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Appravasi Ghat
inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2006

AAPRAVASI GHAT

WORLD HERITAGE SITE

M a u r i t i u s

A A P R A V A S I G H A T T R U S T F U N D

PUBLICATION SUPERVISOR

Corinne Forest,
Head Technical Unit, Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund

PROJECT COORDINATORS

Satyendra Peerthum and Christelle Miao Foh,
Research Unit, Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund

TEXT & RESEARCH

Dr. Richard Allen, Lovehin Andiapen, Babita Devi Bahadoor, Dr. Diego Calaon, Kiran Jankee-Chuttoo, Corinne Forest, Natasha Kheddoor-Ramcharitar, Christelle Miao Foh, Vikram Mugon, Ashvin Nemchand, Satyendra Peerthum, Maurina Soodin-Rungheen

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INTRODUCTION

Indentured migration is a major milestone in the modern history of the Indian Ocean and the wider European colonial plantation world of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The indentured labour system was introduced in Mauritius as the *Great Experiment* by the British Imperial Government in the aftermath of the abolition of slavery, with the specific objective of demonstrating the superiority of ‘free’ labour over slave labour. This modern system of contractual labour led to the genesis of a new world economic order which exists to this day. The Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Site is a tangible symbol of this new labour system.

In the nineteenth century, the indentured labour system was the defining feature of labour in the European colonial plantation world. Central to this innovative system was the indenture contract which was a written agreement entered into by a person who agreed to work for another person for a given period of time. A fundamental aspect of plantation labour was that the indenture contract regulated the terms of employment of labourers and it defined the general standard of living, specifying wage rates, working hours and the type of work, rations, housing and medical treatment.

The indenture system, although based on a contractual agreement between employer and labourers, differed from other and earlier forms of contractual labour of

the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries’ European colonial plantation world. It included a clause that a wage be paid on a monthly basis and a penal clause for non-fulfilment or violation of the contract by the indentured labourer.

The historical importance of the Labour Diaspora for the Indian Ocean in particular is that it was the largest movement of population to take place in this part of the globe during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Aapravasi Ghat is significant because it welcomed the largest number of these indentured immigrants.

Between 1826 and 1910, more than 462,000 labourers who were recruited in India and in different regions of the Indian Ocean and brought to Mauritian shores, passed through the Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Site to toil on sugar plantations. Furthermore, Mauritius was the first country to introduce indentured Indian labourers on a large scale. The Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Site, formerly known as the *Immigration Depot* and *Coolie Ghat*, was the first depot where indentured labourers were registered.

More than two-thirds of those immigrants settled on the island which altered the social, economic, religious and political landscape. In addition, the thousands of Malagasy, Comorian, East African, Liberated Africans and Chinese contractual workers who were also introduced to work on Mauritian sugar estates, also contributed to the emergence of the island’s multi-ethnic society.

The uniqueness of the Mauritian experience with indenture and the singularity of the history of the Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Site provide deep insights into the nature and dynamics of the emergence of post-emancipation societies in European colonial plantation world during the mid-19th century and beyond. Indentured immigration in British Mauritius symbolizes the successful interaction and peaceful co-existence of communities of Asian, African and European origins which has led to the emergence of a pluri-cultural society.

The success of indentured immigration in Mauritius led plantation owners in other parts of the European colonial plantation and independent countries to emulate the Mauritian ‘*Great Experiment*’. Between the 1840s and 1870s, Guyana, Trinidad, Fiji, Jamaica, and South Africa and many other European colonies began to employ indentured labourers. A large number of ships bound for the Caribbean and South Africa stopped at Mauritius.

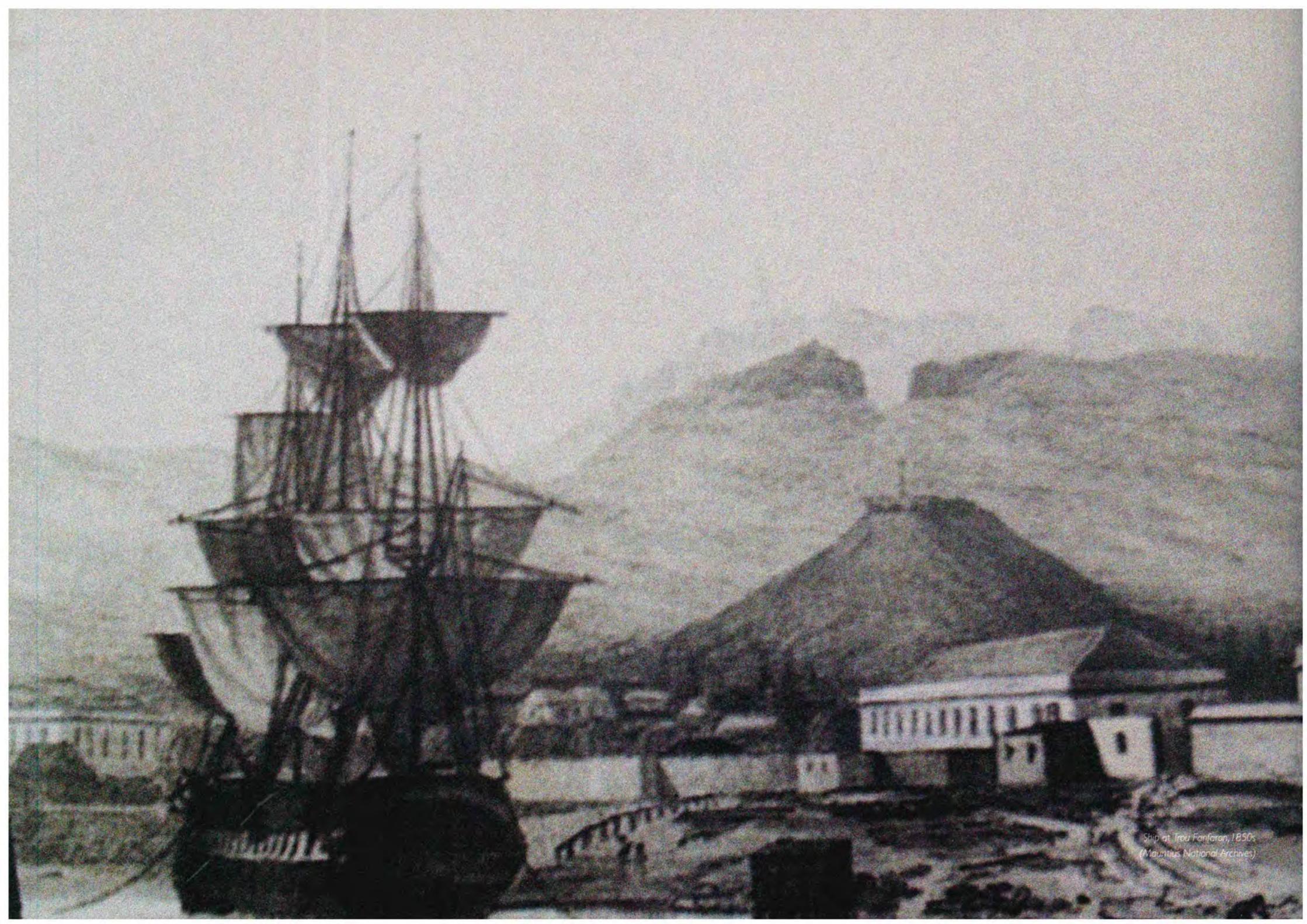
During the period of indenture, more than 2 million indentured labourers left India, South-East Asia, China, Africa, Java and Melanesia for various parts of the British, French, Dutch, Spanish, German colonial empires, and independent countries. Moreover, more than 1.2 million of these labourers came from India and were despatched to work in the Caribbean, southern and eastern Africa, the Indian Ocean, South East Asia and the South Pacific.

The Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Site is a hallowed *lieu de mémoire* that symbolizes a movement of peoples who defied tradition, travelled hundreds of miles to Mauritius and other foreign lands. They crossed the *kalapani* hoping for a better future for themselves and their children. As a result, indenture contributed in shaping the histories and destinies of those countries thanks largely to the success of the '*Great Experiment*' led in Mauritius where the Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Site played a crucial role in this complex historical process.

Dharam Yash Deo Dhuny
Chairman, Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund

The names of the 36 Hill Coolies from Bihar (India) who arrived in Mauritius on 2nd November 1834 on the ship the Atlas (Mauritius National Archives)

Sardar.	X	Zungam	X
Subaram Maite.	X	Callachaud.	X
Bhoodhoo.	X	Bholah.	X
Champah.	X	Tisara Bhoodhoo.	X
Bhundhoo.	X	Sibchurn	X
Chooneram.	X	Chhota Bairdhoo.	X
Juttoo.	X	Seenram.	X
Chhota Bhoodhoo.	X	Budphram.	X
Bachoo.	X	Muggrao.	X
Orjooon	X	Sharcab.	X
Pannohun.	X	Chaylin.	X
Lookram	X	Choolungs.	X
Phieram.	X	Bhaggratt.	X
Ghaupsa.	X	Gingaram.	X



Ship at Trou Fanfanon, 1850s
(Mauritius National Archive)



01

INDENTURE AS A NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL PHENOMENON

The arrival of Javanese indentured workers in Paramaribo, Suriname, 1920s
(National Archives of Suriname)



INDENTURE IN MAURITIUS: THE AAPRAVASI GHAT WORLD HERITAGE SITE

On 16 July 2006, the Aapravasi Ghat was inscribed on the World Heritage List of UNESCO. This inscription marked the recognition of indenture, so far considered as a silent part of colonial history. The Aapravasi Ghat became an international symbol of nineteenth century indenture because it represents the success of the ‘Great Experiment’. This Experiment took place in Mauritius to evaluate a new system of recruitment called *indenture* after slavery was abolished.

As from the 1830s, the British authorities sought to set up a new system of recruitment for its colonies around the world where workforce was much needed in various thriving industries. In response to the abolitionists’ pressure to set up a ‘free’ system of labour, the British restored indenture formerly used to recruit workers from Europe to America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Before resorting to indenture on a large scale, the British chose Mauritius as a place of experiment for

The 16 Steps of the Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Site where tens of thousands of indentured labourers first set foot on Mauritian soil (AGTF Collection)

this new system of recruitment. As early as 1829, 400 Chinese workers from Penang in Malaysia and Singapore and 800 Indian workers from Madras in India were recruited to work on the island’s plantations. However, these workers did not adapt to local working conditions and were soon repatriated.

The difficulties of dissociating the recruitment of indentured workers from Africa from the institution of slavery resulted in the rejection in 1834 of a proposal to import African labourers into the island. Proposals were also made in 1835 and 1836 to introduce workers from the island of Anjouan in the Comoros, the island of Madagascar, and even from the East African possessions of the Imam of Muscat.

The most logical place from which Mauritian planters might import labour was another British colony, India, which seemed to have an inexhaustible supply of inexpensive labour and, moreover, had a government that viewed emigration as a way of relieving overcrowding population and improving the lives of the subcontinent’s poorer inhabitants.

It was the recruitment in 1834 of 70 labourers from Calcutta and Bombay that is widely regarded as marking the beginnings of the ‘Great Experiment’. Between 1834 and 1838, more than 24,000 indentured Indian immigrants, privately recruited, reached Mauritius. Their arrival heralded the beginnings of what soon became a global movement of indentured labour.

Mauritius was the crucial test case in the use of indentured labour and was the first country to receive indentured labourers during the nineteenth century. In total, 462,000 indentured labourers arrived, stayed and transited through Mauritius

between the 1830s and the early 1900s. The Mauritian Immigrant Depot - the Aapravasi Ghat - was built in 1849 to receive the increasing number of indentured labourers who emigrated from India, East Africa, China, Southeast Asia and Madagascar to work on the island's sugar estates. Over 70% of today's Mauritian population are the descendants of those indentured immigrants.

The Aapravasi Ghat symbolizes an important development in modern human history: this architectural ensemble stands for the 'Great Experiment' initiated by the British Government after the abolition of slavery in the British Empire in August 1833 to demonstrate the superiority of 'free' over slave labour in its plantation colonies. The result of this 'Great Experiment' was the creation of a system of indentured labour that entailed the movement of diverse peoples from colonized areas to other established colonies.

Although depots were built in other colonies and countries, including Indian port-cities such as Calcutta and Madras, to process and accommodate the indentured immigrants, most of the structures no longer exist or are in ruins. The Aapravasi Ghat is the best known and preserved example of immigration depots that witnessed the world-wide migration of more than two million indentured men, women, and children to over 30 colonies, countries, and territories between 1834 and the 1920s.

As such, the Aapravasi Ghat represents not only the development of the modern system of contractual labour but also the memories, traditions and values that those men, women, and children carried with them when they left their homes to work in foreign lands, and which were subsequently bequeathed to their millions of descendants.

Indenture entailed a mass migration that resulted in the creation of multicultural societies around the world.



The Hospital Block of the Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Site (AGTF Collection)



The shed for indentured immigrants (AGTF Collection)

THE INDENTURE SYSTEM DURING THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

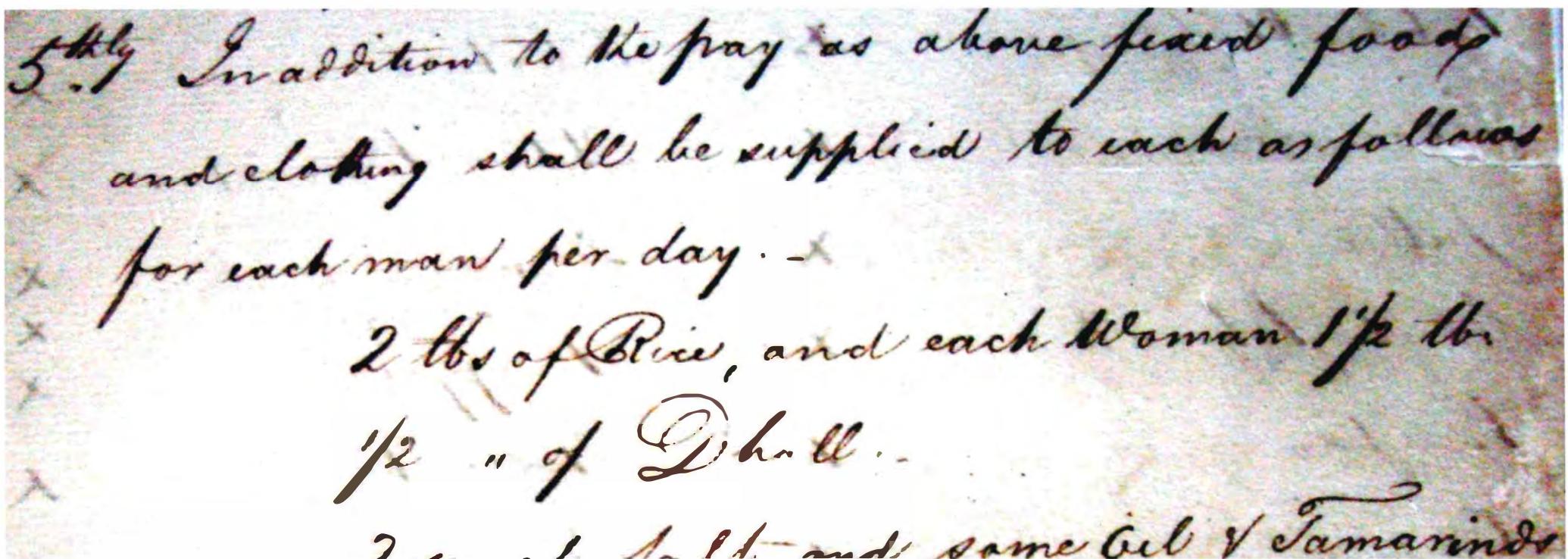
The term ‘indenture’ refers to a written contract entered into by one person to work for another person for a specified period of time. An indentured immigrant was an individual who agreed to be transported to a colony to labour, often for five

years or more. Labourers’ contracts specified their terms of employment and outlined their general standard of living: wage rate, working hours, type of work, rations, housing and medical care. The laws that regulated relations between ‘masters’ and their indentured ‘servants’ addressed several mutual rights and obligations.

In Mauritius, for example, Ordinance No. 16 of 1835 stipulated that a ‘servant’ who refused to work, who engaged in various acts of misconduct (such as disobeying orders or being absent from work without permission) or who left his ‘master’ before his contract had expired could be fined or imprisoned. The same Ordinance also prohibited

labourers from joining together to change the terms of their contract or terminate their service, and specified that labourers who had been imprisoned had to make up for the time they had spent in prison.

The nineteenth-century abolitionists argued that the indenture system was actually a “new system of slavery” because of these regulations whereas the partisans of these clauses emphasized that such legislation prevented workers’ ‘idleness.’ The extent to which indentured labourers were ‘unfree’ or coerced remains a subject of discussion and debate to this day.



An extract of the labour contract of the 36 Hill Coolies from Bihar (India) engaged as indentured labourers in Mauritius in November 1834 (Mauritius National Archives)





*Indo-Mauritian workers from marcellement Saint André in the 1940s
(Mauritius Chamber of Agriculture)*

INDENTURE IN OTHER FORMER COLONIES

Mauritius welcomed the single largest contingent of indentured immigrants. In other parts of the world, the largest numbers of indentured immigrants were landed in Guyana, Trinidad, South Africa and Réunion Island. Yet in these countries, sites and structures similar to those in Mauritius have not always survived in their original form or have disappeared.

The emancipation of three-quarters of a million slaves in the British West Indies in 1834 raised the same problems for local sugar planters as it did for their Mauritian counterparts half a world away. The British Government in London and colonial governments were anxious to maintain sugar production. Caribbean planters needed more labour than was available locally and wanted workers who would work for lower wages.

They looked to places such as Africa and China but, like Mauritian plantation-owners, came to rely largely on India for a steady supply of labourers. As such, Mauritius served as the model for a system that dispersed indentured labourers from Africa, East Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia and the South Pacific around the world.

A group of Liberated Africans on a sugar estate in Long Mountain in 1870
(Mauritius National Archives)



ID Immigration Depot no longer in existence

LP Landing Place

QS Quarantine Station no longer in existence

● Structure preserved

ID Immigration Depot preserved, restored or renovated

QS Quarantine Station preserved, restored or renovated

European colonies where indentured workers were introduced between the mid-19th and early 20th centuries

British Colonies	Spanish Colonies	Dutch Colony	French Colonies	The Pacific Region
British Guiana	Cuba	Suriname	Guadeloupe	Australia
Trinidad and Tobago			Martinique	Samoa island
Jamaica			Réunion Island	New Caledonia
Grenada			French Guiana	Hawaii
St Kitts and Nevis				
St Lucia				
St Vincent				
Seychelles				
Salomon Islands				
British Honduras (Belize)				
Kenya				
Barbados				

BRITISH GUIANA (GUYANA)

British Guiana first imported Indian indentured workers in January 1838 when 396 'hill coolies' from northern India arrived from Calcutta. As in Mauritius, allegations that the workers had been exploited resulted in a temporary suspension of Indian emigration to the colony. After the importation of Indian indentured labour resumed, a total of around 238,000 Indians reached British Guiana during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The 1838 ban on the importation of Indian labourers prompted local British planters to search for other sources of labour. In 1853, the first Chinese indentured labourers, who had been recruited in Malacca, Singapore, Penang and Macao, landed in British Guiana.

The British and Chinese governments began to supervise the recruitment process to curb abuse of the workers, and also encouraged families to emigrate to the colony. Most of the 13,533 Chinese indentured immigrants who reached British Guiana landed between 1860 and 1866. During the nineteenth century, more than 14,000 African and 32,000 European indentured workers also worked on the colony's sugar estates.

*The photograph of the Immigration Depot in Georgetown, Guyana in 1980
(Walter Rodney National Archives of the Republic of Guyana)*

SURINAME

Indentured labourers began to reach Suriname, a Dutch colony in the Caribbean, ten years before slavery was abolished in 1863. The first batch came from China and was soon followed by labourers from India and Java. Over 37,000 Indians and almost 20,000 Javanese were recruited before 1916 to work in the colony, along with 2,800 Chinese and 500 Europeans.



The Immigration Depot accommodations for newly landed indentured immigrants in Paramaribo, Suriname during the early 1900s (Courtesy of the Late Dr. Dew Baboram of Holland)

FRENCH GUIANA, GUADELOUPE, MARTINIQUE AND RÉUNION ISLAND

The abolition of slavery in the French Empire in 1848 left French colonies with the same labour problems that British colonies had faced in 1834. French planters tried initially to recruit Indian workers, but British authorities refused them access to Indian labour markets until 1860. In the meantime, they attempted to recruit Indian labourers through France's possessions, namely Pondicherry in India and looked to Africa and China as well.



La Grande Chaloupe Quarantine Station in Réunion Island (AGTF Collection)

The Quarantine Station at La Grande Chaloupe was the place where all immigrants were landed before being allocated to sugar estates. Three quarantine stations or "Lazarets" existed in Grande Chaloupe and Ravine in Réunion Island.

Many contemporaries viewed the indenturing of Africans as little more than a resurrection of the slave trade. The number of indentured Africans imported into French colonies reached as high as 10,000 in 1858. After India was opened to French recruiters in 1860, large numbers of indentured Indians reached France's colonies. About 118,000 landed on Réunion before 1924. Martinique housed 25,000 Indian immigrants in 1884, while 40,000 reached Guadeloupe before the indenture system came to an end.

TRINIDAD

The failure to attract Europeans by paying them bounties to emigrate to the island led the Trinidadian colonial government to look to China, Africa and India for much needed workers. Early in the nineteenth century, the Colonial Governor proposed recruiting Chinese labourers. However, the several hundred Chinese who arrived in 1806 did not take to estate labour and either demanded to be repatriated or left the plantations to engage in business and trade. In 1841, a Committee of local planters recommended that free workers should be recruited from Africa, but attempts to import labourers from Sierra Leone and other areas along the West African coast failed.

Like in other British colonies, Trinidadian planters ultimately relied on indentured labourers from India, the first of whom arrived in 1845. Almost 145,000 Indian indentured immigrants landed in Trinidad, the great majority of whom arrived by 1850. By the time the indenture system came to an end, 2,500 Chinese, 18,000 Africans and 900 Europeans had also worked as indentured labourers on the colony's estates.

The disembarkation point and quarantine station for indentured immigrants to Trinidad and Tobago in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was in Nelson Island, one of the five islands which lies west of Port of Spain in the Gulf of Paria.



Indentured workers eating their meal at the Immigration Depot in Trinidad (National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago)



A view of the Nelson Island Quarantine Station off the coast of Trinidad
(Courtesy of Mr. Manraj Ramphal of Trinidad)



Comorian indentured workers in Réunion island, 1900s
(Courtesy of Michèle Marimootoo)

JAMAICA

The first shipment of Indian indentured immigrants reached Jamaica in 1845. Indian labourers were recruited and shipped to the colony in response to requests made by local planters. The requests were processed in Jamaica and then forwarded to the Colonial Secretary in London who passed this information to Emigration Agents in Calcutta or Madras who recruited workers. The main landing place for indentured labourers was located along the southern coast of the island near Old Harbour, a town west of Kingston. In addition to the 36,000 Indians who reached Jamaica, the island also received 1,100 indentured labourers from China, more than 11,000 from Africa, and 4,500 from Europe.

Country	Number of Liberated Africans
British Guiana	14,500
Jamaica	12,000
Trinidad	18,360
Grenada	1,540
St Vincent	1,040
St Lucia	730
St Kitts	460
Bahamas	6,124
Total	54,754

Table I: Liberated Africans who were brought to the Caribbean region during the mid-19th century

(Satyendra Peerthum, Voices from the Edge, 2015)



Sheds for indentured workers at the Immigration depot in Jamaica during the 1860s
(National Archives of Jamaica)

CUBA

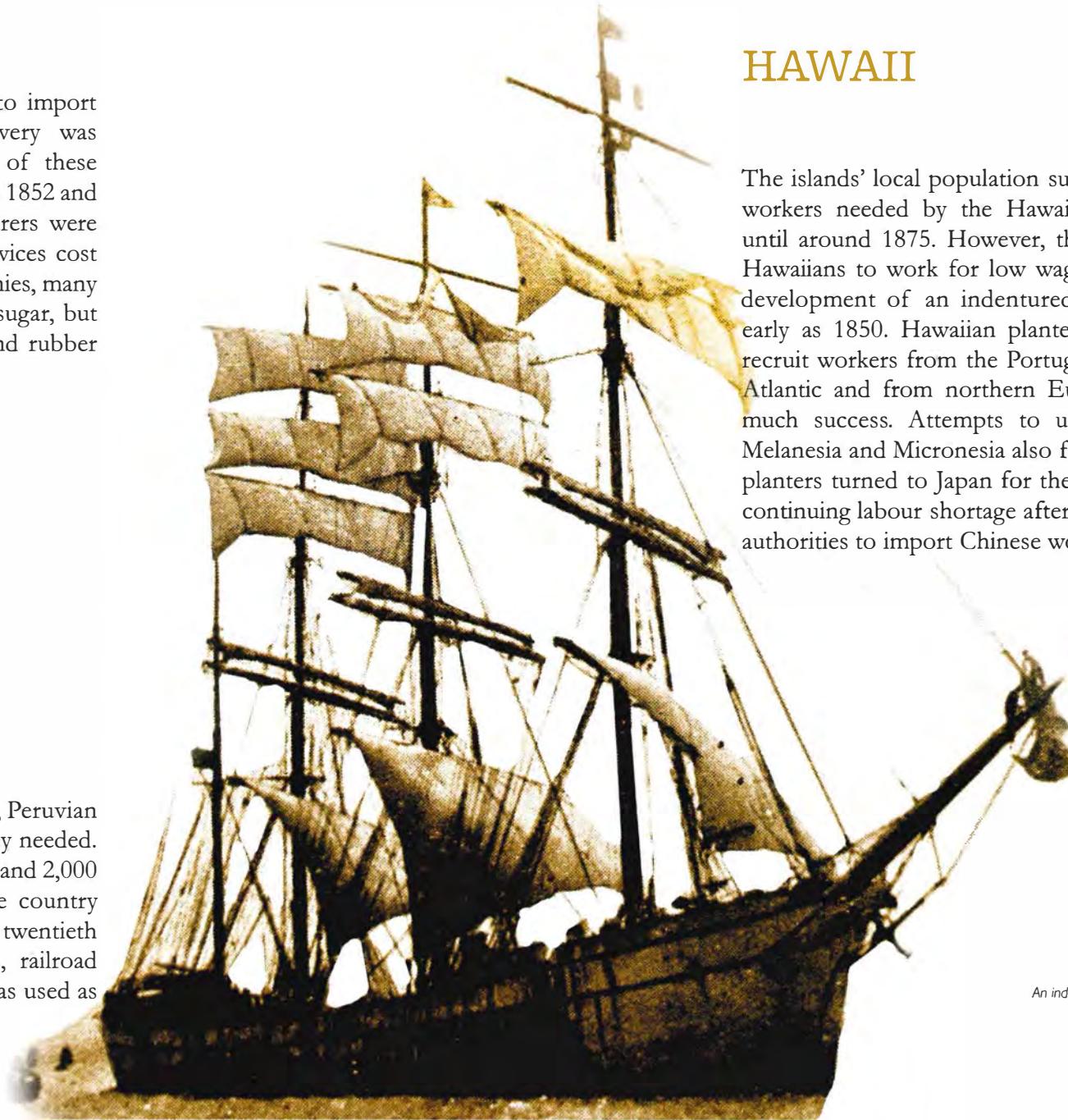
Cuba was a Spanish colony that began to import indentured labourers even before slavery was abolished on the island in 1886. Most of these workers came from East Asia and between 1852 and 1874, more than 125,000 Chinese labourers were employed on the island because their services cost less than those of slaves. As in other colonies, many of these workers were used to produce sugar, but some also worked on coffee, tobacco and rubber plantations and on the island's railroads.

PERU

Following the abolition of slavery in 1854, Peruvian planters looked to Asia for the labour they needed. Almost 100,000 Chinese, 21,000 Japanese and 2,000 Pacific Islanders were imported into the country during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to work on sugar plantations, railroad construction and to mine guano which was used as fertilizer.

HAWAII

The islands' local population supplied most of the workers needed by the Hawaiian sugar industry until around 1875. However, the refusal by many Hawaiians to work for low wages encouraged the development of an indentured labour system as early as 1850. Hawaiian planters tried initially to recruit workers from the Portuguese islands in the Atlantic and from northern Europe, but without much success. Attempts to use labourers from Melanesia and Micronesia also failed, and Hawaiian planters turned to Japan for their labour supply. A continuing labour shortage after 1875 led Hawaiian authorities to import Chinese workers as well.



An indenture ship in Havana, Cuba, 1870s
(National Archives of Cuba)

FIJI

The first indentured labourers who reached Fiji in 1864, came from the neighbouring South Pacific islands of the New Hebrides, the Solomons and the Gilberts. However, declining populations soon made these islands an unreliable source of labour. The need for a dependable labour supply increased after Fiji became a British colony in 1874.

Sir Arthur Gordon, the first British Governor, who had experience in other British plantation colonies namely Trinidad and Mauritius, initiated the introduction of indentured workers from India. Some 63,000 Indian workers reached Fiji before the local indenture system ended in 1916, more than one-half of whom remained in the colony after their contracts had expired.

*Indian indentured women and their children on a sugar estate in Fiji in the early 1900s
(National Archives of Fiji)*







SOUTH AFRICA

In the mid-nineteenth century, the colony of Natal in South Africa faced a labour shortage because of the local African population's unwillingness to work on European-owned farms, and especially on the sugar plantations that began to be established during the 1860s. In 1859, the Natal Government arranged for labour to be imported from other colonies and in November 1860, the first batch of 342 Indian indentured labourers landed at Durban.

Indentured Indians also worked in other regions of what would become modern South Africa. More than 150,000 Indian indentured labourers were brought to South Africa between 1860 and 1911.



Indian indentured labourers disembarking in the port of Natal, 1800s
(Courtesy of Dr. Kalpana Hirall of South Africa)

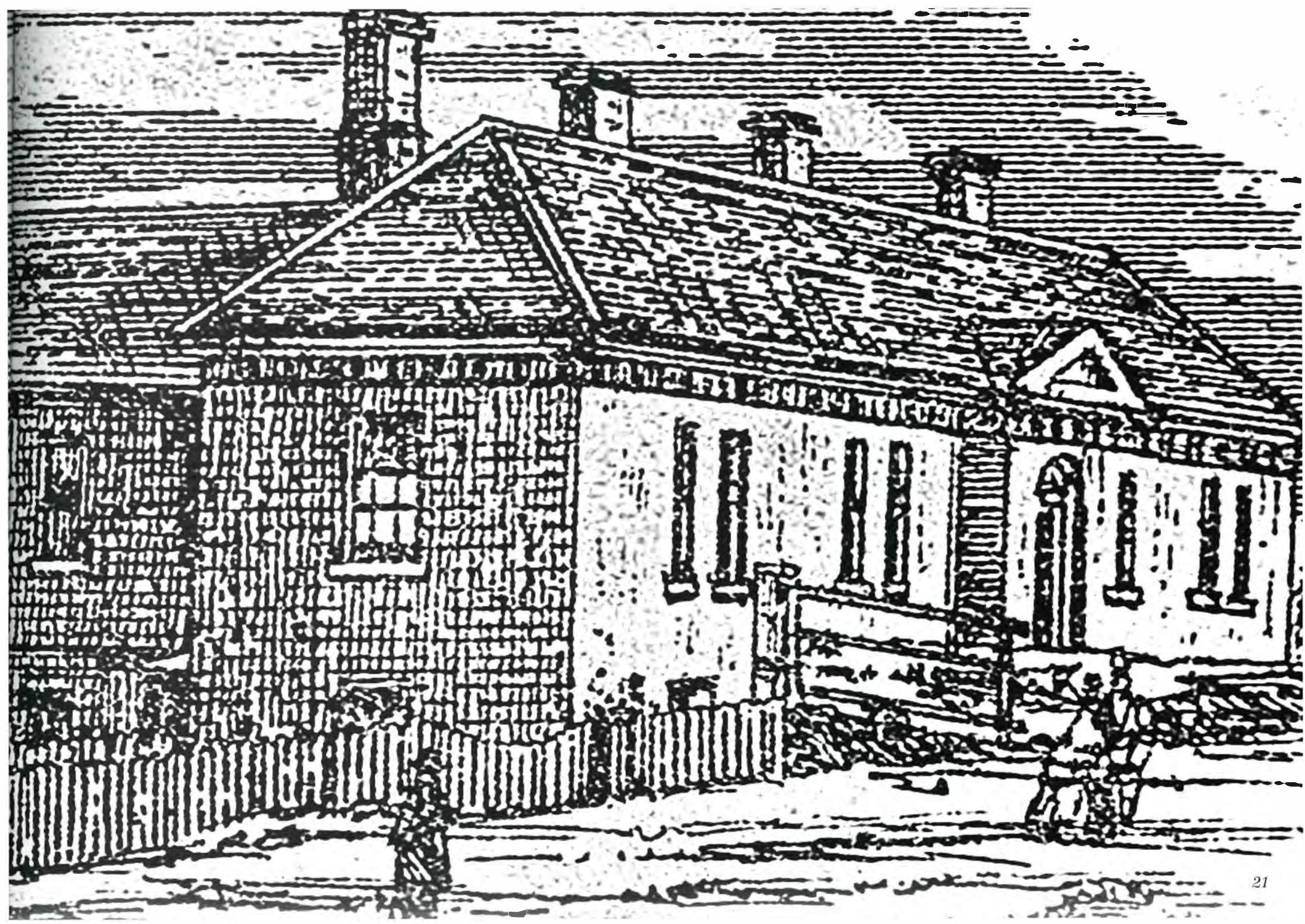
AUSTRALASIA

Small numbers of Indian indentured labourers were shipped to Australia during the 1830s and 1840s, but the use of indentured labour did not become common until after the 1860s when the plantation system developed in this part of the world.

Plantations in Samoa and Queensland in northern Australia, initially produced the cotton needed by textile factories in Britain and Europe whose normal supplies were disrupted by the American Civil War (1861-1865). However, sugar and copra soon replaced cotton as the principal plantation crops. The islands of Melanesia were an important source of workers for the Queensland sugar industry between 1863 and 1904, as well as for plantations in New Caledonia and Samoa.

*The Immigration Depot in Brisbane, Queensland, 1850s
(Queensland State Archives, Australia)*

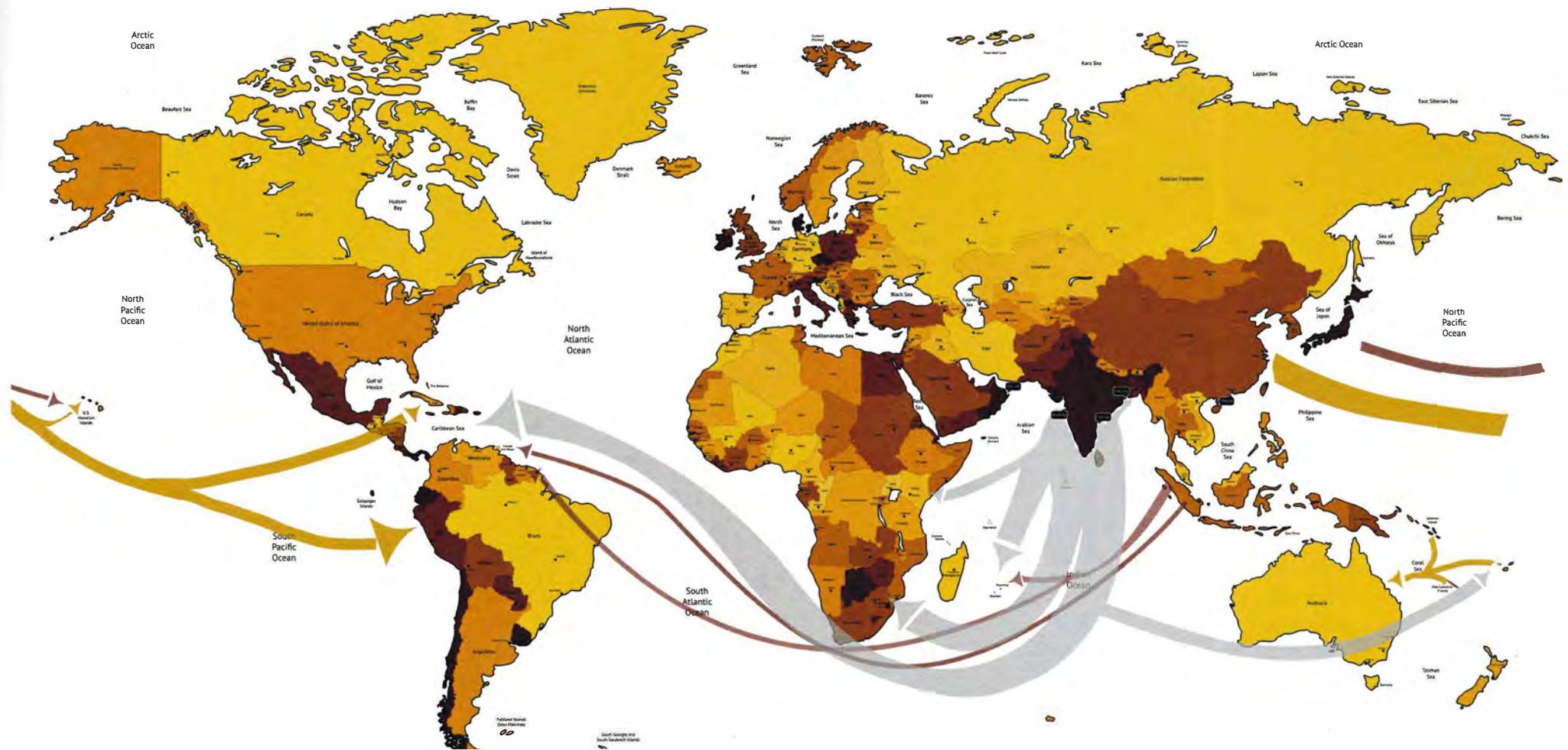




Country	Europeans	North Americans	Africans	Indians	Chinese	Javanese	Japanese	Pacific Islanders	Other	Total
British Caribbean	40,966	1,842	54,754	429,454	17,810					544,826
Mauritius			6,221	451,786	3,139				780	461,926
Réunion Island			40,000	75,636	1,265					116,901
French Caribbean	1,180		19,500	79,089	2,129					101,898
French Pacific					1,035					1,035
Dutch Guiana	480			34,502	2,839	19,330				57,151
Cuba					121,810					121,810
Peru					98,500		17,764	2,116		118,380
South Africa				152,184	63,695					215,879
East Africa				39,437						39,437
Queensland					5,130			62,542		67,672
Fiji				56,000				26,460		82,460
Hawaii	13,401				34,309	65,034		2,253		114,997
									Grand Total	2,044,372

Table 2: Number of indentured labourers who were taken to different parts of the world between the 1830s and the 1920s

(Satyendra Peerthum, Voices from the Edge, 2015)

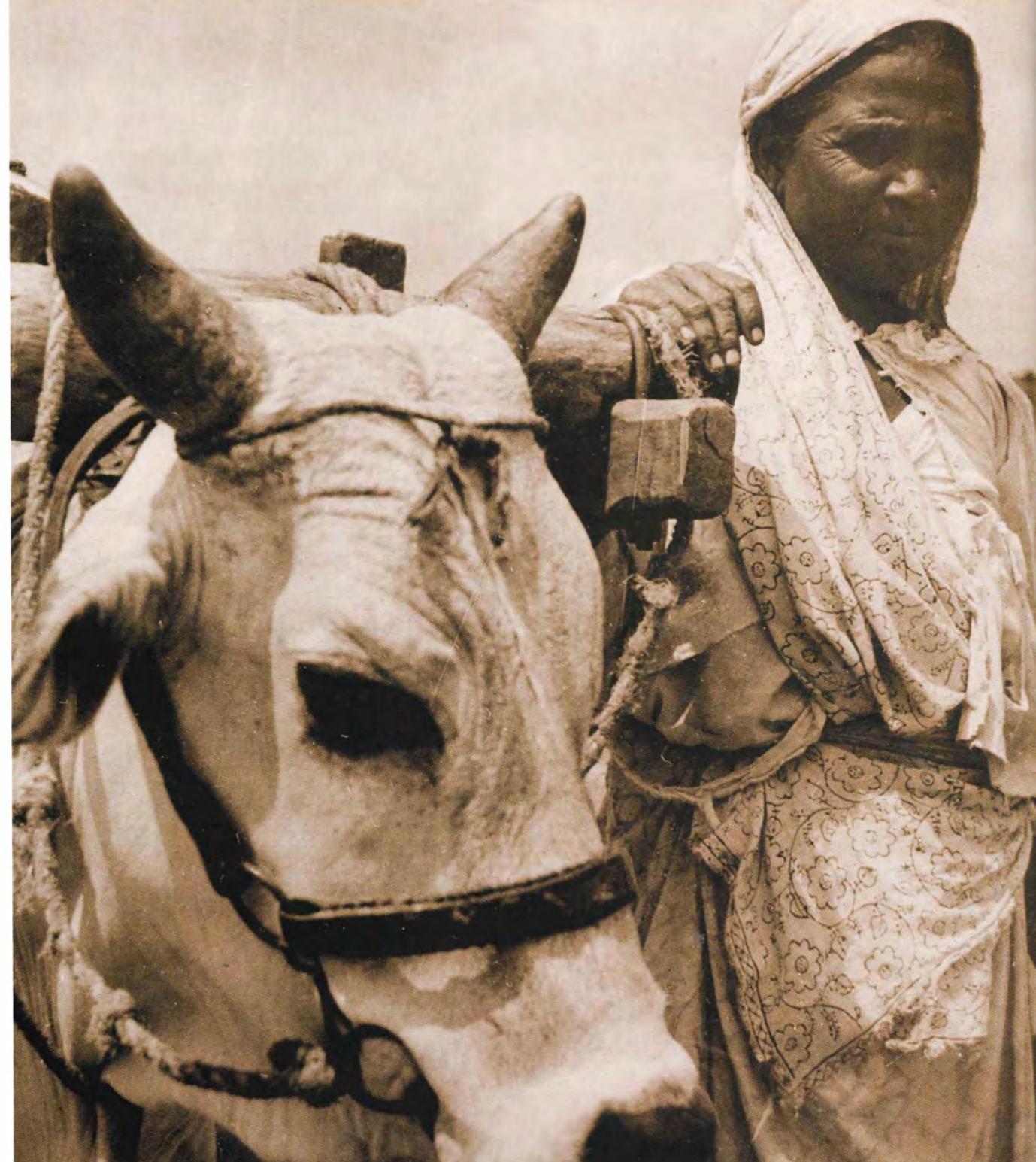


A map of the world showing the different destinations of the indentured labourers in the colonial plantation world between the mid-19th and early 20th centuries (AGTF Collection)

THE LEGACY OF THE INDENTURED DIASPORA

The ‘Great Experiment’ with the system of indentured labour that began in Mauritius in 1834 led to the migration of more than 2,000,000 men, women and children throughout a colonial plantation world that extended from the Caribbean through the Indian Ocean and across the South Pacific to Latin America. This global movement of workers from sub-Saharan Africa, Australasia, East Asia, South Asia and Southeast Asia was an integral part of the development of the modern world in which we live. Those who traversed the length and breadth of the colonial world as a result of this system carried their cultural, linguistic, religious and social traditions with them - traditions that contributed to the creation of the rich, multicultural societies that form part of their legacy not only to their sons and daughters, but also to the rest of us.

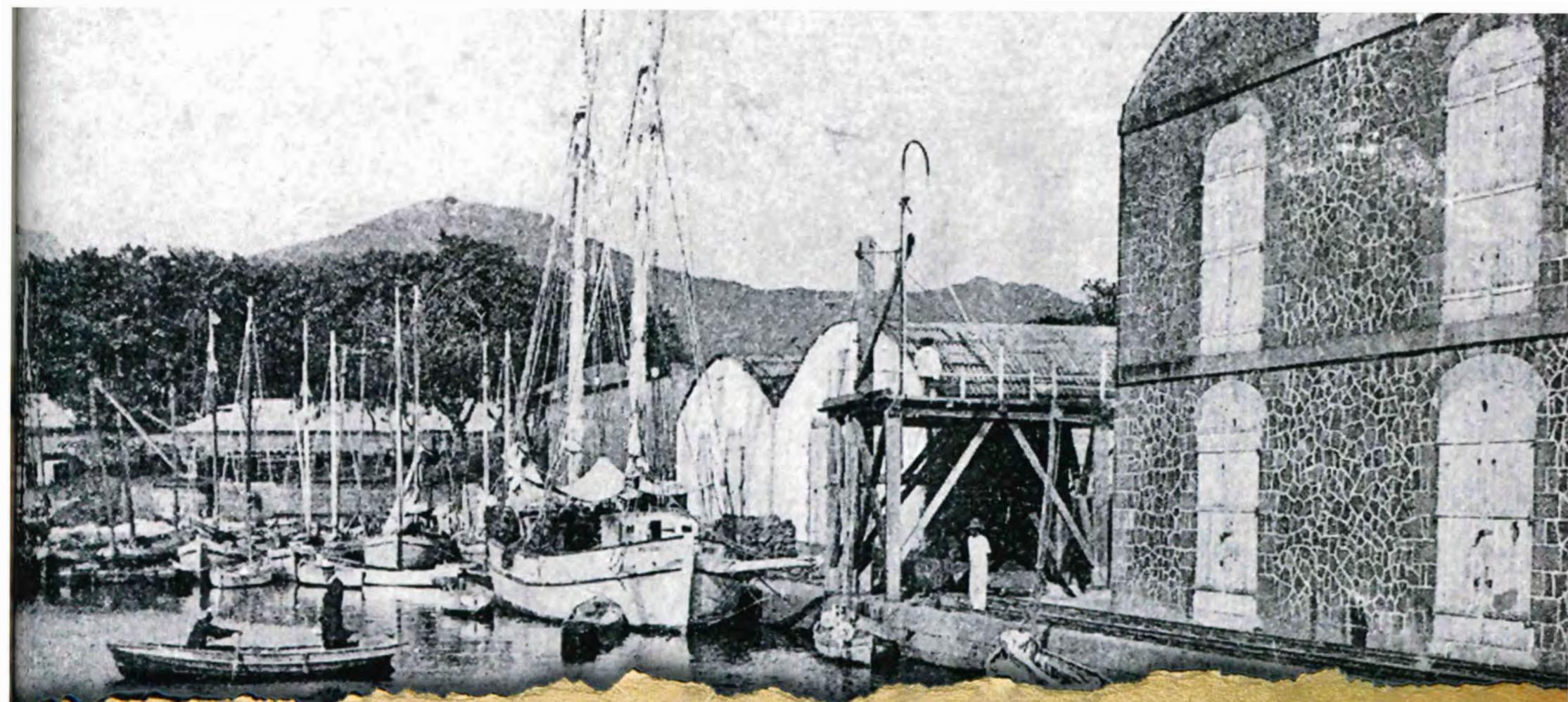
*Woman guiding an ox cart transporting sugarcanes, 1958
(British National Archives)*



02

FROM VILLAGES IN INDIA TO MAURITIUS

*View of the Immigration Depot
(AGTF collection)*



In the 1830s, Mauritius experimented with various forms of contractual labour in view of the abolition of slavery and the setting up of the apprenticeship system. The fast expansion of the sugar industry in Mauritius and the consequent need for manpower led to the massive recruitment of indentured labourers between 1834 and 1910, mainly from India. Between the late 1820s and early 1830s, periodic efforts had been made to engage small numbers of Indians to work as indentured labourers in Mauritius. The Indian sub-continent was a rich source of low-cost labour that was readily available for the British colonies, to the point that 97.5% of the indentured labourers who arrived in Mauritius, originated from India.

The journey of the Indian indentured labourers started with their recruitment in villages by agents. The agent would then lead the group of recruits to the port of embarkation to proceed with the formalities at the depot of emigration.

During the early period of indenture, the recruitment process was not regulated and therefore witnessed many abuses: most indentured labourers were recruited by deception, kidnap or deceit. In 1842, the British imperial authorities passed an Act with the objective of exercising governmental control over indentured emigration from India.

Act XV of the British Government of India led to the appointment of Emigration Agents at the ports of embarkation namely at Calcutta, Madras and Bombay in order to curb the abuses that affected the indentured labourers. Despite a well-regulated system, irregularities continued to be part of the recruitment system. Misconduct towards the recruits in the sub-depots, forced confinement of

persons not willing to emigrate, forceful attempts at registering women not willing to emigrate, abduction of married women from their homes and other trickeries to recruit labourers continued to prevail.

THE DEPARTURE

Once a potential recruit had agreed to emigrate, the *arkattia*, *duffador* or *maistry* would hand over the recruit to a licensed recruiter who would look after all the emigration formalities of the prospective indentured labourer. The recruit was bound to stay for a specified period in a house or warehouse before embarking for Mauritius. Several procedures were observed at the Emigration Depot before embarkation. Such procedures included hygiene control, registration, issue of tin ticket, verification of identity, payment of gratuities to emigrants and completion of the passenger list.

THE VOYAGE EXPERIENCE

The long voyage of the indentured labourers often proved to be a test of severe endurance. The vessels transporting labourers were not suitable for carrying people over long distances (see Table 3). Labourers were crammed in the lower deck. Moreover, the travelling conditions prevailing on board the ships were very harsh. Overcrowding, contiguity, unsanitary conditions and the woes of travellers combined to increase their miseries during the voyage.



1

Requisition sent by
planters in Mauritius



2

Request processed by
the Protector of Immigrants



3

Request sent to Emigration
Agency in India



4

Request received by a
licensed emigration agent



5

Identification of potential recruits
by Duffadors Arkattias Maistries



6

Potential recruits handed to the licensed
emigration agent to be sent to the
Emigration Depot



7

Medical inspection of potential recruits
at the Emigration Depot



8

Registration of recruits at the
Magistrate's office



9

Sea Voyage



10

Arrival at the Immigration
Depot in Mauritius



11

Allocation to sugar plantations

An overview of the different procedures leading to the recruitment of indentured labourers
(AGTF Collection)

Ports of Embarkation	Destinations	Duration of Voyage (Weeks)
Britain	North America	4 to 5
Bombay	West Indies	20
Calcutta	West Indies	20
Calcutta	Mauritius	19
Calcutta	Natal	12
Madras	West Indies	10
Madras	Natal	7
Madras	Mauritius	10

Table 3: Duration of voyages to British colonies
(Hugh Tinker, A new system of slavery, 1974)

VESSELS CARRYING INDENTURED LABOURERS

During the early years of emigration, French sailing ships, private vessels and the British East India Company merchant ships transported indentured labourers. Throughout the nineteenth century, the transportation was undertaken mostly by British mercantile firms. Ships were selected by tender according to public notice. The number of permits grants awarded to carry indentured labourers on vessels was controlled and determined upon the availability of fitting accommodations and supplies on board ships.

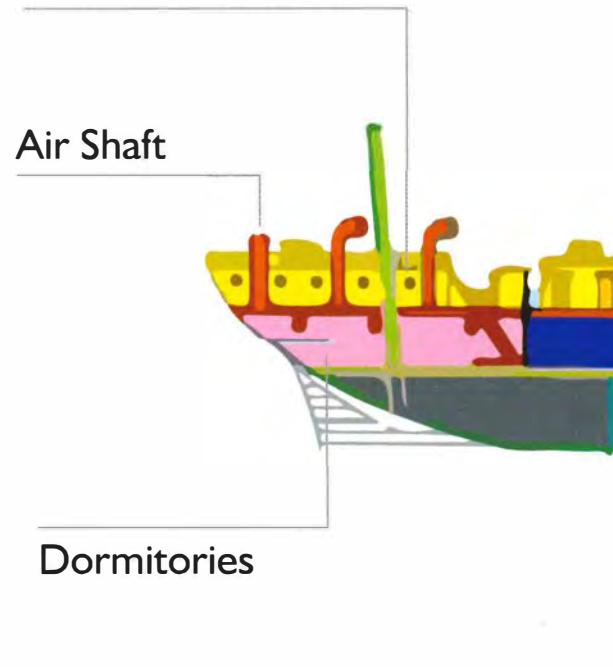
The transportation of Indian migrants had become a lucrative business. As such, the larger wooden and iron built ships known as barque of 600 to 1,000 tons were introduced into the trade. The tonnage of sailing ships varied from 400 to 2,000 tons with a carrying capacity of a maximum of 300 individuals. These ships were originally built for carrying cargo. Therefore, temporary adjustments were made and partitions and bunks were erected to provide dormitories for passengers.

One of the most common ships used in the conveyance of indentured labourers was the clipper. It usually comprised of three levels: on the first level, there was a hospital and a dispensary where immigrants received medical treatment;

the second level served as dormitories for the emigrants and the third level was where cargo and provisions for the voyage were stored.

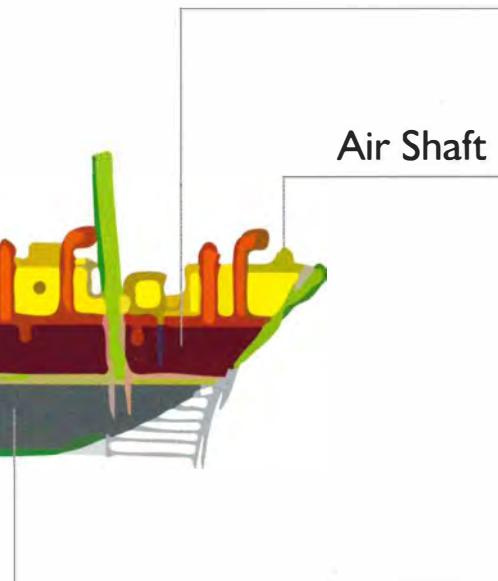
The cooking galley was also accommodated on the upper deck. Tents were sometimes erected for cooking purposes on top deck galleys.

Hospital & Dispensary



Accommodation for Married couples

Space for single men and Crew



Cargo hold and store of provisions for the voyage

Illustration of a vessel carrying indentured labourers
(Redrawn from Hugh Tinker, A new system of slavery, 1974.)

LIFE OF EMIGRANTS TRAVELLING ON SHIP

The emigrants woke up early. Their outfits were rolled up while the decks were hosed down and sanitized. If the weather permitted, the emigrants were sent on the upper deck, if not, they were to remain in the lower deck. The clothes of the emigrants were inspected almost every week during the voyage to verify any sign of infectious and/or contagious diseases on board and to maintain hygiene and good living conditions during the journey.

For the majority of the emigrants, there was a break of kin. Once on board the ship, they constituted themselves into small groups, which allowed them to forge ties of friendship, which eventually became *jahaji bhai*, that is a bond of brotherhood among fellow passengers. During the voyage, emigrants whiled away their time singing traditional folk songs, chanting and reciting religious texts, and playing traditional games such as cards besides indulging in storytelling. However, it depended mainly on the captain's policy on board.



Food being served on board to Indian indentured children on the way to Fiji
(Basil Lubbock, Coolie Ships and Oil Sailors, 1955)

DISTRIBUTION OF MEALS ON BOARD SHIPS

All registered indentured labourers were entitled to three meals as daily rations. On some ships, only two meals were served as regulations concerning the preparation and distribution of meals were not strictly observed. The *Bhandbarries* (cooks) drew supplies for the first meal at 6 a.m., to be generally served at 9 a.m. depending on the weather conditions. For the second meal which was considered to be the main one, rations were issued at 3 p.m. to be served between 5 p.m and 6 p.m. Food was usually served on the upper deck except when confronted to bad weather, immigrants ate in the lower deck in the dormitories.

Cooking was done on ship galleys. Moreover, when weather conditions did not permit meals to be cooked, dry provisions like biscuits and bread were provided to the emigrants. Some emigrants were allowed to prepare their own meals on ship galleys and some brought their own cooking utensils to cook their food during the passage.

Ship log of Lady Merville

21st June 1875

After the deck has been washed, the immigrants were sent up to wash themselves. Many of them had a bath after receiving their water. They were sent on deck to take their breakfast which was served out to them in my presence at about 11 a.m., they were sent on deck with their cumlies. The tween deck is not so wet today as the ship is not pitching too much. The tween deck dried and holy stoned by some of the immigrants and disinfected with carbolic acid. At about 2 p.m. the immigrants were sent down to take their meals and prepare themselves to take their dinner. The dinner was served in the tween deck on account of the weather getting rainy again. One boy named Mungra was found this morning by the compounder with left arm broken. Neither the father nor the mother can say when and how the child broke his arm. The man named Nunhova, who suffered from dysentery for the last few days died last night at about 11 p.m.

Source: MGIIIA/PE 127

HEALTH AND EPIDEMICS

During the long voyage, emigrants and members of the crew were frequently victims of contagious diseases such as cholera, small pox, typhoid and dysentery. Numerous laws and regulations were introduced to prevent the propagation of such diseases, for instance all ships transporting indentured labourers were required to carry a surgeon on board to provide medical care to crew members and passengers.

Medical examinations were carried out in all ports of embarkation before emigrants went on board. Vaccination against small pox was made compulsory and recruits who suffered from diseases or any physical defects were debarred from embarking. Inspectors who were responsible for the emigrants were fined if found guilty of negligence. Despite these measures, the overall travel conditions were inadequate and epidemics continued to be part of the voyage of the indentured labourers.

Ship log of Lady Merville

24th July 1875

Weather fine. Signals were passed this morning between the vessel and Flat Island. Vessel proceeds to Port Louis and anchored at the quarantine station during the day. Immigrants were sent on deck this morning at 9 a.m, their breakfast was served out to them on deck and at 11 a.m they were all sent on deck. The tween deck was dry and holly stoned and disinfected. At 4 p.m dinner was served out on deck. Closets cleaned and disinfected by topasses.

25th June 1875

(...) The man named Bhilok who was suffering from dysentery for some time is getting weaker and weaker. A cabin was given by the Captain to serve as an hospital for the dysentery and other cases and the hospital was kept for the measles cases only.

Source: MGIIIA/PE 127

QUARANTINE STATIONS

On entering the outer harbour in Port Louis, ships suspected of carrying epidemic diseases were sent to the quarantine stations on the outer islands. When Mauritius was hit by the cholera outbreaks in the mid-1850s, ships crowded with immigrants were forced to quarantine on Gabriel Island. Other quarantine stations were located on Flat Island and at Pointe aux Canonniers.



Accommodation for immigrants on Flat Island
(Balfour Report, 1921)

Ship log of Lady Merville

26th June 1875

Weather fine the whole day. Immigrants went on deck early this morning to wash themselves and clean their plates. The man named Bhilok who suffered from dysentery died last night at about 10 p.m. and was buried this morning at 5 a.m. (...). One of the immigrants was admitted this morning with measles and another with dysentery. As the ship is not pitching so much, the tween deck is not so wet and damp as before. Closets cleaned and disinfected several times by the topasses.

27th July 1875

Ship proceeds this morning to Flat Island. Immigrants had an early breakfast. At about 2 p.m., vessel anchored at Flat Island. Island under the charge of Pilot. At about 3 p.m., the captain and Pilot went on shore and as soon as they were landed on the jetty, the boat was captured and smashed and the crew saved. At about 6 p.m., signal was made from the shore to send another boat which was sent immediately but was captured and smashed, the same as the first one and a boat was sent to pick up the crew who were on the boat. Immigrants had their dinner in the tween deck and they were much frightened.

28th July 1875

Landed at Flat Island.

[Extract from the ship log of the Lady Merville,
in 1875 for the voyage from
Calcutta to Mauritius.]
Source: MGIIIA/PE 127

03

FROM IMMIGRATION DEPOT TO SUGAR ESTATES

Children in a village
(British National Archives)



THE ARRIVAL IN MAURITIUS

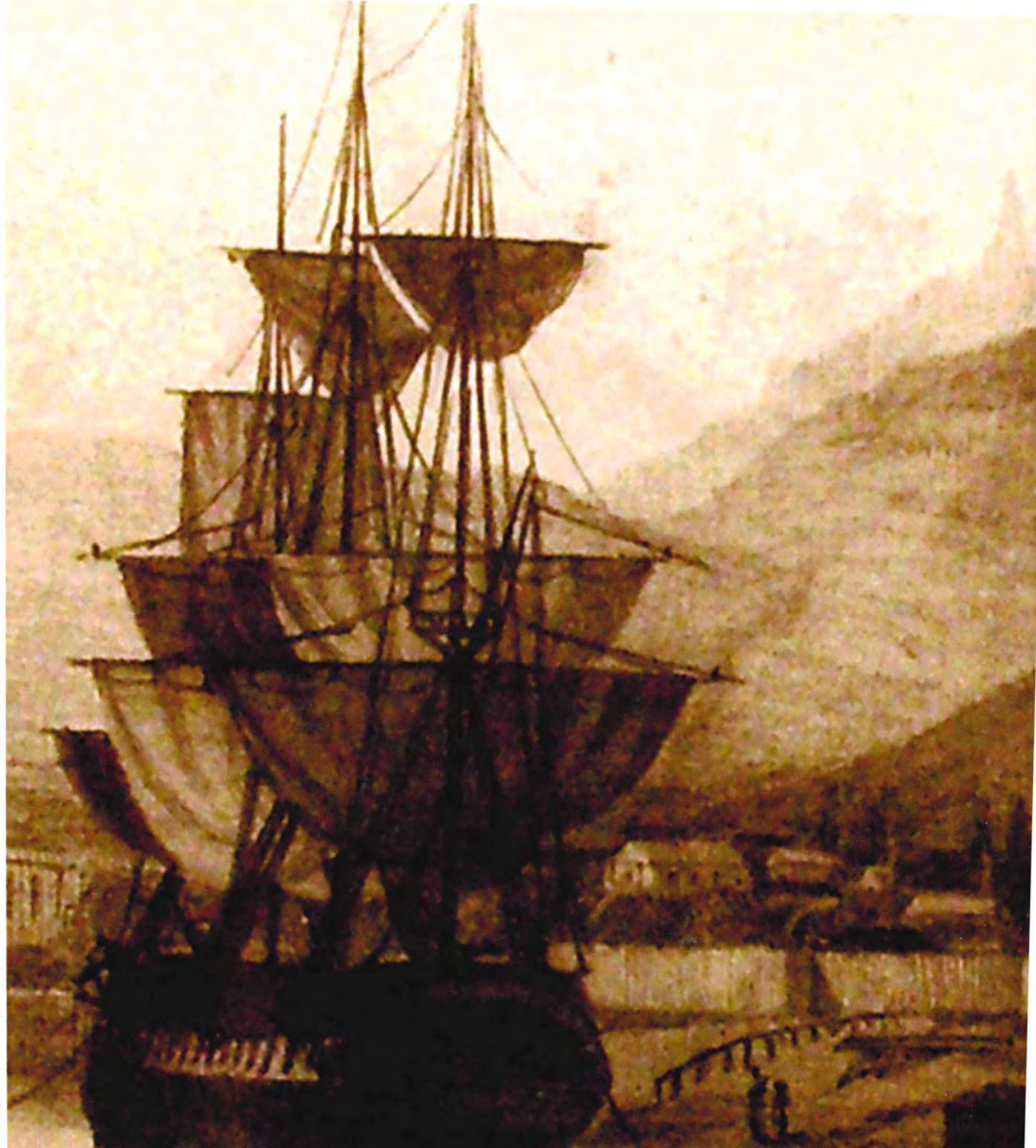
As soon as ships conveying indentured labourers arrived at Port Louis, the Immigration Department was notified. The Immigration Inspecting Officer, accompanied by peons, went on board the ship for inspection purposes. The peons were responsible for the distribution of clothes to the newly arrived immigrants and to lead them to the upper deck to be washed.

Women were allotted a separate segment of the deck which was screened off for their use. However, they were inspected by the Health Officer and the Inspecting Officer of the Department.

After the inspection, the clothing of the immigrants was collected, counted and separated into two bundles, one which was usable and the other unusable. The unusable one was placed on board and sunk while the reusable one was sent to the quarantine station at Pointe aux Canonniers to be washed and sent back to the Depot for the next arrival of immigrants.

The licence for disembarkation and landing of immigrants was issued by the Protector of Immigrants. After completing all the formalities, the ships entered the inner harbour, the lighters came alongside and the immigrants were disembarked at the entrance of the depot yard and at the same time, the captain sent on shore a sealed bag containing papers relating to the immigrants and the voyage.

An indenture ship anchored in front of the Immigration Depot, 1856
(Mauritius National Archives)



TROU FANFARON: A SUITABLE SETTING FOR AN IMMIGRATION DEPOT

The sugar industry started thriving as from 1825 when the customs tariff was abolished and the price of sugar aligned with that of its competitors in the Caribbean. Within only five years, the surface of cultivated land doubled. As from the mid-1850s, sugar production reached more than 100,000 tons a year which made of Mauritius the most productive sugar colony in the British Empire. The Mauritian economy was then largely reliant on sugar, pillar of the monocrop economy.

However, the industry was confronted with a dire need for labour. The British Government responded positively to planters' pressing requests for the importation of indentured labourers. During the first fifteen years of indentured labour immigration, no proper facilities existed to accommodate indentured labourers and process them. Unsanitary conditions prevailed in the various locations where indentured immigrants were received. The urgency to improve conditions, considering the magnitude of the migratory flow, led the colonial administration to construct an official depot in 1849. The basin of Trou Fanfaron, initially used for landing and ship repair, was reckoned as a prime location for the Immigration Depot.

Trou Fanfaron was the main harbour of the island during the French occupation. It was further developed by Chevalier de Tromelin between 1771 and 1783 in view of establishing a powerful naval base capable of accommodating a squadron of ten ships and several frigates for the French navy, thus consolidating French presence in Isle de France and the Indian Ocean. It had been entirely dredged and fitted with an arsenal before Chevalier de Tromelin departed for India in 1781. And by 1787, the port attracted a large number of ships, increasing the demand for boat repairs and naval construction, activities that were pursued exclusively at Trou Fanfaron.

Recent archaeological excavations uncovered vestiges of Tromelin's engineering works, namely a calle de débarquement or landing dock. Archival maps indicate that the dock was composed of three stone walls delimitating a rectangular space fitted with two sets of stairs that enabled access underneath the hull of boats. The dock had multiple uses, including disembarkation of people and goods, and boat repairs.

Between 1803 and 1810, Port Louis then called Port Nord-Ouest or Port Napoléon, developed into a major naval and commercial station in the Indian Ocean. General Decaen, Governor-General of Isle de France and La Réunion, developed Caudan as a commercial hub and built a line of fortifications on both sides of the port at Ile aux Tonneliers and at Fort Blanc to withstand mounting British pressure on Isle de France. Port Napoléon became the main Place Forte of an overall defensive system developed by the French all over the island. The port was thus equipped with all necessary infrastructures: Trou Fanfaron was exclusively devoted to boat

repair activities and ship construction as attested by the archaeological excavations while Caudan to commercial activities. During this period, Port Louis was one of the most thriving ports in the French Empire, before it succumbed to the British in 1810.



THE IMMIGRATION DEPOT THROUGH TIME: 1849 - 1910

The Immigration Depot underwent three phases of development since its creation in 1849 on account of the massive inflows of immigrants from India. Between 1849 to 1938, it was enlarged twice particularly during the peak periods of indentured labour immigration.

The British colonial administration established the landing-place for the registration and temporary accommodation of indentured labourers. The project of building a depot was conceived as from 1838. The planned capacity of the depot, equipped with all amenities, was targeted to accommodate around 600 immigrants and to receive them in good conditions.

Before the Immigration Depot became operational on 27 April 1849, indentured labourers were crammed in several warehouses not equipped with even bare sanitary facilities. An archival document informs that the space recommended per immigrant was between 1.4 m and 1.7 m, requirement which was not always respected. The lack of water and ventilation coupled with insufficient facilities for immigrants provided poor conditions of stay.

In the first phase of its development, the depot was delimited by an enclosure and it comprised a courtyard surrounded by sleeping sheds, a kitchen

and privies. The depot also housed the Immigration Office where officers were stationed to regularize the stay of indentured labourers.

The Immigration Office was housed in a building that was originally part of the hospital complex built under the administration of Mahé de La Bourdonnais in 1740. Archival maps show that it had been used as a *magasin* or store probably for storing goods. This store was the living and working place of the officers posted at the depot.

In the early 1850s, the enlargement of the depot was deemed necessary as the number of indentured labourers doubled between 1845 and 1854. From around 35,000 in 1845, the number rose to a total of 71,972 in 1854. On some days, more than 1,000 immigrants were housed there.

The second phase which consisted of enlarging the depot lasted from 1859 to 1866. The enlargement was necessary in order to cope with an increasing indentured immigration and to further improve sanitation and basic conditions of stay. As the extension required additional space, the area called the *parc à boulets* today was acquired and the dry dock situated on the shoreline was backfilled to create a landing space for indentured labourers.

The waste water and rainwater system was redesigned in order to address the problem of water supply just enough for 50 people. The floors of the buildings used by the immigrants were covered with bitumen to improve hygiene. A ventilation system was also fitted inside several buildings to ensure better air circulation.

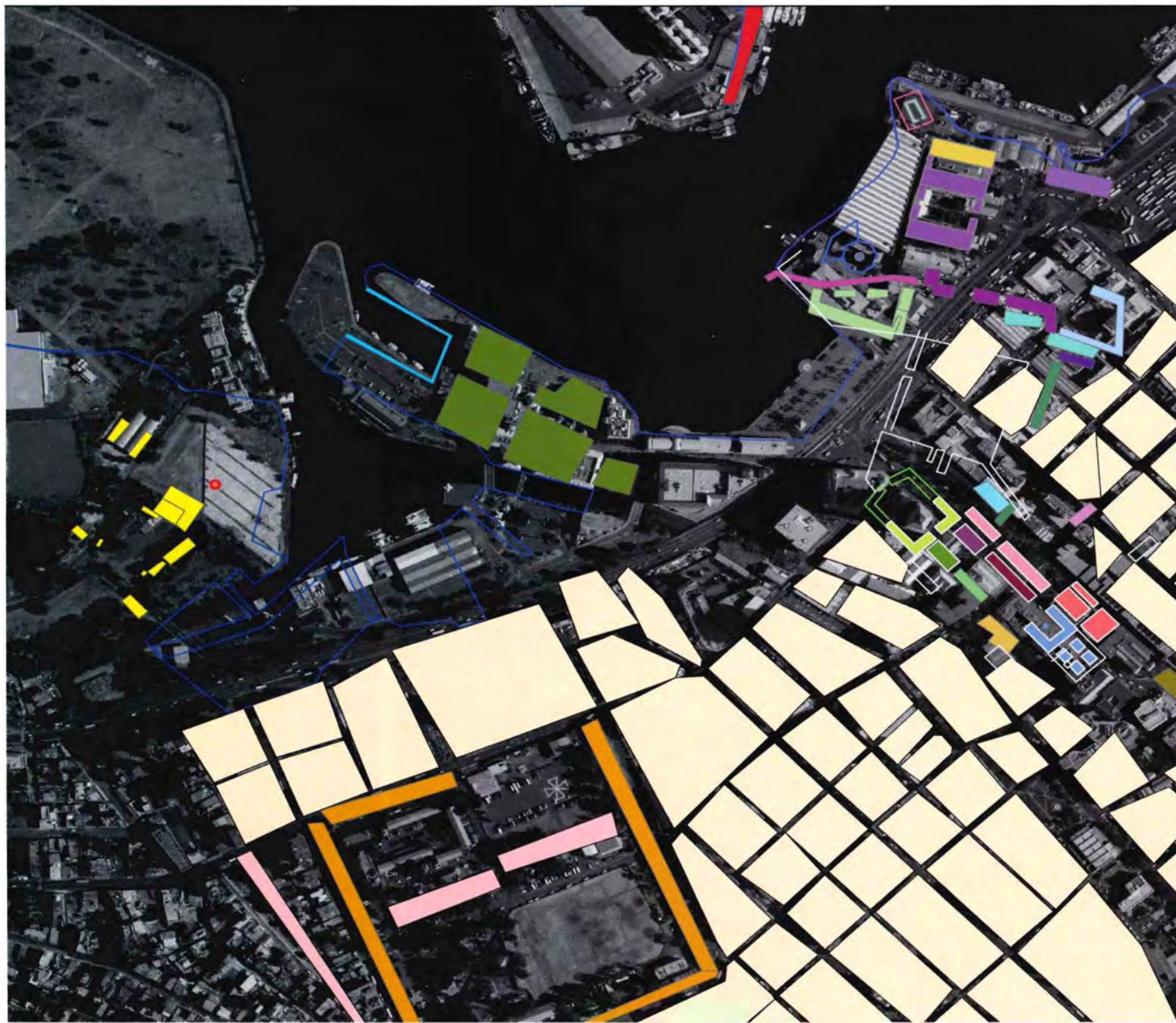
In 1859 when the works were completed, the depot was surrounded by a wall along which sleeping

sheds with rudimentary wooden beds were erected. The roofs of the dormitories were covered with terracotta tiles preferred to tin sheets for protection against heat. The depot provided a shaded yard with a space reserved for privies and washrooms.

A second extension was effected to the depot in the early 1860s because of the constant influx of indentured immigrants and the resulting insalubrity prevailing at the depot. Additional works were undertaken to ameliorate the conditions of stay of immigrants. One of the measures consisted in separating "old" immigrants – those who had already completed their contracts – from the immigrants who had just arrived referred to as "new" immigrants.

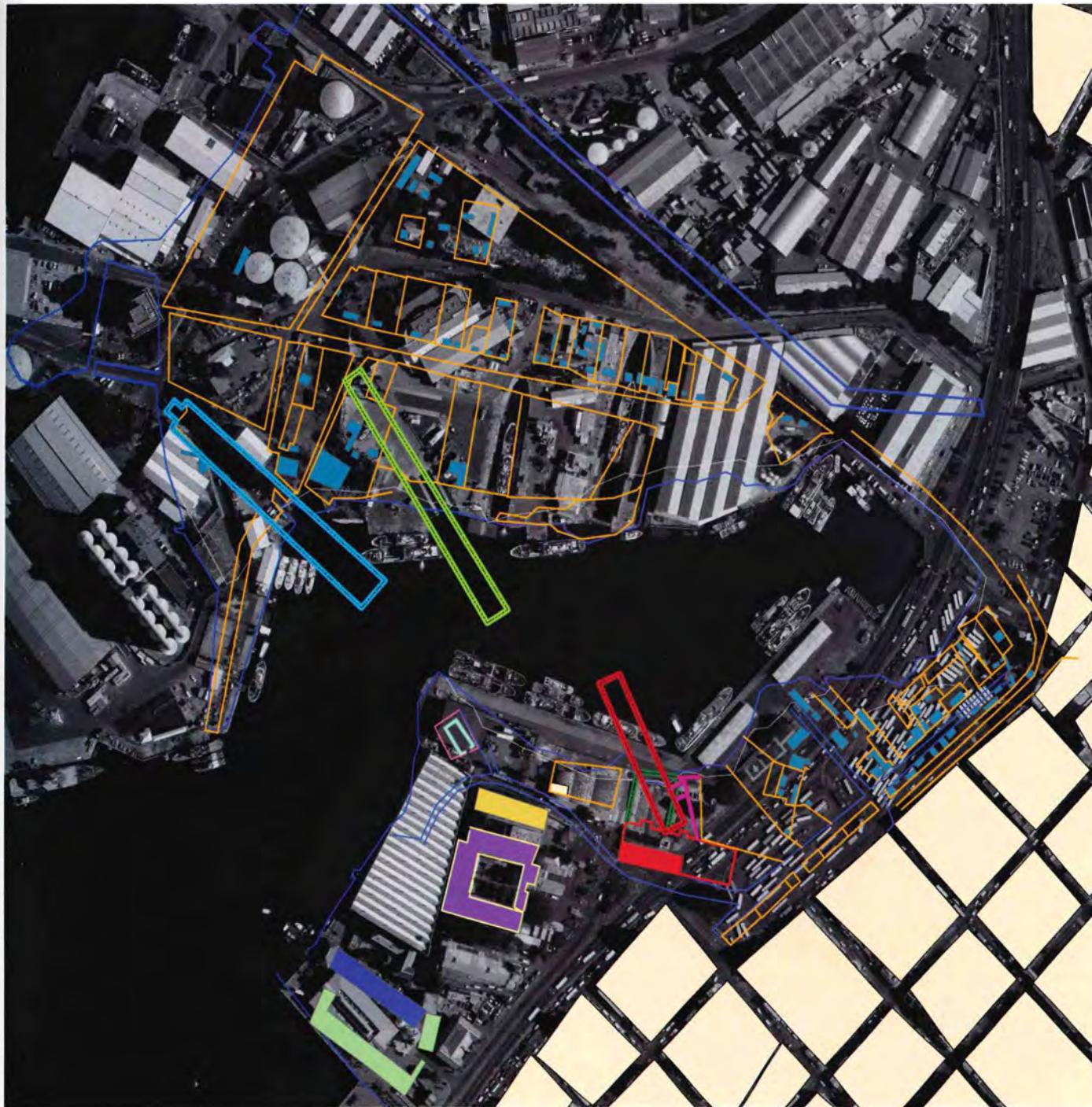
By 1860, the depot was divided in two parts. This new organisation of the depot became physically effective with the construction of the railway in 1864. The railway line was constructed through the depot and divided it into two separate parts connected by a pedestrian bridge.

In this new configuration, sanitary facilities were created on both parts of the depot. On completion of the works, the size of the depot reached its peak with a total area of 3,000 square meters. The depot had a capacity of 200 people on one side and 250 on the other for which sanitary amenities, kitchens and dormitories were constructed or improved. Additional sleeping sheds were built along the wall which separated the depot from the railway line.



0 100 200 Meters

Port Louis harbour area including Trou Fanfar in 1818 and 1819
(AGTF)



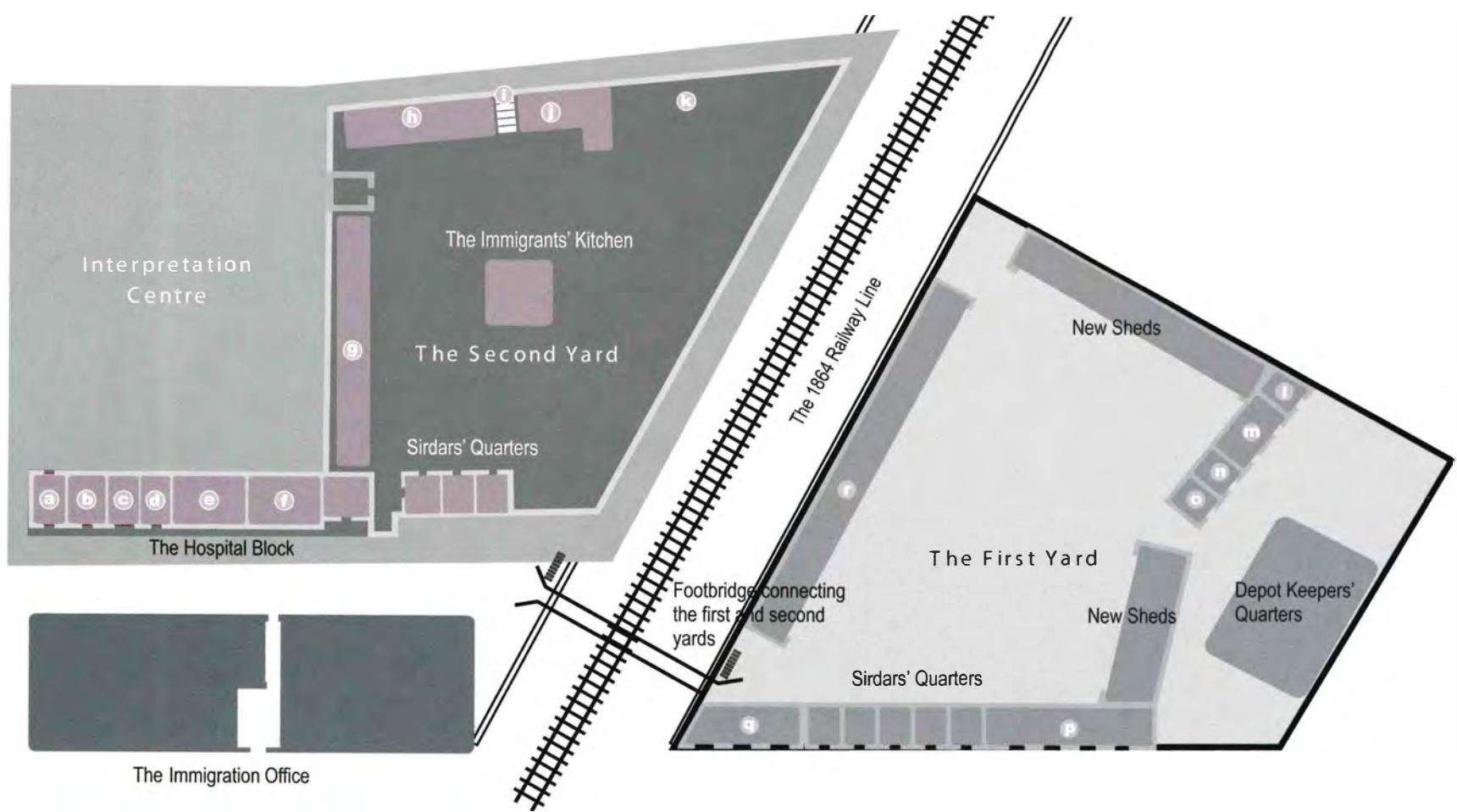
Legend

	Map1858_Town
Name	
Cliff	Settled Area
COASTLINE	Camp de noires du Roi
Map1858polygon	Casernes
Name	Caudan Warehouses
Ateliers et magasins	Champ De Mars
Hotel du Gouvernement	Church
Petit Port / bassin des chaloupes	Fortification
	La Citadelle
	Line Barracks
	Moulin A Vent
	New Dock
	Trou Fanfaron area, building
	Warehouses
Map1858Hospital	<all other values>
Name	
Batterie	Batterie
Building	Building
Custom Port House Office	Custom Port House Office
Hopital	Hopital
Immigration Office	Immigration Office
Magasin double	Magasin double
Map1858Fort	
Name	
Fort	Batterie
Terreplein	Ilot
Map1858_Tonnelliers	
Name	
Batterie	Batterie
	Immigration Depot
	Road
Map1858Hospital_line	
Name	
<Null>	<Null>
Batterie	Batterie
Immigration Depot	Immigration Depot
Road	Road
Map1858_TrouFanfaron	
Name	
BRIC PatentSlip	<all other values>
BRIC Warehouse	BRIC PatentSlip
Entrance Immigration Depot	BRIC Warehouse
Mr Brout Patent Slip	Entrance Immigration Depot
Mr Vigoureux Patent Slip	Mr Brout Patent Slip
Parcel	Mr Vigoureux Patent Slip



0 100 200 Meters

Trou Fanfaron in 1854 (AGTF)



The Immigration Depot

The Hospital Block

- (a) The Gatekeeper's Office
- (b) The Stable
- (c) The Cart Room
- (d) The Officers' Kitchen
- (e) The Surgery
- (f) The Ward

The Second Yard

- (g) Immigrants' Shed
- (h) The Privies
- (i) The Steps
- (j) Bathing Area
- (k) Sheds

The First Yard

- (l) Kitchen
- (m) Servants
- (n) Store
- (o) Sirdar
- (p) Cookhouse

- (q) Lavoratories
- (r) Sheds

A redrawn modern plan of the Immigration Depot in 1866
(AGTF)

THE ROLE OF THE DEPOT

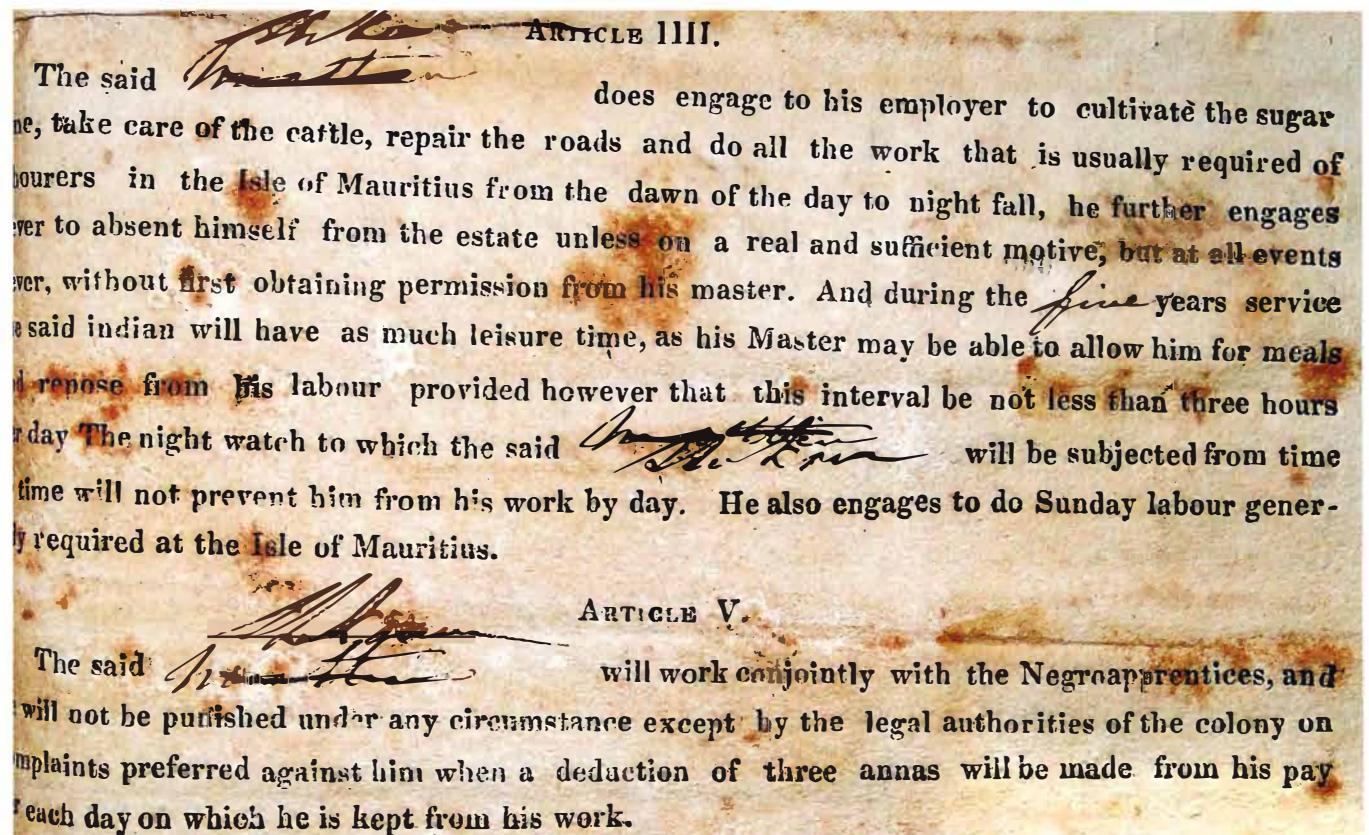
The depot, and de facto the Immigration Office, was established through legislation in 1842, when indentured immigration was placed under the aegis of the Government. The law imposed that immigrants spent two days at the depot before signing their employment contract. This measure aimed at ensuring in theory that immigrants had the time required to choose an employer.

This law also made provision for the creation of the post of Protector of Immigrants. His role was to implement the laws regulating indentured immigration, to supervise the good management of arrivals and departures, to receive vagrants (or indentured labourers without papers), to inspect the sugar camps and other living places of the indentured labourers, among others.

The Protector of Immigrants was supported by a staff ranging between twenty and thirty employees. His office, which was located at the Immigration Depot, was primarily an administrative centre where foreign workers came under indentureship. The main activity was the regularisation of the stay of indentured labourers. Upon arrival, each indentured labourer had to register, obtain a residence permit and sign his employment contract. The employment contract was signed before a Magistrate ensuring that both parties agreed to the terms and conditions laid down in the contract. Other administrative procedures included the issuance of marriage certificates, payment of taxes, and registration of titles deeds.

The Report of the Royal Commissioners of Enquiry of 1875 summarized the functions of the Immigration Depot as follows:

1. Agency to recruit indentured labourers in India and bring them back to their country once their industrial residence was completed, or sometimes, when they had to return;
2. Enable indentured population to remit money to India;
3. Administrative centre for the indentured population in the colony;
4. At the arrival of immigrants, be in charge of their landing and distribution.



The indenture contract of an immigrant from Pondicherry, India which was drafted in Cuddalore in 1838
(Mauritius National Archives)

LIFE OF IMMIGRANTS AT THE DEPOT

The newly arrived immigrants

Upon their arrival, immigrants were taken to the courtyard of the depot so that the Protector could carry out an inspection. He counted the number of arriving immigrants, recorded their complaints and proceeded with the regularization of their stay. Their personal details were recorded, and they were issued an immigrant ticket containing:

- the ship number;
- their name;
- the name of the father of the indentured labourer;
- the caste;
- the place of origin;
- the registration number of the immigrant;
- the age;
- the height;
- information on corpulence;
- an indication confirming the presence of tattoos.

In addition to the ticket, immigrants were given a number that allowed their identification. This numbering system was standardized as from 1847 to avoid duplications. However, this numbering system did not allow formal identification nor did it prevent frauds. Indeed, if an indentured labourer returned to his country of origin at the end of

his first contract and came back, a new number was assigned to him. Thus, the same indentured labourer could receive several numbers, which rendered formal identification extremely confusing.

Consequently, a photographic unit was created in 1867 to take portraits of indentured labourers. These photographs - mandatory on the ticket - allowed better identification of indentured labourers. It was also a means to ensure that they were registered and allowed to stay in the colony. If an indentured labourer failed to produce his ticket on demand, he was liable to a penalty or conviction for vagrancy.

As from 1867, the list of names of newly arrived indentured labourers was published in the newspapers. After registration, their contracts were prepared and the date of distribution to the sugar estates was fixed. Before confirming their future place of work, the indentured labourers gathered in bands composed of friends or families. During their two-day stay at the depot, they had the opportunity to meet *sirdars* or team leaders, generally former indentured labourers themselves. The *sirdars* acted as intermediaries between the planters, or their representatives, and the indentured labourers. They also acted as interpreter to help indentured labourers choose their future employers.

At the depot, if needed, the indentured labourers received medical care provided by the Immigration Department. However, all costs related to the stay of the indentured labourers at the depot were borne by the planters. The fees were paid at the time of distribution. These expenses were incurred for food generally consisting of *dhal* (dry beans), rice, salted fish cooked in large pots in the kitchen reserved for immigrants.



THE DISTRIBUTION

The distribution day was set two or three days after the indentured labourers landed at the depot. An advertisement indicated the opening of the depot for distribution an hour before it was held. The planter often accompanied by *sirdars* went to the depot for the distribution that usually started after 10 a.m.

Once the conditions of work were agreed, indentured labourers gathered in bands, appeared in front of a Magistrate with the planter to finalise and sign the contract. This initiative aimed at ensuring that the indentured labourer and the planter were full aware of the contents of the contract.

5 years industrial residence in Mauritius with double the time of any unlicensed absences.

Name	Father's Name	Name	Father's Name
Pungasunny	Cyclelingum	Thonacodee	Ramos
Northroyen	Cooper	Syndarum	Ramasaur
Hylaeum	Nagapen.	Venatachellum	D.
Sabaputhra	Malremostor.	Cyclelingum	Shopay
Muthosauny	Cyaphoree	Venatachellum	Casey
Colinelavelor	Brandroyen.	Egurunden	Deekaler
Vodargen	Oraphoree.	Venatachellum	Ramasau
Searamontes	Djaves.		
Gauripen	Sohramanien		
Cathaw	Veerasen		

The above Contract was explained in my presence to the said Immigrants and signed before me by them with their names or marks and by *John Tamm* authorized Agent of the said *Mr. O'Farrel* at *Madras*.
this day of 18⁵⁹

Contract of indentured labourers signed in 1859
(MGIIIA/PF series)

INDENTURED LABOURERS REACHING THE END OF THEIR CONTRACT

The depot was also an important administrative centre for the indentured labourers who were already engaged. Those who had completed their contracts and wished to re-engage or to return to their country of origin went to the depot to fulfill the requisite formalities. Others came in search of civil status documents (marriage certificate, death certificate, for example), their title deeds or to remit money to their family.

Indentured labour immigration declined significantly as from the 1870s and came to a formal end in 1910, when the Immigration Depot ceased its conventional activities. However, as all documents produced by the Immigration Office were kept at the Depot until the 1960s, the indentured labourers and their descendants continued to go to the Immigration Depot for their current affairs.

*Portraits of indentured labourers taken in the 1860s
(MGIIIA/PE series)*

