**Utopian dream for Caribbean isle goes bad**

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The annals of journalism are rife with unintended consequences. The San Francisco Chronicle's inadvertent role in the invasion of the tiny Caribbean island of Anguilla in 1969 by the military forces of the declining British Empire is a bells-and-whistles example.

This story is so similar to the Leonard Wibberley classic, "The Mouse That Roared," that it hints of plagiarism, although The Chronicle's Anguilla misadventure was an original. In Wibberley's 1955 satire, the tatterdemalion Duchy of Grand Fenwick intrigues to declare war on the United States and then surrender post-haste to enjoy the comforts of the generous reconstruction aid America famously afforded its vanquished enemies; very funny.

It was not so funny, however, in 1969 when Great Britain invaded Anguilla - a leeward sand spit in the Lesser Antilles islands then without telephones let alone an army - to put down to a perceived threat to Her Majesty's government. The invasion was the real deal - paratroopers landed! - and the proximate cause of this international incident was The Chronicle and the antics of some of the fabulous San Francisco characters the newspaper held dear.

Scott Newhall, The Chronicle's buccaneering, wooden-legged editor - he lost a limb adventuring in Mexico - was gung-ho for the cause of Anguillan independence and put his money where his editorials were: Chronicle copy boys were dragooned into service to work an antique coin press outside the newspaper's offices to counter stamp 10,000 foreign coins that Newhall had purchased with the words "Anguilla Liberty Dollar." The plan was to sell the coins to collectors to get the foundling republic on a firm financial footing.

Chronicle Editor Scott Newhall's bold crusade to reverse little Anguilla's fortunes, alas, went awry. (Duke Downey)

Newhall's private Marshall Plan for Anguilla included the creation of snazzy Republic of Anguilla passports with faux-leather covers. He designed an Anguillan flag - two comely mermaids on a field of blue - that first kissed air over the St. Francis Hotel when the Anguillan freedom delegation came to visit San Francisco in 1967. Anguilla's passport and flag appeared overnight courtesy of Freeman, Mander & Gossage, the advertising shop of Howard Gossage, Newhall's buddy and Anguillan co-conspirator.

Gossage was an advertising genius who hated his profession and made his living biting the hands that fed him. "To explain social responsibility to advertising men is like trying to convince an 8-year-old that sexual intercourse is more fun than a chocolate ice cream cone," Gossage would often say. (Gossage, in the 1960s, presciently predicted the current plight of daily newspapers. He said that advertising would eventually kill off newspapers by artificially subsidizing subscription prices below their costs: "A newspaper should cost as much as a pack of cigarettes.")

Acting Mayor Peter Tamaras (left) and Peter Adams, Anguillan president, check out the republic's funky flag. (Jerry Telfer, File 1967 / The Chronicle)

Gossage hosted a world-class intellectual salon at his magnificently restored firehouse-office on Pacific Street and was always on the hunt for the next big idea. Tom Wolfe, in a famous essay on Marshall McLuhan, credits Gossage for virtually inventing the man, and the genesis of the great Anguilla caper was the occasion of Gossage introducing the thinker he had handicapped as the next McLuhan - Professor Leopold Kohr, the prophet of smallness. Kohr maintained that when things - corporations and governments alike - became too big, they no longer functioned well, if at all. He advocated that San Francisco become a city-state. Newhall was all ears.

When Anguilla declared independence July 11, 1967, it was the moment the city-staters had waited for - a wannabe country of the perfect size (6,000 population, salt-farm and fishing economy) to try out the professor's theories. Newhall immediately assigned globe-trotting reporter George Draper to the story, and the editor himself accompanied his ace to Anguilla "for a firsthand excursion into a revolution." Draper was a suave and perpetually tanned slave of deadline who wore the mufti of Brooks Brothers pink shirts and threw louche parties in his Nob Hill apartment to which the social set thronged. Draper's copy breathed a world-weariness and droll acceptance of the continuing foibles of humanity. Newhall once sent Draper to Africa on an inventive assignment to expose the Zanzibar slave market by buying a slave girl and then dramatically freeing her at the United Nations, but the plan was aborted when Draper ran out of expense money en route. Professor Kohr had hastened to Anguilla to advise the government-aborning that by applying his principles of smallness, Anguilla would "rival, one day, the glories of ancient Greece."

Reporter Draper was not so sure. "The future course of the Anguillan republic is open at this moment to the most extreme conjecture," he wrote, in a Chronicle front-page dispatch from the rebellious island. Robert Bradshaw, the premier of the British Commonwealth Federation of St. Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla, from which Anguilla was attempting to free itself, was not so diplomatic. He went on the radio to blame "interfering Americans" for all the bother. By "interfering Americans," he meant those busybodies from San Francisco.

This bother came to a boil when Anguilla boldly asserted its independence in Times Roman large type in that most contemporary of proclamations, a full-page advertisement in the Aug. 14, 1967, New York Times. The Times ad copy was written by Gossage and, in one of the finer ironies of competitive newspapering, personally paid for by the editor of The Chronicle. The arresting headline on the advertisement was: "Is it 'silly' that Anguilla does not want to become a nation of bus boys?" The ad pledged Anguillans to the strict code of smallness and rejected any ideas about turning their idyllic island over to tourist-hotel developers - because then most of their citizens would end up working for the hotels at menial tasks, such as busing tables. Anguilla could make it on its own with a little help from its friends, particularly friends who would buy their Liberty dollars and use their passports, dual citizenship being an implied nonproblem. This way, Anguilla could remain small.

The advertisement had the opposite effect. The unspoiled island prompted international interest from developers and other schemers. Proposals cascaded in for casinos, offshore banks, cancer-cure hospitals, free-love colonies. These seemingly lucrative offers both rattled and tempted the fledgling we-will-stay-small government. The pragmatic Anguillans went sideways on the idealistic San Franciscans. Could just one, well, maybe two, hotels possibly be so bad?

"It was then our plans began to go awry," Newhall recalled, without acrimony. When the Crown's representatives began to publicly fret that organized crime might be infiltrating the island, Great Britain dispatched some 300 troops in March 1969 to take control. Draper and Newhall had long gone. There was no resistance.

The well-meaning San Franciscans who had fronted the expenses for Anguilla's attempt to stay small were left to pay off large bills, including airline tickets and hotel room-service charges - lamb chops were the Anguillans' favorite, at 10 bucks apiece. They also were left with a disposal problem of some 5,000 Anguilla Liberty dollars.Today, you can buy them on eBay. In its history, The Chronicle has been no novice at newspaper promotion - it was not an accident of positioning that Luisa Tetrazzini sang "The Last Rose of Summer" on Christmas Eve of 1910 directly in front of the-then Chronicle building at Kearny and Market streets - but Anguilla was not a circulation promotion. The Chronicle neither gained, nor sought, advantage from this great endeavor. This was at a time - it was after all the Panglossian '60s - when ideas were the lingua franca of San Francisco and there was competition over who could be the most effective Don Quixote.

For many years, the unused flag of the Republic of Anguilla hung in a place of honor in the Telegraph Hill apartment of Dr. Gerald Feigen, the third member of Newhall's free-Anguilla triumvirate. Feigen was Gossage's partner in the idea business, and a legendary wise-cracking proctologist. Feigen loaned Anguilla's only bank the funds to replenish its bare coffers and lost all his money. Anguilla today is no longer so small. It is a self-governing British territory that is headquarters to offshore corporations and a neon-less Vegas Strip in the far Caribbean of hotels and resorts that employ many, many busboys.

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