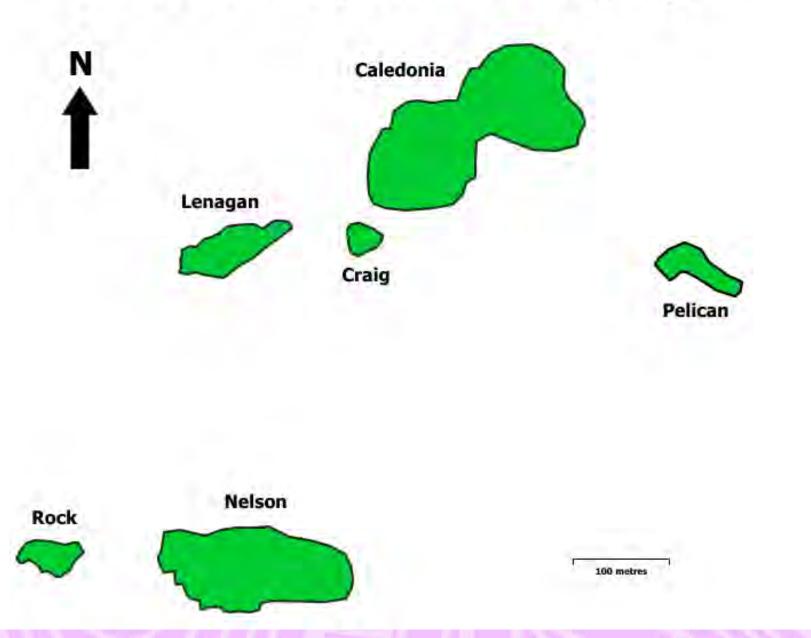
Nelson Island and Indian Indentureship in Trinidad

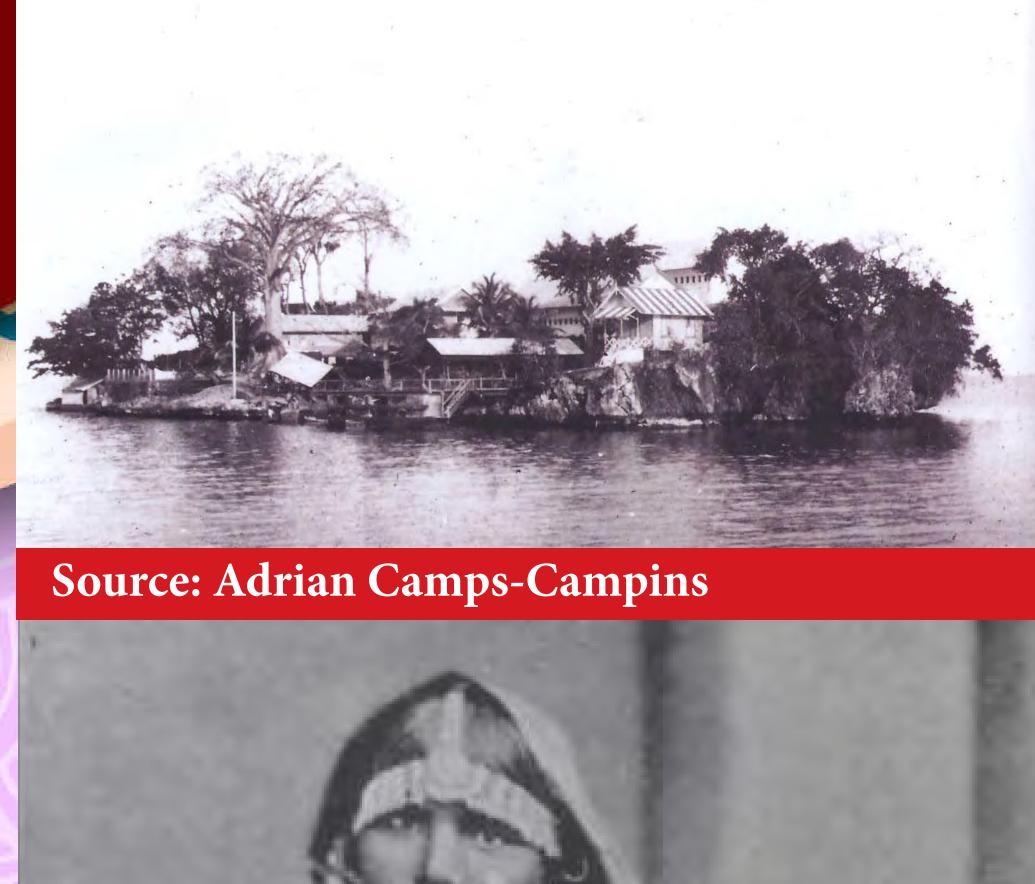
Nelson Island is one of the Five Islands off Trinidad which lies west of Port of Spain in the Gulf of Paria.

The island has historical importance for the many ethnic groups that now populate the twin-island state of Trinidad and Tobago. From 1866 to 1917, Nelson Island was used as a landing, immigration and quarantine station for Indian indentured immigrants to Trinidad.

This exhibition highlights the role of Nelson Island during the period of Indian Indentureship, with photos and records from the National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago.

The Five Islands, Trinidad and Tobago









Indian Indentureship in Trinidad

On May 30th 1845, the Futtle Rozack commonly known as the Fatel Rozak docked in the Port of Spain harbour in Trinidadwith 225 adult passengers on board. The passengers were the first immigrants from India who had come to the British colony to work on the sugarcane plantations after the abolition of African slavery. They had spent 103 days at sea during the long and dangerous journey that spanned 14,000 miles (36,000 km). The immigrants were contracted for five to ten years to work on estates (sugar, cocoa and coconut) in a system that ended in 1917.

A total of 147,596 Indians came to Trinidad over this 70-year period. Although they were promised a free return passage back home, at least 75 percent of them stayed

and settled in the New World colony. In many ways, they brought India to the Caribbean. They continued with their traditions of Hinduism and Islam, and continue to add colour to Trinidad and Tobago's cosmopolitan society.

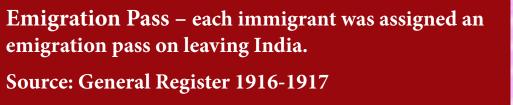
Descendants of these Indian immigrants, who now comprise about half of the multi-ethnic society of the twinisland state (1.3 million), commemorate the arrival of their ancestors to these shores annually.

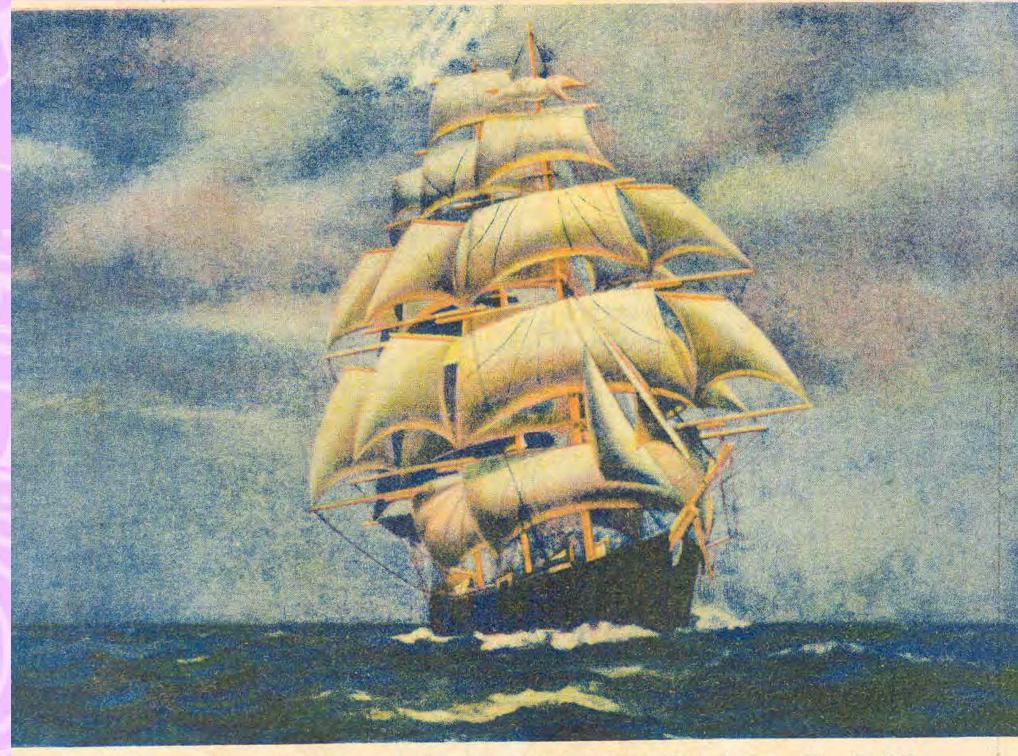
This historic day was proclaimed a national holiday – Indian Arrival Day, in 1994.

Source: Dr. Kumar Mahabir

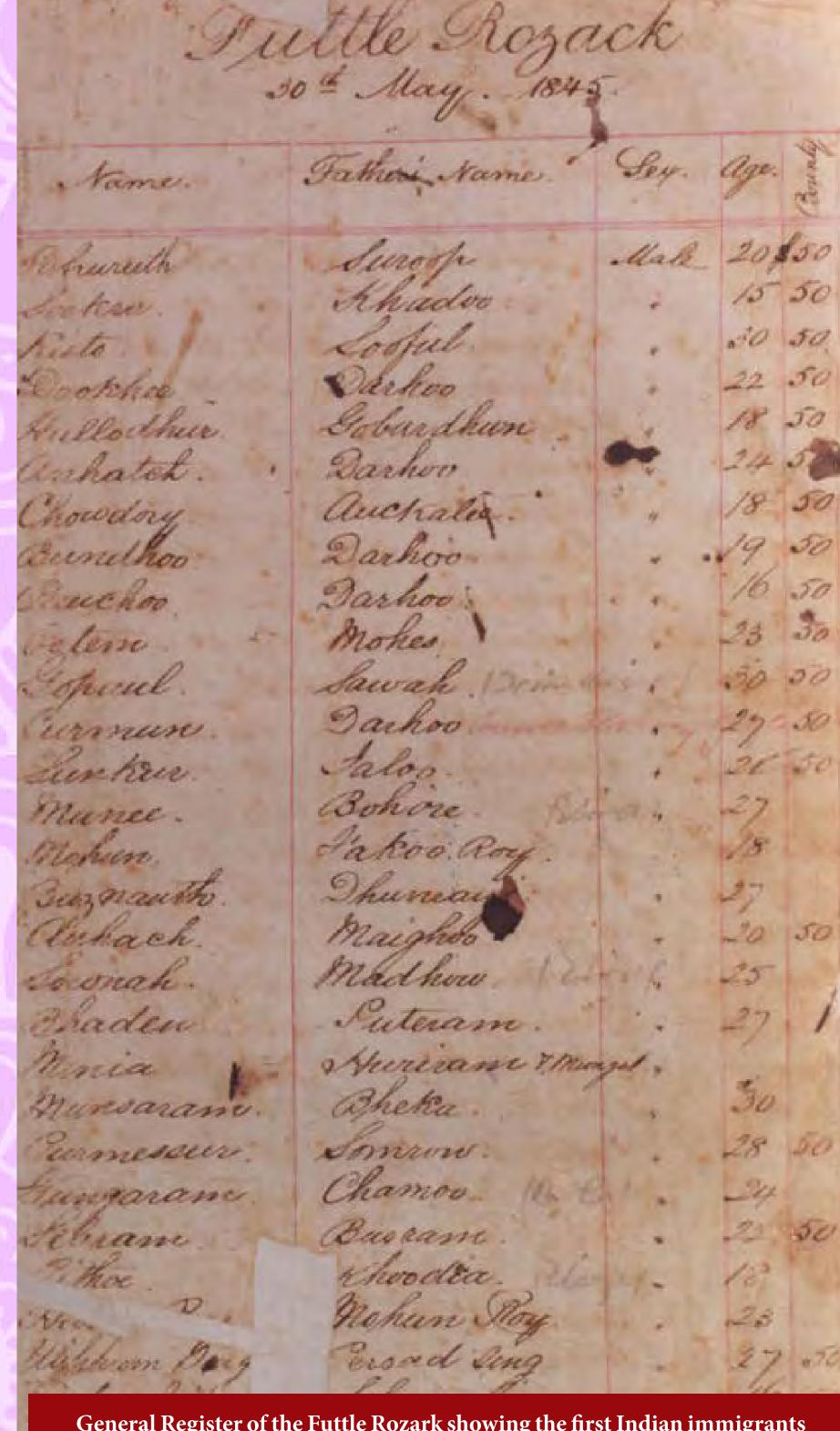


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from all bodily and mental disease; and that he has been	
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Surgeon Superintendent.	
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Certified that the man above described has appeared on behalf of the Government of Trinidad as willing to proceed that I have explained to him all matters concerning his engagement.	ent and duties.
that I have explained to him as	M. Morran
Govern	nment Emigration Agent for Trinidad.
Permitted to proceed as in a fit state of health to undertake	the voyage to Trindad.
	1 6 FEB 1011
	Protector of Emigrants.





An Artist's conception of the 'Fatel Rozack' which arrived in Port-of-Spain harbour, May 30, 1845.



General Register of the Futtle Rozark showing the first Indian immigrants to arrive in Trinidad. The general registers record the name of the ship and date of arrival, name of indentured, father's name, registration number, sex, age and estate of indenture.

Source: General Register 1845-1856



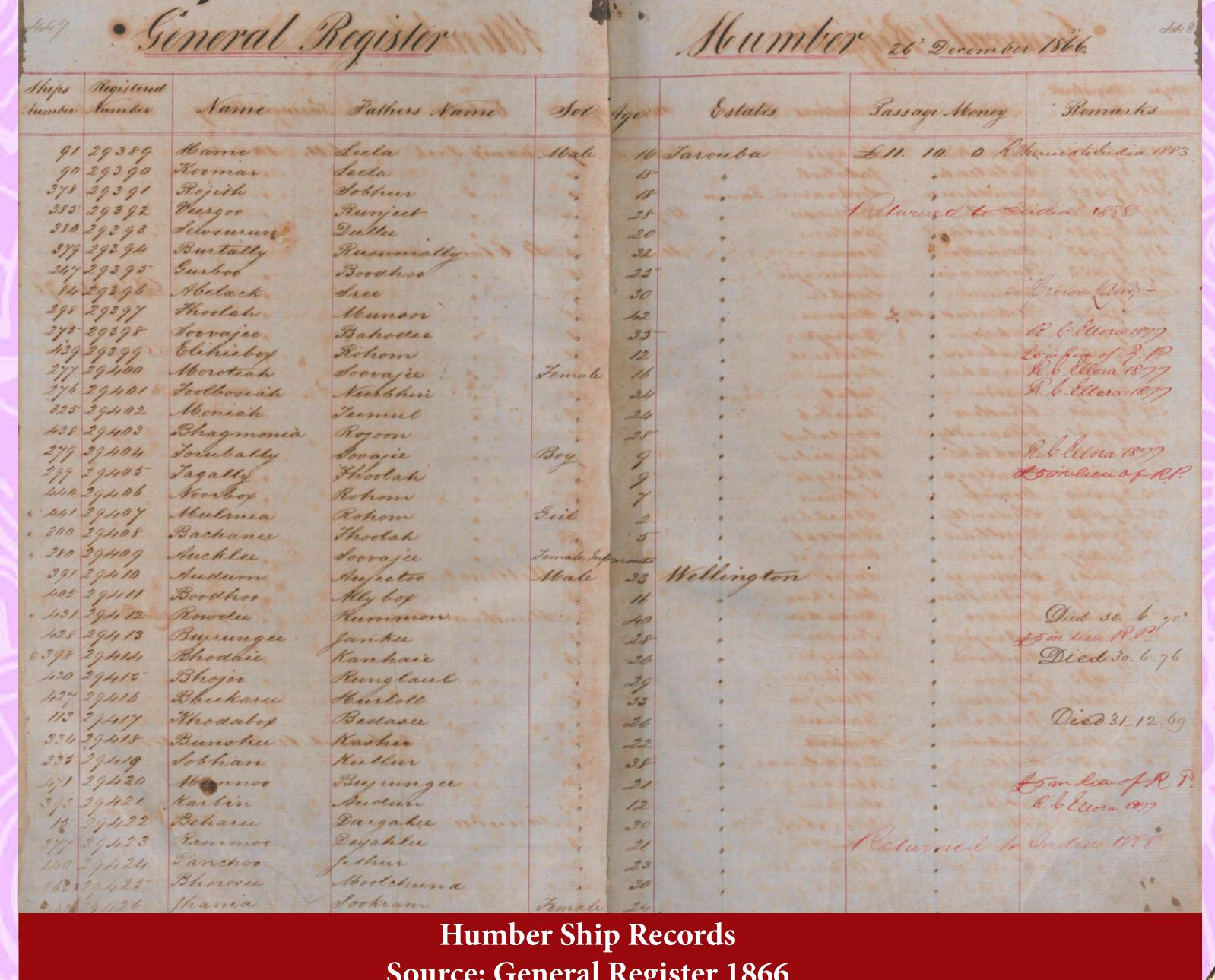
First arrivals on Nelson Island

Nelson Island became the Immigration Depot fornewlyarrived Indianimmigrants after the system for receiving immigrants was reorganized in 1866. This involved the disembarkation of immigrants from the ship onto barges and then onto Nelson Island.

The first ship to anchor at Nelson Island in 1866 was the Humber which brought 473 immigrants: 329 men, 84 women, 32 boys and 14 girls.



Newly arrived immigrants on Nelson Island



Source: General Register 1866



The Establishment of Nelson Island as an Immigration Depot

THE TRINIDAD CHRONICLE, FEBRUARY 15, 1867.

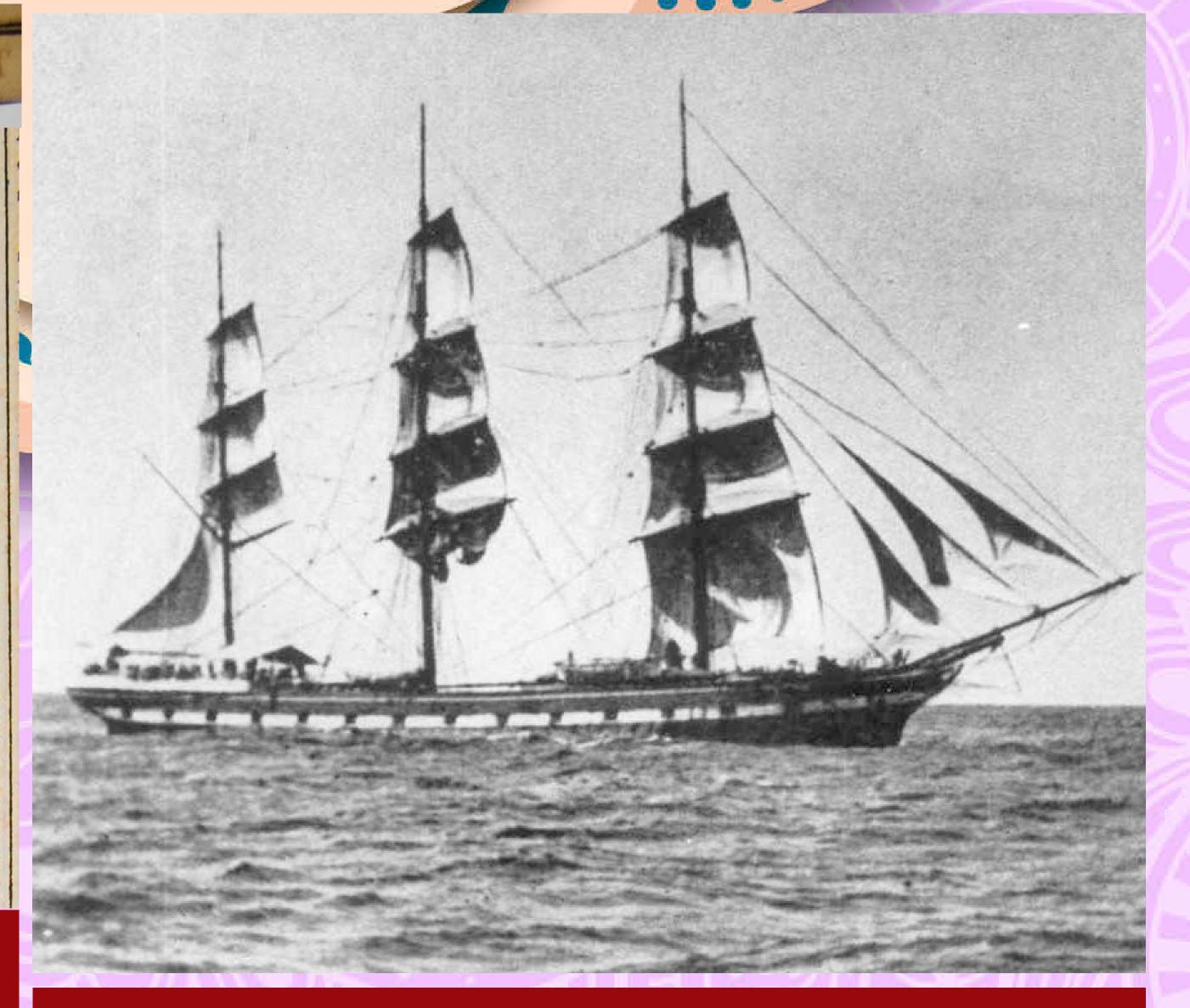
THE GOVERNOR'S MESSAGES.

The two most important of the Messages read at the last meeting of the Legislative Council refer to the establishment of an Immigrant Depôt and to the state of the law with regard to the sick and destitute poor. In the first Message his Excellency refers to the fact that a vote of £540 for the erection of Depôt Buildings at Carrera's Island was asked for by Mr. Rushworth, including in the sum an additional amount of £340 for their improvement and extension. Mr. Rushworth on that occasion informed the Council that this expenditure had exceeded the amount originally contemplated by Mr. J. H. Manners-Sutton in consequence of the temporary conversion of these buildings into an Auxiliary Ulcer Hospital, a step taken partly in order to diminish the pressure upon the Colonial Hospital, then crowded far above its means of proper accommodation, and partly on account of the benefits which it was anticipated the patients would receive from sea bathing and sea air. It soon became evident, however, that the causes which had led to the occupation of the Island for Hospital purposes in the first instance, were likely to render the period at which it would be again available for the uses for which it was originally destined very uncertain. The number of ulcer cases sent to the Island in the first instance was only 23. This number had in September increased to 94, and in December it amounted to 120. The number of patients in the Colonial Hospital at Port-of-Spain remained all this time almost undiminished, and considerably in excess of that for which proper accommodation can be there provided. It was originally contemplated to erect an additional building on Carrera's Island for the reception of the Immigrants, but this course appeared to the Governor to be open to many obvious objections, among which not the least was the inexpediency of discouraging the newly arrived Immigrants by bringing them at once in contact with a mass of festering disease. Of the other Islands, that which after examination appeared best suited for the proposed Depôt was the one known as Neilson's or Stevenson's Island. The Governor in the first instance contemplated the removal to this Island of the Convalescent Ulcer Hospital, the establishment of which in a permanent form had certainly not been contemplated by the Legislature, or so far as the Governor is aware by his predecessors in office. He would then have been enabled to apply Carrera's Island to those purposes to fit it for which the sums expended there had been voted. Medical testimony, however, proved that Neilson's Island, though not unsuitable for the purpose of a temporary residence for such short periods as those during which newly arrived Coolies would probably be detained there, was not so well adapted for more permanent occupation, or hospital .

accommodation. The Ulcer Convalescent Hospital has accordingly been allowed to remain where it was originally placed, and the Immigrant Depôt has been established at Neilson's Island. The hope that the Colonial Hospital would have been free from pressure before the season at which the arrival of Immigrant Ships might be anticipated, and the buildings on Carrera's Island consequently available. 1 nad been cherished up to the last possible moment. The preparations made for the reception of the Coolies at Neilson's Island, were consequently not fully completed on the arrival of the Humber and Roxburgh Castle. Nevertheless, the arrangements made proved sufficient, and worked very satisfactorily. The vote asked for (viz., £467. 2. 4.) comprises two items, a sum of £208. 6. 8. applicable to the purchase of the Buildings on the Island, and compensation to their occupier; and a sum of £258 15.8 intended to defray the expense of the additional buildings which it has been found necessary to erect, and which are all of a temporary and inexpensive character.

The Governor's message in the Trinidad Chronicle announcing the use of Nelson Island as an immigration depot.

Source: Trinidad Chronicle
February 15th 1867

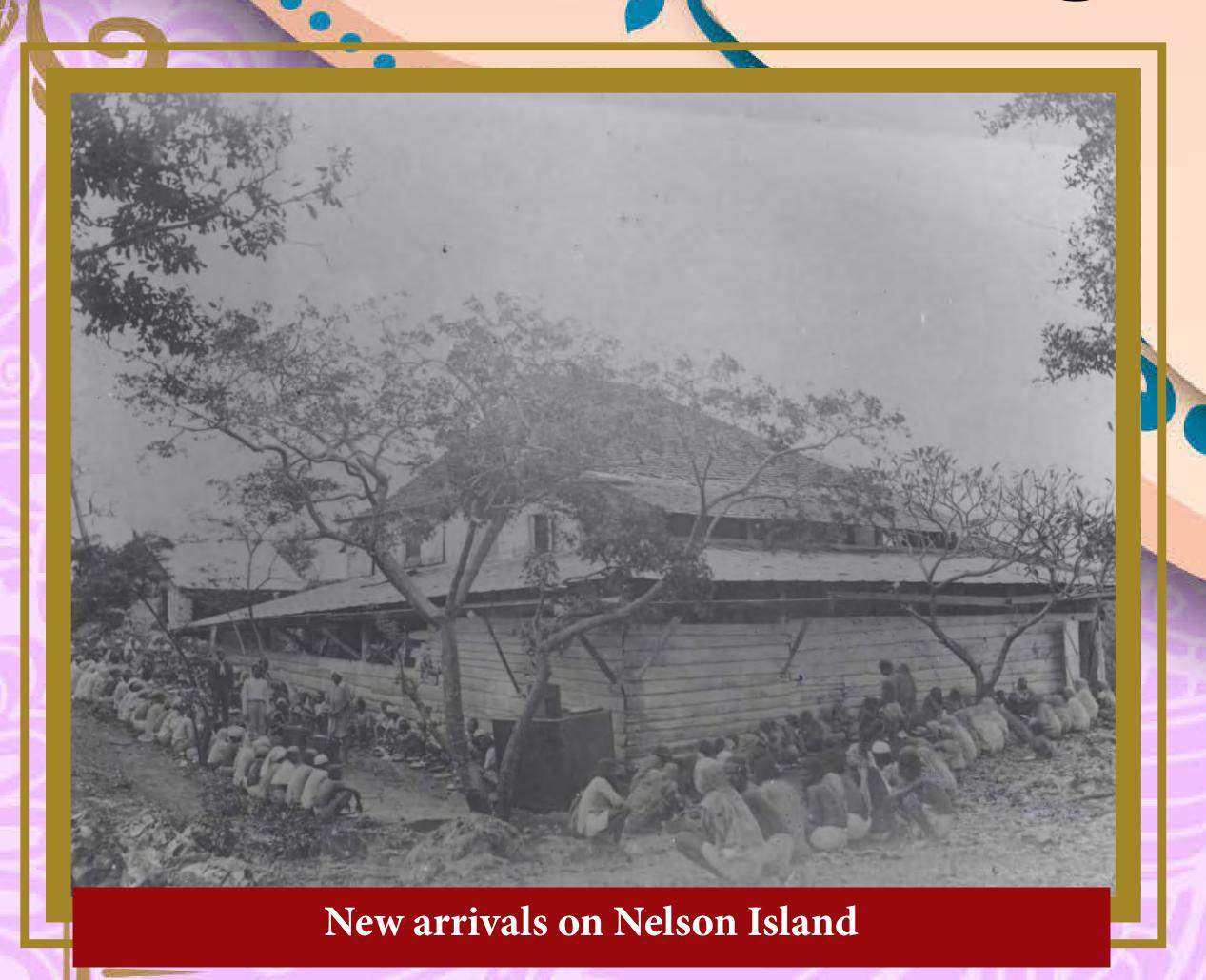


Ailsa was among the 228 ships that brought Indian immigrants to Nelson Island from 1866 to 1917.





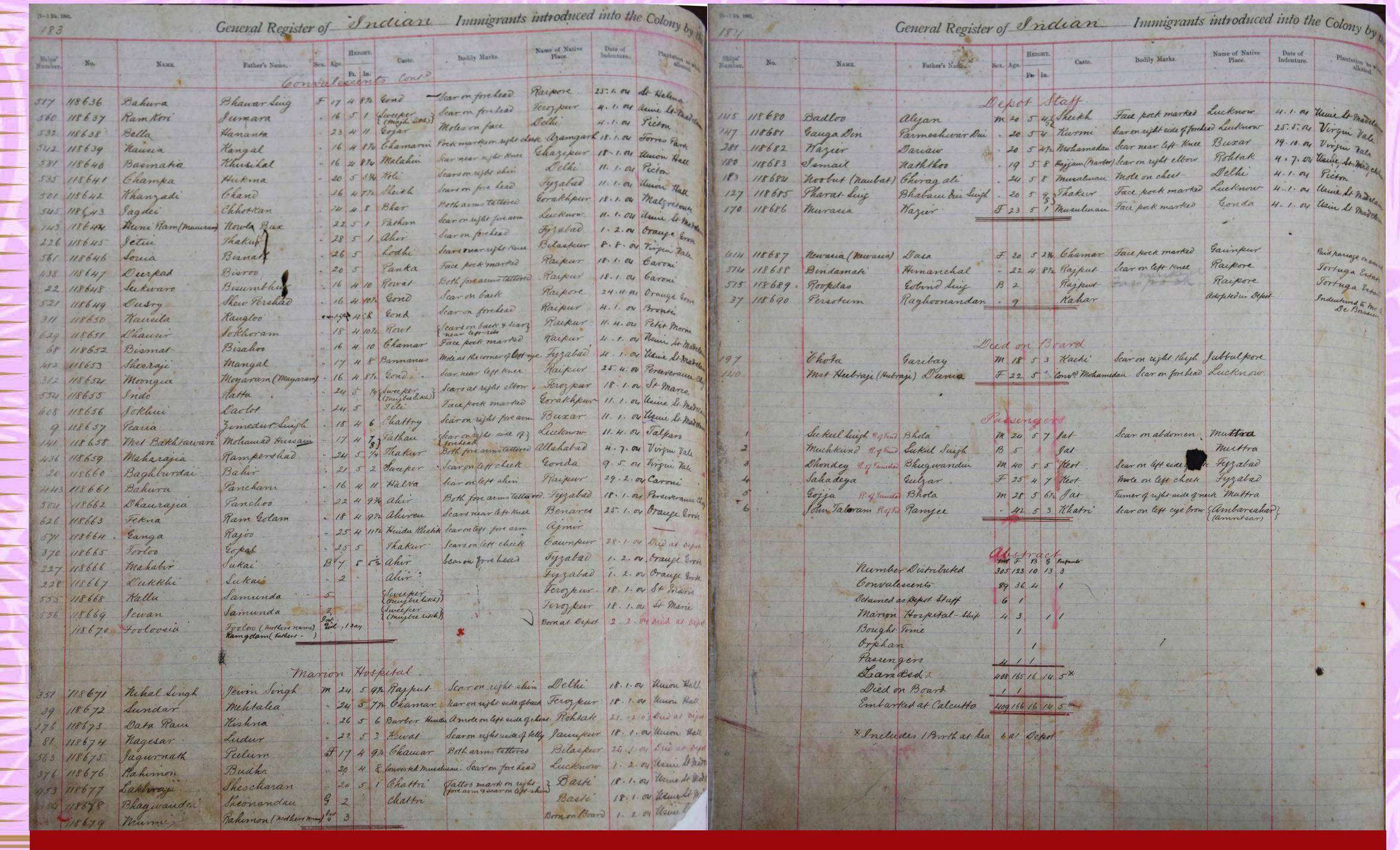
Nelson Island as an Indian Immigration Depot



On arrival, Indian immigrants were medically examined and either sent to the Marion Hospital for medical treatment or to the Convalescent Depot to regain their strength after a long journey at sea.

In the early years, the Nelson Island Immigration Depot provided accommodation for approximately 450 people. By 1881 it was improved and enlarged to hold 600 persons and by 1912, there was accommodation for 1000 persons.

Following arrival on the island, immigrants were requested to sit in the assembly area to be addressed by the Protector of Immigrants and his interpreters, where they were read their contract in Hindi and Urdu. Most immigrants spent about ten days on the island before being transferred to work on the estates.



List of persons who arrived from Calcutta on the S.S. Main on 2nd December 1903 showing persons assigned to the Convalescent Depot and the Marion Hospital, and a summary of the distribution of such persons.



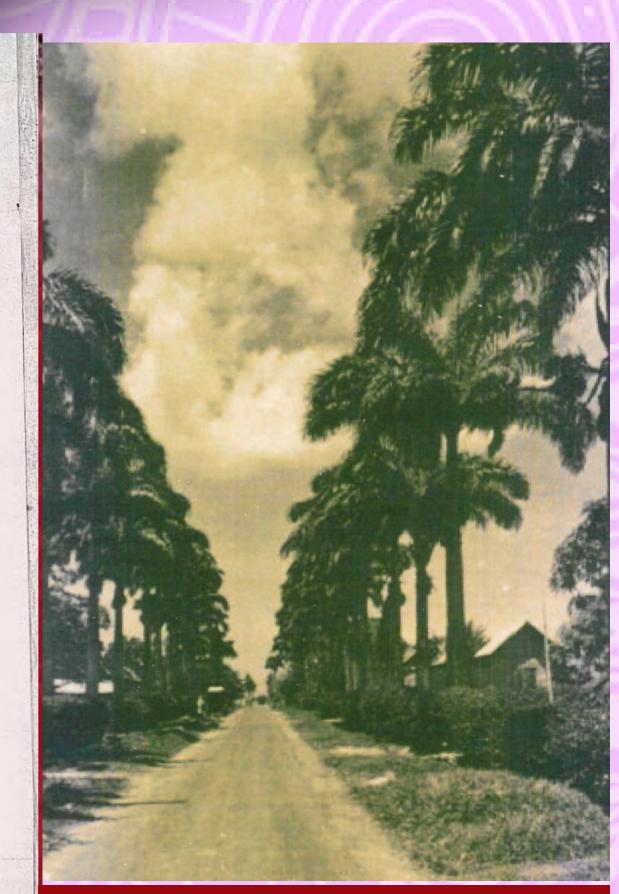
Work on the Estates



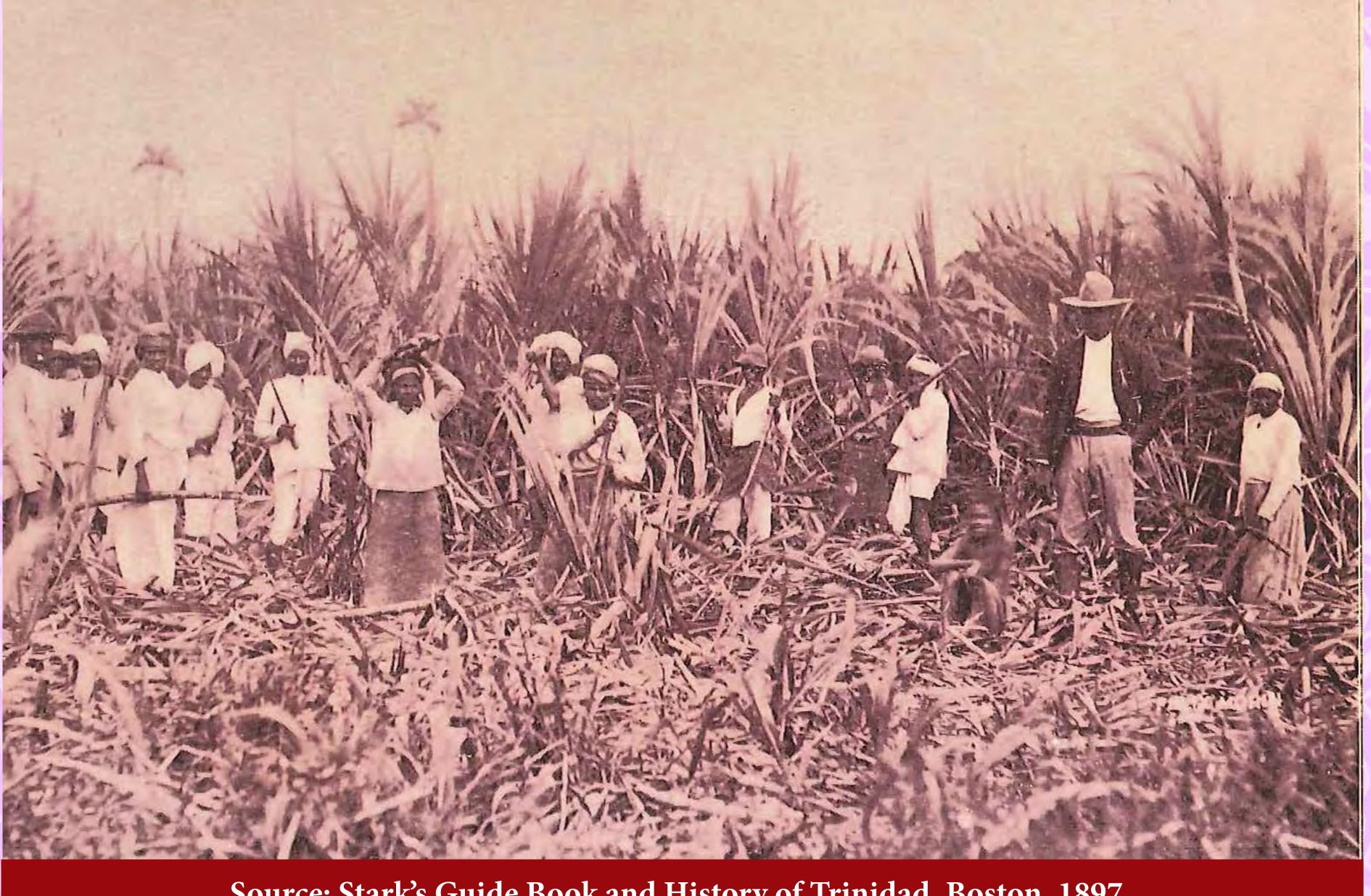
In theory, immigrants were required to work nine hours a day except Sundays, Good Friday, Christmas and New Year's day. 7 In practice, the immigrants' working day began between 6 and 6:30 in the morning. About 10:30 a.m. a halt was made for the midday meal. Legally the break was for only half an hour: in practice it usually lasted about an hour. At approximately 2 o'clock those with specific jobs to be done in one day finished and returned to the barracks or other quarters. The slow workers and men working in excess of the standard finished by 4 p.m. The less efficient and slower workmen took more frequent casual halts. Those who worked by the hour usually stopped about 4:30 p.m.⁸

There were two classifications of work assigned; task and time. Time work comprised nine hours of labor at various tasks, and was paid by the hour. Task work consisted of an assigned job which in theory should require nine hours work to complete, but usually took much less, and was paid by the job. In the fields, almost 80 to 90 per cent of the work was done by assigned tasks.9

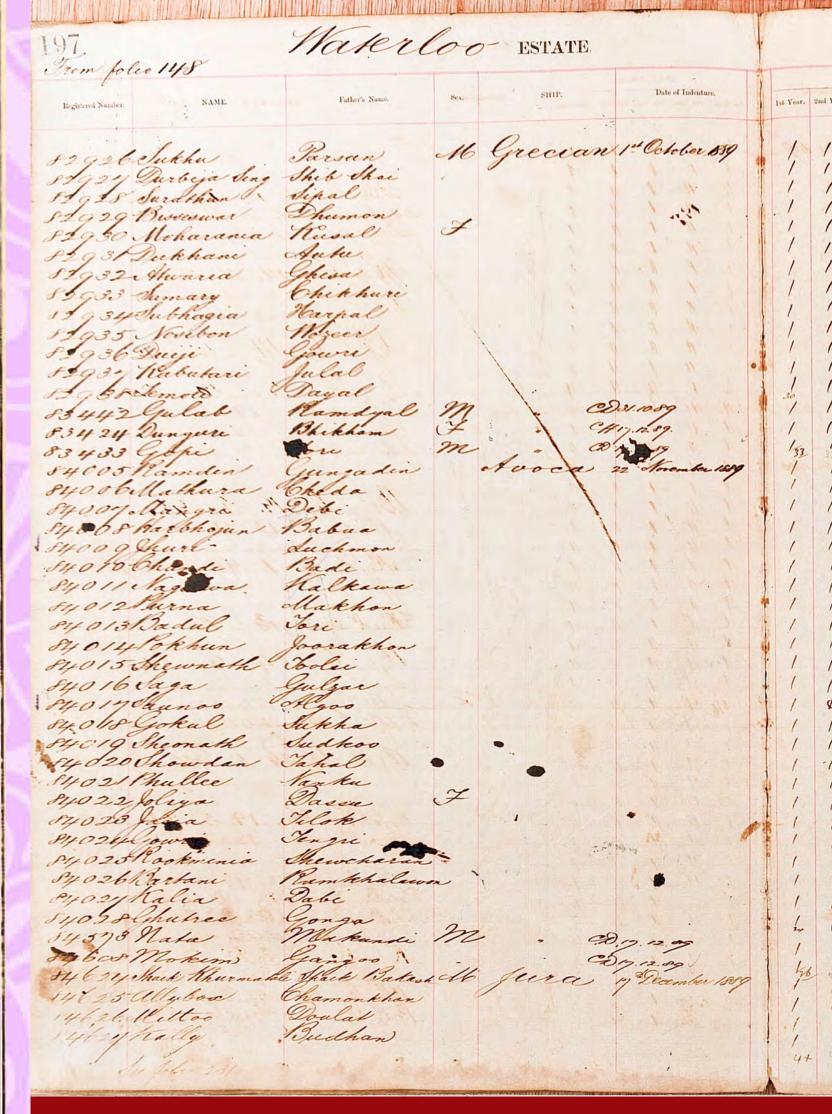
Source: Stark's Guide Books History of Trinidad By James H. Stark



Waterloo Road



Source: Stark's Guide Book and History of Trinidad, Boston, 1897.



Estate Register for Waterloo 1884-1891





Return to India



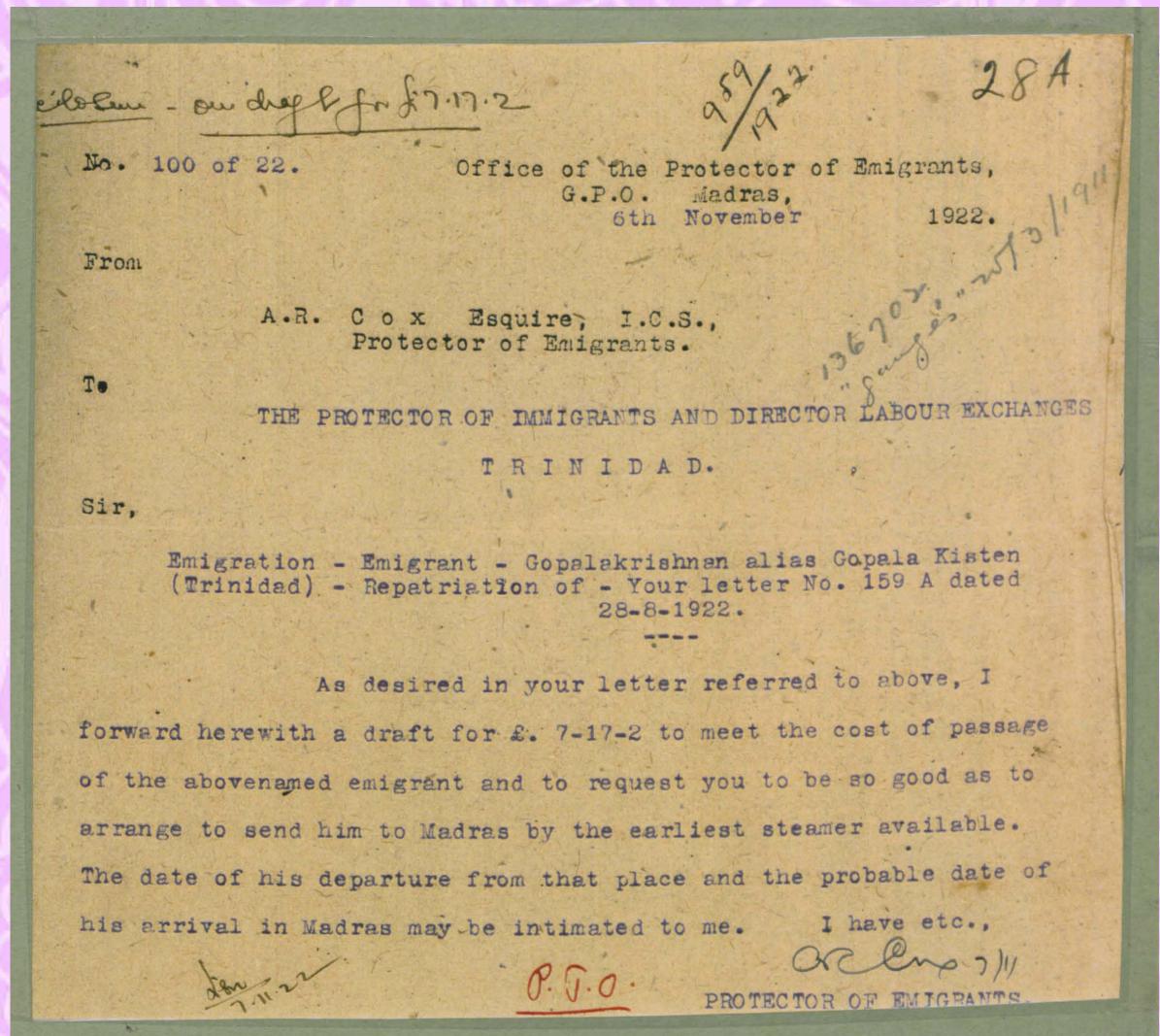
Nelson Island served as a port of departure for ex-indentureds returning to India until 1939. The returning immigrants stayed on the island until 300 to 400 of them were gathered to fill a shipload. Some of the returnees even came from neighbouring Suriname and Guyana.

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The ship Arima was among the first ships listed to leave Nelson island with returnees



Register of Returned Immigrants 1936



Letters between the Emigration Agent at Calcutta and the Protector of Immigrants, Trinidad, reveal valuable information on immigrants, including issues of repatriation.

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- The National Trust of Trinidad and Tobago, The Built Heritage of Trinidad and Tobago, 2012. We acknowledge with appreciation the research assistance provided by Shamshu Deen.

