

AfroPanamanian Newsletter



English opens doors. Read the Newsletter

www.afropanameniannewsletter.mex.tl

We encourage our web readers to feel free to use our links to find scholarships, jobs, grants and others.

No.6 Vol. V

July-August 2014

ISSN 23088524



Supercentenarian James Sisnett

He was Barbadian

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

CREDITS

Editor : Sandra Patterson (R.I.P)

Assistant: Ines V. Sealy

MEMBERS

**President
Roberto L. Alleyne**

**Treasurer
Fernando A. Goldson**

**Others
Ines V. Sealy
Dilsia Alleyne
Roberto L. Alleyne
Cecil V. Reynolds**

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

***“Rather
fail with honor
than
succeed
by fraud”***

Sophocles

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 afropanamaniannewsletter@gmail.com

June Feedback

On the celebration of the Decade of Afro-Descendants (contributed by Juan Fagette)

The Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent has proposed to the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) the development of a Plan of Action for the Afro-Descendants Decade proposed by the UN, to prepare the guidelines of participation, rights and inclusions and to promote, in coordination with the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Racial Equity Institutions, or whoever are responsible for the implementation of policies aimed at the Afro – Descendant population, the follow up of their compliance.

A ONE-OF-A-KIND EVENT ... AFFORDABLE FUN FOR ALL AGES ALL FACES ---FREE ADMISSION

ISLANDS/PANAMANIAN CUISINE. HANDICRAFT, ETC..

Was held on August 15, 2014 from 8:00 am - 4:00 pm at the PARAISO BASEBALL Diamond and Gym

KIKI HOLDER @CANALZONEBREEZE@AOL.COM can be commended on its successful outcome.

Your newsletter, of April refers to other cultures such as the chinese whom came to Panama as laborers to work on the canal, if so it might have been such a minuscule group, for they are not listed in the census, taken of the workers by nationality, whom came to work on the Panama canal.

They were the main labor force, that built the Intercontinental railroad in the USA, during the gold rush era, which transported gold from California to eastern USA shores.

Chinese were contracted to build the Panama railroad in the year 1850, a great number fell victim to the tropical woes and diseases a great number died, others escaped to the terminal cities, after being held as captives by their employers.

Jamaicans were contracted, whom labored until the railroad was completed

Dear ChuBlou:

Thank you for your feedback.

The article you refer to, was written by Prof. Charles Barton (R.I.P.)

He mentions that Chinese "arrived in Panama to offer their services", not that they were contracted for the construction as were the West Indians. Therefore, they were not in the census.

We are happy to see that our readers are "heads up".

---- **Turn your cel on or leave it**

The **US** Traffic Security Authority annouced that security personnel abroad may be requiring passengers at airports to turn their celular phones on to make sure they work and are not explosive devices.

Passengers will not be permitted to board if the devices do not work, and, may be subject to other types of search. This is to update security measures to avoid terrorist attempts coming from Europe and the Middle East.

----The **American Society of Panama** is now accepting Scholarship application forms for the school year 2014 – 2015. The application form and guidelines for filling out the application forms are on the website www.amsoc.org under Scholarships.

Applicants must comply with all the requirements and send the completed form to American.society.panama@gmail.com or give to a Board Member by OCTOBER 1, 2014.

*Get your bound copy of the Fourth year of the **AfroPanamanian Newsletter***

The bound versions of the 2013 Newsletter

2012, 2011 are still available

from Ines at (507)224-4177.

June Feedback

There are many videos on You tube. Check them out.

<http://horacero.com.pa/opinion/lo-que-falto-en-la-celebracion-del-centenario-f5e.html> (contributed by M.L. Espino P.)

Here they are admitting the benefits and differences in treatment between the whites and the Blacks:

http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-28594016?ocid=socialflow_twitter (contributed by Robert Jackman)

There is a town of West Indians living in Cuba, mostly Barbadians, who went there to work in the cane plantations. In this link shared by Robert Jackman, maybe you will see someone, in Barabua, who looks like one of your ancestors. Apparently, they kept records.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-20849214>

-----Jamaica has a new Director of Tourism: *(contributed by Sharon Parris-Chambers)*

Mr. Paul Pennicook is a well known figure in Jamaica's tourism industry and is highly respected at home and abroad. As we meet the challenges of modernizing the operations of the Board and deepening the partnerships with industry players, seeing that Jamaica has always been at the forefront of Caribbean tourism, Mr. Pennicook looks forward to continuing in that tradition.

For details on upcoming special events, attractions and accommodations in Jamaica go to the JTB's Web site at www.visitjamaica.com or call the Jamaica Tourist Board at 1-800-JAMAICA (1-800-526-2422). Follow the JTB on Facebook at www.facebook.com/visitjamaica, on Twitter at www.twitter.com/visitjamaicanow, on Instagram at www.instagram.com/visitjamaica, on YouTube at www.youtube.com/myjamaicajtb, on Pinterest at www.pinterest.com/myjamaica, or View the JTB blog at www.islandbuzzjamaica.com.

Descendants of West Indians who lived in Gamboa, Canal Zone are planning to get together; they request that you save the date :

We will be hosting our second 'Gyamboa Meet and Greet Event' in Brooklyn, New York on **October 12th** between 4pm-10pm.

Ricardo Millett is asking you to '**HOLD the Date**'. Soon we will share with each of you more specific information on the venue (location, program, meal, music and showing of our 'Gyamboa interaccional webpage' scheduled to be launched next month).

For now, please assist us to get the word out to all the 'Gyamboa related' folks on your email list to 'hold the date' and expect more details in the near future. We are hoping to get at least 200 folks together for a celebration of 'Gamboa life, memory and legacy' ...to have a meal, a laugh, share some memories and generally have some fun and basilón.

Please email ricardo@ricardomillett.com or Emy Cooper (ecooper1274001@comcast.net) with any questions...butch

Enter A.T.T.T WEB page: <http://www.attt.gob.pa/> to verify your status with the Municipality with regards to traffic violations and fines:

Decide whether you will verify by:

ID No.: (include dash)

License control No.: (found under your picture 9 digits)

Enter – your status should appear

----- Congo Man Live – The Mighty Sparrow (contributed by Roberto Alleyne)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x69VpqaAj1w>

-----**Expocomer beckons to Jamaican businesses** *(contributed by Melida Harris Barrow)*

Panama trade show sets up special Caribbean Pavilion for 2015 event.

http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/business/Expocomer-beckons-to-Jamaican-businesses_17355307

Descendants of the West Indian workers who built the Panama Canal feel left out of the fetes held by the Canal Authorities to celebrate the 100 years of the opening of the Canal.
For the public, The Panama Canal Observation Center offers free visits with free bus transportation to and from the Center leaving the Grand bus terminal upon showing your Metrobus card, every Saturday of August.



Figali Gala

In his article Cecilio E. Simon, ex-Dean of the Faculty of Public Administration of the Univ. Of Panama states:

¡We will not tolerate to be brush[ed] aside and treat[ed] like dirt!... “¡Those who underestimate us and treat us like dirt, listen to the thunderous scream of our afrodescendant community... respect our legacy!”

See complete article in Spanish with English comments at:

<https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B4vpQfLGil0gVVV2QnNmdkZlVlU/edit>

But, SAMAAP and other Afro-Panamanian groups celebrated our way.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-BofAJ3yTIA>



SAMAAP Ball



SAMAAP Ball



Dr. Airall receives key to the City

Dr. Guillermo Ever Airall, presented his book "Silver and Gold: Untold Stories of Immigrant Life in the Panama Canal Zone" which present anecdotes of life during and after the construction of the Panama Canal. Airall is the first person being honored by the new Mayor of Panama, Jose Isabel Blandon.

According to Prof. Gerardo Maloney in La Estrella de Panama of August 17, 2014 to be viewed at:

<http://laestrella.com.pa/panama/huellas-obrero-antillano-canal/23796719>

...In Panamanian hands, the Canal should not repeat the history of exclusion and xenophobic rejection as was done by the Panamanian society towards West Indians; which, although not unique, was expressed in the 1941 Constitution, famous for its article on "race of prohibited immigration". On the other hand, the Canal, in Panamanian hands should serve to produce benefits through social policies to reduce inequality and poverty in popular sections which would be an ideal way to compensate the injustices faced by one of the most significant human components of the history of the Panama Canal.

Barbadians came to Panama to celebrate with us: (photos by Omaidia De Frias)



Author Velma Newton



One of the groups



Transiting the Canal

*In our October 2013 Newsletter we presented "An up-hill fight for Recognition" in which we mentioned ASEAP's work to bring recognition to Black Ethnic groups. Saturday, August 16, 2014 saw them offering free consultations: legal and medical within the Vereda Afro-Antillana (formerly Sidney Young Park) at the corner of 13 Street Rio Abajo all day. **Congratulations!!! They promise other such activites in the future.***

Dr. Velma Newton was almost kept on skates while visiting Panama:

By Ines V. Sealy

We sat on a panel in Barbados on Wed. August 6 at the Lloyd Erskine Sandiford Center, during the III Diaspora Conference, then met again in Panama on Wednesday August 13 at the Afro-Caribbean Museum in Panama; next day at the book presentation of Dr. Guillermo Evers Airall. Of course there are some of her movements that I was not privy to, but, she had to be present as she was being honored by the Society of Friends of the Afro-Caribbean Museum of Panama on Saturday, August 16. Sunday, the 17th she attended the Ecumenical service at the St. Christopher's Auditorium.

Dr. Newton was one of many Barbadians (over 170) who came to Panama to celebrate the 100 years of the opening of the Panama Canal. Honored together with Capt. Vilma Romero, a female Panama Canal Pilot, Dr. Michael Conniff (a US writer), Lic. Roman Foster (author of the Diggers' documental), Prof. Gerardo Maloney (Author, poet, ex-director of Channel 11 TV), is currently the Director of the Caribbean Law Institute Centre, Faculty of Law at Cave Hill Campus, University of the West Indies. She is best known for her book, THE SILVER MEN, published in 1984 (now out of print), but translated to Spanish by SAMAAP in the 1990s.

In the morning of the 15th, she attended the annual celebration of the ceremony in Culebra Cut in memoriam of our West Indian ancestors who toiled and died constructing the Panama Canal. In the night, she was at the presentation of the key to the City to Dr. Airall by the Mayor, *Jose Isabel Blandon*. She further lectured during the Book Fair at Atlapa, and then at the UDELAS university. She was kept busy up to the day before she left Panama. <http://168.77.213.155/wordpress/?p=3864>

This song is on exhibit in the West Indies:

“THE PANAMA MAN”

Oh de Panama Man 'ent got no money,
still de Panama Man want love,

Wen de Panama Man come back from sea
and de Panama Canal

Chorus

But 'e cahn get me Wid out de money
to buy a taffeta dress!

If de Panama Man gwine court wid me,
He gwine treat me like a queen!

If de Panama Man gwine court wid me,
He gwine treat me like a queen!

Folk songs of Barbados, 1999

We tried to find the music to the song, unsuccessfully, but, if any of you can find it, we would really like to hear it. Anyway, here are some BARBADOS FOLK SONGS:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z0be57G1IQs>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X-BoHRqtTtU>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LYfSv4Rikgk>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0YO8KC-ffJo&list=PLtws0ud6fVGopHf4erslqrT7sluut-FS1&index=4>

BARBADIANS TRAVERSE THE CANAL SINGING TO CELEBRATE THE 100 YEARS:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C7yLkEoik2M>

THE AFRO-PANAMANIAN FORUM CONGRATULATES THE PANAMA CANAL

(excerpts from its pronouncement)

...If today we congratulate ourselves on having recuperated the Canal, and show it off with pride, we should also show the same pride in each of the human groups which made its construction and operation possible...

...It has been 100 years *[of injustices]*, both in the light and in the dark; that is why the present generations of Afro-descendants honor the memory of the struggles and sacrifices of our grandparents and parents, we assume the commitment to continue making their best efforts to arrive at a country without discrimination, in which equal importance is given to the different ethnic groups that conform this nation, and, upon this recognition, establish the public policies which guarantee the tenable and integral inclusion of Afro-Panamanians in all aspects of the development of the country, finally overcoming social inequalities, which cause so much incomprehension within the family of this nation.

The Forum congratulates the Country, its Afro-Panamanians and the grassroots sectors, who through their struggles made the Canal's existence possible, first, and secondly, the sovereignty of Panama over all its territory.

Celebration of the Panama Canal's Centennial

by Dilsia Mariela Miller Collins-Alleyne

On the Fifteenth of August 2014, the Panama Canal celebrated One hundred years of providing service to the maritime community.

This celebration brought a lot of thoughts, considerations, special programs, activities and events. The local news media provided programs with the history of the Canal from its beginning to this day.

Today I will focus on the socio-cultural part of the celebration:

A news network did a special report on the Panama Canal, the reporter visited the state of Florida to interview a group of Canal Zone workers that moved back to the US, after Canal treaties came in to effect.

They considered themselves “pana zonians”, they stated that moving back to the US did not make them feel at home, they did not relate to the culture, they missed the beaches, the sun, the mountains, the Panamanian people, their coworkers, the outings. They missed Panama.

Their reunion was organized with sale of Panamanian souvenirs, they were dressed in guayabera, floral shirts, molas and entertainment was Panamanian folk dancers and murga, they even danced to the tune of our folk music.

On the other hand, the gala event of the celebration sponsored by ACP included representation by the Spanish, French, Chinese and “*Antillanos*”, it triggered a series of social and ethnic comments. – The average Panamanian believed that they were not considered or included. The high class took over the gala event.

The Panama Canal was recovered and transferred to the Panamanians due to the blood that was shed by students and people from the “*barrios*” or towns.

On another level, some of our black leaders were concerned because on a foreign TV station, the reporter mentioned the work of the USA, the French and said that the Chinese supplied the largest group of people for the construction of the Panama Canal.

It was interesting to read the comments written on the e-mails that went back and forth.

- The person who brought the mistake to our attention wrote an e-mail with the observation and correction of what was said and sent it to the TV station. He asked them to be more inclusive and reminded them that Latin America has a debt with the group of afro-descendants because of slavery and exploitation.
- Another writer said that the older folks already know the history of Panama, we should be worried about the younger ones, who, because of lack of knowledge, when they hear these things, will not be able to decide which story is correct. He went on to say, we then ask ourselves - why our youths are so confused when it comes to these topics.
- Another participant said the following; “from 1979 when the Torrijos Carter treaty went into effect they are trying to disqualify the participation of the afro-descendants in the construction of the Canal”.

He added, “I believe the intention is to **minimize** what is already written in history about the influence of people from the Caribbean and Blacks in the Canal's construction and the development of the Republic of Panama and then **erase it**”. The Panama Canal in hands of the Panamanians, the Canal widening, means a new history of the Canal and the Republic of Panama.

- Another, commented that we as afro-descendants should reflect on what we have done wrong? He added and I will say - for lack of the correct teaching of our real history being included in our own books and in the curriculum of Panamanian education. He added - but we can continue the fight for education and leave the fight among ourselves for the benefit of others.

These are comments that took place based on the celebration of the Canal's centennial and I believe it is important to share them with you. Remember, our thoughts are also valuable. This way all of us that were here, and those that will read this in the future will have another perspective of this celebration, other than history and gala.

It was not all “**peaches and cream**”.

THE TRAIN

by L. Emanuel

This railroad was built, many years ago
 In the US this idea, was concocted as known
 To move gold from west, to northeastern shores
 Crisscrossing the isthmus from then until now.

History recalls, a few contractors of yore
 Imported many chinese, as the labor force
 Not adapted to the harsh, tropical woes
 Many perished, escaped, hid, who knows.

The railroad company, so desperate for men
 To Jamaica they went, and hired right then
 Whom brought this venture, to an early end
 Trains keeps rolling, right around the bend.

While awash in nostalgia, I have often recalled
 Many miles of tracks, from Colon to Panama
 Steam engines in tow, passenger cars for all
 Thus I wonder, why such things should pass.

No longer a transport, for many ingots of gold
 Nor for our diggers, from the great ditch of old
 Diesel engines, haul containers, stacked twofold
 The leisure car can be pricey, so I have been told.

Strikes

Ines V. Sealy
 3/29/2014

Mr. Ricardo Martinelli
 Then President of Panama
 thinks like an ostrich:
 problems will solve themselves
 or just go away
 while my head is buried in the sand.

With strikes and protests
 all over the country
 the populace shows its distress:
 bus owners protest for overdue money,
 civilians protest for water
 and living quarters.

Construction workers strike
 for arbitration of wages
 Teachers strike, Retirees strike
 hospital employees strike
 all for more money,
 The cost of living has gone up.

The rich are becoming richer
 and the poor, poorer.
**“He who wears the shoe,
 feels the pinch.”**

Panama Canal 100 years

by Ines V. Sealy
 8/20/2014

100 years of the Panama Canal
 Its authorities were the celebrators
 for many to attend, not all;
 activities at Figali in Amador.

Amador is a deadend place;
 three islands connected to mainland
 by a landbridge called causeway,
 of debris dug from the Panama Canal.

Figali is a convention Center
 taken away from its owner,
 large enough to house hundreds
 but not enough parking for their cars.

**Beautifully decorated,
 150 artists on stage;
 only dignitaries and their relatives invited.
 Thank God for this TV & technology age.**

Canal Decoration



THE UNTOLD STORY

Wraps or Tie-heads

If we look at pictures of our women during the construction of the Canal and after, we'll notice that although the women from the islands may have worn handkerchiefs to tie their head during the week or while working, Sunday or festival wear was a hat. Especially after Josephine Baker went to France.

Wraps, as we are wearing them these days, were fashionable for the female members of the Spiritual (jump-up) churches. They were the identification wear of these women. It was called Tie-head. When the jump-up women went to church, they dressed in white and tied their heads with colors according to their rank in the church and the liturgical season. They have strived to upgrade the names of the churches: Revival, Pentecostal and nowadays, Spiritual churches, are accepted as Evangelical.

Since those churches were not the official religion of the country, actually, not accepted as a religion and had to use a one-room for their services, looked on as a curiosity, followed to the wilderness, etc., if you were not a member, then you did not wrap your head.

As the acceptance of Blacks in the diaspora has been growing, different types, shapes and sizes of wraps are coming into vogue. We are doing research on African attire, learning and practicing how to wrap our heads and prepare a Gele.

Here is one of the tutorials offered on Youtube for wrapping one's head:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sk4dgs93biE&sns=em>

(contributed by Cecil V. Reynolds)

Hats and caps are still fashionable, but a colorful or intricate wrap or gele is much admired.



Gele



Wrap

--0--

Descendants of Canal Zone workers have been clamoring for some type of recognition of our ancestors' contributions to the Panama Canal. At last some government has found the desire to honor them with a:

Plaque Commemorating West Indian workers



Excerpted from The Panama News.

On July 17, 2014 Her Majesty's Government and the Panama Canal Authority afforded a bit of redress to West Indian Canal construction workers.

The plaque, donated by the United Kingdom, recognizes that much of the work force used: to cross the isthmus by the Panama Railroad (1850-1855), for the attempted unfinished French construction effort (1880-1889) and the heavy digging at Culebra Cut from 1904 to 1914 by the US was West Indian. They did the work then, and their descendants continue to do this labor now during the expansion.

BARBADOS COMMEMORATES THE 100 YEARS OF THE PANAMA CANAL

Barbadian, 113 years old, Second oldest in the world died in May of this year.

The world's second oldest man, James Sisnett of Barbados died at the age of 113. James Emmanuel "Doc" Sisnett was born on February 22, 1900 was the second oldest man behind 116 year old Jiroemon Kimura of Japan.

Sisnett was one of the last two living men verifiably born in the 19th century and the oldest and last surviving verified man born in the year 1900. He was the only living verified Barbadian supercentenarian and the last surviving verified man born in the 19th century.

His Nurse at the Ocean View Nursing Services in Graeme Hall, Linda Bowen, says of him:

"He was really funny and made us laugh. He had the most endearing smile, which brought joy to us and we are really privileged and happy to have known him."

"He loved the limelight and being interviewed. He was just great.

One day his family took him out for a ride and he said, 'Oh dear, I had a lovely ride but you know what, I did not see one donkey cart, only big, big motor cars!'"

For the original report go to:

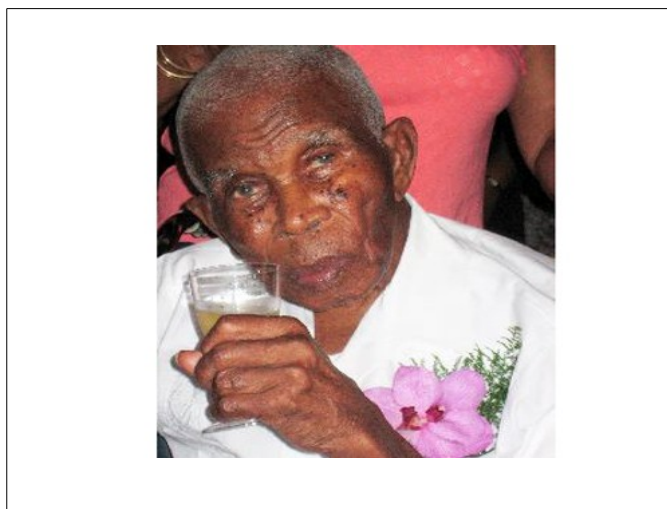
<http://www.barbadosadvocate.com/newsitem.asp?more=lifestyle&NewsID=30742>

--0--

To commemorate the centenary of the building of the Panama Canal the Barbados Museum & Historical Society is developing a commemorative exhibition.

Titled 'We Were Giant': The Story of the Barbadians who built the Panama Canal' the exhibition is designed to commemorate the centenary of the ending of the construction of the Panama Canal in 1914.

<http://www.barbmuse.org.bb/events/event/panama-centenary-exhibition/>



If you're setting off to Barbados to learn more about your ancestral connections, there are some important places that you should consider visiting:

- The national archives at Black Rock, Bridgetown, hold plantation files as well as the ever-useful birth, marriage, and death registers, wills and deeds. The plantation files have a surname index and it is possible to trace owners/managers from 1650s.
- If you have the parish name of the ancestor you are researching, local churches still hold valuable information. There are records in St. Michael parish from as early as 1648. The archive of the Barbados Museum & Historical Society, housed at the Barbados Museum in Garrison, Bridgetown, hold many useful research items especially for the period prior to 1800. They keep family files, which include histories deposited by family historians, and boast an enthusiastic and very knowledgeable staff.
- Barbadian church records 1637-1850, Civil Registration records 1900-1931 (and marriages recorded between 1643 and 1800), plus census records for 1679-1680 and 1715 as well as slavery records 1780-1840 can all be viewed on microfilm at the LDS London Family History Centre at Hyde Park (or ordered to be viewed at any LDS Family History Centre – visit www.londonfhc.org to find details of your nearest one). Associate FamilySearch libraries (such as the one at Solihull Public library) may also have copies of relevant microfilm records – check before visiting.