Fredrik Thomasson
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6849-9720

Gustavia Free Press? Handwritten and Printed Newspapers in the Swedish Colony Saint Barthélemy

In late 1831 rumors about handwritten newspapers were circulating in Gustavia, the capital of the small Swedish Caribbean island of Saint Barthélemy.[1] Copies of the English-language *Gustavia Free Press* were found posted to doors, and left in the shops which bordered the town's harbor. [Figure 1.] Great interest was manifested in the paper's content and people would meet up in stores to hear the paper being read out loud. Its stated aim was outlined in the third issue:

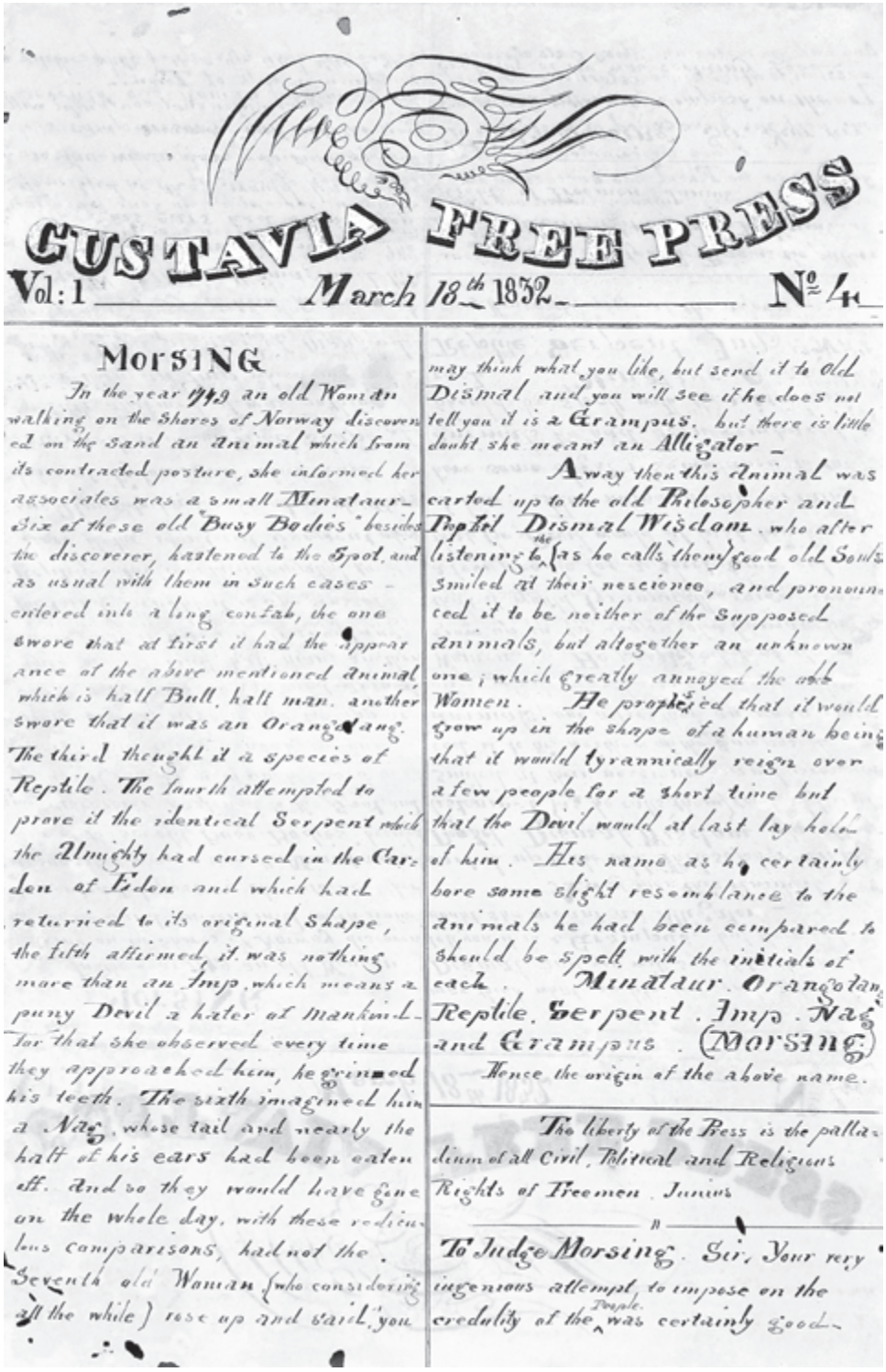
> Can lampooning tend to any good? Certainly! Could we communicate through a public paper without libelling – the villainous transactions of the judge to our most gracious sovereign? Could we attempt to assert, that only two counsellors in court ever open their mouths ... ? No. Well then lampooning must tend to good, since it exposes – all faults and the faults of all.[2]

The writer in the *Gustavia Free Press* claimed that it would not have been possible to criticize Swedish officials in a "public paper," that is a printed paper. Access to printing was limited in the Caribbean, and handwritten publications became a necessity when presses stopped working or were completely under governmental supervision.

As underlined by several contributions in this volume, it is difficult to discuss handwritten newspapers without considering their relation to printed papers. This chapter investigates the Swedish colony's handwritten pamphlets and newspapers as well as outlining the history of print in the colony. It aims to give an overview of Swedish Saint Barthélemy's history of freedom of the press and expression from the 1790s until the early 1830s. It is only possible to understand the publication of both news and satire at Saint Barthélemy as an interplay between handwritten and printed media. The colonial government's attempts to stymie both handwritten and printed

1 I would like to thank the conference organizers Kirsti Salmi-Niklander and Heiko Droste for their valuable comments. The research was supported by Riksbankens Jubileumsfond (Grant P15-0156:1).

2 Archives nationales d'outre-mer (ANOM), Aix-en-Provence, Fonds suédois de Saint Barthélemy, vol. 299, *Gustavia Free Press*, no. 3 (1 March 1832).



GUSTAVIA FREE PRESS

Vol: 1 March 18th 1852 No 4

MORSING

In the year 1749 an old Woman walking on the Shores of Norway discovered on the Sand an Animal which from its contracted posture, she informed her associates was a small Minataur— Six of these old "Busy Bodies" besides the discoverer, hastened to the Spot, and as usual with them in such cases — entered into a long confab, the one swore that at first it had the appearance of the above mentioned Animal which is half Bull, half man. another swore that it was an Orang'd'ang. The third thought it a species of Reptile. The fourth attempted to prove it the identical Serpent which the Almighty had cursed in the Garden of Eden and which had returned to its original Shape, the fifth affirmed, it was nothing more than an Imp, which means a puny Devil a hater of Mankind— for that she observed every time they approached him, he grinned his teeth. The sixth imagined him a Nag, whose tail and nearly the half of his ears had been eaten off. and so they would have gone on the whole day, with these ridiculous comparisons, had not the Seventh old Woman (who considering all the while) rose up and said "you may think what you like, but send it to old Dismal and you will see if he does not tell you it is a Grampus. but there is little doubt she meant an Alligator —

Away then this Animal was carted up to the old Philosopher and Prophet Dismal Wisdom, who after listening to (as he calls them) good old Souls smiled at their nescience, and pronounced it to be neither of the supposed animals, but altogether an unknown one; which greatly annoyed the old Women. He prophesied that it would grow up in the shape of a human being that it would tyrannically reign over a few people for a short time but that the Devil would at last lay hold of him. His name as he certainly bore some slight resemblance to the animals he had been compared to should be spelt with the initials of each. Minataur. Orang'o'tang. Reptile. Serpent. Imp. Nag and Grampus. (MORSING)

Hence the origin of the above name.

The liberty of the Press is the palladium of all Civil, Political and Religious Rights of Freemen. Junius

To Judge Morsing. Sir. Your very ingenious attempt, to impose on the credulity of the People, was certainly good—

Figure 1. First page of issue four of Gustavia Free Press. *Vol. 299, Fonds suédois de Saint Barthélemy, ANOM.*

publications is an interesting example of how similar the situation was in colony and metropole in the beginning of the period, and how it diverged when royal power was curtailed in Sweden.

Swedish Caribbean historiography and freedom of the press

It is challenging to align Sweden's involvement in slavery and the slave trade with the narrative which culminated in the creation of the modern Swedish state. Indeed, Swedish freedom of press and expression laws have sometimes been singled out as important elements in the often teleological narrative describing Sweden's path to modernity.[3] Saint Barthélemy is not part of this story and the examples given account for here nuance this narrative by illustrating how freedom of the press and expression were handled in the colony. Sweden's Caribbean colony is understudied and previous historiography has regarded Saint Barthélemy as an insignificant episode and mostly treats the territory as an isolated space with little bearing on Swedish history.[4] Another facet of Swedish colonial amnesia is a reluctance to recognize that administrators in Stockholm were well aware of what was happening in the colony. As shown below, the metropolitan authorities interceded frequently, and, with regard to prosecution against the *Gustavia Free Press*, the king himself intervened.

Sweden was one of the last nations to enter the race for Caribbean colonies. King Gustav III was obsessed with gaining a foothold in the Americas in order to participate in the sugar and slavery economy. After negotiations with France Sweden acquired Saint Barthélemy in 1784, and thus became a slaving nation. Swedish Caribbean slavery was finally abolished in 1847. Saint Barthélemy is a small arid island where plantation agriculture was never going to be possible. It was declared a free port in 1786 and its capital Gustavia became a bustling cosmopolitan town. By 1810 Gustavia was one of Sweden's five or six biggest towns, with around 5,000 inhabitants and a majority black population. The colony was retroceded to France in 1878.

Vive la République

Only a few years after Sweden acquired the colony, political circumstances changed radically in the Caribbean. The period of 1789 to 1815 in Saint Barthélemy was politically chaotic. The French Revolution and the wars that

3 There is abundant Swedish literature on the regulation of printing and freedom of the press, most recently an anthology published by the Swedish parliament commemorating 250 years of the 1766 Freedom of the press act: Wennberg & Örtenhed (eds) 2016.

4 However, Swedish colonial historiography is presently expanding and the third and fourth doctoral dissertations (the first was in 1888 and the second in 1951) on the Swedish possession were defended in 2016: Wilson 2016; Pålsson 2016. For an overview of the present state of research: Thomasson 2016, 280–305.

followed it led to the abolition of French Caribbean slavery and the Haitian Revolution. Saint Barthélemy was mainly neutral throughout this period and became a destination of choice during several waves of emigration from neighboring islands. Two examples are planters who left French islands after the Revolution, and black people who fled Guadeloupe when French slavery was reintroduced in 1802.

An early example of how the island government controlled political expression is when it prevented an unwanted publication from being released in 1797. Samuel Augustus Mathews had recently moved to Saint Barthélemy and was already known as a writer of a pro-slavery tract printed at the Dutch island Sint Eustatius in 1793: *The lying hero or An answer to J. B. Moreton's manners and customs in the West Indies*.[5] Mathews ended up in court after having told a local merchant that he intended to print a gazette in support of the French Revolution, the manuscript ended with: "Vive la République." His intention was probably to print it on one of the neighboring islands as there was as yet no press in Saint Barthélemy.

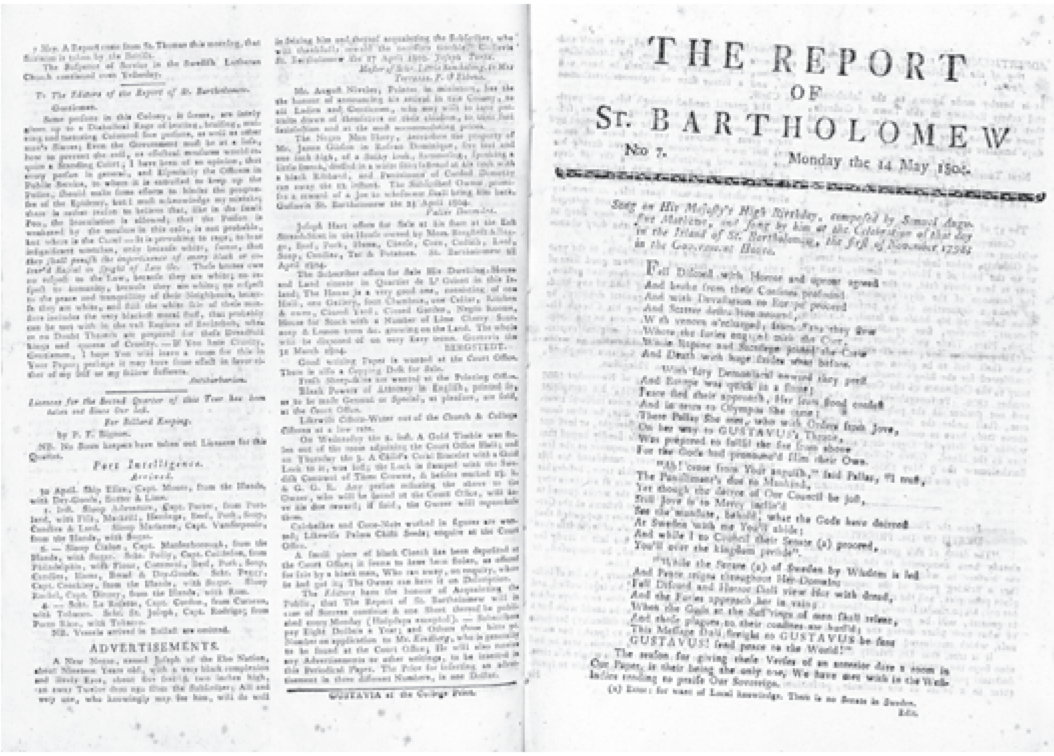
Mathews denied the charges made against him in court. As material proof was lacking the court could not sentence him. The court nevertheless informed Mathews "that if he wants to stay on the island he must improve his behavior, and stay calm."[6] He followed the court's order. By the following year he had changed his allegiance from the French Republic to the Swedish monarchy and wrote a "Song on His Majesty's High Birthday ... sung by him at the Celebration of that day [1 November 1798] ... in the Government House." In time Mathews became an established merchant in Saint Barthélemy. [Figure 2.]

At this point in the 1790's the suppression of Mathews' planned paper was similar to what would have been the governmental response to such a publication in Stockholm where even news about the French Revolution was prohibited. In Sweden the levels of government control and print censorship had fluctuated since the first proclamation of a freedom of the press law in 1766. Gustav III then immediately restricted the press's freedom after coming to power in 1771, and went on to become increasingly autocratic during his reign.[7] The decades following the assassination of Gustav III in 1792 until the coup that deposed his son Gustav IV Adolf in 1809 have been called "the iron years" [*järnåren*], a term which particularly refers to a lack of freedom of the press and expression.

5 For Mathews' eventful life: O'Flaherty 1999, 49–58; for his position on slavery: Brereton 1999, 59–62.

6 ANOM, Aix-en-Provence, Fonds suédois de Saint Barthélemy, vol. 141, Council protocols, 17 November 1797: "que s'il veut rester en l'isle, il doit mieux se comporter, se tenir tranquille."

7 The main titles on Gustav III and freedom of the press remain: Boberg 1951; Nyman 1963. Criticism against Gustav III was circulated in a large range of handwritten pamphlets: Mattsson 2010. For an introduction to early Swedish newspaper history: Holmberg, Oscarsson & Torbacke 2000.


THE REPORT OF ST. BARTHOLOMEW

No 7. Monday the 14 May 1804.

Figure 2. The Report of St. Bartholomew. *Right-hand page, number seven (14 May 1804) with Samuel Augustus Mathews' song in praise of the Swedish king. Uppsala University Library.*

The Report of St. Bartholomew

During the early years of Swedish rule there were no obvious plans to bring a printing press to Saint Barthélemy. However, printing soon became necessary. The first example of government printing I have found dates from 1787 when the council (the island's governing body) printed a summary of local tariffs and fees. In 1790 the council ordered new customs tariffs to be "printed in a sufficient number to make it known all over this part of the world." It was not stated where the work was carried out, but in 1793 other regulations were printed on Sint Eustatius.[8]

In 1803 the island's judge, Anders Bergstedt, bought a used press from Stockholm.[9] In April 1804 Bergstedt began printing an English-language

8 Riksarkivet, Swedish National Archives (SNA), S:t Barthélmysamlingen, vol. 1B; Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, MSS Z-A 4 BANC, Saint Barthélemy council protocols, 12 March 1790: "l'impression d'une quantité d'exemplaires suffisante pour le faire connoitre par tout dans cette partie du monde;" Saint Barthélemy council protocols, privately held ms, digital photographs in the author's collection, 28 March 1793.

9 For an overview of printing at Saint Barthélemy: Thomasson 2018c.

newspaper called *The Report of St. Bartholomew*. [Figure 2.] *The Report* is in many respects a typical Caribbean colonial newspaper and while it was fairly regularly published during the early years it soon ran into financial difficulties.[10]

Handwritten and printed satire

More than twenty years after having initially sought to print revolutionary propaganda Samuel Augustus Mathews was back in court in 1818. It appears that he could not stop writing, or publishing. Mathews and the free black man John Allan, the printer that had succeeded Bergstedt in publishing *The Report*, were accused of: "that the former had authored and the latter had printed an immoral song." The song was read to the members of the court, but "was of such a nature that it could not be included in the protocol."[11]

This case was not exceptional in itself, but what is notable is that the song was printed. The Swedish governor had extensive legislative powers and tried to prohibit expressions of dissent. In 1813 a proclamation was issued "prohibiting the writing and diffusion of anonymous pamphlets in the countryside."[12]

As with the printed song, these have not been preserved for posterity. The fact that we at all can follow these affairs in the court protocols is nevertheless exceptional in a colonial Caribbean context. The Swedish surviving judicial archives are unusually rich and on many of the other islands very little court documentation remains from this period.[13] Printed ephemera from the Caribbean is likewise very rare. *The Report of St. Bartholomew* survived because almost complete runs of the paper were brought to Sweden already in the early 19th century. Neither the climate nor political circumstances were conducive to the long-term survival of paper. [See figure 4 for an example of insect damage.]

That the island's satirical writers continued their work is obvious from *The Report of St. Bartholomew*. It published announcements offering rewards for information leading to the capture of authors: "Two hundred dollars will be given to any person who will discover or give such information as will lead to a discovery of the Author or Writer of a scurrilous Libel which was posted on a Window, fronting the road ... on last Sunday afternoon about 4 o'clock." The notice claimed that "yet there is a circumstance, not quite light

10 The most comprehensive study concerning printing in the Caribbean: Cave 1987, which also reprints his article on *The Report of St. Bartholomew*: "Printing in the Swedish West Indies" 1978, 205–214. Swedish titles that analyze *The Report of St. Bartholomew* are especially Pålsson 2016, ch. 6; Franzén 1974, 63–69.

11 ANOM, Fonds suédois de Saint Barthélemy, vol. 188, court protocols, 9 January 1818: "för det den förra författat och den senare tryckt en otucktig Sång," "var af den beskaffenheten att den ej kunde till protocollet tagas."

12 ANOM, Fonds suédois de Saint Barthélemy, vol. 134, 4 April 1813: "förbjudande anonyma skrifters författande och utspridande på Landet."

13 For an introduction to the history of the Swedish Saint Barthélemy archive: Thomasson 2018a, 78–90.

as air, that almost points to the Author. If he will avow himself, he may be assured that none of the individuals he has abused, will seek for legal remedy against him!"[14] 200 dollars could buy a normally priced slave at this time.

"Libels" continued to be posted in town. A few months later the reward was reduced: "As a Libel against me was yesterday found affixed with wafers on the corner of the Store belonging formerly to the late Mr. Bonnet, I do hereby promise a reward of One Hundred Spanish Dollars, to whomsoever will detect and make known the Author thereto or the person who affixed it." This announcement was given in the form of a proclamation and thus had legal validity. In addition to the cash payment the Governor promised another type of reward: "To His Majesty the King I will besides Petition that a Mark of his gracious Favour may be conferred in him or those that detect or contribute to the detection of the Offender, suited to their rank and situation."[15]

I have found no judicial cases connected to these events. It is probable that they were handled outside of court. Official proceedings required protocols and would result in even greater publicity of the fact that government was being criticized.

It is also possible that the efforts to police the distribution of these tracts were efficient as writers resorted to publication channels in neighboring territories. The next installment was played out in a different island's paper. Number 575 (21 July 1818) of *The St. Christopher Advertiser and Weekly Intelligencer* contained "a Copy of a letter transmitted to the Editor from St. Bartholomew, and whereas the said Letter is a most infamous libel against this Government." A proclamation admonished all "faithful and loyal Swedish subjects to communicate immediately ... the culpable part ... as far as they wish to avoid heavy responsibility and to be eminently entitled to the consideration of Government." To take the battle to another island was obviously considered a worse affront and the reward was now upped to 500 dollars "for the detection and legal conviction of the said authors if he be a resident of this island."[16]

The end of newspaper printing

The island government felt like it was being attacked from all sides, and while *The Report of St. Bartholomew* did not print matters that could be considered libel against any specific individual, many of the satirical letters and stories John Allan published could certainly be interpreted as veiled attacks on the government. The governor decided to deal with the matter and informed the Colonial Department in Stockholm about his decision in March 1819:

14 *The Report of St. Bartholomew*, no. 296 (1 September 1817).
15 *The Report of St. Bartholomew*, no. 315 (26 January 1818).
16 ANOM, Fonds suédois de Saint Barthélemy, vol. 134, 27 July 1818. I have not been able to locate the issue of *The St. Christopher Advertiser*.

> The printing press and newspapers here have long been very neglected and completely in the hands of the mulatto who prints free of editorial control. Not only have indecent and libellous things against individuals been printed, but even the Governor was pasquinaded ... I have therefore ordered the press's owner to run all impending publications past the Government Secretary, who in turn will report on them to the Governor before they are printed.[17]

Pre-publication censorship is complicated and would have been difficult to implement in the long run, especially considering the pared-down nature of the colony's administration. Censorship was certainly one of the reasons which led to the demise of *The Report of St. Bartholomew*. The last known issue was published 28 October 1819, and contained an article copied from a London paper promoting freedom of the press.

With regard to printing on Saint Barthélemy it has generally been believed that the island's press then ceased printing newspapers. However, two newspapers were printed on the island in the 1820s, *The St. Bartholomew Chronicle, and Gustavia Gazette* and *The West Indian*. The last known edition of *The West Indian* is dated 27 October 1827. In August 1828 a government protocol stated that an announcement had been published in the island's paper.[18] Until any additional numbers of *The West Indian* or any other title surface, the end date of newspaper printing on the island during the Swedish period can be set at August 1828.

Gustavia Free Press

The first evidence of the handwritten paper *Gustavia Free Press* is a prospectus dated 25 November 1831. It lamented the lack of a printing press: "Fellow country men, we have long since been deprived of a press, we have been deprived of a proper channel to express our wrongs, our enslaved state, and the despotic & arbitrary sway of this government." The prospectus added that the first number had already been published, and that ensuing numbers would appear at the beginning of every month. No copies of the first issue survive but copies of numbers 2–4 (two of them in two copies) are extant. [Figure 3.] These copies only survived as a result of being confiscated by the authorities. As with many printed newspapers of the day the *Gustavia Free Press* consisted of a single folded sheet, with four pages of two columns.[19]

17 SNA, S:t Barthélemysamlingen, vol. 6A, report from Governor Berghult, 20 March 1819: "Boktryckeriet och avisorne härstädes har på längre tid varit på det högsta försummadt och helt och hållet lemnat till den Mulatt som trycker, utan någon redaction. Derföre hände, redan längesedan att ej allenast oanständiga och smädliga saker emot individuer trycktes, utan efven Gouverneurens person pasquillerades ... Derföre har jag ålagt Boktryckeriets ägare att innan utgifvningen af skrifter som derifrån emaneras, besörja att desamma upvisas för Gouvernements Secreteraren, hvilken sedan derom till Gouverneuren rapporterar."

18 Thomasson 2018c, 2–25.

19 All issues of *Gustavia Free Press* in ANOM, Fonds suédois de Saint Barthélemy, vol. 299.

Figure 3. Two mastheads of Gustavia Free Press. *The lower image is the second copy of number four, compare Figure 1. Vol. 299, Fonds suédois de Saint Barthélemy, ANOM.*

It was distributed in at least three copies. An undated supplement gives information where: "Supplement to Gustavia Free Press, at F. Bayley's Store 3d Copy, (1st at Marcial's [store], 2d at Vendue office)." It may be discussed to what extent such information should be trusted as it greatly facilitated the police's efforts to sequester copies. However, a few notes survive which give additional information about where issues were found. The "Vendue office" belonged to auction master Gustaf Ekerman. A couple of issues were brought to the police by his slave "Sambo Ekerman." Another paper was found by a Mrs Duprat on her door, other issues were posted on shop doors or delivered to various townspeople. As the ensuing court case made clear, knowledge about the paper in Gustavia was widespread, if not universal, among the English-speaking white population.

Another question concerns the number of people involved in the paper's production. The colophons cited several fictitious names, but this might be

a strategy to spread responsibility. However, there was more than one scribe involved in copying the issues.

There are several indications that the author(s) were educated. An example is a quotation in number four of a British 18th-century pamphleteer: "The Liberty of the Press is the palladium of all Civil, Political and Religious Rights of Freemen, [signed] Junius."[20] [Figure 1, second column.]

The *Gustavia Free Press* and its supplements used a series of print metaphors, such as "reprinted in the last number," and mimicked printed newspapers: "To be inserted in the Gustavia Free Press by a correspondent" as well as alluding to the adaptability and speed of the handwritten medium: "our corrected copy will be out this week."

While the *Gustavia Free Press* mocked local power holders, the aim was to also influence local politics. Such a goal presupposed wide popular knowledge of the paper and its contents. The author(s) teased the island's judge who ordered the police to confiscate the paper: "Your Honor is aware that before Mr Mathews can possibly lay his itching fingers on them, the contents are publicly known. Only two copies of one piece you succeeded in depriving our friends of Perusing, and this but for a short time." This was vice fiscal Samuel Augustus Mathews whose father ironically was the eponymous writer who previously had been accused of publishing and printing political and salacious material.

The author(s) further challenged the authorities by claiming that issues of the *Gustavia Free Press* were "finders, keepers" items: "We caution every man, against locking up our productions, they belong to those alone who find them, we desire they may be returned, or else Judge, what will the consequences be?"

It is difficult to reconstruct satire, and the results are often tedious for a reader without intimate knowledge of the context. The *Gustavia Free Press* was heavy-handed, especially in its criticism of Lars Gustaf Morsing. He was the island's judge as well as acting governor during the appointed governor's absence from April 1831 to October 1833. There was infighting among the Swedish officials who governed the island, to the extent that several parties wrote to Stockholm to plead their cases.[21] Such conflicts were fertile material for satire.

Morsing was, for instance, accused of favoring Danish merchants from Saint Thomas: "He has no doubt, a great fellow feeling for his Sister Isle, in iniquity, and despotism ... with all the national qualities of Hypocrisy and dissimulation about him." The author(s) doubted the situation would improve: "but how can we expect such conduct from a mind of the blackest Hue, from a man who without any regard to truth or Justice, will always hold out his itching palm and receive the 'Spanka [sic] Dollars.'"

20 Some merchants in Saint Barthélemy had large collections of books. For example, the estate inventory of John Joseph Cremony, who died in 1820, contains Junius' letters, Pålsson 2016, 260.

21 SNA, S:t Barthélemysamlingen, vol. 11, letters and documents dated 3 January, 3 & 9 March, 2 & 20 April, 3 May 1832.

Mathews also got his fair share of criticism. The paper wondered whether the government was unaware that he had participated in the illegal slave trade: "the Viper Mathews, was an aider and abettor to the notorious Almeida? Can he deny that he is aware of Mathews having smuggled African Slaves, for that reprobate, into this port? ... His Swedish Majesty must and shall know all these things." José Joaquín Almeida was a famous privateer and slave trader. When he was executed in Puerto Rico in February 1832, this was reported with satisfaction in the *Gustavia Free Press*. According to other sources, Mathews had indeed served on Almeida's ship. It is also true that slaves were smuggled via Saint Barthélemy right into the 1820s. The paper used various metaphors connected to skin colour and slavery, such as "No alternative is left ... but to break the fetters of our Slavery." However, there is no explicit criticism of the institution of slavery itself in the paper.

Investigation and trial

In April 1832 the Gustavia merchant Abraham Haddock submitted a petition to the court. He and his brother Henry had been mocked in the *Gustavia Free Press*: "these two individuals have like the Mushroom sprung from a dunghill into notice." They were, among other things, accused of theft, perjury, insurance fraud, and for having colluded with the judge, as well as paying him bribes. Abraham Haddock was an alderman in Gustavia, an elected office. He complained that "a practice of lampooning unfortunately prevails, to an extent before unprecedented in this place, by which a system of organized malice is carried out by a concealed bevy of abandoned characters." He continued by listing all the ill effects of slander and stated that it might also lead "to acts of riot in the community".[22] Haddock demanded that an investigation be started.

The government did not itself formally initiate judicial procedures, which may mirror the strategy used in the cases from the 1810s recounted above. If, for instance, Judge Morsing had brought a case to court, he would have exposed himself to further ridicule and attacks.

The ensuing court case produced long protocols, but the name *Gustavia Free Press* was never mentioned, it was usually called "lampoon" or "libel" in the proceedings. There is, however, no doubt that the documents referred to are the handwritten papers. For example, the name of the aforementioned slave Sambo Ekerman appears on one of the notes accompanying a sequestered issue. He was indeed interrogated in court about how and where he found the copy of the *Gustavia Free Press*.

Many witnesses were interrogated and most of them admitted that they had heard about the paper, in some cases read it, and in other cases having heard it read out loud. Even an eight-year-old boy was interrogated as he had found an issue of the paper. The paper was read aloud in shops and a French-

22 ANOM, Fonds suédois de Saint Barthélemy, vol. 227, court protocols, April 1832; SNA, S:t Barthélemysamlingen, vol. 11, extracts sent to Stockholm.

speaking witness recounted how the paper had been translated to him at one of Gustavia's many taverns.

As the court did not discover who the author(s) were, it chose to prosecute the owner of the shop which, according to the petitioner Haddock, had served as the distribution center for the paper. Haddock himself claimed "that he who publishes slander, though not the author, is guilty with the author, and ought to be punished to the same extent as if the author."

The first person accused was John Lamitt, a Gustavia shop owner. He denied all involvement in the production but could not deny that he had been present when it was read in his shop. After a long trial, the sentence was an anticlimax. The shop owner was fined 5 dollars for insults against Haddock. The court explained: "This may be considered a trifling punishment. But it is not so in reality. You stand thereby again recorded on the minutes of the court for a breach of the law." During the investigations it had turned out that it was Lammit's son Lambert who had invited people to attend readings of the paper in the shop. It was suggested that the reading of the paper was a way to generate business for the store. No proof was found that Lambert was the author. The court accused his father of being a bad example and "that the defendant has been actuated upon by some designing persons, to whom he has served as a tool for spreading the effusions of their spleen or malice." Worse was that a personal conflict had arisen between Lambert and Haddock. Haddock accused Lambert of attacking him physically in the street and witnesses confirmed this. Lambert Lamitt was sentenced to eight days' imprisonment on bread and water.

During the trial it became obvious to the members of the court that the existing Swedish legislation was not suited to their perceived needs. They were not happy with the "trifling punishment." The governor decided to proclaim a new law concerning the distribution of "defamatory rumors" and in the preamble the Swedish code of 1734 was cited: "If someone distributes such writings with malicious intent to make them widely known, he shall be punished as if he had written them himself."[23] That the person distributing the paper could be condemned for the same crime as the author was to the court's liking, but its members knew they would have problems proving malicious intent. The court proclaimed a regulation that changed the Swedish law and made it possible to sentence a distributor without proving intent.[24] The new law also raised the fine to 500 dollars, a substantial amount of money. It was meant to act as a strong deterrent against further written attacks on the government and prominent merchants.

23 Code of 1734, Section of crimes [*Missgärningsbalken*], ch. 60, § 5: "Utsprider någon annar sådana skrifter i ondt upsåt, at them rychtbara giöra; straffes lika som hade han sielf them skrifvit."

24 ANOM, Fonds suédois de Saint Barthélemy, vol. 228, court protocols, 24 April 1832, FSB; SNA, S:t Barthélemysamlingen, copy in vol. 11.

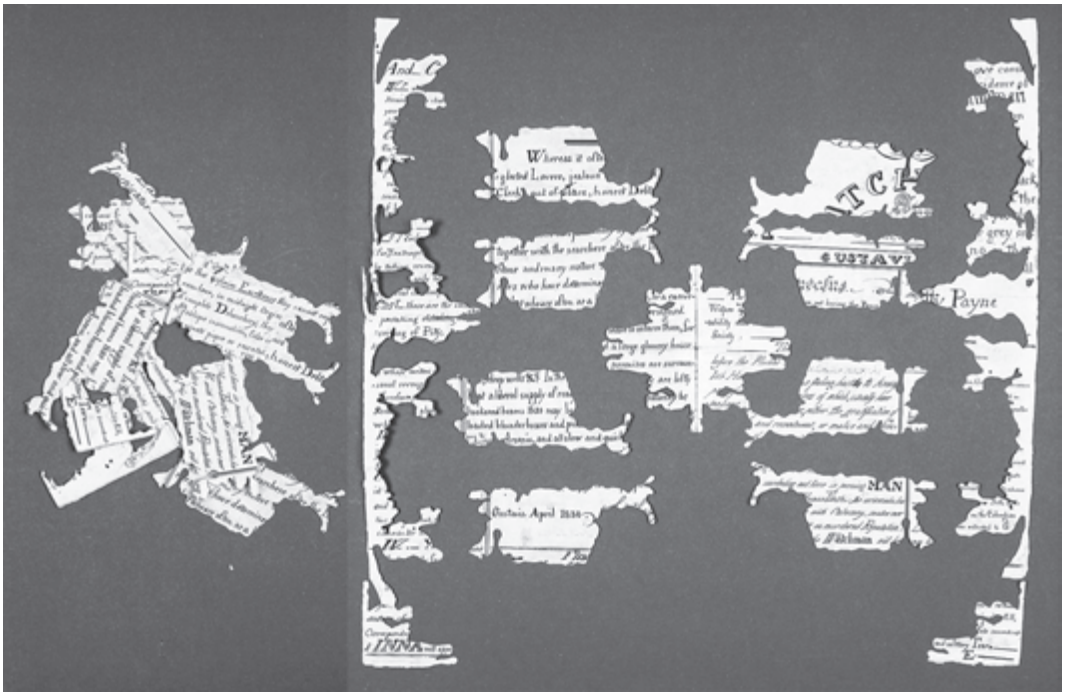


Figure 4. Left, insect-damaged paper fragments. Right, the same pieced together to form the only known number of another handwritten Gustavia paper, The Watchman*, dated April 1832. This is the only proof of its existence. It may have been an attempt to start a new title after or during the prosecution of the* Gustavia Free Press*. Vol. 299, Fonds suédois de Saint Barthélemy, ANOM.*

Royal intervention

Sweden had gone through major political changes in the first decades of the 19th century. Gustav III's son Gustav IV Adolf was deposed in 1809 and the French field marshal Jean-Baptiste Bernadotte was elected crown prince in 1810, adopting the name Karl-Johan. Though he only became king in 1818, he had been the de facto leader of government since his arrival in Sweden. A new freedom of press act was introduced in 1810, but the crown prince found it too liberal. It was changed in 1812. The state was given extensive powers to confiscate publications and to prosecute publishers and printers. Although it remains debated as to just what extent the sharpening of the press laws had any effect, a fair number of publications were, however, confiscated and a few writers jailed during Karl-Johan's reign.[25]

Karl-Johan was well aware of the possible economic advantages of Caribbean colonies. Before arriving in Sweden, he had been at the political-military center of French politics for almost two decades, at a time when the

25 Boberg 1989. For Karl-Johan's management of publicity and press: Almqvist 1929, 134–160; Rosengren 1999; 2008, 147–168.

colonies had played an important role in the French economy. He strove to enlarge Swedish colonial territories in the Caribbean which led to the brief Swedish acquisition of Guadeloupe in 1813–1814. At the Swedish parliament of 1812 Karl-Johan managed to have the ownership of Saint Barthélemy transferred to himself and the royal family. During a few profitable years in the 1810s money from the island was an important source of income for the crown prince. The transfer of ownership also meant that the legal situation at the island became even more ambiguous as Swedish law now could be overridden by the personal intervention of Karl-Johan. He was personally involved in the running of the colony until his death in 1844.[26]

The Lamitt case was reported to Karl-Johan who sought a more severe punishment for criticism of the island government. The official responsible for colonial affairs in Stockholm wrote to the Saint Barthélemy governor informing him of the king's decision. The letter was in French but the passage concerning the punishment was translated into English and the royal decision was communicated to the culprit Lambert Lamitt:

> His Majesty has found the crime for of which [sic] you Lamitt have been accused by Mr Haddock & duly convicted before the Court, that of assisting in publishing a defamatory libel, to be of such heinous nature, that, in commuting the punishment incurred, according to the recommendation of the Court, He has been pleased to ordain, that you shall be banished from the island for the time of one year. The said order is to be carried in effect within eight days and you, Lamitt, must, therefore leave the Colony on or before Tuesday next week.[27]

Banishment was extremely rare in Sweden and was usually used at Saint Barthélemy as a punishment meted out to slaves who were sold off the island never to return, a penalty which often broke up families and social bonds.

Satire and dissent in metropole and colony

Governor Morsing noted in his report to Stockholm dated 24 September 1832, that "the pasquinades have entirely ceased after the court case against Lamitt."[28] However, the month after the king's decision to banish Lamitt was made public, *The St. Christopher Advertiser and Weekly Intelligencer* published a letter to the editor satirizing the Swedish court.[29] The anonymous writer, "An Observer," compared the British 1832 Reform Bill which had been passed earlier the same year with Swedish governance. The letter accused the court of disregarding Swedish law in its sentences.

26 For an introduction to Karl-Johan's colonial interests: Thomasson 2018b, 105–122.

27 ANOM, Fonds suédois de Saint Barthélemy, vol. 229, court protocols, 17 September 1832.

28 SNA, S:t Barthélemysamlingen, vol. 11, Morsing report, 24 September 1832: "Les pasquinades ont entièrement cessé depuis la poursuite contre Lamitt."

29 *The St. Christopher Advertiser and Weekly Intelligencer*, no. 1350 (30 October 1832). ANOM, Fonds suédois de Saint Barthélemy, vol. 228.

Once again 1810s tactics were being used. There was no longer a printed paper in Saint Barthélemy, but that may not have made a great difference. Just as the author(s) of the *Gustavia Free Press* remarked, it was impossible to print such material anyway, while the neighboring islands' papers probably published these "letters" with a certain glee. To publish material – satirical or not – concerning other colonial territories was also a way of communicating with the local government. This was a strategy used by *The Report of St. Bartholomew* when, in 1819, it reported on political struggles on Barbados, a conflict which bore uncanny similarities to infighting in the Swedish colony.

A Gustavia burgher was accused of being the author of the St Kitts satire, but no proof was found. Morsing, probably knowing it was useless, stated: "As defendant Wilson, although suspected of the insertion in the St: Kitts papers of a perverted statement of a sentence of this court, has not given any explanation in this respect, I further am of the opinion, that said paper be submitted to the Executive with a view of promoting the discovery and punishment of the real author."[30] But irrespective of the facts, the *Gustavia Free Press* affair and its sequel tainted Morsing's reputation. He left the island the following year.

As in the Swedish metropolitan case, it is doubtful whether censorship was successful in the long run. In some respects the Caribbean, with its highly connected territories, represented a geographical space where satire was easier to spread. English, as one of the *lingua francas* in the Antilles, also facilitated the publication and diffusion of satire and political critique. Few Stockholmers read foreign papers, while in Saint Barthélemy and surrounding islands *The St. Christopher Advertiser and Weekly Intelligencer* remained a common point of reference. News spread quickly in the Caribbean and European, American, and local newspapers were widely circulated. In addition, manuscript and oral news about the surrounding islands governments' shortcomings were consumed avidly. One of the most discussed cases of such spreading of information is how news about the French Revolution spread and to what extent this knowledge influenced the rebellion and wars that led to Haitian independence.[31]

The policing of dissent in the colony, and the prosecution of the *Gustavia Free Press* in particular, highlight both similarities and differences between metropolitan and colonial attempts to stymie political opposition. The grievances of the Gustavia authors were often different to those of the writers and printers whose publications were confiscated or prosecuted in metropolitan Sweden, but there were also common complaints. Justice and corruption have always been fertile areas for satire and criticism. The objects of satire – local powerholders – were the same, and neither the governors of Saint Barthélemy, nor the king in Stockholm, were happy to be criticized in public.

The colony's distance from Sweden was both geographic and political. When Gustav III urged his Paris ambassador in 1779 to step up his efforts to

30 ANOM, Fonds suédois de Saint Barthélemy, vol. 227, court protocols, 14 December 1832. The quotation is from an undated protocol in the same volume.

31 For a discussion of these themes: Gaspar & Geggus (eds) 1997.

acquire a Caribbean territory, it was precisely this remoteness which formed an explicit goal. In addition to dreaming about a sugar island, the king also envisaged a trans-Atlantic possession as a place "where one could send all the hotheads of the realm."[32] After the transfer of Saint Barthélemy to royal property in 1812 the colony became increasingly forgotten in Sweden. Karl-Johan had little incentive to publicize Swedish participation in slavery and in the transatlantic slave trade. As the authors of *Gustavia Free Press* had pointed out, Saint Barthélemy inhabitants were still at least into the 1820s involved in the illegal trade in new captives from Africa, notwithstanding that Sweden had already in 1813 signed a treaty that bound it to abolish the trade. The colony only surfaced in the Swedish debate again in the 1840s when the abolition of slavery had become an international issue.

Far away from Stockholm and the cumbersome Swedish legislative processes, the island governors used their local law-making powers to stem criticism. Anders Bergstedt, in his role as the island's judge, had been taken to task by the Supreme Court in the 1810s for excessive independence in legislation. In the prosecution of *Gustavia Free Press* such independence was not anymore criticized. The overzealous legislative efforts of the Saint Barthélemy governor were instead superseded by Karl-Johan himself.[33] Without being reined in by his advisers and an often recalcitrant parliament, he could afford himself the luxury of personally increasing the penalty against someone – far away on the small Swedish Caribbean island – who had been involved in the mockery of Swedish officials, and thus, royal power.

Sources

Archival sources

Archives nationales d'outre-mer (ANOM), Aix-en-Provence (France)
Fonds suédois de Saint Barthélemy

Bancroft library, University of California, Berkeley (USA)
MSS Z-A 4 BANC

Private collection
Saint Barthélemy council protocols 28 March 1793. Digital photographs in the author's collection

Riksarkivet [The Swedish National archives] (SNA), Stockholm (Sweden)
S:t Barthélemysamlingen

Uppsala University Library, Uppsala (Sweden)
MS F 479

32 Uppsala University Library, F 479, Gustav III to Gustav Philip Creutz, 10 September 1779: "ou on pourroit envoyer touttes les tetes inquiettes du Royaume."
33 Thomasson 2016, 297.

Rare books and newspapers

Mathews, Samuel Augustus 1793: *The lying hero or An answer to J. B. Moreton's manners and customs in the West Indies*. St. Eustatius: Edward L. Low & Co. Library of Congress, Washington, DC (USA).

The Report of St. Bartholomew
The most complete collection at Kungliga Biblioteket [The Swedish National Library], Stockholm (Sweden), which also holds a microfilm with issues integrated from Uppsala University Library, Uppsala (Sweden) and Riksarkivet [The Swedish National Archives] (SNA), Stockholm (Sweden). A few issues unknown in Sweden in the library of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts (USA).

The St. Bartholomew Chronicle, and Gustavia Gazette

The West Indian
Both titles in Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley (USA)

The St. Christopher Advertiser and Weekly Intelligencer, no. 1350 (30 October 1832)
Archives nationales d'outre-mer (ANOM), Aix-en-Provence (France), Fonds suédois de Saint Barthélemy, vol. 228

Literature

Almqvist, Helge 1929: "Karl Johan, utrikespolitiken och pressen år 1813", *Scandia* 2:1, 1929, 134–160.

Boberg, Stig 1951: *Gustav III och tryckfriheten 1774–1787*. Stockholm: Natur och Kultur.

Boberg, Stig 1989: *Carl XIV Johan och tryckfriheten. 1810–1844*. Göteborg: S. Boberg.

Brereton, Bridget 1999: "The historical context of Moreton's (1790) attack on slavery and Mathews' (1793) response". In: Bruyn, Adrienne & Philip Baker (eds), *St. Kitts and the Atlantic Creoles. The texts of Samuel Augustus Mathews in perspective*. London: University of Westminster Press, 59–62.

Cave, Roderick 1978: "Printing in the Swedish West Indies", *Libri* 28:1, 1978, 205–214.

Cave, Roderick 1987: *Printing and the Book Trade in the West Indies.* London: Pindar Press.

Franzén, Gösta 1974: *Svenskstad i Västindien. Gustavia på Saint Barthélemy i språk- och kulturhistorisk belysning*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell.

Gaspar, David Barry & David Patrick Geggus (eds) 1997: *A Turbulent Time. The French Revolution and the Greater Caribbean*. Indiana University Press: Bloomington.

Holmberg, Claes-Göran, Ingemar Oscarsson & Jarl Torbacke 2000: *Den svenska pressens historia. 1, I begynnelsen (tiden före 1830)*. Stockholm: Ekerlid.

Mattsson, Annie 2010: *Komediant och riksförrädare. Handskriftcirkulerade smädeskrifter mot Gustaf III*. Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis.

Nyman, Elmar 1963: *Indragningsmakt och tryckfrihet 1785–1810*. Stockholm: Bok- och Reklamtryck.

O'Flaherty, Victoria Borg 1999: "Samuel Augustus Mathews. His life and his times". In: Bruyn, Adrienne & Philip Baker (eds), *St. Kitts and the Atlantic Creoles. The texts of Samuel Augustus Mathews in perspective*. London: University of Westminster Press, 49–58.

Pålsson, Ale 2016: *Our Side of the Water. Political Culture in the Swedish Colony of St Barthélemy 1800–1825*. Stockholm University. Available from http://su.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:967510/FULLTEXT01.pdf

Rosengren, Cecilia 1999: *Tidevarvets bättre genius. Föreställningar om offentlighet och publicitet i Karl Johanstidens Sverige*. Stockholm: Symposion.

Rosengren, Cecilia 2008: "Journalism on Royal Duty. Pehr Adam Wallmark in Defence of Charles XIV". In: Alm, Mikael & Britt-Inger Johansson (eds), *Scripts of Kingship. Essays on Bernadotte and Dynastic Formation in an Age of Revolution*. Uppsala: Historiska institutionen, 147–168.

Thomasson, Fredrik 2016: "Thirty-Two Lashes at Quatre Piquets. Slave Laws and Justice in the Swedish Colony of St. Barthélemy ca. 1800". In: Weiss, Holger (ed.), *Ports of Globalisation, Places of Creolisation. Nordic Possessions in the Atlantic World during the Era of the Slave Trade*. Leiden: Brill, 280–305.

Thomasson, Fredrik 2018a: "Den karibiska skorpionen. Om digitaliseringen av det svenska Saint Barthélemy-arkivet i Aix-en-Provence", *Historisk tidskrift* 138:1, 2018, 78–90.

Thomasson, Fredrik 2018b: "Entre rêves coloniaux et réalités politiques. La Guadeloupe suédoise (1813–1814) et ses conséquences", *Bulletin de la Société d'Histoire de la Guadeloupe* 2018, 105–122.

Thomasson, Fredrik 2018c: "Tryckort Gustavia. Svenska karibiska tidningar, statstryck och slaveri 1804–1828", *Biblis* 81, 2018, 2–25.

Wennberg, Bertil & Kristina Örtenhed (eds) 2016: *Fritt ord 250 år. Tryckfrihet och offentlighet i Sverige och Finland – ett levande arv från 1766*. Stockholm: Sveriges riksdag.

Wilson, Victor 2016: *Commerce in Disguise. War and Trade in the Caribbean Free Port of Gustavia, 1793–1815*. Åbo: Åbo Akademi University Press. Available from https://www.doria.fi/handle/10024/118693