

Historic Berbice Commemorated the 250th anniversary of the Slave Rebellion of 1763.

The 2013 Commemoration Program

The historical significance of 2013 to Guyana and all Guyanese was marked by the hosting a series of activities in New Amsterdam to commemorate the 250th Anniversary of the Berbice Slave Revolt. The 2013 commemoration program was organized by COFONA and lasted between July 28th and August 10th. With funds raised from overseas and locally, the organization spearheaded two weeks of activities which included:

- A colorful Opening Ceremony
- A five (5) day International Conference
- Exhibition of artifacts mounted by the Museum of African History
- Emancipation Day Celebration
- NA Township Heritage Ball
- The Recognition & Acknowledgement Ceremony
- A Cavalcade of Sports

A Colorful Parade

The **Opening Ceremony** on Sunday, July 28th displayed a colorful parade of the uniformed services, the town constabulary, civic and community organizations, culture groups, and church representatives all led by COFONA's smartly dressed New Amsterdam Drum Corps and the GDF marching band. Taking the salute at a strategic location along the parade route were the President of Guyana, the Hon. David Ramoutar; the Minister of Youth, Sports and Culture, Hon. Frank Anthony; the Mayor and Deputy Mayor of New Amsterdam, the Hon. Claude Henry and Mr. Harold Dabydeen, respectively; the Regional Chairman for Region 6, Mr. David Armogan, and COFONA'S (USA) President, Dr. Leonard Lewis. The parade marched to the state house where a sizeable crowd of dignitaries and residents filled the grounds while others lined the roadway outside the compound. In the background, the brightly uniformed GDF band serenaded the crowd with the familiar renditions of Guyanese folk songs. After cultural presentations by youth groups and other cultural artists, the main speaker, the Hon. David Ramoutar, President of Guyana, delivered a speech that highlighted the significant role of the Berbice Slave Revolt in the nation's quest for freedom, and blended it into a call for national unity as a way forward for Guyana.



NA DRUM CORPS



President Ramoutar at Opening Ceremony

Shortly before his address, other speakers drew attention to the town's historical importance and highlighted the need for development in the town. Indeed, the Opening Ceremony created high expectations of the commemoration activities planned for the two weeks.

Educating For the 21st Century

The **International Conference** convened its first session on Monday, July 29th at the conference center in the Berbice High School Auditorium. Over a five day period, approximately 400 conference participants explored the themes of (1) social and psychological impact of the slavery experience, (2) examining the question of reparations, (3) preserving and promoting our cultural heritage, (4) educating for the 21st century, and (5) empowerment strategies for community development.

Several international presenters addressed the conference. Dr. Alvin Thompson, a Guyanese historian, captured the audience's attention with gripping details of the brutal conditions under which the captive Africans lived on the plantations, and the significant role Berbice played in their struggle for freedom. Notwithstanding that, however, he spoke of the historical importance of the Winkle community and of its potential as a national heritage site. Ms. Esther Stanford-Xosei, an activist, and an avid researcher of reparations, brought the issue of reparations to the fore at an opportune time as the Caribbean nations are currently presenting a case for reparations from their former colonizers. Dr. Ewart

Thomas, a professor of psychology and former Dean of the Humanities and Sciences at Stanford University, and son of the renowned A.N. Thomas, a former headmaster of Mission Chapel School in the '40s and '50s, spoke of the necessity for Guyana to use technology creatively to improve its educational system for the 21st century. Other speakers during the five-day conference included: Mr. Leon Saul, Ms. Jenny Daly & Ms. Shaundel Phillips (Culture), Dr. Dizal Samad, (Education), Mr. Haslyn Parris, Mr. Imran Sacoor, Mr. Carl Greenidge (Business & Economic Dvlp.), and Mr. Alex Foster (Empowerment).



Dr. Alvin Thompson describing the Slave Trade



Ms. Esther Stanford-Xosei on Reparations



Dr. Ewart Thomas



Youths learning Masquerade and Qweh Qweh

Participants shared in the enlightening discussions on the various topics including how the township could develop its historical heritage sites and strategies for youth empowerment. The session on culture engaged the audience in active participation as they learned the traditional dancing of Masquerade, Qweh Qweh and African Drumming.

The Museum Came to NA

To celebrate this historic occasion, the **Ministry of Culture hosted a Cultural & Photographic Exhibition** at the New Amsterdam Secondary School. Several units of the ministry, including the Museum of African History and the National Archives, participated in the display of items for the exhibition. School children and residents of the township and its environs, as well as visiting groups from



Youths visiting the cultural exhibits at the New Amsterdam Secondary School compound

neighboring places such as Buxton, had an opportunity to visit the exhibition over the two-week period it was hosted in the township. Officials from the Ministry of Culture noted that for the first time in the ministry's history it had hosted a national exhibition outside the confines of Georgetown, the capitol. Personnel from the Ministry of Culture remained in New Amsterdam for the duration of the exhibition to oversee the exhibits and to educate visitors. The exhibition attracted a sizeable crowd of both children and parents who visited the exhibits and were excited to learn about their history and culture.

Our Ancestors' Model

Several villages near and far participated in the **2013 Emancipation Day** celebrations on Emancipation Day, August 1st. Cultural groups from Fryish, Courtland, Kildonan, Canje, Sandvoort, and other areas congregated on the African Village site (Scots School ground) to partake in the cultural festivities that marked the emancipation of Africans from captivity. The significance of this collaborative effort to bring the groups together was not missed by the organizers; for despite activities planned in their respective villages, participants made the sacrificial effort to also join the celebrations in the New Amsterdam township. Intentionally, they followed the model set by our ancestors years ago when they too collaborated and worked together to achieve common goals. It is this model for collaboration that, hopefully, could be emulated by succeeding generations.

Depicting Our Heritage

The **Heritage Ball** at the Metro hall provided the opportunity for a different aspect of life in New Amsterdam to be depicted. Dressed in stately African outfits, the 200 guests displayed the splendor of the African culture in a hall, beautifully decorated with colorful African fabric and palms. The young hostesses displayed their craft of hosting with grace and poise. This formal occasion provided the youths with an opportunity to shine, and they did, while allowing us the privilege of seeing our youths potential for leadership roles in an awakening Guyana. The food, exquisite to the palate, and served in style, provided a somewhat rare opportunity for visitors to experience another side of life in the town of New Amsterdam.



African splendor at the Heritage Ball at Metro Hall in New Amsterdam

We Say 'Thank You!'

Over 300 guests packed the auditorium of Berbice High School for the **Recognition & Acknowledgement Ceremony**. The occasion recognized 250 individuals with awards. These individuals either made a difference in the township, or on the national or international stage, or who otherwise achieved personal accomplishments worthy of recognition. Awards were presented to individuals in fifteen (15) different categories: including business,



Community Developers Awardees



Culture, Music and Dance Awardees

community development, education, entrepreneurship, journalism, legal profession, sports personalities, medical & health profession, music and culture and dance, politicians, trade unionists, uniformed services, religious leaders, and writers. One category was reserved for groups that made an impact on the social fabric of the community. This public recognition to these worthy individuals was well received by the honorees and the public in general.

A Cavalcade of Sports

The **Cavalcade of Sports** was organized as the closing event for the final day of the two-weeks of the 2013 celebration. The sports events were scheduled to include cycle racing, volleyball, soccer, basketball, circle tennis, and novelty sports; however, not all the events occurred on the said day. Enthusiasts of the cycle racing competition organized by the veteran cyclist, Mr. Roberts, punctuated Main Street on the quiet Sunday morning with shouts and exclamations as the racers flashed past the finish line in breakneck speed. Indeed, the cyclists were in fine form and represented several clubs in the town and beyond as well. And while several other sporting events planned for the day were called off for reasons beyond the control of the organizers, nevertheless, the night soccer matches attracted a sizeable crowd for the late performance of the eleven competing teams. Eventually, after an entertaining display of football skills, the best team captured the coveted trophy that was presented at the close of the competition.

The Dazzling Mr. Anthony Price

An **Evening of Jazz** saw the dazzling Mr. Anthony Price, the grandson of the late Mr. Randolph Bennett, serenade the town hall crowd with oldies that brought back memories of days long ago when dance partners nimbly stepped around the crowded dance floor.



Mr. Anthony Price Performing at the Town Hall

A Visit to Sandvoort

Or the hike to the village of Sandvoort where the youths, and older folks, spent **A Day on a Farm** fishing, boating, and learning about farming. And while the season did not afford the luxury of picking mangoes from the budding trees, nevertheless, the experience had many anticipating what a return trip would be like when mangoes would be in season.



A Visit to Sandvoort

Having Fun While Learning!



Paulette Henry addressing children at Literacy Fun Day

The **Children's Literacy and Fun Day Extravaganza**, organized by Ms. Marva Gordon's family and friends, and in collaboration with COFONA, had over 250 children of various ages participating in organized activities in the New Amsterdam Secondary School auditorium. Due to overwhelming demand, tickets had to be used for admittance to control attendance, lest too many children showed up. Fortunately, all the children who came were admitted. Not only did they spend the day in a wholesome environment where learning took place, but they left with backpacks and much better prepared for the new school year.

Celebrating Emancipation in Style



Performing at the Annual Emancipation Day Concert at BHS.

The **Mission Chapel Annual Emancipation Day Concert** at the Berbice High School auditorium. Many of the groups performing is supported by the efforts of Ms. Mary McAuley. This year's concert was well attended by visitors participating in the 2013 Commemoration Activities.

Presentation made to the NA Library



The Library Staff receiving the gifts from Ms. Ruthel Hamilton-Fung and Dr. Leonard Lewis.

COFONA's Education liaison, Ms. Ruthel Hamilton-Fung made a presentation of books, a globe, and craft materials to the NA public library. This is the third presentation made to the library by COFONA through the graces of Ms. Hamilton-Fung. The NA library staff expressed appreciation for the gifts and thanked the organization for its thoughtfulness in remembering the needs of the library.