

# GUYANA UNDER SIEGE

## The History of Den Amstel & Fellowship

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*[As one browses through the little book entitled **Over the Years**, there is a quotation on the cover, "Being a record of men and women who helped to build worthy place for their sons and daughters." Published under the authority of the Den Amstel and Fellowship Village Council, British Guiana, 1947.]*

**Historical Feature:** It was the hundredth year since the existence of the village "Fellowship". The centenary committee conceived of the idea that there must be a record compiled to tell the story of men and women who built the community from the earliest times. According to historical revelations, Den Amstel was a coffee plantation owned by a Dutch planter named John Craig. Plantation Den Amstel was named after the two sons of Mr. Craig; his sons' names were Denny and Amstel.

In the late 18th century ex-slaves pooled their resources together and purchased the plantation, having learnt that it was up for sale. During this time much emphasis was placed on Fellowship. It was considered advisable to include Den Amstel community in the record, as the two communities existed as one environment. The destiny of one was that of the other. These two communities are separated by a sideline trench. Anyone who approached and entered the communities would view them as one village because of their geographic location and situation.

Den Amstel and Fellowship is situated in the County of Demerara. It is about seven miles from Vreed-en-Hoop, which is on the left bank of the Demerara River. It sandwiches two villages, Plantation Blankenburg on the east and Plantation Hague on the west. Its border on the north is Atlantic Ocean and on the south, the Boerasirie Conservancy. It was not recorded how Fellowship got its name, however, strong indications are that it has its origin with the new proprietors of the plantation.

When one considers what ideas interlocked in the minds of the people who made this historic event memorable, one must admit it was in their ancestors best interest that development continued at the expense of their descendants. A record of this nature should not only prove interesting to those who had direct connection, but should attract all those who have followed progress in local administration.

To the people of Den Amstel and Fellowship, a glorious heritage was passed on. A people so privileged that they are envied by their other local neighbourhoods on the West Coast of Demerara. As they were the first village to hold a village council meeting and form a legislative council. In 1838 after the abolition of slavery on the 1st of August, the freed Negroes were paid small wages. They saved part of those wages from time to time and when the owners wanted to abandon the plantation because of the many floods that destroyed the crops and made the plantation less prosperous, 125 of the ex-slaves offered to buy with their savings. The ex-slaves became proprietors in 1854. Each proprietor had his portion of land to maintain, but this was not successful. The reason was because the people failed to keep their surroundings in a healthy condition, such as weeding the yard and keeping drainage gutters around their premises clean.

In 1846 Fellowship was bought for \$6,000 by 83 proprietors. They included such names as the Jacksons, ancestors of Sir Donald Jackson. The ex-slaves had to pool their earnings to purchase the village. This portion of land stretched from the Atlantic Ocean to Grown lands near the Boerasirie Conservancy. The Crown lands at the back of Fellowship were bought in 1897 by four proprietors. On 3rd August 1857, thirty-five out of 125 proprietors made representation to the Central Government Board.

Just to mention some of the original proprietors of Fellowship whose names are worth mentioning and they are as follows: The Jacksons, Russells, Veiras, Jordans, Cummings, Hicksons, Archer, Black, Henry, Jacob, Hendricks, Green, Lewis, Waterton, Daniels, Waddell, Bart, Thorne and Pollard.

**Influence of the Church:** Church influence played a dominant role in the lives of the people within these communities. They then established themselves where the population was the thickest and where bright prospects pertaining to religious and cultural development existed. The development of the political environment grew out of circumstances, which unveiled themselves. As a new people became engrossed with new aspirations, the horizon was necessarily limited. Gradually as education spread, the avenues for expansion and development widened. What appeared distant eventually came within grasp as time rolled on. Pioneers of the gold and diamond industries were given their place even the apparently insignificant looking individual had his/her place within the compass of village life. It was character of individuals that really mattered. Even if there was constant failure academically their strength of character and forbearing determination was properly displayed.

**The Missionary Role:** Missionaries then are to be given significant mentioning, as they were the first to

diffuse edifying influence and scholastic achievement. They trained teachers who were destined to do work among the people. The association between the church and the school is one of long standing. From the teaching profession came the first set of men who went off to study Law and Medicine. Tribute must be paid to those early teachers who proved successful because of the training given to them. They excelled when they entered other professions.

**The Teachers:** Teachers have played a prominent role in the intellectual development of the district. They took up what was started by the church. When the churches could not carry the burden of providing universal education, it handed over to the State the privilege of financing it. Some of the teachers were as follows: William Elliot Lewis, a Barbadian; Mr. Adolphus Medas, Hubert Archibald Boston, H.S. Jackson and L.B. Russell.

"The growing community is not required to allow itself to be perpetually governed from without, so leading members have to take training in order that the privilege and honour of guiding the village might be given to them. Education then in the political sphere had to be undertaken, and the success of the village chairmen as leaders of the village should be a source of satisfaction."

**The Mantle of Leadership:** Persons outstanding in the direction of leadership were Mc Farlene Corry and Joseph Waterton Jackson. The former inaugurated the Village Chairmen's Conference and the latter was among the founders of the West Demerara Chairmen's Union.

Den Amstel and Fellowship was declared a village District in 1892. The village chairmen from that time 1945 were as follows: 1892-1894 - Mr. S. C. Thorpe; 1894-1895 - J. Herbert; 1895-1922 - J. Mc Farlene Corry; 1923-1943 J.W. Jackson; 1943-1945 J.T. Roberts and 1945 - W. A. Bart. Mr Mc Farlene Corry was the first local chairman of the Den Amstel/Fellowship Village District.

Mr. Lionel Langevine was the last of the chairmen who served under Den Amstel/Fellowship Village Council. After which the Local Authority changed to Neighbourhood Democratic Council.

The Local Government Board with its quest for dynamism used all the necessary resources to steer the villages in the best interest of the reigning administration. So that when villages reached the stage that proved they were able to accept greater responsibility, an elastic system of government would undoubtedly allow provision for the transfer of that responsibility.

The philosophy existed that "Youths must be trained and the New Order makes preparation for training both the head and the hand of youths."

**Congregational Ministers:** During the periods 1817-1926 numerous events took place which serve to inform and educate generally. In 1817, Reverend Richard Elliot started the missionary work at Ebenezer Congregational Church. This led to a Mission house being built at Plantation La Jalousie in 1819. Probably because of his influence and the role he played in the Ebenezer Church, Reverend Elliot in 1823 was arrested and confined in the Dutch Reformed Church. This church known today as St. Andrew's Church, was occupied by government forces. After being released in 1824 he returned to England, this led to the closure of the mission.

The year 1829 marked the rebirth of the mission by Joseph Ketley, after having been closed which for six years. In April 1920, Michael Lewis, Ketley's brother-in-law, took charge. When one Reverend Wray left Berbice for England in 1831, Lewis took charge temporarily. Ebenezer Church was then left without a minister.

James Scott arrived on December 31, 1831, and his family joined him in 1832. Mrs Scott died in 1836. In 1838 Reverend Scott returned to England and returned with a second wife in 1839.

The completion work on the church was done by Scott in 1843. A school called Ebenezer Congregational was built in that very year. Many of the villagers attended this school. Reverend Scott returned to England with his wife in 1849. She died in 1852 and again he retired to his place of birth in 1868.

Another minister was appointed to Ebenezer in 1865, but took office in 1867. His first wife died in 1847, and he married for the second time in 1849 to one Jane Buchanan Laing of Den Amstel Village. He was ordained in 1853 and later died in 1888. Reverend James Lampard Green succeeded Mr Foreman and renovated the church and installed a pipe organ. He was the last of the London Missionaries Society.

The first local Pastor who took charge of Ebenezer Congregational Church on March 1, 1896, was Thomas Burchell Glasgow, ATS. He married one month later to Helena B. Lawrence, he was said to be very brilliant and scholarly. T.B. Glasgow died in 1924. In 1929 David W. Hamilton Pollard, B.A. filled the vacancy and left in 1942. The year 1944 Adam T. Johnson took charge of the congregation.

**The Naming of the Streets:** As one approached from the old public road of Den Amstel, there is Statue Street, which got its name due to a Statue, which was erected at the head of the street in the

year 1897. It is engraved V.R., which means Victoria Reigns. This landmark reminds one of the 50th reign of Queen Victoria. Then there is Wellington Street, which is on the other side of the public road, which was named after Nellie Wellington, the first woman to sit on the Legislative Council of Den Amstel/Fellowship. Then there is Young Street named after Emily Young, a registrar of births and deaths. Langevine Street, after a prominent proprietor and member of the Council, Gray Street after Nana Gray also a prominent proprietor.

**The Youth Camp:** In 1945 the government established a camp site in the village. It consisted of four huts, a kitchen and a dining hall. There, youths participated in club activities including cooking, cultivating kitchen garden and cultural activities.

**Ebenezer Congregational Church:** The cornerstone was laid on the 25th April 1955, by his Excellency, Sir Alfred Savage, the then Governor of British Guiana. In 1956 this church was built at Den Amstel to replace the one at Blankenburg, which was, then in a state of disrepair. The Reverend Dr. Carlyle Miller was the minister during that time.

**The Community Center:** This was constructed by both the government and the people in the village, with the government contributing half the money and the villagers contributing money and labour. The roads were built with burnt clay and each side was lined with daisy flowers. Vehicles seldom used the roads, as it was better to travel on foot or cycle.

**Transportation:** Chuck! Chuck! - Chuck! Chuck poooooop, one can hear these sounds coming from a distance. As this was the sound of the train which travelled from Vreed-en-Hoop to Parika. Stopping at each station at the request of its passengers. This transportation system was managed by the Transport and Harbours Department.

The people of Den Amstel enjoyed this service much to their convenience. Other than pedal cycles, foot, and horse and donkey carts, the train was the main means of transport. At the end of June 1974, the railway service came to an end. Many live to regret this termination. The Guyana Transport Service Limited came into effect on July 1st, 1974 and is presently at a halt.

In summation what comes to the fore is that churches played a vital role in the lives of the people in the Den Amstel/Fellowship community. The cornerstone was laid down. The Ebenezer Congregational Church was most influential and instrumental in molding the characters in the village. Children who were born in this community are always referred to as Ebenezer boy or girl. For Ebenezer carried many great personalities who in turn shaped lives for generations to come.

