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PREFACE

Early in my graduate career at LSU, Dr. William V. Davidson and I had a prolonged discussion about potential dissertation topics. It was my first real taste of the dynamism and generation of intriguing research topics that similar conversations continue to produce, with him as well as my colleagues who also study Honduras and Central America. This dissertation, though a scholarly undertaking, is offered in the spirit of enthusiasm and fun that I believe should be a part of the geographic enterprise. Through many trips to the archives and into the field, I have thoroughly enjoyed this project, and the final form of this dissertation is an attempt to convey some of that enthusiasm to the reader. Thus the heavy emphasis on visual representation, and the narrative flavor of the text itself.
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ........................................................................................................ iii

PREFACE ................................................................................................................................... vi

LIST OF TABLES .................................................................................................................... ix

LIST OF FIGURES .................................................................................................................. x

ABSTRACT ............................................................................................................................... xiii

CHAPTER

1 INTRODUCTION ................................................................................................................ 1
   Mahogany in the Americas ......................................................................................... 3
   The North Coast of Honduras ............................................................................... 12
   On Historical Geography ..................................................................................... 18
   Sourcing the Mahogany Trade ........................................................................ 19
   A Note on Maps ..................................................................................................... 22
   Topics of Consideration ....................................................................................... 28

2 MAHOGANY EXTRACTION IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY HONDURAS ..................... 32
   Scouting the Forest .............................................................................................. 33
   The Mahogany Gang ............................................................................................ 34
   The Mahogany Works ........................................................................................ 37
   Felling the Timber ................................................................................................. 39
   Timber Haulage .................................................................................................... 43
   Moving the Timber ............................................................................................... 49
   Perspective ............................................................................................................. 50

3 BANKS AND BOOM IN THE MID-DAY SUN: ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEGACIES OF THE MAHOGANY TRADE ON THE NORTH COAST ......................................................... 55
   Creeks ..................................................................................................................... 56
   Banks ....................................................................................................................... 58
   Booms .................................................................................................................... 60
   Other Toponymic Legacies .................................................................................. 61
   Perspective ............................................................................................................. 64

4 CONSIDERING THE MAHOGANY LANDSCAPE ................................................. 65
   Settlement Landscapes ........................................................................................ 66
   Physical Landscapes ............................................................................................. 71
   Locations ................................................................................................................. 75
   Perspective ............................................................................................................. 85
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Sections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>THE EARLY TRADE: ON THE MARGINS OF EMPIRE</td>
<td>Belize and Logwood in the Eighteenth Century, The British Settlement at Black River, Spanish Colonization on the Miskito Shore, From Isolation to Independence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>MAHOGANY ASCENDANT: EARLY EXPANSION AND CONFLICT ON THE NORTH COAST</td>
<td>Morazán and Bennett on the North Coast, The Mahogany Duty, A New Era: Expansion in the Early 1840s, Prospect: Renewing the Miskito Controversy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>MAHOGANY IN TRANSITION: 1850s-1870s</td>
<td>The Transition on the Aguán, Farther Up, Further In: Ocampo on the Patuca, A Question of Control, Follin and the West, Peripheral Events, Considering the Transitional Period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>“FRUTAS TROPICALES”: DENOUEMENT OF THE MAHOGANY BOOM IN THE LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY</td>
<td>Late Nineteenth Century, Exporting to the End: The Last Major Concerns, The Move Away from Mahogany, Tropical Sunset: Trickling into the Twentieth Century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>CONCLUDING REMARKS: ON LITTORAL LEGACIES</td>
<td>Perspective Past, Perspective Present</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

LITERATURE CITED | 202 |

VITA | 228 |
1. Exports from Black River, 1750-1786 ............................................................... 100
LIST OF FIGURES

1.1. Distribution of mahogany, Middle America.......................... 5
1.2. Distribution of mahogany, South America.......................... 6
1.3. Mahogany on the Río Paulaya, eastern Honduras.............. 8
1.4. Major mahogany rivers of northern Honduras.................. 14
1.5 The Valle de Ulúa .............................................................. 15
1.6 The Valle del Aguán ............................................................ 17
1.7. Squier's depiction of the upper Río Patuca watershed ....... 23
1.8. Wells' depiction of the upper Río Patuca watershed ......... 26
1.9.a. Piedra Blanca ................................................................. 29
1.9.b. Piedra Blanca as rendered by E.P. Usher ......................... 29
2.1. Mahogany works on the Río Ulúa .............................. 38
2.2. Cleared area surrounding mahogany tree ...................... 41
2.3. Platform for mahogany cutters ........................................ 42
2.4. Dendritic pattern of mahogany extraction ....................... 45
2.5. Dragging mahogany out of the forest .............................. 47
2.6. Mahogany truck ............................................................... 48
2.7. Staging mahogany on a river bank................................. 51
2.8. Mahogany proprietary marks ........................................... 52
2.9. Mahogany in Río San Juan, Nicaragua ........................... 53
3.1. Booms on the lower Ríos Aguán and Limón.................... 62
4.1. Contemporary settlement at Francia ................................. 67
4.2. Contemporary settlement at Quebrada de Arenas ............. 69
4.3. Contemporary settlement at San Antonio de Sara ............................................. 70
4.4. Rocky bed of Taujica Creek at high water ..................................................... 72
4.5. Truck paths entering Taujica Creek, 1850 ..................................................... 73
4.6.a. Mouth of Taujica Creek, looking upstream ................................................. 74
4.6.b. Mouth of Taujica Creek, looking downstream ............................................. 74
4.7. Quebrada de Arenas works, 1850s ............................................................... 76
4.8. Lower Quebrada de Arenas ............................................................................ 77
4.9. Contemporary site of Quebrada de Arenas works ......................................... 78
4.10. Contemporary site of Corte Sara works ......................................................... 79
4.11. Contemporary site of Los Mescales works ..................................................... 80
4.12. High bank on Río Jalan, at Corte Sara ......................................................... 81
4.13. High bank on Río Guayape, at Los Mescales ................................................. 82
4.14. High bank on Río Guayape, at Las Guapoinoles ............................................ 83
4.15. Bank on Río Aguán, at Quebrada de Arenas ............................................... 84
4.16. Landscape near Piedra Blanca ....................................................................... 86
4.17. Shallow stream bed, Quebrada de Francia ...................................................... 87
4.18. Landscape near Francia .................................................................................. 88
4.19. Landscape near Corte Sara ............................................................................ 89
4.20. Landscape near Corte Sara ............................................................................ 90
4.21. Alluvial landscape, Río Aguán ................................................................. 91
4.22. Alluvial landscape, Río Limon ....................................................................... 92
7.1. John Carmichael's map .................................................................................. 153
8.1. Ocampo's sites in the upper Río Patuca watershed ....................................... 172
9.1. Shipping manifest of Frederic Debrot .......................................................... 181

9.2. Shipping manifest of Frederic Debrot .......................................................... 182

9.3. Mahogany cut by Binney, Melhado and Company, Upper Aguán valley, 1878-79 ............................................................... 184

10.1. Mahogany rivers of northern Honduras, 1830s-1880s ........................................ 197

10.2. Mahogany on Río Patuca, December 1999 ................................................ 201
ABSTRACT

Combining archival and field investigation, this study reconstructs the historical geography of mahogany in Honduras. Focusing on the north coast, its temporal focus stretches from the mid-eighteenth century through the last years of the nineteenth century. This incorporates the earliest stages of the commercial mahogany trade in Honduras, its decline and subsequent rebirth, its boom period in the mid-1800s, and its eventual decline.

The initial chapters of the study address cultural aspects of the mahogany trade. The mahogany extraction process is examined in detail to provide a foundation for discussion of the expansion and development of the trade itself. With this framework, it becomes possible to explore the trade's legacies in the contemporary Honduran landscape, including investigation of toponyms and relict mahogany sites.

In the chronological narrative, particular emphasis is placed on the rebirth of the trade in the 1830s under the auspices of Francisco Morázan and Marshall Bennett, as well as the boom years of the 1840s and 1850s. This period was characterized by sustained expansion up the main river valleys of the north coast. In the Aguán valley, rival mahogany interests succeeded in generating a great deal of diplomatic activity concerning the sovereignty of the Miskito Shore as well as a litany of armed incursions and property seizures. Ultimately, as the boom passed so too did much of the conflict. As the trade declined in importance, British mahogany cutters were supplanted by Honduran and American concerns, and mahogany was eventually replaced by the fruit trade.
The impacts of the mahogany trade were ultimately limited to the north coast itself. Though lucrative to a small number of individuals, mahogany failed to generate significant returns to the state, and the region remained as isolated from state influence as it had before the trade began. Yet the trade had substantial local impacts, opening the lowland forests to development and generating a flurry of local economic and political activity. These impacts are still evident in the contemporary cultural landscape, although mahogany has largely disappeared from the river valleys of the north coast.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The post-contact history of Central America has frequently been characterized as a long and complicated tale of economic booms and busts, political and social upheaval, and foreign intervention (Helms 1971, MacLeod 1973, Nietschmann 1973, Woodward 1985). While the legacies of this history are subject to debate, one of its more notable aspects is the creation of a diverse cultural landscape, a landscape that reflects the very complexity out of which it arose. Although the extraction and use of various woods has been part of this landscape for hundreds if not thousands of years, it was not until the mid-1700s that mahogany emerged as the true king of the tropical forest. For nearly 150 years, mahogany stirred the human tempest of lowland Central America, influencing government, economy, and society and becoming an integral part of the ongoing isthmian narrative. Despite its near-ubiquity during this long era, however, mahogany remains a curiously forgotten piece of the Central American puzzle. Nowhere is this more true than in Honduras, where the lucrative mahogany trade has received only cursory attention from those seeking to unravel the historical geography of this enigmatic republic.

That mahogany should receive such limited attention is somewhat surprising. It has been addressed at varying levels of significance in previous research on the Honduran north coast, but in most instances it has been peripheral to analysis of political and commercial conflict between European, national, and eventually North American interests in Honduras. Naylor's (1967) discussion of the mahogany trade and British migration to the Miskito1 Shore was the first sustained effort to detail aspects of the
mahogany trade in Honduras, but gave scant attention to the full context of the trade in Honduras itself. That study was supplemented with additional insights in a longer work (1989) detailing the history of informal British imperialism in the Bay of Honduras and the Miskito Shore; it is by far the most complete work on British involvement in the region. Yet Naylor's political focus left many of the most intriguing questions about the mahogany trade unanswered, particularly details about its expansion and its role in the ongoing development of nineteenth-century Honduras. Mack (1997) briefly discussed mahogany's role in the Trujillo hinterlands, but again the subject was peripheral to the intent of the study, and the substantive questions concerning mahogany left unaddressed.

In particular, some of the most fundamental questions concerning mahogany in Honduras have yet to be satisfactorily considered. What prompted the rise of the mahogany trade on Honduras' north coast? Who was involved in the trade, and why? How did the quest for mahogany alter the human and physical landscapes of northern Honduras? What was the place of mahogany in the broader rubric of Central American political, economic, and social life? And what are the geographical legacies of the trade today?

This dissertation answers these questions by reconstructing the historical geography of mahogany on the north coast of Honduras. Its temporal focus stretches from the mid-eighteenth century through the final years of the nineteenth century, a period that includes the earliest stages of the trade, its rebirth and boom period, and its decline. However, this dissertation is much more than a chronological reconstruction of the mahogany trade. It is a historical geography in the fullest sense, placing the mahogany trade within the context of the landscape from which it arose, the legacies it
left behind, and the ultimate impacts of the trade on the complex mosaic of contemporary Honduras. In this respect, the study adds one of the missing chapters to the ongoing narrative of the north coast, a dynamic tale that yet remains to be fully told.

**Mahogany in the Americas**

Mahogany is the commonly used commercial name for the genus *Swietenia*, which includes three recognized species, and a host of similar woods from Africa and Asia. The word itself has been traced to the Nigerian *oganwo*, and likely entered the English language after the British occupied Jamaica in 1655. Within fifty years of that event, mahogany was a commonly recognized part of the English language, with printed usage as early as 1671 (Symonds 1934a, Lamb 1966). The Spanish term for mahogany, *caoba*, is one of the handful of legacy words left by the Arawak Indians, and was first noted by the early chroniclers of the Columbian encounter, including Oviedo y Valdes and Las Casas (Lamb 1966).

Symonds (1934a) claims that three distinct 'varieties' of mahogany were recognized by the end of the eighteenth century: Spanish (or San Domingo), Cuban, and Honduras. A cursory review of his descriptions reveals that Spanish and Cuban mahogany were likely differentiated only by their local growth characteristics, while Honduras mahogany is distinct from both. Interestingly, English merchants in Jamaica claimed that mahogany from that island was superior to the three mentioned above, although it was likely the same species as that found on the other islands of the Caribbean. Much of the confusion was eliminated when mahogany became of sufficient commercial importance to receive the attention of botanists in the mid-1700s. The earliest classification of mahogany derived from an illustration in Catesby's (1743)
Natural History of Carolina, Florida, and the Bahama Islands, and by the late 1700s *Swietenia mahogani* became the accepted botanical classification of the species (Lamb 1966). Until the mid-1800s, all American mahogany fell under this rubric, although it was commonly recognized that mahogany from the mainland had different characteristics than that found in the western Caribbean. In 1886 *S. macrophylla* was described as a distinct species, while a third commonly recognized species, *S. humilis*, had been described earlier in the same century (Record and Mell 1924, Lamb 1966).

**Distribution and Characteristics of Mahogany**

Each of the three species of mahogany has a vastly different natural range (Figures 1.1, 1.2). The distribution of *S. mahogani* includes southern Florida and the Bahamas as well as the islands of the Greater Antilles. *S. humilis* is found only on the Pacific margin of Middle America from southern Mexico to Costa Rica (Record and Mell 1924, Lamb 1966). The species with the greatest range is *S. macrophylla*, commonly referred to as big-leaf mahogany. *S. macrophylla* is found from Mexico through Central America to the southern Amazon Basin over more than forty degrees of latitude (Record and Mell 1924, Lamb 1966, Veríssimo, et al. 1995). Of these three species, the current study focuses on *S. macrophylla*, which occurs naturally around the Bay of Honduras and on the Atlantic side of the Central American isthmus. Despite its presence on the Central American isthmus, *S. humilis* is not addressed because much of the available documentation suggests that the Pacific mahogany trade has been of limited historical importance in a commercial sense. In 1857, at the height of the Atlantic mahogany trade, William Wells noted that small amounts of mahogany were cut in the Goascaran and
Figure 1.2. Distribution of mahogany, South America (Lamb 1966)
Choluteca watersheds of southern Honduras and then floated a short distance to the port of Amapala, where the timber was milled and shipped. Wells took care to note that "... the mahogany trade on the Pacific ... will yet require many years to become remunerative and permanent, there being no sure market for the wood ..." (Wells 1857: 347). The situation remained unchanged even well into the twentieth century (Zon and Sparhawk 1923). The historical geography of *S. humilis* merits, perhaps, additional consideration at a later date.

The mahogany tree is an emergent, frequently attaining heights of 100 or more feet (Record and Mell 1924, Snook 1998). At such heights its trunk is several feet in diameter, the bole straight and free of branches for as much as sixty feet, and supported by large buttress roots (Figure 1.3) (Lamb 1966, Record and Mell 1924, Snook 1998). In its natural habitat, mahogany occurs not in stands but scattered through the forest, often at no more than one or two trees per acre (Record and Mell 1924, Snook 1998). This distribution accounts for the distinct dendritic pattern commonly associated with mahogany extraction, both historically (see Chapter II) and in more recent decades (Gullison and Hardner 1993: 6, Veríssimo et al. 1995: 52, Whitman et al. 1997: 90). Another of the more salient characteristics of naturally occurring mahogany is its age distribution. Mahogany is found in essentially even-aged cohorts, a fact that has been attributed to the impact of catastrophic disturbance as well as the regenerative requirements of the tree itself. Mature trees can disperse mahogany seeds across large gaps in the forest, but limited viability of those seeds (less than six months even under controlled conditions) can account for the failure of the tree to regenerate in areas that have been logged (Lamb 1966, Snook 1996, 1998). In response, mahogany extraction
Figure 1.3. Mahogany on the Río Paulaya, eastern Honduras
(Courtesy W.V. Davidson)
has generally been selective, assuming a shifting, seasonal nature as cutters moved from tract to tract removing all of the commercially valuable trees (see Chapters 5-8). A great deal of emphasis has recently been placed on understanding the ecology and growth characteristics of mahogany throughout the American tropics, largely as a result of increased concern over the conservation and management of tropical forests the world over (Veríssimo et al. 1995, Snook 1996). Despite this increased attention, contemporary scientific understanding of mahogany ecology remains generally poor, particularly in South America (Gullison et al. 1996). However, $S. \text{macrophylla}$ in Middle America has been more extensively studied, making it somewhat easier to consider big-leaf mahogany in its Honduran context.

Generally speaking, $S. \text{macrophylla}$ is found in the northern half of Honduras, particularly in the tropical rain forests of the lower mountain slopes and the river valleys of the Caribbean lowlands (Zon and Sparhawk 1923, Record and Mell 1924, Lamb 1966, West and Augelli 1989). In particular, the rich alluvial lowlands bordering the major rivers of Honduras' north coast were abundant in mahogany and other tropical hardwoods before development altered the landscape (Squier 1855, Wells 1857, West and Augelli 1989). Honduran mahogany is generally considered to be soft, easily worked wood with a broad, straight grain (Hodgson 1757, Record and Mell 1924, Symonds 1934a). As elsewhere, however, the character of the wood can vary greatly depending upon its general conditions of growth, particularly soil type. Mahogany found growing in moist, rich soils tends to produce soft wood with a broad grain and generally light color. That grown in more difficult conditions such as rocky soil or less abundant moisture produces harder wood with a closer grain somewhat darker in color (Record and Mell 1924, Lamb
Growing conditions can affect the tenor of the wood to such a degree that *S. macrophylla* and *S. mahogani* are almost indistinguishable from each other when grown under the same conditions; the same purportedly holds true for *S. humilis* (Lamb 1966).

**Uses of Mahogany**

When Samuel Record called mahogany "the most valuable timber tree in tropical America", his frame of reference was the early twentieth century, but mahogany had been used and valued in the Americas for hundreds of years (Record and Mell 1924). Although it was almost certainly used by pre-Columbian cultures for a wide range of purposes, much of the record concerning mahogany before contact has been lost. Edwards (1965: 37) suggested that hardwoods may have been used for dugout canoes in South America; such canoes are today one of the more common indigenous uses for mahogany and similar woods in Middle America. Soon after European contact, the wood came to the attention of the Spanish, who recognized its beauty and used it in the cathedral on Santo Domingo in 1514 (Record and Mell 1924, Lamb 1966). Some of the earliest ships constructed by the Spanish in the New World utilized mahogany, and it was also likely used in a wide range of domestic construction, including house frames and roof supports (Chaloner and Fleming 1850, Chambers 1851, Record and Mell 1924, Lamb 1966). Mahogany from the Americas was used in some of the ships of the Spanish Armada, and Spanish sources for mahogany in the early colonial era included the islands of the Caribbean as well as Mexico, probably signaling the use of at least two different types of mahogany (Chaloner and Fleming 1850, Chambers 1851, Payson 1926, Lamb 1966).
Like the Spanish, the English were well aware of the value of mahogany for ship
construction, especially for the Royal Navy (Albion 1926). Sir Walter Raleigh is reputed
to have used mahogany for ship repairs as early as 1595 (Chambers 1851, Record and
Mell 1924, Lamb 1966). Catesby (1743) was among the first to comment on the
beneficial ship characteristics of mahogany, including durability and resistance to
gunshot, but later accounts refer primarily to its buoyancy and resistance to rot (Chaloner
and Fleming 1850, Chambers 1851). Even extremely old mahogany Spanish ships
captured by the English were broken up and the pieces redistributed, including the
famous 'Gibraltar' tables found in most British naval vessels by the 1800s (Chaloner and

Mahogany probably began to be imported into Great Britain for various uses by
the late 1600s; Symonds (1934a) traced the earliest mention of such imports to 1699,
when 'Jamaica mohogany' is mentioned in the official import statistics. Mahogany began
to be employed in the English furniture trade by the first quarter of the eighteenth
century, and was sufficiently appreciated that royal and commoner alike were aware of its
beauty (Symonds 1934b). Mahogany from the West Indies was used for finer, more
delicate pieces, while big-leaf mahogany from the mainland became valued for cabinets
and larger, more lustrous pieces (Record and Mell 1924, Symonds 1934a, Lamb 1966).
Many of the most famous names in furniture, including Chippendale, Sheraton, Phyfe,
and Hepplewhite plied their trade during what many consider the 'golden age of
mahogany', from the 1720s to the 1820s (Lamb 1935, Lamb 1966). By the early
twentieth century, mahogany had been used in a myriad of additional ways, including
railway cars, interior decoration for businesses and private vessels, musical instruments,
and plywood veneer (Lamb 1935). In the producing regions, mahogany has also been employed in countless ways, including railroad ties for the banana railways (Wilson 1968) and domestic construction as well as furniture, which remains the most popular use of mahogany even today.

**The North Coast of Honduras**

In Honduras, it is not at all uncommon to hear people refer to *la costa norte* (the north coast) with no specific frame of reference; the coast is generally perceived as that northern zone adjoining the Caribbean, including the Bay Islands. Such a definition suffices for most who need only to differentiate the region from, for instance, the mountainous interior or Mosquitia. In the current study, the term is even more problematic. Certainly the low coastline between the Honduras – Guatemala border and the flatlands to the east of Trujillo fall within any broad definition of the north coast. But exactly how far inland does that apply? The mahogany trade extended far up the watersheds of the Ríos Ulúa and Aguán, including a number of reasonably large tributaries, ephemeral swamps, and seasonal streams. Many would also claim the main rivers of eastern Honduras – the Negro, the Platano, the Patuca – require inclusion in any consideration of the Honduran mahogany trade. However, the study is, in a very real sense, limited by the actual extent of mahogany logging in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Thus the primary focus of the study lies between the Ulúa and the Aguán, with occasional mention of the trade farther east to the Río Negro. The Río Patuca, on the other hand, is more difficult to justify for inclusion in the study, especially since the historical focus of the trade on that river was far inland, in the drainages of interior Olancho. Nevertheless, the Patuca has been included in the study for much the same
reasons that other rivers occur in the text: it is where the document trail leads, and a full rendering of the trade during its growth, expansion, and eventual decline requires such consideration. So to use *la costa norte* to denote the parameters of the study is a necessary generality, and should be cautiously appraised.

Broadly speaking, the study area falls within Departments of Cortes, Atlantida, Colon, and Gracias a Dios (west to east). The northern boundary of the study area (Figure 1.4) is the narrow coastal plain stretching roughly from Omoa to the mouth of the Río Negro (Barra Plaplaya), a distance of approximately 270 km between 84°50' and 88°10' west longitude. South of this narrow plain lies the extensive coastal ranges of northern Honduras, including the northernmost Sierra de Omoa, the Sierra Nombre de Dios, and the Sierra de Paya. These ranges generally denote the historic southern boundary for the mahogany trade in Honduras, although the mahogany concession of Francisco Morazán (see Chapter 6) included all lands south to the fifteenth parallel. This was likely a creative way to appropriate the mahogany of the river valleys, which determine the true southern boundaries of the north coast mahogany trade.

In particular, the coastal ranges are interrupted by the valleys of the Ríos Ulúa (Valle de Ulúa) and Aguán (Valle del Aguán), as well as a host of smaller rivers that drain generally northward into the Bay of Honduras. The Ulúa valley (Figure 1.5) is a broad, fertile alluvial valley extending south into the interior. The Río Ulúa cuts through the plain before veering west near Pimienta and eventually entering the western highlands. Near this same point is a junction with the Río Comayagua, and several smaller valleys are found on the Ulúa's main tributaries. The lower valley also contains the lower Río Chamelecon, which flows almost parallel to the Ulúa until it trends
Figure 1.4. Major mahogany rivers of northern Honduras
Figure 1.5. The Valle de Ulúa
westward in the vicinity of La Lima. The Valle del Aguán (Figure 1.6) also trends southwest, and its flat alluvial plain is generally unimpeded until the Aguán enters the mountainous interior approximately 170 km inland. The lower valley is split by the Aguán and the Ríos Chapagua and Limón. Among the most notable of the smaller rivers on the north coast are those that traverse the broad section alluvium between Tela and La Ceiba (the Ríos Lean, San Juan, and Cuero) and the Río Papaloteca between La Ceiba and Trujillo.

The north coast, including the major river valleys, lies in the *tierra caliente* (hot land), with generally high daytime temperatures (85°-90° F) throughout the year and average nighttime temperatures around 70° F; there is little temperature variation between the coldest and hottest months (West and Augelli 1989: 40). Precipitation, however, exhibits a distinct wet-dry seasonality. The rainy season of winter (*invierno*) is generally between June and December, with the most intense rains falling after September. In late August or early September there is usually a short respite from the rains, but the true dry season, or summer (*verano*), does not arrive until January. Rain is then infrequent until the onset of the next rainy season. Though most of the original vegetation has been cleared from the north coast, the *tierra caliente* is well known for its lush tropical growth, including the rapidly vanishing lowland tropical rainforests. Segments of these forests exist along the more remote watersheds of the north coast, but the region has been largely cleared of its original vegetation; some locations, such as in the Aguán valley, now appear as more arid savanna-like landscapes.
Figure 1.6. The Valle del Aguán
On Historical Geography

When one is confronted with large blank spots on the map of geographical understanding, there is little choice but to begin sketching in the details as they become available. This study appropriates some of the most enduring and fundamental methods of historical geography to address the blank spot that is the Honduran mahogany trade. In particular, it rests heavily on the foundation for historical geography first codified by Carl Sauer (1941). Sauer saw historical geography as perhaps the most important of geographic endeavors, a broad-based genetic approach to understanding people and the land through time. Sauer's methodology, as such, relied primarily on empirically-based narrative and description. Such an approach to historical geography has been characterized as "...empathetic reconstruction and contextual interpretation, undertaken more to depict reality than to depict theory..." (Lovell 1992: 6). Indeed, this approach has been characterized as one of historical geography's most substantial contributions to the field of human knowledge (Harris 1978).

Beyond this, one of the more intriguing challenges of historical geography is the reconstruction of past cultural landscapes. Indeed, Sauer (1925) held that careful reconstruction of cultural landscapes was one of the most important tasks of historical geography. Sauer's notion of the cultural landscape, however, has undergone a great deal of critical review in the ensuing seven decades. Definitions of the cultural landscape now encompass a wide range of social and humanistic inquiry, and the concept is one of the more lively topics of debate in contemporary human geography (Cosgrove and Daniels 1988, Jackson 1989, Cosgrove 1994, Rowntree 1996, Groth 1997). Nevertheless, at their most fundamental level cultural landscapes are still the product of human interaction...
with, and transformation of, the physical landscape through time. This interaction is the means through which human cultures express themselves, and requires full consideration of the material and non-material elements of culture (Sauer 1941, Parsons 1994).

Because the human relationship with the physical world is fundamentally fluid and dynamic, these landscapes require both spatially and temporally informed perspectives to be fully understood (Sauer 1925, Meinig 1979, Lovell 1992, Appleton 1997, Harris 2001). Hence the value of historical geography for filling in the problematic gaps in our understanding of the events and processes that have shaped the ongoing narrative of Central America.

**Sourcing the Mahogany Trade**

One of the most challenging yet fundamental aspects of historical geography is the need to master archival sources; such mastery requires creative and engaged use of the archival record in "... an ongoing, evolving interaction between the scholar and the voices of the past ..." (Harris 2001: 331). Because the present study focuses a great deal of attention on the role of British citizens in the development of the mahogany trade, archival research has of necessity included sources outside of Central America. The greatest single source for documents concerning the activities of Great Britain and British citizens in Central America is the Great Britain Public Record Office (PRO). In particular, the records of the Foreign and Colonial Offices contain extensive diplomatic correspondence, memorials, and commercial records. Two separate visits to the PRO, totaling five weeks in the spring and fall of 2000, uncovered an embarrassment of riches for the Honduran mahogany trade, including a nearly unbroken record of the trade for much of its boom period in the 1840s and 1850s. Additional materials create a contextual
framework for the trade, including events in the Bay of Honduras, Central America, and the western Caribbean. Among the most exciting and important materials in the archives, however, are a series of three manuscript maps discovered on the initial visit in the maps and plans of the Foreign Office records (Carmichael 1848d, PRO 1850, Usher 1850). Together, these three maps constitute a valuable source for reconstructing the mahogany trade east of Trujillo during the 1840s, and they have been a key component of the current study (see below, Detailing the 1840s). Discovery of contemporary maps is a rare and welcome occurrence in historical geography, particularly when they contain an extensive array of details and have been constructed with such obvious care.

Beyond the wealth of materials in the PRO, the other key archival resource for reconstructing the mahogany trade is the Archivo Nacional de Honduras (ANH) in Tegucigalpa. As with many of the archives in Latin America, a substantial portion of the documentary material of the ANH has been lost or exists in various stages of decay. Compounding the difficulty of work at the ANH is the generally poor cataloging of its resources; most documents are stacked in loose piles organized only by year. That said, in recent years the conscientious work of its current director, Licenciado Carlos Maldonado, has transformed the archive considerably. Not only has he initiated the Herculean task of cataloging the archive, but he has also increased the overall accessibility of the archives for research. Many of the materials that exist in the ANH are similar to those of the PRO, including diplomatic correspondence, commercial transactions, and trade accounts (cuentas). Research at the ANH in the spring and summer of 2001, totaling seven weeks of intensive archival work, uncovered a substantial array of information detailing the Honduran mahogany trade. Though the record is
unfortunately less extensive than that found at the PRO, this research was able to address several gaps in the narrative of the trade during the nineteenth century. Among the most useful materials are several cuentas and key details concerning timber concessions, as well as supplemental materials for the Morazán era and the latter half of the nineteenth century. A brief trip to the archives in January 2002 complemented the earlier research with a review of available government newspapers (La Gaceta, El Redactor) from the mid-1840s to the late 1870s.

Preliminary research plans for the dissertation also included the Archivo General de Centro America (AGCA) in Guatemala City. Though its dealings with matters Honduran is generally limited to the colonial period, the potential for documentation concerning the early mahogany trade required investigation of its resources. An initial foray into the card catalog (fichero) at this well-catalogued archive in summer 1999 suggested over one hundred potential leads. However, subsequent research for a two-week period in the fall of 2000 failed to establish any relevant sources of information.

One of the enduring attractions of historical geography is the opportunity to combine archive and field into a coherent, meaningful synthesis of a particular place or problem. Indeed, it may be impossible to do otherwise for any real understanding of the geographical past. For Sauer (1941) there was certainly no question that historical geography demands field exploration, a perspective that has recently been affirmed by Harris' (2001) consideration of the complementary relationship between archive and field. Though the primary sources of documentation for this dissertation lie buried in the repositories of Honduras and Great Britain, the very nature of the mahogany trade as an extractive activity requires a more substantial consideration of the physical landscapes,
sites, and situation of mahogany. Accordingly, this dissertation also incorporates insights from exploration of relict mahogany landscapes. First intimations of the constraints imposed by the physical landscape on mahogany production arose largely in response to a brief reconnaissance of the Valle del Aguán in summer 1999. An extended traverse of the Río Patuca in late 1999 reinforced several of these insights and provided a more general perspective on the trade on the upper Patuca. The most productive field excursion, however, was an intensive visit to the wilds of Olancho and back through the Valle del Aguán in January 2002. This latest foray located several key mahogany sites in the upper Patuca watershed (Corte Sara, Los Mescales, Las Guapinoles), confirmed several hunches regarding settlements and landscapes associated with the mahogany trade (Francia, Piedra Blanca), and allowed more extensive consideration of the physical contexts of mahogany extraction. Perhaps most importantly, these field excursions ultimately led to "... that high moment when the past is clear ..." (Sauer 1941:); such high moments are rare, and can only arise through the creative combination of field and archive.

**A Note on Maps**

During the nineteenth century, a great deal of foreign attention was directed at Central America. Resurgent interest in a trans-isthmian crossing, the emergence of the United States on the world stage, and ongoing commercial exploration attracted the attention of a great number of commentators, both academic and not. One of the fruits of this interest in Central America was a voluminous printed record, including travel accounts, monographs, commercial reports, and maps. Though these sources must always be used with caution, it is also worthwhile to discuss some of the more
problematic aspects of using contemporary maps to reconstruct the mahogany trade; three of the most representative examples serve as worthy examples.

The first such example addresses the map generated by Ephraim George Squier during the 1850s. The Squier map was primarily drafted to indicate the projected path for the Honduras Interoceanic Railway, and its concurrent emphasis on the topography and settlements of western Honduras reflects this intent. Unfortunately, Squier's description of the mahogany trade (1855: 172-179, 257-262), which is valuable in its own right, is not reflected in any way on the map. This is troubling for two reasons, both arising from Squier's claim to "... depend almost entirely on my own observation ... as there are no authorities ... upon which to proceed ... " (1855: vii) in compiling his work. The first problem stems from indications that Squier appropriated, verbatim yet unattributed, several passages of text from previously published travel accounts and treatises in portions of his description of the mahogany trade (compare Henderson 1809: 60-61 and Squier 1855: 175). The question thus arises of how valuable Squier's perspective may be, even for those areas of western Honduras where he purportedly paid careful attention to his surroundings, including the mahogany paths of the Ulúa valley (1855: 257).

More problematic for attempts to understand the geography of mahogany in nineteenth century Honduras, however, is his perpetuation of the inherited cartographic inaccuracies of earlier maps (i.e. Jeffreys 1776). Accordingly, Squier's map not only renders several rivers of the north coast as north-south drainages into the interior, but also severely misrepresents the upper Patuca watershed (Figure 1.7). Most obviously, the map has been rotated such that the rivers bear no relation to their actual cardinal directions. The Río Jalan, for example, is depicted north of Juticalpa, and the Ríos Guallambre...
Figure 1.7. Squier’s depiction of the upper Río Patuca watershed (Squier 1855)
(Guayambre) and Guayape are similarly misrepresented. In addition, the Guayambre appears to join the Patuca far downstream from the Guayape. Though this is not unusual in the sense that all maps shift as any given area is more fully explored and understood, these inaccuracies were in turn appropriated by William Wells, whose 1857 map makes more explicit attempts to locate mahogany works in eastern Honduras.

Wells, of course, was more concerned with the gold washings he encountered in Olancho than the timber trade, but his map nevertheless fails to address the glaring errors of Squier's map or even adequately identify those locations he himself purported to visit. Wells quite obviously used the earlier Squier map as a base, adding detail when necessary. But unlike Squier, Wells confined his efforts to a larger-scale rendition of eastern Honduras. The map itself, however, only makes minor adjustments to the upper Patuca (Figure 1.8). Though Wells added key topographic details and even corrected part of the rotational error of Squier, the main fluvial features remain distorted. The directional relationships of the Ríos Guayambre, Guayape, and Jalan have been rendered somewhat more accurately, but their courses and proximity to settlements leaves much to be desired. In particular, the relative position of the Jalan and Guayape with Juticalpa is surprisingly poor; Wells provided a detailed description of his trip to the Río Jalan from Juticalpa and also mentions other travels in the same area. The ultimate difficulty with Wells' map, however, is its unfortunate lack of positional accuracy for the mahogany works he either visited (Corte Sara) or discussed with Opolonio Ocampo and others. Wells identified several mahogany works, but placed them in such a generally haphazard fashion on his map that attempts to visit those locales 150 years later are problematic.
Figure 1.8. Wells’ depiction of the upper Patuca watershed (Wells 1857)
That said, the maps of both Squier and Wells can both be used (cautiously) as general guidelines for field exploration of the mahogany trade in the nineteenth century, and indeed have been used in the current study to identify the likely locations of several former mahogany works.

**Detailing the 1840s**

In a similar vein, account must be taken of a detailed map of British logging activities outside of Trujillo in the 1840s. Though the map includes substantial detail, its author unfortunately failed to include his name anywhere on the document. However, supplementary evidence from the archives strongly suggests that the author of the map was Edward P. Usher, member of one of the oldest families in Belize (Price 1861). Usher was actively involved in the Honduran mahogany trade during the 1840s, developing and managing works for a variety of concerns in the lower Aguán valley. One of his duties in this capacity was apparently as a surveyor, which trade he sought to extend after his mahogany-related employment ended in the 1850s (Faber and Rhys 1857: 92, Mathe 1861: 94). As part of those efforts, in 1861 Usher submitted a partial tracing of his "Plan of Mosquito and of the adjacent Port of Trujillo" to the Colonial Office in London. That plan, according to Usher, was based on explorations from 1845 through 1853, "...this being revised and corrected from Plans done by him in 1848 and 1850." (Usher 1861). The latest date for mahogany operations on the previously unsourced plan is 1849, and the title is virtually identical to that of Usher's later plan. Additionally, the later tracing bears strong resemblance to portions of the earlier map. It thus seems logical to assert Usher's authorship of the earlier manuscript map, in all likelihood the 1850 document.
Although the authorship of the map now seems clear, perhaps even more important is the degree of detail included in the map. It is, quite simply, one of the most valuable sources extant for identifying the actors involved in the mahogany trade during the 1840s, and similarly valuable for denoting the extent and general aspect of the mahogany works in the Trujillo hinterland during this key period. Usher's attention to detail even included a detailed rendering of the landmark Piedra Blanca (Figure 1.9a, 1.9.b), making it a much simpler task to correlate his information with that of contemporary maps. This and similar details, in fact, have proven invaluable in reconstructing the locations of past mahogany operations in the Aguán area. Nevertheless, as with the Squier and Wells maps mentioned above, the Usher map must be used cautiously. It is by no means the product of a modern scientific survey, and its status as a manuscript map leaves numerous features subject to liberal interpretation. Though Usher included a scale on his map, it is impossible to accurately overlay it on modern maps; mountains and stream courses are often stylized, and many of the directions in which features trend are incorrect. Even with these shortcomings, however, the plan remains a valuable source for reconstruction of the mid-nineteenth century mahogany trade.

**Topics of Consideration**

This dissertation, in its efforts to fully convey the scope and impacts of the Honduran mahogany trade, is comprised of two parts. The first section, consisting of the second, third, and fourth chapters, may best be considered as the more explicitly cultural portion of the study. Chapter 2 explores the process of mahogany extraction, from forest to sea. Mahogany logging is portrayed as a curiously systematic process, dependent on
Figure 1.9.a. Piedra Blanca (Courtesy J.R. Samson)

Figure 1.9.b. Piedra Blanca as rendered by E.P. Usher (Usher 1850)
physical geography as well as the mandate of humans. The next two chapters bring the
cultural landscapes of mahogany into sharper focus. Chapter 3 explores the toponyms
associated with mahogany logging. Given its role as a primary economic activity, it is
not surprising that the mahogany trade stimulated new exploration and development.
One of the residual legacies of this process is the naming of landscape features. In the
case of Honduras, those toponyms are also associated with the domination of English-
speaking interests in the mahogany trade. These toponyms are perhaps some of the most
compelling clues for identifying the general parameters of mahogany logging in
Honduras, as well as the importance of the trade in cultural memory. The third chapter in
the 'cultural' section relies on field observation to reconstruct the landscapes associated
with the mahogany trade. In particular, visitation of relict mahogany sites allows further
exploration of the trade's legacies in modern Honduras as well as more in-depth
consideration of the physical constraints and landscapes associated with the trade itself.

The second section of the dissertation details the ascension, expansion, and
eventual decline of the mahogany trade, from its earliest manifestations until the fruit
trade supplanted it in the waning years of the nineteenth century. Chapter 5 explores the
roots of the trade in eighteenth century, when mahogany surpassed logwood as the most
desired wood from Central America. The next chapter details the rebirth of the
mahogany trade in the 1830s. Francisco Morazán’s enormous mahogany concession
provided the impetus for this rebirth, and at the same time created a template for much of
the ensuing period. Most notably, the Morazán contract and ensuing competition for the
mahogany resources of the north coast rekindled the protracted debate over the
sovereignty of the Miskito Shore. This debate would be the dominant framework
throughout the boom period, which reached its peak in the 1840s and 1850s. The boom period is the subject of Chapter 7, which also details the territorial expansion and sustained impetus of the mahogany trade during that period in the Trujillo hinterlands. Such expansion, though extensive, was the result of but a few individuals, whose commercial ambition prompted much of the diplomatic and military strife during this period. Once the boom period ended, so too did the intense competition for resources and territory, and the trade entered a period of unimpeded activity. Chapter 8 discusses this curiously quiet period in detail, focusing on ongoing attempts to exploit new mahogany resources. The same chapter also explores the gradual shift to include other tropical timbers in logging activities, a move prompted by the passing of mahogany’s boom years. As the mahogany forests of the north coast gradually receded, the stage was set for introduction of a new boom product. Chapter 9 discusses the transition from mahogany to fruit, a process largely contingent on the earlier success of the mahogany trade in the nineteenth century. This study, then, attempts to reconstruct the ongoing narrative of the trade as well as the context, constraints, and legacies that link it to the cultural landscape of the north coast.

Notes

1 For much of the time period covered in this dissertation, the indigenous group and the part of eastern Honduras and Nicaragua bearing their name were referred to as Mosquito. The preferred spelling and usage is now Miskito, and as such is used throughout this study to for the group, and when referring to the Miskito Shore.
CHAPTER 2
MAHOGANY EXTRACTION IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY HONDURAS

During the height of the Central American mahogany trade in the mid-nineteenth century, mahogany works (*cortes*) stretched from Panama to Mexico, fingerling inland along major watercourses and the alluvial flatlands of the Caribbean and Atlantic littoral. Despite this wide range, the trade assumed virtually identical form regardless of the region in which it was conducted. This commonality allows a reconstruction of the Honduran trade to be based on a wide range of sources. Most observations of and insights into the processes of getting mahogany from the forest to market come from the travelers, adventurers, and diplomats passing through the region, especially during the nineteenth century. A substantial number of this group eventually published, in one form or another, accounts of their exploits in Central America, and it is their observations that establish the foundation for a historical perspective on the extraction process.

Historically, the process itself maintained a fairly predictable form from its earliest incarnations until well into the twentieth century, when mechanization changed the basis of the industry. In Honduras, as throughout Central America, timber extraction was a well-defined process, contingent on seasonal, social, and financial constraints as well as the vagaries of local geography. The mahogany trade was highly dependent on the wet-dry seasonality of the tropics, primarily in its need for a reliable means of moving timber to market but also in the limitations it placed upon both man and beast. The majority of work was confined to the dry season, when workers identified standing timber, created vast networks of roads through the forest, and were able to prepare timber
most easily. During the rainy season timber was brought down to the coast for shipping, and the entire process would resume as soon as new tracts of timber were accessible. It was not uncommon for the entire process to take six to eight months, and some concessions were worked almost year-round.

Scouting the Forest

The initial step was simple: to find mahogany in sufficient quantities to merit the sizeable expenditure of time and money involved in establishing a commercial operation. Since mahogany is usually found scattered throughout the forest rather than in stands, the task was more difficult than might be supposed. Each mahogany operation hired its own scouts (hunters), who were responsible for identifying and locating trees for the season's operations. As the success of a season's work rested on the individual's ability to identify a sufficient number of commercially valuable trees, hunters were often paid higher wages than mere laborers, and it was not uncommon for them to be paid per tree suitable for cutting (Squier 1855: 174, Morris 1883: 47). Given the importance of the task, hunters were usually chosen from the most clever or experienced woodsmen available. Hunters would usually be hired to scout trees in August or September, just before the fall rains. In late August mahogany leaves begin losing their color, making them easier to distinguish from the surrounding flora (Henderson 1811: 58, Lamb 1966) and skilled hunters would climb the tallest trees they could find and take advantage of any elevated terrain in their efforts to identify trees (Henderson 1811: 57-58).

However, scouts were required to do more than identify standing trees. Almost equally important was their ability to locate trees that could profitably be removed from the forest after cutting. Thus, the scout was required to locate trees as near as possible to
the works, or any accessible watercourses, or at the very least in areas where workers
could construct truck paths to useful watercourses with the least amount of effort
expended. Hunters could further prove their worth by locating trees that minimized the
construction of a second series of roads during one season or avoiding smaller trees that
would not justify the time and labor to remove them from the forest (Wells 1857: 349,
Gibbs 1883: 121). However, by the early twentieth century, when large tracts of land
were more difficult to secure and the most easily accessible mahogany had already been
cut, the scouting process involved more substantial efforts on the behalf of
concessionaires. These latter efforts usually entailed a speculator and several indigenous
guides setting off to search for trees, which could take several weeks of exhausting trips
into the forest and poling pitpans up various creeks (Payson 1926: 6-7). Hunting could
also be an intrigue-laden process, as rival mahogany concerns often competed in the same
area. Given the often tenuous legality and intense competition of the trade, hunters were
sometimes forced to hide their tracks from other hunters working in the same area; it was
not uncommon for mahogany trees identified by one hunter to be cut more expediently by
another's employer (Henderson 1811: 59-60).

The Mahogany Gang

Once an appropriate location had been identified, the next step was to secure a
sufficient number of laborers to carry out the season's work. A typical mahogany gang
would range in size from just a few men on the smaller operations to fifty or more at the
largest works; larger gangs were often broken into smaller units for easier manageability.
This also made it easier to establish a hierarchy of workers, with a foreman who would
usually oversee several works, a captain or overseer for each of the smaller units, and
then the laborers who performed the majority of the work (Henderson 1811: 57, Wells 1857: 348, Squier 1855: 179). In Belize, slaves formed the primary labor pool until well into the nineteenth century (Camille 2000: 106), but in Honduras laborers were generally free. Labor contracts could range from as little as four months to as long as a year, with most contracts averaging six or eight months. Wages for mahogany gangs in Honduras were akin to those in Belize and elsewhere in the region: the range for general laborers appears to have been between eight and sixteen dollars a month for the majority of the nineteenth century, while individual captains could earn twice or three times that amount and a foreman would earn upwards of a hundred or more dollars a month. Those at the lowest rung of the labor force were paid differentially depending on experience or general proclivity for the work to which they were assigned (Young 1842: 124, Squier 1855: 179, Bureau 1894: 48). A more detailed rendering can be gleaned from Antonio Mathe's complaint against the Honduras government for interruptions at his works throughout the late 1840s. Compensation was established at a rate of fifteen dollars per worker per month, while the foreman in this company received one hundred and twenty-five dollars a month. Also included in the claim was an account of rations provided to each of Mathe's works; twenty hands at the Bonito River works were provisioned from twenty barrels of flour, ten barrels of pork, measures of rum, gin, and tobacco, and miscellaneous sundries in addition to their wages (Mathe 1848d: 91); it was not uncommon for mahogany cutters to be provided rations and tools in addition to their wages (Squier 1855: 179, Bureau 1894: 48).
Ethnicity

The documentary accounts and consular dispatches rarely mention the role of specific groups involved in the trade, but it is a factor worth considering given its role in shaping the cultural landscape of the region. European interests were clearly the driving force behind the mahogany trade, and are considered in a more general context throughout the current study. In Belize, where most of the houses conducting the Honduras trade were initially located, the earliest mahogany gangs were comprised of slaves of African descent. Indeed, the growth of the mahogany trade may have been an impetus for increasing the number of Africans in Belize (Camille 2000: 106).

Eventually, these slaves would become the basis for what contemporary accounts referred to as the 'Belize Creoles': those of African descent with an admixture of Spanish or Indian blood. Morris (1883: 117-118) mentions these Creoles as the best-qualified group of workers for mahogany cutting. He also noted that Black Caribs1 occasionally joined the Creoles on mahogany crews, but were not a significant source of labor in the trade, while Indians were considered ill-suited for the work.

It is highly likely that some of the earliest mahogany cutters in Honduras were African slaves as well. The earliest British settlers at Black River were slaveholders who engaged in a wide range of activities including mahogany cutting (Otway 1765: 233). Local indigenous groups such as the Mosquito were also employed in commercial cutting during the eighteenth century, although it is unclear if any other groups were so employed (Jones 1768: 24). As the trade expanded, so too did the role of the Mosquito. In the 1830s Frederick Chatfield (1836b: 92) informed Lord Palmerston that "... Native Indians assist to fell and truck out the timber . . . ." Bell (1899: 189) recounts his
experiences with the Mosquito, including seasons of mahogany cutting, claiming they " . . . are not powerful or enduring workmen, although they ply the axe with great skill." Payson (1926: 7) claims that Mosquito and Sumu were employed as tree hunters; presumably this was for their intimate knowledge of local geographies. However, it appears that the majority of non-European workers were either Caribs or blacks from Jamaica (Wells 1857: 348, Squier 1855: 179). Mahogany cutters from Belize seemingly found it expedient to bring their 'Negroes' from Belize to work in Honduras (Chatfield 1836: 92), although it also appears that Caribs frequently went to Belize and contracted to cut timber (Young 1842: 124, Squier 1855: 179). Anecdotally, the largest and best-run mahogany works in Honduras were those that employed 'negroes or Caribs' (Bell 1899: 192). Further evidence to the role of Caribs in the mahogany trade comes in the observation that a mid-century market downturn and subsequent reduction in the number of active works resulted in several hundred Caribs being underemployed or unemployed (Hall 1859).

The Mahogany Works

The mahogany gangs based their season's labors at the works. Always located on a high bank along one of the major rivers, a works was frequently occupied for only a short time, although some of the more extensive mahogany concerns used the same works for three or even four successive seasons (Usher 1850). A typical works (Figure 2.1) usually had an array of semi-permanent buildings constructed from local materials and thatched with palm. Larger structures were used for administrative operations, workers erected basic shelters for sleeping, and cooking sheds were established alongside
Figure 2.1. Mahogany works on the Río Ulúa (Squier 1855)

Though the works was generally the focus of daily trips back and forth into the forest, it was not uncommon for workers to spend substantial time out in the bush, especially during trucking season, and building even more rudimentary accommodations for their use. Works were also the main focal point for the truck paths leading out of the forest. As the dry season approached, cattle were driven overland to the works, where swaths of land had been cleared for pasturage and oxen were penned to await trucking. The cattle were generally fed grass, although breadfruit foliage was also apparently desirable (Duval 1881: 62, Bureau 1894: 48).

Notwithstanding the clear role of a works as a social nexus during the mahogany season, it is worth noting that women are rarely mentioned as a significant presence. In farthest Mosquitia workers generally made do with only rudimentary communal sleeping areas, though more private huts were sometimes built for married men (Bell 1899: 187). William Wells visited works on the upper Río Patuca where women were employed as cooks, although attempts were being made to "... dispense with the women, who, it appears, do not confine their talents to culinary avocations ... " (Wells 1857: 349); women were apparently a similar distraction in the works with which Bell was acquainted (Bell 1899: 197).

**Felling the Timber**

After the season's trees were identified, laborers secured, and the works established, a series of trails was created throughout the forest. These trails were initially established as a hunter marked trees for the season's cuttings and located them in
reference to the site of the works. Once cutting began, the trails were used as baselines for building the truck paths used to move mahogany out of the forest.

One of the general concerns of the mahogany cutters was the quality of the timber. Squier (1855: 174) suggests that cutters avoided felling timber between April and August, when the wood was more likely to split, while Henderson (1811: 62) claims the most experienced workers felt February through September was the period to be avoided; should wood be cut when prone to splitting, a common precaution was to submerge the tree in water (Henderson 1811: 68). Both accounts point to January as the month for cutting, which coincides with most others, which suggest the cutting season began immediately after the fall rains and the Christmas holiday season (Wells 1857: 348, Gibbs 1883: 119). Cuban mahogany cutters, though working with a slightly different species, would only fell trees during the wane of the moon, when wood was purportedly deeper in color and freer of sap then before a full moon (Chaloner and Fleming 1850: 43). Local Honduran custom also dictated felling trees during the wane of the moon, when insects were purportedly less likely to infest the wood (Wilson 1968: 213).

Once undertaken, the simplest, though most dangerous, part of a season's work was the actual cutting of the trees. At the base of each tree a small clearing was made (Figure 2.2), providing enough room for workers to build a platform from which to cut. Given the large buttress roots characteristic of large tropical trees such as mahogany, the platforms (Figure 2.3) occasionally had to be built to heights of twelve or more feet (Henderson 1811: 60, Wells 1857: 349, Bell 1899: 189). These platforms were designed to allow two men to work at cutting the trees, sometimes using axes but more frequently employing crosscut saws. Most, if not all, of the saws and axes for this and other tasks in
Figure 2.2. Cleared area surrounding mahogany tree (Payson 1926)
Figure 2.3. Platform for mahogany cutters (Payson 1926)
the mahogany trade were imported from England (Wells 1857: 350). Once a tree was cut, it was trimmed and cut into manageable segments, depending on the requirements of the proprietor. The trunk was considered most commercially valuable due to the sheer quantity of wood it provided, although the grain of the branches had a closer grain and was prized by furniture makers and others desiring a finer-grained wood. After being cut and roughly squared, trees were ready to be brought out of the forest (Henderson 1811: 60-61, Wells 1857: 350, Morris 1883: 47).

**Timber Haulage**

The earliest means of bringing out mahogany was what Camille (2000) has labeled 'human haulage'. This was simply the time-honored practice of dragging or rolling the felled wood to the nearest available watercourse so it could be floated downstream; it is still practiced by indigenous cutters today (McSweeney 2000). This practice, though straightforward and effective, limited mahogany cutters to those trees located within a short distance of the main rivers, tributaries, and floatable swamps of the coastal flatlands.

By the first decade of the nineteenth century, cattle were being used in the mahogany trade, quickly becoming the primary means of moving timber out of the forest (Barrow 1803: 14, Henderson 1811: 63). Mules were sometimes used when cattle were not generally available, particularly in Mexico, but cattle were the preferred option (Lamb 1966: 35, Snook 1998: 63). Whereas the previous reliance on human labor severely limited commercially accessible mahogany, the advent of cattle haulage immediately increased the effective distance of a mahogany operation to three or four miles from streamside, greatly increasing the amount of timber that could be feasibly
extracted (Barrow 1803: 14). Eventually cattle were bringing wood out from as far as eight to ten miles away (Morris 1883: 48, Napier 1973: 40).

The introduction of cattle into the extraction process also meant a shift in the degree of labor involved. Human haulage meant little more than rudimentary trails carved through the forest, but cattle required more substantial pathways; extensive networks of roads (truck paths) had to be constructed. These truck paths typically exhibited a dendritic pattern (Figure 2.5) that can be attributed to the natural distribution of mahogany in the forest. Since mahogany occurs at most in concentrations of one or two trees per acre and is rarely clustered, constructing paths only to each tree minimized the amount of time and labor spent in clearing forest. Paths were constructed hierarchically: single paths from trees led to branches, which led in turn to main roads, which terminated at the most accessible stream or at the works itself. The primary expenditure of labor in a mahogany operation was not the cutting of trees, but the creation of these roads through the forest; it was commonly accepted that more than half of the labor output in a given season would be invested in building roads, with some estimates ranging as high as two-thirds (Chaloner and Fleming 1850: 41, Squier 1855: 176).

Truck paths were usually built in two stages. One group of men was required to clear upwards of a hundred yards of underbrush and scrub a day, while a second would follow behind and clear the standing trees (Squier 1855: 176, Gibbs 1883: 121). Bridges were often built over creeks and steep ravines, although they added time and effort to the labor process (Squier 1855: 121, Bell 1899: 194). Always, the intent was to create the smoothest, most efficient path from the trees to the works. Ephraim Squier observed
Figure 2.4. Dendritic pattern of mahogany extraction (PRO 1850)
truck paths on the Río Ulúa "... several miles in length, thirty feet in width, carefully leveled, grubbed, and bridged for the passage of loaded trucks ..." (Squier 1855: 257).

**Trucking**

There were two ways in which cattle were used to bring mahogany out of the forest. The first, known as skidding, involved hitching up one or more teams of oxen and simply dragging the wood out of the forest (Figure 2.5). Hauling in this manner was accomplished by either dragging the trunk out on the ground or, more frequently, loading the mahogany onto a large sledge (drag) that was then pulled over a series of skids, or smaller logs, laid out in the mud and soft ground. In addition to being useful when the ground was particularly wet or soft, this method was frequently employed to take advantage of sloping terrain (Wells 1857: 350-351, Gibbs 1883: 122, Morris 1883: 47, Bell 1899: 194).

The second, and more preferred method, involved the use of large, crude trucks to carry the logs (Figure 2.6). The employ of trucks required nearly all of the hands in a given operation, including two drivers per truck, several men to load the mahogany, and the rest engaged in cutting fodder for the cattle. Depending on the size of the truck and the terrain to be crossed, anywhere from four to fifteen pair of oxen were employed to pull it (Chaloner and Fleming 1850: 41, Squier 1855: 177, Gibbs 1883: 122, Bell 1899: 194, Payson 1926: 10). Though the length of a truck varied depending on the size of logs being extracted, they usually had solid wooden wheels, constructed from woods such as santa maría (*Calophyllum calaba* Jacq.), of two to three feet diameter and up to a foot thick (Duval 1881: 62, Morris 1883: 47). A typical works usually deployed
Figure 2.5. Dragging mahogany out of the forest (Otis 1909)
six or more trucks per season, which could form a procession a quarter-mile in length (Squier 1855: 178, Bell 1899: 194)

The trucking season began in earnest as soon as the roads were dry and firm enough to support the traffic generated by the cattle trucks. This meant that trucking was usually well underway by April if not sooner (Squier 1855: 177, Morris 1883: 48). Given the extremely hot daytime temperatures of the tropical lowlands, it is not surprising that the trucking of mahogany was undertaken chiefly at night. Many authors refer to the almost sublime nature of hauling at night, but it is perhaps best captured in the description from Squier (1855: 178):

The great number of oxen, the drivers half naked (clothes being inconvenient from the heat of the weather and clouds of dust), and each bearing a torch-light, the wildness of the forest scenery, the rattling of chains, the sound of the whip echoing through the woods – then all is activity and exertion so ill corresponding with the silent hour of midnight, makes it wear more the appearance of some theatrical exhibition than what it really is, the pursuit of industry which has fallen to the lot of the Honduras wood-cutter.

Workers would set out after dark, return by the early morning hours laden with felled timber, and set out again that evening; once trucking began, they labored feverishly to finish before the onset of the rains, when the truck paths would become inaccessible fields of mud (Wells 1857: 351, Squier 1855: 178, Duval 1881: 63).

**Moving the Timber**

Logs were trucked to two locales, either tributaries of the main rivers, or directly to the works themselves. In the first instance, logs were promptly rolled in to the streambed and left to await the coming of the floods, which would be used to move them to the works. Frequently, it took more than one such flood to move timber down the
often-shallow streambeds (Bell 1899: 195). If the season was particularly dry, timber was left until the next season in hopes that it could eventually be floated downstream. In the second instance, logs were collected on the bank until the trucking was completed (Figure 2.7). Once all the timber was assembled at the works, it was squared and marked with a proprietary stamp (Figure 2.8), then tumbled back into the river and floated downstream. Workers would either ride some of the timber down the river or follow closely in pipantes and canoes. Closer to the mouths of the rivers, the logs were collected at a boom, a chain or set of cables stretched across the river. Since the timber had to be floated when the streams and rivers were at their highest levels, this was also when the greatest amount of loss occurred. Individual logs would sometimes be lost on the trip to the boom, and it was not unusual for rogue logs to be lost past the boom and out to sea. When collected at the boom, the logs were separated according to their mark, trimmed to remove the splintered ends developed during the journey down river, and assembled into large rafts (Figure 2.9). The rafts were then floated the remaining distance to the sea, where they were loaded onto ships bound for Belize, Liverpool, London, as well as the American trade in Boston and New York (Henderson 1811: 56, 63-64, Young 1842: 117, Wells 1857: 351-352, Squier 1855: 178, Duval 1881: 63, Gibbs 1883: 123, Morris 1883: 48, Bell 1899: 194-195).

**Perspective**

The generally well-defined process for bringing mahogany from the forest to the market developed largely in response to the nature of its natural habitat, where thick, uncharted forest contained only a few individuals of any given species within a wide area. Given the difficulty of working in virgin tropical forest, it is not surprising that the
Figure 2.7. Staging mahogany on a river bank (Koebel 1925)
Figure 2.8. Mahogany proprietary marks (Carmichael 1856b)
Figure 2.9. Mahogany in Rio San Juan, Nicaragua (Payson 1926)
earliest mahogany operations focused on finding the timber closest to major watercourses and dragging it streamside. As mahogany grew in value and technological improvements (particularly the introduction of cattle to the process) were made, the mahogany entrepreneurs were able to move farther and farther from streamside locations, expanding into the forest and creating extensive networks of roads and ephemeral mahogany works. In tandem, the extraction process itself became segmented, with specific tasks assigned to scouts, cutters, and road builders, although all were called to participate in the all-important haulage of felled timber at the end of the season. The selectively intense nature of mahogany extraction, wherein few permanent markers remained on the landscape (most impacts relating merely to cleared land) makes it difficult to visualize the mahogany landscapes of northern Honduras in today’s landscape. But having a clearer picture of what once was makes it easier to seek out and understand the legacy of mahogany extraction in the contemporary Honduran landscape, and that task is the focus of the next two chapters.

Notes

1 The indigenous group living along the Caribbean littoral from Belize to Nicaragua has historically been referenced in several ways. Though now generally referred to as the Garifuna, the use of the terms Black Caribs or even Caribs is not uncommon, and these terms are used interchangeably in this text.
Honduras, like most of its sister states in Central America, has a long and complex cultural history. In particular, the influence of Great Britain and English-speaking peoples has been pronounced, particularly along the Caribbean littoral. One of the ways to trace the extent and nature of this legacy is through the study of the cultural landscape as it exists today, teasing out the clues to its past. Toponymic research, the study of place names, is a common method for commencing such a task. Although some recent studies of toponymy incorporate current social theory and perception into the considerations of naming (Roberts 1993, Jett 1997), a more enduring and fundamental approach is empirically cataloging place names and linking them to a larger historical and social context (West 1954, Lind 1962, Zelinsky 1962). This chapter falls squarely within the latter tradition, exploring the continuing legacy of mahogany extraction in the toponymy of northern Honduras.

The mahogany trade in Honduras has historically been associated with English-speaking interests. Though Spanish colonists may have begun logging mahogany and other valuable woods along the north coast of Honduras in the late 1500s, commercial mahogany exploitation began only in the 1700s, when commercial houses from British Honduras turned their focus from logwood to mahogany. And the growing mahogany trade in the Bay of Honduras was also a key factor in the return of British interests to Honduras in the 1820s and 1830s, when English-speaking mahogany cutters were a
The mahogany trade opened up large segments of northern Honduras to exploration and exploitation, revealing previously unmapped landscape features and dramatically altering the cultural landscape of the region. Newly discovered watercourses were frequently noted with the terms _creek_ or _branch_. The actual process in which mahogany was logged and brought out from the forest gave rise to a host of additional toponymic generics. Most mahogany camps were set up on a river _bank_ or rise. The mahogany works itself was also known as a _bank_ or, occasionally, a _barquadier_. The latter is an obvious cognate for the term _embarcadero_, although it is not necessarily associated with the timber industry or even English-related toponyms in Honduras. As logs were floated downstream, they arrived at the river mouth, where a _boom_ stretched across the river was used to gather them (Henderson 1811, Squier 1855, Morris 1883, Bell 1899). The presence or absence of these terms, as formal names or as common landscape generics, can be considered as a marker of not only the mahogany trade, but also the general extent of English-language influence in the named landscape of Honduras.

**Creeks**

Exploring the usage and relative concentration of _creek_ and its variants in the landscapes of the north coast makes it possible to establish a somewhat broader context for understanding the extent of English influence in the area. In particular, the use of the Spanish variant _crique_ strongly suggests a transfer from English naming practices, because Spanish speakers more frequently employ the term _quebrada_ for the same
landscape feature (Ford 1991). Well over two hundred instances of the two words, especially crique, are found on the maps of northern Honduras as either a landscape generic or a formal place name. This makes creek and its Spanish cognate the most frequently encountered English-derived place name found in Honduras. Indeed, random occurrences of creek, crique, or a similar variant can be found at points inland along nearly the entire Caribbean coast from Omoa east.

However, there are four areas that appear to have a higher concentration of the terms, meriting closer inspection. The first is an area surrounding La Ceiba, particularly in the coastal lowlands west of the city. This concentration perhaps reflects La Ceiba's role as an epicenter of the banana trade, dominated by American (and therefore English-speaking) interests for over a century. But it is also noteworthy that this concentration incorporates the watershed of the Río Cuero, a known area of mahogany exploitation in the nineteenth century and also the general area of the bank toponyms discussed previously. Certainly the toponymy reflects this sustained English-speaking interest in the area. A second is found, not surprisingly, in the eastern portions of the coast, including Mosquitia. This part of Honduras was never effectively brought under the control of Spain, leaving it open to opportunistic pirates, explorers, and commercial interests, most of whom were English-speaking. In addition, this is a physically challenging region, laced with many small watercourses. It follows that English-speaking explorers would leave a legacy in the region's landscape toponyms, and the sheer number of creeks and criques seem to bear this out. That said, it is difficult to relate these toponyms to any logging activities in the region, especially because the
majority of the named features occur away from major rivers essential for conducting the trade.

The third concentration of *crique* may bear the most direct linkages to the role of the British in the logging trade. A distinct clustering of *criques* occurs in the hinterlands of Trujillo, particularly the Aguán valley. In the mid-nineteenth century this valley was the focus of intense logging operations conducted by English commercial houses. Given both the exploratory nature of the trade (opening up new areas for exploration) and the persistent presence of British citizens in the area, it is not surprising to find this concentration in this locale. Finally, the fourth clustering of this term in the toponymy can be found in the area surrounding the lower Río Negro. As alluded to above, the ongoing British settlement at Black River explains a great deal about the persistence of English-derived toponyms in this part of Honduras.

**Banks**

It is difficult to ascertain exactly when the word *bank* became commonly used in the mahogany trade. Ford (1991: 15-17) suggests that it is a Creole word commonly used in Belize to refer to streamside logging operations. In Honduras, this usage appears apt, especially given the Belize-based roots of most of the mahogany cutters in the region. Seasonal bases of operations were generally referred to as mahogany *works*, but on maps they were frequently noted as *banks*; thus we can find occasional references such as the Piedra Blanca *works*, but numerous locations such as France's Trial Bank, R.C. Wardlaw's Bank, T. Jennings Bank, and so on. Yet the necessarily short-lived location of a mahogany bank (they sometimes existed for only one season) left few permanent
legacies in the official toponymy. Only a handful of settlements exist that are named with some variant of *bank*, and no landscape generics.

However, several of these settlements may be remnants of the logging industry. For instance, the settlement of *Benque Viejo* is quite likely a legacy of the timber trade. It lies in a broad river valley on the upper reaches of the Río Sico, one of the two main tributaries of the Negro. Given its proximity to the Black River settlement founded by William Pitt and its accessibility, it seems likely that the forest resources of this area were exploited in some manner (Dawson 1983). Well up the once mahogany-rich Aguán valley one finds the generic *El Benque* at the headwaters of Quebrada Zarca, but it is unclear how this may be related to any historical logging activities. Between Tela and La Ceiba, the lowlands surrounding the Ríos Colorado and Cuero were also areas of mahogany extraction. This region includes *El Banco*, on the lower Colorado, and *San Juan Benque*, near the upper Cuero. The latter may be too far into the mountains to be related to the mahogany trade, but the possibility is intriguing. The remaining four variants have even less obvious linkages to logging activities. *Benk* and *El Benk* lie in far Mosquitia away from major watercourses; the latter is a village directly on the coast, though the former lies on an inland lagoon. Two additional *El Benques* appear far to the interior of Honduras, away from known or potentially significant areas of mahogany exploitation. Finally, there exists a *Quebrada El Benque*, or "stream of the bank", which leads into the Río Bonito, which in turn leads into the well-exploited Aguán valley. The name of the stream and its general proximity to the Aguán suggest some form of past logging activities.
Booms

As the most efficient, reliable, and inexpensive means of moving timber from the interior to the coast for shipping, rivers functioned as commercial highways from the earliest timbering activities until well into the twentieth century. As the Honduran mahogany trade expanded during the early and middle nineteenth century, it increasingly moved inland using the watercourses of the major rivers. From these locales, felled timber was floated downstream during the rainy seasons, and timber was gathered, sorted, and prepared after it had been collected. A boom usually consisted of a great chain stretched across a river, but was occasionally a set of cables employed in the same manner. Boom sites were ideally located at a bend in the river or some other place where it was easy to trap the timber. Given its prominence in the extractive landscapes of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, it is reasonable to assume that booms would remain in the toponymy of contemporary Honduras; this is only partially true.

In the western reaches of Honduras' Caribbean Coast, the lower courses of the Chamelecón and Ulúa have been enormously impacted by the fruit trade. Man-made canals dissect the region, and the major rivers themselves have been channeled and altered to suit the whims of the banana growers. Thus it is surprising that one finds the settlement of El Bum on the lower Chamelecón; certainly its presence in this altered landscape suggests the presence of the boom at or near this juncture of the river. However, virtually no other settlements can be linked in this manner to possible boom locations. Only two exist, both on the Río Coco, which forms portions of the border between Honduras and Nicaragua. The lowest simply bears the name Boon, sometimes rendered as Bum. Farther up the Coco is the settlement of Bum Sirpi, or "little boom". It
is also worth noting Hacienda El Boon east of La Ceiba, quite possibly established at or near a boom site on the Río Papaloteca.

More direct evidence of booms in the Honduran landscape can be found on the Ríos Aguán and Limon east of Trujillo. The Aguán was one of the main foci of the Honduran mahogany trade, and the Limon is a lesser river located in the same alluvial plain as the lower Aguán. Official maps depict El Bun in the lowest reaches of the Aguán, and El Bun is also noted on the Limon (Figure 3.1). Though the boom on the Aguán is difficult to corroborate on historic maps, that on the Limon exists in almost the same exact location on at least one map circa 1850 (Usher 1850); interestingly, the same manuscript map does not depict a boom on the Aguán. Farther east, the record of logging in the environs of the Río Tinto is somewhat murkier than elsewhere in Honduras. However, Cerro Bum is found on the Paulaya, one of the major tributaries of the Tinto. This can easily be interpreted as the hill above, or on, the boom. Other than these three instances, boom derivatives fail to appear in the official toponymy of Honduras, although it is likely that boom referents continue in the folk lexicon, especially concerning the major watercourses of northern Honduras.

**Other Toponymic Legacies**

Although bank, boom, and creek are the easiest terms to link to sustained English-language logging and exploration in northern Honduras, they are not the only toponyms that attest to the mahogany landscapes of the past. There are two other elements of the named landscape that are worth mentioning in this context. Both reflect Spanish usage, but serve as general indicators for the overall impact of mahogany on Honduras place names.
Figure 3.1. Booms on the lower Ríos Aguán and Limón
The most common of these is the term *embarcadero*, which is generally defined as a landing place, especially on inland watercourses. Indeed, this appears to be its most common application in Honduras, especially in Mosquitia, where the nature of the physical landscape often requires crossing numerous small streams and lagoons. However, given the practice in Belize of referring to a mahogany works as a *barquadier*, it can also be referenced as a potential site of logging activities (Ford 1991: 19). Such may be the case with the occurrences found on major rivers, but it is impossible to determine if this is indeed the case unless they are apparent in a formal place name; no instances of this currently exist in Honduras.

Though it is not directly associated with English-language toponyms related to the mahogany trade, note must also be taken of *caoba*, the Spanish word for mahogany. Surprisingly, few place names can be found in Honduras which refer to *caoba* in the landscape. On the middle Río Patuca is Corriente Caoba, "mahogany rapids," referent to the mahogany in the forests surrounding the Patuca. And two small streams, Quebrada de la Caoba in the watershed of the Río Negro and Quebrada la Caoba on the upper Patuca were almost surely named for the abundance of the precious wood on their banks. One final usage of caoba, somewhat surprisingly, is found among the banana lands of the lower Ulúa valley. In this instance, several estates bear the name of what were once prominent timber trees in the region. Thus, in addition to Finca Cedro, Finca El Nispero, and the like, there is also a Finca Caoba; the naming of these banana estates suggests a tacit acknowledgement of the area's previous commercial history.
Perspective

Though the mahogany trade was responsible for a great deal of exploration and settlement on Honduras’ north coast, its toponymic legacy is surprisingly small. Most of the remaining toponyms that are directly attributable to the mahogany trade can also be linked to its period of maximum expansion in the early to middle nineteenth century, when the trade was dominated by English-language cutters from Belize and elsewhere. It was these cutters who inscribed banks, booms, and creeks on local landscapes, and whose cultural legacy persists despite decades of Spanish-speaking influence in those same landscapes. Though Spanish-speaking merchants were also active at various times in the mahogany trade, the infrequent appearance of Spanish toponyms relating to mahogany provides an even clearer indication that the primary impetus behind the trade was the dominant English-speaking influence from outside Honduras.
CHAPTER 4

CONSIDERING THE MAHOGANY LANDSCAPE

As discussed earlier, one of the more rewarding aspects of historical geography is the opportunity to visit relict landscapes. Such opportunities cannot always be realized, but they can be an invaluable means of testing ideas gained from archival research, considering the legacies of particular processes after an extended time period, or stimulating new ideas and insights into a particular question or problem. Fortunately, the documentary record for the mahogany trade on the north coast of Honduras is sufficiently complete to create numerous possibilities for visitation of these relict landscapes. Several such visits to the sites of former mahogany works subsequently generated fresh insights into the landscapes associated with mahogany extraction in the nineteenth century. One such insight derives from attempts to merely locate former mahogany sites through the use of contemporary Honduran maps, and considering potential linkages of those sites with the settlement landscape of modern Honduras. A second set of considerations arose during preliminary site exploration in the Aguán valley, when the constraints upon the mahogany trade imposed by the physical environment were somewhat startlingly revealed. Supplemental to these considerations is the perspective that can be gained from the current landscape, which even in its dramatically altered form illustrates key insights into the mahogany extraction process. This chapter reviews the implications of those perspectives and forms something of a visual complement to the rest of the study, hopefully leading the reader into a deeper appreciation of the historical underpinnings of the contemporary Honduran landscape.
Settlement Landscapes

That mahogany had long-lasting impacts on the settlement landscapes of the north coast seems like an obvious conclusion to draw; the movement of people and settlement frontiers into forest regions is a well-documented theme in human geography, from the tropics to more temperate climes (Williams 1989, Dean 1997). Yet it is difficult to establish a clear 'settlement frontier' with respect to the mahogany trade, particularly since mahogany logging resulted in few areas of substantial clearing but rather ephemeral truck paths and randomly cleared patches of forest where trees once stood. The exact manner in which mahogany logging impacted the settlement of various areas requires long-term inquiry into both the historical and geographical development of individual settlements, and is beyond the scope of the present study. However, visitation of relict mahogany sites in northeastern Honduras, combined with careful perusal of the legacy maps left by Usher and others, has provided several tantalizing insights into the settlement history of the north coast.

Unsurprisingly, the most direct linkages between mahogany and settlement landscapes appear to lie in the Trujillo hinterlands, where mahogany dominated regional economic activity for much of the nineteenth century. Perhaps the best indication of a link between mahogany and settlement is found at Francia, at the mouth of Quebrada de Francia on the south bank of the Río Limón (Figure 4.1). Alexander France was but one of several mahogany entrepreneurs in the area in the late 1830s, and Usher's map clearly indicates this location as the spot of France's Trial Bank; the link is too obvious to be coincidental. Up the Aguán valley, the links are somewhat less direct but still suggestive. Quebrada de Arenas is found on the main highway a short distance from the banks of the
Figure 4.1. Contemporary settlement at Francia
Río Aguán (Figure 4.2). The location of the settlement is close to the site of the Quebrada de Arenas works, an extensive and long-term focus of mahogany logging in the 1840s and 1850s (Usher 1850, PRO1525). In the same time period, extensive mahogany works were also found on the Río Bonito (Usher 1850). The location of those works appears to be at the same location as the contemporary settlement of Bonito Oriental. With time and a complete rendering of the Aguán valley mahogany works, it is almost certain that numerous additional examples will further elucidate these and similar linkages.

Even farther inland, in Olancho, Opolonio Ocampo established a major mahogany works (Corte Sara) on the Río Jalan in the 1850s. The still-isolated Jalan valley is only today undergoing agricultural development, but the bank above the probable works location is occupied by the sprawling town of San Antonio de Sara (Figure 4.3), and several landscape features in the area incorporate Sara into their names. Identifying Ocampo's former mahogany works, however, also demonstrates the dangers of making superficial linkages. For example, at Los Mescales on the Río Guayape, the site of the works can be identified with a fair degree of certainty, as can two settlements in the same area. Yet Las Marias and El Cacao are both recently settled agricultural villages, high on the bluff above the site of the works. On the opposite bank of the Guayape, Los Guapinoles is also the site of recent intrusion, difficult to link to logging activities in the nineteenth century.

Beyond the examples attributable to specific mahogany works, other intriguing possibilities remain for understanding the complex human geography of the north coast. In particular, the manuscript maps left behind by the mahogany trade suggest a partial
Figure 4.2. Contemporary settlement at Quebrada de Arenas
Figure 4.3. Contemporary settlement at San Antonio de Sara
explanation for the distribution and maintenance of Carib communities east of Trujillo. By the early 1800s, the Caribs were diffusing outward from Trujillo, where they had been landed in the 1790s. When the mahogany trade entered a period of sustained expansion in the 1830s, the Caribs were its most prized labor pool (Squier 1855: 179, Wells 1857: 348, Bell 1899: 192). Thus it is not surprising to find Carib villages at the mouths of the Rios Chapagua, Aguán, and Limón by the 1850s (Usher 1850). It is unlikely that these villages were founded in response to the mahogany trade (Davidson 2002), but certainly mahogany laborers were drawn from them. This ready source of seasonal employment may have induced more Caribs to stay in the area rather than continuing to move farther eastward down the coast.

**Physical Landscapes**

The characteristic dendritic patterning of the mahogany extraction process was in many ways contingent on the floatability of particular watercourses. In particular, if a creek was not sufficiently deep during high water to float mahogany, it had to be circumvented in some fashion. The streambed at Taujica, for instance, remains shallow and full of rocks even at the end of the rainy season, obviously unable to float mahogany or anything else more than an extremely short distance (Figure 4.4). Truck paths constructed by O.L. Rhys in the late 1840s clearly entered Taujica Creek at a point further downstream (Figure 4.5), where water levels are deeper and rocks less frequent. And at its mouth, Taujica Creek is certainly deep enough to justify floating timber (Figure 4.6a, 4.6b). At the same time, it is also evident that even Taujica Creek was not the preferred means of moving mahogany out of the forest. The area between Taujica Creek and Quebrada de Arenas is sufficiently flat to justify constructing truck paths
Figure 4.4. Rocky bed of Taujica Creek at high water
Figure 4.5. Truck paths entering Taujica Creek, 1850 (PRO 1850)
Figure 4.6.a. Mouth of Taujica Creek, looking downstream

Figure 4.6.b. Mouth of Taujica Creek, looking upstream
directly to the works on the bank of the Río Aguán, and a road network did indeed extend several miles into the interior from that point (Figure 4.7). Similarly, Quebrada de Arenas itself is much too shallow to float timber, even at its mouth (Figure 4.8), which explains why truck paths extended on both its eastern and western margins, but never directly to its banks.

More general topographic considerations accounted for the locations of the works. Beyond the obvious consideration of being near to at least a season's worth of mahogany, the ideal works relied on two elements, namely flat land and a high riverbank. Works were almost always located on a flat stretch of the riverbank, where it was relatively easy to make a clearing, construct buildings, house and feed workers, and establish a staging area for the timber itself. Clear indications of this are seen at Quebrada de Arenas (Figure 4.9), the site of Corte Sara (Figure 4.10), and at Los Mescales (Figure 4.11).

High cut banks were essential for safeguarding the works from floods during the rainy season, but also for lessening the task of moving timber from the works into the river. At Corte Sara, the works was likely located on a high bank above substantial rapids, from which point timber could be rolled into the Río Jalan (Figure 4.12). Ocampo's former sites on the Río Guayape also support this conclusion (Figure 4.13, 4.14), as does the location of the Quebrada de Arenas works on the Río Aguán (Figure 4.15).

**Locations**

As a final consideration, it is worth noting the insights to be drawn from observing the contemporary landscape at relict mahogany sites. At the base of Piedra Blanca, for instance, E.P. Usher established a works for Antonio Mathe in the late 1840s (Usher 1850). That exact location is now the site of a very small settlement, but it is
Figure 4.7. Quebrada de Arenas works, 1850s (PRO 1850)
Figure 4.8. Lower Quebrada de Arenas (Courtesy W.V. Davidson)
Figure 4.9. Contemporary site of Quebrada de Arenas Works (Courtesy W.V. Davidson)
Figure 4.11. Contemporary site of Los Mescales works
Figure 4.12. High bank on Rio Jalan, at Corte Sara
Figure 4.13. High bank on Río Guayape, at Los Mescales
Figure 4.14. High bank on Río Jalan, at Las Guapinoles
Figure 4.15. Bank on Río Aguán, at Quebrada de Arenas
virtually impossible to speculate on the mahogany landscape in that area. However, the
land has been cleared and largely planted in fruit, revealing a gently rolling topography
(Figure 4.16). Such topography illustrates the type of landscape into which mahogany
logging could extend given the limitations of nineteenth century hauling technology. A
similar perspective is gained from the landscape surrounding Francia, where flat land
made it easy for the France concern to cross a shallow streambed (Figure 4.17) and
exploit the rolling topography of the area (Figure 4.18). Even Ocampo's site on the Rio
Jalan, a much narrower valley, exhibits the same characteristic topography, combining a
long rise to a bluff (Figure 4.19) with easily accessible hills (Figure 4.20). But most
mahogany concerns in the nineteenth century limited themselves to the broad alluvial
margins of rivers such as the Aguán (Figure 4.21) and the Limón (Figure 4.22); it was in
these low, marshy flatlands that Honduras mahogany was found in abundance.

Perspective

It is difficult to convey on the printed page the insight gained from entering the
field to discover relict landscapes. That task is even more difficult when one is certain
beyond all reasonable doubt that one is standing on the bank at a former mahogany works
where once stood only vast stretches of primary tropical forest. This chapter has been an
attempt to convey some small measure of that insight, largely through the visual record.
That such disparate elements as settlements, physical limitations, and (earlier) toponymic
legacies can be linked to forays into relict mahogany landscapes is somewhat startling,
given the time that has passed since mahogany loggers entered the forests of northern
Honduras and the changes wrought by a developing society. It is certainly heartening for
Figure 4.16. Landscape near Piedra Blanca
Figure 4.17. Shallow stream bed, Quebrada de Francia
Figure 4.18. Landscape near Francia
Figure 4.19. Landscape near Corte Sara
Figure 4.20. Landscape near Corte Sara
Figure 4.21. Alluvial landscape, Río Aguán
Figure 4.22. Alluvial landscape, Río Limón
Honduras and the changes wrought by a developing society. It is certainly heartening for those who would unravel the contemporary cultural landscape that such possibilities remain within our grasp.
CHAPTER 5

THE EARLY TRADE: ON THE MARGINS OF EMPIRE

The early mahogany trade of Honduras developed in the context of larger political and economic issues during the eighteenth century. The most trenchant of these was the ongoing dispute between England and Spain over the English presence in the Bay of Honduras, especially at Belize. This dispute was largely centered on the lucrative logwood trade, which by the late 1600s had become a vital part of the European dyestuff economy. In turn, this trade spurred development on the Miskito Shore, was the subject of several treaties between Great Britain and Imperial Spain, and formed the foundation of British woodcutting culture in the region. Indirectly, it was one of the primary reasons why commercial mahogany cutting began in Honduras in the middle of the eighteenth century. This chapter examines the framework surrounding early mahogany cutting in Honduras, particularly its roots in Belize and the role of the Black River settlement east of Trujillo.

Belize and Logwood in the Eighteenth Century

Though the history of Belize is generally traced to its role as an early pirate haven, the settlement itself gained impetus only after the European powers moved to suppress piracy in the western Caribbean. After the 1667 Treaty of Madrid, pirates were forced to pursue more legitimate occupations, and many of them turned to cutting logwood (*Haematoxylum campechianum* L.) in Belize and the Yucatán Peninsula. By the end of the seventeenth century, the Belize logwood trade had broken the Spanish monopoly on the lucrative dyewood trade (McJunkin 1991, Camille 1996). More
importantly, the growth of the Belize trade solidified the English presence in the western Caribbean, which now included Jamaica (occupied since 1655), a range of small settlements on the Miskito Shore, and the logwood cutters in Belize. In the first half of the eighteenth century, the Belize logwood trade reached its peak, and a triangle trade had developed between the three areas of settlement (Camille 1996, Naylor 1989). Rather than sit idly by while their sovereignty disappeared in the Bay of Honduras, the Spanish made numerous attempts to stop the logwood cutters in Belize, and diplomatic relations between Spain and England frequently alluded to the problem of the English settlement at Belize (Naylor 1989).

The Treaty of Paris, signed in 1763 to conclude the Seven Years War, formally gave British subjects the legal right to cut logwood in the vicinity of Belize, in exchange for the removal of all British fortifications in the Bay of Honduras (Naylor 1989: 55-56, Camille 1996: 81). Ironically, just as the treaty made it easier for the logwood cutters of Belize to carry out their work, the cutters themselves were shifting their attention away from logwood to mahogany (Craig 1969). In 1783, after the Wars of the American Revolution, the European powers signed the Treaty of Versailles, which had virtually the same prescriptions for Central America as the treaty signed twenty years earlier. Once again, the British agreed to dismantle fortifications and settlements in the Bay of Honduras, and the Spanish agreed to allow logwood cutting within prescribed limits in Belize. Significantly for the growing Bay of Honduras mahogany trade, Spain also included a provision allowing the cutting of mahogany by those residing at Belize. After three years of diplomatic wrangling and settler protests that culminated with the treaty-
affirming London Convention of 1786, plans were officially made to sacrifice the English settlements on the Miskito Shore for the long-term security of Belize.

**The British Settlement at Black River**

Farther east around the Bay of Honduras, the Black River settlement had by this point become the focal point for British settlement in Mosquitia as well as the site of the first commercial mahogany cutting in Honduras. By the early eighteenth century, a motley collection of British subjects had settled in the region roughly centered on Black River, making it one of the few outposts of British presence on the Miskito Shore (Dewar 1928: 124-125, Naylor 1989: 39-40). This small cluster of settlers made the area the nearest refuge for woodcutters from Belize when they fled from Spanish territory (Hodgson 1757). In 1730 the Spanish launched an attack on the logwood encampments in Belize, spurring a retreat to Black River. Though the majority of the refugees soon returned to Belize, several stayed, including William Pitt, who is generally considered the founder of the Black River settlement. Subsequent flights from Belize in the face of Spanish aggression further increased the number of settlers at Black River, as did the settlement's convenient location as a way station for ships trading between Jamaica and Belize. By the time the British evacuated the Miskito Shore in 1787, the population of the coast had swelled to more than two thousand, including slaves imported to work the sugar and cotton estates (Offen 1999: 271).

As one of the few dynamic centers of British activity on the Shore, Black River gradually became its leading political and social center. After the resolution of the War of Jenkins' Ear (1739-1748), Black River became the seat of the first British Superintendency for the Miskito Shore (1748-1786). The superintendency was
nominally intended to safeguard the well being of British subjects in Mosquitia as well as their indigenous allies the Miskito, but in reality it functioned solely to ensure uninterrupted trade in the region. The general interests of the logwood trade were still paramount in official British circles, and Black River continued to serve as a refuge when the Spanish routed the cutters from Belize. Furthermore, Black River was viewed as an essential link in maintaining communications between Jamaica, Belize, and the small British settlement on Roatán, as well as for potential commerce with the Kingdom of Guatemala (PRO 1744: 3). The settlers at Black River, who had been the most vociferous in demanding official status, also viewed the superintendency as an economic tool. But, wary of ceding too much local governance to official British authority, the settlers frequently found themselves at odds with the actions of superintendents assigned to the Shore. Numerous disputes arose over the role of the superintendents and the desires of the settlers, most notably in the land colonization schemes drawn up by several residents of the area. Relative internal calm was achieved in the region only on the eve of renewed conflict with Spain, a conflict that eventually led to the dissolution of not only the superintendency but also the Black River settlement itself (Naylor 1989: 57-60).

The economy of Black River was a blend of activities both legitimate and surreptitious. Black River played a significant role in the thriving contraband trade, forming a major conduit for illicit trade from the interior through the Trujillo hinterland (Mack 1998). Settlers in the area also hunted for tortoise shell, gathered sarsaparilla, and many of the leading residents planted sugar, cotton, and indigo or raised cattle (Trelawny 1751, Jones 1768, Dixon 1785, Dawson 1983). Though it now appears that the settlers at Black River were not involved in the cutting of logwood (Offen 2000), their ties to the
Belizean community certainly meant that most of them were well versed in the timber trade. Despite the absence of logwood, the region surrounding Black River was abundant with tropical hardwoods, and the Black River settlers apparently began cutting mahogany soon after the settlement was established (Otway 1765).

The Black River Mahogany Trade

Given its role in the economic activity surrounding Black River, surprisingly little documentary evidence exists for recreating the Black River mahogany trade. The first real indication that commercial cutting was underway dates to 1751, when Robert Hodgson informed the Duke of Bedford that 500,000 feet of mahogany were exported annually from the Shore (Hodgson 1751: 550-551). When Hodgson wrote his full-length treatise on the Miskito Shore in 1757, he considered the trade to consist of an average 200,000 feet per year (Hodgson 1757: 63). By this time, the settlers at Black River had assumed an aggressive trade profile, sailing twelve of their own trade vessels. Most of these sailed directly for England, New York, or Jamaica with their cargoes, although occasionally stops were made in Belize to fill out the cargo with logwood. Though clearly impressed by the potential of the hardwood trade from Black River and the Miskito Shore in general, Hodgson was also the first to raise questions concerning the nature of Honduran mahogany itself. In this rendering, the mahogany found in Honduras

... is not reckoned so good as that of Jamaica, the Reason probably is, that what is now got in that Island, grows in dry, rocky ground ... and for want of soil is of a slow growth and close grain; but here it has been cut for convenience in low land near to the Water Side from which situation its growth is quick, and its grain open; but some cut on the high land is as good as any (Hodgson 1757: 65).

Despite Hodgson's misgivings, the mahogany trade continued to expand over the next decade, and by 1769 mahogany was the most valuable export from Black
River (Table 1). A detailed account of vessels trading at Black River in the first nine months of 1770 indicates that some quantity of mahogany was stowed on every outbound ship (PRO 1770). Though lacking in specifics, some residents claimed the annual trade had grown to one million feet by the mid-1780s (PRO 1786).

The British withdrawal from the Miskito Shore, begun in February 1787 and continued over a period of several months, had disastrous consequences for the nascent Honduras mahogany trade. In addition to the loss of the current season's mahogany, which awaited the June rains to be brought to market, the cutters saw the previous season's wood wasted as well. The essential floods never arrived in 1786, and the cutters saw an entire season's worth of wood left dry in the creeks of eastern Honduras (Lawrie 1786, PRO 1786). Two seasons' worth of felled and rotting timber was, perhaps, an apt symbol for the abrupt cessation of livelihood in the British settlements of the Miskito Shore.

As something of a postscript it appears that, once removed to Belize, the Black River mahogany cutters continued to ply their chosen trade. By the mid-1750s the Belize cutters, facing a protracted decline in the logwood trade, began to cut mahogany. In 1771 mahogany surpassed logwood as the most valuable export from Belize, and by the time the evacuees arrived it was the main focus of the Belize trade (Burdon 1931: 183, Camille 1996: 82). Increased local competition, in the form of the influx of Black River cutters into Belize, prompted a flurry of new regulations concerning the mahogany trade. Among the most notable, the new competition led to explicit codification, for the first time, of the legal bounds acceptable for a mahogany works (Burdon 1931: 164-165), and
Table 1. Exports from Black River, 1750-1786

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Mahogany feet</th>
<th>-value (£)</th>
<th>Sarsaparilla lbs.</th>
<th>value (£)</th>
<th>Turtle Shell lbs.</th>
<th>value (£)</th>
<th>Other value (£)</th>
<th>Total (£)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1750</td>
<td>500,000</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>40,000</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>27,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1757</td>
<td>200,000</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>120,000</td>
<td>12,000</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>7,500</td>
<td>27,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1761</td>
<td>446,000</td>
<td>5,575</td>
<td>150,000</td>
<td>7,500</td>
<td>12,600</td>
<td>3,150</td>
<td>7,092</td>
<td>23,317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1763</td>
<td>650,000</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>110,000</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>8,000</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1769</td>
<td>789,000</td>
<td>19,737</td>
<td>195,300</td>
<td>17,902</td>
<td>9,600</td>
<td>3,840</td>
<td>22,319</td>
<td>61,048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1786</td>
<td>1,000,000</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Hodgson 1751, 1757, Speer 1765, Otway 1764, PRO 1786, Offen 2000
enhanced plans for the administration of justice in Belize focused in great part on procedures for regulating mahogany shipping (PRO 1787).

**Spanish Colonization on the Miskito Shore**

Despite their eventual success in forcing British subjects out of the Miskito Shore, Spanish attempts to colonize the Shore were ineffective and, at times, disastrous. The previously thriving settlement at Black River was renamed, but Río Tinto was more akin to a military outpost than a dynamic population center. Most of the Spanish colonists sent to Río Tinto faced miserable conditions and lived in constant fear of the local Miskito groups. Relations between the Spanish and the Miskitos were tenuous along the whole Shore; the Spaniards feared an uprising, the Miskitos saw little utility in trading with the Spanish and disdained the small gifts proffered by their new landlords. By all appearances, economic activity save for the contraband trade with the interior was minor (Sorsby 1972: 147). Great Britain maintained unofficial contacts with their old allies in the Mosquitia, who were agitating for aggression against the Spanish presence (Floyd 1967, Naylor 1989). In the 1790s renewed conflict between Britain and Spain increased the fear of British attack along the northern coast, and more soldiers were counted among the populace than settlers (Sorsby 1972: 149 n.14). By the end of the decade, the entire coast east of Trujillo, save Río Tinto, was virtually abandoned except for a few scattered indigenous clusters and the Garifuna, who may have begun their expansion eastward by that time (Parsons 1954, Floyd 1967, Davidson 2002). Finally, in September 1800 the expected Miskito uprising occurred, and the Spanish ended their efforts to colonize the Miskito Shore. With the attention of the European powers diverted by the Napoleonic
Wars, peripheral areas such as northern Honduras were left to drift further into the background of Central American economic affairs (Naylor 1989).

**From Isolation to Independence**

Meanwhile, partially in response to the renewed relations with Miskito groups and partially to dissatisfaction with their lot in Belize, some of the old settlers were agitating to go back to the Shore (PRO 1793). Although former settlers began reestablishing themselves on the Shore in the waning years of the Spanish occupation, most of the trade conducted during this period appears to have been local and inconsequential (Sproat 1803). Nevertheless, resumption of mahogany cutting remained an alluring possibility. Well aware of the potential riches lying in the forests of eastern Honduras, the leading woodcutting concerns in Belize resolved to maintain relations with the Miskito groups, who were entering a period of relative stability after years of internal dissension and power struggles (Burdon 1934: 65, Naylor 1989: 74-76). According to a London import agent, mahogany prices fell dramatically in 1812, largely in response to high imports of Spanish mahogany in the two preceding years (Burdon 1934: 153). Though by this time several of the Belize houses had began exploiting Spanish territory on the Deep and Moho Rivers south of the legal limits (Camille 2000: 105), it is likely the import numbers included mahogany from points east in the Bay of Honduras.

Mahogany had also piqued the interest of the naval authorities in Great Britain. In 1812 John Wright contracted with the Naval Board for 350 tons of mahogany from the 'Honduras Shore' to be delivered to London. The mahogany supplied was to be evaluated for its shipbuilding capabilities by the British navy, with further contracts possible should it prove suitable for official purposes. Wright also apparently intended the contract to
facilitate a commission as a public agent on the Miskito Shore, which would further expand his financial opportunities. However, two years after the contract was signed, Wright had failed to commence procuring the timber (SRO 1813, Wright 1814). By 1818 Belize mahogany concerns, in an attempt to protect their cuttings from competition, began demanding changes in the duty regulations. A public meeting in July resolved that a duty of twenty-five pounds Jamaica currency per thousand feet would be charged on mahogany cut outside the limits of the territory and then shipped through Belize (PRO 1818); even more aggressive attempts to control the trade would be made in the ensuing decades as Belize faced increasing competition from the Honduran timber in the 1830s and 1840s.

Traces of the mahogany trade are also found in the sordid tale surrounding Gregor MacGregor's failed Poyais project. After procuring a massive land grant from the Miskito King in 1820, the erstwhile adventurer MacGregor sailed for England, where he schemed to secure financing for his colonization project in the Black River region. In one attempt to attract investors, MacGregor's agent Thomas Strangeways wrote a glowing account of the Poyais district, which effectively stretched from Cabo Camerón to the Rio Patuca. Despite some obvious embellishments, Strangeways also spoke well of the rich resources in the region, including the vast tracts of mahogany and other timbers (Strangeways 1822). The master of the ship Kinnersley Castle, the second to carry colonists to Poyais, also testified to the rich resources of the region, particularly mahogany, rosewood, and cedar. Governor Hall even promised the shipmaster that, if he would but wait a few months, the 400-ton vessel could be filled with mahogany and sarsaparilla (Crouch 1823). Despite such hopeful beginnings, the colony was an
unmitigated disaster, with most of the settlers falling seriously ill and eventually being relocated to Belize (Douglas 1823). In March 1823 George Frederick rescinded MacGregor's grant, perhaps by suggestion of the Belize mahogany merchant Marshall Bennett, and Poyais was effectively finished (Frederick 1823, Hasbrouck 1927, Naylor 1989: 81). MacGregor undertook a protracted legal and public relations battle to save his embattled kingdom, but ultimately failed to realize his vision.

By the time MacGregor's Poyais scheme collapsed, Central America was moving unsteadily into independence. The merchants of Belize had solidified their role as a regional trade entrepôt, but most of the Caribbean littoral remained underdeveloped and isolated. The region east and south of Trujillo, which had appeared so promising for a brief time in the eighteenth century, lay dormant to such a degree that the Miskitos began to question whether the British were still their allies (Naylor 1989: 97). The newly formed Central American Federation also saw little reason to exploit or settle the area, preferring instead to concentrate its efforts on the dyestuff trade and the remnants of other colonial enterprises. The resumption of mahogany logging on the north coast of Honduras would be just one facet of this ongoing search for new economic opportunities in the wake of independence. Ultimately, the failed Poyais ventures may perhaps serve as an apt coda for the early mahogany trade in Honduras that, despite early indications of success, was gradually abandoned and cast to the fringe. The region would only become of interest again when the mahogany trade entered a boom period in the mid-nineteenth century. That boom is the main focus of the next three chapters, including many of the issues and concerns surrounding its expansion up the rivers of northern Honduras.
Entering the 1830s, Central America was undergoing a period of rapid transformation, and individuals seeking personal power and wealth capitalized on much of the chaos and uncertainty surrounding independence. At the same time, the mahogany trade entered a boom period, largely because of increasing demand from the English furniture trade. That demand, coupled with low import duties and a rapidly diminishing supply of easily obtainable wood in Belize, spurred a resumption of mahogany cutting in Honduras. Unlike previously, when the trade had been confined to a relatively small portion of the coast far to the east of Trujillo, most operations centered in the two richest mahogany valleys on the north coast, those of the Ríos Ulúa (in the west) and Aguán (in the east). Further, the revival of the trade in the 1830s was directly attributable to the need of the Honduran state to generate revenue, the personal ambitions of a small group of private individuals, and the vast untapped resources of the river valleys on the north coast.

**Morazán and Bennett on the North Coast**

Central to the resumption of the mahogany trade in Honduras was one of the most famous figures in Central American history, Francisco Morazán. Though his political and military exploits have been treated with varying degrees of objectivity and depth, one of the abiding issues concerning Morazán's role in the affairs of his time centers around his business concerns. Like many of his peers, Morazán likely used his power and influence to secure a wide range of business transactions for personal gain. Because
mahogany was one of the most timely and valuable resources in Honduras during the years of the Central American Federation, it is not surprising that Morazán's most lucrative business concerned the mahogany trade. In this, he was able to secure the rights to nearly all of the commercially valuable mahogany in Honduras, and the prosecution of Morazán's mahogany affairs not only spurred the resumption of cutting on the north coast, but also provided fodder for many of the political and commercial conflicts surrounding his tenure as President of the Federation.

The other key figure in the resumption of mahogany cutting on the north coast was Marshall Bennett. Like Morazán, Bennett was a highly controversial figure. Originally one of the leading members of the woodcutting oligarchy at Belize, he was also one of the first to realize the economic advantages to be gained by leaving the settlement and allying himself with Central American interests. Capitalizing on the Guatemalan government's willingness to establish large colonization grants, Bennett managed to appropriate grants to extensive areas of unoccupied land in Guatemala, one in conjunction with the East Coast of Central America Land Company and the other under his own name. In the first instance, Bennett facilitated the grant to the company and used the same process to secure land in Vera Paz while establishing his credibility for the second. The latter grant, in particular, was highly advantageous for Bennett, as it included the rich mahogany forests on the north shore of Lago Izabal as well as those on the lower Rio Motagua (Griffith 1965: 65-66, 81-82, Griffith 1977: 207, Naylor 1989: 110-111). Before entering into partnership with Morazán, Bennett also established interests in Honduran mining concessions and an agreement to provide a new mint apparatus to the government in Comayagua (Griffith 1977: 203-204). Engaged by
Morazán to conduct some of his business affairs by 1834, Bennett realized that solidifying his commercial relationship with Morazán would give him a financial stake in most of the available mahogany in the Bay of Honduras. Indeed, after Morazán secured his second contract from Honduras, Bennett became the sole agent for the concession and received one-third of all the profits cleared from the sale of mahogany trees on the north coast of Honduras (Morazán 1840a: 283).

The First Contract

Morazán signed his first mahogany concession with the Honduran government in November of 1834. Though apparently all the arrangements were well known, other woodcutting concerns worked aggressively to counteract Morazán's concession on the north coast. In January 1835, Armando Cabal and the North American Augustus Follin offered the Honduran government 8,000 pesos for a quantity of mahogany cut on the north coast (Maradiaga 1835a: 633). In February, the Commandant of Omoa stopped several foreign mahogany cutters from felling trees in an unspecified locale. Apparently the commander was unaware that the cutters were operating under the auspices of Morazán and his agent Marshall Bennett (Herrera 1835). Cabal and Follin petitioned the government to cancel the concession on the grounds that it was illegal, or at the very least that Bennett should be prohibited from selling trees until the status of the concession had been determined (Maradiaga 1835b: 645, Griffith 1977: 214-215 n.23). The government responded by declaring a temporary suspension of mahogany operations on the north coast, which caused Morazán to lodge protests of his own and begin pursuing a second contract to resolve the situation (Herrera 1835, Griffith 1977: 214-215 n.22).
The Second Contract

By early April, Morazán submitted a new proposal to the government. He had by this time strengthened his commercial partnership with Bennett, and the new proposal incorporated Bennett's efforts to supply minting machinery to Honduras (Griffith 1965, 1977). However, the Preparatory Committee and the Executive Council refused to act on Morazán's proposal, claiming that it required the full attention of the legislative assembly (Castanon 1835a, Castanon 1835b). Despite the recommendations, Chief of State Joaquin Rivera used his executive privileges to sign a contract with Morazán on April 14 (Morazán 1840b). In choosing to work solely with Morazán, Rivera ignored the fact that additional offers had been made by other interested parties; as just one example, it appears that an unidentified Belizean interest offered to pay 12,000 pesos for a three-year concession similar to that signed by Morazán (Chatfield 1835: 176-177).

The contract granted Morazán the right to cut mahogany for a period of twelve years; the term was fixed at the date on which each particular tract of mahogany began to be worked. The villages of San Pedro Sula and Yoro were named as the western and eastern boundaries, respectively, although the actual longitudes given in the contract expressed far different boundaries. The western boundary of 88° 45' is well west of San Pedro Sula, and Yoro is nowhere near the eastern boundary of 84° 15' specified in article two of the contract. Rather, the eastern limit was in actuality the mouth of the Río Patuca, far to the east on the Miskito Shore. Quite obviously the grant was intended to stretch along the entire north coast. The sites included in the contract lend credence to this interpretation: Río Chamelecón, Río Ulúa, Estero Salado (Salt Creek), Río Papalotepe (Papaloteca), Guaymoreto, Río Aguán, and the valley of Olanchito all fall
within the larger boundaries, with only the Ríos Chamelecón and Ulúa in the more restrictive interpretation. The contract also extended from the coast inland to the fifteenth parallel, effectively giving Morazán control of all the mahogany on the north coast (Morazán 1840b).

Morazán managed to manipulate the terms of the contract to cover a larger range of activities than mere woodcutting. In the first article of the contract, Morazán assumed the responsibility for Bennett's promise to deliver the mint, valued at 24,000 pesos, within eight months; the value of the mint was to be paid with the proceeds from the mahogany concession. Morazán was also promised a payment of 14,000 pesos, which could be satisfied in a number of ways, most of which were creative measures to draw money out of the virtually nonexistent Honduran treasury. Among the most notable was a provision to direct tobacco receipts from Costa Rica into Morazán's purview (Griffith 1977: 205-206, 222 n.§). In addition to the compensatory elements of the contract, Morazán was given duty reductions for the wood cut under the concession, as well as the right to use whatever wood was found in the granted area for establishing works and other facilities. Honduras also agreed to protect any mahogany works established under the provisions of the contract (Morazán 1840b).

Though the contract reached with Honduras was enormous, Morazán tried to extend his monopoly even farther, into Nicaragua. Like the Honduras concession, the proposed extent in Nicaragua was vast; Chatfield claimed Morazán sought exclusive rights to the territory between the Río Pantasma (in the highlands north of Jinotega) and the Río San Juan, or almost all of eastern Nicaragua. Curiously, Morazán offered only two dollars per tree in Nicaragua, even though the going rate in Honduras was ten to
twelve dollars per tree (Chatfield 1837d: 182). However, Morazán was not the only one aware of the potential profits from mahogany concessions, and Nicaraguans with similar designs managed to thwart the concession (Chatfield 1837b: 128).

Conflict on the Western Boundaries

Morazán's concession also engendered a number of disputes and intrigues, establishing a precedent for the mahogany trade throughout the nineteenth century. By summer 1835 Bennett began negotiating for the disposal of mahogany on the Río Ulúa. At the same time, other mahogany concerns were approaching the Commandant of Omoa in the hope that they could negotiate an arrangement with him for mahogany tracts in the same area (Bennett 1835a). Mere days after informing Morazán of his progress in selling the trees, Bennett wrote another letter in which he implicated Joseph Swasey as well as Cabal and Follin, who were resisting the second contract as much as they had the first. Swasey even went so far as to contact Morazán directly in the hope that he would sell the trees at a lower price than Bennett was demanding (Bennett 1835b). At the same time, Cabal was planning to make overtures to Morazán about purchasing part of the concession outright (Bennett 1835c). However, it appears that these entreaties were of little consequence, and Bennett and Morazán remained in full control of the concession.

The next February Bennett informed Morazán that many of the Belize cutters were still occupied cutting in their own territory, but would soon be proceeding to the Ulúa to fell the trees he had sold. Bennett sold 600 trees in the first year of the contract, to a total of four different concerns from Belize (Bennett 1838). However, several of the cutters voiced concerns to Bennett over the difficulties they encountered loading ships off the mouth of the Ulúa. After arranging a demonstration loading, Bennett managed to
secure the sale of a thousand more trees, at ten dollars per tree, in the expectation they would be felled shortly (Bennett 1836a). Still aware of the threat posed by Cabal and Follin, Bennett also sent them a reminder that he was Morazán's sole agent for the sale of trees on the Ulúa, and if they wished to cut trees there they must make arrangements with him (Bennett 1836b). But Morazán's name and Bennett's administrative control of the concession was no guarantee that conflicts could be avoided, and discontent emerged again once the Belize cutters moved into the area.

Perhaps in an attempt to reaffirm the boundaries of the concession, it appears that most of Bennett's initial sales were far up the Ulúa, near the towns of Tiuma and Santiago. However, local officials took exception to the arrival of the mahogany gangs, and aggressively harassed their operations. Thomas Jennings purportedly dishonored a local woman, even though she was a notably infamous character in the area, and was fined 200 pesos by the mayor of Tiuma. The same mayor forced John Usher to stop cutting, even though he had already felled some thirty trees, on the pretext that his operations were beyond the legal limits of the concession (Cubas 1836a, Morazán 1836a, Soper 1836). Usher was so frustrated with the hindrances placed in his way that he returned to Belize and demanded compensation for his losses (Bennett 1836c).

Even more disturbingly for Bennett and Morazán, the actions of the mayor of Tiuma were predicated on a competing grant issued by the Honduras government. The new contract was secured by Jóse Francisco Zelaya, and either abutted the Morazán concession or fell in the same territory, depending on how the boundaries of the 1835 contract were read. Although details are scarce, it appears that the Zelaya grant was for all of the wood between the town of Amapa and Palenque, a ford somewhere on the Ulúa
near Tiuma. Zelaya claimed to Morazán confidant Miguel Cubas that the concession included more than 16,000 mahogany trees, and that he hoped to sell as many as 6,000 as quickly as possible to cutters from Belize (Cubas 1836a). In detailing the dispute, Cubas expressed his opinion that the area certainly fell under the terms of Morazán's grant, but suggested a commission might be required to measure the degrees of longitude and latitude to everyone's satisfaction (Cubas 1836b). In response, Morazán drafted letters of protest to the government, reasserting his right to all of the wood on the Ulúa and complaining about the activities of the local populace. Morazán also reminded the government of the stipulation that it provide protection for those cutting under the auspices of his grant, but there is no evidence he felt a clarification of the boundaries was necessary. Indeed, he claimed that even a cursory glance at a map would be proof enough that the area fell under his purview (Morazán 1836b). There is no evidence of a response from the government, but neither is there evidence that Morazán, Bennett, or Cubas evinced further concern over the matter, suggesting that the dispute was resolved to their satisfaction.

Conflict on the Eastern Frontier

Though Bennett had managed to stabilize the western end of the concession, problems on a larger scale soon arose far to the east on the Río Limón. Increased competition and a reduction in easily accessible timber had forced many of the Belize mahogany concerns to look elsewhere for more profitable sources of mahogany. Because Bennett, either outright or as Morazán's agent, controlled nearly all of the available timber from the Guatemala border through Honduras, the only place available to secure mahogany was on the Miskito Shore. Seeking any advantage possible, the Belize
interests found it expedient to revive the authority of the Miskito King, based on the premise that the Miskito Shore was a sovereign state apart from Central America. The firm of Hyde and Forbes procured a grant between Cape Camaron and Cape Honduras from King Robert Charles Frederick, an area including the easily accessible timber of the Limón. Disregarding the fact that it was claimed in the Morazán concession Hyde and Forbes proceeded to launch their woodcutting operations in late 1836 or early 1837 (Hyde 1837: 296).

Despite his initial inclination to merely direct the Commandant of Trujillo to dismantle the works, Morazán sent a confidential note to Chatfield in December to ascertain the best way to deal with the situation (Morazán 1836c). For his part, Chatfield replied that to his knowledge the boundary of the Miskito Shore had always been Cape Honduras, and that the Central American claims to the territory were of no consequence (Chatfield 1836c: 174). Chatfield, under the mistaken assumption that Morazán's concession stretched only from Omoa to Trujillo, suspected that Morazán's actions were motivated by a desire to reduce the amount of mahogany available on the market (Chatfield 1836d: 170-171). Nearly a year passed before Chatfield recognized his mistake and understood that Morazán's concession stretched all the way to Punta Patuca (Chatfield 1837b: 127).

The next February, Robert Frederick sent notice to Alexander MacDonald, who had succeeded Cockburn as Superintendent in Belize, that he had received letters from both Bennett and the Commandant of Trujillo, threatening the use of force against the contested works on the Limón (Frederick 1837a). Frederick also sent a petition to the King of Great Britain, asserting the Miskito Shore extended to Cape Honduras and
seeking protection from Central American aggression (Frederick 1837b). MacDonald, who referred to Bennett as "a notoriously bad character", was convinced that the Miskito King had legitimate concerns and that neither Bennett nor Morazán had any right to claim the disputed area as theirs since it was obviously not Central American territory (MacDonald 1837a: 230-232). He also notified Chatfield that he would not sit idly by while mahogany cutters from Belize were hindered in any way, especially as the Bennett claim to the Limón was superfluous anyway (MacDonald 1837b: 69). In March, Morazán arranged to meet privately with Chatfield to discuss the mahogany cuttings on the Limón. In that meeting Morazán, wary of conflict with Great Britain, assured Chatfield that the government had no intention of using force to settle the dispute (Chatfield 1837a: 74).

Instead, that spring Morazán instructed Bennett to notify those cutting under his auspices on the Limón to temporarily forego cutting more trees, although they should continue their efforts to remove the timber already felled. Bennett quite possibly was also operating with more discretion in consequence of his recent meeting with MacDonald in Belize, in which the Superintendent had warned him of the political implications of his actions. MacDonald felt it improper for Bennett, a British subject, to sell mahogany on behalf of a Central American concern (Morazán) to British subjects in an area where Great Britain did not officially recognize Central American sovereignty. Whatever his personal opinion may have been on the matter, Bennett felt it prudent to confine his operations to an area that was indisputably within Central American territory. Though woodsmen from Belize had recently returned from Cape Gracias a Dios, where they failed to find any trees worth felling, and entreated him to sell them mahogany on
the banks of the Limón, Bennett declined. Instead, he offered to sell them the wood on Guaymoreto Lagoon, just east of Trujillo (Bennett 1837a). Despite Bennett's judicious withdrawal, there was enough mahogany at stake on the Limón that the issue remained contentious.

Lord Palmerston, spurred by entreaties from both the Miskito King and the Superintendent of Belize, directed Chatfield to remind the Central American government that Great Britain "... cannot view with indifference any interruption to the peaceable commerce of Her Majesty's subjects." (Palmerston 1837: 9-10). Also convinced of the legitimacy of the British claimants, Lord Glenelg suggested to Palmerston that the practice of sending gifts from Belize to the Miskito King should be renewed (a 1837). In October MacDonald wrote a letter to Glenelg agreeing with the decision to revive the long-dormant practice, but only if the Belize residents were not forced to pay for it out of their own funds (MacDonald 1837d: 48). Clearly, the Belizean woodcutting interests were interested in solidifying their claims to the mahogany on the Miskito Shore.

However, in the fall of 1837 Morazán and the government were still asserting the territory to be Central American, and were demanding duties on vessels loading off the Miskito Shore (Hyde 1837). By this time Hyde and Forbes were not the only mahogany concerns operating in the area. In fact, two vessels were being sent from Belize to the Aguán to load mahogany cut by John Booth, and MacDonald had given notice that they were not to be interfered with in any way (Bennett 1837b). At this time Booth was apparently working for the firm of France and Cox, who were sending regular payments for their trees to the Miskito King (Walker 1847b: 39). At the time he wrote to Lord Palmerston, Hyde was apparently unaware that mahogany cut under his Miskito grant
had already been seized by the Commandant of Trujillo. MacDonald, incensed by the seizure, threatened to call in naval support from Jamaica if the wood was not returned to Forbes and Hyde (MacDonald 1837c). For his part, Chatfield informed Morazán directly that actions taken against British subjects on the Miskito Shore could not be taken without the expectation of some kind of response from Great Britain (Chatfield 1837c: 135). But the British government, in particular Colonial Secretary Glenelg, had begun to question the wisdom of closer ties with the Miskito Kingdom (Stephen 1837b: 292-293). After Hyde complained to the Foreign Office about the seizure, he received the reply that, if the grant was received under the auspices of the Miskito king, then that was the authority to which he should turn for protection against interference with his works (PRO 1838: 31). There is no indication that either Hyde or MacDonald pursued this particular matter any further, although MacDonald would eventually take an even more aggressive role in supporting the Miskito Shore as a quasi-independent state (Rodriguez 1964, Naylor 1989). Additionally, the dispute on the Limón piqued the interest of Foreign Secretary Palmerston, who would remain involved in the affairs of the Miskito Shore throughout the height of the mahogany era.

Irrespective of the territorial disputes, Bennett continued selling trees throughout the extent of Morazán's concession. The offer to sell the trees at Guaymoreto that Bennett had made at the start of the controversy was accepted by the Belize resident James Welsh, who paid Bennett for 273 trees felled by the summer of 1837. Bennett also continued selling trees on the Río Aguán to at least one woodcutting concern despite its proximity to the area of dispute, receiving payment from José Farrel for one hundred trees in the same year (Bennett 1837c). Additionally, overtures were made to sell trees as
far east as Black River, although Bennett eventually recommended to Morazán that the
sale be abandoned (Bennett 1838).

The records Bennett maintained for Morazán to justify his expenses and accounts
also indicate that each successive year became progressively more lucrative for the two
partners. The initial sale of just 600 trees in 1835 almost doubled in 1836, and the
number of Belize houses working under Bennett's administration increased from four to
eight. That year Bennett sold 1,068 trees, ultimately taking in more than ten thousand
dollars for the timber (Bennett 1838). The following year appears to have been the most
lucrative; with seventeen concerns under contract 1,979 trees were felled, all except the
373 sold to Welsh, Jennings, and Farrell coming from the banks of the Ulúa and
Chamelecón. Owing to the prospect of unrest and the pending disposition of the Galvez
government in Guatemala (Woodward 1985), the number fell sharply in 1838 to barely
more than a thousand trees (Bennett 1838).

Given the vast extent of the concession and the difficulties faced in traveling
through the region, it is not surprising that attempts to circumvent Bennett's
administration continued unabated, even in the uncontested areas. The most direct way
to accomplish this was to surreptitiously fell more timber than the amount for which one
had contracted. John Usher, one of the original cutters to whom Bennett sold trees in
1836 and 1837, managed to cut and remove at least 152 more trees than had been
arranged with Bennett. The illegal cut was not discovered until late in 1838, but Usher
was nonetheless compelled to submit 1,520 dollars as payment for the trees (Bennett
1838). There is no indication that Usher was penalized or subjected to any legal
proceedings, attesting to the value of experienced cutters and the unremitting focus of all involved on maximizing profits from the sale of any and all mahogany possible.

By 1839, Morazán began to lose control over his political and commercial affairs. Morazán's second term as president of the Central American Federation ended that year, and the Federation itself was crumbling. To compound matters, Bennett died that fall, leaving Morazán's commercial affairs, especially the mahogany concession, in disarray. Perhaps attempting to capitalize on the unsettled state of Morazán's affairs after Bennett's death, at least one enterprising woodcutter made attempts to secure mahogany outside the constraints of the concession. In October 1839 Martin Bulnes appeared before the authorities and expressed his intent to cut one hundred trees of mahogany at Puerto Caballos. Quite possibly Bulnes was intending to cut trees that were only marginally saleable, hence he only offered four pesos per tree rather than the standard rate of ten dollars (Velasquez 1839).

Upon losing Bennett, Morazán was left without a knowledgeable partner to administer his concession. He first sought to engage Francisco Camoyano, a Spaniard living in Belize, but Camoyano lacked any real experience in the mahogany trade (Camoyano 1839: 270-271); his lack of experience quickly proved insurmountable. By January 1840, Morazán's trusted friend and associate Jóse María Lozano assumed a de facto role as Morazán's new agent. After a fact-finding visit to Belize, Lozano informed Morazán that Camoyano was making sales without clearly specifying locations or terms of removal, but that Lozano had thus far managed to smooth any difficulties with the Camoyano arrangements. He also informed Morazán that concerns over the boundaries of the concession were once again becoming a problem. In this instance, the Honduran
government directed authorities in the departments of Yoro and Santa Barbara to prohibit any cutting under Morazán's auspices in two disputed locales. The former involved sales made far inland on the Ríos Amapa and Cuyamapa, the latter at Tulian, Cienaguíta, and Puerto Caballos, all on the coast in the vicinity of Omoa. As before, the longitudinal boundaries of the concession were being questioned, although all of the sites identified are within even the most restrictive interpretation of the grant. Lozano managed to make arrangements with Augustus Follin that would apparently procure the trees near Omoa, but a resolution to the matter, according to Lozano, would require cash payments to curry local favor. If such payments were forthcoming, Lozano assured Morazán that he might be able to secure the sale of as many as six thousand trees (Lozano 1840a: 273-274). However, subsequent events would resolve the situation in a different manner.

By this time, the Central American Federation was in its final days, and Morazán was facing imminent defeat in Guatemala (Griffith 1977: 209). Though faced with the most significant defeat of his professional career, Morazán appointed Lozano as his agent for the concession. Sensing the pending dissolution of his contract with Honduras, Morazán also directed Lozano to make a general sale of trees as quickly as possible (Morazán 1840a: 283-284). Unfortunately the document was intercepted and used by Morazán's enemies as additional proof of their claims that Morazán had placed his personal ambition ahead of the public good, and the resultant outcry for all practical purposes ended the ability of Lozano to make any additional sales (Griffith 1977: 209). Morazán's agreement with Honduras was officially terminated in June 1840 (Aguilar 1840b). Morazán himself had already fled into exile, and the cancellation was merely a formality, predicated on Morazán's failure to uphold the terms of his agreement with the
state. Worse, the state also held Morazán liable for the proceeds he had realized from the sale of mahogany trees over the course of the concession, and an additional sum from payments made on the mint (Morazán 1840a: 284, Aguilar 1840a: 285-286).

Reflecting on the collapse of his public life in Central America, Morazán suggested to Lozano from exile that much of the discontent raised against him for his business affairs was attributable to Bennett (Morazán 1840c: 275). However, the point was moot at this juncture. In November, Lozano informed Morazán that his contract with Honduras had been officially cancelled, and that Frederick Chatfield had seized the opportunity to make a proposal to take over a similar concession in the name of the British public (Lozano 1840b: 277). Chatfield was anxious to secure the repayment of the loans made to the Federal Republic of Central America by the Barclay Herring Company in the mid-1820s, which had not been satisfactorily addressed more than a decade later. As an equal member of the ill-fated state, Honduras was responsible for a sixth of the sum owed, and Chatfield intended the mahogany trade on the north coast to help repay the debt. In May 1840 he formally submitted a proposal to the Honduras government for an arrangement similar to the one entered into by Morazán five years earlier. Of the proceeds raised from the sale of mahogany under his proposal, two-thirds would accrue to the debt and the remaining third would belong to Honduras (Chatfield 1840a). Although it was of little consequence, Chatfield apparently informed the Foreign Office of this action only after he had submitted the proposal to Honduras (Chatfield 1840b). The final agreement, reached in 1841, was indeed strikingly similar to the Morazán contract. Though the proceeds were to be split evenly rather than in the more favorable arrangement suggested earlier by Chatfield, the grant covered all mahogany
and Brazil wood in the area between Trujillo and Omoa inland to the fifteenth parallel
(Hall 1841a, 1841b; Chatfield 1841: 126).

**The Mahogany Duty**

The underlying subtext for many of the conflicts and misunderstandings in the revived mahogany trade of the 1830s was the recurring question of mahogany duties. Though Belize was not an official colony of Great Britain, it nonetheless enjoyed a marked preference in the amount of duties it paid on goods shipped to the British Isles; mahogany was no exception. As long as mahogany cutting was confined to the territory identified in the 1786 agreement between Spain and England, there was little concern over the question of duties on goods imported from the Bay of Honduras. However, once the Belize cutters began to exhaust their supply of easily accessible trees, they were forced to venture beyond the established limits into Spanish territory, and the duty issue became a point of contention (Naylor 1989: 104-105).

The first local ordinance designed to eliminate competition from foreign wood was passed in 1817, under which wood cut from outside the legal limits of the settlement and exported through Belize was subject to an export fee of twenty-five pounds per thousand feet (Cockburn 1832). However, the continued removal of easily accessible mahogany gradually forced almost all of the cutters to expand their operations beyond the legal limit, and the 1817 provision was increasingly ignored (Naylor 1989: 104-105). This expansion of the effective boundaries of the settlement led indirectly to the colonization grants appropriated by Juan Galindo, Marshall Bennett, and William Gould in Guatemala (Griffith 1965). Though mahogany increasingly came from areas outside the boundary, Belize still enjoyed a preferential advantage, but by 1826 that advantage
was only five pounds per thousand feet over the rate charged for foreign wood (Naylor 1958: 96 n.31, 1989: 107). In a new regulation passed in 1832, the Board of Trade recognized the changing conditions in the mahogany trade, and passed a regulation allowing the preferential duty for all mahogany in the Bay of Honduras cleared through Belize in a British vessel (Naylor 1958 n.32, 1989: 106-107). Intent on maintaining their mahogany monopoly, the Belize merchants took the Board of Trade regulations one step further, limiting the preferential rate only to those who were actual residents of the settlement; Marshall Bennett, among others, was living elsewhere by this time. Superintendent Francis Cockburn refused to approve the regulation, but officially acknowledged that easily obtainable mahogany was becoming scarce in Belize, and that cutters from Belize were actively securing timber in Guatemalan territory (Cockburn 1832; Naylor 1958: 97).

Because Bennett was the most aggressive and successful in securing grants and concessions in Central America, he was also the focus of most of the attempts to control the foreign wood passing through Belize. In a move to limit Bennett's success in exploiting Central American mahogany, the Belize Public Meeting passed a local regulation in March 1835 establishing two duties on wood cut outside of the settlement's limits and cleared through that port; British subjects would pay a rate of five pounds per thousand feet, while foreigners would be levied seven pounds and ten shillings for the same procedure (PRO 1835, Naylor 1989: 112). Bennett responded by lodging a protest with the Board of Trade, and a subsequent ruling affirmed that local regulations should not be allowed to hinder any aspect of the mahogany trade conducted by British subjects. The local duty was repealed by the acting Superintendent in May, and mahogany cut
from anywhere in the Bay of Honduras by British subjects was once again granted the same rate as that cut in Belize (Naylor 1989: 258 n.33).

Fearful that Bennett and others would cut and load mahogany outside of the limits, clear it through Belize and claim the preferential rate, Chatfield appealed for the intervention of Lord Palmerston in the debate, citing the commercial benefits that would accrue if "... no Vessel shall be allowed to clear outwards from the port of Belize, unless she shall have cleared inwards previous to breaking bulk ..." (Chatfield 1836a: 89). Mere days after his first dispatch, Chatfield sent Palmerston an even more detailed description of the Belize clearance issue (Chatfield 1836b: 91-94). Superintendent Cockburn harbored the same opinions as Chatfield, but both men were ultimately to be disappointed (Cockburn 1836). Instead, the Board of Trade asserted that trade regulations were a matter for Parliament, and were not to be altered at the whim of local interests; the ruling that all British-cut mahogany be given the preferential rate stood (Naylor 1989:112). Though the ruling certainly meant that there would be an increase in the supply of available mahogany being shipped to England through Belize, it did not mean, as some claimed, that Belize cutters were necessarily at a competitive disadvantage. Nevertheless, citing higher costs at home, Belize cutters like Hyde and Forbes turned their attention elsewhere, most particularly to the mahogany beyond Bennett's control, on the Miskito Shore (Hyde 1837).

All that remained was for the Belize woodcutting interests to ensure the same rates for mahogany from Miskito as from the Bay of Honduras. In this regard, the Miskito King proved as pliable as when distributing grants to the woodcutting concerns. In May 1837 King Frederick sent a petition to the King of Great Britain in which he
pointed out that ships sailing from the Miskito Shore were subject to foreign duties, while those from Belize were not, regardless of the fact that British subjects were responsible for both activities. Frederick also claimed that it would be more expedient to ship directly from the Shore rather than through Belize (Frederick 1837a). Later that same year Thomas Hedgecock, heavily vested in the renewed Poyais venture at Black River, reiterated the particulars of the situation to Lord Palmerston (Hedgecock 1837). After consideration by both the Colonial and Foreign Offices, in August 1838 the Board of Trade extended the preferential rate to the Miskito Shore and allowed ships to sail directly from that locale, essentially establishing the precedent that British subjects could cut anywhere in Central America and be afforded the preferential rate (Naylor 1989: 116-117).

Though the duty question was effectively resolved by the gradual expansion of what constituted importable timber, the ultimate impact of the controversy was more telling. Competition in the mahogany trade led to the expansion of cutting outside the territorial limits of Belize, extending eventually all the way to the Miskito Shore. That same competition helped resurrect the debate over the Miskito Shore, and led directly to the conflicts between competing interests on the Ríos Limón and Aguán in the 1830s. As the Morazán era came to a close, surprisingly little had actually been resolved on the north coast. Mahogany had clearly captured the attention of a wide range of commercial interests, but continued confusion over the territorial status of the Miskito Shore, combined with personal ambition, would continue to be a problem well into the 1840s and beyond.
A New Era: Expansion in the Early 1840s

Despite Morazán's effective control over all of the major river valleys on the north coast, the conflicts over the Miskito Territory and an abundance of easily accessible timber limited the actual area exploited under the contract. Save the Welsh and Jennings sales at Guaymoreto, nearly all of Bennett's sales extended inland along the watersheds of the Ulúa and the Chamelecón. Once Morazán's contract with Honduras was suspended, the entire coast once again became open for exploitation. In the 1840s, mahogany concerns continued expanding up the Ulúa and the Chamelecón, but also expanded eastward along the narrow coastal margin. At the same time, cutters operating in the vicinity of Trujillo seized the opportunity to push up the Aguán as well as continue clearing the timber from the lower reaches of the Limón, Chapagua, and other smaller rivers.

Expansion in the West

In the western portions of the coast, an old name resurfaced as the most powerful man in the mahogany trade. By the time Morazán's contract was suspended, Augustus Follin had solidified his position in the region such that Jóse Lozano had even recommended him as the best person to act as Morazán's new agent. Subsequent events suggest that Follin was more content to satisfy his personal ambition, and would have been disappointed by a relationship with Morazán. By the mid-1840s, Follin was reputed to have the most extensive mahogany concern in Honduras (Wells 1857: 347). Building on his earlier efforts to secure timber in the Ulúa and Chamelecón watersheds, Follin signed a contract with Honduras on October 28, 1843 in which he agreed to pay ten dollars per tree for mahogany cut on the Ríos Ulúa, Chamelecón, and Comayagua.
Though the exact limits of Follin's contract are unclear, it appears that he was granted an extremely liberal concession, which led to a significant number of trees being cut in a relatively short period of time. In fact, Follin was apparently so confident of his ability to procure the concession that his crews were felling trees even before the contract was signed. A commission sent to document the trees cut under Follin's auspices indicated that his most extensive works were on the Chamelecón. At the four works established on the Chamelecón, 845 trees were felled in two seasons. The commission's documentation was so thorough that the report included the number of canoes at each works that had been made from felled mahogany. At the same time, an additional 143 trees were felled on the Río Blanco, a tributary of the Chamelecón extending to the west. The other two rivers yielded significantly fewer trees, perhaps indicating the more easily accessible timber had already been removed. Only 115 trees were felled in those two years on the Río Comayagua (Humuya) and the commission could only find twenty-five trees belonging to Follin on the Ulúa (ANH 1845a).

However, other players were also active in the Ulúa region. Charles Cunningham, formerly of Belize, established a large works at the mouth of Quebrada Tulúa (Toloa). The contract extended for three leagues on both sides of the creek from Tulúa to Guayma (Guaymas), and all the way to the Chamelecón (Cunningham 1845b). Cunningham claimed the first 150 trees felled from his works in 1845, but clearly anticipated a greater harvest because the claim was so extensive. Like others operating in the west, Cunningham agreed to pay ten pesos per tree felled (Cunningham ANH 1845a, Alvarado 1845). At the same time, John Milar, a citizen of the United States living near Lago Yojoa, sought a concession for the mahogany on the Río Yure from its confluence
with the Humuya upstream as far as they could cut, again for ten pesos per tree but also including an offer to pay one thousand additional pesos after cutting began. Honduras willingly acceded to both offers, further expanding the reach of the mahogany trade on the north coast (Alvarado 1845).

As with Morazán and Bennett a decade earlier, even Follin's power and influence were no guarantee that he would not be cheated of the profits from his mahogany concerns. In one instance, Thomas Jones, under the employ of Cunningham and his agent Joseph Raboteau, was engaged in securing timber for two vessels loading of the bar of the Ulúa. At the same time, Follin 'lost' two mahogany logs in the same area; because mahogany was only sorted out by marks immediately prior to loading, this may have been a standard occurrence. However, Follin received notice from an informant that Jones had stolen the two logs in question and sold them to the two British vessels he was employed to load (Jones 1847). Jones was subsequently imprisoned at Omoa for nearly four months, and was seeking resolution nearly a year after the event (Chatfield 1847b).

Follin's aggressive expansion of his mahogany operations in the 1840s also included a turn east from the Ulúa. In particular, the narrow coastal fringe east of the Laguna de los Micos, including what are now the cities of Tela and La Ceiba, held an attractive amount of easily accessible timber that had yet to be exploited commercially. Apparently seeking to stretch the limits of his concession, Follin established works to the east almost immediately after the 1843 contract with Honduras gave him access to the Ríos Ulúa, Chamelecón, and Comayagua. In 1845 Ysidoro Meza notified the government that Follin was the owner of works that had been established on the Ríos Leán and Papoleteca, as well as two locales on the Ulúa, at Tibombo and Colmacaba
(Meza 1845). Already working in the area east of the lagoon was Joseph Swasey. One of the original mahogany cutters venturing into Honduras from Belize, Swasey first merits mention as one of the parties contesting the Morazán concession in 1835. Though the exact nature of his position is unclear, Swasey may well have been one of the foremen or overseers in Cabal and Follin's early mahogany concerns. However, by the 1840s he was pursuing contracts in his own name. In 1841 Swasey informed the government that he had discovered one thousand mahogany trees in the lowlands surrounding the Río Satuye on the north coast, and that he intended to purchase them from the government at a rate of ten dollars per tree. Though unlikely that such a large number of trees be found in such a limited locale, Swasey had apparently ventured into the Cordillera Nombre de Dios as well; his application to the government specifically included a request to build roads into the mountains to secure his timber. The Honduran government agreed to grant Swasey the contract, with payments on the felled trees to be made at Trujillo or directly to the agents established by Frederick Chatfield for the old Barclay debt (Sorel 1841)

The limits of the Swasey contract may actually account for the distribution of Follin's activities in the area; the Leán and the Papoleteca lie to the west and east, respectively, of the Satuye, and there is no indication that Follin attempted to establish operations near Swasey's claim. Despite his grandiose expectations on the Satuye, the claim had been effectively abandoned by the mid-1840s. After making late payments to the Honduran authorities for his trees, Swasey ventured farther eastward and sought employment from the firms expanding their reach up the Río Aguán (Bernardez 1845a; Usher 1850).
Expansion in the East

At the same time that Follin and his competitors were pushing eastward from the Ulúa, a similar expansion of mahogany operations was occurring in the Trujillo hinterland. As had Follin in the Ulúa and Chamelecón, James Welsh quickly assumed a role as one of the most important mahogany operators in the contested Aguán region east of Trujillo. Welsh was perhaps in a stronger position than any of peers, whether in the west or the east. Not only was he actively engaged in the Honduras mahogany trade as the principal partner in the firm Welsh, Fernandez, and Company, but he also maintained active outside business interests in Belize. In that regard, he was a partner in the firm of Welsh and Gough, which was the designated agent for handling the commission granted to Chatfield for the Barclay Herring debt. Additionally, the Welsh and Gough concern moved into the mahogany lands of the lower Río Motagua, just over the Honduran border with Guatemala, after Bennett's death (Alvarado, et al. 1845a, 1845b). Welsh also engaged in the cattle trade between Belize and Honduras (Welsh 1848). The majority of Welsh's interests, however, lay in the mahogany of the Trujillo hinterlands.

After establishing the mahogany works at Guaymoreto Lagoon in the 1830s, Welsh and his long-time associate Thomas Jennings gradually extended their reach farther eastward in the early 1840s. By mid-decade, he secured rights to all of the mahogany between Trujillo and the lower Río Aguán, including the Río Chapagua and the Río Lirio (which becomes the large lagoon near the mouth of the Aguán). The number of trees felled in the area was not great, but from 1841 to 1844 Jennings directed the removal of 167 trees from the southern fringes of Guaymoreto, and an additional 100 on the Chapagua. An additional 149 were felled on the Lirio in 1845, but the majority of
Welsh's interests lay up the Aguán; in those same few years, Welsh reported to Honduras that he felled 756 trees at his works upriver (Bernardez 1845b, 1845d). Most of the trees felled on the banks of the Aguán proper likely came from the area surrounding Quebrada de Arenas. Robert Wardlaw established an extensive works on either side of the small creek in 1844, and contracted to sell the trees to Welsh until 1846 (Usher 1850). At the same time, Jennings was cutting for Welsh in the central coast west of Trujillo, in the same general area as Follin and Swasey. In 1845, Jennings submitted a claim to the authorities at Trujillo for 174 trees for Welsh's account on the Río Cuero, west of modern La Ceiba, in 1845 (Bernardez 1845b).

Also working on the Aguán was John Booth, who was the foreman for the Alexander France and James Cox concern that cut mahogany between the Aguán and the Limón in the 1830s. After France and Cox apparently abandoned their interests in the region, Booth went to work for William Vaughan. In 1840 he lost an entire season's worth of timber in the upper Río Bonito when the river proved 'impassable on account of rocks'. Despite this costly miscalculation, Vaughan retained Booth's services, and Booth directed Vaughan's operations at the Cotton Tree Bank located on the west bank of the Aguán above the Río Bonito in 1841 and 1842. By the mid-1840s, Booth was working for himself, securing proprietary rights to his own works even farther up the Aguán. In 1845 Booth employed Edward Usher as his foreman at Ilanga and Chichicaste, and he also controlled works at Biscoyula and opposite the mouth of Tocoa Creek in 1844 and 1845 (Usher 1850). The other major Belize concern working in the area was Archibald Montgomery. In 1844, Montgomery employed James Swasey to establish a small bank near the mouth of Chapagua Creek, and continued his operations there for two years, but
there is no indication that it was especially lucrative. Montgomery also took over the
Ilanga works that Edward Usher established for John Booth in 1845, but again operations
only continued for two years (Usher 1850).

Such was the Belizean interest in mahogany during this period that grants
occasionally were procured but not executed. A certain Mr. Neal, a carpenter from
Belize, was granted a mahogany concession by the Miskito authorities in the early 1840s
somewhere on the lower Río Limón. However, Neal never availed himself of the right to
cut, and the contract was voided upon the death of Robert Charles Frederick in 1842.
Neal was then informed that he would be allowed to renew the grant and maintain the
preference of his location, at the rate of two dollars per tree (Ingram 1845b). However,
there is no indication that Neal ever took advantage of this opportunity, either (Usher
1850). In the year previous, James Grant made a proposal to make parts for ten cannons
in exchange for mahogany rights. The proposal was accepted, but the contract was
delayed, and Grant later submitted a similar proposal, substituting cash for cannons
(Grant 1845). Subsequently, Grant was given rights to mahogany on the lower east bank
of the Aguán (ANH 1845b), but again there is no indication that he ever took advantage
of the contract, possibly because of Welsh's influence in the same area. Interestingly, the
contract Grant eventually agreed to with Honduras charged seven dollars a tree for an
unspecified locale near Trujillo, though the standard rate by this time was five (Bernardez
1845c). Likely this indicates a significant difference in either the size or quality of the
trees in a given area, especially since mahogany concerns were active throughout the
region and its mahogany resources were generally well known.
Local Honduran interests were not entirely left out of the early scramble for the region's mahogany wealth, although documentation is sparse for their activities. José Prieto, responding to the cancellation of Morazán's contract, seized the opportunity to establish a works far up the Aguán at Cuyulapa. Prieto agreed to pay the government five pesos for each tree felled, but the area proved difficult to work (Prieto 1843a, 1843b). He seems to have abandoned this works after just one or two seasons in favor of more accessible timber on the lower Aguán, but that venture was also ill fated. Prieto died before the operation became successfully established, and the timber felled under his concession was not trucked out, but left in the forest for want of roads with which to remove it (Usher 1850). The local mahogany empresario Welsh, in fact, directed Jennings to secure the timber, and Welsh claimed 257 trees from that area to the Honduran authorities in 1845 (Bernardez 1845d). There are also indications that Honduran interests cut mahogany near Ilanga as early as 1842 (ANH 1842). There were also at least three small Honduran concerns operating in the middle Aguán by mid-decade near Taujica Creek. In the early 1850s Welsh noted that Rodriguez, Vergas, and Marin were all working in the area in the mid-1840s, but there is no indication they remained active for any notable length of time (Welsh, Fernandez, and Company 1852: 87-88). And, much as he had with Prieto's contract, Welsh bought the contract of Francisco Pinto after his death, also in 1845. Pinto's contract was for wood on both sides of the Aguán at a rate of five dollars per tree (Welsh 1851b: 44).

**Prospect: Renewing the Miskito Controversy**

The personal ambition of men like Francisco Morazán and Marshall Bennett, combined with increasing demand for mahogany in the world market, led to a revival of
the Honduras mahogany trade in the 1830s. Under the concession granted to Morazán, mahogany works became a regular feature of the Honduran landscape, from Omoa to Trujillo and beyond. Save the untimely demise of first Bennett and then the Central American Federation, Morazán may have continued exploiting the mahogany of the north coast well into the 1840s. However, the cancellation of Morazán' contract opened the region to a wider range of interest, and the early 1840s was a period of even more rapid growth in the mahogany trade. In the west, Augustus Follin readily moved into the role of regional empresario, overseeing some of the most extensive works in Honduras. In the east, competition was greater, and a broader range of concerns contested the mahogany on the banks of the Aguán, fostering a more aggressive expansion upstream. By the mid-1840s, operations extended far up the Aguán past Ilanga to Chichicaste and Cuyulapa.

Though this first phase of expansion engendered surprisingly little conflict or dispute, the seeds of controversy had been sown in the dispute over the Limón in 1836. The dispute would be renewed after mahogany operations under the umbrella of Miskito authority resumed in earnest in 1845, with the arrival of Antonio Mathe and Company in the region. Mathe and others claiming Miskito jurisdiction intensified the competition for mahogany in the Trujillo hinterlands. That competition, combined with progressively more aggressive political maneuvering by Honduras and Great Britain, would determine the course of the trade in its eastern extremities for much of the next decade.
By the middle of the 1840s, the Honduran mahogany trade entered a sustained period of growth. In the west, mahogany works extended dozens of miles up the Ulúa and Chamelecón watersheds. After the chorus of disputes surrounding Morazán concession in the 1830s, the region entered a period of relative calm, and cutting continued generally uninterrupted. But in the east, where mahogany works stretched inland along the Aguán valley and several smaller rivers, the disputes of the 1830s remained unresolved. Though James Welsh could realistically claim to be the most dominant of the mahogany concerns cutting mahogany in the east, the fact that he cut solely under the authority of the Honduran state left the area open to rival claims from outside interests. As British commercial interest in the Miskito Shore revived in the mid-1840s, so too did attempts to exploit the lucrative mahogany resources in areas claimed by that state. This resumption of cutting under the Miskito authority in the formerly contested lower Aguán valley not only created an intense rivalry between local mahogany entrepreneurs, but also set the stage for renewed conflict between Honduras and Great Britain. That conflict would dominate and define the course of the mahogany trade in the Trujillo hinterland for nearly two decades.

New Competition in the Trujillo Hinterland

Beginning in the mid-1840s, the virtual monopoly enjoyed by James Welsh in the Aguán valley was challenged by the firm of Antonio Mathe and Company. Mathe was a
Spaniard educated in England and resident at Belize for a period of time, and was generally well regarded in the region (Walker 1846b: 22). The backing for the firm, however, actually came from John Carmichael, a Liverpool financier; Mathe acted as the agent for the firm's activities, primarily in the mahogany trade (Mathe 1852: 121). After receiving mahogany grants from the Miskito authorities, Mathe established extensive works in the Aguán valley and points east through the end of the decade. Unlike James Welsh, who was responsible for mahogany works far up the Aguán valley as well as its lower reaches, Mathe concentrated the majority of his activities in a limited area. Most notably, Mathe cut intensively on the Ríos Bonito and Piedra Blanca. James Donald established Mathe's first works on the east bank of the Río Bonito in 1845, and Edward Usher would venture farther upstream in subsequent seasons. Usher also cut trees on the Río Piedra Blanca for three years beginning in 1846. Working for Mathe, James Courtnay established a works on the north side of the Aguán in 1846, opposite Taujica Creek, at the same time James Swasey was doing the same slightly upriver. Later, Courtnay revived Archibald Montgomery's old works at Cotton Tree Bank in 1848 and 1849. At Quebrada de Arenas, Robert Wardlaw ended his association with James Welsh in 1846, and for the next two years cut trees under contract for Mathe. In conjunction with John Wright, Wardlaw also established the Escalera Bank west of Taujica Creek in 1847, but it was the farthest Mathe and Company would extend their interests up the Aguán valley (Usher 1850). Smaller works also existed farther east, past the Limón at Salt Creek and at Sangrelaya (Mathe 1848a: 57), and Mathe lost at least one season's worth of timber on the Limoncito in 1846 (Usher 1850). Further, there are some
indications that Mathe also cut in the vicinity of Black River in 1846 or 1847 (Donald 1847: 199).

At the same time that Mathe initiated his operations in the area, other Belize cutters continued to press individual claims in the area. Archibald Montgomery visited Patrick Walker, the British consul-general for Mosquitia, in summer 1844 to seek permission to cut mahogany in the Aguán region, as did Robert Wardlaw and several other unidentified interests (Walker 1847b: 40). By 1845, James Swasey had moved well east of the Satuye, and was actively seeking permission to cut on the east bank of the Aguán under the same conditions as the others already working there. Once again, the rate charged per tree under Miskito authority was a paltry two dollars per tree instead of the five currently charged by the Honduras government (Ingram 1845b: 112). Swasey does not appear to have established a bank on the east side of the Aguán, but instead worked the other side for Montgomery and Mathe in 1844 and 1845 (Usher 1850). By the time the dispute over the Miskito boundary reached its peak in the latter half of the decade, Swasey was well removed from the center of the conflict, having ventured several miles east to Sangrelaya to establish a new works (Loustalet 1849).

**Roots of Conflict: The Miskito Boundary Question Resurfaces**

The arrival of new competition in the Trujillo hinterland, in the form of Antonio Mathe, was to have long-lasting effects on the course of the region's mahogany trade. Mathe entered the area under the terms of a grant received from the Miskito state, while his most serious rival, James Welsh, was working under the authority of Honduras. Both firms were competing for a generally limited resource, ensuring that the competition between them would be intense. More importantly, the commercial rivalry rekindled the
long-standing question of the Miskito Shore, especially since its political geography and the nature of its authority were intimately linked to British activities in the Aguán valley.

Informal Empire on the Shore

Most of the responsibility for increased British involvement on the Mosquito Shore lay with Belize Superintendent Alexander MacDonald. His aggressive defense of the Hyde and Forbes concern on the Limón in the 1830s was merely a prelude to further agitation and involvement in Miskito affairs by the British government. By the close of that decade, several new colonization projects were launched under the cover of grants from Robert Charles Frederick, most notably in the Black River region (Naylor 1989: 118-130). Though the particulars of the colonization schemes had little to do with the Honduras mahogany trade, they significantly impacted the course of government in the region. By 1840, MacDonald responded to a direct request from the Miskito King to take a more active role in the affairs of the Shore by appointing a five-member commission to supplement the king's authority. He acted independently of both the Colonial and Foreign Offices, and in so doing prompted a sharp disagreement over the nature and extent of continued British involvement on the Miskito Shore (Naylor 1989: 132-133). Though MacDonald's blatant attempts to govern the Miskito Shore were eventually thwarted by officials in London, his aggressive enforcement of Miskito sovereignty prompted a protracted series of border disputes with the neighboring states of Central America. The most inflammatory were in the south, with Costa Rica and Nicaragua, but a precedent for aggressive boundary enforcement in support of commercial interests was thereby established (Naylor 1989: 136-138). It was a precedent that would have long-term implications for the Honduran mahogany trade.
By spring 1844, MacDonald was back in London, but former aide Patrick Walker was appointed the new consul-general to the Miskito Shore. The appointment was made through the Foreign Office, but Walker was officially answerable to the Governor of Jamaica, who was in turn under the aegis of the Colonial Office, reflecting the still-unsettled question of how Great Britain viewed its presence in Mosquitia. Though in many ways the position was new, it also echoed the earlier practice of appointing British residents that had begun in the eighteenth century (Naylor 1989: 151). By effectively giving governance to one individual, it also subtly established the mechanism of "informal empire" that enabled Great Britain to avoid the major responsibilities of colonial administration while managing affairs to its own advantage. In this light, Walker's most pressing concern was satisfying British commercial interests on the Shore while simultaneously legitimizing the existence of the state itself. Walker's aggressive profile in this regard prepared the way for the ensuing decade and a half of boundary disputes, sovereignty struggles, and commercial maneuvering that would characterize the rest of the short-lived Miskito kingdom. On the Honduras border, those disputes were intimately linked to the mahogany trade.

The Wardlaw Affair

When the Belizean mahogany cutters Archibald Montgomery and Robert Wardlaw visited Bluefields in the summer of 1844, each left with the understanding that Walker supported their rights to cut on the Aguán. Wardlaw was a familiar face in the mahogany trade, already cutting trees for James Welsh at Quebrada de Arenas. Walker purportedly informed Wardlaw that he lacked the authority to grant him an exclusive license, but saw no reason why he could not exploit the territory because John Booth and
Alexander France had apparently defaulted on their obligations to pay the Miskito King for their timber; if Wardlaw would but agree to pay the requisite fees for the timber felled, he should be in good stead with the Miskito King. (Walker 1845: 89). Apparently satisfied with Walker's reply, Wardlaw agreed to pay the requisite two dollars per tree and made plans to establish his works in the disputed territory (Ingram 1845a: 109).

Only a few short months passed before Wardlaw encountered difficulties with Honduras. That October the authorities at Trujillo apprised Wardlaw that his operations were located in Honduran territory, and he would have to contract with that government if he wished to continue cutting timber on the Limón (Sorel 1844). They also moved to enforce the Honduras duty laws on ships delivering to the disputed works. In early 1845, Jose Sorel and Jacobo Bernardez sent notice to Wardlaw that the schooner True Blue, which was laden with flour, biscuits, pork, and goods for his works, must register at Trujillo and pay the appropriate duties (Sorel and Bernardez 1845a, Lamothe 1845: 18-19). Sorel and Bernardez also took steps to prevent Wardlaw from cutting a cattle road from La Brea to Chapagua (Sorel and Bernardez 1845b: 18). In response, Wardlaw restated his belief in the legality of Miskito authority, but attempted to convince the Hondurans he would satisfy whatever legal claims could be made for the territory in question. To this end, he chided Sorel and Bernardez for sending their notice under cover of armed troops " . . . as if with the view of intimidating me, should it be decided that you are to have the right of laying duties on goods landed here, it will not be necessary to resort to force . . . " (Wardlaw 1845a: 82). Wardlaw also informed Chatfield of the problems he was facing east of the Aguán, claiming that he was merely reoccupying one of the old claims of Alexander France, that the Aguán had always been considered the
boundary between Honduras and the Miskito Shore, and that Booth, France, and Cox had also refused to pay duties for goods landed in the same area in which he was cutting (Wardlaw 1845b: 84). Chatfield promptly notified the Honduran government that he had no qualms with claiming the Aguán as the boundary, and that this was the first he had heard of the issue since his discussions with Morazán in 1836 (Chatfield 1845b). In short order Chatfield was apprised that, as far as Honduras was concerned, the limits of the national territory should be the same as they were during the rule of Spain (Cisneros 1845: 20-21). For his part, it appears Wardlaw surrendered to practicality and resumed his contracting for other concerns up the Aguán valley. He oversaw operations at various times for Archibald Montgomery, and continued to supervise the Welsh operations on the Aguán through 1846 (Usher 1850). By the late forties he established works for Antonio Mathe in several locations, although he appears to have played little or no role in the disputes that would eventually arise between Mathe and the Honduras government.

Montgomery was more cautious than Wardlaw, who continued to fell trees in the Aguán valley even after indications of dissent from the Hondurans. Despite Walker's assurances that he saw no obstacles to cutting in that locale, Montgomery relocated east of the Limón in 1845 (Usher 1850). However, he faced many of the same problems encountered by Wardlaw, and by 1846 he was embroiled in the region's intensifying power struggle. In February of that year he complained to Patrick Walker that the authorities at Trujillo were detaining imported items meant for his mahogany works. Montgomery also appears to have reached an agreement with Mathe for a works east of the Limón (Montgomery 1846a: 169). One month later, the same authorities prevented
Montgomery from driving his cattle east to Sangrelaya, and Montgomery lodged another protest with Walker (Montgomery 1846b: 175).

Also that March, the Honduran government took measures to limit the potential resistance to its efforts to assert territorial authority by force of arms. The clearest indication of this course of action is reflected in an unusual request made to Frederick Chatfield, entreating the British consul's aid in regulating the amount of firearms and ammunition brought into the country by those engaged in the mahogany trade (Chatfield 1845a: 243). Clearly, the notice was a prescient recognition of the increasing tension east of Trujillo, but the government's inflammatory and aggressive actions would eventually intensify the situation beyond the actions of a few mahogany cutters carrying firearms.

The Curious Case of Messrs. Mathe and Carmichael

The actions taken by the authorities at Trujillo against Wardlaw and Montgomery were merely a prelude to a more protracted series of conflicts over Mathe's holdings in the area. As the largest and most active of the firms cutting under Miskito authority on the Aguán, Mathe and Company became an obvious target for the reassertion of territorial control by the Hondurans. This Honduran aggression would in turn lead to increased involvement by official British interests, contributing to the protracted debate over the nature and limits of the Miskito kingdom.

Disrupting the Works

When Mathe began developing his works on the east bank of the Aguán in 1845, the response of the local authorities was almost immediate. The initial attempts to thwart Mathe's activities centered around the cattle intended for his works; without the cattle, it would be impossible to extract enough trees for a successful season. Thus three hundred
head of cattle being brought from Honduras were prevented from crossing the Aguán near Ilanga, and the schooners *Molestadora*, *Victrless*, and *Victoria* were detained at Trujillo, unable to unload their cattle at the mouth of the Aguán, where they would have been driven overland to the works. By fall of that year, direct action had been taken against the works. On the Río Bonito, most of the twenty men hired by James Donald to prepare for the upcoming season either fled in the face of armed troops or were jailed at Trujillo, and several thousand dollars worth of provisions were confiscated, including barrels of flour and pork as well as rum, gin, and other sundry goods. Farther down the coast at Salt Creek and Sangrelaya, thirty-two workers were chased away or jailed, and more provisions were seized. Operations for the upcoming season were suspended in both locations, a loss compounded by the inability to finish removing trees left from the previous season's work (Mathe 1848d).

Similar disruptions to Mathe's operations occurred in the summer of 1846, when a local ordinance was enacted that forbade Spanish laborers from contracting for any concerns not directly operating under Honduran authority. In September, militia from Trujillo established quarters on the east bank of the Aguán, sent to monitor the events unfolding at Mathe's holdings (Mathe 1846a: 4). Although it is unclear exactly where this outpost was established, subsequent events seem to place it in the vicinity of the Río Bonito. Mathe was sufficiently concerned about the Honduran presence that he appealed to Walker for protection in the event of further untoward circumstances against his interests (Mathe 1846b: 7). His concerns were sound: by October the Hondurans confronted Mathe with a demand for payment on the trees already felled in the area. Still confident in his rights under the Miskito grant, Mathe continued preparations for the next
season's operations while simultaneously appealing to Walker for a resolution to the affair (Mathe 1846c: 10).

Unfortunately for Mathe, resolution came at the hands of the Hondurans, who moved against the Piedra Blanca works being established by Edward Usher. Because the Piedra Blanca works was new, the damages were less severe than the previous year at Río Bonito. Usher lost no men to the Trujillo jail, but the Honduran troops seized his stores of provisions and also pitpans, dories, and miscellaneous tools needed at the works (Carmichael 1847, Usher 1847). Mathe's works on the Río Bonito had also been reestablished by this time, and the Hondurans appropriated another measure of provisions from that location as well as another pitpan (Mathe 1848d). That December, John Carmichael, who had thus far been silent in the affairs of the mahogany concession, submitted a memorial to the Foreign Office in London, protesting the Honduran aggression against his works near Trujillo (PRO 1846: 1).

In January 1847, one of Mathe's other foremen, James Donald, attempted to mobilize a local militia, comprised mostly of Caribs, to strengthen Mathe's position at Piedra Blanca and on the Bonito (Donald 1847: 200). At the same time, the Hondurans continued their efforts to disrupt the mahogany camps. Within days of Donald's letter to Usher, Honduran troops seized Limas, lingering only long enough to sack its stores of provisions, raze the town, and hoist the Honduran flag before progressing eastward to Sangrelaya and Sereboyer (Ciriboya) (McDonald 1847: 192, Walker 1847c: 202-203). Apparently Donald's militia never came to fruition, and in April Mathe informed the Miskito Council of State that the east bank of the Aguán was still completely under Honduran control (Mathe 1847b: 9).
The unfolding events in Honduras as well as on the southern boundary of the Miskito Shore prompted Lord Palmerston to undertake a full review of the boundary question in spring 1847 (Naylor 1989: 154). Included in that process were the comments of, among others, both Chatfield and Walker, who were best appraised of the situation on the Aguán. In a dispatch to Palmerston, Walker traced the boundary from Hodgson's account in the mid-1700s through the more recent activities of Belize mahogany concerns in the 1830s, all of which justified the Aguán as the historic boundary (Walker 1847b: 36-40). At the same time, Chatfield was also remonstrating against the arbitrary extension of the boundary by Honduras. He referred Palmerston to the dispatches submitted in 1836 concerning the Morazán concession as well as the Wardlaw affair just two years earlier for an appraisal of the boundary issue. He also emphasized that, in his opinion, the best Honduras could do was claim legal right to the west bank of the Aguán, although even that was a tenuous claim. Also, even if that claim could be justified, the duties placed upon vessels trading up and down the coast were exorbitant (Chatfield 1847a: 99, 103). Apparently satisfied that Honduras had no legal claim to the east bank of the Aguán, Palmerston directed Chatfield to submit a claim to Honduras for the "unjustifiable interruption of trade" at Mathe and Carmichael's works in 1846 (Palmerston 1847a: 28).

The claim submitted by Mathe for the 1846 aggression was substantial. Shrewdly, Mathe sought full compensation not only for the actual disruptions but a range of projected losses resulting from the events. For preventing the cattle from crossing at Ilanga, Mathe submitted a claim of over four thousand dollars, including loss of their service as well as the labor to maintain their newly penned status, while those detained at
Trujillo added nearly six thousand dollars to the claim. The seizures and breakups at the works on the Bonito, at Piedra Blanca, and near Sangrelaya were even more devastating for Mathe. Not only could he claim losses against the wages of his laborers and the provisions, but the product of the upcoming cutting seasons was also factored into the claim. At Bonito, for example, Mathe detailed laborers directly affected as well as the number projected for the upcoming season's work, as well as their provisions. The Salt Creek and Sangrelaya works were written into the claim as total losses, implying that Mathe eventually gave up his attempts to cut in that vicinity. More importantly, Mathe claimed substantial losses on the mahogany depreciated by the disruptions, including losses for the "... difference in market value of wood ready to be brought out, but prevented from doing so, from want of cattle and other obstacles thrown in the way... valued at that time at nine pence sterling per superficial foot..." (Mathe 1848d: 91). Mathe figured the losses on the timber at $43,750, which brought the total amount sought to the astronomical sum of $103,938 (Mathe 1848d).

British Authority on the Shore

In a bid to reassert its increasingly ephemeral bureaucratic authority, the Miskito Council of State contributed its perspective after Mathe pressed his claim with Chatfield. The Council reminded him that all incidents should initially be referred to its authority rather than that of Great Britain, and cited Wardlaw's problems in 1845, noting that had he appealed to Miskito authority the situation might have been more easily resolved. The Council also issued a cautionary note about mahogany monopolies on the rivers under its jurisdiction, emphasizing individual grants and stimulating trade through competition as the more prudent path; Mathe, accordingly, must seek permission for each individual
works rather than a general claim to territory (Council of State 1847: 114, 116). Perhaps seeking a sympathetic reduction in his financial obligations to the Miskito administration, Mathe responded by submitting a payment of six hundred pesos to the Miskito authorities for trees felled under his grant, but only with the reminder that his works were now under the control of Honduras. He also acknowledged an outstanding debt of 1,848 pesos, but reiterated that little else would be forthcoming pending resolution of his claims against Honduras for the disposition of his works (Mathe 1847b: 9-12). Nevertheless, at the same time Walker was defending Mathe to Palmerston, who had apparently questioned the total sum of Mathe's claim. In reply, Walker referred to the extensive nature of Mathe's holdings in the area, which made it unlikely that the claim would be exaggerated (Walker 1847a: 1).

As the area surrounding the Aguán was the only viable economic zone on the Miskito Shore, Walker felt it prudent to forcefully reaffirm the authority of the Miskito king in the disputed area. Though he had previously warned the Hondurans of his intent to send an armed force to the disputed area, Walker did not take any direct action until June, when he commissioned a small force of thirty men to sail to the Aguán and confront the Honduran forces occupying the east bank (Hodgson 1847: 22-26). In this course of events, a confident Walker acted even before he received Palmerston's dispatch concerning the disposition of Mathe's claim against Honduras. However, Palmerston's notice that Chatfield was being instructed to pursue the claim only strengthened Walker's position on the Shore; now Walker had official sanction for his aggressive assertion of Miskito authority (Palmerston 1847b: 16). The actual confrontation was somewhat anticlimactic, and Commander Watson from the Sun informed Walker that resistance had
been minimal; by June 20 the Honduran flag was taken down and the area reclaimed under Miskito authority (Watson 1847: 40-43). The expedition's success, however, was illusory. After Watson and police magistrate John Dixon removed their forces and returned to Bluefields, the Hondurans once again crossed the Aguán and reasserted their authority. That August Mathe's foremen were notified that fallen timber could only be removed by paying Honduras for the trees. Under protest, Mathe agreed to pay Honduras for a certain number of the trees felled on the east bank of the Aguán, at the standard Honduran rate of five pesos per tree (Mathe 1847a, Zelaya 1848: 210).

By late summer, Palmerston had agreed with the assessments of his officials in Central America, and upheld the boundaries of the Miskito Shore as the Río San Juan in the south and Cape Honduras in the north. Emboldened by his success in evicting Honduran troops from the Aguán, Walker seized the opportunity to assert Miskito authority on the Río San Juan in September, where he used the warship *Alarm* to regulate a commercial dispute involving a Frenchman, Miskito authority, and Nicaragua. Despite creating a diplomatic nightmare for Chatfield, Walker received official support from Palmerston. Nevertheless, Walker's actions contributed to the general sense of unease concerning the administration of the Mosquitia by the British (Naylor 1989: 154-157). After his inflammatory maneuvers on the San Juan, the *Alarm* returned to Bluefields, where Walker realized the opportunity to employ it on the disputed Honduras boundary as well.

In discussions with Captain Granville Loch, Walker discussed the possibility of stationing a permanent garrison on the Aguán, to be manned by sixty troops and two field pieces procured from Belize (Walker 1847d: 124-129, Loch 1847: 39). Although troops
were never permanently stationed on the Aguán on behalf of the Miskito authorities, the next month the *Alarm* sailed to Trujillo to protest the aggression against Miskito sovereignty. Loch managed to convince the Hondurans to remove themselves from the east bank pending diplomatic resolution of the boundary issue, an action that the Honduran government quickly denounced (PRO 1848a: 79-81). After the *Alarm* left the area, Honduran troops returned to the area to prevent Mathe's workers from pulling out the felled timber (Carmichael 1848a: 103). In addition to capturing the interest of Great Britain and Honduras, the events unfolding near Trujillo were being closely watched by the United States, which was becoming increasingly involved in Central American affairs. The consul for the United States was the long-time mahogany merchant Augustus Follin, who was both personally and publicly concerned over the conflict. In a memo to the Secretary of State in Washington, Follin submitted a summary of the conflict, as well as his opinion that the British government was aggressively trespassing on Honduran soil, possibly as part of a larger design on the whole coast (Follin 1849).

Events on the Miskito Shore took a turn for the worse in January of 1848. Flush with his successes of the previous summer and fall, Walker continued aggressively countering Nicaragua in the south. After Nicaragua reclaimed Greytown (San Juan del Norte) in late January, Walker gathered a punitive force to move up the Río San Juan against the Nicaraguans. In the course of the action Walker drowned, effectively casting the Miskito government into an ineffective shambles and ending the aggressive profile of Great Britain on the Miskito Shore. His successors, William Christie and James Green, were forced to assert an increasingly illusory British authority on the Shore. In the Foreign Office, Lord Palmerston's interests remained focused on the south and the
question of the great inter-oceanic canal, leaving the Honduras border increasingly isolated and peripheral to the unfolding events on the isthmus (Naylor 1989: 165-169). Much of the responsibility for resolving the issues on the Aguán, as it had before Walker seized the initiative, lay in the hands of Frederick Chatfield.

That May, Chatfield petitioned the Honduras government to address the claims he had submitted on behalf of British subjects and implied that naval force would once again be used if satisfaction was not forthcoming (Chatfield 1848a: 210). Though a blockade never materialized, he continued to press the issue with Honduras through the summer, when he reiterated that there was no historical precedent for Honduras to claim authority eastward of Trujillo (Chatfield 1848b: 319). But Chatfield also refused to submit the whole Mathe claim to Honduras. In a dispatch sent to Lord Palmerston in July 1848, Chatfield reviewed the course of events surrounding the claim, including its roots in the Wardlaw and Montgomery problems of 1845. As far as Chatfield was concerned, Mathe bore most of the responsibility for his difficulties with Honduras. The root of the matter lay in Mathe's actions toward the local authorities. When the Trujillo authorities threatened Montgomery's works on the Aguán, he agreed to pay a sum to Honduras for the continued right to cut, which in effect only changed slightly the profit margin of the operation. Mathe refused a similar proposition, even under protest, and was now being forced to pay Honduras anyway, even while the other claim was working its way through diplomatic channels. Thus Chatfield had only submitted the $16,344 claim for the 1846 disruptions instead of the $103,938 detailed by Mathe in his first complaint. Further, it appeared unlikely that he would give serious consideration to the second claim submitted by Mathe prior to that summer (Chatfield 1848b: 318, 1848c: 56).
Perhaps having learned from his previous dealings with Chatfield, Mathe's second full claim contained more specific information than had his first. Its first article sought compensation for the provisions seized from Edward Usher's works at Piedra Blanca in late 1846. Subsequent articles detailed everything that had occurred since, including the further seizures of provisions at Piedra Blanca and at Bonito, ongoing shipping concerns, and the continued loss of labor as a result of the aggression from the Trujillo authorities. The most startling amount rendered, however, was for over forty thousand dollars in losses owing to short deliveries of wood from all of Mathe's major works on the Aguán. At Quebrada de Arenas, Mathe claimed 500 logs felled, of which 196 were left abandoned (at an average of 850 feet of saleable lumber per tree). At his Chapagua works, Mathe claimed that 350 logs had been prepared, but only 202 were removed in time. Finally, 900 trees had been felled by fall 1847 at the Piedra Blanca and Bonito works, but only 667 were extracted in time. Mathe claimed full market value on the several hundred thousand feet of timber that had gone unrealized due to the actions against his works. Unlike the first claim, the estimated losses of saleable timber accounted for the majority of the second claim. Clearly, Mathe realized that projected labor losses were heavily outweighed by actual commercial opportunities foregone (Mathe 1848d).

Further Aggression

In August 1848 the Trujillo authorities returned to Mathe's works, once again enforcing the 1846 ordinance against Spanish workers contracting for those cutting under foreign (Miskito) authority. Unlike the previous intrusions, this action was primarily intended to prevent Mathe from grazing cattle for the upcoming season. Oscar Rhys and
William Courtnay both wrote to Mathe to express their alarm over the detention of men hired to oversee the cattle, without whom it was entirely possible the cattle would be lost (Courtnay 1848, Rhys 1848). After carrying away all the Spanish laborers from the Quebrada de Arenas and Taujica works, the troops moved to Piedra Blanca to do the same, also removing two Indians from Belize, likely hired as scouts. While the Honduran troops were progressing down the Aguán, they also took pains to count and mark all of the trees felled on the east bank of the Aguán, indicating that payment would be due Honduras for those trees (Christie 1848a: 10, Mathe 1848b: 143). As had happened the year previous, Mathe's foremen were then informed that they would be required to pay five pesos for each tree counted before it could be removed from the vicinity. With 1,589 trees counted, the required payment reached $7,945, but Mathe took pains to pay it quickly in order that his wood could be extracted from the forest (Mathe 1848c: 141, Chatfield 1849c: 183).

Nevertheless, Mathe once again lodged a formal protest. Mindful of his previous warning, this time Mathe submitted the protest to William Christie, the recently appointed consul-general for the Miskito Shore (Chatfield 1848d: 139). Christie dutifully forwarded the new Mathe complaints to Charles Grey, the governor at Jamaica, who was officially responsible for the British presence on the Shore. As had Walker previously, Christie recommended the visit of a vessel from the West Indies Station to warn the Trujillo authorities of the "serious consequences" of continued aggression against Miskito territory. He also relayed Mathe's complaint that James Welsh was cutting extensively in the area, without a license or any consideration of the regulations established for mahogany cutters by the Miskito authorities, without paying any fees or dues, and that
Welsh still considered the area completely under the authority of Honduras. Christie suggested it would perhaps be wise to have the commander of the warship also pay a visit to Welsh after visiting Trujillo (Christie 1848a: 10). In a dispatch sent to Lord Palmerston two days later, he reiterated the call for a blockade, but also suggested a fixed military presence on the east bank of the Aguán (Christie 1848b: 8-9). That same month Carmichael submitted another memorial to the Foreign Office, detailing the latest aggressions and once again appealing for a resolution to the situation (Carmichael 1848c). Encouraged by the support he received from Lord Edinbury concerning this latest appeal, Carmichael eventually informed the Foreign Office that he was willing to forgo any claims for unclear losses and leave the settlement in the hands of Chatfield (Carmichael 1848b: 115). Hoping to illuminate the situation further, Carmichael enclosed a detailed map illustrating the state of his works on the Aguán (Figure 7.1).

Having failed to observe any satisfactory progress concerning his claims, Mathe resubmitted the particulars to Chatfield in February. With the letter he included a note from Francisco Camoyano demanding payment for the 1,589 trees, and a receipt for the same. He also submitted a copy of a notice received from William Christie in Belize directing payments to be made only to the Miskito government, apparently to reinforce the injustice of the Honduras payments. Even more importantly for his claim, Mathe submitted certification from several London mahogany brokers concerning deterioration (and subsequent reduction in value) on the trees delayed by the incursions (Mathe 1849a: 234). Chatfield, however, had already prejudged the claim, just days before submitting a demand for $18,725 to Honduras (Chatfield 1849a, Chatfield 1849b). Mathe tried again in March, but to no avail (Mathe 1849b). Perhaps annoyed by Mathe's persistent
Figure 7.1. John Carmichael’s map (Carmichael 1848d)
attempts to seek full redress from Chatfield, the British consul considered another perspective on the whole affair, suggesting to Palmerston that Mathe was certainly not as blameless as he claimed. If Mathe were so confident in Miskito authority, reasoned Chatfield, there would have been no reason to clear goods through the Honduran port of Trujillo (Chatfield 1849d: 231).

At the same time that Chatfield was beginning to question the integrity of Mathe's actions on the Aguán, it came to light that Mathe was neglecting his obligations to the Miskito authorities. It appears that Mathe, resigned to paying the Hondurans for his mahogany until the disputes were resolved, simply decided against paying both authorities for his trees. Mathe, however, was not alone, as failure to pay Miskito duties had been a recurrent problem at least since 1846 (Walker 1846a: 141, Naylor 1989: 163). After being informed of Mathe's reluctance to pay the proper fees in Bluefields, Palmerston directed Chatfield to suspend his efforts at reconciling the claim until Mathe paid in full the amount owed in that quarter (Palmerston 1849a: 5). There is no indication that Mathe settled his accounts with the Miskito authorities expeditiously, but by June Palmerston notified Chatfield that the British government approved of his recently negotiated settlement for $46,989 (Palmerston 1849b: 18). Palmerston followed in September with a recommendation that Chatfield keep up his efforts to receive redress from Honduras as well as to pressure Mathe to pay his obligations to Miskito (Palmerston 1849c: 40-41). A chastened Mathe, realizing his entire operations were in jeopardy, finally paid his accounts to Palmerston's satisfaction that November (Palmerston 1849d: 65).
While attempting to regulate the disputes over mahogany on northern boundary of the Miskito Shore, Chatfield and Palmerston were also deeply concerned about the increasing involvement of North American interests in Central America. Most of the new attention focused on Nicaragua and the proposed inter-oceanic canal, but as evidenced by Follin's memo the year before, the Americans were also wary of events in the northern reaches as well. Follin again had reason to be concerned over British involvement in the area when the warship HMS *Plumper* arrived at Trujillo in early October. The *Plumper* was sent specifically to enforce payment of claims against Honduras by British subjects, particularly those of the mahogany cutters such as Mathe. To that end, the ship's commander was authorized to demand $111,061 for those claims, to be paid immediately, without awaiting word from the national government at Comayagua. Failing to receive the full sum, Captain Nolloth claimed the port and seized the much smaller sum of $1,200 from the customs duties (Nolloth 1849, Naylor 1989: 177, Mack 1997: 224). Surprisingly, the incident appeared to generate few repercussions from either the Hondurans or the Americans, perhaps because of the continuing controversies in Nicaragua and the new crisis precipitated over the Isla la Tigre that same fall (Naylor 1989: 177-178). Those issues would, in fact, facilitate a period of relative calm in the Trujillo hinterlands, a period that would last for nearly two years before conflict once again arose on the Aguán.

**Welsh and Honduran Authority on the Aguán**

Up until this time the region's other significant mahogany entrepreneurs, James Welsh, had remained somewhat in the background of the territorial controversies. Welsh, of course, had been active throughout the entire Aguán valley well before Mathe's
entrance into the region. Though aggressively expanding his operations throughout the region, Welsh generally took care to ensure that his actions were in compliance with the recognized sovereignty of Honduras, and only ventured across the river with that government's consent. He had begun cutting on the east bank of the Aguán, the area claimed by the Miskito government, as early as 1844, when Robert Wardlaw established the works at Quebrada de Arena and Taujica. This location, by all appearances, became the main focus of contention between Mathe and Welsh as the former developed his interests in the region. In 1845 Welsh appropriated the Fernando Pinto grant and thereby reaffirmed his access to mahogany on both banks of the Aguán. The first indication that Welsh had little use for Miskito authority surfaced almost immediately after he crossed the Aguán, when he declined to pay the Miskito agents for any mahogany rights or duties (Adolphus 1845: 130-131). There are also indications that Welsh was well aware of the potential for conflict on the east bank of the Aguán. Under his direction, trees were cut in a select few locales, in places where the wood was fairly inaccessible. He later claimed that his actions were intended to establish rights of possession in those areas where the trees had been felled (Welsh, Fernandez and Company 1852: 87-88).

Nevertheless, he remained in the background as Mathe attempted to rescue his operations from the Hondurans through the late 1840s.

In an early attempt to counter Welsh's recalcitrance toward the Miskito government, Patrick Walker entreated Superintendent Fancourt to pressure the Belize cutters working on the Aguán into complying with the regulations of the Miskito Shore. This was especially important, in Walker's opinion, because mahogany cutters had recently begun exploring the mahogany resources of the central and southern portions of
the Shore (Walker 1846a: 141). William Christie gave Welsh more prominent blame for
the situation on the Aguán with his dispatches to Governor Grey in Jamaica and Lord
Palmerston in the Foreign Office in fall 1848. By this time, a frustrated Antonio Mathe
had begun submitting his complaints directly to Christie, in the process implicating
Welsh as the culprit behind many of his travails (Christie 1848a: 10, 1848b: 8-9). A
nonplussed Welsh refused to reconsider his actions toward the Miskito government. The
next fall Welsh notified Christie that he was well aware of Carmichael's problems on the
Aguán, but reminded Christie that he had entered the Quebrada de Arena region first, and
controlled extensive works throughout the valley from Guaymoreto to Chapagua Creek
(Welsh 1849: 23).

Apparently unconvinced by Welsh's reasoning, Christie suggested to Palmerston
that the real cause of the conflicts on the Aguán was Welsh, not Mathe. In Christie's
opinion, Welsh was clearly ignorant of the greater issue underlying the controversies,
namely the question of Miskito sovereignty. Welsh, opined Christie, knew little of the
history underlying the boundary question and was interested only in his own personal
gain (Christie 1849: 22). Christie's observations may have been correct, especially given
the intense value of the mahogany on the banks of the Aguán and its tributaries. Welsh's
directive to have trees cut at various locations on the east bank of the Aguán was intended
to establish first rights to those areas and warn off competitors, yet he was unable to
secure those rights because of Mathe's expansion in the region. Indeed, once Robert
Wardlaw began cutting trees at Quebrada de Arenas for Mathe rather than Welsh, the
latter lost access to a substantial amount of timber. However, Welsh was not merely
promoting his own personal agenda in the area; rather, as the holder of a legal monopoly
from Honduras, he was the rightful claimant to the mahogany found in the Aguán valley, and his actions reflected this fundamental fact.

By 1850 James Green brought the Welsh question to the forefront of the Miskito agenda. That summer, he complained to Palmerston about Welsh’s persistent refusal to acknowledge Miskito authority and pay duties for his timber. At the same time, he pressed for a portion of the money being paid to Chatfield on account of the British bondholder debts to be redirected to the Miskito treasury; that money was being paid from Honduran mahogany revenues, including those from Welsh’s operations (Green 1851: 76-77). The next spring Welsh sent a detailed defense of his actions to Green, citing his arrangements with Honduras and suggesting that it would be 'suicidal' to make arrangements with the Miskito government (Welsh 1851a: 95). Green, however, persisted in his efforts to bolster the virtually nonexistent Miskito treasury, having already sent Captain James Daly to take up temporary residence at Limas and administer relations with the mahogany cutters (Green 1851: 78). After Daly complained about the cutters’ conduct and general lack of respect, Green decided to take action. In late September the HMS *Bermuda*, with Green, Daly, and the Miskito king aboard, sailed to the mouth of the Aguán, landed on the west bank, and pulled down the Honduran flag there posted, replacing it with that of Mosquitia. Two of Welsh’s schooners, the *Bathurst* and the *Devon*, were prevented from loading mahogany, as was (astonishingly) a Russian vessel also destined for Belize. Welsh’s agent in the area, Richard Krause, eventually paid Green 500 dollars to secure the vessels, and Green apparently withdrew shortly thereafter (Welsh 1851b, ANH 1851a: 126).
Both Welsh and the Honduras government registered complaints against Green’s actions. Welsh sent a lengthy exposition to the new Superintendent of Belize, P.E. Wodehouse, complaining about Green’s harassment and detailing the reasons for his refusal to acknowledge Miskito authority. Welsh cast himself as a businessman who was merely working with the only authority that had ever had any viable presence in the region, and was attempting to remain firm in his contractual arrangements with Honduras. For emphasis, he again alluded to the consequences of countering Honduran authority, and the losses that he would thereby incur (Welsh 1851b). The Honduras government responded with vigorous protests of its own against the action, making sure to relate it to the entire sordid history of the "sham monarchy" established in its eastern territory. Much of the ultimate blame was placed on Frederick Chatfield, particularly his arbitrary extension of the non-existent state's boundaries to Punto Castilla (ANH 1851a: 126, ANH 1851b: 126-128).

Nonplussed, Chatfield threatened Honduras with a naval blockade if it failed to make good on its debts to British citizens. However, he tempered the threat with an offer to initiate a final resolution to the boundary issue if steps were taken to resolve the claims (Chatfield 1851: 139). Honduran President Velasquez responded by directing the Commandant of Trujillo to support Welsh and the terms of his legally established contract on the Aguán; at the same time he suggested that Welsh might possibly be convinced to take up the matter directly with British officials (Velasquez 1851a: 138, 1851b: 138-139). In addition, Velasquez reminded Chatfield that, as far as the Honduras government was concerned, most of the claims against it were illegitimate anyway, a position reinforced by the payments being made by Belize-based commercial interests
(i.e. Welsh) to Honduras (Velasquez 1851c: 139). Chatfield responded by sending the HMS *Rosamond* to Trujillo in January, which was apparently sufficient to convince the Hondurans to agree to a partial settlement to some of the claims, using payments gathered from Welsh in the process (Campbell 1852: 50-52, Cruz 1852a, 1852b). Chatfield was recalled from his post in Central America that summer, and it appeared the territorial dispute had run its course (Naylor 1989: 188).

**The Conflict at Limas**

However, the territorial issue flared again that summer, when Welsh prodded the Honduran government to take further notice of the situation east of Trujillo. From his perspective, Carmichael and Mathe had taken no notice of the prior claims established by Welsh in the 1840s, and also hired Honduran labor for their works despite regulations to the contrary (Welsh, Fernandez and Company 1852). Almost immediately the threat of intervention once again arose in the area. On November 10, Colonel Mariano Alvarez seized the initiative, leading a force of sixty men into Limas, where they raised the Honduran flag and caused nearly all of the laborers in the area to flee. Alvarez demanded that Carmichael's works on the Aguán be broken up, and the timber already felled be turned over to Welsh. Further, mahogany felled in locations other than those claimed by Welsh would need to be declared to Honduras, with the requisite fees to follow (Carmichael 1853a: 36). Robert Humel, the manager of Carmichael's concerns in the area, responded by noting the historical claim the firm had on the Aguán, "ascending as far as Tauhuica creek", and claiming payments to Honduras would interfere with Miskito sovereignty (Humel 1852a). Humel himself was ordered to appear before the government in Comayagua within eighty days, there to legalize the works and guarantee
payment (Humel 1852b, Carmichael 1853a). After being notified of the actions against his holdings at Limas, Carmichael submitted an appeal for military support to James Green and also sent a memorial to John Russell in the Foreign Office (Carmichael 1852a, Carmichael 1853b). In the memorial, Carmichael noted that his earlier commercial activities on the Aguán had led to a resurgence of British capital entering the region, and noted that mahogany operations now extended well beyond the Aguán valley to the Patook (Patuca) River and east as far as Caratasca Lagoon. Carmichael also noted that the disruption at Limas would cause him the loss of 1,500 logs of mahogany which were in the process of being floated to the river mouth at the time, with a market value of over £20,000 in England; for that matter, the next season's cuttings had also been placed in jeopardy because the works would not be properly prepared (Carmichael 1853a: 36).

In December the Honduras government notified Charles Wycke, Chatfield's replacement, that it had acted only in support of Welsh's standing in Honduras. Further, Wycke was informed that proceeds derived from Welsh's contract were one of the few sources of the revenue used to pay its foreign debt, especially that arising from British claims (Mejia 1852). Surprisingly, there appears to have been little fallout from the seizure of Limas. The next summer, in response to continuing petty harassment at Carmichael's works, workers from Belize were mobilized in a show of support for Carmichael, but no further conflicts arose as a result (Daly 1853: 139). In London, Lord Clarendon, perhaps preoccupied with the Bay Islands, decided against pursuing the matter any further, authorizing intervention only in situations of minimal risk (PRO 1853: 238). Much like the previous intrusions, however, the claim process extended well beyond the immediate context of the event. By 1855, Carmichael had fully documented a
claim for well over 250,000 pesos, which he estimated as £36,317 actual losses in England. As had Mathe in the previous claims, Carmichael submitted both actual and projected losses. However, he had also by this time given up his mahogany works in the area, selling one to an old foreman and abandoning his fledgling works on the Patuca (Carmichael 1855). By the next year, Carmichael amended his claim to account for 1,842 trees instead of the approximately 1,500 he earlier referenced, but still received no satisfaction on his claim (Carmichael 1856a: 365-366). Carmichael also sent a detailed rendering of his previous mahogany exports to justify the importance and value of his operations in the area (Carmichael 1856b), to no avail. Resolution of the complaints, in fact, would not be forthcoming for nearly two decades.

By 1859, the amount owed by the Honduran government for the Limas disruptions had grown to more than ninety thousand dollars. In an attempt to reach a settlement, Santos Guardiola proposed a new concession for the firm. The proposal was to include the right to cut mahogany, cedar, and any other precious woods available on any vacant lands in the Atlantic littoral of the state; mahogany trees were valued at 7 pesos per tree. Additionally, any exports of timber were to be excluded from Honduran duties until the claim amount was reached, and Carmichael was also exempted from a range of taxes normally imposed by the state. The Honduran government granted a formal concession to the concern in 1859 (Guardiola 1859), but it was too late for the beleaguered mahogany merchant. He had gone bankrupt in 1858, and died in 1873 just months before his claims (including the first submitted by Mathe in 1846) were fully settled (Fletcher 1859: 299-306, PRO 1873: 92-95).
Moving On: Closing the British Era

The affair at Limas in 1851 was the last major dispute between Honduras and the British concerning the mahogany works in the Aguán valley. Nevertheless, minor conflicts arose through the end of the decade as troops from Trujillo occasionally threatened English mahogany cutters as far east as Black River and the Patuca (Green 1858: 166-167). However, the territorial dispute on the Aguán gradually receded into the background as British diplomatic attention focused elsewhere. Despite the frequently violent and punitive actions taken by Honduras, Great Britain, and the Miskito government, the conflicts east of Trujillo remained fundamentally a question of commercial interests. The disputes were primarily engendered by a small number of mahogany cutters more interested in their private gain than any real concern for the sovereignty of the Miskito Shore. In fact, it was almost inevitable, given the lucrative nature of the mahogany trade, that conflict would erupt over access to a limited natural resource in a relatively small geographic area. Save this intense commercial competition, it is unlikely that the British government would have become so embroiled in the controversy in the northern extremes of the Miskito Shore, or that Honduras would have responded so vigorously to perceived territorial infringement.

After a great deal of diplomatic wrangling and political infighting, a settlement on the impasse over British territory in the Bay of Honduras was finally reached in 1859. Under the terms of the treaty, the British agreed to surrender its fledgling colony on the Bay Islands as well as forego all authority on the Miskito Shore. For British merchants and landholders operating in the area, the only real concession was that a joint commission appointed by Great Britain and Honduras would evaluate grants made by the
Miskito government. For its part, Honduras agreed to respect the grants and leases made under Miskito authority, with disputed claims to be considered by a joint British-Honduran commission (PRO 1859). Despite infighting between the Colonial and Foreign Offices, the authority of Great Britain on the northern Shore was effectively terminated, and its diplomatic focus turned south of Cabo Gracias a Dios to the pending resolution of the canal question. Though in many aspects the cessation of official British involvement on the Shore signaled the end of an era, it had little long-term impact on the course of the mahogany trade in Honduras, which would continue unchecked for several more decades.
CHAPTER 8

MAHOGANY IN TRANSITION: 1850s-1870s

The period immediately following the boom years of the Honduran mahogany trade is somewhat difficult to characterize. Unlike the 1840s and 1850s, when intense competition and lucrative returns led to rapid expansion and increasingly contentious disputes, the third quarter of the nineteenth century passed almost uneventfully. Though the boom passed relatively quickly, the mahogany trade continued much as before, with minor waves of expansion attributable to a small number of entrepreneurs focused on securing as many trees as possible. In the late 1850s and early 1860s British Consul William Hall provided a telling commentary on the purported decline of the mahogany trade in Honduras. In 1859 Hall noted that the mahogany works were decreasing, resulting in unemployment for ‘hundreds of Caribs’. He nevertheless remained optimistic about the potential for Honduran timbers, particularly for shipbuilding. In a series of consular reports on the trade of Honduras, beginning in 1859 and ending in 1862, Hall reported that mahogany was the least remunerative of all the goods brought out from Honduras. Though the actual amount of mahogany exported remained reasonably high (never less than 60,000 feet per year), its returned value placed it well behind a host of other goods, ranging from cattle and dried hides to sarsaparilla, precious metals, and dyewoods such as fustic (Hall 1859, 1860, 1861, 1862). However, Hall’s somewhat disheartening picture of the mahogany trade is tempered by the caveat he issued in 1858, in which he expounded on the difficulties of establishing any real perspective on the revenues of the trade. Simply put, Hall acknowledged the porosity of
Honduran duty regulations at that time. The trifling amount returned to the Honduran treasury was partially the result of inefficient accounting practices, but even more attributable to lax enforcement; a great deal of timber was shipped directly from the source, without official permits or even a hint of duties being paid (Hall 1858).

The general implication to be drawn from Hall’s series of reports, though, is that by the late 1850s the trade was moribund, on the brink of a near-terminal decline from which it would not recover. That implication must be considered untrue. Despite well-reasoned assertions to the contrary (see Naylor 1967), the Honduras mahogany trade continued to develop after the 1850s. From the British perspective, the trade did indeed decline, and from the 1860s onward British cutters played a minor role in the affairs of the mahogany trade on Honduras’ north coast. Honduran and American interests, however, stepped readily into the gap left by the decline of British interests in the trade. Though the sheer productivity and profitability of the trade would be less than during the boom period of the 1840s and 1850s, there are numerous indications that territorial expansion continued apace and the Honduran government continued to include mahogany in its attempts to generate revenue and development. That said, available documentation for this crucial period is at best incomplete, and signature events with which to elucidate the trade few.

**The Transition on the Aguán**

The mid-century transition between boom and maintenance certainly witnessed continued operations in the Aguán valley. In fact, the Aguán mahogany trade remained of sufficient importance that it is the most frequent source of documentation in the 1860s and 1870s. More significantly, the Aguán, rife with British entrepreneurs throughout the
rise of the mahogany trade, quickly passed from British domination to that of local Honduras and a minor wave of American interests. Though it seems likely that a host of smaller mahogany concerns cropped up in the 1850s, a relatively small number of proprietors rather than a wide array of individual logging interests once again dominated the trade.

Residual British Influence

One of the few new British concerns operating in the area belonged to British vice-consul George Pithketly. Pithketly first appears in the Honduran mahogany trade in the late 1840s and early 1850s, but had participated in mahogany cutting for nearly thirty years (Pithketly 1854); he apparently moved to Honduras as one of the managers for John Carmichael’s works east of Trujillo. He was engaged in this capacity until shortly before the incident at Limas in fall 1852. In fact, Mariano Alvarez, the Commandant of Trujillo responsible for the Honduran troops, believed at that time that Pithketly was still employed in that capacity (Pithketly 1852). Naylor (1989: 280 n. 40) suggests that Pithketly was still employed by Carmichael, along with Robert Humel, through the early stages of this critical event, at which point both men resigned and began negotiating in their own interests with Honduras. This interpretation of events is difficult to corroborate, though a testimonial from Pithketly, included in one of Carmichael’s complaints, details his activities for Carmichael through the spring of 1852 (Pithketly 1854). If Pithketly did indeed resign before the Limas events, it suggests a possible mechanism that may have aided Carmichael’s transition out of the Honduran mahogany trade.

Irrespective of the Carmichael chronology, within two years Pithketly established his own works in the area. In the spring of 1854 Pithketly petitioned Honduras for the
right to cut timber on the Ríos Limón and Paya, as well as at Quebrada de Arenas, Quebrada de Agua, and at Taujica (Bernardez 1854b). Most of these locations had already been worked at some point in the past, but Pithketly’s proposal clearly indicates Carmichael’s withdrawal from the area after the incidents at Limas as well as the decline of James Welsh’s effective monopoly in the Aguán valley. Even more tellingly, the Pithketly contract included one of the earliest indicators of pending change in the mahogany trade itself. Though Pithketly offered to pay the standard rate of five pesos for each mahogany tree felled, he also explicitly sought the right to cut cedar (cedro) as part of the same process. The market return on cedar was too small for Pithketly to make a proposal to pay for it, but the value of the canoes and furniture for which it would be used was high enough that the wisdom of securing was readily apparent (Bernardez 1854a, Bernardez 1854b).

James Welsh, clearly the main concern operating in the Aguán valley though the 1840s, also continued working in the area through the mid-1850s. By 1850 he had directed his attention away from the more contested areas of the Aguán valley and expanded his operations further afield. This expansion led to trees being cut at such wide-ranging locations as the camino real between Chapagua and Trujillo, the Río de Tarra, Quebrada de Huacal, Parras, and Biscoyula. Interestingly, the trees Welsh cut in these locations were accounted for as either hueco (hollow) or solido (solid), with two hollow trees counting as one solid; accordingly, this distinction reduced the fees Welsh was required to pay to Honduras, though he had access to many more trees (Martinez 1850). In 1856, Welsh was mentioned with George Pithketly as one of two parties whose trees required confirmation from the local authorities at Trujillo (Velasquez and Boginoff
1856). At the same time, Welsh remained actively involved with his commercial interests at Trujillo, including the mahogany works in the Aguán valley (Welsh 1856). Welsh also likely used his position of dominance in the region’s trade to secure some measure of vertical integration, outfitting his own trading vessels to ply the coast between Trujillo, Omoa, and Belize (Campbell 1852). From all appearances, Welsh remained active in the Honduran trade until his death in 1861; with his passing went also the last of the great British concerns operating on the Honduras coast. Hereafter accounts of the trade are dominated by Honduran and American interests.

Working the Upper Aguán

Despite a general decline in mahogany prices after mid-century, the mahogany concerns continued their gradual expansion up the Aguán valley. In 1869, just a few years after Edward Hall declared to the Foreign Office that timber operations had declined precipitously, substantial amounts of mahogany were still being felled as far upriver as Sonaguera. Available documentation suggests that there were at least three significant mahogany entrepreneurs in the upper Aguán at this time. Two of these, Edward Prudot and John Dillet, appear to have been Americans, while the third, Francisco Bernardez, was most likely the only Honduran working the area to any significant degree (ANH 1870b). Though impossible to prove at this juncture, Bernardez’ presence in the upper Aguán valley suggests a possible linkage to the Trujillo official Jacobo Bernardez, who played an active role in the boundary disputes between Honduras and Miskito authorities in the 1840s and early 1850s. Francisco Bernardez was himself an official in the Trujillo military establishment in the mid-1850s, when he was
involved in George Pithketly’s attempts to secure a mahogany concession. Bernardez' entry into the mahogany trade may have come as late as 1867, when he was serving as a consular agent for United States interests at Trujillo, and received permission to cut mahogany near Cuyulapa (Bernardez 1867).

Of the three individuals working the upper Aguán, Bernardez was the most active, cutting 127 trees at Cuyulapa and 230 at San Pedro de Chacalapa. Prudot and Dillet, combined, only accounted for 16 trees, Prudot taking seven from Nansal and Dillet nine at La Brea. Interestingly, trees were also felled in the same general area under the auspices of the government, without identifying those responsible for taking the timber. This suggests that the trees were directly contracted by the government, possibly in an attempt to secure larger profits than normally gained from granting concessions to individuals. If so, the 16 trees felled that year at the mouth of the Chapagua, the 208 near Quebrada de Arenas, and the 4 counted at Montana de Aguán should have provided a substantial return for Honduras (ANH 1870b). It is also quite possible that Prudot and Dillet were in some way involved in this process, especially given the unlikelihood of an entrepreneur investing substantial capital for the minimal return from just a few trees.

In perspective, the account of trees felled in 1869 seems to indicate a substantial decline in mahogany activities in the Aguán valley, most certainly in its upper reaches. Yet ten years later, the amount of trees felled in the same general area would actually increase, suggesting that a substantial number of opportunities existed for those involved in the mahogany trade (Caceres 1880); the final stages of expansion in the upper Aguán are addressed in the next chapter.
Farther Up, Further In: Ocampo on the Patuca

Earlier, in the 1850s, mahogany operations could be found as far east (and inland) as the watershed of the Río Patuca. John Carmichael, of course, was developing a works at an unknown location on the Patuca in 1852. However, there are surprisingly few indications that additional mahogany concerns entered the area in any great number. This may be attributable to difficulty in securing ships at the mouth of the river, which was problematic at various times on all rivers of the north coast but perhaps especially difficult on the Patuca. When William Wells made his visit to Olancho in the early 1850s he reported that there existed at least a dozen works in the area. Though descriptions and details about the full range of these works are scarce, it is clear that at least one major concern, that of Opolonio Ocampo, established a number of works at various locations in the upper reaches of that watershed beginning in the early 1850s. In the first year of the decade, Ocampo registered his intent with the Honduras government to invest capital in a range of mahogany works near Catacamas (Lindo 1850). By mid-decade Ocampo developed at least five distinct operations in that general vicinity, including on the Ríos Jalan, Guayape, Guaymabre, and Frio (Figure 8.1). Wells visited the works on the Jalan, known as Corte Sara, and related Ocampo’s holdings overall at approximately three thousand trees, most of which had yet to be sent downriver. Though at first the number appears exaggerated, an average of six hundred trees annually from a works is in accordance with takings on the Aguán and other rivers during the initial periods of exploitation. And Ocampo, unlike others working the other major north coast rivers, faced the difficulty of floating his timber a greater distance to the sea, as well as over
Figure 8.1. Ocampo’s sites in the upper Río Pataua watershed
numerous rapids. For this reason, the Patuca and its tributaries were much more challenging for mahogany operations than other rivers such as the Aguán and the Ulúa.

**A Question of Control**

Throughout the mid-nineteenth century the Honduran government invested a great deal of time and effort overseeing the mahogany trade. One of the most important of these activities, certainly in terms of state revenue, involved near-continuous efforts to monitor illicit cutting in Honduran territory. The question of illicit cuttings had first become an issue with the Morazán concession in the Ulúa valley, and was still an object of concern in the mid-1840s (García 1846). Thus it is no surprise that the fringes of the trade continued to be occupied by those either unwilling or unable to procure legal access to the trees. The aggressive measures by Honduras in defense of its territorial integrity against Miskito-authorized grants were the most blatant form of enforcement, but there are also other indications that Honduras fought to keep control of its resources.

While Opolonio Ocampo was making overtures to the Honduran government outside of Catacamas, rumors surfaced that various British parties were clandestinely cutting in the same area. Specifically, British loggers were rumored to be establishing illegal cortes in the vicinity of Agua Caliente, at the confluence of the Ríos Guayape and Guayambre, and near Sacualpa. Lucas Calix, the official in charge of counting the timber felled in the Department of Olancho, even went as far to notify the local ‘Tuaca’ (Tawakha) groups to report any suspicious or unusual activity in the region (Calix 1853). Given the accessibility of the region’s major watercourses and Ocampo’s extensive operations in the same general area, it is difficult to imagine that any clandestine cuttings
entailed more than a few trees felled in highly inaccessible locations. The issue was apparently resolved locally and the state was not further involved.

Concern over illegal cuttings may have reached its peak around 1870, particularly in the western valleys. An explicit effort was made in 1869 in the Department of Santa Barbara to identify exactly who was cutting trees and in what quantities; those who were doing so illegally were to be given the opportunity to amend the situation with the state (Fonseca 1869). Additionally, several individuals were detained for suspicious activities in regards to precious woods on the upper margins of the Ríos Ulúa, Chamelecón, Blanco, and Comayagua in March 1870 (ANH 1870a, ANH 1870c). On the Ulúa, Concepcion Caballero was discovered cutting mahogany and several other types of precious woods, but made arrangements with the authorities to avoid any punitive actions (ANH 1870d). Though seemingly minor in the larger scope of the trade, the concern over illegal cuttings illustrates perhaps the most enduring issue confronting state control of the trade, namely certification of the trees cut from its territory. Mahogany could not be included as a consistent source of state revenue if trees could not be accurately counted and only partial duties were collected from shipped timber.

**Follin and the West**

For the western reaches of the north coast, surprisingly, there is little indication that the mahogany trade experienced any significant disruptions or major expansions in the middle of the nineteenth century. As in the Aguán valley, the western trade remained the purview of one major concern, that of Augustus Follin. But Follin’s dominance, unlike that of James Welsh, appears to have gone unchallenged for a substantial period of time. Indeed, Follin remains at the forefront of affairs only through the peak of British
diplomatic involvement in the late 1840s and early 1850s. Follin, by this time appointed as United States consul, vociferously protested the aggressive British presence on the Miskito Shore as early as 1848. Clearly concerned about his own financial interests, Follin also promoted the unlimited potential of the Honduras trade for the United States, specifically including mahogany as one of the most likely products (Follin 1849). Follin remained concerned about British activities on the north coast as tensions increased in the early 1850s, as evidenced by a personal rather than official note sent to Secretary of State Daniel Webster in the summer of 1851. In that letter Follin emphasized his substantial mahogany interests in Honduras from west of Trujillo to Omoa, and the potential losses he would face if the British continued to meddle in the affairs of Honduras (Follin 1851). Certainly, if his operations remained active as far east as the Ríos Lean and Papaloteca and up the Ulúa watershed, Follin faced monumental financial risk. By 1857, Follin was reputed to have “. . . conducted the most extensive cuttings in the country . . . “ (Wells 1857: 347).

From this position Follin, again much like Welsh east of Trujillo, seems to have practiced his trade generally unimpeded. However, Follin’s activities also presaged the transition away from mahogany to other useful timbers. In 1860 Follin successfully obtained a contract for the removal of the mora (fustic) in an unspecified location on the north coast. Given Follin's earlier control over most of the lower Ulúa and Chamelecón, it seems likely that he was now interested in going back to many of the same locations and gaining added value from areas where mahogany had been cut out (ANH 1860). However, after petitioning for the contract to cut mora, there is little indication that Follin spent many more years involved in the timber trade of the north coast.
Peripheral Events

Though having little impact on the overall course of the trade, several unrelated events illustrate the pervasiveness of mahogany and the mahogany trade in northern Honduras during the mid-nineteenth century. For example, the 1859 treaty between Great Britain and Honduras concerning the disposition of the Miskito Shore and the Bay Islands also had peripheral impacts on the mahogany trade. Since mahogany remained a lucrative resource, the Honduran government quickly moved to make mahogany grants available in its recently re-acquired territory. Further, Honduras also agreed to pay an annual sum of five thousand dollars for Miskito education for a period of ten years (PRO 1859). Though there is little indication that many speculators undertook to bid for the rights being advertised by the Honduras government, at least one, Philip Toledo, considered the feasibility of undertaking the annual payments in exchange for exclusive rights to cut mahogany (Mathew 1862).

In a little-known footnote to Central American history, even the American filibuster William Walker had linkages to the mahogany trade. In the final days before his capture and subsequent execution, Walker's attempts to escape led him to a mahogany works near the mouth of the Limón in quest of a boat. Unfortunately for Walker, the works had recently been abandoned, and he was forced to flee farther down the coast. The erstwhile filibusterer was subsequently captured by the British between the Limón and the Aguán and taken to Trujillo, where he was tried, executed, and buried (Salmon 1860: 197-202). Walker, certainly, may have felt the trade had declined unreasonably from its earlier heights.
Nearly two decades later, there is evidence that mahogany may have influenced the development of San Pedro Sula, in the Ulúa valley. The valley had been the focus of intense mahogany cuttings for decades, but San Pedro Sula was just beginning its transition from regional backwater to thriving mercantile city (see Pastor 1990, Euraque 1997). On the cusp of this transformation, the village served as one of the main gathering points for mahogany cutters from throughout the region (Frye 1875).

Considering the Transitional Period

The paucity of resources for reconstructing the mid-nineteenth century Honduran mahogany trade makes it difficult to reconstruct with any certainty the signature events of the period. That said, it seems readily apparent that the trade continued more or less on an uninterrupted trajectory at least until the 1870s. In the west, where Augustus Follin established an uncontested regional monopoly until at least the 1860s, few clues indicate the progress of the trade in this late middle period. Though the Ulúa and other neighboring rivers clearly remained locales of mahogany exploitation, the main focus of the trade was fixed far to the east, in the Aguán valley. Available documentation suggests that steady expansion of logging, particularly in the east, continued to return fairly substantial harvests of mahogany. This sustained interest in mahogany ensured, at the very least, that the trade would continue to play a role in the economy and development of the north coast through the middle third of the nineteenth century. By the end of that period, however, a general decline in the trade would portend pending changes that would effectively close out the mahogany era on the north coast.
By the 1870s, the last halcyon days of the Honduras mahogany trade were clearly on the horizon. The aggressive expansion and commercial rivalry that characterized the trade for nearly half a century left the resource heavily overexploited. Mahogany firms had worked their way well up the major river valleys of the north coast, and the forests were exhausted of easily obtainable mahogany. Though both demand and prices remained sufficiently high on the world market to generate interest in continued exploitation (Camille 2000: 107), little remained for the Honduras mahogany merchant except the random patches of territory that had escaped the frenzy of the boom years. Before long, those same merchants would expand their operations to incorporate other lucrative tropical woods and supplement their declining mahogany interests. And it was only a matter of a few short years before fruit would begin its own rise to dominance on the north coast, effectively superseding what little remained of the mahogany trade in the late nineteenth century.

**Exporting to the End: The Last Major Concerns**

The final stages of the mahogany trade, as had been true for its brief existence in Honduras, was dominated by just a few major concerns. By this point Honduran firms were clearly the major interests in the timber trade, but they were supplemented by a small array of foreign interests. This small cadre of operators kept the trade alive through the 1870s and 1880s, but their ultimate disappearance from the trade is perhaps the
clearest indicator available concerning the close of the mahogany era in Honduras. However, before that time came, those few remaining merchants would extend the trade to its farthest reaches on the north coast.

Los Bousquet Hermanos

In the mid-1870s there was a brief resurgence in firms exploiting mahogany from the western valleys of the north coast. The most prominent of the Honduran firms working in the area was that of the brothers Bousquet. The Bousquet family, much like James Welsh decades earlier, controlled extensive commercial operations throughout northern Honduras. Most notable among these is an extensive cattle operation based in Olancho, from which the Bousquets directed a thriving trade with Cuba (Bousquet 1878). The Bousquet interest in the Cuban cattle trade raises the possibility that the firm also supplied cattle for its own and other timber operations in the Ulúa valley. In terms of the mahogany trade, the initial contract, for one hundred or more trees at a price of five pesos each, was signed in spring 1874. The Bousquet contract centered on the area known as Boca Rajada, near an island formed by the confluence of the Ríos Mesapa (Mezapa) and Guaima (Guaymas), in Laguna de Toloa (Bogran 1875c). At this location the Bousquets engaged Alexander McStubbs to fell their timber under the terms of an 1874 contract with Honduras, which promised five pesos per tree for one hundred or more trees felled at that location (Bogran 1875b). Jóse Daniel Bousquet notified the government in December of that year that a total of eighty-six trees were in various stages of removal from the area; twenty-eight trees were lying in the forest (having been worked into sixty-five pieces), fifty were marked and waiting to be cut (‘pendientes a los palos’), and eight more were in the water awaiting the floods (Bousquet 1874). The firm apparently
managed to truck the felled trees out in time for the spring floods, paying 140 pesos for them to the Honduran government by May (Bogran 1875b, 1875d). The fifty trees previously identified seem to have been accounted for with a supplemental contract signed in early May 1875 (Bogran 1875c); the 250 pesos due for the trees was paid shortly thereafter (Bogran 1875e). These relatively small amounts of timber, however, where insufficient to keep the Bousquets active in the mahogany trade. Within the year, the firm disappeared from the local mahogany scene, and by the next decade their attention had turned to ongoing attempts to channel the Ríos Ulúa, Blanco, and Comayagua for a proposed steam navigation scheme (ANH 1887: 2-3).

Debrot Stays the Course

In the first third of the 1876 economic year (that is, in fall 1875), only four firms exported timber from Omoa. Of these, only Frederic Debrot and Jóse Benjamin sent timber to England. Debrot, certainly, included some mahogany in his 104,000 feet of timber (Figure 9.1, 9.2), but it is unclear if mahogany accounted for any portion of the nearly 168,000 feet of timber exported by Benjamin (ANH 1875d). That same fall Benjamin was cutting masica (ironwood) near the small Garífuna village of Cienaguita, where Augustus Follin and other cutters had been active years earlier, making it unlikely that significant mahogany remained in the area (ANH 1875d). The French firm of Gaubert and Compañía, however, likely included mahogany as one of their exports to France (ANH 1875d); Gaubert possessed a contract to fell approximately 150 trees in the same general area as the Bousquet concern, in the Laguna de Toloa (Bogran 1875c). The fourth member of that list, William Bain, exported his timber to Havana, which makes it unlikely that mahogany was included in his accounts (ANH 1875d).
Figure 9.1. Shipping manifest of Frederic Debrot (ANH 1875a)
Figure 9.2. Shipping manifest of Frederic Debrot (ANH 1875b)
Of the four concerns only Debrot remained active through the 1870s and beyond. Debrot's initial contract with Honduras, signed in 1872, granted him rights to 1,000 trees of mahogany and cedar. By the end of the decade, however, various parties within the
Honduran government questioned Debrot's legal standing (ANH 1880a). Undeterred, Debrot continued cutting well into the 1880s. However, by the end of that decade Debrot's timber exports declined along with those of everyone else. In 1889 he only shipped 5,576 feet of mahogany and cedar combined (Vallejo 1893: 282). Given the rise of cedar as a significant export in this time period, the possibility exists that Debrot only exported a small number of mahogany trees at this late stage.

Binney, Melhado y Compañía

The last major firm cutting mahogany in the Aguán valley was also a Honduran concern, that of Binney, Melhado and Company. From all appearances, the company was one of the more active commercial concerns in the Trujillo area through the 1870s and early 1880s (Viada 1884). As one element of its commercial operations, the firm contracted to cut mahogany for a variety of interests in the Aguán valley. Unlike the western valleys, where there are few indications that the mahogany trade remained robust past the early 1870s, by the end of the decade the company was felling more timber in the area than had been taken in earlier years. A report from one of the commissions employed to count and mark timber amply documents the extent of the cuttings directed by the company in the upper Aguán valley for 1878 and 1879 (Figure 9.3). At Monga, the company cut trees under a contract with the concern of Julia and Castillo. In 1878, a total of 252 trees were felled, with an additional 232 cut the following year. In the same account there are indications that the daughters Bernardo were actively overseeing a
Figure 9.3. Mahogany cut by Binney, Melhado and Company, upper Aguán valley, 1878-79
mahogany concession, including works at Chichicaste and Sonaguera. Both locations were lucrative, with 452 trees cut over two years at Chichicaste and 300 at Sonaguera during the same period (Caceres 1880). In all likelihood this Bernardez concern was an extension of the family mahogany business initiated by Francisco Bernardez in the late 1860s. Though John Dillet seems to have left the trade by this time, Edward Prudot remained active in the upper Aguán, maintaining a concession at Chichicaste in 1878 where 110 trees were felled by Binney, Melhado and Company (Caceres 1880).

A substantial number of trees were also felled directly on behalf of the Honduras government, suggesting that it was perhaps finally realizing reasonable profit from the mahogany trade. The 'Arboles del Gobierno' were cut at Monga, Chichicaste, and Sonaguera like those of the private concerns, but over four hundred additional trees were felled on behalf of the government account at Corozo, even farther up the Aguán valley. All told, just two years' worth of cutting in the upper Aguán valley accounted for 2,183 trees; clearly, mahogany still existed in sufficient numbers to satisfy those seeking to profit from its extraction (Caceres 1880). The company continued cutting at a fairly substantial level for several years; in just one season during the early 1880s the company lost an entire season’s worth of 1500 logs when its timber was lost to sea (McConnico 1884: 6). Despite the substantial losses likely incurred, the firm was referenced as the most significant mahogany exporter in the Trujillo area in 1884 (McConnico 1884: 2).

The company also maintained a presence in the western portions of the north coast. In 1872, for example, the company signed a contract for 875 trees of mahogany and cedar in Ríos Ulúa, Comayagua, and Blanco, including an array of tributaries. For unknown reasons, however, the company was unable to commence cutting in the original
locale. Within two years, the company petitioned the government to change the location of the contract from the Ulúa valley to a more central portion of the coast. The new location centered on the Ríos Lean and Canjelica, generally the same area where Follin had been active in the 1840s and 1850s (Binney, Melhado and Compañía 1874). The central portion of the coast, in fact, was the focus of several attempts to secure mahogany in this latter period.

Scattered Concessionaires

In addition to Binney, Melhado and Company, the central coast also received the attention of William Guild, who operated primarily out of Belize. In 1876 Guild negotiated a contract with the Honduras government, whereby he received exclusive rights to the mahogany and cedar on the Río Colorado for ten years. In a somewhat unusual take on the standard timber contract, Guild agreed to pay a fixed sum of eight pesos for each thirty-six varas of longitude from which timber was extracted instead of the usual fees for each tree. Guild also agreed to pay a flat sum of three thousand pesos to finalize the contract (ANH 1876a). At the same time Guild was also trying to gain rights to an array of mahogany eastward along the coast, including near the Río Patuca and at Caratasca (ANH 1876b).

Just five years later, Santos Bardales submitted a petition to the Honduras government, seeking permission to assume the mahogany concession of Francisco Pineda. That contract had been signed sometime in the 1870s, and was for 3,000 trees, at seven pesos per tree instead of the standard five. Though the contract indicates optimism concerning available mahogany on the north coast, the intended location of the contract remains a mystery. Bardales requested maintenance of the Pineda terms, but only if he
was granted freedom from export duties. Otherwise, the required fees for the mahogany should be reduced to five pesos per tree (Bardales 1881). David Maler, a resident of Puerto Cortez, benefited from an even better agreement with Honduras; Maler bought the rights to one hundred mahogany trees for only 400 pesos in 1875, although it is unclear where they may have been located (Ferray 1875).

Despite the precipitous decline in the amount of mahogany being exported from Honduras, it was still promoted commercially through at least the mid-1880s. In preparation for the upcoming New Orleans Exposition, each of the departments and municipalities of Honduras submitted a range of materials representative of its produce. Almost every single district from the north coast included mahogany in its submission (ANH 1884b, 1884c, 1884d). At Trujillo, Eduardo Viada was still enthusiastically describing the 'large copses' of prime mahogany in the Aguán valley (Viada 1884: 17). However, he just as vociferously mentioned the potential of other valuable timbers in the area, including cedar and hule (Viada 1884: 15). These contrasting perspectives on the declining trade are also evident in the reports made by United States Consul William Burchard in the 1880s. Though Burchard indicated that mahogany was still one of the principal exports from Puerto Cortes (which supplanted Omoa as the western port for Honduras) as late as 1884, there is little evidence to support his claim (Burchard 1884). Indeed, Burchard just four years earlier had declared the mahogany trade all but dead, a victim of the increasing use of iron rather than wood in the naval architecture of Great Britain (Burchard 1880).
The Move Away from Mahogany

Despite the hopeful outlook of those promoting it, the mahogany trade was clearly on the wane in Honduras. Part of the reason lies in events outside of Honduras, where world market prices remained low (Follin 1874). Yet explanation can also be found in Honduras, where decades of expanding extraction removed much of the commercially accessible mahogany from the river valleys of the north coast. By mid-century, savvy entrepreneurs began exploring other possibilities for capitalizing on the coast's forests. As the peak of the trade faded, mahogany was increasingly used in the domestic market, then supplanted by other timbers, then finally overwhelmed by the burgeoning fruit trade for which Honduras would later become famous.

Of Iron Horses and Tall Trees

Even at the height of the mahogany boom, mahogany was still available for many of its traditional domestic uses, including canoes and various construction projects. However, the late nineteenth century spurred an increase in the domestic use of mahogany in Honduras; much of the increase came as railroads began to finger their way across the Honduran landscape. Attempts to develop railroads in Honduras first surfaced in the middle of the nineteenth century, with various proposals and concessions to construct the Honduras Interoceanic Railway (Squier 1855). The full tale of these attempts unfortunately remains untold and lies beyond the scope of the current study, but attempts to traverse Honduras' western corridor can be traced to the early colonial era (Brady 1995). However, by the late nineteenth century, continuing efforts to develop the railways of Honduras serve as an indicator for the state of the mahogany trade along the north coast. One of the controlling interests in the development of the Honduras Railroad
in the 1870s was Frederic Debrot, the long-term mahogany merchant in western Honduras. But not all the mahogany cut by Debrot went for export; a substantial amount turns up in the accounts the company submitted to the Honduran government. Nearly 7,000 feet of mahogany, for example, were used in constructing station facilities, with another 2,500 feet designated for the station platform. Further, mahogany was used for other elements of the railway, including some bridges and in a hotel being built to complement the railway (ANH 1875c). Similarly, in 1884 mahogany was specifically included in a contract concerning the latest incarnation of the interoceanic railway. That contract granted the railroad company the right to cut and export a range of woods from its lands free of duties or charges. A later article in the contract went even further, opening up the company's options for construction using the timber, and freeing any bridges, loading docks, or other facilities from any kinds of taxes (ANH 1884a).

New Timbers

One of the clearest signs that mahogany had assumed a lesser role in the region's economy is illustrated by the turn to other types of timbers. Among the earliest indicators of this trend, George Pithketly secured the rights to cedar in the 1850s, and Augustus Follin continued the trend with his contract for mora in 1860. By 1864 the firm of Serra and Serra made arrangements with Honduras to cut cedar and maría (Santa María) for ten years in various locales on the littoral of the north coast (ANH 1864). An additional contract for various timbers was also signed by the same concern in 1872, with no specific mention of mahogany (Bogran 1875a). In the late 1860s, even the Melhado interests at Trujillo secured a contract for mora from Sonaguera (on the Río Aguán) to the Río Limón, a not inconsiderable distance (ANH 1868). By 1875, the rivers of the
western north coast were yielding remunerative quantities of rosewood, logwood, and fustic in addition to mahogany (Frye 1875). And Frederic Debrot was exporting rosewood, mora, cedar, and fustic as well as mahogany (ANH 1875a, 1875b).

Yet another indication of the transition to other timbers is found in the attempt by General Salomon Ordonez and Andrés Thomas to exploit hule (India rubber) east of Trujillo. The two men secured exclusive rights to nearly all of the wood from Trujillo to Brus Laguna, including the Ríos Aguán, Negro, Platano, and Patuca. The contract was intended to last three years, with the principals involved paying only four hundred pesos per year for the contract (ANH 1880b). Interest in exploiting additional timber from old mahogany lands also remained high in the Ulúa valley. In 1879 Francisco Castro secured a concession from the government to cut trees at a place called Cajon, on the margins of the Río Ulúa (Mejia 1880). Unfortunately the types of trees drawing Castro’s interest remain unknown, but they almost certainly included cedar and perhaps mora; the mahogany in this region was likely well-exploited by this time. And an even more telling indicator of mahogany’s reduced role can be found in the various accounts of timber exports for this period, which combined mahogany and cedar into one category for export (Vallejo 1893).

The Fruit Trade

By the 1870s, the impetus for economic development on the north coast was shifting to fruit cultivation (Frye 1875). The stretch of coastal lowland from Omoa to Puerto Cortez was under cultivation by the end of the decade (PRO 1880). Most of the Caribs in the area were formerly employed in logging; Tulian, Cienaguita and other locales by this point had been logged for mahogany and other timbers for decades.
By the late 1870s British interests established a large coconut plantation in the vicinity of modern Tela, at Punta Sal. The plantation was sufficiently remunerative that local Hondurans masqueraded as elected officials in an attempt to extort cash from the estate's manager (Laroch 1877). In the same vicinity, American businessman Charles Mills purchased fifty-three caballerias of land west of Tela to establish cocoa and sugar estates (ANH 1877). By the late 1880s the focus of the fruit trade turned to bananas, which would dominate the north coast for decades to come (Soluri 1998). One of the consequences of this was the rapid appropriation of land on the north coast for the fruit trade (Kepner and Soothill 1935). For example, the increasing trade led Enrique and Salvador Pizatti to seek one hundred manzanas of land outside La Ceiba specifically to establish a banana estate (Pizatti 1887). The concentration of fruit-growing estates in the central coast was well underway, and mahogany receded even further into the background in the region.

**Tropical Sunset: Trickling into the Twentieth Century**

Despite the obvious decline of the mahogany trade at the beginning of the twentieth century, at least some entrepreneurs remained hopeful (or delusional) as to its potential riches. Aiming to exploit these riches, the Liverpool Mahogany Syndicate was incorporated in 1897, only to suspend operations within a few short years (PRO n.d.). And, still failing to recognize the dimensions of the decline, the Spanish Honduras Mahogany Company was launched in 1914. As had its predecessor, the company foundered, and it was defunct by 1920 (PRO n.d.). Available documentation also suggests that Honduran interests also remained hopeful at the beginning of the twentieth century. In perhaps the most curious example, Alfredo Melhado secured a contract from
Honduras for all of the mahogany and cedar found on national lands on the margins of the Ríos Aguán and Piedra Blanca and the lagoon at Chapagua. Yet those same lands were likely devoid of most commercially valuable mahogany by this time. Melhado, however, was just continuing the family business; he was the principal in the firm that grew out of Binney, Melhado and Company in the Trujillo area (ANH 1904).

By the early years of the twentieth century the fruit industry had solidified its dominance on the north coast (Soluri 1998). Though focused on expanding their fruit plantings, the banana companies remained aware of the valuable timber remaining on their vast holdings. As had happened in the late nineteenth century with the railroads, however, much of the timber remaining under the control of the fruit companies was being used on site rather than being exported. Samuel Zemurray's United Fruit Company, for instance, creosoted timber for railroad ties and bridges. However, workers on the Truxillo Railroad near Black River found themselves working in vast expanses of nearly virgin forest, thick with mahogany, and the company gave some consideration to its commercial exploitation (Wilson 1968: 213). But this echo of the trade's lucrative past only illustrates the vast distance between the nineteenth century, when timber was king, and the twentieth, when the fruit companies held sway; the glory days of mahogany were gone forever on the north coast.

Notes

1 On one of my research trips to Tegucigalpa, I had a long discussion with a taxi driver about various aspects of the Honduran fruit trade. That conversation began after we drove by several roadside fruit stands and he made the offhand comment 'frutas tropicales', with obvious pride for the bounty of Honduras' agriculture. It seems an appropriate marker for the rise of the fruit trade as mahogany diminished in importance.
CHAPTER 10

CONCLUDING REMARKS:
ON LITTORAL LEGACIES

By the early twentieth century, mahogany was largely gone from the major river valleys of the north coast of Honduras. The once lucrative trade, object of so much passion and competition, would no longer play a significant role in the primary economic activities of the country. That the oft-romantic tale of mahogany has gone largely unremarked until the current study is a curiosity, understandable only with the knowledge that many fascinating elements of the geography and history of Honduras have yet to be addressed in any satisfactory manner. This dissertation has been a sustained effort to detail the geography attendant with the development, expansion, and eventual decline of the Honduras mahogany trade. Supplemental to this effort has been its focus on the cultural context and legacies of the mahogany trade on the north coast. The mahogany trade occupied a brief yet chaotic period of Honduran history, and its tale is likewise brief. But the short period during which it was the main object of desire for commercial interests on the north coast incorporated political conflict, commercial intrigue, and wide ranging exploitation of the forests into a compelling narrative fraught with implications for understanding the north coast of that enigmatic republic.

Perspective Past

The development of the mahogany trade on the north coast was directly linked to British influence in the Bay of Honduras. As Belizean logwood cutters sought refuge from Spanish aggression, they found safe haven in the fertile lowlands of the Black River region. These refugees were the first to actively exploit the rich mahogany forests of the
north coast, and for forty years in the mid-eighteenth century the Honduran mahogany trade grew unabated. Without the impetus provided by the Belizean refugees, it is likely that the mahogany resources of Honduras would have failed to attract attention until well into the nineteenth century. As it was, early attempts to develop the trade were abandoned along with the rest of the Miskito Shore in the waning years of the eighteenth century. One can only speculate what course the north coast mahogany trade might have taken if the British had not abandoned the Shore. Mahogany had already supplanted logwood as the most valuable article of trade in Belize, and was quite clearly assuming a more important role in the trade emanating from Black River. Unable to capitalize on the British retreat, however, the Spanish never established effective control of the Shore much less engaged in any sustained economic activities such as mahogany logging.

Mahogany remained desirable on the world market through the tumultuous years of Central American independence and the collapse of the Spanish Empire, largely because of the English furniture trade. This sustained interest, combined with the rapidly diminishing supply of readily available wood in Belize, prompted commercial expansion outside of that settlement. That expansion led directly to the fortuitous commercial partnering of Francisco Morazán and Marshall Bennett, which in turn launched the most important era of the Honduran mahogany trade. Morazán's massive mahogany concession not only gave new life to the trade, but also fostered renewed debate over the territorial sovereignty of Honduras, a debate that had never been effectively resolved during the colonial period.

This prolonged Anglo-Hispanic conflict remained manifest through the first half of the nineteenth century, particularly in the bitterly contested lower Aguán valley. That
Belize-based mahogany concerns felt justified in claiming the authority of the Miskito Shore in the area only prompted territorial enforcement from Honduras. Those choosing to operate under the apparently more legitimate authority of Honduras, in turn, increased the level of competition in the disputed territory. This increased competition ultimately resulted in armed aggression, property seizures, and a great deal of diplomatic saber rattling, but was ultimately nothing more than commercial conflict over a natural resource. That the conflict grew to such intense levels in spite of mahogany's relative abundance is testament to the value of the wood and the isolation of the north coast from effective national control.

The boom period, dramatic as it sometimes was, nevertheless appears to have had little effect on Honduras or the north coast as a whole. The Caribbean littoral remained nearly as isolated from the centers of power and population in mid-century, particularly in the Trujillo hinterlands, as it had twenty years earlier, and there are no indications that the trade caused a significant upsurge in local populations, settlements, or economic growth. Rather, the trade was still dominated by a few entrepreneurs interested solely in extracting mahogany from the alluvial forests, then moving on once a given area was exhausted of accessible timber; the frenzy of the boom period only increased the transitory nature of the trade itself.

The final stage of the mahogany era is perhaps best characterized as a time of sustained activity, albeit a time brought to an abrupt end by the virtual disappearance of the trade. After the boom crested in the late 1850s and early 1860s, little remained for the region's mahogany entrepreneurs to do save continue as before. The intense expansion of the boom period was replaced by a more pragmatic, thorough exploitation
of remaining forest growth. Available documentation suggests that the trade continued on a more or less sustained pace until it was dealt a mortal blow by the continued vagaries of the world market. Mahogany may have once been the king of the tropical forest, but it was increasingly coupled with cedar, rosewood, and similar timbers as mahogany entrepreneurs sought to maintain commercial viability. That the trade remained peripheral to the ongoing narrative of Honduran progress is perhaps indicated by its gradual decline in the documentary record of the late nineteenth century. By this time, state interest in the north coast was clearly oriented toward North America, a focus that within a few short decades would make the mahogany trade a distant memory on the north coast. Ultimately, everything would be subsumed under the vast fruit concerns from the north, and Honduras would become the archetype for the banana republic.

One of the most dramatic occurrences in the narrative of post-colonial Honduras has been the transformation of the north coast from a marginal, isolated periphery into a dynamic commercial region vital to the national economy. Though the majority of this development occurred within the twentieth century, the mahogany trade quite clearly established a precedent for expansion and exploitation that foreshadowed the region's rapid rise as a fruit frontier. That expansion left almost no area of the north coast untouched (Figure 10.1). Without such wide-ranging expansion during the nineteenth century, it is unlikely that fruit entrepreneurs would have been apprised of the vast stretches of Honduras that lay open to their ambition. That said, it is also clear that the mahogany trade of the north coast had less impact on Honduran political and economic development than at first might be imagined. The limitations of transport and communication with the power centers of the state left much of the trade outside the
Figure 10.1. Mahogany rivers of northern Honduras, 1830s-1880s
effective purview of the state government, and did little to stimulate any large-scale migration, settlement, or development. Indeed, the powerful changes wrought on the north coast in the last century owe much of their impetus to mahogany's successor.

**Perspective Present**

Fortunately, the cultural legacies of the mahogany trade remain accessible today. The numerous diplomats, adventurers, and commercial speculators that visited Central America from early independence through the end of the nineteenth century left behind a lively descriptive record of the mahogany trade. Such accounts have ultimately proved valuable for reconstructing the processes and parameters of mahogany extraction during its dominance of the tropical timber trade. This descriptive record has also been supplemented by the diverse array of photographic materials made available by those documenting the early twentieth century trade, when mahogany was still profitably cut in such locales as Belize and eastern Nicaragua. Without such clear and compelling indicators, it would be difficult indeed to convey the vivid cultural landscape associated with the mahogany trade at its peak. Perhaps even more compelling for contemporary research, however, are the landscape legacies left by the mahogany trade. Though the fruit trade wiped clean large segments of the north coast, leaving little or no trace of previous economic activities, it is still possible to find echoes of the mahogany trade. Many of these come in the form of the toponymic record, but many more lie hidden in the landscape, awaiting the properly inquisitive eye. These landscape legacies should not be thoughtlessly discarded, but carefully considered for what they may tell us about the complexities of the past and the vagaries of cultural change writ large in the landscape.
Beyond its importance for understanding the cultural and economic landscapes of contemporary Honduras, the Honduran mahogany trade occupies a curious niche in the development of the north coast. At one point the flashpoint for a range of conflicts and diplomatic saber rattling, it ultimately proved to be little more than a minor wave in the progression to the modern fruit trade. Though important in this regard, the mahogany trade owed more to personal ambition between rival commercial interests than it did to any grand attempts to develop the resources of the north coast. Without the impetus provided by those individuals, mahogany may never have assumed the role that it did in the ongoing narrative of the north coast. It is perhaps even possible that the forests of the north coast may even have survived rather than succumbed to the blandishments of commercial expansion. Certainly the fruit companies may have faced greater obstacles as they sought to establish themselves throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But the task of elucidating historical geography harbors little room for speculative enterprise, and the fact remains that mahogany went the way of countless extractive economic activities before and since.

Unfortunately, when today one traverses the major river valleys of the north coast, mahogany is not a common sight. The two main centers of mahogany extraction, the Ríos Ulúa and Aguán, betray almost no indication of their roles in the mahogany trade. In the upper Ulúa watershed, one may perchance see mahogany in its full magnificence, but on the lower reaches one finds only fruit dominating the broad alluvial flatlands. To the east, a similar tale unfolds in the Aguán valley, and the epicenter of the Honduras mahogany trade today offers only vast swaths of African oil palms and fruit to its visitors. Even farther east, there are tales of illegal mahogany extraction, and the ensuing clearing
and deforestation that follows (Herlihy 2001), but this very illegality testifies to its scarcity in the region. Only, perhaps, on the Río Patuca may one find commercially inaccessible mahogany in some general proximity to the water's edge, but even this is a daunting task. On the cusp of the new millennium, the only mahogany an intrepid group of geographers observed on the Patuca was hewn into rough boards and left to await transport downstream (Figure 10.2). Yet mahogany remains entwined in the cultural fabric of Honduras. It remains ubiquitous in the form of dugout canoes, though they may now be carved with chainsaws instead of axes and machetes (McSweeney 2001), and in Mosquitia the preferred wood to place above a grave is still mahogany (Wood 2001). But the once-common mahogany cutters of the north coast are now encountered only rarely. When one by chance meets a Carib on his way to cut mahogany, it may well be on a bus outside of Trujillo, and he may tell you he is heading south. It is there, in the mountainous interior, that the giants of the forest manage to survive and continue to reign over the dark, somber forests.
Figure 10.2. Mahogany on Río Patuca, December 1999
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Abbreviations

ANH  Archivo Nacional de Honduras
BT   Board of Trade, Great Britain Public Record Office
CO   Colonial Office, Great Britain Public Record Office
FO   Foreign Office, Great Britain Public Record Office
PRO  Great Britain Public Record Office
SRO  Great Britain Scottish Record Office
T    Treasury Series, Great Britain Public Record Office
US   United States Department of State microfilm series

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VITA

Craig Stephen Revels was born in Chicopee, Massachusetts on August 28, 1966. Although living for brief portions of his childhood in exotic locales such as Guam and Maine, he spent the majority of his formative years in Aurora, Colorado. He graduated from Gateway High School in 1984, whereupon he matriculated at the University of Colorado in Boulder. Pursuing an idiosyncratic education, he was eventually introduced to the wonders of geography and received his Bachelor of Arts in that discipline in spring 1988.

Intent on learning more about the world, the author spent the next few years in a variety of occupations, traveling as much as time and finances would allow. After drinking deeply from the well of experience, he made the decision to pursue graduate training in geography. In 1995 he entered the Master's program at Portland State University. Determined to combine incorporate an international element in his research, he completed a thesis on the historical geography of coffee in Nicaragua and graduated in spring 1998.

Mr. Revels entered the doctoral program in the Department of Geography and Anthropology at Louisiana State University in August 1998. His current research explores the historical and cultural geography of mahogany in Honduras, although he has maintained a wide range of interests. He will receive his doctorate in May 2002, after which time he will continue to travel, think, and generally consider the wonders of the world.