

A BRIEF LOOK INTO OUR LOCAL HISTORIC SPANISH COMMUNITIES

(PART TWO)

The Secretariat for the Implementation of Spanish (SIS) is the unit of the Ministry of Trade and Industry responsible for implementing the Spanish As the First Foreign Language (SAFFL) initiative. In addition to being responsible for the implementation of SAFFL related programmes and projects, the SIS is also intended to serve as a national resource by conducting research into locally based historic Spanish communities.

The following is part two in our research series on local historic Spanish communities in Trinidad and Tobago.

ARIMA

Arima is a borough situated in the eastern part of Trinidad. It was made a borough on August 1, 1988 and is the fourth largest town in Trinidad and Tobago. Located 26 km (16 miles) east of the capital, Port of Spain, Arima supports the only organised indigenous community in the country, the 'Santa Rosa Carib Community' and is the seat of the Carib Queen (currently Valentina Medina). Arima was founded in 1757 by the Capuchin friars as a mission to convert the Amerindian population to Christianity. The name *Arima* is reported to mean *water*. Historically the third town of Trinidad, Arima has slid into fourth position as Chaguanas has boomed into the largest town in the country. Arima and its environs were selected to conduct research because of its rich cultural Spanish history. Additionally, Arima is the home of a number of local Spanish persons who till this day, have continued to reside there. Arima and its environs which include *Mundo Nuevo*, *Talparo*, *Brazil Village*, *San Rafael* and *Las Lomas* are home to scores of local Spanish families who are descendants of old peons (persons mixed with Spanish, Amerindian and African). Some are even direct descendants of persons from Spain and the other countries of the Spanish-speaking world. This therefore was the impetus.

The Research project: how was it structured?

The *Community Research Project (Arima)* was divided into two parts: firstly interviews and secondly a bilingual signage presentation ceremony. In order to conduct the interviews, a questionnaire was created to gather data from the local stalwarts and oral historians. The various village councils, primary schools, local churches and priests assisted in this regard by compiling a list of possible interviewees. The Mayor His Worship Alderman Adrian Cabralis and Deputy Mayor of the borough of Arima Mr. Ricardo Bharath – Hernandez also got involved in this stage of the project. Dates and venues were arranged for each interview and the prospective interviewees were notified by telephone and in some cases ‘word of mouth’. Visits were even made to the homes and schools of the some of the interviewees. Eighteen interviews (18) were conducted over a four (4) week period in January and February 2007 and their ages ranged from 12-81 years.

When asked if they identify themselves as of Spanish origin, 89 % responded affirmatively but when asked if Spanish was spoken in their homes, only 61 % responded positively. They too commented that although Spanish was spoken amongst their relatives, it was not always spoken with the children. Roughly 83 % believed that Arima and these villages have changed from the time they arrived or moved to the district but 72 % believe that a lot of aspects of the district’s present culture such as the parang festivals, latin dances, local latin food, annual carib festival and the arena massacre site still stand out to them as being of Spanish origin. They believe that these aspects have been essential in the cultural preservation. It is interesting to note that 67 % of the persons interviewed believed that children living in Arima and its environs today are unaware of their heritage and culture. It may be for this reason that 78 % believe that new projects and programmes such as Spanish instruments for the schools, cultural events to preserve the local Spanish heritage and Spanish language courses for the villages need to be implemented in the area. Indeed the SIS has played its part in this regard.

The second aspect of this community research project involved a bilingual signage presentation. This took place on Friday April 13, 2007 at the Arima Town Hall. Present were SIS staff members along with the Mayor of Arima, Alderman Adrian Cabralis; Member of Parliament for Arima, Ms. Penelope Beckles; and Mr. Manmohan Gosyne, Councillor of the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation. On this day, the SIS presented bilingual 'WELCOME/BIENVENIDO' signs to nine 'corner-stone' institutions. These were:

- ❖ Brazil R.C. School
- ❖ San Rafael R.C. School
- ❖ San Rafael R.C. Church
- ❖ San Rafael Community Centre
- ❖ Mundo Nuevo Community Centre
- ❖ Talparo Community Centre
- ❖ Santa Rosa. R.C. Church
- ❖ Arima Community Centre
- ❖ Santa Rosa Carib Community Centre

The objective of this presentation ceremony was to commemorate and acknowledge the importance of these areas which form part of our rich multi-cultural fabric by donating bilingual signage to their communities. The SIS was thrilled to contribute in some way to maintaining its legacy and heritage. Additionally the SIS has also coordinated two Spanish language acquisition classes in the district of Arima along with a conversation class. This will also help them in maintaining and improving their Spanish language skills.

From the above responses, it is evident that Arima and its environs, even with all the changes that occur and continue to occur, are considered historical landmarks today in 2007. While most persons are familiar with the areas of Brazil and Arena because of the Arena Massacre, these areas are still strong in Spanish culture. However, due to the changing attitudes of the villagers, technology, modernization and general development,

there is a lack of appreciation for the villages and its rich Spanish heritage. Hopefully, with these responses and opinions brought to the fore, the SIS can continue assisting these communities and districts so that the upcoming generations can benefit from the rich knowledge in the same way.

ST. JOSEPH

St. Joseph, founded in 1592 by Antonio de Bernio, is the oldest town in Trinidad and Tobago. Originally named San José de Oruña, it served as the capital of Spanish Trinidad between 1592 and 1783. To celebrate this town's 415th anniversary, the *St. Joseph First Capital Committee* hosted its St. Joseph Day in May 2007 to mark this event. This town was established 100 years after Christopher Columbus' arrival to the shores of Trinidad in 1492.

The SIS donated a bilingual sign to the George Earle Park in commemoration of its Fourth Annual First Capital Day celebrations. The donation of this sign was imperative as it also paid homage to the previous name of the George Earle Park which was Barrack Square.

St. Joseph will be completed in more detail in the near future. Look out for our next research project which will focus on St. Joseph, Siparia and Cedros.

© The Secretariat for the Implementation of Spanish, 2007

For more information about the Spanish As the First Foreign Language (SAFFL) initiative, please contact the Secretariat for the Implementation of Spanish (A Division of the Ministry of Trade and Industry) Riverside Plaza, Besson Street, Port of Spain. You can contact the Secretariat at 623-2931-4 or spanishsecretariat@gmail.com.