The reign of business alongside the peaceful Demerara River was once held firmly for almost a century by one of the most successful families that ventured where so many others failed. The Paterson’s family accepted the enormous challenges of 1800s frontier life and became legendary in the early history and foundations of British Guiana.

“These rivers know that strong and quiet man
Drove back a jungle, gave Guiana root
Against the shock of circumstances, and then
History move down river, leaving free
The forest to creep back, foot by quiet foot
And overhang black water to the sea.”

John Paterson 1816-1898-Third child of J.D Paterson

It was in the early 1800s that Scotsman John Dagleish Paterson {1775-1842} settled at Christianburg, Upper Demerara and founded the family concerns which grew to be one of the most noteworthy and prosperous in British Guiana. He was of the trios of Britons known in the history of the district as Three Friends, who arrived together to settle in Demerara as the colony capitulated to the British in 1803. The three men, Paterson, Spencer, and Blount, established themselves separately on estates on the Upper Demerara.

There were already estates in the area, Robert Frederick Allicock lived on the eastern shore of the Demerara River and owned Noitgedacht or Plantation Retrieve, an area of 4901 Rhynland acre or 8.040 square miles. John Allicock had owned Plantation Wismar 401 acres after 1759. Anthony and John Somersall Harrower and Donvin owned Nerva Sawmill; Christian Fenette owned Christianburg prior to John Dagleish Paterson.
John Dagleish Paterson, popularly believed to have come from a family of bankers, referred to as Scottish army major, naval officer and engineer, was also credited with a series of other endeavors in Demerara including the building of the Eve Leary Police Barracks, co-owner of Union Coffee House with Malcolm Campbell until his death in 1808. He was recorded as selling Timber Plantation Susanna Rust in 1807 on the East Bank Demerary by the Demerary Gazette. John Dagleish Paterson was one of the three famous contractors who constructed the 1829 British Guiana, Government building in Georgetown which is now called the Parliament Building. The other two contractors were Roderick McKenzie and Hector Kemp.

John Dagleish Paterson or JDP came from Dumfries-shire, Scotland where the Patersons had lived for generations in the Parish of Tynron. In 1691 they were tenants at Clonrae, Craignie, Craigturow and Ford. William Paterson 1691-1743, was tenant in Aird, close to Ford. In the 18th Century (the Barony of Airds in Tynron had been acquired by the 2nd Duke of Queensbury from Sir Robert Grierson of Lag in 1708. His son William (1733-1810) who married Jean Dagleish (1740-1824), moved before 1793 to Craireknowe, a farm in the neighboring Parish of Durisdeer. All were buried at Tynron. John Dagleish Paterson of Christianburg (1775-1842) was William and Jean's third son. Their surviving second son, William Paterson (1774-1855) inherited the tenancy of Craireknowe.
The fourth son, John (1808-1886), farmed at Craigdarroch, a neighbour of Craireknowe, near Sanquhar, and it was at Craigdarroch that the later Patersons of Demerara often stayed when they visited Scotland in the 1800s.

Early plantation life along the Demerara\(^1\) was diverse in the variety of crops and products supplied for the export market. The plantations in Upper Demerara grew sugar, coffee, cocoa (cacao), plantain, tobacco, citrus, and many other items that fetched a high price back in Europe. Cotton and sugar were grown in the 1700s at Wismar by planter Anthony Somersall in 1759. Coffee rapidly declined in cultivation and export by 1846, as the transformation of the labor force occurred with the abolition of slavery and resulting historical changes.

Balata Rubber was also a major industry of employment. Large crews of workers were required for obtaining and processing the latex of the Bulletwood. The tapping groves on the Bulletwood tree for Balata rubber were made about 10 inches apart in a feather stitch pattern. The latex flowing down the cuts was caught in a calabash made from the fruit of the calabash tree and the result of the day’s tapping, removed in tins to the camp where the latex was poured into shallow trays called “Dabrees” which hold 5-30 gallons of more. The flow of the latex was affected by the weather and other condition but on first tapping, an average of 4-6 pounds per tree is obtained. On re-bleeding the same tree after the five year rest rule\(^2\), the yield is only about one third that of the first tapping. In 1917, Balata export from British Guiana reached 1,595,888 pounds. The Balata trade came to an end by the Second World War when trade was severely affected, as cheaper petroleum based products were perfected.

The soil along the Demerara’s flood plain which seemed to be so fertile for the first crop of the early planters soon ceased to yield. One by one, settlers were forced to leave their land on the Demerara and return to the richer coastal plains. Paterson quickly adapted to the conditions and concentrated his efforts on this valuable and bountiful forest country through which the river flows.

In course of time it was Guyana’s pristine forest of magnificent hardwood that would lead the way as Paterson amassed a considerable fortune and became a powerful figure on the Demerara and early British Guiana. Guyana’s primeval forest, rich in the finest hardwood was prized by many. Greenheart, Mora, Purple Heart, Bania, Dakama, Wallaba, Crabwood, Bullet wood, and many other hard woods were logged from the 22,000 acres of Paterson’s land.

Greenheart is one of the better known hardwoods in the world and by far the most exported due to its exceptional qualities and versatility. Greenheart has three varieties black, white and brown. It is extremely hard and requires no treatment. Durable uses included dock piling, dock gates in salt water, shipbuilding, wharves, bridges, and house construction. Guyana was the only country that exported Greenheart and is still the primary exporter after all these years.

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1 The Demerara River was called Demerary.
2 Bullet wood trees may not be re-bleed until the previous cuts are entirely healed, which takes from 4-5 years.
Wallaba is the most abundant wood in Guyana with Mora coming second. Cedar for furniture-making and Baramalli in the use of paper-making were some of the many soft woods exported. Timber was hauled by men, oxen, or by winches then floated along the creeks and rivers of Upper Demerara and processed by Paterson’s sawmill at, strategically located, Christianburg called Red Camp.

He bought up vast stretches of land. At one point, it was said that Paterson had owned more than 22,000 acres or 34.37 square miles of land, which stretched all the way westward to the mighty Essequibo River. Sizable timber grants were leased and worked by grant holders when Paterson arrived. He was soon the principal buyer of timber and his business grew. He was prominent in the supply of timber for Government and other buildings in Georgetown.

In 1824, Paterson installed a water wheel\(^3\) at his saw-mill to assist in processing wood. It caused much interest in its time since it was the first of its kind in the colony. Water from the nearby Catabulli creek\(^4\) was channeled to turn this wheel. A system of gears and belts were used to provide power to the Sawmill. It was the first water-powered sawmill in Guyana and it was an example of the ingenuity of J.D Paterson.

The Paterson family had some of the first Steam Powered Brigs\(^5\) that ran frequently between Christianburg and Georgetown towing greenheart punts. A steam tug made a record two-way journey to Georgetown in only 12 hours to fetch ice and fresh meat, accordingly to the 1993 Guyana Guardian.

It was said that Paterson was a sober and God fearing man. In that repugnant age of devils dressed in angels’ robes, and hell presenting the semblance of paradise, he insisted on his slaves joining in the family’s daily religious observances.

\(^3\) The water wheel is now a monument and stands a silent witness to history.
\(^4\) Catabulli creek was called "Kathapoety creek" by the early Dutch. It is possible that it was called by this Dutch pronunciation of its Amerindian name during Paterson’s time.
\(^5\) A steam powered brig is a two-masted ship or boat that can use sail or steam to power up.
In his martial life, his twelve children were born of two successive spouses. His first spouse was Elizabeth Hill, who bore five older children. The picture of John Paterson in this article was the third child of this union. Jane Mckell, the niece of Elizabeth Hill, later had seven children and was granted an official status which Elizabeth never achieved by becoming John Dagliesh Paterson’s lawful wife. Research into the history of Paterson descendants is complicated not only by the number of his children, but also by the fact that he had two sons named John by each of his two spouses.

In Jane Mckell he had chosen a wife of character and ability, who was to be a worthy successor to him in his timber business.

In Henry Kirke’s book 25 Years in British Guiana published in 1898, he wrote of his time as a judge in Guyana and his many trips up the Demerara River. According to Kirke, “Christianburg, about 70 miles from Georgetown, was the residence of a Scottish family named Paterson. The house was one of the largest and best built in the colony. A large Sawmill is near the house worked by waterpower, and behind stretched the red shingle roof cottages of the employees. The landing place was marked by a flagstaff and flanked by two Old Dutch cannons…”

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6 Henry Kirke was a former Sheriff and Judge of Demerara.
He went on to describe the inside of the home and the dignified old widow who lived there. “She was the living proof of the health of the Demerara River for persons of temperate habits.” Kirke was speaking of the period around the 1870s.

John Dagleish Paterson had two families: His first partner was Elizabeth Hill (1778-1860) by whom he had five children; 
**James** (1812-1842) was 30 yrs old when he died. 
**William** (1814- before 1900) graduated with a degree in medicine at the University of Glasgow, practiced medicine in British Guiana for a while, and then returned to Scotland to open a Baths Establishment in Rothesay, Isle of Bute. 
**John** was known as **Brandy** John (1816- 1898) in picture. He married Sarah DeNieuwerkerk, granddaughter of Clout DeNeiuwerkerk owner of plantation Watooka. John was the last of the 12 children to die in 1898 and is the only known image of his family to have survived. 
**David** (1818-1847) married Nancy Allicock (Nancy born in 1820). She was believed to be 2 years old when R.F. Allicock died in 1822. David died by drowning in the Demerary River off Watooka. He had a daughter named Catherine Jane Paterson by Nancy. Later, she married Francis (Frank) Fiedtkou (1820 born) David Paterson was my three times great grand-father. 
**George** born abt.1822 died Feb. 2, 1855 in Glasgow

Elizabeth Hill died 25th April 1860 at age 82. Born abt. 1778, Elizabeth was sister to Mary Hill who was married to Clout DeNieuwerkerk of Watooka. Her other sister was Jane Hill, who was the mother of Jane Mckell. Jane Hill/Mckell born abt.1739 - died Oct.18, 1835 in Christianburg (British Guiana colonial Index).

In 1823, John D. Paterson advertised his intention to leave the colony at some point after May 29 with 3 children and 1 servant. In the same month, it was advertised that Jane Mckell, niece of Elizabeth Hill, left the Colony after June 2. The Brig “Essequibo” left Georgetown for Glasgow at the end of June, which was announced in the Royal Gazette May 1823.

In 1823-24 JD Paterson married Jane Mckell, the daughter of Jane Hill, in Scotland. 
JD Paterson returned to Demerara in 1826.

In his Will (deeds Registry 101 of 1842, proved 27th Oct., 1842) J. D. Paterson said that he and Jane Mckell, a young lady of the Upper Demerara, have been married “by Contract Antenuptial.” That marriage produced seven children:
**Thomas** (c1824-88) died at his Middle St. home and was taken by the Colonial Steamer “Sproston’s Wood” for interment at Christianburg: Royal Gazette:

**John Dagleish** II (c1826-66) died in Dalbeattie December 22, 1866 at age 40 and was buried at Tynron, married Grace Edger Lewis (c died Feb.22nd 1917); both buried Tynron:
**Jane Dagleish** (c1827 died Nov. 26th 1853) tomb stone is at Christianburg. , unmarried:
**Alfred** (alive in 1853) born 1830 married Ann Paterson (1825-1871) -Died after1857
**Christina Lucas** (1832-73) died at Langlands, Dumfries, and 17 July 1873 aged 41: buried Tynron: Dumfries & Galloway Courier.
Christina married William Knox (1810-66) at St. Philips Church, Georgetown, in 1865 (he died at his America Street home July 26, 1866 and was buried in Georgetown: The Colonist:

Catherine born abt.1834 married Butt
Mary Elizabeth born abt.1837- married Blount

There is evidence in some accounts that Thomas Paterson may have gone to Australia in the 1850s, but he obviously returned and lived in Georgetown until his death.

In 1861 Dr. William Paterson expressed satisfaction “that those was in some employment when you last heard of him.” {Letter dated June 13th. 1861, Rothesay to George Booker)

Elizabeth Hill's Will was proved in Georgetown 1860, the will deposited 2nd May, 1860.

On Saturday 22nd October 1842, John Dagleish Paterson died at his residence at Christianburg: at age 67 and was interred in the family plot, joining so many of the early settlers in making Guyana their permanent home. His tomb along with several children is still there.

Jane Paterson nee Mckell (1801-1889), the wife of JDP, lived to be 88 years old and was alive in 1870: Henry Kirke Twenty-Five Years in British Guiana and Guyana Guardian 1993. Jane Paterson nee Mckell grave lies next to husband John Dagleish Paterson at Christianburg

**John Dagleish Paterson’s Will** is preserved in the Guyana’s Supreme Court Registry and throws light on the life and character of John Dagleish Paterson.

The first provision provided an annuity of 300 pounds for life to his wife Jane.

The second provision stated “In consequence of the present depreciation of the Property in the colony and the little prospect of any advance in the value thereof or in the revival of its commerce” Paterson willed that the establishment should be carried on by his wife for at least two years before the property can be sold.

To Elizabeth Hill he left the dwelling house and other buildings at Amelias ward, furniture, silver plate, bed, table linen and other plenishing. The cattle thereon, one hundred acre of land and also an annuity for life were provided in the Will for her.

The older five Paterson’s children by Elizabeth had become of age and were educated already. One of the sons, William, was a medical Doctor. The Will made provision for the education of the Paterson seven younger children apart of a few bequests that the twelve children to “share and share alike”.

One of the executors of the Will was George Booker who with his brother Josias founded the firm which became the very successful Bookers Bros. McConnell and Co.

This sawmill would not be sold for another 52 years and was a very successful and profitable business. In the 1890s the Georgetown authorities were considering building a railway from Demerara to Essequibo to facilitate traffic to the interior.
The proposed railway would allow goods which were normally carried up the Essequibo and over the dangerous rapids on that river, to begin their journey along the calmer Demerara, and thence to cross by rail to the Essequibo at a point above the rapids. The area of Wismar, Christianburg, and the large area between Wismar and The Essequibo River along with the Sawmill business was sold to the British Government for the large sum of 97,000 dollars in 1894 accordingly to the author of *Run Softly Demerara. The 1993 Guyana Guardian* reported the sum was actually about 350,000 dollars. So lucrative was the business that within twelve years of government operation it recouped the entire purchase price of the land. For unknown reasons this very profitable business was closed shortly after.

The Paterson Great House was turned into a rest house then served as Upper Demerara Court House until an early morning fire in April 12, 2011 consumed the oldest building in Linden and probably Guyana. This vintage of history withstood the ravages of a lost time and was 208 years old.

Some of Paterson’s children who did not return to Scotland have families, but the Paterson name in Guyana appears to have been lost through marriages. Today, dozens of families who carry different names such as Allicock, Blount, Van Lange, Fleming, Fiedtkou, Bremner, DeNeiuwerkerk, Outridge, Couchman, and many more are descendants of this once powerful Demerara River family. Both of my parents descended from him, making him my great grandfather, four times over.

*My mother Enez Allicock in yellow blouse visiting the Paterson’s family plot in 2010*

Guyanese Online - [http://guyaneseonline.wordpress.com/](http://guyaneseonline.wordpress.com/)
Sir Winston Churchill once said that ‘Of all the small nations of this earth, perhaps only the ancient Greeks surpass the Scots in their contribution to mankind.’ Tiny Scotland, with an 1800 population of less that 2 million, extended their influences around the globe, including British Guiana. One amazing fact is, the Bank of England was founded by a Scot, William Paterson and that the William Paterson was born in Tynwald, Dumfries-shire. John Dagleish Paterson or JDP came from the Parish of Tynron Dumfries-shire, hence a story of intriguing interest.

So ended the reign of the Patersons of Christianburg. Old John Dagleish Paterson who was successful where so many failed in founding a flourishing and profitable business in British Guiana, would have approved of the Demerara Bauxite Company who have in a sense, and on a scale that he would not have dreamt of, becoming his successor in the region where he once ruled supreme.