



19th October , 2003

Issue #1

EL CAYO – DAWN OF A CENTENARY! 1904 - 2004

Elias A. Awe

On the occasion of its 17th anniversary (5th September 2003) of the founding of the Octavia Waight Centre (OWC), the Board of Governors of the OWC took the opportunity to launch the:

CELEBRATE EL CAYO 2004 PROGRAMME

As we observe our 99th birthday as a town on 19th October 2003, the Board decided to publish the **NOSTALGIA NEWSLETTER**. It is intended to have monthly publications to disseminate historical information and memorable photographs to our readers, thus creating the momentum and eliciting interest from the public to mark our 100th Anniversary of Township status come October 19, 2004 (Handbook of British Honduras 1925). We plan to celebrate our centenary with all the pomp, cheers and festivity a unique occasion like this so deserves.

It is with a sense of pride and nostalgia, therefore, that we share with you this first issue of our newsletter to launch the **CELEBRATE EL CAYO 2004 Programme**. We promise to do our utmost to keep you informed of the rich, diverse and interesting history of this place we call home. We also invite comments, suggestions and contributions that will further enrich the colorful story of our twin towns.

According to the annals of history, this region of the world was first inhabited by the Mayas over 2000 years ago. (There are scholars who speak of other people being here before the Mayas). Our era, however, began after the middle of the 1800's, when the place called El Cayo was first settled and used as a "bakadeer" (logging camp). It is presumed, and arguably so, that the humble settlement started as a "bakadeer" in the area of what is today "Hodes Place". Tell you more on this later.

The small settlement then became a village but was not granted township until the 19th of October, 1904, or some fifty four years after it was first settled. Prior to the name Cayo, the area or region was referred to as the Western District hence the football team of yesteryears called "WD" with players like Edmund Marshalleck, Leandro Leal, Nato Lisbey, Alvaro "Pappy" Habet, Hector D. Silva, Miguel Bejos, Elias Alfaro, Albert Musa, Willy Bush, Tat Luna, Mariano Itza and Rupert Waight.

It was not until 1882 that the 'Western District' was changed to Cayo District (Colonial Guardian 12 August 1882) and what is now San Ignacio/Santa Elena was called "El Cayo" and was administered at the time by a Magistrate. Since 'San Ignacio de El Cayo' was strategically located near the Belize River, it was named district capital. The name "El Cayo" or the "Caye of St. Ignatius" is attributed to the fact that El Cayo, now San Ignacio, is surrounded or embraced by a body of water flowing from the Mopan and Macal rivers.

We recall that our towns were then famous for its logwood in the riverine areas and then for the booming mahogany, chicle and transportation industries. In those days, mule packs played a key role in transporting goods overland, first from Belize to Benque Viejo and in the advent of the Cayo Boats around 1905, from El Cayo to Benque Viejo and the wider Peten region. When the Cayo boats came into the scene, some of us can recall that the boats practically connected the country of Belize by plowing through the Macal and the Belize or Old River, transporting goods and passengers to and from the old capital city. At one point, San Ignacio was indeed the main hub or commercial center for Benque Viejo del Carmen and the wider Peten region with a customs office and river-mail service.

On this unique and special occasion in the history of our town and indeed our country, we want to reflect from whence we came and celebrate our people, our culture, our natural resources, our artisans and the myriad of attributes God has so gracefully bestowed on us to protect, enhance and to cherish.

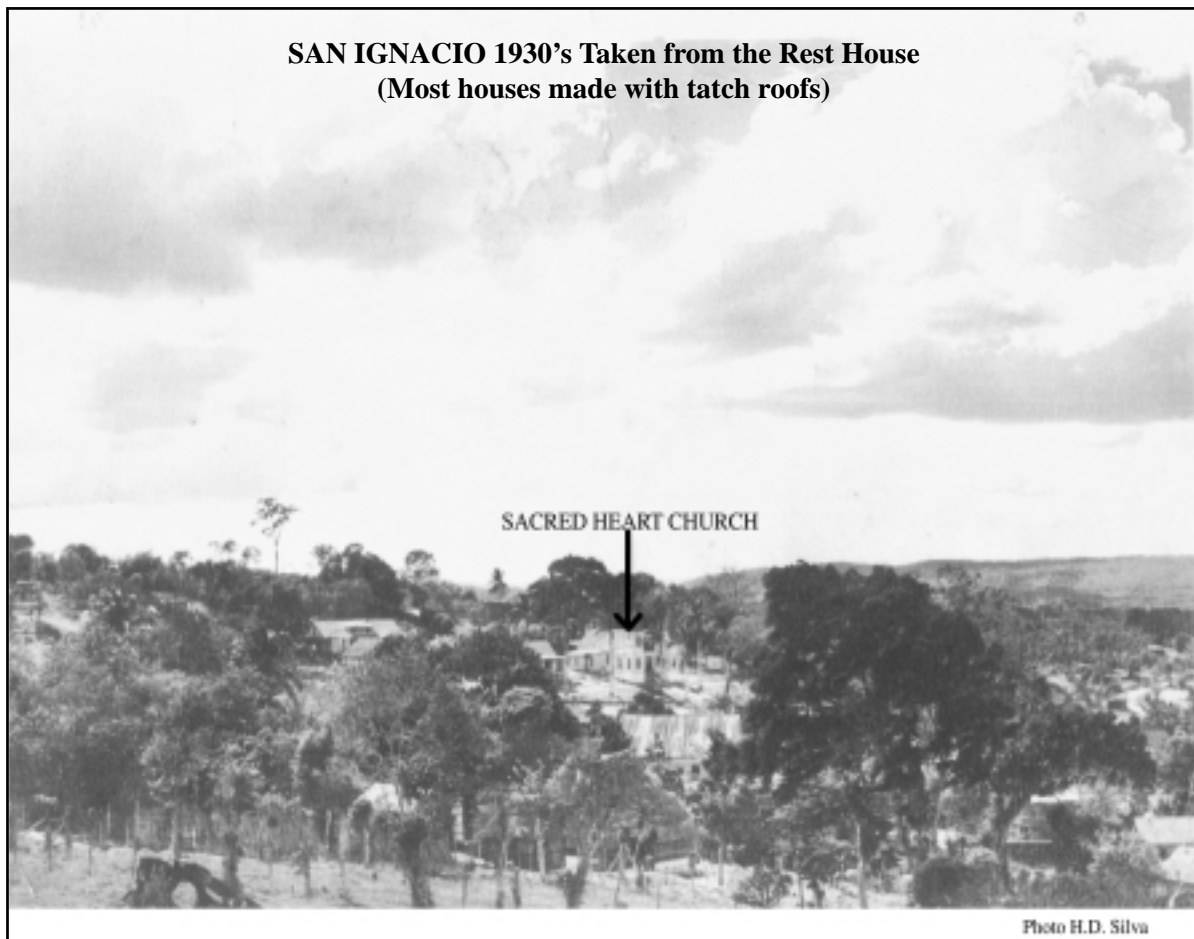
At this juncture of our history, we want to honor our men and women from all walks of life and backgrounds who truly gave their very best to improve the social, economical, political and religious life of **the place we so proudly and dearly call home.**

As a result of this special upcoming event, the Board of Governors of the Octavia Waight Centre has decided to take the lead as Coordinator to organize the celebration and give it the special attention it truly deserves. This, of course, will not be done alone as we hope to co-opt the support of organizations and work in partnership with individuals and other agencies. If you the reader have any contribution to make in terms of historical information, songs, poems or old photographs of El Cayo, please send it to:

The Editor, NOSTALGIA,
P.O. Box 167,
Octavia Waight Centre,
San Ignacio, Cayo.

We will acknowledge any contributions made by the general public.

We now invite you to read on and enjoy a hike down history lane.



BRIEF HISTORY OF SAN IGNACIO

Alfonso A. Tzul

Back in 1847 the British mahogany cutters and their workers had established many permanent camps along the Belize River as far up as Benque Viejo. These mahogany cutters employed many Peteneros and Mayas as workers. Some Peteneros and Mayas also lived at or close to the British camps. Many other Mayas also lived in isolated hamlets in the recesses of the forest even before the arrival of the British cutters and continued thereafter and they made their presence felt by raiding the British camps sporadically during many years.

When the Caste War (war of Races) began on the 30th July 1847, many more Mayas joined their brothers in Belize. Their presence increased the population of the isolated hamlets making them visible to the British and tension between them began and increased. Consequently, open warfare ensued between the British and the Mayas.

On December 21, 1866 the Mayas defeated a British contingent close to San Pedro. The British, however, took their revenge on February 9, 1867 when they burnt down San Pedro and the surrounding villages of Santa Teresa, San Jose, Naranjal, Cerro, Santa Cruz, Chorro and Chumbalché. After a prudent period, however, the Mayas returned and reoccupied the villages.

Subsequent to the burning of San Pedro, the Mayas attacked all the mahogany camps, except Young Girl, along the Belize River bank and burned them. They even burnt down the Maya villages of Benque Viejo, Succotz and Clarissa Camp. The attack was so severe that all mahogany work ceased at that time.

The Crown Surveyor, J.H. Faber, visited the camps. He left Young Girl on May 25th and returned on May 27, 1867. This is his report: *"All camps were abandoned. Burnt and in ruins except Spanish Lookout where Mr. Gillett lived, agent of the Young Toledo & Co. and a few Spaniards who had returned to pick up their belongings to go back to Peten. We met several boats coming down loaded with provisions and pieces of furniture. Places visited were: Society Hall, Mount Hope, Spanish Lookout, Turn Bull Bank, Tiger Run, Duck Run as far as Branch Mouth."*

In May 1867, except for Young Girl, there were no active mahogany camps up the Belize River; no Succotz, no Benque Viejo. In June 1867, the Alcalde of Succotz, Apolonio Ake conferred with British Commissioner, Captain Edmund, at Young Girl and after conditions were agreed upon, he immediately began to rebuild Succotz. Shortly thereafter, the Alcalde of Benque Viejo, Genaro Castellanos, and Samuel August formerly of Duck Run, began to rebuild Benque Viejo.

By the end of 1867, the mahogany camps were rebuilt and new ones established.

Catholic missionary work in the camps began in 1865 and was disrupted in 1867, it resumed in 1868. In that year, Fr. Andrew Bavastro S.J. visited the villages of Benque Viejo and Succotz.

It was his first visit in the area where he worked for the next ten years. Fr. Bavastro S.J. again visited Benque Viejo and Succotz in 1870 as he was unable to visit the area in 1869. He is credited as follows: "He built the first Chapel in the west at Cayo and dedicated it to San Ignacio." It is unlikely, however, that Fr. Bavastro could have built the chapel on his first visit in 1868. It seems more likely that he built it in 1870 because by then he would have been more acquainted with the people. So the evidence indicates that the Cayo camp began sometime in late 1867; it was visited in 1868 and in 1870 its Chapel was built and dedicated to San Ignacio. From that time onward, the settlement was called San Ignacio. This date (1870) is supported by the fact that Fr. Andrew Bavastro S.J. and the visiting Bishop of Jamaica, Fr. Joseph Wooldett visited the area in 1872 and their report indicates staying in San Ignacio for several days. On that visit they reported San Ignacio to be a village of about 200 residents. Another important visitor to San Ignacio was Henry C. Fowler, the Colonial Secretary. Here is his account of the village then: *"We started on the 23rd of November, 1878... We left Belize in a Pitpan which was proceeding up the river to the Cay (Cayo) ... It took ten days hard paddling to reach the Cay or left branch, the distance being estimated at 150 miles by river; ... I left the Pitpan at "Tea Kettle" and rode to the Cay, Mr. Tillett kindly sending me horses from Orange Walk (Little Orange Walk)... Going by land from Tea Kettle brought me to the Cay a day before the Pitpan. So I inspected the school and held an examination of the pupils and awarded prizes. The Cay is a settlement on the forks of the river... and in the event the country being ever opened up, will be an important station ... The land belongs to Mr. Auguste. The village is called San Ignacio, and the population is about 150. The Jesuits have begun a mission here and propose building a large church. The school is conducted by a lay brother and his wife. The idea is to constitute San Ignacio the headquarters of a district in which will be included many surrounding Indian villages and settlements."*

The village of San Ignacio continued to grow and develop in the following manner: In 1877, Fr. Manuel Lloyd from Spain arrived in Belize and became the first resident priest in San Ignacio that same year. He remained in San Ignacio for many years until his death.

The first appointed Alcalde of the village of San Ignacio was Edgar Alexander August vide Government Gazette dated 10th August 1878.

In 1881, the Cayo District was established with San Ignacio as the capital vide Ordinance No. 8 of 1881 and gazetted on 14th January 1881.

In 1882, Captain George Manus, Inspector of Police was appointed as Acting Magistrate of the Cayo District (Government Gazette of July 29, 1882). This announcement was followed immediately by another Government gazette dated 31st August 1882 announcing the appointment of Benjamin Travers Esquire – the first District Magistrate.

The Gazette dated 28th October 1882 made the following announcement:

“The Government Pitpan appointed to leave the Cay (Cayo) for Belize on the 10th and Belize for the Cay on the 18th of every month carrying mails, passengers and freight. Will call at: The Boom, Bakers, Bermudian Landing, Double Head Cabbage, Big Falls, Orange Walk, Rock Donde, San Francisco, and Mount Hope. Passengers \$2.50 each,”

The first Marriage Officer of San Ignacio, Fr. Jose Maria Pinelo S.J. was appointed in 1883. (Government Gazette dated 13th January 1883).

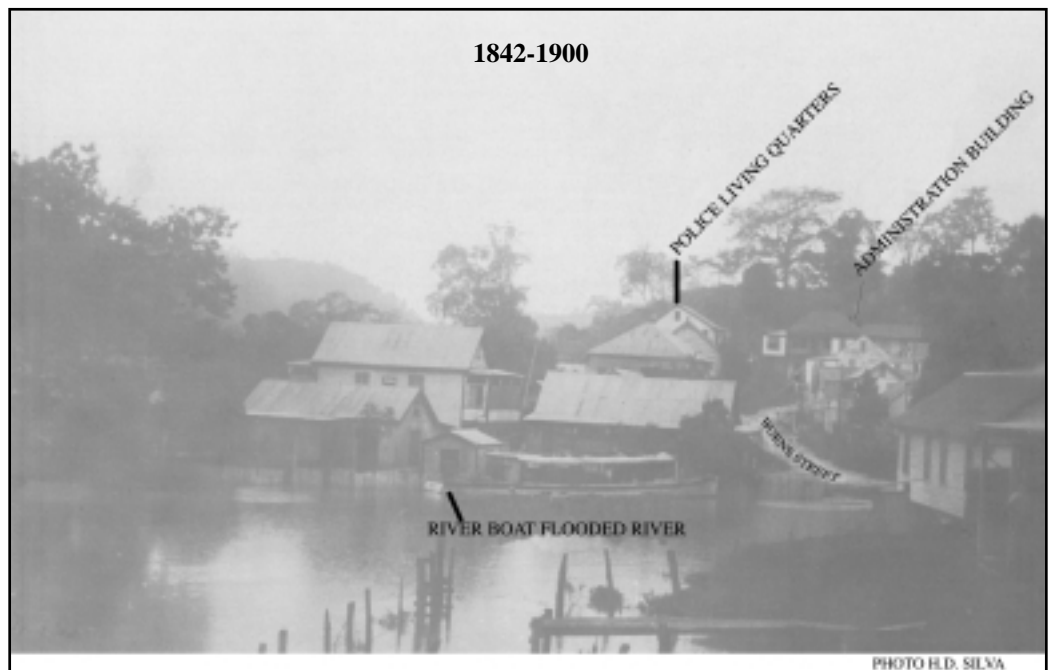
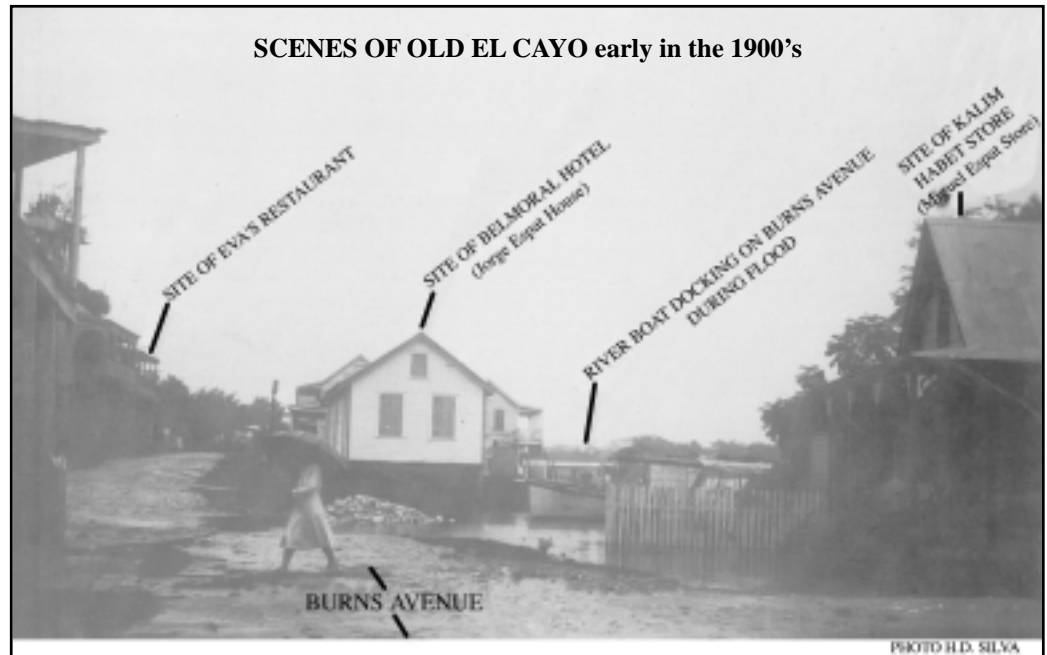
With the increase in population and trade and it being the capital of the district, San Ignacio experienced further development. Notably is the change in administrative structure, e.g. the post of District Magistrate was replaced with District Commissioner in 1892. This change in administration brought about improved public services and town planning. In that same year, a district court was established to further the administration of justice in the district.

Another significant development in the 1890’s is the arrival of Lebanese (Arabs) settlers in San Ignacio and Benque Viejo. They quickly became traders and merchants. About the same time chicle extraction became an important industry in both Peten and Belize. This industry became a very important activity in San Ignacio and the Lebanese merchants became chicle contractors and exerted much economic influence in San Ignacio for many years.

The combined development in government services and trade continued to expand, consequently, by the end of the nineteenth century San Ignacio was indeed a bustling village. Pitpan loaded with merchandise from Belize arrived regularly. Mule and carts transported the goods from the boat wharf to the stores and goods back to the Pitpans enroute to Belize. These mule and carts also transported

passengers from San Ignacio to Benque Viejo. Mule packs transported goods from San Ignacio all the way to Flores, Peten and returned with chicle from the interior of the Cayo District and Peten. Chicleros arriving in town after many months in the forest patronized the shops and of course the many bars. Shops and canteens really saw good days in old San Ignacio.

These activities certainly overshadowed the humble mahogany camps of El Cayo in 1868. As a consequence, on the 19th of October 1904, the villages of San Ignacio and Benque Viejo were officially granted township status.



EL CAYO LAND OF ENCHANTMENT

Hector David Silva

The twin towns of San Ignacio and Santa Elena (once known as El Cayo) have a very folkloric, romantic and important history. This town played a major role in the economic life of British Honduras, today the Nation of Belize.

Folkloric because it has a history of pleasure mixed with pain. San Ignacio has seen many episodes when many sporting activities flourished such as:

Horse Racing with such bold and daring Jockies like Don Gregorio “Gollito” August, Rody Hernandez, Jesus Guzman, William “Tajili” Lennan, Valentine Vasquez Sr., and Raul Torres; horses like, Seige Narkus, Robin, Timoshenko, Nylon, Blue Gown, Jalisco, Trigger, Conejo, War Chief and General George to name a few.

Football with such great players like Trophy Lisbey, Cutty Mossiah, John and Tuto Patterson, Joe Pinelo, Carmen Pulido, Tomas Sabido, Antonio Awe, Carlos Harrison, Teco Lisbey, Miguel Bejos and many recent ones of the WD and Avengers team.

Softball with such stars as: Marina and Hilda August, Dorothy and Carola Anderson and Ducha Waight.

San Ignacio had a romantic era, when music and musician abounded, be it Marimberos, Trios, Solo guitarists, Adolphus Trumpet, Middleton Orchestra, Western Voices such as Victor August, Mimi Guerra, Joe Moreno, Luis and Miguel Zaiden, Federico Salazar, Abilio Cruz and “Los Tres M’s”.

San Ignacio was the leading contributor to the revenue of government with its Chicle and Timber industries. It should be noted that in the early 1900’s, San Ignacio was the main trading post between Belize City and Peten, Guatemala. Many Belizeans accumulated their wealth through San Ignacio.

Today San Ignacio has begun a renaissance (re-birth) with new industries in agriculture, tourism and services, including banking.

Following is a song written by Hector David Silva as a tribute to El Cayo.

EL CAYO – THE ENCHANTED LAND

1. Come let us sing our lovely song
For the district we call our home
It’s El Cayo the Enchanted Land
With its highlands and running streams.
The Cayo District with rolling hills
And friendly people to welcome you
It’s so pleasant to come again
Whenever you are feeling a little blue.

Chorus:

Sweet home, sweet home, El Cayo
The land of my enchantment
I will not change for any place in this world
For better or for worse, it is my sweet home
The land of my dreams.

2. Let us all enjoy – the beautiful sceneries,
Of this lovely paradise in our nation,
For when we return to our destination,
We will not forget – this pleasant found spot
In this lovely land.

Chorus:

3. We join – all Belizeans in prayers
In praise – to the Lord for His blessings
For shedding His blessings on our land,
For peace and love – and tranquility –
On our native land.

TRIBUTE TO THE TWIN TOWNS 1904 – 2004

Elias A. Awe

It is with nostalgic pleasure that we remember **ninety-nine years** ago, when El Cayo was officially given town status.

The twin towns were first inhabited in the second half of the 1800’s but were not granted township until the **19 of October 1904** (Handbook of British Honduras 1925).

In yesteryears, our towns were famous for the booming mahogany, chicle and transportation industries. In those days, mule packs were used for terrestrial transportation while boats plowed the Macal or Belize River transporting passengers and goods from El Cayo to the old Capital, Belize, and back. Historians refer to the time as the “romantic era”.

As we mark our 99th anniversary, we want to take time out to honour those brave men and women from all walks of life who gave their very best to improve the social, economical, political and religious life of this “gem” called El Cayo.

It is gratifying to recall the contribution made to our economy by people like Wahib Habet, Emilio Awe, Louis Sylvestre Sr., the Mengel Co., Ben A. Stuart of the Freiburg Mahogany Co., Arcenio Maruffo, Guy Nord, Julio Espot, Antonio Figueroa, David Espot, Luis Alberto Espot and Escander Bedran.

We respectfully salute, Pat Gray, Harrison Courtney, Enrique Sandino Depaz, Hector David Silva and Joseph Stanislaus Andrews who served as elected representatives for Cayo.

On this day, we acknowledge the arduous and dedicated efforts of men like Frederick Waight, Agustin Sabido Sr., Norman Broaster, Felipe Escalera, Andres Boiton, Jorge Awe and Jose

**Brief History
of
THE OCTAVIA WAIGHT CENTRE
Home for the Elderly**

Elias A. Awe

Maria Galvez. We make honourable mention of people like Ambrocio Herrera, Andres Requena, Ivan Flowers, Pancho "Marimba" Pinelo, Federico Valdez, Jorgito "Juri Juri" Perera and Abelardo "Bala" Heredia.

We remember and recognize with much appreciation the services of Everal Waight, Carlos Harrison, Leopoldo Waight, Lawrence Price, Thomas Sabido and Hernan Ochaeta.

Our heartfelt gratitude goes out to our teachers, our manual workers, loggers, chicleros, farmers, shoemakers, tinsmiths, barbers, tailors, jewelers and tanners. We thank our religious leaders for helping to mould a healthy and Christian society.

It is with fond memories that we remember Wilfrido Moreno, Percival Middleton, Pablo Guerra, Victor August and Los Atlanticos Band.

On this memorable day, we greet our women for their role in nation building, and make honorable mention of our midwives, Octavia Waight, Florence Humes, Teresa Thompson, Fernandez Requena, Mariana Hoil, and Merdith Sanz. We recall, Maria Samos, Petrona Briceño, Diega Pinelo and Alicia Harrison. Our appreciation goes out to Lileth Perdomo, Oralia Waight, Mable Pitts, Inez Fernandez and Ella Aragon.

It is timely to pay homage to Hamid Musa, Antonio Espat, Domingo T. Espat, Eduardo Espat, Alfonso Aragon and Paulino Castellanos Sr.. Today we hail men like Teodocio Ochoa, Alfredo Zaidén, Eduardo Luna and Peter August Sr. for being active participants in the development process.

Our respects and gratitude go out to Domingo Cruz Sr., George Isaac Marin, Francisco Alvarado, Tancredo Perez, Toribio Cowo and Gregorio Pinelo for their contribution to the development of our twin towns.

It is with distinct privilege and pride that we pay tribute and extend our fullest respect to a son of the soil – our very own Prime Minister of Belize, Said Wilbert Musa.

To these and the many unsung heroes that have contributed to the overall growth of San Ignacio and Santa Elena, we congratulate you, we commend you, we thank you, and ask that together we continue the struggle of building a better society and a better home for our future generations.

To all our Belizean compatriots and friends from abroad, we invite you to come, share with us: the beauty, the splendor, the serenity and friendship of our old home town, San Ignacio & Santa Elena, nestled on the foothills of the Maya mountains.

After conducting a survey of the country back in 1984, Ken Tout, Coordinator of Help the Aged International and his wife Jai, decided that the best and most ideal place to build a home for the elderly was in serene San Ignacio, Cayo.

This decision was then followed by a team of volunteers from Operation Raleigh (UK) who started construction in March 1985. Operation Raleigh completed about 50% of the building and left in June that same year. In 1986 another team sponsored by the Lord Mayor of Birmingham's Initiative continued with the construction work from March to June under the Supervision of Peace Corp Volunteer, David Wheeler (builder) and with substantial support from the Listowel Boys Training School and the community at large. The building dimensions then were: 134'L X 32'W, 6' W porch, 6 rooms (16 X 16'), Dining Hall 32 X 22', Kitchen 33 X 10'. On 5th May 1986 we received the visit of the Lord Mayor of Birmingham, Councilor Frank Carter and the Lady Mayoress, Elsie, who came to see the work in progress.

At the time, Dr. Bidar Swamy was the Chairman of the HelpAge Belize - Cayo Committee and he was very instrumental in lobbying for the building with Help the Aged International based in the United Kingdom. Dr. Swamy resigned his post on 10th November 1985 as he left to pursue further studies abroad. The HelpAge Cayo Committee was then formed by Elias Awe, Dan Silva, Azucena Winsor, Ismael Garcia, Juva Fernandez and John Lamb.

The Octavia Waight Centre was inaugurated on 5th September 1986 by Hon. Philip Stanley Wilberforce Goldson. The home has a capacity to house 24 residents on a beautiful setting on 2 + acre plot of land.

The Centre was given the name in honour of Mrs. Octavia Waight, affectionately known as "Miss Acti", who was one of the first midwives and care givers to serve the community at a time when there was no resident medical doctor in the area. Mrs. Waight was born on 1st August 1868 and died on 6th January 1959 at the full age of 91 years.

Today there is a Board of Governors comprised of Elias A. Awe, Sister Josella Flowers (Pallotine), Bernadette Fernandez, Carmita Lennan, Margaret Juan SRN, Fatima Morris, Herman G. Pastor and Hazel Hutchinson.

Our mission: "*To provide the elderly with an environment that enhances dignity, self-esteem and physical and mental well-being.*"

We invite you to come, visit the home and meet and share with old friends.

This issue sponsored by Rotaract, San Ignacio