

# AfroPanamanian Newsletter



*English opens doors. Read the Newsletter*

No.3 Vol. I

April 2010

Donation



Poetry

Controversy

Anecdotes

## LOS AMIGOS :

### Por la superación de la Etnia Negra

A group of friends 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.

#### CREDITS

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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 used as a 10 cent postage stamp for years. Permission for its continuous use was given by he grandnephew, Cecil Reynolds

#### EDITORIAL

##### Price Change:

*Lic. Sandra Patterson*

*When we decided to publish a newsletter in English it was to be done using the latest in technology, to print each number and sell copies at a reasonable price which we felt could be twenty five cents, even offering the first edition free of charge.*

*But then came our first dilemma: Mathematically this does not work because the cost of printing is way over the stated sale price.*

*After debating we decided to use internet communication, for the advantage it offers of a wider range of public and being able to present it in color.*

*For those who, not only don't have, but know nothing about computers, hard copy is still available.*

*For the time being we will not specify a price but ask for your reasonable donation so that we may continue supplying hard copy with details of our objectives for the benefit of our people.*

## **THINGS THAT YOU DON'T NEED, MAYBE USEFUL TO OTHERS.**

How about a Flea Market in the Rio Abajo Area? This activity would include books, handicraft, clothes, utensils, etc.

Bartering: Bring what you want to get rid of, sell it or exchange it for something you need.

A book swap: exchange one book for another

## **OLDEN DAYS SAYINGS:**

**“Tout mon bagay”.** All of you.

**“Vamoose.”** Leave, get out of here.

**“Suppose your nose was a door post”.**

**“Supposition bears no argument”.**

**“Too much of anything is good for nothing”.**

Don't exceed.

**“When you won't hear, you must feel”.**

**“Wake up with wantee, wantee and go to sleep with gimme gimme”.**

Always begging.

**“You see to want, you ask to borrow”.** Someone sees something he wants.

He then borrows to obtain it.

**“Giving away your nose to spite your face”.** Lending or giving away something that you soon need.

**“Thief from a thief, God laugh”.**

**“You are where you have been”.** Environment influences behavior.

**“You are what you eat”.** Your food affects your body.

**“Guillaunt for pea soup”.** Standing around talking, wasting time.

**Tips:**

**Drop a metal spoon in peas  
when boiling, to soften them.**

**Use Coca-cola or Pepsi to clean metal**

To graduate from the University of Panama, Panama's law requires students to be versed in English. Start practicing your English right here.

## THE UNTOLD STORY

Many of our ancestors had leased land in the Canal Zone. When the time came to stake their claim, they or their relatives were either negligent or they didn't have the money or something. Tell us about them. Tell us about your experiences.

### RICE AND PEAS

Lic. Sandra Patterson

*You may think this article is about a nice Sunday dinner but don't whet your palate. I'm referring to the building that once stood at the corner of Central Ave. and "Q" street in Calidonia, running lengthwise to end at Mariano Arosemena Street (Across from Machetazo). It had a main entrance on Central Ave. and one on the "Q" St. side.*

*A wooden two story building built over pillars, and like all the other Müller edifications, had a very wide balcony, two sets of stairs and a passage leading to the bath area.*

*Grandma Nety, my mother's mother, Venetia Victoria McGrath Roseway, lived there until they were ready to pull it down and the Müllers moved her to the big Müller's building so I really new the place.*

*Why the peculiar name?*

*To today I haven't found one person who can tell me the real origin of it but my parents gave me these two versions:*

- *Most Müller's buildings were painted brown and white. That's where the name came from. But then, why weren't the others called the same?*

*In Spanish they call this combination "moros y cristianos".*

*The building had a small one step difference in level. Some people claimed that it was built in pieces (risen in pieces.) That, at the long run, with the different twangs (dialects and languages), ended up being pronounced RICE and PEAS.*

*Not to eat.*

### A DYING CULTURE IN PANAMA

By Antonio Cox

Our ancestors came with a dream. It was hard for them to mix, since they were trying to maintain their culture ("Don't play with those Paña").

They passed it on, but not for long. The third generation is not aware of what's going on with regards to loss of culture. They got weak and lost their identity, for instance, changing their names from John to *Juan* and from Peter to *Pedro*, surnames from White to *Blanco*, Brown to *Moreno*, Adams to *Adames*, etc., selling their parents' homes to live with their in-laws, not speaking the language they first learnt.

The kids are blaming their parents for not teaching them what they knew, since they did not realize that the culture is dying at a fast pace.



## FUNERAL CUSTOMS

*By Ines V. Sealy*

Funerals are expensive and time consuming.

Attending a funeral in our country can encompass a whole day.

This Episcopalian most of her life, decided to whet her curiosity about other religions after attending a Roman Catholic funeral, which strictly lasts only one hour and is pretty cut and dry and doesn't continue at the cemetery.

She also attended Methodist funerals which last over an hour with lots of singing, preaching and praying in the church and at the graveside.

She attends Baptist, Evangelical funerals which last up to two hours at the church, another hour or so at the graveside with lots of singing and rejoicing, and then she attended a Jehovah's Witnesses funeral, at which, there is one song at the beginning, one at the end, and in between the Leader preaches a sermon and everyone else is mum.

But then there are the lodges (Shepherds, mechanics, masons, etc.) which also have their ceremony at the graveside, prolonging the stay a little longer.

They all promote a repast after the cemetery at a hall or restaurant, causing a funeral to encompass an entire day.

The Jews do not permit gentiles into their synagogue, gentiles wait in the vestibule while the ceremony is done inside. The entourage then walks behind the casket for a ways before it is mounted into the hearse and taken to the cemetery where the burial is also secret.

Have you heard of nine nights? Well these are nights before and after the funeral. Days gone by, these nine nights were wakes in which the men drank rum and played dominoes, draught, cards, told jokes while the women drank tea, cocoa, coffee and ate sandwiches listening to the jokes until wee

## Obeah, High Blood Pressure, Diabetes and Pig's Feet Stew

*by Roberto Alleyne*

Like most West Indies families, we've got some preferred cooking and eating habits - all delicious, but few really healthy. This brings to mind the saying "you are what you eat"

Granted, "slave food looks and tastes great. And best of all, at least until a few years ago, it was affordable for our then large sized families. Today, we know better and, doctors know a lot more about "the silent killer" - high blood pressure and its **complications**.

A few weeks ago, I met a childhood friend which I had not seen since the late sixties. It happens, that his family moved to the "States". Today he is retired and will be moving back to Panama in the near future.

Sometime after the discussion of the defeated "tres en uno" treaties, I recall, my buddy and I went to "Ciudad Radial" and somehow we got to a "session" - that is, an Obeah service. Well, that's what we were told. Nonetheless, I never saw a more crystalline glass of water and a white candle so bright with light. Today I can still recall the fragrance of the "Florida Water", though not much liking the odor of the opened coconut and of course, the very fashionable outfits of the female attendance - all white, of course. But this was not my first encounter with the term obeah.

It was the latter part of 1962; my grandmother took me to Coco Solo Hospital for my first ever surgery - an inguinal hernia. "Mama" - as she was called, greeted and spoke to several acquaintances prior to my admission.

hours of the morning to accompany the mourners. Some brought their drinks and contributed to the victuals.

As a part of her long life, she was present at a Chinese funeral, at which they distributed candy, uncooked rice as a gift and burnt false money. She then went to the home for the repast. The Chinese custom was explained at that repast: When a Chinese male is buried, A month after, the family take a banquet of food to the grave and leave it so that the new arrival can entertain his friends who will come to visit him. Then a year after that, more food and liquor is left, for the dead to entertain his friends.

**The graveyard attendants must be well fed.**

Then and there, I found out some more details of her recurring illness – hunger but loss of weight, nausea and vomiting, weakness and fatigue and, a lot more stuff. Then suddenly, one lady said “Dem obeah you” and followed with a litany of remedies. By 1965, at the age of 62, mama died. Grandpa – Papa, as he was called, lived for an additional 15 years. His death certificate depicts chronic coronary disease and similar to Grandma, we knew he also had diabetes. Recalling both life styles (no sugar, no salt), traditional and inherited eating habits, illnesses and resulting death, it appears that the curse (Obeah) remains in the family.

**– What about your family?–**

## **MANGO TREE LAWYERS**

*By Fernando A. Goldson*

Do you remember some of the services that were rendered to our parents and grandparents from the Caribbean by the known mango tree lawyers?

Those were men who hung around the Archives, who offered to transact the necessary steps to acquire a document.

I came to understand that those services our West Indian folks sought from these individuals were simple things, but were needed because they were scared and intimidated by the government authorities, mostly, due to the language (Spanish) and how they were treated just because they could not express themselves in Spanish.

They found it necessary to request assistance through these known mango tree lawyers, who, if not of West Indian parentage, took advantage of them (mostly in a monetary form). In many cases, the services they received were mediocre at best.

Simple services, such as certificates, cedula, property registration, any court case, testaments, etc.

I personally remember that in order to be registered in the public school system, it was almost impossible, unless you had a connection or sought out a mango tree lawyer.

Many stories have been told over the years of things that happened to folks we know.

Readers, we would appreciate hearing from you.

# *Economical Giant*

*By Antonio Cox Sr.*

3-8-10

“**History repeats itself**”, we have to be focused and know when it repeats and when to take advantage of the situation.

Five years after the Canal was built, these workers had more money than any other ethnic group in the region. Women were brought or sent over, some were sweethearts coming to get married, some of them were very young.

It was said that in Panama there was a money tree, jobs were all over, some of the workers were paid in gold. Land was very cheap, some of the workers started buying land and building their homes here and some even built although they had the intention of going back home. We must remember that they came on a contract. Most of them understood they had to go back when the contract expired, no one knew how long the contract was for.

They started having children and registering them under the flag of their origin, automatically they were sons and daughters of the soil. There was a president by the name of “A. Harry Ass” who wanted to send them all back to their country of origin along with their children.

Black workers spooked and decided not to invest in Panama.

Those who stayed with their children, worked until they retired, most without pensions. They educated their children who got jobs on the Canal Zone, fought for better salaries and were able to retire with good pensions, but they have decided not to invest their money, hurting their kids and grand kids. **History always repeats itself.**

ENGLISH SERVICES ARE BEING HELD AT 6:30 P.M. ON SUNDAYS AT  
HOSSANNA BY PASTOR ROBERT ROBINSON.

“MISSION VIDA INTEGRAL”

## OPPORTUNITIES:

### Fullbright Programs

#### Investigation for Caribbean and Central American Professors and Professionals

The Department of State of the United States of America, Cultural and Education Bureau offers scholarships for investigation and/or professional training for the years 2010-2011 in three to four-month courses to **Caribbean and Central American Professors and Professionals**. **English level required: Intermediate to Advanced.**

#### Fullbright Program – Hubert H. Humphrey (HHH) – Professional Exchange Administered by the IIE

10-Month Academic And Professional Program. Offers the opportunity to establish productive, lasting collaboration and relations between US. Citizens and their professional peers in other countries, fomenting exchange of knowledge and mutual understanding. Emphasis is made on wide-range policies and problem-solving-related subjects. This program is not for academic credits. It is directed to Professionals with distinguished achievements in their career. *Level of English required: Intermediate to Advanced.*

- Added information:
- [http://spanish.panama.usembassy.gov/programas\\_fulbright.html](http://spanish.panama.usembassy.gov/programas_fulbright.html)
- [pancultural@state.gov](mailto:pancultural@state.gov)

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