

# The environmental impact of colonial activity in Belize

## O impacto ambiental da atividade colonial em Belize

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**Rita Pemberton**

Department of History, University of the West Indies, St. Augustine  
Trinidad and Tobago  
[ritpembe@hotmail.com](mailto:ritpembe@hotmail.com)

Recibido: 25 de febrero de 2012

Aprobado: 11 de marzo de 2012

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### **Abstract**

From the activities of buccaneers, pirates, baymen, logwood, mahogany and agricultural companies, this study traces the factors which have shaped the unique culture of Belize and discusses the ways in which colonial rule has impacted in the colony's environment. The study aims to show the forces which stimulated forest conservation policies in a colony where the lack of imperial restraints on the early settlers permitted their control of extensive acreages of forest and uncontrolled extraction of particular species of the forests. It is argued that the pattern established by the early settlers was reinforced when British imperial control was established as the land holdings of private companies engaged in mahogany and agriculture were extended. The influence of these companies impeded the successful implementation of forest conservation and facilitated the over exploitation and denudation of the forest of Belize.

### **Key words**

Belize; forest history; agriculture; mahogany

### **Resumo**

A partir das atividades de bucaneiros, piratas, colonizadores das Honduras Britânicas, companhias agrícolas e de exploração de mahogany, este estudo traça os fatores que moldaram a cultura específica de Belize e discute como a regra colonial impactou no meio ambiente dessa colônia. Mostra as forças que estimularam políticas de conservação florestal, numa colônia onde a ausência de restrições sobre os primeiros colonizadores permitiu que esses controlassem largas florestas e extraíssem algumas espécies sem qualquer restrição. Argumenta que o padrão estabelecido por esses colonos foi reforçado à medida que o controle imperial Britânico se estabeleceu e pela extensão das companhias privadas de agricultura e extração de mahogany. A influência dessas companhias impediu uma conservação florestal bem sucedida e facilitou a super exploração e o desnudamento da floresta de Belize.

### **Palavras chave**

Belize; história florestal; agricultura; mahogany

## Introduction: historical background

Located on the Caribbean Coast of Central America and bordering Mexico in the north and west and Guatemala on the west and south, Belize has a land area of 22,966 sq. km. (8867 sq. miles) which was densely forested. The territory was first inhabited by the Maya Indians but was occupied by European settlers in 1638. The Spanish invaders set up scattered communities and showed little interest in people or produce. Between 1650 and 1700 Spanish raiders, who constituted the main Spanish presence in the colony, sought captives to work on plantations in Cuba. Although significant numbers of Spaniards never settled in Belize, they claimed sovereignty over the territory and challenged the right of Britain to settle there. As a result there were frequent conflicts between the British and the Spanish during the 18<sup>th</sup> century when the Spanish attacked British settlements and forced the settlers to leave.<sup>1</sup> The British were persistent and ultimately gained control of the territory. The non Spanish residents, especially the British earned a livelihood selling dyes and logwood (*Haematoxylum campechianum*) which were in heavy demand. Spanish concern about the growth in the numbers of foreign settlers on their territory led to the signing of a treaty of the Convention of London in 1786 forbidding the British from establishing any kind of plantation of sugar, coffee etc and settlement on the land. As a result for 200 years there was a small population biased away from agriculture and these two factors, which continue to impede the development of present day Belize,<sup>2</sup> are of significance to the country's environment.

British pirates and adventurers, who used the territory as a base to attack Spanish ships, were among the first European settlers of Belize.<sup>3</sup> Their numbers increased as the settlement became a popular haven for pirates and buccaneers of all nationalities. Around the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century these adventurers, called baymen, began to cut logwood which they found in the area and for which there was a growing demand in Europe. Initially, woodcutting was a secondary activity which was carried on between pirate expeditions but when piracy and buccaneering were outlawed, woodcutting became the full time activity

<sup>1</sup> WRIGHT, A.C.S.; ROMNEY, D. H.; ARBUCKLE, R. H. and VIAL, V.E. *Land use in British Honduras: report of the British Honduras land use Survey Team*. London: HMSO, 1959, p. 115-116.

<sup>2</sup> WRIGHT. *Land use...*

<sup>3</sup> LESLIE, Robert (ed.). *A history of Belize: nation in the making*. Belize: Cubola Productions, 2002, p. 18.

of the settlers. British rule of the land was confirmed in 1798 and in 1862 the colony was officially called British Honduras. It was made a crown colony in 1871 and was administered by the Governor of Jamaica until 1884. Its name was changed to Belize (from the Mayan word for muddy waters) in 1973 and it became an independent state in 1981.<sup>4</sup>

### **Economic activities in Belize: from logwood and mahogany extraction to agriculture**

The early British settlers had no long term plan for permanent settlement and they built temporary accommodation near to the logwood groves and changed their location frequently as new stocks were found. With regard to labor, the baymen organized enslaved Africans for the extraction of timber. According to Nigel Bolland,<sup>5</sup> the earliest reference to an enslaved African presence in Belize was in 1724 but by the 1750s this group constituted a majority of the population rising to 75% by the end of the century. Each logwood cutter had free access to whatever he found as there were no regulations relating to land tenure. The settlers formulated a system called the 'Public Meeting' in which they elected officers and passed resolutions which had the force of law.<sup>6</sup> These regulations were generally concerned with the boundaries to the spots they occupied and the logwood works they established. Thus, they acquired the authority to allocate land in the settlement and this authority was maintained until 1817.<sup>7</sup> As the logwood trade declined, the trade in mahogany (*Swietenia macrophylla*) developed and came to dominate the economy of Belize throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Thus the earliest European settlers established a colony in which the main economic activity was centered on extraction which laid the basis for subsequent settlement and cultural patterns in Belize. The most striking aspect of the activities of the early settlers was the extent to which they were able to do as they pleased in Belize. Devoid of any metropolitan control, they made their own rules to give sanction to their activities.

<sup>4</sup> CARICOM Secretariat. *Our Caricom community: an introduction*. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2005, p. 411-412.

<sup>5</sup> BOLLAND, Nigel. 'Timber extraction and the shaping of enslaved people's culture in Belize' in SHEPHERD, Verene (ed.). *Slavery without sugar: diversity in Caribbean economy and society since the 17<sup>th</sup> Century*. Gainesville: The University Press of Florida, 2002, p. 36.

<sup>6</sup> BOLLAND, Nigel and SHOMAN, Assad. *Land in Belize 1765-1831*. Kingston, Jamaica: Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1977, p. 9.

<sup>7</sup> BOLLAND and SHOMAN. *Land in Belize*, p. 9-10.

Because of the differences between the two plants, the change from logwood to mahogany exploitation had far reaching consequences for Belize. Logwood trees are small and they grow in concentrated stands near rivers and the coast. Logwood production requires small outlays of capital and a small labour force. Mahogany trees are large, grow in scattered inland locations and have to be shipped as large logs. Mahogany works were therefore more difficult and expensive to operate. Mahogany required a larger capital outlay, a larger labour force and control of a larger land area than logwood works. Hence the mahogany business came under the control of a small class of wealthy cutters who owned extensive areas of land.<sup>8</sup> Logwood and mahogany extraction became the chief pursuit of enslaved men creating what Bolland describes as “a unique slave system”<sup>9</sup> in this colony. Few were engaged in agriculture which was never given a chance to develop in this territory<sup>10</sup> and a marked gender based division of labour was the norm in the society. The pattern of land holding with extensive private holdings being predominant was also enduring.

Such was the extent of private land ownership in Belize that in 1871 two firms had possession of almost all the private land in Belize, Young and Toledo and Company and The Belize Estate Produce Company (BEC). In 1880, Young and Toledo went bankrupt and its lands were sold in large parcels, some of them to BEC. The BEC became the largest landowner owning about half the privately owned lands in Belize and a few large absentee land holders owned the remainder. The majority of the population was excluded from landowning even while much of the privately owned land remained idle. Mahogany remained the chief pursuit. Thus, a land use pattern based on predominant private ownership by a small number of individuals and companies was established and prevailed in Belize right up to independence in 1981.

From the early period as a colonial possession, there were developments which were significant for the environment in Belize. The population remained relatively small and the main economic activities were related to forest exploitation, over which the authorities were able to exert little control. Since forests

<sup>8</sup> BOLLAND and SHOMAN. *Land in Belize*, p. 15.

<sup>9</sup> BOLLAND. *Timber extraction*, p. 37.

<sup>10</sup> BOLLAND. *Timber extraction*, p. 102-103.

occupy more than 2/3 of the land area,<sup>11</sup> the forces affecting the forest industry are of significance to the environment in Belize and deserve academic scrutiny. This forms the subject of this study which utilizes reports on forests in Belize and the documented views of persons who were intimately related to the colony during the colonial period. While the history of many British Caribbean territories is centered around clearing forests for plantation agriculture the history of Belize, up to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, is centered around activities that occurred in the country's forested areas. This study aims to show how colonial policy impacted on the environment in Belize. It is argued that not only did colonial policy support an uncontrolled extractive process which was itself environmentally unfriendly, but it created a system which proved to be a serious hindrance to the implementation of successful conservation practices when it was determined that these were needed in Belize. The challenge of large private land holding to public policy is well illustrated by the operations of the BEC which was able to function outside of the law.

### **Change in the physical environment of Belize**

The Mayan Indians lived in scattered communities established where fresh water was abundant. They selected well drained locations for housing, in areas with outcroppings of clay for wares, lime for burning and land nearby for plantation 'milpa' crops. Apart from the annual burning for milpa, which was common among the ancient Maya,<sup>12</sup> there is little evidence of environmental destruction by the first peoples of Belize. This situation changed when European settlers arrived.

The forests of Belize provided the main source of revenue for the 260 years covered in this study. The revenue generated by forest exploitation was greater than all the other economic activities put together. Since the forests were of exceptional importance to the colony forest management and policy ought to have been of special interest. While the loggers operated in their own self interest, even when metropolitan rule was confirmed, there were few official attempts to direct their activities and exert some controls over them. The continued presence of good timber belied the fact that "(a) considerable portion

<sup>11</sup> BOLLAND. *Timber extraction*, p. 102-103.

<sup>12</sup> HUMMEL, C. *Report on the forests of British Honduras with suggestions for a far reaching forest policy*. London: Crown Agents for the Colonies, 1921, p. 10.

of the original capital stock of the British Honduras forests has been used up... ”<sup>13</sup> The description of the operations of logwood and mahogany works which follows, demonstrate how this situation developed

### **Logwood and mahogany works**

The colony of Belize was marked by the many logwood and mahogany works or banks where logs were collected along the Belize River. The best mahogany was found in the North of the colony. The earliest laws with respect to land holding were made by the settlers whose general practice was:

“When a person finds a spot of logwood unoccupied and builds his hut, that spot shall be deemed his property and no person shall presume to cut or fall a tree or grub a stump within less than one thousand paces or yards of his hut to be continued on each side of said hut, with the course of the river or creek on both sides”.<sup>14</sup>

This law was replaced by the system of land grants made by the superintendent of the settlement which allocated un-surveyed settlements known as ‘works’. These were created:

“On any river or creek a starting point is selected, usually to the mouth of a small creek entering the main river, the mouth of the main river or some fixed point. From this starting point the mahogany work was described as having a base line of three miles on the river and the sidelines extending halfway or the usual distance ‘aback’ to the next navigable stream. Eight miles is the usual distance ‘aback’ and a navigable stream is one that will float a mahogany log in the wet season”.<sup>15</sup>

Titles were regulated and by proclamation and were deemed to be the absolute freehold property of the occupants. As a result of more than 250 years of wood cutting operations, “... much of the forest timber within easy reach of the principal rivers has been cut down.”<sup>16</sup> Mahogany, cedar and rosewood were the most valued timbers and chicle was collected from the sapodilla tree. The value of these products enhanced the value of land so the loggers placed much emphasis on preventing the alienation of land to small holders for activities other than logging. According to the Director of Public Gardens and Plantations in Jamaica:

“Most of the mahogany forests at Orange Walk are in the hands of a few proprietors, who, to preserve the young trees, as a rule discourage settlement. They adopt a rude system of forest

<sup>13</sup> HUMMEL. *Report*, p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> WRIGHT. *Land use*, p. 120.

<sup>15</sup> WRIGHT. *Land use*, p. 120

<sup>16</sup> MORRIS, D. *The colony of British Honduras, its resources and prospects with particular reference to its indigenous plants and economic products*. London: Edward Stanford, 1883, p. 17. Morris was the Director of Public Gardens and Plantations, Jamaica.

conservancy backed by a very strict trespass law, which entirely prevents the land from being alienated or used as provision grounds by settlers".<sup>17</sup>

Mahogany works began with the location of the trees by an enslaved mahogany hunter who was dispatched into the forests to locate new areas of mahogany stools. Plans were made for the logging operation which would begin during the dry season with the construction of a wharf on the river bank for receiving and squaring the timber before they were put into the river. A main road was cleared into the forest to provide access in all directions and this road had to be sufficiently wide to permit the movement of the widest logs and the passage of the large trucks that drag the logs to the river to be floated downstream.<sup>18</sup> In addition to the uncontrolled extraction of mahogany which pervaded the operations in Belize, there was uncontrolled felling of trees to establish camps for the loggers and create access for the logging operations. The clearings for these camps and road construction were duplicated every new season by every group of mahogany works and resulted in unnecessary seasonal deforestation which remained unnoticed until the 1930s.

### **The development of plantation agriculture**

The collapse of Spanish rule in Central America facilitated British settlement of Belize. Several groups of immigrants flocked there stimulating population growth which reached 25,000 in 1848.<sup>19</sup> A local agricultural company, formed since 1839, was authorized to make land grants to private individuals, sought to foster increased agricultural production in the colony. In 1850 the first sugar plantation was established and by 1857 when there was a few more in operation, the first exports of sugar and rum were made.<sup>20</sup> When British administrative control of the colony was formally established in 1862, government sought to regulate the use and transfer of crown land. This was primarily located in the southern part of the colony for the northern areas had already been alienated to private individuals and firms engaged in the timber trade. Under British colonial rule there was a significant increase in investment capital to

<sup>17</sup> MORRIS. *The colony of British Honduras*, p. 44.

<sup>18</sup> MORRIS. *The colony of British Honduras*, p. 44.

<sup>19</sup> MORRIS. *The colony of British Honduras*, p. 116.

<sup>20</sup> MORRIS. *The colony of British Honduras*, p. 117.

establish plantations. Vast tracts of land passed into private hands as large sugar and coffee estates were established.<sup>21</sup>

Failure of a number of agricultural undertakings in coffee and bananas prompted the authorities to sell crown land at £1 per acre but since the best land had already been alienated and few were interested in purchasing the remaining land at those prices. Small farmers could not afford the price and large planters were not interested in the scheme. In 1915, with the introduction of the Location ticket system which allowed small farmers to buy land in annual installments on condition that it was kept under cultivation, surveys, primarily of urban areas, were undertaken while the forested areas remained largely un-surveyed. As a result of British colonial land policy therefore, extensive acreages of land passed into the hands of private owners. By 1959 about 45% of the land in Belize had passed into private hands and many large landholdings were lying idle.<sup>22</sup> Thus the impact of British policy in Belize was to facilitate further private ownership of extensive areas of land to large land holders which were cleared for agricultural production even if they were often not fully utilized for this purpose. Private ownership was predominant both in the north and south of Belize to facilitate both the timber and agricultural industries.

### **The investigations and their outcomes**

The first investigation of the forests of Belize was made by Hooper in 1886 as a part of an imperial drive in the British colonies. This undertaking was simulated by complaints emanating from Jamaica about the environmental destruction caused by small holders on the island, the problems of deforestation in India, the proddings of colonial officials stationed in the Caribbean colonies as well as the imperial desire to derive greater economic benefit from the colonies' forests. Hooper cautioned that the system of private mahogany operators tended to "extirpate mahogany wherever accessible" and expressed concerns that some of them would cut undersized wood to the detriment of the industry.<sup>23</sup> He recommended the introduction of forest conservation strategies, the establishment of a department of

<sup>21</sup> MORRIS. *The colony of British Honduras*, p. 115.

<sup>22</sup> MORRIS. *The colony of British Honduras*, p. 262-264.

<sup>23</sup> HOOPER, E.D.M. *Report upon the forests of Honduras*. Kumaol Collectorate Press, 1887, p. 12-13.



Forestry and the implementation of forest regulations.<sup>24</sup> No action was taken on these recommendations and the pattern of extraction continued unabated.

In the wake of conflicting reports about the state of the forests in the colony, an investigation into the forests of Belize was conducted by Forest Officer H.E. Hummel in 1921. Hummel lamented that up to that time, the colony had no forest department and he observed that:

“These valuable forests have never been under any professional or other systematic management, with the result ...that a large portion of the original *capital* stock has been removed and is lost for good”.<sup>25</sup>

Hummel noted that unlike the situation in other colonies, in Belize, the greater part of the more accessible forest lands are in the hands of private individuals or companies.<sup>26</sup> In some cases the size of their land holdings was so enormous that they did not possess the means to develop them and scientific forestry was largely unknown in Belize.<sup>27</sup> While the process was hardly noticeable, the entire country “has to a very serious extent been made poorer” and in an undeveloped state. To correct this Hummel stated that “(a) far reaching forest policy is therefore required for the future.”<sup>28</sup>

### **The establishment of the Department of Forests**

Hummel's report led to the establishment of a Forest department in 1922, the formulation of a comprehensive forest policy, the beginning of an investigation of the forest reserves and the classification of the vegetation of Belize. The department focused on the policy of controlled extraction of mahogany and pine to prevent over exploitation but it faced serious challenge from the private owners of forested land whose holdings were significant.<sup>29</sup> The forest policy aimed to strengthen the existing forest industries of the country, make better use of the numerous local species which have been underutilized, to increase the growth and reproduction of mahogany on both private and public lands and provide advice and

<sup>24</sup> HOOPER. *Report*, p. 16-20.

<sup>25</sup> HUMMEL. *Report*, p. 4.

<sup>26</sup> HUMMEL. *Report*, p. 82.

<sup>27</sup> HUMMEL. *Report*, p. 82-83'.

<sup>28</sup> HUMMEL. *Report*, p. 4.

<sup>29</sup> WRIGHT. *Land use*, p. 120-123.

information on forestry to the general public.<sup>30</sup> A change in the method of exploiting the forests to embrace more modern and systematic methods with concessions for longer periods was also recommended.<sup>31</sup> The department also took measures to protect the fauna of the colony by legislation in 1935, 1944 and 1945.<sup>32</sup> The establishment of the department of forestry did not and could not address the environmental issues raised by forest activity in Belize because the government did not control a significant portion of the forested land and a particular culture of extraction had become steeped in the timber industry. In particular, there were powerful private interests who were able to function beyond the reach of the law. The extent of its influence is revealed in the discussion of the Belize Estate and Produce Company which follows.

### **The British Honduras Estate and Produce Company (BHEPC)<sup>33</sup>**

This company was registered in London in 1875, initially for the export of logwood and mahogany but later was also involved in the production of aniline dyes and chicle. The company, which was owned by Hoares Bank in London, owned one fifth of the colony or 11/4 million acres of land and was able to benefit from the changed rules of communal ownership of land utilized by the system of location tickets which restricted operators to a specifically defined area only as long as forest operations were being carried out. They were allowed to have only one ticket at a time. It does appear the Hoares Bank used its influence to attain this change.<sup>34</sup>

The company was a profitable enterprise when it was run by locals with experience in the mahogany trade. From 1915 Europeans with forestry training administered the company which then made less and less profit. In 1931, company officials asked the Belize branch of the Royal Bank of Canada for a loan of £60,000 with government guarantee. The Bank refused as it was of the view that the company was mismanaged and should be sold, but there was support for the company in imperial circles.

<sup>30</sup> HUMMEL. *Report*, p. 110-111.

<sup>31</sup> HUMMEL. *Report*, p. 112-113.

<sup>32</sup> WRIGHT. *Land use*, p. 274.

<sup>33</sup> GREENIDGE, W. 'British Honduras as an appendage of the Belize Estate and Produce Company'. (memo, 1936). MSS British Empire S 356 FCB 141/1. Greenidge served as Chief Justice of Belize until 1936.

<sup>34</sup> GREENIDGE. *British Honduras*, p. 2.

According to one colonial officer "... the Colonial Office professes to believe that it is the backbone of the colony and the whole colony is administered as an appanage of the Belize Estate and Produce Company".<sup>35</sup>

To former magistrate Greenidge, such was the influence of the BHEPC that officers in government employ who spoke out against the company, were removed from office. The Company continued to ask for and was granted, government loans based on the argument that it was an employer of labour. However, Greenidge asserts that the company seldom employed more than 200 labourers per year and then only for a 7 month period. Apart from paying very low wages, the company did not comply with government regulations. Workers were paid £10 per month and given rations valued at £6 per month with which to support their families in the town. Workers were forced to buy food from the company grocery at exorbitant prices as a great part of the wages were paid by coupons redeemable only at the company grocery, despite a government notice that workers did not have to accept coupons as wages. The company also employed 90 men at its sawmill at 4 shillings or £1 per day. Yet government defended the loan as saving employment and provided other forms of assistance to the company.<sup>36</sup>

Company influence was further demonstrated after the destructive hurricane of 1931 which struck after a 118 year hiatus. Most houses in the country were uninsured and the colonial government asked the imperial government for loan to lend homeowners to rebuild and to develop agricultural industries since mahogany and chicle trees were nearing exhaustion. After much negotiation, a loan of £1.1 million was agreed to but the imperial government insisted that £100,000 be given to BHEPC. When the Legislative Council opposed this arrangement, constitutional adjustments were used to override its decision. Subsequently, the vote to the company was increased at the expense of the vote for agricultural settlements. The Governor made no secret of the fact that the colony would not have received the imperial loan without the grant to the company. Greenidge asserts that the loan was approved one year after the

<sup>35</sup> GREENIDGE. *British Honduras*, p. 3.

<sup>36</sup> GREENIDGE. *British Honduras*...

hurricane when the colony was compelled to agree to the terms regarding the Company and no loan was given for home construction until August 1932. While the company continued to receive further loans, the government ordered that no loans be given on properties with 2<sup>nd</sup> mortgages. The imperial generosity to the company was not extended to other sectors of the local community for it took three years of negotiation for them to agree to support the construction of a small factory to produce sugar for local consumption and they provided such rigid terms for a loan of £6000 for a coconut products factory that the people abandoned the idea.<sup>37</sup>

Despite the injection of funds, the company was unable to meet its commitments. In 1931, the colonial government sought to increase land taxes from 11/2 cents per acre to 21/2 cents. The company opposed and refused to pay while the governor refused to have them prosecuted. The common folk who did not pay their taxes were either imprisoned or had their lands confiscated. The Governor was transferred and the new governor reduced the tax to its original figure.<sup>38</sup>

When the company was found to be gathering chicle from 85000 acres of crown lands on the frontier with Guatemala and Mexico, it was given rights to do so at the exclusion of other fellers in the most productive mahogany area. Because of its influence in government circles, this company was able to operate outside the law of the land. The primacy afforded to company interests precluded the ability of the authorities to change their ways of operation and made it impossible for them to institute effective forest conservation measures.

### **The culture of extraction**

Writing on the role of anthropology in the environmentalism discourse, Kay Milton states that “by analyzing environmentalism as a cultural phenomenon, it can throw light on the character and content of environmentalist thought.”

While some of her arguments are debatable, the notion of environmentalism as a cultural construct is a useful one. When applied in the context of colonial Belize, it is found that the collection of

<sup>37</sup> GREENIDGE. *British Honduras...*

<sup>38</sup> GREENIDGE. *British Honduras...*

people who occupied Belize developed a peculiar culture around the extraction of timber from the forests. This culture emerged as much from the free for all associated with the uncertainty of tenure during the earliest colonial periods, as from the system of extraction utilized by logwood and mahogany cutters and the sanction of the imperial authorities to these systems. Operating without any controls, the loggers were permitted to do as they wished with the forests. In their quests for profits, conservation was not a priority. Mahogany cultivation fostered a culture to which the population was bound. There was a dislike for agriculture and right up to the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the authorities grappled with strategies to inculcate a culture of agricultural production in Belize. The pattern of colonial rule in Belize which permitted the development of a culture of extraction was also facilitated by the generous alienation of large tracts of land into the hands of few owners. The extensive areas of land under private control proved restrictive to the attempts to introduce forest conservation in the colony. In some cases the sheer size of the holdings made their owners unable to afford to institute such measures. While the visibility of extensive forests masked the need for conservation efforts, there was a loss of specie caused by the overexploitation of mahogany in the accessible areas and of others which were removed in the process involved in the setting up of the logging works. The reports on the forests make reference to the difficulties of convincing private landholders to invest in the non profitable enterprise of forest conservation. Some of these large operations wielded immense power, as is well demonstrated by the case of British Honduras Estate and Produce Company which is discussed above. But the introduction and expansion of plantation agriculture is also culpable for sugar and coffee plantations also required extensive clearings. Thus, in the quest to expand agricultural production environmental concerns were not primary. Ultimately, colonial activity in Belize facilitated both over exploitation of the forest resources, as was the case with mahogany and denudation to make room for agricultural production. This meant that both the northern and southern parts of Belize were deforested.