad of English investments in the South meant that the Scots could put their money in a multitude of other organizations. What differed was that the settlement of a Scottish colony and the nascent trading opportunities excited the masses, garnering widespread support. In addition to the propaganda tools, recruiting agents of the Company toured the country to explain the potential investment opportunities. The agents were met with excitement and the Earl of Marchmont noted, "There is an unaccountable inclination among people here to go thither; and, by what I can find, that undertaking is not likely to want all the support this country is able to give it, either of men or money, so long as we have any."⁵⁶

The enthusiasm of the people appeared almost limitless. In a modern conversion of the capital raised in 1696 alone, comparable investment would be about £103 Billion or 2.35 times the value of annual exports.⁵⁷ That number is striking by any standard. The ability to raise the sum so quickly and without difficulty became a great source of pride among the Scots. In a piece written by a Scottish noble, he declared the ease of acquiring subscriptions "gives the World a sufficient Proof that Scotland was neither Poor, nor disjointed, as some people would have believed."⁵⁸ The enthusiasm of the people did not

⁵⁵ Jones, 22.

⁵⁶ Insh, "The Company of Scotland Trading to Africa and the Indies," 170.

⁵⁷ Jones, 37.

⁵⁸ "Gentleman lately arriv'd., The History of Caledonia, Or, The Scots Colony in Darien in the West Indies with an Account of the Manners of the Inhabitants and Riches of the Countrey," *Early English Books*, 1641-1700 / 1309:20 (London : Printed and sold by John Nutt, 1699., 1699), 9-10.

rest after the financial subscriptions had been met. This pride reverberated in an address to the King by the Council-General of the Company: “Contributed as Adventurers, in raising a far more considerable Joynt-Stock, than any was ever before rais'd in this Kingdom, for any Publick Undertaking or Project of Trade whatsoever, which makes it now of so much the more Universal a Concern to the Nation.”⁵⁹ Let us move the historiography from the story of an uneducated, uninformed, and unprepared nation into one that demonstrates the excitement as well as the faith in a plan to be executed. The Darien Scheme was far more than a trip to find a spot to colonize and trade; it became a source of national pride and seemed to embody the future of Scotland.

Capturing the public mood, pamphleteers and propaganda artists encouraged the publication of all those who subscribed to the Company. One could easily read the names of who had contributed and what amount, further encouraging more financial contributions to the Company. The mentality of posing a united front, of all joining in the effort together, permeated Scotland and further amplified the excitement as well as the national unity in support of the project.

The formation of a group such as the Company of Scotland was necessary for the economic and political survival of the nation. The Scottish people recognized that their limited industry and trade opportunities, along with famine conditions, would force them to enter into an unfavorable union with the English. They sought to avoid this by taking control of their situation and attempting to change their struggling status. Scotland’s

⁵⁹ Company of Scotland Trading to Africa and the Indies, “The Original Papers and Letters, Relating to the Scots Company, Trading to Africa and the Indies from the Memorial given in against Their Taking Subscriptions at Hamburgh, by Paul Ricaut, His Majesty’s Resident There, to Their Last Address Sent up to His Majesty in December, 1699: Faithfully Extracted from the Companies Books., *Early English Books*, 1641-1700 / 959:05 ; *Early English Books*, 1641-1700 / 724:22 ([Edinburgh? : s.n.], 1700), “The Humble Address of the Council-General of the Company of Scotland Trading to Africa and the Indies,” 8.

hopes rested on the success of the Darien Scheme, without which they would most certainly be forced to enter a union with England. Scotland had the option to either succumb to union or try to avoid it with a national economic endeavor. Their fears were realized when the Darien Scheme did not work, and less than a decade later they had no choice but to join into that union with England, validating that their concerns were real all along.

Without an outlet for commerce, the economy of Scotland would have surely collapsed and forced submission to the English, causing Scottish merchants to seek an alternative means to earn income. The English continued to limit trading privileges with foreign nations and also raise the tariff on Scottish linen imported into England. By the mid-to-late seventeenth century, the largest market for Scottish wool now cost the producers and distributors throughout Scotland higher taxes that would immediately and disastrously diminish profits, further straining the livelihood of the Scottish people.⁶⁰ In a public lament against the unjust treatment by the English, one Scot decried, “The People of this Kingdom, whom you Represent, have been depriv'd of the Benign Influences of our Kings these 100 years. Our Neighbours having the Political Fathers of our Country, under their Command, are so far from leaving them at Liberty to Treat us as subjects and children, that they have from time to time made 'em Treat Us like Enemies; but never more than at present.”⁶¹ The appeal for fair treatment while simply just existing without oppression was often times all the Scots could do. By the last decade of

⁶⁰ T. C. Smout, *Anglo-Scottish Relations from 1603 to 1900* (Oxford ; New York: Published for the British Academy by Oxford University Press, 2005), 112.

⁶¹ Anon, “The People of Scotland’s Groans and Lamentable Complaints, Pour’d out before the High Court of Parliament,” *Early English Books*, 1641-1700 / 2575:15 ([Edinburgh : s.n., 1700?], 1700), 1.

the seventeenth century, the Scots had endured enough and worked to find an applicable solution to their problems.

Scottish born financier William Paterson was the mastermind behind the Darien Scheme and he spent years working to construct his vision. He sought to create an outpost in the Caribbean that would spark trade and eventually lead to a Western route to Asia. Paterson crystallized his dream to create a Scottish colonial settlement, find new markets, break the monopoly of the East India Company, establish African trade, and pursue national interests. These aspirations led to the formation and execution of a trade company to the West Indies where all of this could be realized. Colonization and then establishing trade were the clear defining steps in acquiring national success. Scotland saw how foreign trade made England rich, and they came to the solution that it was also the answer to Scotland's poverty.⁶² Insh quotes Scottish noble James Balfour's papers revealing, "that though the influence of the London merchants affected very definitely the trend of Scottish economic development both in 1693 and 1695, the native Scottish impulse toward foreign trade was not only much stronger than has hitherto been suspected, but had also a precisely defined objective."⁶³ The Darien Scheme was not a haphazard plan impulsively decided upon and put into action; rather, the Scots knew that a plan like this one could pave the way for future success and be a way to alleviate their current woes.

The Caribbean territories had almost entirely been settled and lands for potential colonization were relatively scarce. The Scots hoped to establish a location in the Caribbean which would provide close proximity to the trade in that realm, with the

⁶² David Armine Howarth, *The Golden Isthmus* (London: Collins, 1966), 106.

⁶³ Insh, "The Darien Scheme," 9.

plantations in America, connections with Africa, and eventual trade with Asia. If a more desirable, easily acquired, plot of land were available, they most certainly would have sought it; however, the English, French, Dutch, and Spanish had already made their mark on the region, claiming nearly every piece of inhabitable land. The area of Darien was well considered and well researched before settlement and it was with great thoughtfulness that it was selected as the site of the Company's colony.

A Scottish port linking the Atlantic and the Pacific might be the single greatest port in the world. The Scots envisioned opening it up to all European traders to allow commerce "free from any restraint for or by...reason of state."⁶⁴ For the creators of the Company, this colony would be the key to world commerce and also used as a means to promote peace and Protestantism.⁶⁵ The vision to select Darien was academic and well-conceived, and should be given credit as such.

⁶⁴ Philip J. Stern, "British Asia and British Atlantic: Comparisons and Connections," *William and Mary Quarterly* 63, no. 4 (2006): 693–712, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4491576>, 707.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 707.

William Paterson

With any decent business proposal, deep consideration is given to ascertaining the potential risks and rewards. Part of the decision process factors in the experience of the architect to weigh the soundness of the design. The person credited with the formation and implementation of the Darien Scheme is a man named William Paterson. He was born in Dumfriesshire in southern Scotland and grew up in the West Indies where he acquired a large fortune. His time there fueled his interest in the region and piqued his curiosity in using the American Isthmus as a link for trade routes.

Upon returning to Britain after a number of years in the Caribbean, Paterson became quite successful by using his financial astuteness to position himself among influential London businessmen. He later went on to create the Bank of England and was highly respected throughout Britain. His life proved to be an incredibly successful one and his reputation often preceded him. Paterson was successful in nearly every venture he undertook. He was not some upstart idealist looking for a Western passage to Asia; instead, he was a man familiar with the region and one whose financial prowess and reputation proved immensely credible in the formation and subsequent backing of the project.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ The scholarship concerning William Paterson is consistent throughout the historiography. Biographers like Barbour and Bannister along with Darien historians like Insh, Cundall, and Hart were used to compile this view of Paterson.

Paterson carefully considered the location for his proposed colony. While living in Jamaica he met William Dampier and Lionel Wafer. These two well-known buccaneers had spent a great deal of time in Central America and he obtained much of his information from their first-hand experience.⁶⁷ He used the knowledge of the region and paired that with his superior intelligence and financial acumen to create a plan that would bring financial success to his home nation.⁶⁸

Paterson saw beyond the settlement and provided an ambitious vision:

The time and expense of voyage to China, Japan, and the richest part of the East Indies, will be lessened more than a half, and the consumption for European commodities soon to be more than doubled, and afterwards yearly increased. Thus these doors of the seas and the keys of the universe would of course be capable of enabling their possessors to give laws to both oceans, and to become the arbitrators of the commercial world, without being liable to the fatigues, expense, and dangers, or of contracting such guilt and blood, as Alexander and Caesar.⁶⁹

The settlement was necessary to create and sustain a trading post that would open up commerce from Africa to the Atlantic, throughout the Caribbean, and into Asia.

After carefully considering each portion of the plan, Paterson's idea was presented to and accepted by the elite in London. His proposal was deemed intellectually sound and potentially fruitful. After the formation of the Company, the Court of Directors further endorsed Paterson's idea, resolving "that it is the Opinion of this Committee that the said Mr. Paterson hath with much pains and expense procured several Discoveries of places of Trade and Settlement which if dually prosecuted may prove

⁶⁷ Barbour, 3.

⁶⁸ Hart, 45.

⁶⁹ Saxe Bannister, *William Paterson, the Merchant Statesman, and Founder of the Bank of England: His Life and Trials* (Edinburgh: W. P. Nimmo, 1858), 159.

exceeding beneficial to this Company.”⁷⁰ His knowledge of trade and finance placed him “far ahead of his time” and with the collection of intelligence and maps he acquired through meetings with Dampier and Wafer, it was a clearly plausible plan that could yield great success.⁷¹

Paterson held numerous meetings with individuals who had seen the spot first-hand. He recognized the potential for wealth and knew they could more efficiently exploit it than the Spanish had. “The Indies of Spain be still not only much more considerable than those of all the nations of Europe together, but capable of giving a greater scope of profitable navigation and industry than all the known world besides.”⁷² He went on to further state, “thus the Indies, which, but indifferently managed, might have made the Spaniards the greatest and richest people that ever were.”⁷³ Paterson knew the natural riches of this area would produce much-needed treasures for Scotland. He was informed of the gold mines, the luxurious wood, and access to other minerals and metals that would boost the Scottish economy, something the nation so desperately needed.

In conjunction with his geographic knowledge, Paterson’s understanding of trade and finance made the proposal a realistic one. Paterson’s impressive resume as the founder of the Bank of England provided the expertise needed during the formation of the Company of Scotland. Paterson had clear directions and strong convictions when expressing the way in which he wanted the Company to be organized. “For we must not act apart in anything, but in a firm and unite body, and distinct from all other Interests

⁷⁰ “Farther abstract of the proceedings of the Court of Directors,” *Darien Papers*, 11.

⁷¹ Howarth, 103.

⁷² Bannister, 19.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 129.

whatsoever.”⁷⁴ He also weighed in on the direction for the formation of leadership by asserting, “They think this Company can not be managed by Correspondence alone like some sort of Grades, but most by Council and conversation: and therefore intreats that this Society may be reckon’d one intire body, and not several interfering parts and interests.”⁷⁵ Paterson specifically detailed the way he thought the Company should be organized to maximize the potential for success.

One assumption that Paterson may have too readily accepted was the support of the English government. His vision for Darien certainly benefitted the Scottish, but the nature of free trade for all European nations and the continued relationship with the English was sure to produce positive results, as he was quick to note. “There will be herein more than means sufficient for laying the foundations of our trade, and improvement as large and extensive as his Majesty's empire, and to order matters so, that the designs of trade, navigation, and industry, instead of being like bones of contention, as hitherto, may for the future become banks for union to the British kingdoms.”⁷⁶ He could not conceive how a proposal that would ultimately benefit the English would eventually be sabotaged by them for political purposes.

William Paterson’s role in the conception and formation of the Darien Scheme is critical in the argument for the well-planned nature of the enterprise. His credibility and knowledge base were an integral part in its acceptance and initial success among the elite and the subscribers. He was a trustworthy individual who was widely respected and it was his attention to detail and specific plans that gave the scheme weight in the political

⁷⁴ "Letters from William Paterson to the Lord Provost of Edinburgh," July 9, 1695, *Darien Papers*, 4.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 2.

⁷⁶ Bannister, 157.

climate. To reiterate the point, the Scots did not blindly follow a grandiose plan hoping for success; rather, they looked to the expertise of an individual who had lived in the region, gained reliable intelligence on the location, and used his financial prowess to create a plan for Scottish colonization and economic success.

Countering Previous Claims of Scottish Ineptitude

The portion of the Darien Scheme that receives the most condemnation is the planning and provisions before setting sail. Upon close research into the primary documents, this stance cannot be fully supported.

Through the overwhelming evidence of public support, subscriptions for the Company were raised in record fashion. “It could be argued that it was miraculous that the Company was able to extract anything given the scarcity of money in Scotland, and was a reflection of the continuing loyalty and optimism of the shareholders.”⁷⁷ The standard argument of a poorly planned scheme presumes idiocy on the part of the Scottish people instead of giving them credit for their confidence in the proposal. In a time when money was scarce and investment opportunities were abundant, we must divorce ourselves of the notion that the Scottish people blindly committed incredible sums of money simply out of disdain for the English or pride of their homeland. This was not a whimsical idea or an ill-prepared plan; it was quite the opposite, resulting from years of calculation.

One commentator at the time dubbed the whole venture “an amazing yet a natural product of the curious blend of cold, thrifty, common sense and poetic idealism found in

⁷⁷ Watt, 61.

Scotsmen.”⁷⁸ In the Act forming the Company, the plans are clearly articulated.

“Merchants more or fewer may contract and enter into such Societies and Companies, for carrying on of Trade, as to any subject of Goods or Merchandise to whatsoever Kingdoms, Countries, or parts of the World...where Trade is in (use to be) or may be followed.”⁷⁹ The Company would also benefit from the experience of men who had played roles in the organization of other enterprises, lending their expertise and further reinforcing the leadership of the Scheme.

To secure its authority, the Company adhered to the legal protocols and also published pamphlets supporting their claim to trade in the Indies. "That as, by the 8th Act of the 5th Session of King William's Parliament...Our Company is established with as large, ample, and legal Rights, Privileges and Immunities, as any other Trading Company whatsoever does enjoy,"⁸⁰ boasted the Directors.⁸¹ They felt secure, there would be no justification for denying the Scottish ability to conduct commerce as they saw fit within the confines of the legal guidelines.

Even though the Company Directors acquired legal rights by Parliament to settle territory and to begin foreign trade, they still painstakingly went through the plans looking for potential deficiencies. “Several objections were considered, including the unhealthy climate, infertility of the land, lack of good harbours, potential for English,

⁷⁸ Ibid, 80.

⁷⁹ Scotland., “Act for a Company Tradeing to Affrica and the Indies. June 26, 1695,” 1695, 1.

⁸⁰ “A Full and Exact Account of the Proceedings of the Court of Directors and Council-General of the Company of Scotland Trading to Africa and the Indies, with Relation to the Treaty of Union, Now under the Parliament’s Consideration.” In a Letter to a Person of Quality. Containing The Author’s Apology for Publishing the Same. ([Edinburgh?], 1706).
<http://find.galegroup.com/ecco/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=ECCO&userGroupName=dayt38887&tabID=T001&docId=CW3300186352&type=multipage&contentSet=ECCOArticles&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE>, 16.

⁸¹ “Proceedings of the Court of Directors,” 19.

French, and Spanish opposing, but these were all dismissed.”⁸² That may seem like a list of possible obstacles, but the Directors surely did debate amongst themselves and weighed the success against the risks.

The Scots were not new to colonial ambition and trade. Expansion to neighboring islands as well as to Nova Scotia, New Jersey, and South Carolina provided Scottish merchants with a background in similar ventures. The previous colonial attempts are widely panned by historians because they did not have the longevity of their English counterparts. The dismantling of these colonies was not so much a product of Scottish inadequacy as a result of other factors. Historian Christopher Whatley states, “The scale and achievement of three generations of transatlantic entrepreneurial endeavor that preceded this...have been underestimated by historians and may have provided an alternative means to incorporation of maintaining an independent, economically viable Scotland within the regal union.”⁸³ Pamphlets discussing expanding trade were prevalent throughout Scotland in the final decade of the seventeenth century. One entitled *An Historical Account of the Rise and Growth of the West-India Colonies* demonstrates that this concept was already circulating among the population and the bounty to the west was enticing.⁸⁴ That particular propaganda piece was published in 1690 and was not singular in its discussion of Scotland’s ability to seek foreign opportunities to grow their markets and to boost their economy.

As the public desire for economic growth became a major concern for the Scots, the Directors took the proposition of a national trade company very seriously. William

⁸² Watt, 143.

⁸³ Whatley, 15.

⁸⁴ “*Historical Account of the Rise and Growth of the West-India Colonies and of the Great Advantages They Are to England, in Respect to Trade,*” London (New York: Ayer Co Pub, 1972).

Paterson used his financial sense to formulate a viable plan, meanwhile nationalists like Andrew Fletcher also took great care in scrutinizing the plan. Fletcher deemed it necessary to study England's political maneuvering and his critical analysis provided him the awareness of how to successfully run a commercial civilization and operation.⁸⁵ The Directors and subscribers were not reliant on the information of one individual; they took meticulous consideration when viewing the many permutations.

The Company is often criticized for the selection of the settlers that comprised the first expedition. However, the settlers for the Darien colonization were chosen with care. Charges that too many ministers and not enough able-bodied men were sent can be found throughout the historiography, but the sources prove otherwise. While ministers may not seem necessary to the survival of a colony, in the time of heightened religious devotion, the Scots believed it was crucial to have the pious men accompany them. A great number of strong men were selected to join, as well as women to do the domestic labor, who were just as important to the success of a colony as strong men. One example to note is the inclusion of pastors did not ruin the Puritan settlements of New England.

Applications to join the settlement far exceeded the room available on the vessels. The large numbers of volunteers allowed the Directors to select those most desirable for the journey. Sixty military officers with experience on the European continent, in addition to people with a wide variety of occupations who were deemed best suited for the success of the settlement, were chosen.⁸⁶ Not only did the Directors choose healthy men, but they also selected those who had experience in combat should that skill set be

⁸⁵ Tatsuya Sakamoto and Hideo Tanaka, eds., "The Rise of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment," *Routledge Studies in the History of Economics* 56 (London ; New York: Routledge, 2003), 9.

⁸⁶ Hart, 52.

needed. They also chose volunteers based on their occupation to fulfill the needs of various tasks in order to ensure the successful operation and management of a colony. In a public address, nationalist Andrew Fletcher asserted, "I'm certain that the Directors were at no small Pains to invite such as they thought most capable for that Station."⁸⁷ The careful decision to select settlers based on their backgrounds demonstrates foresight and analytical thinking in the preparations to form a flourishing overseas outpost.

Lionel Wafer and William Dampier provided a copious amount of information to Paterson and the other Directors concerning the geographic location of the colony. They also outlined the weather patterns and the time that would be best suited for arrival. Based on this intelligence, the "expedition had been timed to land in Darien in the beginning of winter--the 'dry season'—the most healthful time of the year in Europe to face the climate of the Isthmus."⁸⁸ The Directors were not naïve about the potential difficulties of acclimatizing to Caribbean weather. Knowledge of the seasons played a fundamental role in scheduling the departure and sailing dates for the settlers. It is unfortunate that despite this planning, the voyage was delayed, which resulted in the settlers landing in the colony at the height of the rainy season, something the Directors had worked to avoid. "Their two Ships sail'd from this River for Edinburgh on Monday or Tuesday last. They once designed to have sheathed or doubled themselves, but having been detained so very long by contrary winds, they now have resolved to lett their Ships proceed on their Voyage to America as they are, that they may lose no more time."⁸⁹ The

⁸⁷ Andrew Fletcher, "A Short and Impartial View of the Manner and Occasion of the Scots Colony's Coming Away from Darien in a Letter to a Person of Quality," *Early English Books*, 1641-1700 / 960:25 ([Edinburgh : s.n.], 1699., 1699), 14.

⁸⁸ Barbour, 82.

⁸⁹ Insh, "Papers Relating to the Ships and Voyages of the Company of Scotland Trading to Africa and the Indies," 46.

decision to set sail in the face of potential weather difficulties was considered, but the window to travel was diminishing and if they delayed their departure even more, they risked using up the capital for a voyage that could take many more months to execute.

The plans for the journey were no less considered. Explicit sailing instructions were provided to the captains of each ship to maintain secrecy of the final destination and also in efforts to eliminate any potentially mutinous activity. Within these sealed instructions, the captain of one ship, William Tenant was told, “You are also to concert and agree with the said Captain Brown, as to an equal division of all the Seamen which are to carry over the Company’s said two ships from Hamburgh as aforesaid, but if you should happen any ways to differ therein, you are to be determined by the said Mr. Stevenson as absolute umpire for us in that.”⁹⁰ The Directors established a chain of command and division of labor. Nearly all aspects of the voyage had been deliberated, from the provisions and date of departure, to leadership and hierarchy.

Even from the outset, the objective remained clear. The Company would not settle in a place inhabited by any ruling European nation and would garner favor from all indigenous people in the area. The Scottish did not intend to operate like the Spanish; rather, they hoped to find a favorable spot for settlement, build a peaceful trading port, and have diplomatic relations with the native people. “It was agreed on by all that it would add much to the security of the enterprize, if they could enter in a League and strict bond of friendship with the Indians, whom they knew to be great Enemies to the

⁹⁰ “Sailing instruction to William Tenant,” *Darien Papers*, 48.

Spaniards.”⁹¹ By securing the blessing of the Indians, the Scots secured safe haven in their new home.

Relations with the Spanish were equally considered. While the Scots believed they had a legitimate claim to the land, they were prepared for any possible Spanish reprisal. History had shown that the Spanish were spread out across the region, and on multiple occasions groups of as few as 500 men were able to fend off a Spanish attack. No less convinced in their claim to the Isthmus, the Scots primed themselves for potential aggression. “We are in no great fear that any army of the Spaniards or others (who can, after their march, be in condition to harme us; and by sea, were our forts and batteries, which are all quite demolished) rebuilt and well planted, there would be no great fear of invasion, for the Bay is good, and very defensible.”⁹² The Scots planned for the potential attack and situated their fort in a favorable location but also used historical accounts knowing that the Spanish threat was likely minimal.

Understandably, the Scots had optimism for what the new colony could provide. Paterson’s initial dream of finding a route to Asia was still desired. “As we grow stronger, we shall endeavour to procure a part in the South Sea, from whence it’s not about 6 weeks Sail to Japan and some parts of China.”⁹³ This location was critically considered as a source of the Scots’ nascent trading industry, the home of a colonial outpost, and the site of the most important shipping lane to connect the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. These considerations were not taken lightly and the Company, along with

⁹¹ “Gentleman lately arriv’d.” 22.

⁹² “Letter From the Council to the Directors,” Dec. 23, 1699, Darien Papers, 216.

⁹³ “Gentleman lately arriv’d,” 53.

the settlers, continued to focus on these goals throughout the formation and implementation of the Scheme.

In a report back to the Scottish people, the Lord Advocate of the Company professed, “The Company prepared Men, and Provisions, and set our their Ships, and in the Month of November 1698, arrived on the Northside of the Isthmus of Darien in America, they pitched upon a Place ne’er before possess’d by the Spaniards; and after formal and distinct Treaties, obtained the Consent and Good will of all the Neighbouring Natives and People.”⁹⁴ News like this was received with great excitement among the population. Initial word of success from the colony and pieces of gold mailed back to the families at home proved to the people of Scotland that the colony was a success, and with that, they outfitted another fleet of ships to send more provisions and to carry more settlers.

Unbeknownst to those in Scotland, by the time the letters and excitement had reached home, the fate of the settlers had turned. The rains, dwindling provisions, and acts of sabotage left the settlers unwilling to continue, causing them to soon set a course back for Scotland. While Darien settlers outfitted a return home, the newest fleet of ships set course for New Caledonia. Once they arrived, the new group of settlers was in shock. They expected to see a thriving settlement of their countrymen and instead found nearly no sign of life. “Our Party were not lent forth to settle a Colony, but only to be a Recruit and Supply to a Colony, which we expected in some Measure already settled and

⁹⁴ Company of Scotland Trading to Africa and the Indies, “The Original Papers and Letters, Relating to the Scots Company, Trading to Africa and the Indies from the Memorial given in against Their Taking Subscriptions at Hamburg, by Paul Ricaut, His Majesty’s Resident There, to Their Last Address Sent up to His Majesty in December, 1699: Faithfully Extracted from the Companies Books,” *Early English Books*, 1641-1700 / 959:05 ; *Early English Books*, 1641-1700 / 724:22 ([Edinburgh? : s.n.], 1700., 1700, Memorial presented to His Majesty in May 1699 by the 42.

sufficiently furnished with Tools and Instruments of such a Design.”⁹⁵ Without the equipment necessary, the second expedition would not have the option of success and like their predecessors, they too turned course to return back to Scotland. It would be unfair to categorize the fate and limited communication of the time as the ineptitude of the Scottish people, and should therefore not render a criticism of the Company.

⁹⁵ Francis Borland, *Memoirs of Darien*. [electronic Resource] : “Giving a Short Description of That Countrey, with an Account of the Attempts of the Company of Scotland, to Settle a Colonie in That Place. With a Relation of Some of the Many Tragical Disasters, Which Did Attend That Design. With Some Practical Reflections upon the Whole.” Written Mostly in the Year 1700. While the Author Was in the American Regions (Glasgow : printed by Hugh Brown, M.DCC.XV. [1715], 1715), 31.

Adequate Provisions

Colonizers over the course of history have been notoriously inaccurate when predicting the amount and type of provisions needed in new territories. By nature, the settlers are heading into the unexpected. Even with prudence and design, one cannot account for something of which they are unaware. The same folly that has happened countless times over the centuries was no different for the Scots and the Darien adventure. The initial storehouse of provisions proved adequate for the journey and to last the settlers through the voyage and initial months in Panama until reinforcements arrived. The items chosen may have been questionable, but one could also question England taking wool to trade in the humid climate of India. Jamestown's Starving Times lasted for decades. Why is the similar mistake by the Scots viewed differently?

Surely, the settlers needed provisions for the journey itself and the subsequent days and weeks in the new colony. Original preparation considered this, and also dispatching resupply ships to supplement necessary items shortly after. The Directors also factored in the veritable cornucopia of foodstuffs that might be found in Darien. Initial consideration was given to Darien due to its abundance of food supplies ranging from fresh fruit and crops to fish and proteins. The intended provisions were meant to cover the voyage itself along with any items that could not be acquired in the region, but planned for the colonists to begin living off the land once arriving in New Caledonia.

The narrative of the unprepared Scot foolishly loading a vessel with too few provisions for too long a voyage has begun to take on mythical proportions when discussing the Darien Scheme. Yet in almost every aspect of the preparation, the provisions were more than adequate and carefully considered. In a “short and impartial view” of the attempted colonization of Panama rests an unbiased account by Andrew Fletcher:

The Colony that was first sent away in July 1698, for settling a Plantation in America, pursuant to the Instructions then given, carried along with them not only abundance of all Necessaries for such an Undertaking, but also such a Quantity of Provisions, as was calculated for a whole Year, and of some Particulars what was computed might have served for near 18 months: And for their further Security, in case those Provisions should happen to fall short, before Advice could be paid of their Settlement, and the fresh Supplies of Provisions sent after them, there was likewise a Cargo of sortable Goods, to the Value of about 160000 Pounds Sterling prime Cost here, sent along with them, at the absolute Disposal of the Council, for the Colony's life; which Goods were either to be Traded with upon Necessaries at the Council's Direction.⁹⁶

In addition to holistically considering the stash of supplies, the Company made arrangements for stops in Madeira (a major trading post off the coast of Africa) and in the Caribbean. Should the provisions have run low, the captains and settlers on board would have been able to trade goods and to purchase additional items as necessary. There were a series of safeguards to prevent disaster. Storehouses provided a contingency for an additional year past the sailing time. More supplies were scheduled to be sent with the next wave of settlers and they also had the authority to purchase more goods if needed.

⁹⁶ Fletcher, 8.

All of these measures demonstrate the efforts of the Directors to supply their colony with adequate provisions to achieve success.

One area to address is the low number of provisions that remained aboard the ship at the time of departure. “Two or three days after we sailed, the Councell was called on board the St. Andrew, where they found the provisions and neessarys for the voyage fall exceedingly short of what was given out or expected.”⁹⁷ The limited numbers stemmed directly from the delayed departure. For each day the ships remained in harbor, provisions were depleted. Initial amounts were more than sufficient with a substantial contingency rate. As the captains waited for a break in the weather, they had to take the first available opportunity to set sail. This long wait, followed by a quick departure prevented the final inspection of provisions. This may have not seemed to be a priority due to the overabundance of goods in the beginning stages and the unexpected quantity used during the time in harbor.

Careful note of the provisions were conducted in the days and weeks leading up to the voyage. “That the Company may send one or two persons on board each of the said several Ships, to do and act for them as they shall think fitt; Which said Persons shall always have fourty eight hours notice given them before the said Ships shall set sail from any port or ports during their respective voyages, to the end that they may repair on board, wherein if they fail, after due notice given, the same shall not be imputed to the Undertakers but as a neglect to the said persons only.”⁹⁸ Without question, the same inspection should have been done on the actual departure date. However the large surplus was considered and a judgement was made to not take stock once more. Even

⁹⁷ “Report by William Paterson to the Directors,” Dec. 19, 1699, *Darien Papers*, 179.

⁹⁸ “Agreement between the court of directors and Gilbert Stewart,” *Darien Papers*, 59.

with the delayed departure eating into the supplies, the provisions appeared adequate. Captain Robert Drummond, who was Commander of the *Caledonia*, proclaimed, “I have sailed for the space of eight years together in America, and I must say, I never in all that time had Provisions which held out so well.”⁹⁹ This can be credited to the “due care in an equal and moderate distribution of both provisions and liquors” once the Captains on board were aware of the potentially insufficient means.¹⁰⁰

The notion of poorly selected cargo, in addition to the short supply, has been inflated over time. An account by a Scottish gentleman named Herries derided the provisions in a tainted and biased account. He provided a number of every item on board and focused on the number of bibles and wigs that were being shipped in order to ridicule the poor decision. Let us not forget that a driving motivation for the colonization was also to promote Presbyterianism, just as other colonial endeavors spread religious views. In a highly pious time, one can hardly discount the perceived need for such freight.

Wigs and other accoutrements were clearly foolish additions as we critique the items on board in hindsight. What we must not divorce ourselves from is the understanding of society and culture at the time. Wigs were used in legal and political settings; why would they not bring some with them? Additionally, the wigs were seen as potential trade items of great value imported from Scotland. Removed from the situation, it is easy to scoff at this notion, but this misjudgment is not much different than many pieces brought by various other European powers to their newly established colonies. This presents the question again, why are the Scots held to a different standard and criticized more openly?

⁹⁹ Fletcher, 20.

¹⁰⁰ “Address by the Directors to the Officers of the Company,” *Darien Papers*, 271.

In addition to the wigs there were other impractical items, but also a great deal of food, timber, and materials that would prove useful once in the colony. “Most of the trade goods, which they hoped their colony would barter were ironmongery and clothing ... perhaps these were not badly chosen, although the quantities were enough for armies of artisans.”¹⁰¹ It is apparent that the Scots were equipped enough on their journey, and they also intended to barter and trade items from their home nation to areas they knew would not possess such luxuries. It is clear that the colonists made a miscalculation in considering the need for such goods; however the overall argument of poorly planned provisions does not suffice as an explanation. They planned and deeply considered what to bring, but any error in understanding what would be most useful once in an environment totally different to their own, could only ever have been realized once Darien was reached.

The most commonly criticized portion of the Darien Scheme among the historiography is the critique of the provision selection and supply to outfit the settlers with the necessary materials for colonization. In retrospect some choices are questionable today, but by the standards and precedent of the time, these were not uncommon and not ill-conceived when organized. The Scots ensured the storehouse more than exceeded the necessary amount and they allotted for back up plans should the provisions prove inadequate.

¹⁰¹ Howarth, 107.

Land Selection

The Isthmus of Panama was well-known throughout the world. Many European powers recognized the potentially profitable location regarding expanding trade routes. The Spanish had control over most of Central and South America, but the area surrounding the Darien was mysterious and only inhabited by loose bands of native tribes. Paterson, who never visited the area, relied on the accounts of two ex-buccaneers, Lionel Wafer and William Dampier, who had spent a fairly extensive amount of time there. The men were well-known throughout Europe and had a sort of rockstar status. Wafer and Dampier wrote and published a book about the area which filled many Europeans with excitement and intrigue about the region. It was their accounts that provided Paterson with the backbone for the Company's plans to establish a colony there.

Wafer's first book, *A New Voyage and Description of the Isthmus of America* gave an in-depth account of the region. He described in great detail the topography, landscape, weather, native interactions, illnesses/treatments, and animal life. In a later piece, he further described the site of the colony. "The Land within (the mouth of the Darien) is very rich and fruitful but hath noe Harbour besides Carrat Bay which is by report indifferent good...The land of the Isthmus in Generall is very good with variety of

Hills and valleys watered with Rivers and covered with perpetull woods."¹⁰² It was this intelligence that at first excited Paterson and gave him the confidence to move forward with this project on the Isthmus of Panama.

Accounts of the settlement's location are immensely favorable, particularly by Dampier and Wafer who actively explored the area. The amount of positive commentaries on the location is the greatest source to corroborate the selection of Darien, but yet, the historiography points to the area as one that was unconquerable. The Scots were not interested in fighting for territory or engaging in any type of land grab, so they sought a location that was not previously or currently inhabited, or settled by a European power. To support their trade industry, the Scots needed a place rich in raw materials and able to establish plantations. This particular location sat at the western rim of the incredibly concentrated and profitable Caribbean region, but within sixty miles of the start of an Asian route where the possibilities became endless. News of silver and gold in the area piqued Scottish interest and they desired to quickly boost the Scottish economy through these resources. Commercial advancement and the settling of a colony, at Darien or otherwise, would garner the respect from outside nations that the Scottish so deeply craved.

In a proclamation to the Scottish people by the Council of Directors, the colony "at new Edinburg in Calidonia December 28, 1698; it is a more convenient place than any other in all America, to be the Store-house of the unsearchable Treasures of the spacious

¹⁰² Lionel Wafer and William Dampier, eds., *A Short Account From, and Description of the Isthmus of Darien, Where the Scots Collony Are Settled: With a Particular Map of the Isthmus and Enterence to the River of Darien. According to Our Late News, and Mr. Dampier and Mr. Wafer* (Edinburgh: printed: and sold by John Vallange, at his shop on the north-side of the street, a little above the Cross: and by James Wardlaw, at his shop in the Parliament Closs. Price 7 pence, 1699), 150.

South Seas, the door of Commerce to China and Japan, and the Emporium and staple for the Trade of the both the Indies."¹⁰³ Without question, "the place, by its situation in this part of the world, is fit for commerce."¹⁰⁴

Simply looking at the site where the colony was intended to be constructed, the accounts confirm the Company's choice. In a journal one settler wrote, the "Harbour of Caledonia: it was a most excellent one."¹⁰⁵ In greater detail is an account by a Darien settler, Mr. Rose:

The westernmost point towards the harbour is low and very fit for a battery to command the entry, which would be excellently secured by another on the opposite shore. The land on the Pen-Insula is extraordinary good, and full of stately trees first for all uses and full of pleasant birds, as is also the opposite shore, and hath several small springs which we hope will hold in the driest season. But on the other side there are 4 or 5 fine rivers that never do dry. This harbour is capable of containing 1000 of the best ships in the world, and with no great trouble wharfs may be run out to which ships of the greatest burthen may lay their sides and unload.¹⁰⁶

The harbor was seen as fit for housing their ships and for access to the wider waters.

Additionally, it was noted that, "the greatest part of it is land-locked, so that it is safe, and cannot be touched by any Wind, that can blow, the Harbour and the Sea makes the Land that lies betwixt them a Peninsula."¹⁰⁷ Another account states the "Port of New St.

¹⁰³ Robert Ferguson, "A Just and Modest Vindication of the Scots Design, for the Having Established a Colony at Darien with a Brief Display, How Much It Is Their Interest, to Apply Themselves to Trade, and Particularly to That Which Is Foreign," *Early English Books*, 1641-1700 / 276:13 ([Edinburgh? : s.n.], 1699., 1699), 50.

¹⁰⁴ "Letter from the Council to the Directors," Dec. 23, 1699, *Darien Papers*, 216.

¹⁰⁵ Dr. Wallace, "Part of a Journal Kept from Scotland to New Caledonia in Darien, with a Short Account of That Country. Communicated by Dr Wallace, F. R. S.," *Philosophical Transactions* (1683-1775) 22 (1700): 536-43, <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.libraries.wright.edu/stable/102753>, 358.

¹⁰⁶ "Mr. Rose's Journal," Nov. 3, 1698, *Darien Papers*, 65.

¹⁰⁷ Dr Wallace, 358.

Andrew, it's very capable of being defended against the Attacks of the Enemies."¹⁰⁸ The peninsula jutting into the harbor positioned it so "all its armament were destined solely to defensive purposes" providing peace of mind and smart defensive positions in case it was necessary.¹⁰⁹ Without question, the placement of the colony was highly favorable for protection from the winds and other invasions, while also allowing for safe harbor of ships and defensive positioning against potential attacks.

The positive reviews of the region do not stop at the location of the settlement site. The flora and fauna were repeatedly highlighted. "The Isthmus of America, all things considered, is in healthfulness and fruitfulness inferior to few if any of the other places in the Indies, as naturally producing plenty of gold-dust, dye-woods, and other valuable growths, vast quantities and great variety of the best timber for shipping in the known world, and is capable of yielding sugar, tobacco, indigo, cocoa, vanilla, annatoo, cotton, ginger, and such like, of the best, and in very great abundance."¹¹⁰ Again Rose claimed in his journal, "here is plenty and variety of choice fish, fowl, pickery or wild hogg, and I believe venison, to be hade whenever we can be in a condition to look after such things."¹¹¹ Another account lists, "cedar, plantains, pineapple, sugar cane, cinnamon trees, pepper, dye cottons, tobacco, and fowl" as a list of available food options.¹¹² Clearly, Darien was not short on what it could offer the settlers.

In the memoirs of another colonist named Francis Borland, he mentioned "the soil in these parts about our settlement, is generally a strong deep earth and clay, intermixed

¹⁰⁸ "Gentleman lately arriv'd," 12.

¹⁰⁹ Philip Ainsworth Means, *The Spanish Main ; Focus of Envy, 1492-1700* (New York : London: C. Scribner's sons; C. Scribner's sons, ltd, 1935), 228.

¹¹⁰ Bannister, 158.

¹¹¹ "Mr. Roses Journal," Dec. 21, 1698, *Darien Papers*, 79.

¹¹² "Gentleman lately arriv'd," 46-51.

with sand in some places, and if subdued and cultivated, would be abundantly fertile of all that is proper for this climate.”¹¹³ With this he too noted the abundance of food options for the settlers. There “are many orange trees to be found” and “there is here also in the waters both salt and fresh; great variety and plenty of fish, our Men caught some of them.”¹¹⁴ The colonists did not arrive in an area void of food options; instead, they found an endless variety of fish, fruit, vegetables, and protein at their disposal.

Within close proximity to the settlement site were caches of precious metals. “But the Country tho it be Rich and Frutiful on the surface, is yet far Richer in its Bowels, there being great Mines of Gold.”¹¹⁵ The amount of gold enticed the Scots. “At every dipping they find some Gold missed with the land.”¹¹⁶ Some of these riches were even sent back to Scotland which fueled the excitement of those monitoring, with a close eye, the success of Scotland’s first colony.

A mystique surrounded the Darien jungle as a place filled with uncertainty and harsh terrain. In the area that the Scots settled, they found a more advantageous site away from the confines of the jungle. “These Hills are Clothed with tall Trees without any underwood, so that one may Gallop conveniently among them, many Miles free from Sun and Rain. The Air makes on the tops of the Trees a pleasant Melancholly Musick, so that one of the Colony considering the Coolness, Pleasant Murmuring of the Air; and the infinite beauty of a continued Natural Arbor, called them the shades of Love.”¹¹⁷ This beautiful image was described by one of the settlers who had been able to experience the

¹¹³ Borland, 6.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 10 and 16.

¹¹⁵ “Gentleman lately arriv’d,” 18.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 19.

¹¹⁷ “Gentleman lately arriv’d,” 16.

joys of the settlement before its ultimate destruction. He goes on further to describe the water, “the Valleys are watered with Rivers and Perpetual clear Springs, which are most pleasant to drink, being as soft as Milk and very Nourishing.”¹¹⁸

The images painted by the diverse first-hand accounts, all seem to be in agreement that the site of New Caledonia was one of great bounty and harvest. It not only contained an extensive amount of food, but it also provided spices, precious metals, wildlife, and fish, all commodities with which the settlers could not only survive, but thrive as well. The promoters advertised of the favorable climate and access to resources that helped to alleviate any potential concerns for the new settlement. Additional measures were taken to colonize during the healthiest time of the year, in the dry season, when the risk of malaria was much lower. For these reasons, little evidence indicates much concern of disease on the part of the settlers.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 15.

Refuting Additional Claims of a Doomed Mission

While the lack of planning, knowledge, and provisions are the most contentious, other elements of the Darien Scheme garner criticism as well, and those too can be refuted.

First, allusions to the poor conditions of the ships and the amount of dead are highlighted repeatedly in the scholarship. Depressing stories of high casualties, the dead thrown overboard, and a number of settlers contracting illness while on board riddle the research. Death and disease certainly occurred on the voyage from Scotland to Darien, but once again, the perspective is skewed. Seventy-six out of the total 1200 passengers died on the voyage itself, a rate of about 6.3 per cent.¹¹⁹ This is not considered high or even average by the standards of late-seventeenth century travel. The data indicates quite the opposite; the survival rate was strong, if not above average, for sailings of that time.

Second, questions about those selected to travel with the Company raised concern. Some feared the risk that too many able-bodied people were emigrating out of Scotland to colonize the lands rather than staying behind to work in the home nation. This claim directly contradicts other reports that there were not enough able-bodied men on the initial voyage. If one takes this stance though, then it must be considered still another positive that the Company selected strong individuals to colonize. Next, the nervousness that one colonial effort could destroy Scotland's work force is exaggerated. Professor T. C. Smout argued, "in an era when a nation's most valuable asset was

¹¹⁹ Watt, 14.

deemed to be the number of its inhabitants, Scotland was at risk of becoming ‘the only Christian Nation in the universe,’ that ‘suffers itself to run the hazard of being depeopled.’¹²⁰ That argument made at the time sparked concern over the longevity of both the colony and Scotland itself. The Darien Scheme, although it had large expectations, was not in danger of depriving Scotland of its strong male population. A cross-section of volunteers was chosen and the numbers were initially kept relatively low, only 1200 people emigrated over the course of three expeditions. One could assume that surely more would have emigrated had the endeavor been a success, but the fear of losing the male population to a colony that might not be repopulating itself or finding settlers from other lands is hyperbolic in nature.

And third, the settlers are chastised for mismanagement of the colony. As explained earlier in this thesis, upon arrival to the colony, the settlers organized a rotating leadership of seven councilors, each holding power for a month. Historians are critical of this method because petty jealousies and self-motivations could tamper with the best decisions for the colony. This is seen as nonsensical and clearly not a viable system. The reasoning provided by the Scots, however, was to ensure that no one person had total control over the colony. The argument claimed that by rotating power, one person could not claim supreme control and act against the interests of the people. Simply look to the term limits of elected officials in places like the United States. The founders calculatedly formed the government in a way that the leader could not have absolute rule or remain in power indefinitely. The intentions were pure and rooted in solid understanding of historical examples of totalitarian escalations, which the Scots sought to avoid.

¹²⁰ Smout, *Anglo-Scottish Relations*, 113.

Other rules and ordinances were established for the government of the colony. This was not a chaotic state with primitive leadership. The settlers understood that setting rules from the outset was vital in creating a stable colony that would operate smoothly. In a report by Paterson, he outlines the measures he took to handle the management concerns.

I must confess it troubled me exceedingly to see our affairs thus turmoyled and disordered, by tempers and dispositions as boisterous and turbulent as the elements they are used to struggle with, which are att least as mischievous Masters as ever they can be usefull servants. To this disease I proposed as a present ease and a parte of a remedy, that a President of the Councell should be chosen for a month, and that they first should be a land Councillor, and that every land Councillor might take his toure before any of those of the Sea should come in place. This, I reckoned, would be four moneths; and in this tyme I was in hopes that we might be able to make some lawes, orders, and rules of Government, and by People's management in the tyme, to be better able to judge who might be most fitt to preceed for a longer tyme, not exceeding a year.¹²¹

The initial systems proved successful. "For above Eight Months time together, they had so much Prudence as to stifle those Divisions in all publick Concerns, for carrying on the common Interest; as may evidently appear by the Unanimity and Disertion of all their Advices and Letters to the Directors at home."¹²² The local government was not doomed from the start. For the entirety of the colony's existence, despite outside pressures and internal conflict, the local government was able to execute and organize an effective system of ascendancy.

¹²¹ "Report by William Paterson to the Directors," Dec. 12, 1699, *Darien Papers*, 180.

¹²² Fletcher, 14.

The Scots were not lawless vigilantes seeking to exploit the bounty of their new home. They took the formation seriously and with great caution, from the decision where to place the fort to the way they would organize their local government.

Justifiable Land Claims

In an era of rapid expansion, procuring territories is a highly politicized feat. By the seventeenth century most of the conquerable land in the Americas had been claimed by one of the major European powers: England, France, Spain, Portugal, or Holland. When Scotland decided to get involved in the expansion, the other nations did not take kindly to it. The debate of acceptable forms of land acquisition was dubious. What was the basis for legal cessation of land? There was not a clear directive for this, and clearly the indigenous people were not considered. Does a written proclamation suffice or must one step foot on the soil to claim it for their nation? It is clear to see how this vague international “acceptance” of land-grabbing held countries to different standards.

In the initial Act for a Company of Scotland, reiterated before disembarking, the settlers were granted permission to “take possession of an uninhabited place, never before possessed by any European whatsoever” and “The Council General resolved to settle and plant a Colony in some place or other not inhabited, in America, or in or upon any other place, by the consent of the natives and inhabitants thereof...to be called by the name of Caledonia.”¹²³ The Scots adhered to this limitation and wrote back to the Directors in Scotland, “the place att first settlement of the Colony was, and yet continues to be, unpossessed by Spaniards or other Europeans; and wee are welcome enough to the

¹²³ Collection of Addresses, “A Letter from the Council-General of the Company of his Majesty, giving an Account of their Colony’s arrival and settlement at Darien,” 35. AND The Darien Papers, “Appointment of the Council of the Colony,” 49.

natives, so that our right cannot be questioned.”¹²⁴ The settlers not only followed the legal parameters placed on them; they ensured that the directions were obeyed.

The first land agreements were with the native Tule people who lived in the Darien region. Rose’s journal describes the first days of interaction between the Scots and the indigenous people. “Wee saw a flag of truce waved in the bottom of the bay. Wee went thither and found about 20 Indians with bowes and lances, but upon our approaching they unstrung their bowes in token of friendship.”¹²⁵ Later, the Indians travelled in two canoes to the Scottish ship and engaged in friendly discussion with drinks and food until they got drunk and slept aboard the ship all night.¹²⁶

Rose recounted the discussion between the settlers and the Tulé Chief in his journal. “He inquired the reason of our coming hither and what wee designed. Wee answered, our design was to settle among them if they pleased to receive us as friends, our business was trade, and that we would supply them from time to time with such comodities as they wanted, at much more reasonable rates than either the Spaniard or any other could do.”¹²⁷ The relationship between the Indians and the Scottish remained consistently positive. “Soon after their [the settlers’] arrival, the chief Indians here being friendly to them, welcomed them to settle in their Country, and consented to a Grant unto them of that Place and Lands adjacent, our Counsellors satisfying them therefore to their full content.”¹²⁸ The Scots continued to follow the ordinances for colonizing the area, put

¹²⁴ “Letter from the Council to the Directors,” Dec, 23, 1699, *Darien Papers*, 216.

¹²⁵ “Mr. Rose’s Journal,” Nov. 1, 1698, *Darien Papers*, 63.

¹²⁶ “Mr. Rose’s Journal,” Oct. 30, 1698, *Darien Papers*, 62.

¹²⁷ “Mr. Rose’s Journal,” Nov. 12, 1698, *Darien Papers*, 63.

¹²⁸ Borland, 21.

in place by Parliament, and openly discussed their settlement with the native people and received their blessing.

Imperialism rarely considers the rights of the native population or simply ignores their land claims. In this particular case, the Scots went through the necessary channels, even gaining permission of the local tribe to settle in the noted location. The Scots used the open agreement to provide legitimacy to their settlement. "That the Company having Settled with the Consent of these Dariens, must have the same Right, with the same Priviledges and Freedom of Trade/which the Dariens had, and that both are equally free from all the Spanish Pretentions."¹²⁹ The settlers should be commended for their efforts to work with the native people rather than authoritatively seizing land. The permission and partnership provided additional validity to the Scots' acquisition of the land.

Claims by the Spanish raised far more concern than that of the native Indians. The Spanish argued that because they had territory surrounding Darien, that they were thus entitled to Darien itself. The Spanish believed that they had absolute right to the area because they had established colonies in places like Cartagena and Portobello, to the north and south of Darien. Because Darien was nestled in the middle of their empire, the Spanish felt that, "the Extremities that in a manner environ the Isthmus of Darien, their Possession of these Places, must infer a Possession of the Interjacent Country in which the Company hath Settled, and consequently, that the Company hath encroached upon."¹³⁰ Clearly the Spanish wanted to claim all territory for themselves, but the Scots

¹²⁹ Collection of Addresses, "Memorial presented to His Majesty in May 1699 by the Lord President of the Session, and Lord Advocat on behalf of the Company of Scotland, Trading to Africa and the Indies, asserting, the Legality of their Settlement in Darien," 46.

¹³⁰ Ibid, 44.

questioned that if the Spanish did not reside in the area, how were they to be automatically entitled to it?

The Scottish argument continued that just because Spain had control over parts of the coast and areas within the Americas, did not mean they had de jure control over all lands in between. The Scots recognized Spanish control over the neighboring areas, but felt that since the Spanish did not settle the Isthmus, this did not give them right to fully lay claim to entire areas which had not been physically controlled by the Spanish. “The Limits of these places do reach to, and comprehend the Place posses'd by the Company, which neither the Spaniards, nor any for them, will ever be able to prove, by the Law of Nations, or any known Rule or Custom in such Cases.”¹³¹ The assertion that a nation can claim lands just because they have territory surrounding it would be a dangerous and ambiguous one, should all nations want to begin using that mentality, and this is what the Scots actively argued against.

When the Scots landed in Darien, discussions with the native people supported their understanding that the Spanish had no ownership of the area. “For at our coming there, the Indians (that gave us the land) declared to us they were a free nation never conquered, and that Land never did belong to any King or Prince of Europe.”¹³² The Scots saw no evidence of Spanish colonization around Darien and they also took the word of the native people that they were free of European control. The colonists further felt secure in their claim when they did not receive any formal objections from the Spanish governors in the area about their settling the Isthmus.

¹³¹ Ibid, 45.

¹³² “Questions proposed to Captain Pincartone by the Judges at Seville and his answers,” *Darien Papers*, 106.

Captain Pincartone of one of the vessels was questioned about whether he knew if the land belonged to the King of Spain. He replied, “No, for when we came there, had we found any Spaniards or subjects of the Crown of Spain, which should given us an account of that land belonging to the K. of Spain, we would have departed from it as we did from Crab Island, and followed other instructions.”¹³³ The nature of the Scots settlement was to not take any land that was possessed by another European power and to only reside once given permission by the native people. Their intentions were to avoid displacing the Spanish, and as Captain Pincartone states, they would have abandoned the mission and looked elsewhere if they found it inhabited by the Spanish upon their arrival.

No evidence proves Spanish possession of the land unless one believes that all land touching Spanish holdings to be automatically incorporated into the Spanish empire. That mentality does not support other areas of colonization throughout the Americas, so it would reason that it does not hold true in this scenario either. What is more probable is the fear that Spain had of Scotland potentially dividing their empire and reaping the benefits of the rich resources in the area.

The lack of Spanish ownership of the Darien region and the acceptance of a settlement by the native people provided a clear claim to the land by the Scots. They used peaceful means of expansion as the framework for their settlement. Self-imposed limitations meant they would not encroach on other Europeans’ land. Also by gaining the acceptance of the local population Scots did hold true to their word and did not abandon their original promises.

¹³³ Ibid, 105.

Unforeseen Scenarios

The story of Darien's disaster is rooted in the notion of Scottish incompetence and inexperience, claiming they simply could not keep up with the more dominant European nations. Errors in judgement can happen with all plans and occasionally some bad luck thwarts attempts at success. The Darien Scheme was no different. The Company carefully planned and executed the endeavor, writing contingencies for a multitude of eventualities. What cannot be considered are those events outside the realm of consideration. The Company faced obstacles for which they could not have prepared, some of which were external and even natural.

In the initial plans, the Company noted the favorable times of year to sail to the Caribbean and to settle the Isthmus before the rainy season began. Unfortunately, sustained gale force winds in Edinburgh prevented the fleet from debarking at the originally scheduled time, delaying their voyage longer than expected. This postponement compounded various issues leading to the proverbial snowball effect. Provisions on the ships were used while still in harbor, consuming some that would have been beneficial once docked in Darien. Also, by setting out later than anticipated, it set the Scots up to arrive in the Colony at the height of the rainy season.

The first expedition of ships arrived in the Caledonia Bay on October 30, 1698. After a few days aboard the ship hosting discussions with the local tribes, the Scots made landfall and began construction on their new settlement. In a matter of days, the weather

turned quite severe, as recorded in Rose's journal. Each of his entries speaks of the day's activities and also of the astounding amount of rain. In the months of November and December alone he mentions twenty three days of rain and thunder so strong, it rendered the building projects futile.

The excessive rain yielded further delays in the total construction of the settlement. The Scots, although accustomed to overcast and cool weather, were not used to rains of monsoon strength and the humidity only the rain forests of Central America provide. As a result, some members of the settlement began to fall ill. "And tho the Season had, all of a sudden, sowred and tho their Men turn'd afterwards very Sickly upon their Hands; yet they were firmly resolved to maintain that Place and Interest to the last."¹³⁴ Paterson notes that "there is such a thing as a more sickly tyme of the year then other in all countreys," particularly October is the peak malarial season. Although this factor was something they had planned for, they were understandably unprepared to handle the extreme extent of it.¹³⁵ The outbreak of yellow fever in Martinique, ultimately spreading throughout the Caribbean, also threatened the health of the settlers. Once again it was unforeseen events such as this that contributed to the Darien failure more than the perceived incompetence of the Scots.

Despite the setback, the Scots were unwilling to succumb to challenging circumstances. It is true that when they arrived in New Caledonia, it was the height of the rainy season, which posed logistical difficulties. They worked to build the settlement and prospered despite the trials of the elements. Once they were able to survive the

¹³⁴ Fletcher, 15.

¹³⁵ "Report by William Paterson to the Directors," Dec. 19, 1699, *Darien Papers*, 191.

difficult extremes, the situation eased and allowed for enjoyment in their new surroundings.

But those Rains even in the wettest months are not so continued, but there are many fair Days, and sometimes a week together with small Thunder, showers and refreshing breezes of Air. The pleasant dry Months are Decemeber, January, February, March, and April. The Sky is then very serene, and not so much as a Cloud to be seen, and notwithstanding the warm situation of the Climate, it's extreamly Pleasant, every thing having a fresh vendure and odour, the Air gently fanning the Inhabitants, so that the heat is so far from being troublesome that it's delectable.¹³⁶

This account shows that while there were some difficult times, the Scots were able to overcome them and could relish the pleasant surroundings of the new colony.

Work on the settlement was completed and the Scots pursued other objectives in the region. They had found some gold, but not the amount they had expected. Also, after exploring the Isthmus, the Scots surmised that an overland route to the Pacific would be too difficult to construct. The vision was there, but the ability to execute it was not. The Scots realized they would need to abandon this dream and focus first on their trade within the Caribbean and to the east.

Despite the setbacks to the colonization, the Scots still pushed to succeed. Regardless of bad luck and the few lapses in judgement, the settlers proved they could withstand the struggle. The colony was successful for nearly eight months, but by that time the Scots were in gross need of provisions and supplies. Unfortunate news of sunken provision ships never reaching the colony stunted further growth and success. The Scots then needed to turn to other trading partners within the Caribbean to fulfill

¹³⁶ "Gentleman lately arriv'd," 18.

their need for tools, some food, and other items. This was something they hoped to do through trade rather than necessity, but the lost provision ships and the English intervention made the settlers' situation dire.

The Company of Scotland supplied their frigates with enough provisions to last eighteen months. The supply did not last as long due to the initial delay and some of the items were not useful in the new climate. Resupply ships were sent and money was provided to the settlers to engage in commerce throughout the region. All of the factors were accounted for. What was not, however, was the strength of their political opponents.¹³⁷ The Scots apparently believed too optimistically that the anti-East India merchants would support them and open trade, but what they could not have envisioned was their own King turning his back on them and engaging in various tasks to leave the Scots thousands of miles away cut off from all supplies and aid.

¹³⁷ Smout, *Scottish Trade*, 251.

Sabotage on Multiple Fronts

Scotland vehemently believed in open trade as a result of their years of oppression by the English. The vision for the colony at Darien was to open up shipping lanes connecting the East and West and for all European powers to use it freely. They obtained legal rights to follow this vision and had public support from the government through the Acts passed by the Parliament. The mission was most certainly a nationalistic one, meant to benefit the Scots. However, the Directors also knew that such a project would ultimately be to the advantage of all European nations who would profit from more accessible commerce and increased trading partners. Unfortunately, the Scots could have not been more wrong and faced sabotage and betrayal from nearly all their European counterparts.

The once strong partnership of France and Scotland was questioned as soon as the Scots set foot in the Americas. The French had a large holding of islands throughout the Caribbean and a sizeable piece of land in North America. They viewed the Scots as undermining their trade since the upstart Scots would be able to produce and trade at a much lower rate. One Scot noted, “Yea, it is plainly the interest of France to have Caledonia broken.”¹³⁸ Without the connection to the West, the Scots would not directly benefit the French; instead, they posed more of a threat to disrupt the natural order.

¹³⁸ “Scotland Call for Duty,” 20.

The Spanish also had their own motivations. With great landholdings stretching from Mexico to the tip of Chile, the Spaniards were the dominant power in the region. Although the Scots were minute in comparison, they were placed at the center of Spain's empire. "The Spaniards, whom it highly concerns, will do their utmost to disturb us."¹³⁹ The Spanish did not directly attack the settlers, but patrolled the areas and would eventually send in men to flush out the colonists due to the fear of a Scottish colony driving a wedge in the Spanish empire.

The colonists were aware of the external risks, so they had strict internal expectations to ensure the colonists remained a united force against any of those wishing to harm their venture. "It shall be lawfull to any person or persons of what degree or quality soever, inhabiting the said Settlement of Caledonia, not only to protest against, but also to disobey and oppose any such resolution; and that it shall be death either publickly or privatly to move, deliberate, or reason upon any desertion or surrender of the said Settlement of Caledonia, without special order from the said Council-General for that effect."¹⁴⁰ As in all colonial efforts, some became disillusioned with the venture. The lack of provisions from Scotland and the increasing collusion against them in the Caribbean proved challenging for many of the colonists.

The push back from the French or the Spanish may have been manageable. The strain in the settlement could have been resolved with some provisions or nearby trade. Once the English got involved and betrayed the Scots, though, the quick and epic downfall of the colony at Darien was inevitable. The number of communications with

¹³⁹ "Gentleman lately arriv'd," 52.

¹⁴⁰ "Proclamation by the Council-General," *Darien Papers*, 285.

the King and parliamentary approval provided yet another factor for the failure that the Scots could not have planned for.

Back in England, King William III used his power to effectively stop the trade. It was no longer about the colony itself; rather the threat posed to the commercial status quo in the Caribbean. The governor, William Beeston of Jamaica, declared, "whereas I have received Commands from his Majestie ... Signifying to me, That His Majestie is unacquainted with the Intentions and Designs of the Scots Settling at Darien; and that it is contrary to the Peace entered into with His Majesties Allyes: and therefore has commanded me, that no alliance be given them."¹⁴¹ The King now escalated tensions. He did not merely ignore the Scots; he actively worked against them to ensure that no governor in the region would trade or aid them.

The governor of Jamaica took the orders given to him to by the King and went to the Spanish governor in Cartagena to inform him that although the Scots recognized the King, they were not English.¹⁴² To maintain alliances between England and Spain, the English were prepared to disown the Scottish when convenient. The Scots had been the pawn in English policy for centuries and were ordered to fight the King's wars and to pay the King's taxes. Now that the Scots attempted their own endeavor, they were met with rejection and betrayal.

¹⁴¹ William Beeston Sir, b, By the Honourable Sir William Beeston Kt. His Majesties Lieutenant Governour and Commander in Chief, In, and over This His Island of Jamaica, and Other the Territories Depending Thereon in America, and Vice-Admiral of the Same. "A Proclamation," *Early English Books*, 1641-1700 / 2489:06 (Edinburgh : Re-printed exactly according to the originals, Anno 1699., 1699), 1.

¹⁴² Germán Arciniegas, *Caribbean, Sea of the New World*, 1st Markus Wiener Publishers ed (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2003), 258.

When the settlers received word of such proclamations throughout the Caribbean, they were stunned by the acts taken by the King. “She had the surprizing newes, that proclamations were publisht against us in Jamaica, weherin it was declared, that by our settlement at Darien, we had broken the peace entered into with his Majesties allyes, and therefore prohibited all his Majesties subjects from supplying or holding any sort of correpondence with us, upon the severest penalties.”¹⁴³ They struggled to grasp the action of the King because they believed they were well-intended. “But are sorry to find that our good intentions therein must, in all probability, prove abortive, because of the Proclamations which we are advised have been published in all the said Plantations against the supplying of your Colony with any provisions, stores, or other necessaries whatsoever, or corresponding with you in any sort.”¹⁴⁴

Proclamations similar to those issued in Jamaica also occurred in Barbados. “These are therefore in his Majesty's Name ... strictly to command all his Majesty's Subjects inhabiting within this Island, that they forbear holding any Correspondence with, or giving any Assistance to the said Persons; and that no Provision, Arms, Ammunition, or other Necessaries whatsoever to be carried to them, as they shall answer the same at their peril.”¹⁴⁵

Once more in Montserrat, settlers recounted similar obstacles. “But the Governour of Montserrat was so inhumane, that he deny us the Liberty of having any Water or Provisions there, pretending his Orders from the Court of England for so

¹⁴³ “Report by William Paterson to the Directors,” Dec. 19, 1699, *Darien Papers*, 191.

¹⁴⁴ “To Our Trusty and Well Beloved Friends, the right Honorable Council of Caledonia in America,” Aug. 8, 1699, *Darien Papers*, 133.

¹⁴⁵ Collection of Addresses, “A Second Proclamation published in Barbadoes against the Scots Company and Colony,” 84.

doing.”¹⁴⁶ The Scots were in desperate need of provisions by this point. Their stores were running low and the resupply ships sailing from Scotland sank off the British coast before even reaching the Atlantic. The English understood the consequences of prohibiting any aid to the Scottish. They knew it was likely that the Scottish would fail and subsequently abandon their efforts to establish a colony in Panama. The King in an effort to deflect criticism denied such proclamations. “That his Majesty has been graciously pleased to declare that he knew nothing of those West-India Proclamations,” he claimed, but no one believed this at the time or since.¹⁴⁷

The Scots viewed the actions taken by the King as “the total suppression of our greatest commercial company.”¹⁴⁸ They became acutely aware of the political gamesmanship the King displayed. “It’s well known what violent Methods and other indirect Means were practiced, for discouraging any Undertakings that way.”¹⁴⁹ For them, the reasoning appeared obvious, “that it was in the Interest of England, to suppress and keep Scotland poor.”¹⁵⁰ The Scots began to see that the English were less interested in the success of the colonists and more concerned with their own dominance. It was

¹⁴⁶ Borland, 29.

¹⁴⁷ Fletcher, 35.

¹⁴⁸ Young Scotsman, formerly a volunteer in the Corsican service. 1769. “A north Briton extraordinary. [electronic resource] : written by a young Scotsman, now a Volunteer in the Corsican Service.” n.p.: Corte [i.e. London?] : printed, and sold by all the booksellers in Europe M.DCC.LXIX. [1769], 1769. Wright State University Library Catalog, EBSCOhost (accessed April 2, 2016), 67.

¹⁴⁹ “A Full and Exact Account of the Proceedings of the Court of Directors and Council-General of the Company of Scotland Trading to Africa and the Indies, with Relation to the Treaty of Union, Now under the Parliament’s Consideration.” In a Letter to a Person of Quality. Containing The Author’s Apology for Publishing the Same. ([Edinburgh?], 1706), [¹⁵⁰ Philanax Verax, “A Letter from a Member of the Parliament of Scotland to His Friend at London, Concerning Their Late Act, for Establishing a Company of That Kingdom, Tradeing to Africa and the Indies,” *Early English Books*, 1641-1700 / 2502:05 \(\[Edinburgh\] : Printed at London, and re-printed at Edinburgh, by the heirs and successors of Andrew Anderson, printer to the King’s most excellent Majesty, 1696\), 1696\), 5.](http://find.galegroup.com/ecco/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=ECCO&userGroupName=dayt38887&tabID=T001&docId=CW3300186352&type=multipage&contentSet=ECCOArticles&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE.Full and Exact Account of Proceedings, 19.</p></div><div data-bbox=)

probable that the merchants in London had a large influence on making Parliament believe that the success of the company endangered English supremacy.¹⁵¹ “This great commercial company had been long beheld with a jealous eye by our Southern neighbours, who were justly apprehensive of it becoming in a little time a dangerous rival to their East India Company, then a great favourite of their government. Its dissolution, therefore had been strenuously insisted on by the English commissioners.”¹⁵² To the Scots, this was no more than a jockeying for power, but one that put their entire livelihoods at stake.

The Scots looked to Caribbean plantation owners as culprits in their demise as well. “Our Neighbours at Home in their Plantations abroad, some of them, looked upon our Settlement and Undertaking, with a jealous and evil Eye, and the Effects of this, proved also disadvantageous, to the Success of our Colony; for how were we able to stand before such Envy? Especially when alone, and left to our single Strength.”¹⁵³ The Scots felt alone and quickly abandoned their belief that the King supported them. In a series of protestations to the English government, the Scots aired their confusion and their grievances at the utter act of treachery.

The settlers turned to the King and asked him for support. They cited their feelings of betrayal and appealed to the consideration that they as Scots, were subjects under his crown, and should be looked after in much of the same way as their English counterparts.

¹⁵¹Hiram Bingham, “The Early History of the Scots Darien Company: Investigation by the English Parliament”. *The Scottish Historical Review* 3 (12). Edinburgh University Press: 437–48. <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.libraries.wright.edu/stable/25517765>. 1906, 437.

¹⁵²“Letter from Britain,” 62.

¹⁵³ Borland, 101.

We beg of You to consider, how Our Sovereignty and Freedom is Violated, Our Laws trampled upon, and our Trade interrupted; how Our Brethern have been Starved and made Slaves, Our Colony deserted; and Our Ships burnt and lost Abroad; whilst Our Petitions have been rejected, Our Company baffled, Our People famished, Our Metropolis burnt, and flames of Divisions kindled amongst Us at Home... We pray You to Remember, how Promises made You to advance Our trade, have been broke; how those to Our Company have been falsified; and how English Ministers have had Private Orders to act contrary to those Promises.¹⁵⁴

Their intention to highlight the wrongdoings and ask for the support of their King was not well-received.

The colonists were not only shocked but embarrassed by the King's actions.

"How Mortifying, Afflictive, and Grievous it will be to that whole Nation, to be discourag'd and frustrated of Protection from the King, of whom pursuant to the Act and the Patent which he hath granted them, they expected to be countenanc'd, animated and defended."¹⁵⁵ They also could not comprehend how their own leader was so steadfast in orchestrating their demise. "We look upon it as a very strange thing, That the King of Britain should offer to hinder us, who are a Free People, to Trade with whom we please; But are amazed to think, That he would hinder us from Joyning with his own Subjects in Scotland, to whom he had lately given such large priviledges, by so Solemn an Act of Parliament."¹⁵⁶ The Union of the Crowns nearly a century earlier meant that the Scots and English would coexist under the same political authority, the King. Although they had years of contentious relations and culture distinctions, it was astounding that the King,

¹⁵⁴ Anon, "The People of Scotland's Groans and Lamentable Complaints, Pour'd out before the High Court of Parliament., *Early English Books*, 1641-1700 / 2575:15 ([Edinburgh : s.n., 1700?], 1700), 1.

¹⁵⁵ Robert Ferguson, "A Just and Modest Vindication of the Scots Design, for the Having Established a Colony at Darien with a Brief Display, How Much It Is Their Interest, to Apply Themselves to Trade, and Particularly to That Which Is Foreign," *Early English Books*, 1641-1700 / 276:13 ([Edinburgh? : s.n.], 1699., 1699), 41

¹⁵⁶ Collection of Addresses, "A memorial given in to the Senate of the City of Hamburg in French, faithfully translated into English," 6.

whose interest would also be served from their mission, would so actively work to derail it.

England's overt sabotage of the Scottish endeavor was the final element that doomed them to failure. The Scots could have possibly overcome the weather and the difficult landscape. History showed that the Spanish could be held off by small numbers. The prime location allowed access to all of the major trading routes in the Caribbean. Provisions which ran low, could have been easily acquired. Once the English openly and vigorously condemned the Scottish, there was little else that could be done and the Scots were unable to flourish as they had once hoped. The list of contributing factors to the failure of the Darien Scheme is long. Many of those setbacks could have been overcome, though. What was insurmountable was the sabotage of the English. The power William III had throughout the world is clearly a determining factor in the Darien Scheme's downfall, not the ineptitude or poor planning of the Scots. What should be noted is the meticulous effort taken by the Company of Scotland to execute a workable plan that could handle a variety of potential challenges, and they did.

Concluding Thoughts

For months the Scots saw success in the new colony. They managed to endure the rainy season, ally themselves with the native people, avoid any conflicts with the Spanish, and to find suitable food supplies within the proximity of their settlement. A series of events changed the fortune of the Scottish colonists. Bad luck joined with the determination of the English to end all trading hopes, and rendered the Scots unable to combat the challenges.

At the beginning of this thesis, a clear admission was made that the Darien Scheme was a failure. From the outset, concessions were made that the Darien Scheme was a failure. The Scots were unable to accomplish their goal of a Westward passage to Asia, to construct a long-term settlement in the Americas, or to form a viable trading company in the highly competitive Caribbean region. Additionally, acceptance of the few errors in judgement throughout the planning were acknowledged and some of the bad luck that befell the colonists outlined.

Despite all of those concessions, the Scots still could have created a successful colony and trading business in the West Indies. Their planning was deliberate and cautious. They brought together the great minds of the time to conceive of a plan that promised wealth and reputation. Through astute fiscal planning and national support, the Company responsibly sought and purchased ships and provisions to outfit the mission to the highest degree. The Directors deliberately created sailing plans to avoid initial

sabotage and to give the best chance at success. Conditions aboard the ships were above the standard at the time, as only a small percentage of their travelers fell ill.

Once they reached their end destination, the Scots continued to adhere to their self-imposed imperialist rules by claiming land unpossessed by a European power and by gaining permission of the local tribes. The most favorable defensive position rich in food and resources marked the spot of their great colony. After months of positive progress the Scots then turned to open up their trade with other powers throughout the region only to be quelled by their own King, thus stifling any trade or success.

The accounts of the time provide a very different image of the Darien Scheme, as is shown in the historiography. The hyperbolic myth of the “disaster at Darien” needs to be revisited. Let not the tale of Scottish failure be told through critical accounts, rather the story is one of efforts of the Company who worked tirelessly to give their nation the opportunity to succeed amidst oppression. The Scots had the foresight to see an opportunity and they progressed through all legal channels to turn it into a reality. Their strong will and forward planning propelled them to possible future success. Had not the English powerhouse stood resistant, the story of New Caledonia would be very different. The Darien scheme was only a failure due to the flexing of political muscle. Scotland should no longer brandish the black eye of colonial failure. Instead, they should take solace in knowing that their dream was over 200 years ahead of its time, and without political sabotage, could have changed the history of Scotland and the entire world.

“But in all this Business, both abroad and at home, God seems to frown upon up.”¹⁵⁷

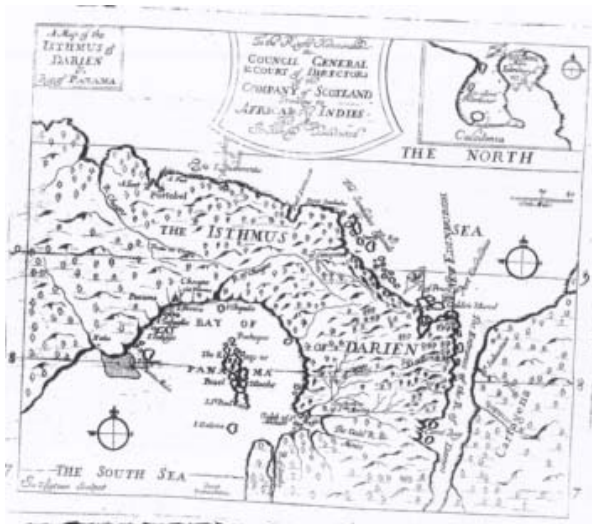
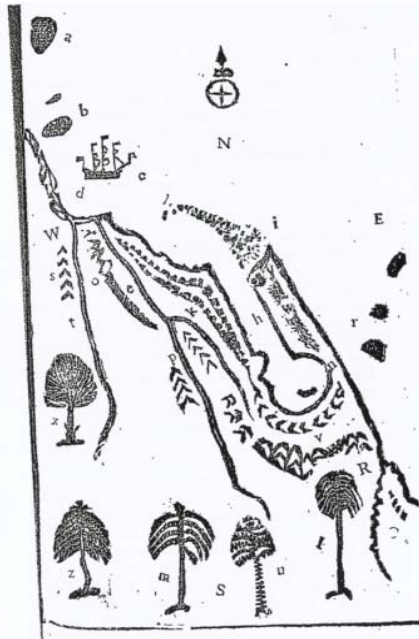
¹⁵⁷ “Scotland Call for Duty,” 5.

Appendix

Map of the Colony

(8)
See the Following MAPP of this NECK and Har-
bour, with a Uensry Explication thereof.

- a. shows the Isle of Pines
 - b. Golden Island.
 - c. where the Spanish Fleet did rid;
 - d. Brandies Bay.
 - e. Acla the Greater.
 - h. CALEDONIA Harbour and Rod,
 - i. The Lock oar.
 - k. Mountains and Woods,
 - l. Rocks.
 - m. The Plantan Tree.
 - n. The Narrow Neck.
 - o. The Orange Grove
 - p. Indian Habitations.
 - r. Little Islands and Rocks,
 - s. Indian dwellings.
 - t. Acla the Lesser.
 - v. Mountains and Woods.
 - w. The watering place.
 - u. The Maccaw-Tree, full of prickles
 - z. The Orange-Tree.
 - y. The Fort.
 - z. The Cockernut-Tree.
 - i. The wild Cabage-Tree.
 - C. Caret-Bay river and Indians dwelling Westward
 - R. About this Bay, the Spaniards landed men against
- us.
- | | |
|---|--------|
| N | North. |
| S | South. |
| E | East. |
| W | West. |



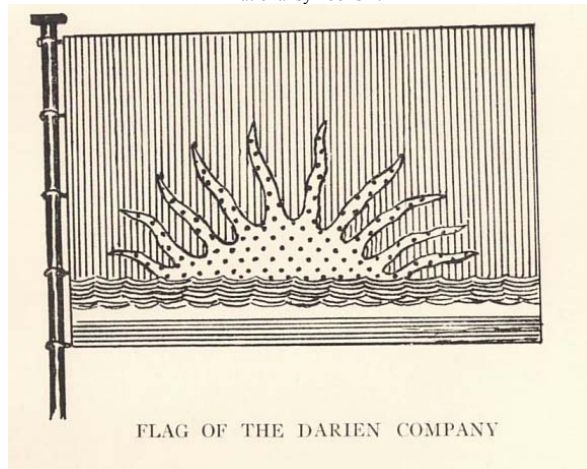
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The Colonial Seal and Flag



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“On a shield quartered by a saltire are a ship, an elephant and two other exotic foreign animals. At either side stands a native of a distant land and above is the rising sun of future wealth. A Latin motto proclaims the Company’s vision: ‘Quo panditur orbis/ Vis unita fortior’ (Where the world stretches forth / its joint strength is stronger). The arms point to powerful strands in the Company’s history: colonization, dreams of wealth, exoticism, global vision and national symbolism.”¹⁶¹



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¹⁵⁹ Wafer and Dampier, 15.

¹⁶⁰ Cundall, 13.

¹⁶¹ Watt, 23.

¹⁶² Cundall, 19.

Poems of the Endeavor

From the Borland Memoirs of Darien

"No wonder then, our Infant Colony
In Darien, could not long Timethriving be,
By such ill Neighbours, in a Spot of Earth
Beset with Griefs, and daily Views of Deaths
Remote from Friends, the Objects of Envy
To many, who did wish we here might die
Our single Strength, but feeble to support us,
Our skill in such affiars, small to direct us
Besides in higher cause of our disstress
God's wratth against us, for our great Trespass
Then strange not that our new Planation
Soon died, and came to Desolation.¹⁶³

“A Poem upon the undertaking of the Royal Company of Scotland Trading to Africa and the Indies”

A proof of which is miserable me,
Who never did an willing injurie
And yet have more then fix years Prison found,
For setting food on Caledonian Ground...
But all in vain, as vainly do I sing,
For non that hear me dare compassion bring...
But shift they fancie to the English shoar,
An hospitable shoar by Trade refin'd,
To strangers ever Equal, Just and Kind,
Ah! Heav'n that to their Kings they were the lame
In this they fail, in this they are to blame.
Their Ertours on that head to Volumns swell,
Ah! Might they ever in Oblivian dwell.
In that once happy Land, and may it be,
Happy again, which I scarce hope to see.
There lives a sort of Merchants might become
The wisest Council board in Christendome.
Numbers of such who do as rightly know...
Envy that Child of Pride begot in Hell,
Oh! May she ever with our Neighbours dwell,
These Neighbours which so hate our British Isle,
They seek our Ruine, at our Losses smile...
Our Wealth in Ashes and destroy our Trade,
Or, that some potent Nation did invade,
Haste, looke about you, English Men, the cries,
The Scots will Trade, Scotland is growing Wise.
Her senat does discern her Interest,

¹⁶³ Borland, 101-102.

They'll choice Trade, by which you once were
 Free Trade to the Indies and America...
 Three Furies which do Envy still attend,
 And never do distinguish Foe from Friend.
 Now these that could silently fit, and see
 Bantam surpriz'd, Amboyna ruin'd be....
 At a wise thing at home intraged grow,
 And by their votes the outmost malice shows,
 As if the Lands were not together joyn'd...
 That Scotland's like to Thieve is very plaine,
 They've got a Law, and can that Law mainataines,
 A law that lets all sorts of Trading free,
 No Land, a Wiser Land did ever see,
 The English anget proves it's excellence,
 They learn the Mighty Value of it thences;
 Wise Paterson, or's Friends, could charm but few,
 Tho all they laid, was Potent, Just, and True,
 They made it evident, that Trade by Sea,
 Needs little more Support, than being free...
 Make us grow Lazie, and in East delight,
 Our Bodies tender, and unapt to fight...
 Whilst to save them, we all Invention rack;
 The shameless Rascals run us in the back....
 Bribe them indeed to come and fetch them hence,
 Thus we enrich them at our own Expense.
 But since it is alle foolish to complain,
 I'll bring my Thoughts to Scotland back again;
 Where all the Truths that Paterson has laid,
 Had in the end but small Impression made...
 On some such Shoar froth all Preluctancy,
 This company designs a colony.
 To which all mankind freely may resort,
 And find quick Justice in an open Port.
 To that the weary Labourer may go,
 And gain an easie Wealth in doing so.
 Small use of tiresome Labour will be there,
 That Clyme richly rewards a little Care,
 There every Man may choose a pleasant Seat,
 Which poor men will make Rich and Rich men Great...
 By Manufacturers here the Poor will live,
 So they that go and they that stay will thrive,
 Then Caledonia by her Lovers won,
 Will now Light shining nuptial robes put on,
 Sea Gods, and Nympho will dance and Tritons play
 And yearly celebrate her Wedding Day.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴ Anon, "A Poem upon the Undertaking of the Royal Company of Scotland Trading to Africa and the Indies," *Early English Books*, 1641-1700 / 2053:06 (Edinburgh : printed for James Wardlaw, and to be sold at his shop in the Parliament closs, 1697, 1697).

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