

A place of honour



Over the years, I watched with sadness the demise of the remains of The Factory. I watched with disbelief the physical abuse – the aesthetic abuse – to which its buildings were subjected. Such abuse is most demeaning to an institution which dominated Anguilla’s physical, economic and social landscape throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Situated in The Valley, near the historic Wallblake

House and the picturesque St Gerard’s Roman Catholic Church, The Factory was once the centre of gravity of Anguilla’s commercial life. It was owned and operated by Carter Rey & Co. The Anguillian-born Carter Rey was the biggest cotton grower on the island (with cotton fields at the Wallblake, Landsome and Forest estates) and as a consequence The Factory was involved in the export of cotton in a big way. Additionally, it was involved in the operation of a general store which sold all types of goods by wholesale and retail.



1930 B/o	\$ 6.73	1931 B/o	\$ 9.79
2 Feb 11 By 2 1/2 lbs Cotton	1.93	Mar 17 By Cash	2.94
	4.20		6.85
22 By 21 lbs Cotton	1.89	To Goods	4.44
	9.31	(Hinges & Staples)	11.29
Apr 16 To Goods	2.60	16 By 20 lbs Cotton	1.22
May 13 .. 2 lbs Rope	.56		10.09
26 .. 1 1/2 lbs Flow	2.64	22 By 20 lbs Cotton	1.20
	14		\$ 8.89
Aug 15 .. 1 Sack	1.92	Apr 1 To 2 1/2 yds Percale	.60
16 .. 2 .. do	24	June 5 To Groceries	9.49
22 .. 16 .. do	1.92	1932	6.8
Sept 9 .. 8 .. Cottonseed	24	Feb 16 By 110 lbs Cotton	10.17
	\$ 18.57		4.62
15 To Goods	1.50	27 By 30 lbs do	5.77
	13.57		1.52
Oct 6 By Cash	4.50	Mar 11 By Cotton 39 lbs	4.23
1931	9.07		1.58
Mar 6 To 6 lbs Nails	72		\$ 2.65
	9.79		

The Factory, which opened for business during the first decade of the 1900s, derived its name from the fact that a principal aspect of its operations was the ginning and baling of cotton in preparation for export. Actually, it housed the only cotton gin on the island thus making it the hub of Anguilla’s cotton industry – the gateway for all cotton exports to England via St Kitts. In view of this, The Factory enjoyed a monopoly over cotton exports so much so that all of Anguilla’s cotton planters took their crops there for sale. And the cotton left Anguilla aboard The Factory’s own schooner, the *Betsy R*. During the period 1910 – 11 cotton exports totalled 148, 595 lbs.

Cotton was so integral to its business that The Factory readily accepted it in exchange for groceries, and other goods, available at its general store. The resultant barter system, which survived until the early years of the 1950s, made life less difficult for the many low-income families in Anguilla. Cash was hard to come by so people paid

for their purchases with cotton. Some took goods on credit and paid for them with cotton when they had harvested their crops. The account books of several Anguillians who took goods on credit are filled with entries showing that they paid for them “by cotton” instead of cash. A page from Thomas Rogers’ account book (1928 - 45) read in part:

March 24, 1932	\$12.26
Feb 13, 1933 [Paid] By 27 lbs cotton	1.08
	11.18
Feb 14 .. [Paid] By 18 lbs cotton	.72
	10.46
Feb 28 .. [Paid] By 36.5 lbs cotton	1.46
	9.00
May 31 .. [One] coal pot	1.56
Aug 12 .. 15 lbs cotton seed	.60
	11.16



The barter system worked well because

The Factory's general store carried a wide range of goods for which people were willing to exchange their cotton. There was hardly anything that one could not buy there. In its hardware section, householders were able to get building supplies such as lumber, shingles, galvanize sheeting and felt; hooks and hinges made by John Martin, its blacksmith; and paint. Paint was sold by the pound, and not by the gallon. In those times it was manufactured in the form of powder and had to be mixed with paint oil in preparation for the painter's brush.

In addition to the sale of building supplies, The Factory's hardware section sold household furnishings and utensils: beds, chairs, tables (and 'oil cloth' for covering them), galvanize pails, bowls, coal pots, cast iron pots, lanterns, 'home sweet home lamps' and goose irons (and wax with which to grease them). It also catered to the specific needs of Anguilla's fishing community by stocking fish pots, fish pot wire, rope, twine, canvas, rigging tar, chains, hooks and oakum used for the caulking of boats. And for the island's small farmers, it stocked hoes, pick axes, cutlasses and machetes.

Like its hardware section, The Factory's clothing section was well stocked. Its wooden shelves were stacked tall with a variety of fabrics: taffeta, crepe, flannel, silk, check, khaki, organdy and others. And in the drawers beneath its long wooden counters were items of much interest to tailors and seamstresses: buttons, lace, atlas thread, elastic and zippers. You name it and The Factory had it – head kerchiefs, chemises, pantalets, hats, pajamas, shoes, suitcases and so on.

As well as providing plenty to wear, The Factory provided plenty to eat. It operated a grocery store which was the only one in Anguilla for most of the early half of the 1900s. In light of this, people

from all across the island were obliged to go there to purchase basic food items to complement their locally grown foods like peas, beans, maize, guinea corn, yams, cassava and sweet potatoes.

The absence of motor vehicular traffic meant that in order to get to The Factory people had to travel on foot, sometimes for long distances. Osbourne Fleming, now Anguilla's Chief Minister, was somewhat fortunate. He recalled riding there, from Mount Fortune, on his uncle's horse, *Pride*, to buy a bag of flour.

Besides flour, other basic food items sold by The Factory included rice, cornmeal, brown sugar, frying/cooking oil, cotton seed oil (for cooking) lard and butter. Some of the butter was made locally. Teacher Eddy Vanterpool carried his mother's homemade butter there in the 1920s. He recalled having to leave his home at Deep Waters, for the long walk to The Factory, before dawn because had he waited for sunrise the heat would have melted the butter.



Teacher Eddy enjoyed going to The Factory for its 'sweets'. In later years, children enjoyed going for its aerated soft drinks called 'colas'. It was around 1939 that The Factory began producing colas in a small building immediately north of the main building complex. The soft drinks business (the cola shop), managed by Joe Gumbs, produced a wide array of flavours to suit the most discriminating tastes. Just the thought of them brings water to the mouth. I recall flavours like *Banana, Orange, Orange Crush, American Cream Soda, Champagne, Champagne Ciderette, Ice Cream, Anguilla Kola, Whisky Stout, Ice Cream Ginger, Root Beer, Raspberry, Ginger Ale, Ginger Beer, Stone Ginger Beer, Lemonade, Lime Juice, Strawberry, Strawberry Crush, Cheerio, Cocktail* and others.

In those days Joe Gumbs' colas were the only aerated drinks sold on the island. And oh the people loved them! At Christmas time, the cola shop was abuzz with activity in an attempt to cope

with the increased demand for the festive season. All across the island, in the 1940s for example, the teenage boys, especially, were at home busily washing cola bottles to take to The Factory for the Christmas drinks. Those from districts like East End, Island Harbour and West End were not bothered about making the tiresome journey because, after all, it was colas they were going for. And they were prepared to walk a hundred miles if they needed to because, to them, a cola was a 'grand prize'.

Joe Gumbs' colas were also loved, and in great demand, by people in the neighbouring islands. In fact, regular shipments were made to Saba, St. Maarten/Martin, St. Eustatius and St. Bartholomew.

The cola shop ceased operations in 1963. While Anguillians of yesteryear hold 'sweet' memories of its delectable drinks, they also hold 'bitter' memories of having to drink Castor Oil, which their parents bought at The Factory, for the cleansing of their bowels. Castor Oil was a purgative which all children hated.



Other nonprescription medicinal products, and ointments, sold by The Factory included Phensic, Ferrol, P. K. L (Pain Killing Liniment), Canadian Healing Oil, Vicks, Menthobalm, Limacol, Quinine, Epsom Salts and Fruit Salts. It sold disinfectants as well. 'Blue soap' was sold in bars of about 12 inches long.

The Factory was very much in tune with the needs of the people it served. It even offered a quasi-banking service which allowed Anguillians to cash cheques drawn on foreign banks. Back then the island's economy was heavily dependent on remittances from overseas – on monies from those Anguillians who had gone abroad in search of work. The remittances were received mostly in the form of cheques which, in the absence of any commercial banks on the island, were cashed at The Factory. Thereafter, The Factory forwarded them to Basseterre, St Kitts, where they were

deposited to its account at either Barclays Bank or the Royal Bank of Canada. The cheques went via the *Betsy R* which returned to Anguilla with supplies for The Factory's general store. The supplies included, among other things, kerosene (for household appliances like lamps, lanterns and stoves) and, from the 1930s, drums of gasoline for the handful of motorcars on the island.

A subsequent increase in the number of motorcars resulted in the installation of a gasoline pump in The Factory's front yard, and the opening of a mechanic shop with Herbert Richardson in charge.

The Factory catered to the Anguillians' every need, even in time of death, for it also sold coffins. John Pierre Gumbs' account book (1923 – 64) shows that on 25th September 1931, he took on credit a coffin costing \$11.54. It was to bury his wife who sadly passed away that same day. Indeed, the lives of the Anguillian people would have been a lot more difficult were it not for The Factory.

Furthermore, The Factory's dominance of commercial activities made it a meeting place for people from all across Anguilla thus contributing towards social harmony and cohesion in an island of widely scattered and remote communities with poor communications. It attracted people from East End to West End to its doors and premises. Indeed, people from the east met those from the west, and those from north met those from south. And so forth. In so doing, new friendships were established and old friendships strengthened. Therefore when The Factory went out of business in 1965, the island had lost an important economic and social institution.

The Factory's closure was a consequence of the decline of the cotton industry (in the 1950s) and the loss of its monopoly position in the wholesale and retail business sector following the emergence of several general stores (like Albert R. Lake, The Galaxy, Caracasbaai and J. W. Proctor) in The Valley area. Unable to compete with them, The Factory closed its doors after more than fifty years of service to the Anguillian people. For most of that time (1920s to 1965) it was under the capable management of Joseph B. Owen assisted, for some 25 years, by Mrs Inez Gumbs.



Joseph B. Owen



Since its closure, The Factory has undergone several renovations, for the purpose of accommodating various types of businesses but, thankfully, some of its distinctive features, particularly its Dutch hip roof, remain intact – unaltered – as a reminder of its historical past. The fact that The Factory was a significant contributor to the survival of the Anguillian people, in some of the harshest days of the twentieth century, is good reason for it to be accorded a place of honour in our land. It was, in its heyday, an oasis in Anguilla's economic desert.