

The Magazine Project

By Alfred Bhulai

Much of our Saints' traditions and lore came to be recorded in the literary institution known as the St. Stanislaus College Magazine. However, after the Ministry of Education took control in 1976 and the founders, the Society of Jesus, left the College in 1980, the Magazine began to fall on hard times. By 1983, even the preservation of its old issues could not be guaranteed.

Concerned members of the St. Stanislaus College Association and the editorial staff sought to preserve this archive in the newly established Caribbean Research Library at the University of Guyana (UG), a semi-autonomous institution. By 2008, when many of the old magazines could not be found in that archive, it was realized in hindsight that we should not have expected better, for UG was also under the effective control of the Ministry of Education.

Further developments are illustrated by an extract from alumnus Alfred Bhulai's letter to the Stabroek News published in the Sunday Stabroek of Jan 4, 2015:

"With the advent of the age of digital technology, the St. Stanislaus College Alumni Association of Toronto (SSCAAT) in Canada, our leading overseas old students chapter, began a project, ca. 2008, to digitise all the St. Stanislaus College Magazines, from their foundation in 1943 under Principal and editor of the College Section Francis J. Smith SJ, President of the St. Stanislaus College Association John Fernandes, and editor of the Association Section P. F. De Caires.

"I joined the online team led by physicist John Sparrock, a Guyana Scholar of the 1950s, now retired and living in the USA. We solicited and received some copies of the magazines. Those from retired justice Desmond Burch-Smith got us going. We scanned, converted to suitable word processing formats, edited and proofread them. Even with the latest optical character recognition (OCR) technology, the amount of work was tremendous; and the few aging volunteers, one each in Barbados, Canada, Guyana, and the USA, meant that only some issues are presently characterised as reasonably well proof-read.

"Many issues were still missing, so I applied to the UG library to allow us to scan their collection. They were in the reference archives (or something like that) and not available to the public except by request. I requested and was eventually given permission to scan. But the helpful assistant librarians could not find many issues, especially the early ones, even after diligent searches.

"I could not ask the librarians I knew in 1983, because they had all long retired or left this world. They could not have been lost in the 2005 flood, because I was shown where they were kept in the top floor. They simply went unaccountably missing from a place not accessible to the public.

"Fortunately, the Society of Jesus heard of our plight and graciously allowed access to their archives. The strictness with which these are kept, even towards brother Jesuits, must be evidently why God entrusted the preservation of the sacred scriptures to men of such discipline through the ages. They become seriously upset if there is any hint my discipline in the use of the material does not match theirs!

"Dr Sparrock believes that our efforts to digitise the St. Stanislaus College Magazine is the first such in the Caribbean. Do let us know if otherwise. Much of the work is available for viewing on the St Stanislaus College website with URL [http://www.st-stanislaus-gy.com/SSC Magazines/SSC-Magazines.htm](http://www.st-stanislaus-gy.com/SSC%20Magazines/SSC-Magazines.htm) .

"There are articles on travels in that era, few more riveting than C. P. De Freitas' description, in the Oct 1943 issue, of his work as a member of the British Guiana Boundary Commission. A perusal of this article should quickly reveal that the visual acuity of the elderly proof-reader was unable to rectify the random punctuations induced by OCR technology – and lend weight to my appeal for help. The inside story of the "Girl Pat" labels' in the 1946 magazine, a tale of postage stamps and a recaptured runaway trawler, shows that Guianese were just as enterprising in those days as the Guyanese hustlers of today. Other digitised works, like Norman E. Cameron's "150 years of Education in Guyana (1808-1957)" and the official 1924 history of British Guiana can be found at <http://www.st-stanislaus-gy.com/History/SSC-History.htm> .

"The College Sections will verify just who was faster than who in athletics, indicate when the rains flooded the place from Hadfield Street to Brickdam, demonstrate that QC beat Saints so often in cricket and football that wins by Saints were sometimes rewarded by half-day holidays*, and record who attended the College or taught there in what years.

"We can come by details of times gone by only by those who take the trouble to make and preserve the records. Saints alumnus Dave Martins contributes weekly columns with vignettes of his experiences, which are automatically archived in the

* But this was only after QC moved out from the other end of Brickdam to their present Camp Road location and vastly increased their student numbers. Before that Saints was more often the better in cricket and football competitions with QC and Berbice High School.

Stabroek News web server. The present generation can reinforce their influence on the future by continuing grand traditions like School Magazines and Yearbooks. There is now a plethora of cameras and other gadgets, a far cry from the days when I had to print my own B&W magazine photographs in the Saints labs at night. So I am also using this opportunity to appeal to alumni still alive and able to join the various alumni associations (in Antigua, Barbados, Canada, England, Guyana, and the USA) to contribute to this effort, or at least to send in news of themselves for possible publication in online editions of the College Magazine that may become realized.”

For some overseas insight into the origin of the present Magazine archiving work, which he is ably leading and doing by far the most work, we managed to persuade John Sparrock to write:

“I was about 4 years into involuntary retirement from AT&T, dabbling with too many things at once, when alumnus Bunty Phillips phoned or emailed from Toronto to have a chat. In my years at AT&T, I witnessed first-hand the rapid technological developments ranging from the increasing bandwidth of the National network to the global expansion resulting from the laying of undersea cables (copper then fibre-optic).

“Distance Learning was on my mind when Bunty called. He was then the President of SSCAAT and was seeking help with his mountain of problems all geared towards preventing our Alma Mater from going under. I was easily hooked.

“Shortly after, alumnus Godfrey Whyte appeared on my radar, and could not be ignored. Between us, we got various saints domains & web hosting services started and thereafter, the Saints email system. After a not-so-gentle nudging from alumnus Rupert DeCastro the majority of the SSCAAT executive adopted the email system as the primary communication tool for Saints-related communications. Accounts were subsequently set up for the folks in Guyana, Barbados and elsewhere.

“It is not clear exactly when and how the digitization of the Saints magazine started, but what is known is that the initial scanning activity began in Toronto. This was followed by a global search for missing copies. By then, alumnus Ray Shaw, serving as the IT representative on the College’s Board of Governors (BoG), gracefully handed over to me the development of the School web page, freeing himself up to tackle the organization of the IT labs and computing facilities at the school.

“The response to the requests for copies was almost miraculous, with the donors ranging from: alumnus Horace Persaud, then President of the New York chapter, who personally delivered his batch to my home; all the way to Guyana where BoG chairman, alumnus Chris Fernandes, mailed his copies which ended up lost, even after several inquiries in Guyana.

“By this time I was designated ‘Chief Cook & Bottle Washer’, with the responsibility of scanning to pdf format, then using OCR tools to convert to text, then copying the text to a MS-Word document for cleanup and formatting before converting back to pdf format for uploading to the Magazine section of the Saints web site . This was slow and tedious work but I enjoyed the support of alumni Ken Khan and Alfred Bhulai who took on the proofreading activity.

“This activity was running in parallel with a host of other Saints-related activities, including various textbook initiatives, where I was hooked on textbooks that were being digitized and becoming available on the web. Not surprisingly, the digitizing and publishing of CXC material crept into the picture, resulting in the delivery, by courier, of all Ken Khan’s historical material that he had accumulated while he was Principal of Saints (1972-80). Many of those documents were too unique and important for me to ignore, so the magazines had to wait until they were published in the History section of the Saints web site.”

We also had Bunty Phillips visiting Guyana ~2009, returning to Toronto with Saints Magazines and then Godfrey White delivering them to New York for the alumni there to get them to John Sparrock in New Jersey.

Alumnus John Choy who taught at Saints in the 1960s returned to Guyana in 2007 after retirement as a teacher in Canada and taught Maths and Chemistry for 2 years at Saints again. He tried to assemble a team to scan the Magazines in Guyana, but failed because of lack of access to computers.

Finally, Ariola Barrow, the College Librarian, who was the only Saints member of staff to volunteer for computer training offered by the daughter of alumnus and former SSCAAT President Paul Archer, was then able to become employed by Alfred Bhulai to do all the scanning and some of the converting of the Magazines for John Sparrock to upload. This effort is still continuing, although there was a recent setback that requires the website to be rebuilt under www.st-stanislaus-gy.com

We are also happy to announce that all the old Magazines have been successfully sourced, the last one being the long-missing 1969 issue, presently on loan to us by alumnus Chris Fraser of Fraser’s Battery Service after he read the above letter in the Stabroek News.

The entire project renewed old comradeships and even established communication between alumni of different eras presently on different continents, who would never have otherwise exchanged words. All the known St. Stanislaus College Alumni Associations in the world participated.

References:

[Saints News & Views, Volume 23 , Issue 1, 28 Mar., 2016](#)