

Surinam to East Tytherton - The Story of Harriet Maynard 1850-1906

One of the tasks of historians is to scan through records. As I looked at the 1861 census, one name in particular stood out: Harriet Maynard, born in Surinam, a student at the Moravian Girls' School in East Tytherton. Surinam? A tiny country on the north-western edge of South America, in between British Guiana to the west, and French Guiana to the east. Surinam (modern Suriname) was former Dutch Guiana, but changed hands with the British administration, ending up with Dutch oversight. Who was this Harriet Maynard? Was she white or Black, slave or free? For Surinam was legendary for its barbaric slave *régime*, where slaves outnumbered whites in a proportion seen perhaps nowhere else in the Caribbean. For, although Surinam was geographically within the South American continent, it was thoroughly Caribbean in every other way.

Further research soon showed surprising and not quite expected answers. Yes, Harriet was indeed, or had been a slave. She had been born into slavery, since her mother, whose name we do not yet know, was a slave. Legal tradition throughout the Caribbean decreed that the status of children was dictated by the status of the mother. Thus this legitimated a culture of sexual exploitation of Black women by white men, for slaves were extremely valuable financial assets, and more. For they also represented status. The more slaves, the more status.

But what of her father, William Maynard? While there are still many questions to be answered, we do know that he attended the Moravian church in Surinam, and that he came to England with a letter of recommendation from them. However, he was not positively received, since he had evidently formed a relationship with a Moravian woman of some standing in the Moravian community in Ockbrook, Derbyshire, Rachel Spence, whom he subsequently married.

This caused consternation. Should the new Mrs. Maynard be regarded as a legitimate wife, in the eyes of the Moravians, since her new husband had been living with a woman as if his wife in Surinam? This tells us that (if he was white) that William Maynard could not be married legally to a Black woman (regardless of whether she was a slave or not), and so had opted for the local tradition of a 'Surinam marriage', in which the mother and another person would escort the girl into the man's bedroom, and then announce to the immediate locality the nature of the event. We know from Moravian records that the mother of Harriet was William Maynard's personal slave, so she was probably his 'housekeeper'—the standard euphemism for such arrangements of concubinage. Whatever the case, four year old Harriet was able to sail for England in around 1854, to become part of the Moravian Sisters' House, where she would have been looked after and cared for. It also means that William almost certainly manumitted (legally set free) both Harriet and her mother.

Slavery ended in Surinam in 1863, and, as far as we know, Harriet never saw her mother again. This leaves us asking questions about the effect that this separation from her mother and possibly other close relations. William Maynard was about 59 at the time of his marriage to 49 year old Rachel Spence, so more children were highly unlikely, and Rachel was a spinster. However, although we do not have specific evidence, both the census records and the close locations of extended family members (within walking distance of each other) suggests that this was a loving and closely bonded family, and one into which a Black illegitimate relation was positively received.

Harriet was then sent to school at East Tytherton, and we find her there in the 1861 census, aged eleven years. We do not know how long Harriet stayed there, but in 1863 her father died, when Harriet was about thirteen. William Maynard was by then living in Adelaide Road, Kentish Town, a rapidly developing part of London. In 1843 this road wasn't even finished, and the road to which Rachel Maynard moved (Rochester Road, in nearby Camden), did not exist. So these were spanking new properties. Rachel was about fifty-seven when her husband died, and she herself passed away in 1879, aged about 72. Presumably Harriet moved into Rochester Road, where she cared for her step-mother until 1879. In 1881, we find the 30 year old Harriet enrolled as an Art Student, perhaps at the nearby famous Slade School of Art. This is interesting, because she is then staying with her aunt, Ann Spence (*née* Benham) and her family, one of which is of particular interest. This is Ann's son, Ernest (d. 1944), who went on to become an established artist himself, and who was accepted by the Royal Academy at least nine times. At this time, Ernest is only about eighteen, and a 'scholar', perhaps also at the Slade School? Who do not know. We do know, however, that Ernest, and his Medical Student brother, are very much part of an artistic family, both of the brothers marrying artists, and (in the 1891 census) living in the Isle of Wight. How is this important to Harriet?

In 1902 a painting was sold at the Newlyn Gallery, called *Sea Lavender*. This was by a 'Harriet Maynard'. We have put her name in inverted commas, because there is a fly in the proverbial ointment: by a very strange coincidence, there were two women artists of this name . . . However, if this is significant, the 'other' artist (said to be a 'sculptor' in the census records) spells her name 'Harriette', which is the only instance of this spelling we have found, together with the fact that she is twelve years younger. We know that Harriet, born in Surinam, died in 1906, at the age of fifty-six years, in Launceston, so she was in Cornwall. Could Harriet Maynard, born a slave, educated at the Moravian Girls' School in East Tytherton, have become a Black artist, and a gentlewoman (she left over—modern values—£250,000 on her death)? This would make her quite unique in the history of Cornish art, and indeed in Black history. Here is a story, with many questions, but still a story to be told.

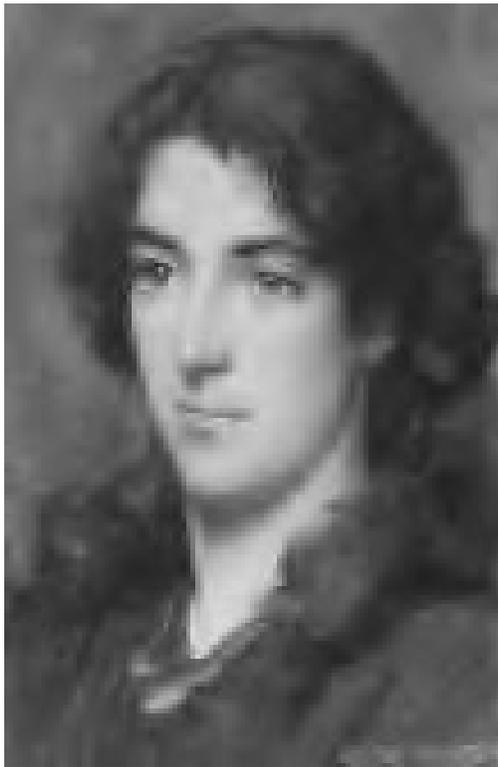
But there is still one more intriguing possibility. There was a famous mixed-race planter in Surinam, by the name of Arnold Maynard. Could he hold the key to Harriet's family origins? Only more research will tell!



Could the woman or girl on the right of the photograph thought to be in the 1860s, and taken in front of the Moravian Church in East Tytherton, be Harriet Maynard?



Artists in St. Ives signed a letter protesting against building development . . . Could this be Harriet's signature?



Head of a Girl, by Ernest Spence, 1910

The Market in Paramaribo, Surinam c. 1830?'



13^e, Demain. ... VUE DU GRAND MARCHÉ AUX LÉGUMES, FRUITS ET VOLAILLES.



Moravian Mission, Paramaribo (1920s? *courtesy, Moravian Archives*).



'Mulatto' women in Surinam. In noting their incredibly strong, beautiful and haunting faces, challenging us over the years, one cannot help but wonder what sufferings they might also have endured (before 1914, *courtesy of the Moravian Archives*).

Moravian Mission Station in Surinam (1920s? *Courtesy, Moravian Archives*)

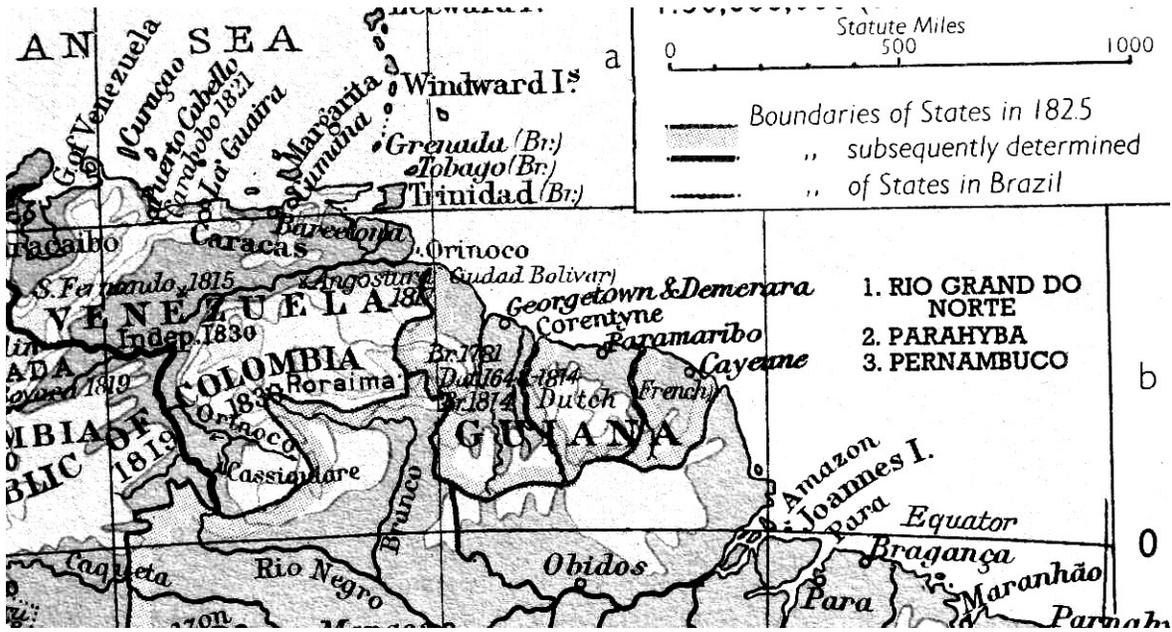


'Bush negro' in Surinam



These transported Africans were direct descendants of the slaves. (Before 1914, *courtesy, Moravian Archives*).

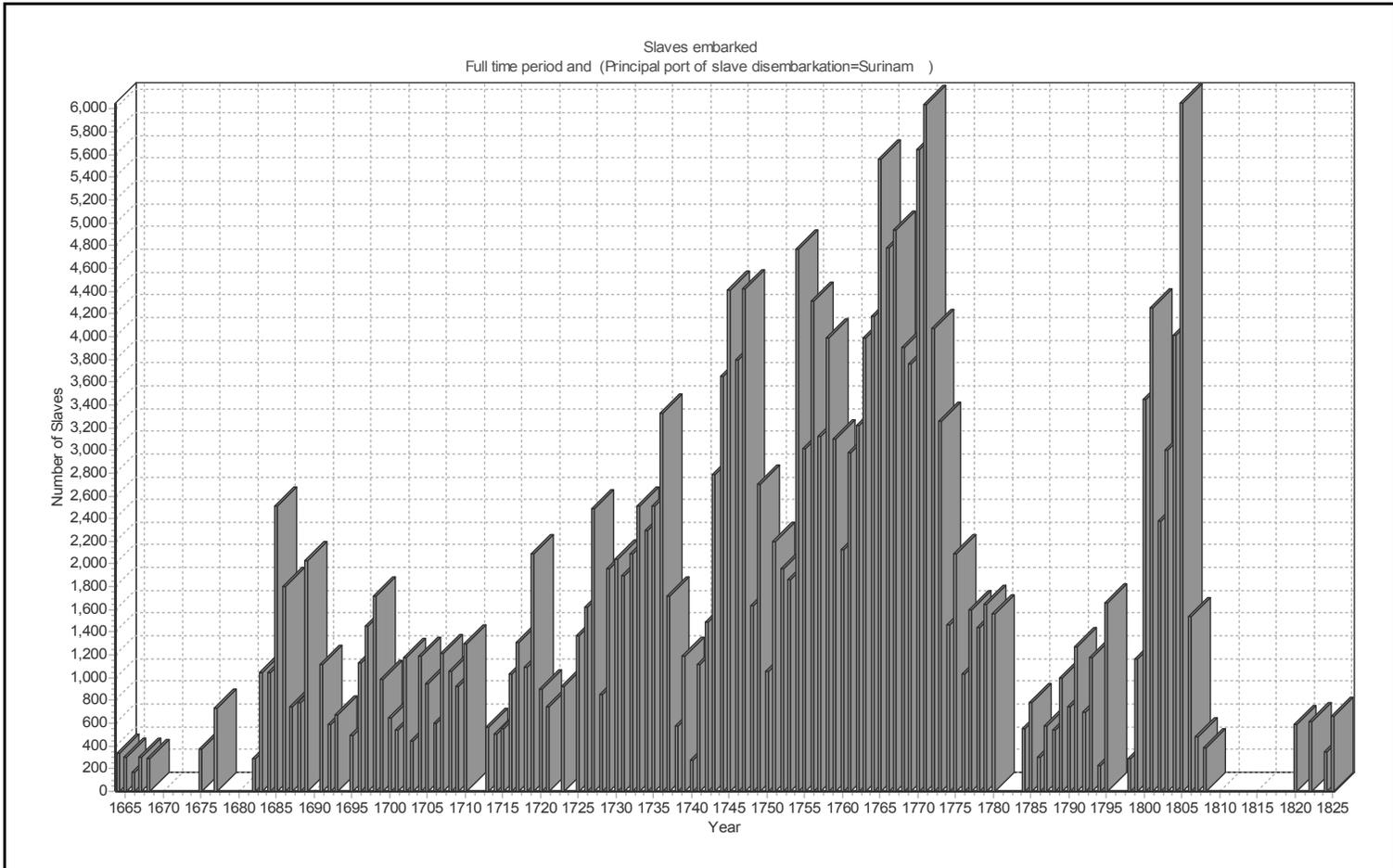
Map showing the location of Surinam (Dutch Guiana) in 1825. The scale shows it to be about 200 miles across.



Surinam (1853), showing the Moravian Station
 (Moravian Atlas, 1853, courtesy, Moravian Archives)



Statistics for the principal port of disembarkation, Surinam. This registers 671 voyages (which will be an underestimate, as there will always be gaps in the records), with a *per* voyage mean of 347 slaves embarked in Africa, and 296 arriving in Surinam. The total *recorded* is 232,793. This represents an average mortality on the middle passage of 11.4% (just below average). The share of males was 61%, with nearly 20% of the overall total (male and female) being children. This slave society would therefore have been a male laager, with very few women. It suggests that reproduction and families were not a priority; working slaves to death was, with re-imports of more slaves. In one year in the 1770s, and again immediately before British abolition, over 6,000 slaves were imported.



ⁱ Courtesy of Tropenmuseum Royal Tropical Institute Object number 3728-375 Litho voorstellende een marktgezicht.jpg.