

Many Changes Noted In Anguilla

By MORGAN BEATTY
Written for The Associated Press

ANGUILLA — Remember Anguilla, the island in the Caribbean whose leader caught the ear of the world with his cry for independence?

Eight months ago headlines paid heed to the mouse that roared like a lion.

Enraptured, outsiders watched as Ronald Webster declared a constitution for his tiny island, and threatened to shoot anyone who denied him. Much of the world applauded. But that was last January.

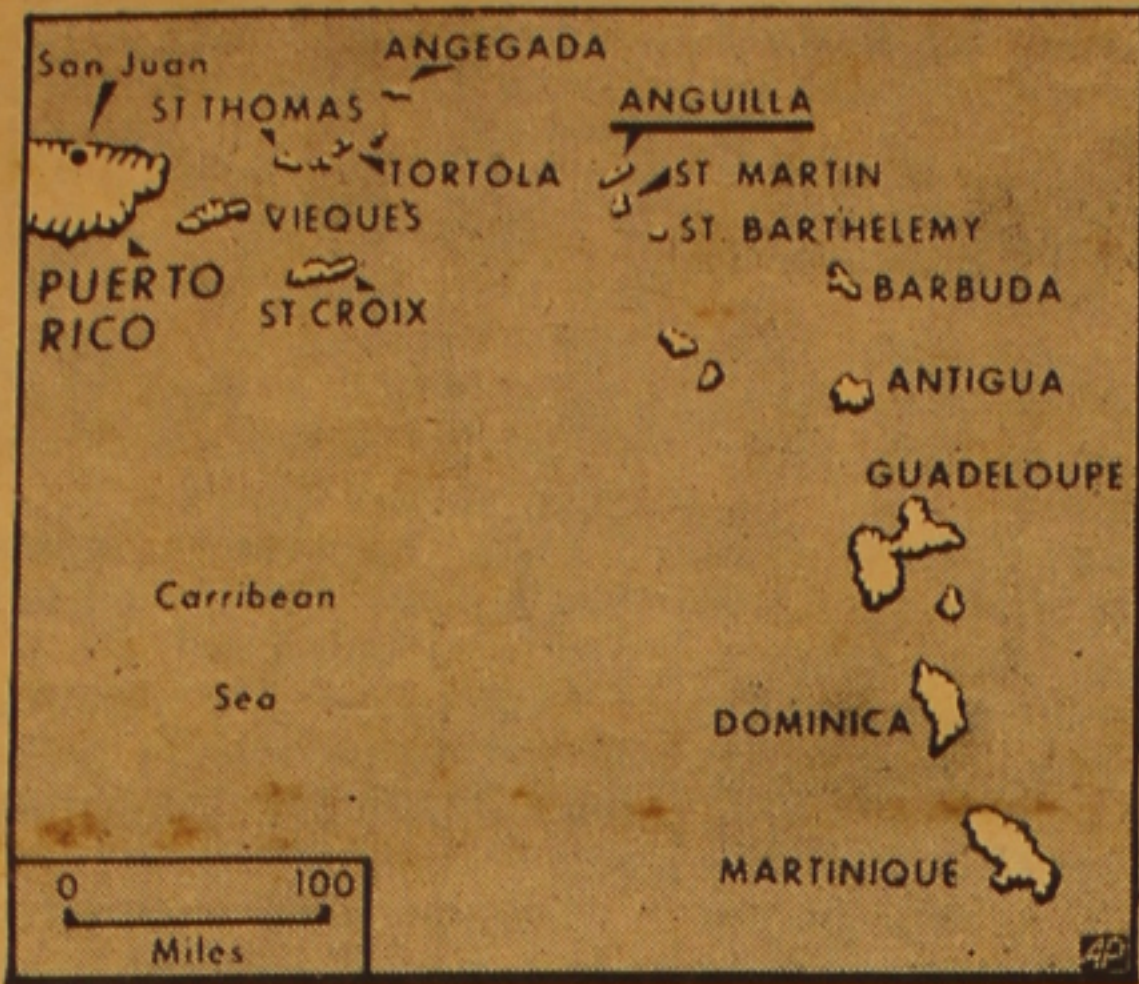
Then the world forgot, or almost forgot, the tiny island, its 6,000 people and its 35 square miles of scrub brush and poverty.

I HAVE just revisited Anguilla. I have talked with the self-styled president, Ronald Webster, and the British officials who were sent to the island, and who took it over with paratroopers in March. They are the people who replaced the Webster vigilantes, the Anguillians who patrolled the beaches against invaders.

Anguilla revisited is a voyage of discovery, the discovery of a new Anguilla, whose leader has abandoned his cry of total independence and says he would now accept a "constitution under the British Commonwealth as good or better than my own."

What has happened to make the big change? Much has happened.

The British government



—Associated Press Wirephoto Map

Anguilla, Center of Spotlight ... British trying to repair years of neglect

has persuaded the independent and associated states of the Caribbean to act in concert. They are the same governments whose leaders asked the British to take over.

They have all agreed that a Caribbean commission of wise men, independent of governments, would recommend a future course for the tiny island.

THE BRITISH have guaranteed that Anguillians will never have to live again under constitutional supervision they do not approve. And Robert Bradshaw, the willful premier of St. Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla who tried to force Anguilla to bow to his rule, has accepted the compromise of a commission of wise men.

The British government has tried to repair 300 years of neglect of Anguilla, neglect by both Britain and the Bradshaw regime. A system of direct aid now bypasses the treasury of St. Kitts-Nevis. American-type bulldozers and tractors roar through the island.

They are making a long airstrip to accommodate huge British Hercules transports. They are carving out long strips of road to connect the few village spots of black top. The opening of the first 10 miles of solid road was the occasion for an island-wide celebration early this month. They are building a new school, too.

British Land Rovers buzz through the island, taking military doctors to their field hospital, taking crews to help dig water wells and scoop out water storage areas. Villages are now twinkling with low-tension electric power, power that once served only a few buildings, here and there. In the last year and a half, the British have allocated \$240,000 in direct aid to Anguilla.

THE DEPARTING British commissioner, John Cumber, has persuaded the Anguilla Council to help administer island services, such as the Anguillan police, the civil service, and a return to Commonwealth and West Indian law and justice. Deputy Commissioner Simon Heman,

in charge of this, says the islanders are working "like stink" to learn the arts of self-government. (That British colloquial expression means working like Trojans.)

Webster describes the process of change from the day in 1967 when the islanders decided they had had enough of being the tattered tail of St. Kitts' constitutional kite. They drove away Kittian police.

They allowed Britain a year to hear their pleas. And then, in Ronald Webster's words, they gave Mother Britain an ultimatum: They would declare their total independence.

And they did last January. There followed the brief withdrawal of British administration; a visiting British foreign service officer, William Whitlock, heard shots fired over his head. He accepted an Anguillan escort off the island. The British said Mafia-like corruption would come, and so they sent paratroopers on March 19. They landed without a shot being fired.

WEBSTER IS still chairman of the Anguilla Council, as he was before the British landed, but he works under British administration. He accepts this temporary arrangement until the Caribbean wise men make recommendations.

He says the people of Anguilla never wanted independence from Britain, only independence from the arbitrary grouping of St. Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla. He described Britain as Anguilla's mother. He still insists that Anguilla was invaded by the paratroopers, an act that heaped coals of critical fire on the heads of the British government for "gunboat diplomacy."

Nobody wanted to look at the facts. Nobody wanted to remember that four independent Caribbean states asked Britain in February to restore British and West Indian constitutional law, and to do what was necessary to accomplish this. Nobody wanted to note that a small force would have drawn the fire of the Webs-

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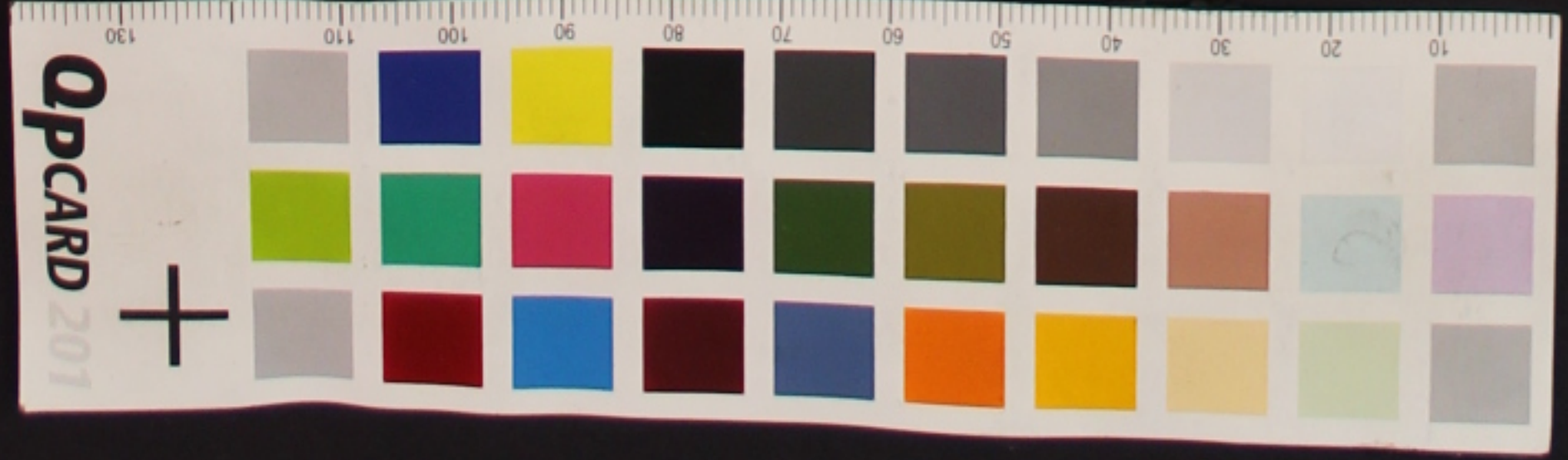
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CHANGES IN ANGUILLA (From Page 6)

ter patrols. The shots would have been returned and lives would have been lost. Royal paratroopers averted any such bloodbath, even a small one. Today, 100-odd paratroopers and small squads of Scotland Yard police are in charge of defense and law and order. Nobody objects, neither Ronald Webster nor Robert Bradshaw.

THE MYSTERY that remains is the question: Who wrote the imitation American constitution promulgated by Webster last January? Island gossip says an American investor wrote it, a man named Jack Holcomb of Fort Lauderdale.

Neither Webster nor Holcomb is saying, but articles 11 and 12 would surrender the right of eminent domain to private investors and restrict the Anguilla government to public utilities. And the chief justice under the Webster constitution would not have had to have a degree in law from any recognized university.

That led the British government to charge that Anguilla was in danger of being ruled by Mafia-type corruption. It led some West Indian lawyers to charge that the Webster constitution was a mockery.

Webster disagrees. He says his document is still alive, until the wise men speak.

His political opponents on

the island answer that the Webster vigilantes ruled the beaches under the Webster constitution, that it could not be a system of American law.



Ronald Webster ... pacified

and it was far from British constitutional law.

Arch-critic Atlin Harrigan, editor of The Anguilla Beacon, says the Webster constitution is dead. And Webster himself talks as if he is using it merely as a bargaining point.

THE TROUBLE with the world's sudden brief view of Anguilla lies in a series of gaps in historical perspective.

First fact of importance is that Anguilla has always been ruled from St. Kitts, and British commissioners of the past had been neglectful. Since 1967 when the British set up an associated government, Robert Bradshaw of St. Kitts has been neglectful.

He has cornered the British aid for the three islands, most for St. Kitts, some for Nevis, and almost none for Anguilla.

This tail-of-the-kite existence for Anguillians is intolerable. Deputy British Commissioner Simon Heman says that Anguillians to a man would still demand independence from St. Kitts.

As a matter of fact, the neglect of Anguilla became intolerable as early as 1825. In that year, Anguillians sent their first petition to England for relief from abject poverty. Three similar appeals have been ignored through the years, until Ronald Webster cried out, "Independence—total independence, now!"

The British government now understands Anguilla's anguish. The only hope for the islanders in the past had been migration. Some 2,000 Anguillians are working in automobile factories near Wimbledon, in England. Some 2,000 more are in New York and New Jersey, another 2,000 in the Virgin Islands and elsewhere in the Caribbean.

These 6,000, most of them breadwinners, send back money to relatives in Anguilla.

ANGUILLA STILL sells half a million pounds of lobster to the outside world each year. It issues postage stamps that sell well among collectors. The new Anguilla

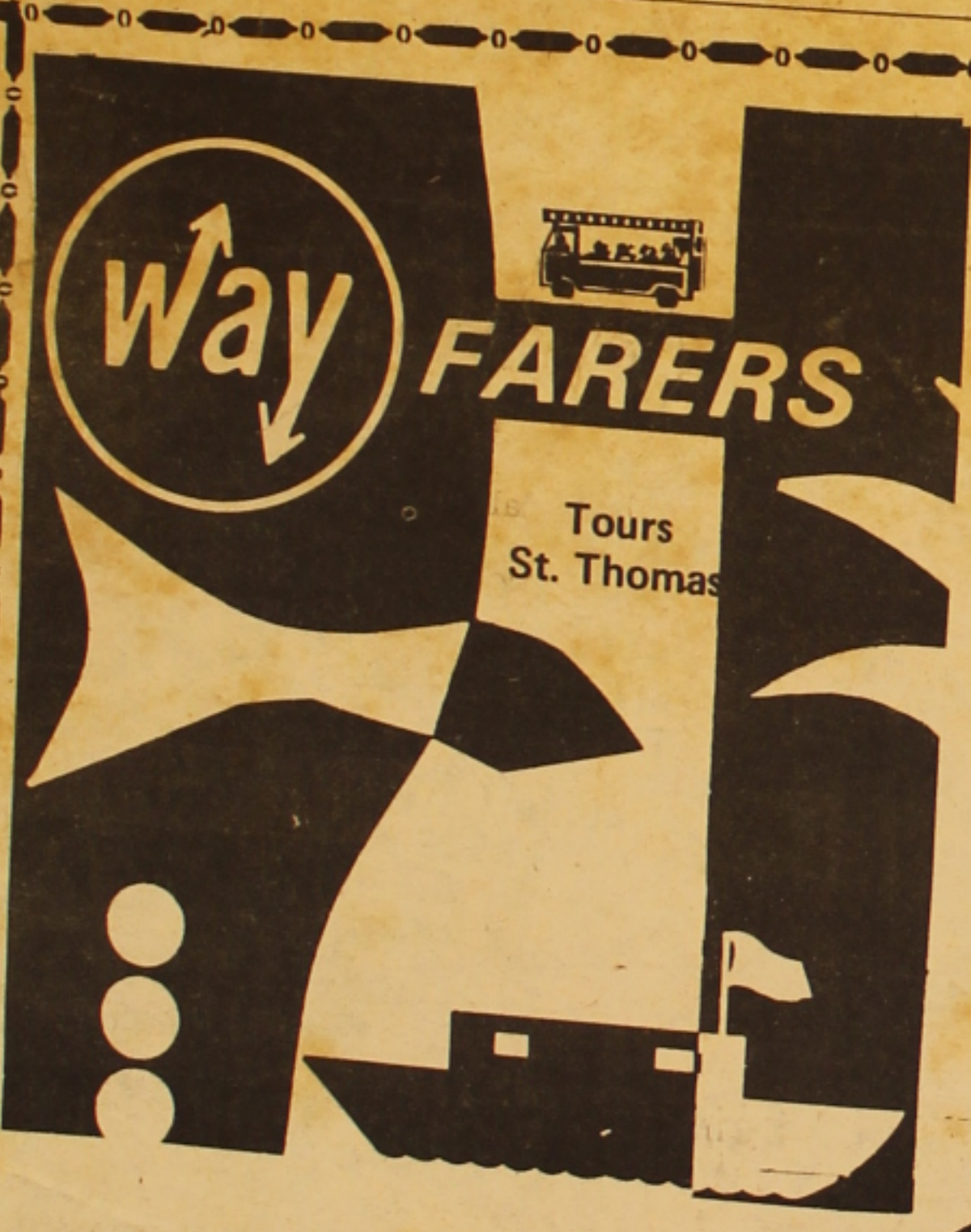


Jackie Adams as she makes her debut at the RKL show at CAHS auditorium.

has found another profitable sideline, selling the national flag created by Ronald Webster. The three blue dolphins, chasing each other head to tail, on a field of white, fetch \$2 each among flag collectors.

And the British help along by flying the blue dolphins on Government House.

But this is not enough to lift Anguilla out of poverty. This is not enough to meet the Caribbean wide problem of defense and law enforcement, a problem created when the British began to pull out. This is not enough to wipe out the cruelty of a life that must be lived with pockets often empty.



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