

# AfroPanamanian Newsletter



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**February-March 2013**

**Donation**



*Statue, donated by Barbadians on 1st St. Colon, Panama, resisted Nature's whipping March 3, 4, 5, 2013*

Anecdotes

Controversy

Poetry

## LOS AMIGOS :

Por la superación de la Etnia Negra  
(Incorporated to SEAPAT EVENTOS, S.A.)

A group of friends, in Panama, decided to join forces to work on the rescue of values, customs and cultural traditions bequeathed to us through our ancestors. These have been displaced by others, thus losing a large part of our Black Heritage. We are evaluating all these forgotten traditions and values and highlighting figures as examples for future generations.

***“For Black history to be done right, we must do it ourselves.” Edward Gaskin***

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The editor is not responsible for the opinions expressed by our collaborators

Cover Page: The stamp which appears on the cover was proposed to the Canal Zone Government by Mr. George W. Westerman (r.i.p.) accepted and issued in 1951 as a 10 cent postage stamp, used for years. Permission for its continuous use was given by his grandnephew, Cecil Reynolds.

### *Editorial*

#### *ADVICE FOR LIFE*

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*The people who  
make a difference  
in your life are  
not the ones with  
the most  
credentials, the  
most money...or  
the most awards.  
They simply are  
the ones who care  
the most.*

***-- Charles Schultz***

***-Kindness is the language the blind can see and the deaf can hear.***

*If you would like to be removed from our mailing list, please type REMOVE and reply to afropanamiannewsletter@gmail.com*

Feedback since January Newsletter:

Hi Inés,  
Kudos! What a nice newsletter in spite of the challenges you and your colleagues are facing with Sandy's passing. You are to be commended on your efforts. Thank you for sharing. Blessings,  
Nadya

How the internet works (sent by Basilio Wilkinson)  
<http://www.wimp.com/internetw/orks/>  
*Knock, knock video poetry (contributed by Rev. Carlos Austin)*  
<http://www.facebook.com/photo.php?v=1091263815193&set=vb.1634457078&type=2&theater>

Royal Reader reminds me of the 4th Reader I still have, which I used when I attended Yaya's school in Exposition 33 street and Peru Ave.  
*V. Best*  
-----  
*Thanks Ines, I hope you are doing fine. Keep up your great work with the monthly newspaper. Don*

**Musically, Rock n' Roll was the thing in the 1950's**

*(from an interview with Bruce Codrington laying on his back)*

**Coming out of the Paraiso and Gamboa communities, there were groups preparing, presenting and performing in social events. Small bands and doo-op singing groups: The Comets, the Earth Angels... the Diamond Aces and the Astronauts which converted to the Dynamic Exciters.**

*(Photo contributed by Rosita Bynoe)*

**The Diamond Aces**



Left to right: Levy Evelyn (Mitch), Alfonso Martin (Brain), Emerson Cooper (Emmy), and Clarence Glasgow (Fatsy).

Instead of gangs to do evil, like we have today, they grouped together to do good.

Then again there were those Canal Zone students who came together for the purpose of providing entertainment for the Clubs on the Army posts in the Canal Zone.

Since the Canal Zone was so influenced by the United States, actually feeling that they were, or wanted to be, US citizens, most parents made the sacrifice of sending their children to the United States to either further their education or to join the Army.

Remember the Korean War, the Vietnam war? Some of them were even drafted from here

Sending them away was also a way to avoid them going to jail in the Canal Zone for vagrancy and loitering (see page 5, Feb. 2011 Newsletter).

Starting in Gamboa. from within the Band of Angels: Alfonso Martin, Newton Buckner, Leon Headley, Ruperto Toppin, Lincoln Jackson, John Toppin, influenced by James Brown & the Temptations the Astronauts singing group incorporated new members and instruments until the combo became The Dynamic Exciters.

**Olden Days sayings:**

“Come after breakfast, bring along your lunch, and leave before supper.”

“When it rains, it pours”

“Jailbait, jailbird”

“Troubles & tribulations”

“Bite off his head”

## The Untold Story

Another salvation from vagrancy and loitering (see page 5, Feb. 2011 Newsletter) was the Apprenticeship program instituted in the Canal Zone as a result of the 1955 Remon-Eisenhower treaty, which permitted the high school graduates, both from the Canal Zone and Panama, to enter trainee positions and opt for trades and professions necessary for the upkeep of the Panama Canal. In conversation with Bruce Codrington on his sick bed, we reminisced...

The treaty stated in no uncertain terms, that the US would train at least 25 Panamanian youth per year, which started the Apprentice School. It stopped security positions, reserved for US citizens such as policemen and firefighters.

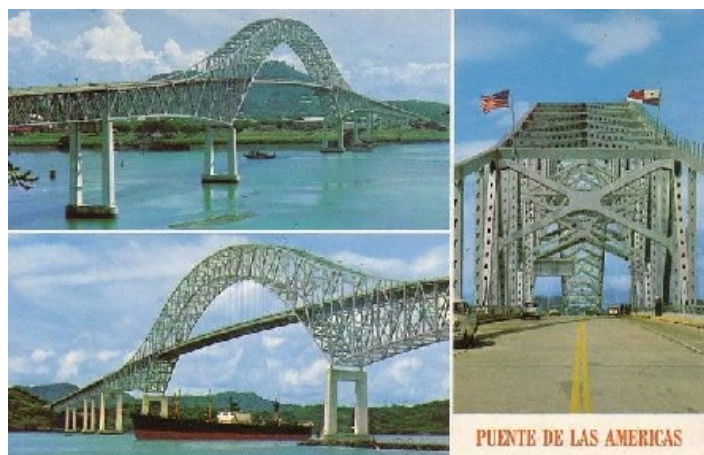
The guys entering the Apprentice program from the Canal Zone Schools realized that their knowledge of math was not up to par for this program (besides the teachers' desire to fail them), but the high school graduates and University students coming from Panama bolstered these young men, grouping together to study and practice the math, helping them to successfully graduate from the program, getting high paying jobs. Some even went on to study at the universities in Panama and abroad to become architects and engineers.

To apply for a job on the Canal Zone one had to pass tests in which, according to your score, you entered a grade level which controlled the pay you received for the work you did. These tests came prepared from the States, and there were books from which one could study to make a higher score, but were not available to John Public (they could not be borrowed, could only be used within the library) until the Canal Zone Library (and its branches) was pressured into providing them for public use.

## APPRENTICESHIP

In summary, the Remon-Eisenhower treaty of 1955 contains the following: (*Excerpted and expanded from Wikipedia*)

- It raised the US annual payment to Panama, for the canal, from \$430,000, to \$1.93 million. As a consequence, Panama agreed to lower, by 75%, the tax on national liquors sold in the Panama Canal Zone.
- Panama was granted the right to collect taxes from Panamanians working in the canal and railroads operating inside the Zone or out of it to be turned over to the Panamanian Government.
- The United States gave back Panamanian jurisdiction of the lands in "Punta Paitilla". It also gave back the lands of "Nuevo Cristobal", "Playa Colon" on the Atlantic, and the Lesseps Park on the Pacific. Panama, as a consequence, had multi-tasks to "beautify" the U.S. embassy in Panama. These tasks included the construction of a park in front of the embassy (Parque Anayansi), and the fixing of two properties next to the embassy.
- The construction of a bridge over the canal, by the USA (named by the US Thatcher Ferry Bridge and by Panama: Bridge of the Americas).
- The permitting of local traders to sell to ships crossing the canal.
- The final elimination of the Gold/Silver roll. Causing a semblance of equality of local workers and North Americans in the Canal.
- The United States was to avoid contraband in the canal. Loss of commissary privilege for non-resident workers. One point which Remon did not approve, and which the U.S. had been requesting since 1947 was finally conceded after Remon's death: The United States was granted, with no cost or 'trick', the military base and beach in Rio Hato, for a period of 15 years. The base was given back on 22 August 1970, after the government of General Torrijos refused to renew US use. (The beach is now Decameron Resort and the Rio Hato airport is being refurbished to international status)



### An Apprentice made it to Minister of Labor



Colon-born Luis Alejandro Anderson McNeill, studied at the interior School of Mechanical Arts (Divisa) graduating as an electrician and welder.

He then got into the Apprentice School in the Panama Canal Company, where he became an Air Condition and Refrigeration technician.

Militating in Local 907, the US Army Labor Union for Non-US employees, his interest in the welfare of all the laborers of the country lead him to become the Secretary General of the National Federation of Democratic Workers.

He participated on the Appeals Board on the Canal Zone and was a member of the Board of Directors of the Panama Canal Commission, a leadership which caused him to be one of the negotiators in the team that worked on the Torrijos-Carter Treaties.

In 1981 he was elected Secretary General of the Confederation of Laborers of the Republic of Panama and appointed Minister of Labor in 1985 after being its Vice Minister.

He died in Venezuela on Nov. 15, 2003, on his job as Secretary General of the ORIT (Regional Organization of Laborers), post he had held since 1986.

### Female Labor in the Canal Construction Days

*Chorrillo* at the foot of Ancon hill in the Capitol of Panama, is the closest town to the *La Boca* settlement, where the majority of the Panama Canal Black working community lived with their families. There were also bachelor quarters.

Some of the men who lived in the bachelor quarters had girlfriends living in *Chorrillo* or were “boarded” by the women residents of *Chorrillo*. They also did the men's washing. Now, the men could have a clean change of clothes, not like Rev. Sealey mentioned, having only one change of clothing or none, having to work in the wet clothes, either because they got wet in the rain or were washed and put back on wet when they worked “down the lines” when there were no women.

The *Chorrillo* women had their children take the food and clothes to and from the “boarders”. The men paid their “washer women” on paydays.

Even though the bachelors had their quarters, many lived with women in *Chorrillo* or Central. Having quarters gave them commissary privilege.

When the *Curundu* laundry (PTJ headquarters in Ancon, across from the *Curundu* Commissary, which is now the Farmer's market on the corner of *Curundu*) opened, many of the women, by then, living in other townsites, such as *Pueblo Nuevo*, *Rio Abajo*, *Juan Diaz*, etc. went to work there.

### Down the Lines

During the expansion of the Panama Canal, 2007-2014, debris taken from the Canal is being carted away in trucks, but, in construction days, both for the railroad and canal, everything was done on track lines. These lines were moved according to the necessity of the work and so was the housing for the workers. Towns sprung up and disappeared “**down the lines**”. Names came and went “**down the lines**”: Empire, *Las Cascadas*, *Matachin*, Mandingo, West Bank, *Chagres*, *Frijoles*, *Bas Obispo*.

**Episcopal Church Women (ECW) celebrate International Women's Day  
During their Diamond Anniversary (75 years)**

*by Dilsia M. Alleyne*

On March 8, 2013 International Women's Day was celebrated in Panama, a good occasion to bring you some information about the Episcopal Church and its women's group.

A little history. It all started in 1871 when the Episcopal Church Women (ECW), formerly known as Women's Auxiliary, was organized by Miss Edna Beardsley, the Associate Secretary of Women's Auxiliary to the National Council, in the USA. In 1938, the Panama chapter was organized.

Considering the growing interest, in 1958, during General Convention, held in Miami Beach, Florida they urged the formation of an organized ECW in various missions, and Mrs. Herbert Evans became the first District President for a three year term. Until 1960 the ECW president was usually appointed by the Bishop.

Many changes came about with the growing autonomy. Panama was no more a Missionary district, but a Missionary Diocese, and later a Diocese. Today the ECW President is elected by the delegates at the yearly meeting.

This year, we are celebrating 75 years of service to the Episcopal churches and communities in the provinces of Panama, Colon, Chiriqui, Bocas del Toro, Herrera and Darien. The theme is "Renew your mind, then you will be able to know the will of God" Romans 12:2. The annual meeting was held on March 7<sup>th</sup> at the Atlantic Episcopal Center in the province of Colon.

The program began, with a colorful procession that included the clergy and women carrying banners representing the groups from the different Episcopal churches.

This year's meeting was attended by 103 persons that included members of the executive board, delegates, clergy, and visitors among which were Mrs. Lollie Everett and Ms. Nancy Scott from our sister Diocese in Mississippi.

The highlight of the day was the Holy Eucharist, officiated by the Rt. Rev. Julio Murray, Diocesan Bishop, who started his sermon with "You ladies are glowing in the name of the Lord."

Bishop Murray was emphatic when he said, that "...the second virus that's worse than HIV, is the global economic injustice that affects women, girls and the elderly, the third one is that women, girls and the elderly are the targets of violence, murder, discrimination etc.," He further stated "...women are the back bone of the church." and, that "... Jesus crossed the barriers and treated every one with respect." The preaching Bishop then added that Paul said "...be transformed in your way of thinking and your way of living will be changed." "the lent season prepares us for renewal and transformation; start by recognizing that you and I are sinners and we can change".

Before closing his sermon, Bishop Murray invited the women to seek change, adding that on March 8, we celebrate the International Women's day and exhorted the Episcopal Church Women to take a stand in this important ministry, and denounce violence against women, "...they are a vulnerable group".

After the service, the local ECW Diocesan President, for three consecutive years, Mrs. Daisy Scantlebury, gave her closing remarks by stating "...that it is necessary to encourage a new generation to come aboard" and, "God wants, that one generation helps the other for continuity, It is not easy; it's a long and everlasting work ... making Jesus your goal everything is possible." Mrs. Scantlebury further extended her thanks to a group of gifted and talented women who under her presidency used their talents in the name of the Lord. "Thank you and God bless you".

(cont.)

At the end of the event, seven former ECW presidents were honored. They were:

Helen Chandler	St. Alban's Episcopal Church (Paraiso Canal Zone)
Sibyl Josiah	St. Alban's Episcopal Church (Paraiso Canal Zone)
Shirley Austin	St. Matthew's Episcopal Church (Ciudad Radial Juan Diaz)
Mariela Edwards	St. Alban's Episcopal Church (Paraiso Canal Zone)
Gwendolyn Thomas	St. John's Episcopal Church (Villa Caceres)
Eunice Vassel	Transfiguration Episcopal Church (Bocas del Toro)
Daisy Scantlebury	St. Paul's Episcopal Parish 2010-2013 (Santa Ana, Panama City)

The Guest speaker for the event was Rev. Can. Glenda McQueen, she started her presentation making reference to the theme of the meeting - Renewal, "we renew our way of being, by how we think and act or behave. Further, Rev. McQueen spoke about Prayer, which she defined as "...an instrument that helps us to be with God."

At the end of her presentation and considering that the 8<sup>th</sup> of March we celebrate International women's day, she challenged the ECW to have a greater effect on the life of women in the communities and churches, to invite them over and have talks with them and walk with them.

The evening was closed with the election of new officers to the ECW, which results follow:

President - Dilsia Miller-Alleyne	St. Paul's
1st Vice - President - Josefina Savoury	San Francisco de Asis
2nd Vice-President - Virginia Williams	Saint Matthew's
Treasurer - Carla Barrett	San Francisco de Asis

The new board will be installed on Sunday March 10, at 9 a.m. at the Episcopal Churches convention service held at the Atlantic Episcopal Center.



Photo taken by Stephanie Batista, Diocesan photographer

Left to right: Virginia Williams, Dilsia Alleyne, Josefina Savoury and Carla Barrett

**Celebrating International Women's day, March 8**

Some Outstanding Afro-Panameñas, local and abroad (Contributed by Newton & Shirley Walker) expanded by Ines V. Sealy



Afro-Panamanian

"Yvette Modestín is a writer and activist focusing on Afro-Latino issues. She was born and raised in Colon, Panama. She is the founder/director of Encuentro Diaspora Afro in Boston, Massachusetts, which mobilizes the Afro-Latino community, empowers young girls of African descent and builds bridges of understanding between African Americans and Latinos.

Modestín has been profiled by the Boston Globe as "The Uniter" for her work in bringing the Latin American and African American communities together and for her activism in building a voice for the Afro-Latino community."

[Text from Amazon.com](#)


Author (Afro-Panamanian)

"Veronica Chambers is a prolific author best known for her critically acclaimed memoir, *Mama's Girl*. The New Yorker called *Mama's Girl*, "a troubling testament to grit and mother love... one of the finest and most evenhanded in the genre in recent years." Born in Panama and raised in Brooklyn, her work often reflects her Afro-Latina heritage."



[Text from VeronicaChambers.com](#)

Nurse Ethel Carolyn Springer (R.I.P.)  
Aug. 30, 1917 – Nov. 9, 1962  
1<sup>st</sup> Anesthetist at St. Tomas Hospital  
Nurse Springer died in an accident on the job

<p>1<sup>st</sup> female and Afro-Panamanian Dean of the Cathedral of St. Luke's of the Anglican Church in Panama.</p>	<p>Rev. Maizee Lennan</p> 
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Dr. Marion V. Clarke Martin  
(Medical Doctor/ Microbiologist)  
1<sup>st</sup> woman and African Descendant to be elected Dean of the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Panama.



Journalist (Barbadian and Panamanian)

"Gwen Ifill is moderator and managing editor of "Washington Week" and senior correspondent for "The PBS NewsHour." The best-selling author of "The Breakthrough: Politics and Race in the Age of Obama," she also moderated the Vice Presidential debates during the Presidential elections in 2004 and 2008." [Text by PBS.org](#)



Actress (Afro-Panamanian)

"Tatyana Ali is a Broadway-trained actress, singer, producer, activist and graduate of Harvard University. Known to millions for her role as "Ashley Banks" on "The Fresh Prince of Bel Air, she is a three-time NAACP Image Award winner and is a fierce advocate for youth and education." [Text from TatyanaAliOnline.com](#)

Lic. Graciela J. Dixon C. (Activist, Lawyer/ex-Magistrate)



1<sup>st</sup> Afro-Panamanian woman to become President of the Supreme Court of the country.



Lic. Lucinda Molinar  
Journalist

At present

Minister of Education of the Republic of Panama.

Dr. Monica Julienne Brown Jacob (R.I.P.)

(Photo contributed by Anthony McLean)

Endocrinologist



Created the Panamanian Association for Diabetics, March 29, 1975 to help persons in Chorrillo, suffering from this pathology. Dr. Brown died at an early age. There is a prize in her name at the School of Medicine of the Univ. of Pma.

**Miss Vivian Witter** – Held the presidency of the Board of Episcopal Churchwomen, besides being the founding president who had the honor to "open" and "close" the Junta Femenina de Beneficencia Ladies Welfare Group.