

## ***A BRIEF LOOK INTO OUR LOCAL HISTORIC SPANISH COMMUNITIES***

### ***(PART ONE)***

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. Based on this rationale, Lopinot and Arima were the first two communities where research was conducted by the SIS. Arima and Lopinot are rich with the Amerindian and Spanish heritage. This year, *Arima* observes its 119<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a Royal Charter Borough and *Lopinot* celebrates 200 years since its establishment by Joseph Compte de Lopinnot. These two districts are known for its rich historic Spanish communities and culture.

### **LOPINOT**

Lopinot is a little village which lies about ten (10) kilometres north of Arouca. It was discovered by the Lieutenant General of the French Army- Charles Joseph Compte de Lopinot who came to Trinidad via Jamaica following the devastating loss of all his possessions in a slave rebellion on another Caribbean island. Despite being *French* in name, Lopinot is one of Trinidad's foremost national wonders and is one of the few in the country with a strong Spanish past. It prides itself on actively maintaining aspects of that culture. This Hispanic culture was introduced and maintained by the villagers from Caura. However, these villagers were then relocated to Lopinot due to the developmental works in the Caura village. These villagers were mainly of Hispanic descent (their parents had migrated from Venezuela) and were the descendents of the old peons (persons mixed with Spanish, Amerindian and African). Last year, the SIS conducted a small research project in Lopinot. This project took the form of visits, interviews with oral historians and younger villagers and a participant observation where SIS staff members toured the Lopinot village.

In order to conduct the interviews, a questionnaire was created to gather data from the local stalwarts and oral historians from the village. The *La Pastora/Lopinot Village Council* assisted in this regard by compiling a list of possible interviewees. A date and venue were arranged for each interview and the persons were notified by telephone. Eleven people were willing to be interviewed and their ages ranged from 18-97 years. It is amazing to note that when interviewees were asked if they considered themselves Spanish in origin, 100 % responded affirmatively. This shows that there is a strong pride and appreciation of their heritage. 100 % also responded positively when asked if they knew from where their ancestors came. Additionally, although the majority of the persons interviewed had ancestors from Venezuela, Spain and Mexico, Spanish was not spoken frequently in their homes during their childhood. However, they did agree that Spanish was indeed spoken by their ancestors with other relatives but not spoken frequently to the children.

100 % of the persons interviewed believe that Lopinot has changed drastically. Some of the changes that they alluded to were the developmental works, the lack of compassion for one's neighbours, the absence of Spanish language and culture in their community, lack of appreciation for their Hispanic heritage, lack of appreciation for the musical genre of Parang and the degradation of the environment (river, fields). In their view, Lopinot is now going through a transformation: one that is affecting its physical and cultural landscape, and the mentality of the people. This is one of the reasons that 93 % of the persons interviewed affirmed that children living in Lopinot today do not appreciate their culture: they believe that some are even unaware of their Spanish culture and background. One interviewee even believed that Lopinot is thought of as being only famous for parang and pastelle. On a positive note, the majority of the interviewees were happy that there was a project called the **Spanish As the First Foreign Language (SAFFL) initiative** and 91 % believed that this initiative will become a reality. They hope that in some way, the SIS and by extension the SAFFL initiative can help foster a greater appreciation for the Spanish language and culture and as a result a deeper understanding of our Spanish heritage.

From the above responses, many consider Lopinot, even with all the changes that have occurred, a historical landmark. However, due to the changing attitudes of the villagers (mainly the younger ones), there is a lack of appreciation for the village and its rich Spanish heritage. One only has to meet local stalwarts like Martin Gomez, Benedict Guerrero, Brenda Salina and 97 year old Lucy Guerrero to realize that this rich history resonates from a place and is echoed when one visits the village. Hopefully, with these responses and opinions brought to the fore, the SIS can possibly assist this community further in bridging the gap between the young and the old and in restoring greater pride and appreciation for the Hispanic culture and heritage.

*Look out for Part Two of this article in our next publication.*

**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](mailto:spanishsecretariat@gmail.com).**