

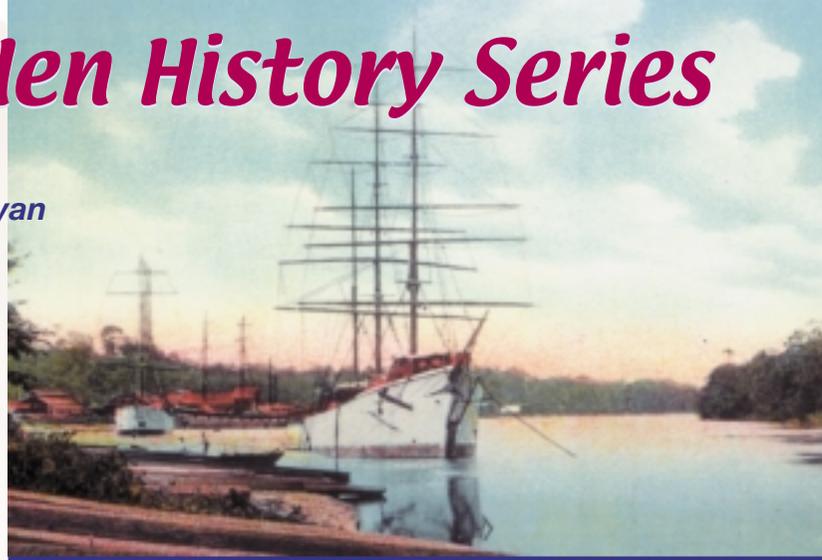
# Linden History Series

by Carmen Barclay Subryan

## Before Linden

*Did you think that Mackenzie was discovered by George Bain Mackenzie, the geologist who started the bauxite plant? Do you know the significance of the court house at Christianburg, one of the longest standing buildings in the area, as well as the significance of the wheel behind the courthouse? Have you heard of Maria Elizabeth, Three Friends, Noit Gedacht, Speightland? Do names like Allicock, Paterson (Patterson), DeNiewerkerk, Spencer, Blount, Binning etc ring a bell?*

Well, let me take you back to times before Mackenzie. Yes, there was life before Mackenzie, and I'll fill you in. For those who do not know, in 1914, George Bain Mackenzie, an American geologist of Scottish descent, arrived at Wismar in a small canoe paddled by an Amerindian, ostensibly to check out reports of



Vessels at Sprostons Wismar Stelling loading greenheart on the Demerara in the 1800s.

bauxite found in the area. Even before Mackenzie, as far back as 1868, according to one report, government geologists had discovered rich bauxite deposits at Christianburg, but it was not until 1906 that Sir John Harrison, Director of Science and Agriculture, confirmed that the discovery was indeed bauxite. Between 1910 and 1911, Sir John published a series of papers in a Geological Magazine about the discovery, and shortly thereafter, between 1913 and 1914, two permits to explore for bauxite at Christianburg, Wismar, and Akyma were issued to a Mr. Evan Wong (*Memorandum on the Occurrence of Bauxite in British Guiana, Argosy, 1937*). The next move was to acquire thousands of acres of land on behalf of the Demerara Bauxite Company (Demba.) It was around this time that Mackenzie appeared.

What most people are not aware of is that a vibrant community existed before Mackenzie arrived. As a matter of fact, the Dutch, who lived in the area before the British, had established sugar plantations in upper regions of rivers before the British began to cultivate the fertile coastlands. Wismar, one of these plantations, once owned by an Englishman named Anthony Somersall, was bought by John Hoo-a-shoo, grandfather of a later Evan Wong who worked at Demba prior to nationalization. The Hoo-a-shoo family also owned the Planba mines which they eventually sold to Demba. Plantation Christianburg, later owned by John Dalgleish Paterson, employed over 2,000 workers, mainly in the woodcutting business (*see adjacent view of the great house*). Paterson began buying up as much land in the area as he could get soon after his arrival at Christianburg. Later, he bought up tens of thousand of acres all the way to the Essequibo. The Paterson story is one that has intrigued many over the years.

Paterson, reputedly a Scottish army major, acquired Plantation Christianburg, a sugar estate, from a Dutchman named Christaan Finet shortly after his arrival in the area in 1810, over 100 years before Mackenzie came. It was Paterson who consolidated and even monopolized the woodcutting business in the area, establishing one of the first water powered sawmills in then British



Patterson's great house of the 1800s, which later became Christianburg Court House.

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The old sawmill waterwheel which operated at Plantation Christianburg, is still there.

Guiana. Paterson had contacts in Georgetown, such as the Bookers brothers, and a great deal of the wood used for Georgetown buildings came from his sawmill. He even built his great house, now the court house, which has stood the test of time. Some may remember that there was a long stelling in front of the court house as well as two cannons. Paterson sounded these cannons when many of his friends and business partners visited him. In his book, *Twenty-Five Years in British Guiana (1872 – 1897)*, Henry Kirke, a Dutchman who was the Sheriff for the Demerara area, recalled visiting Paterson’s great house and meeting Mrs. Paterson (Jane McKell) and her son John Jr. who were running the business. Kirke expressed astonishment at the house which he described as “one of the best built in the colony”, and he described the opulent interior which was comprised of furnishings which Paterson had brought from Scotland. Today, most of the stelling as well as the cannons are long gone, but the waterwheel from the sawmill still remains, a solitary monument to the past (*see above*).

Paterson had a dozen children with two colored women, Elizabeth Hill and her niece, Jane McKell. Though he did not marry Elizabeth, who bore him five children, he did marry her niece after sending Elizabeth to live at Plantation Amelia’s Ward, which he also owned. When Paterson died in 1842 (his will was probated by one of the Bookers brothers), his heirs sold some of the land that he had amassed. In the late 1890’s, Paterson’s son sold the entire estate, including the sawmill at Christianburg, to the government for a great deal of money since the government wanted to build a light railway system connecting Demerara and Essequibo. This railway system was needed because of the dangerous rapids which impeded the transportation of goods to the Essequibo area.



Paddle-wheel steamer freight at lumber-mill stelling on the Demerara in late-1800s.

The idea was that goods could be transported to Wismar via the Demerara River then sent by rail to upper Essequibo. Sproston acquired the contract to build the railroad.

History states that Paterson arrived in 1810 with two companions, Blount and Spencer, who also settled in the area. Blount acquired land at Old England, and Spencer lived at Three Friends, which he named in honor of himself and his two companions, Paterson and Blount. In her book, *Run Softly Demerara*, Zahra Freeth described Spencer’s great house on a hill as being complete with a moat and drawbridge. Spencer became a Postholder, essentially a government agent for Amerindian affairs. He lived with Hannah Simon (Simmons), the daughter of an Amerindian chief. The Spencer line is also interwoven with that of Robert Frederick Allicock, a Scotsman who lived in the area before the arrival of the Three Friends (Blount, Paterson, and Spencer) in 1810. Hannah Simon had a daughter, Nancy, for R.F. Allicock and that daughter later married Spencer’s son, John Jr. Their daughter, Maria Elizabeth, had part of the bauxite mining area named for her.



The Christianburg lumber operations taken over by the Government and operated by Sproston to supply cross-ties for the Rockstone railroad and greenheart dock pilings.

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Photo credits: For the historic early photos in this article, The Lindener thanks Messrs. Paul Mueller and Joseph Murray. A special thanks to Mr. Evan Wong of USA, formerly a Demba Services’ General Superintendent, for the information on the roles of both his grandfathers in establishing the Mackenzie bauxite era.

Some photos were digitally corrected and/or colored by The Lindener.



An old family plot at Speightland.

The Allicock story is particularly interesting since in the 1950's the family was forced to sue the bauxite company which was attempting to displace them. Incidentally, they won the lawsuit because Allicock left a will, which was probated in 1822, giving his plantation, Noit Gedacht (Retrieve), slaves and all, to Ann Mansfield, a colored woman, and their eight children "forever." The story of how Mackenzie used deception to acquire much of the Allicock land, which included Speightland, supposedly to develop orange groves, is well known in the area. Allicock, who had arrived in the area in the late 1700's, more than 150 years before Mackenzie, had become the fast friend and business partner of John D. Paterson, whom Allicock trusted to be the executor of his will. Because of the will, Allicock descendants were able to win a favorable settlement with Demba which was attempting to displace them so that it could build the alumina plant. But the Allicock line extended far beyond Retrieve. In the 1890's, Kirke wrote of visiting Seba (Sebacabra) in the upper Demerara, which was owned by an Allicock who had a white Scottish wife.

Numerous descendants of the Allicocks, Blounts, Patersons, and Spencers still live in the Linden area, their lives intertwined

not only with each other, but also with numerous others who have settled in Linden. Thus, when you hear of names such as Binning, Barclay, DeClou, Flemming, Gittens, Van Gronigen, and Yansen, among others, you are hearing of descendants of Europeans who lived in Linden long before Mackenzie was even a dream.



### About the Author

## Carmen Barclay Subryan

*The acting treasurer of the newly formed D.C. Metro Chapter/ LFU, Carmen Barclay Subryan was born in Linden, where her ancestral roots run deep. She attended Christianburg Scots School, Mackenzie High School, and Guyana Teachers College. In 1968, she left for Howard University where she received her B.A. (Honors), M.A. as well as a Ph.D. in 1983. She has been on the faculty at Howard University since 1974.*



*Always deeply interested in her roots, Carmen has written two novels about life in the Mackenzie area. The first one, Black-Water Women, explores the lives of four women in the area, and the second one, Black-Water People, is a historical novel about her mother's family, the Allicocks, one of the first European families in the area. She is currently working on her third novel, Black-Water Children. Carmen can be reached at [csubryan@howard.edu](mailto:csubryan@howard.edu).*

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author of Black-Water Women

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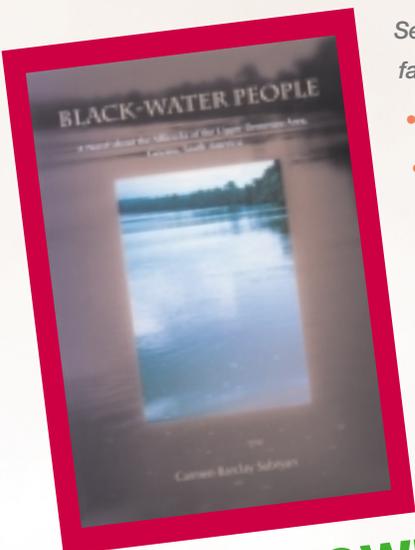
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