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Research and Teacher Training Among the Guaymi Baha'i

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RESEARCH AND TEACHER TRAINING AMONG

THE GUAYMI BAHÁ'ÍS

OF PANAMA

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3/9/87

I.	Objectives of the Paper	1
II.	Introduction	1
	A. Background	1
	B. Description of the Guaymi People	3
	1. Location	3
	2. History	4
	3. Modern Village Description	5
	4. Social Structure and Customs	6
	5. Economy	9
	6. Organizational Structure	12
	C. The Guaymi Project of the Baha'is of Panama	16
	1. History	16
	a. Spread of Influence	16
	2. Present	18
	a. Three Principle Elements and Their Focuses	18
	b. Radio Baha'i	19
	c. The Regional Teaching Committee	21
	d. The Guaymi Cultural Center	28
	e. Spread of Influence	31
	D. Personal Contact with the Guaymis	32
	1. First Visit	32
	a. Local Assembly Management Conference	32
	b. Visiting Local Communities	36
	c. Parting Thoughts	41
	2. Researching the Literature and Preparing for a 2nd	45

3. Second Visit	47
4. Teacher's Conference as Master's Project Focus	52
III. Background on Schools in the Guaymi Area	1
A. Traditional Nonformal Education	1
B. Formal Education	55
C. State of the Project Schools	58
IV. Teacher Training Conference	1
A. Preparing for the Conference	1
B. Structure of the Conference	67
C. Conference Schedule	71
D. Data From the First Three Conference Parts	74
1. Introduction	74
2. Experience	75
3. Educational Background of the Participants	1
4. Purpose of the Schools	77
5. Characteristics of a Good Teacher	78
6. School Curriculum	79
7. Average Teacher Earnings Per Month	1
8. Pass Fail Ratios Among Five Schools	80
9. Community Problems Data	81
E. Results of the Fourth and Fifth Conference Parts	83
1. How to Earn Enough to Meet Ones Needs	83
2. How to Concienticize the Community About Education	88
3. How to Foster Material, Social and Spiritual Develo	93
4. How to Increase the Teacher's Skill Level	99
5. How to Provide Administration and Supervision	105
6. Major Recommendations and Decisions Made	109

V.	Discussion	1
	A. Successes	1
	B. Shortcomings	118
VI.	Conclusions	1
VII.	Bibliography	1

I. OBJECTIVES

I. OBJECTIVES p.1

This paper was written as a partial requirement of a 3 credit "Master's Project", independent study for the Master's Program at the Center for International Education at the University of Massachusetts.

The Master's project it details included two trips to work with a Baha'i project among the Guaymi Indians of Panama. It is not intended to be a scholarly study of the project or the tribe but rather a background report for those interested in working with or learning more about them.

The first part of the paper discusses how I got involved with the project, information about the Guaymi Indians in general, information about the Baha'i projects and details from my visits.

The second part of the paper, provides a background on the community schools (the focus of the paper) being run by the Guaymi Baha'is.

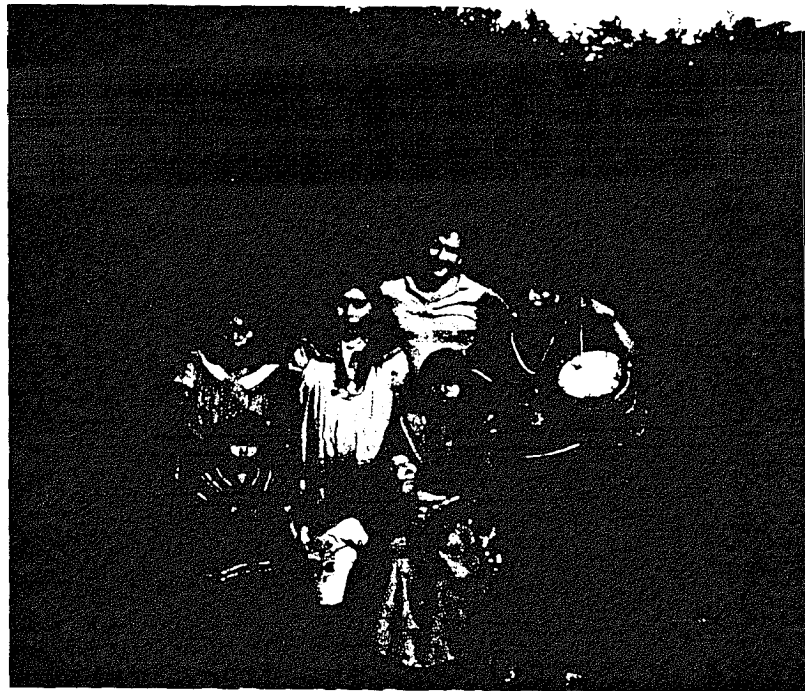
The third and fourth parts of the paper detail decisions that came out of a rather innovative teachers conference I held to address problems in the schools. They then go on to discuss the failures and successes of the conference.

The final section presents conclusions.

If this report appears to jump from subject to subject it is because I am interested in many aspects of the Guaymi Project. When in the field there is no clear division between agriculture and education or anthropology and

I. OBJECTIVES p.2

appropriate technology. The fact that this presentation focuses rather narrowly on a single conference is more due to the requirements of the Master's degree than anything else. It is my hope that people planning extended stays at the Guaymi Cultural Center will be able to use the first two sections as a personal orientation.



Author with Guaymi Indians in Traditional Dress

II. INTRODUCTION



Guaymi Baha'i walking along a road on the reservation in Tolé

A. Background

In the July of 1986 I was feeling greatly distressed by the fact that together with fellow Center member I had been awarded responsibility for a training program for visiting Tanzanian Educators and we had let it slip through our hands. Attracted by the prospects of working with another more illustrious Peace Corps project we had decided instead to take a chance and bid ourselves in on its proposal; a risk that didn't pay off. The project went to another bidder and I found myself unemployed and worst of all with nothing to do.

One thing led to another and I suddenly found myself up in Maine at a Baha'i Summer School seminar being given by Eloy Anello a fellow Center member and Latin American Development specialist with 15 years in the field. He was giving a talk on development management and was discussing a Panamanian Indian tribe that I had heard wonderful things about when I was working in Colombia. Eloy was equally seemed impressed by them.

Eloy was explaining the Guaymis capacity to make collective decisions and then follow through with them. He told about the project Baha'i Guaymis were running, the Cultural Center that they were building and the radio station and schools that they had set up. He described meetings which he attended which consisted of thousands of Guaymis coming together attend all night consultations.

As Eloy went on I began thinking about how I would like to visit them and perhaps make the experience the subject of my Master's Thesis. When Eloy non-chalantly stated "By the way, I am going to visit them in two weeks to conduct management training course.", my mind began to race. Right after the talk I went up to him and asked if it was okay if I accompanied him. He consented and the rest is history (and my master's project).

Within a three weeks I was again listening to Eloy speak but this time to a group of about 120 Guaymi leaders at the Guaymi Cultural Center in Panama.



Mountain view in the District of Tolé

1. Location

The Guaymi Indians, with a current population of about 80,000, are the largest Indian group in Panama. Government statistics show that they are dispersed throughout the in the more inaccessible interior regions of the provinces of Chiriqui, Veraguas and Boca Del Toro, at a ratio of about 6:3:1. At present the territory they occupy is about 6000 to 6500 square kilometers (Linares et. al., 1980) although that area has been greatly reduced over the past several hundred years (Torres de Aruaz, 1980).



Guaymi Village in the District of Tole

2. History

Not much is known about the early history of the Guaymis. First contact by Westerners was made by Columbus during his third visit to the new world. Later accounts written by Fray Adrian de Ufeldre (1682) and the more recent accounts of (Franco 1882, Pinart 1885, Johnson 1948; Alphonse 1948) as well as contemporary data (Young, 1971, Bort, 1976) suggests that Guaymi way of life has changed little over the last several hundred years despite their being surrounded by a dominant and pervasive Latino culture. This fact attests to the stability of their culture.

Early accounts described the Guaymis as slash-burn farmers who depended on fishing and hunting to supplement their diets. The Guaymis had a complicated set of rituals and social laws which revolved around life in a family settlement.

Villages even at that time were very small and situated at large distances from each other. Polygamy, child betrothal, the levirate, the sororate, in-law avoidance and economic obligations to affinal as well as consanguineal relatives were all-important features of the Guaymi culture... The "Balseria", the major Guaymi ritual [was] strikingly similar to [what it is today] (Young, 1980)

3. Modern Village Description

The Guaymis have traditionally lived in settlements of from about 3 to 10 huts built near sources of clean water where land is level enough to build houses. Guaymis villages today take on a variety of shapes and sizes ranging from towns connected to unpaved roads which vary in size from about 20 to 60 houses down to family compounds of only a few houses. Even now settlements are located great distances from each other generally making it necessary to walk at least an hour to get to the nearest neighboring village. Settlement location is to a great degree determined by the availability of sufficient aerable land to support land-extensive slash-burn agriculture and small scale meat production. Villages are organized along the line of family relations with kinship allegiances being a major determinant of social interation.



Traditional house near Quebrada Loro

4. Social Structure and Customs

Although in recent years many of the traditional practices of the Guaymis have begun to disappear, especially in the larger villages, the sharing of food and labor, the collective ownership of land by kinship groups, polygamy and well defined rules of family interaction are still a hallmark of village life. Rituals such as the "Balseria" (a yearly feast/competition hosted by a different settlement and involving as many as 2000 visitors), the "Gueto" (a village purification period lasting four days and nights during which the participants must disdain sleep, drink diluted cocoa and listen to traditional stories from the "Sukia" or (local divine) and others revolving around puberty, burials, and birth (Alphonse, 1956) are becoming much less common according to Guaymis I interviewed. Still, such traditions are commonplace in many of the more remote villages.

There are several spoken Indian languages in the area. Different authors have categorized the languages spoken by the Guaymis and have either broken them into two or three distinct groups. I personally have noticed that the majority of the Guaymis in Chiriqui speak "Movere" at home. Muruge or "Sabanero" is the language of older people and the choice language of traditional chants and prayers and not commonly spoken in that area. Each language has its dialects which make it difficult to produce written material for the area. Dialects vary over very

short distances possibly because of the difficulty to travel or communicate in the area. Spanish is the universal written language and the language of the educated.

Women abide by a strict dress code throughout the region. Dresses are homemade and consist of a long one-piece pleated cotton base with sleeves, borders, waistline and neckline decorated with different colored triangles of the same material. Hair is long and feet are generally bare although some younger women wear tennis shoes. Men wear dress shirts, hats of one type or another, store bought pants and tennis shoes or boots if they have any. Children wear miniature copies of their parents cloths.

There is very little interaction between men and women of different families. Men are the relatively educated and liberal element of the Guaymi Culture. Women for one reason or another have traditionally been denied the right to education and the opportunity to speak up in public or converse with strangers.

General knowledge of the outside world or the different regions the Guaymis inhabit is scarce in the villages. Many have never been as far as the Panamanian Highway and few have visited more than a dozen of their neighboring communities.

Meaningful interaction with Latinos even in the cities is very uncommon. Most intercultural interaction is carried out by men doing seasonal work on plantations, children attending government schools or people purchasing from Latino store

owners. Migration to the cities is relatively limited and short lived.



A family and their cacao harvest
in Tole

6. Organizational Structure

There are three types of political structures among the Guaymis; the traditional, the governmental and the religious.

Traditional: Traditionally the Guaymis were represented rather loosely by caciques (chiefs), who rose through the ranks by demonstrating bravery and generosity. (Young, 1971) In the seventeenth century father Franco described a system, which he characterized as apolitical and not a real form of government, consisting of seven caciques each representing part of the Guaymis. Since that time several have achieved a plurality of support but never autonomous control over individuals. (Arauz, 1980 p.261-2) The assistant of the cacique was called the jirarquai, and it is likely that there was a hierarchy which reached down to the settlement level. Dispersion of the populous made central rule and coordination impossible. (ibid)

Also important were medicine men call Sukyas. Sukyas were used to interpret dreams, exorcise evil spirits, provide medicinal cures (Alphonse, 1956) and according to my own sources educate and pass on culture. Their status was based on past successes although their position was passed on to a relative, male or female, when they died.

Both of these institutions still exist today though their influences are much more limited. At present there are 3 Caciques, elected through a Government supported

process, one for each province, and their influence is greatly hindered by questions about their allegiances. Sukyas still play an important role in some areas but modern medicine and increased world awareness has diminished their clout.

For the most part decisions are made at the settlement level by either an autocratic head of family or a process of consultation and acquiescence. Men have nearly exclusive power over most decision making processes.

Governmental:

The Guaymis elect representatives to both the regional and national congresses as well as the National Assembly of Corrigimintos.

The provinces in which the Guaymis reside are divided into districts which in turn are subdivided into corrigimientos. Boca balsa is a settlement in the corrigimiento of Soloy which is in the district of San Felix in the Province of Chiriqui.

The most visible figure at the level of the corrigimiento is the "corrigidor" (a Guaymi) who serves as judge, government representative, tax collector, distributor of funds and so on.

At the village level government influence is sparse. Vaccination teams, health worker, and extension agents, are generally Latino and seldom if ever travel beyond the points where roads end. This means that their influence is

primarily at fringes of the territory and not beyond. The exceptions are teachers (also Latino) who travel to their posts at one of perhaps 80 government schools which serve the Guaymis. In most cases government teachers are commuters who leave the area on weekends. Few complete more than a couple of years in a given community.

Government support for the Guaymis achieved its peak during the General Torrijos era of the seventies.

Current Guaymi political activism tends to focus around a single issue, that of the "conmarca" or legal definition of the boundaries of the Guaymi reservation. Much of the money destined for the Guaymis is funneled through the government representatives, who according to many Guaymis I spoke to use a sizable portion of it to their own advantage.

Religious

Some of the most pervasive and well organized administrative structures and influences both at the regional and local level are ones associated with religions. The Mama Chi religion, discussed later in this paper, can be found throughout the reservation and has a fairly well defined administrative structure and a good deal of political influence.

The Baha'i Faith, which was probably the impetus of the Mama Chi Movement has erected democratic administrative structures and has majority participation in at least 39 communities.

In recent years the Evangelical movement has proliferated in the eastern part of Chiriqui. I have not been able to find information about either their administrative structure or the extent of their membership but it is a topic worthy of support.

The traditional Guaymi religion with its focus on Gnobo (God) and evil spirits is the undercurrent influencing all aspects of Guaymi life. Inseparable from Guaymi Culture its salient administrative characteristics have already been covered under the heading of "traditional."



Youth on a Center extension visit in
Cerro Caballo

1. History

a. Spread of Influence

The Baha'is of Panama have been working with the Guaymi Indians since 1959. At that time several individuals traveled up to Soloy and explained the basic tenants of the religion to two brothers from the town of Boca de Remedios. Both of them became active members and before long there were thousands of new Baha'is in the area. Many of the Baha'i teachings such as the maintenance of traditional culture, social laws and the concept of an after life were in line with native beliefs. The coming of the Baha'is also coincided with prophecies of a Sukia of the area. The Guaymis quickly spread the message throughout the area forming local assemblies and teaching teams in many of the settlements.

In 1963 an Indian religion, the Mama Chi Movement, emerged in the predominately Baha'i area. Based on a revelation which a woman from Cerro Banco had, it advocated many of the same principles upheld by the Baha'is. It's founder became a Baha'i in 1964 shortly before she died of tuberculosis. Even so the Mama Chi Movement effectively checked the spread of the Faith in the area. Today, Guaymis in the area tend to be either Mama Chis, Baha'is or Evangelical.

Over the years the type and scope of Baha'i projects among the Guaymis has continually increased. Upon arrival of the Faith in the area schools and local community centers were built in many communities. Land was donated for a regional center in Soloy and by 1978 a large meeting hall with room for about 500 was built on the premises. By then schools were being run in a haphazard way in about 20 communities and Local Assemblies were widespread.

Permission was granted for the establishment of a Guaymi Baha'i radio station in Boca del Monte and its construction was completed by 1985. Soon after that construction was begun on a large Cultural Center with two large classrooms a multi-purpose dining hall and dormitories to sleep about 80 people.

If any event can be seen as a turning point in the history and direction of the work with the Guaymis it is the letter published by the Universal House of Justice in 1984 asking Baha'is around the world to become more actively involved in development projects of a socio/economic nature. Although the work among the Guaymis prior to that message had included a development emphasis, it marked the beginning of increased efforts to establish projects among the communities. The cultural center and the radio station as distinct from the regional teaching work are a natural expression of interest in socio/economic development.

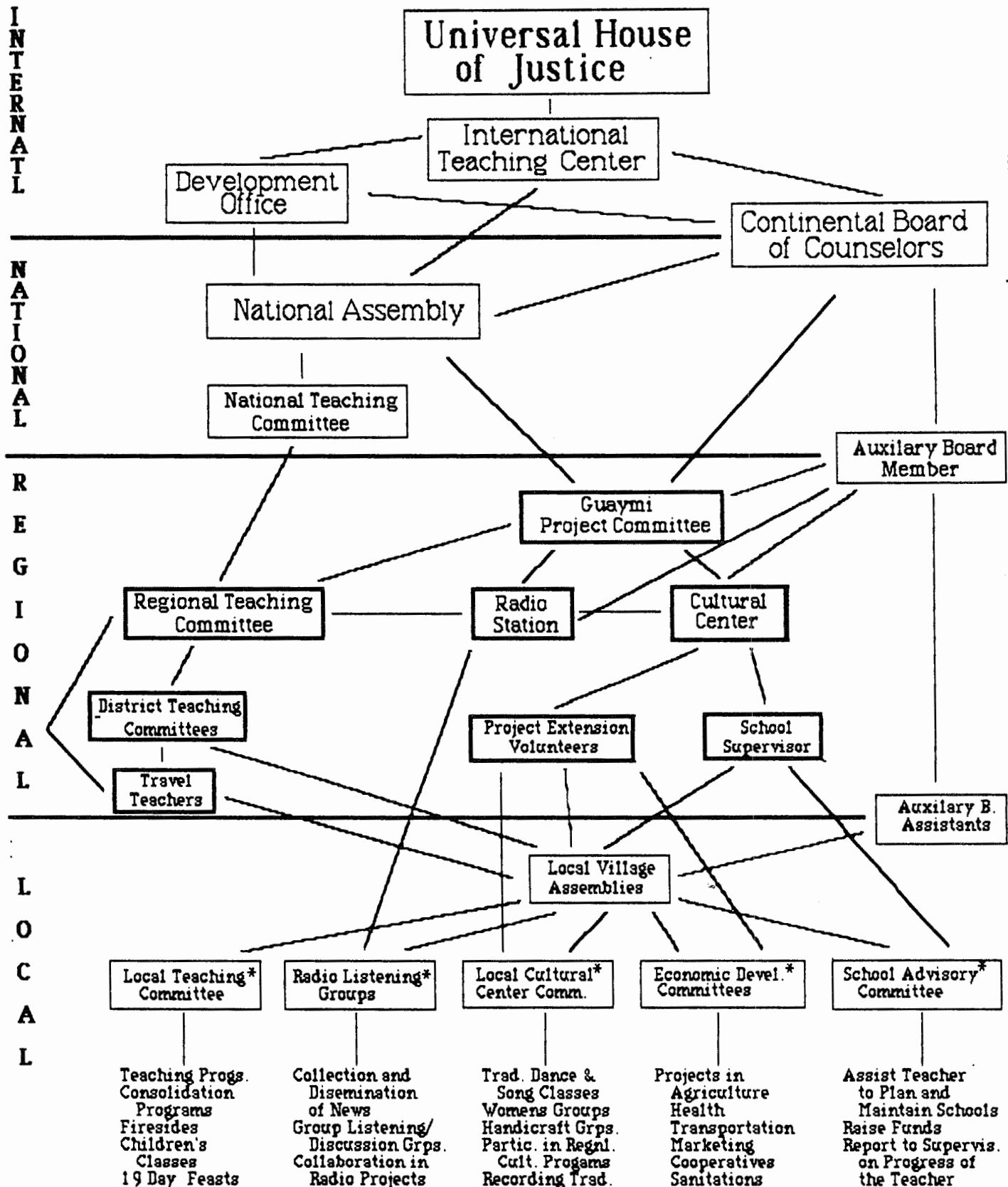
2. Present

a. Three Principle Elements and Their Focuses

Today the work being done by and among the Guaymi Baha'is is extensive. The two major focuses which might be called the spiritual/social and the cultural/economic/social. The first tends to improve village life by increasing adherence to the social and spiritual teachings of the Faith and strengthening its administrative structure. This focus is carried out by the regional teaching committee. The second is more traditional in its approach to development. It attempts to promote Guaymi culture as well as appropriate technology and knowledge in areas such as health, agriculture, education and general community development. It is the principle responsibility of the Guaymi Cultural Center Committee. A third institution the Auxiliary Board Member Position is basically a consultant or support mechanism which supports all efforts in the area. Radio Baha'i the most prominent feature of the work being done with and by the Guaymis operates separately from the other two committees and the Board position. (Recently a bipartisan central committee was established at the bidding of the International Development Office of the Baha'is but it was not in place when much of my work was done.)

In theory the duties of the three institutions are very different but in practice they are quite connected. The Local Assemblies which fall under the jurisdiction of the Regional

Guaymi Project Organizational Structure



* = Institution may not exist in a given community in which case the Assembly is directly responsible.

Teaching Committee are the institution of choice when the Cultural Center seeks to find an institution to sponsor development projects. Likewise, when the Teaching Committee need someone to visit a certain community it will often call upon the Cultural Center Committee for assistance. Volunteers, working under the two committees often switch roles. Anyone, including the government and its institutions is free to use the radio station (at no charge) to get their message across as long as it is not overtly political in nature.

b. Radio Baha'i

The project radio station, like its four sister stations in other indigenous centers in South America, was begun as a vehicle for maintaining consistent communication with the widely dispersed, largely illiterate Indians of the Area. The project station programs are produced in and broadcast from Boca del Monte although some programs and spots from the other stations are occasionally used.

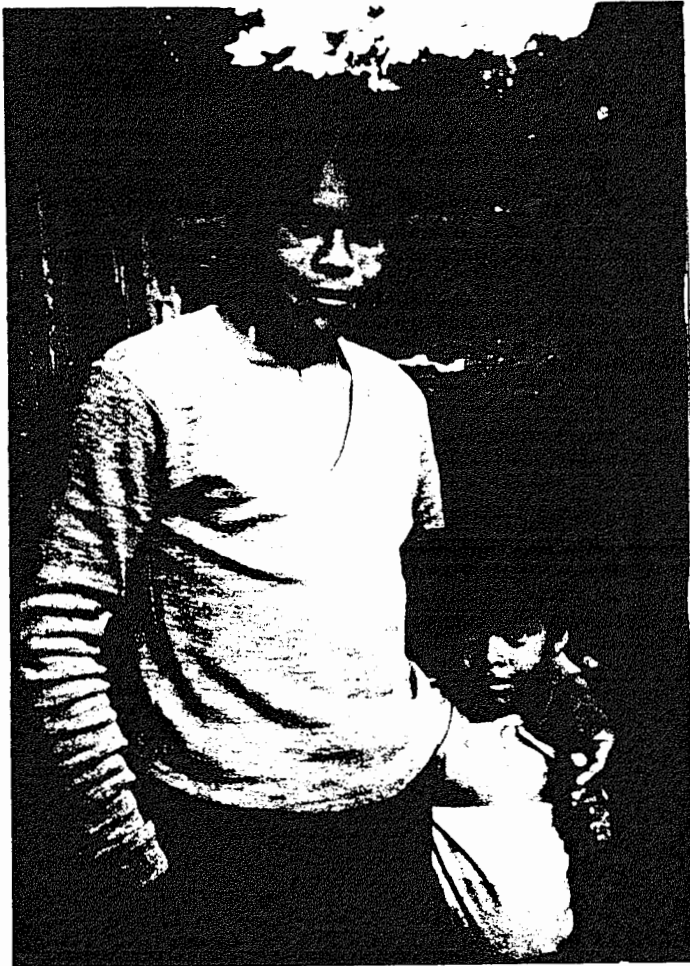
The station is situated at a considerable distance from Soloy, primarily because the location enables the signal to be reached over a wide range of the Guaymi reservation and in particular by Baha'i communities in the district of Tolé and to some extent in Boca del Toro and Veraguas. Broadcasting with 1 kilowatt of power, the effective broadcast range is up to about 30 miles when conditions are right.

The Director of the Radio Station is Manuel Florez a Salvadorian who has worked for more than a decade with the Guaymis. Overseeing his work is the Radio Station Commission of which he is a member. The three individuals of the commission are responsible for maintaining budgets, determining programing and setting the course for future projects and developments.

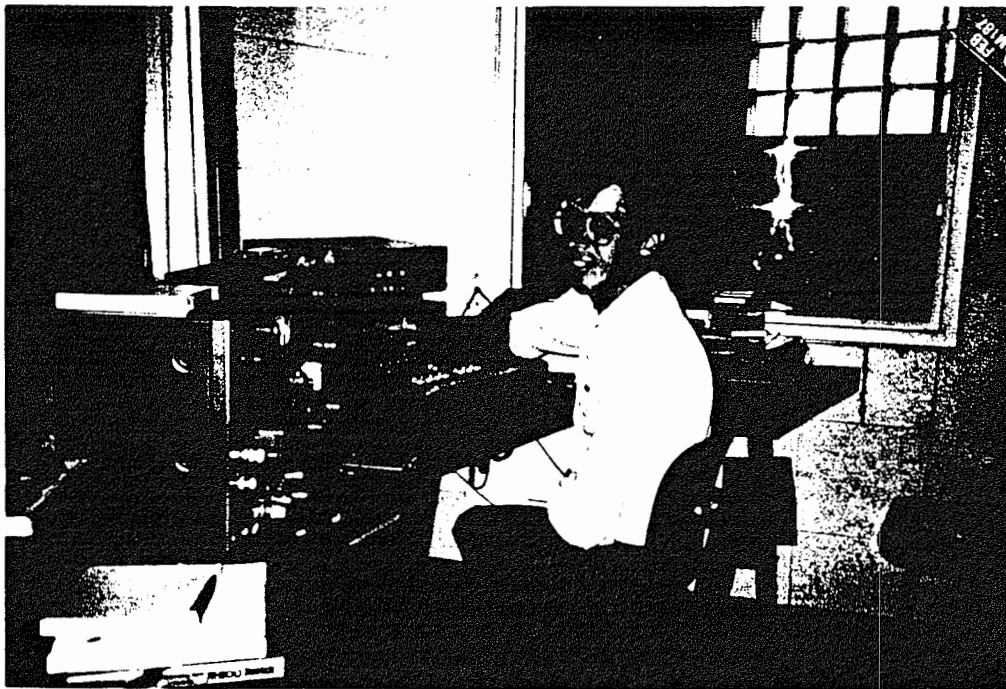
The staff is presently a mix of 3 Guaymis, 1 part time Latino and an American technician. The station d.j.s are Guaymi and Guaymi is the principle language used in broadcasts. Every effort is being made to transfer all aspects of the station over to Guaymis.

Programming is mostly a mix of international music (and in particular Indian music; although the Guaymis don't have much of their own) educational programing and public service announcements. The station is on the air fourteen hours a day with the major part (because of the difficulty of producing educational programing) being devoted to music. Educational programing has focussed on addressing social and technical problems of the Guaymis, explaining and citing the Baha'i writings and describing different cultures.

Recent special projects of the radio have been the sponsoring of community events and the creation of radio listening groups in the communities that it reaches. The station also provides the valuable service of sending messages to communities and individuals free of charge whereby creating a link between communities and the outside world.



Guaymi Auxiliary Board Member



Staff member at the project radio station

Although the station had only been running several months before I first visited it, was clear then that the quality of programing was excellent. The radio station is rapidly expanding its programs and services. It has already been responsible for increased enthusiasm among all of the communities. The most common comment I heard in communities from Baha'i and non-Baha'is alike was that they wanted more educational and spiritual programs and less music. Efforts to produce more content based programming will be difficult due to lack of sufficient qualified personnel.

c. The Regional Teaching Committee

The Regional Teaching Committee is an administrative arm of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Panama. The country is divided into sections for managerial purposes and one of those regions happens to be the area covered by the Guaymi Indians. Overseeing the "RTC" is the National Teaching Committee, whose members appointed by the National Assembly usually for period of about a year.

The RTC at the time of my second visit to Panama, consisted of 3 Guaymi men with a long history of service in the area. They tended to meet irregularly in Soloy or Boca Del Monte to discuss the organization of the following activities.

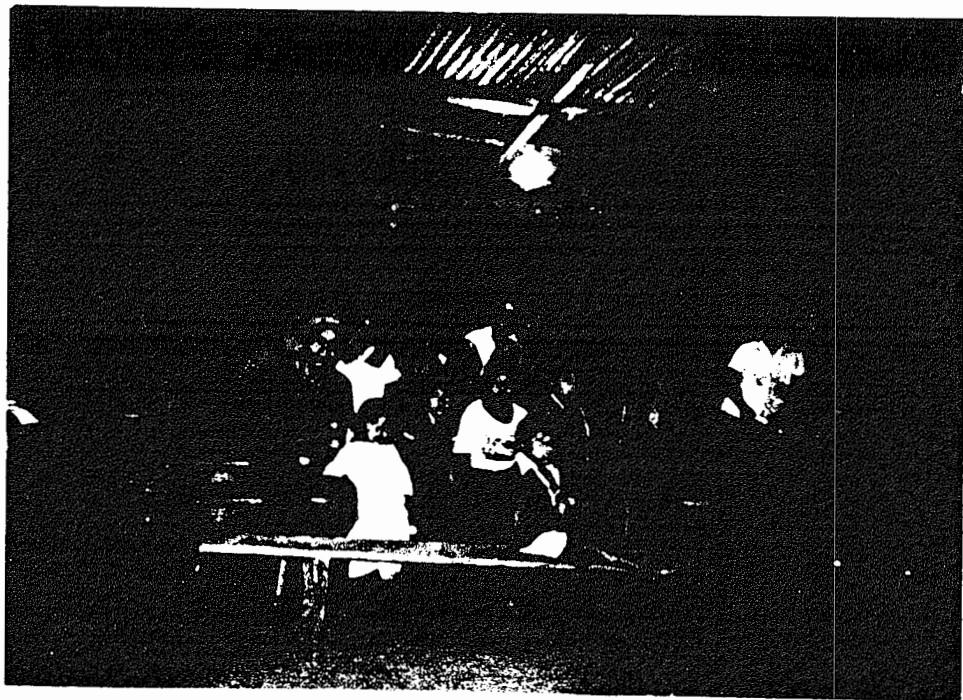
1. Strengthening of Local Assemblies (the elected Baha'i representatives of each village).
2. Consolidation projects: work aimed at increasing the level of activity and understanding of Baha'is in the villages.
3. Teaching campaigns: spreading the influence of the Faith in the region.
4. Regional and sub-regional conferences: conferences attracting large numbers of Guaymi Baha'is to talk about issues pertinent to a Baha'i Life (i.e. women's right, marriage and family life, education of children, life after death, self improvement).
5. Local Assembly Elections and Regional Electoral Conventions for the NSA.

In theory the Local Assemblies reported directly to the National Spiritual Assembly but of the 39 in the area about half had trouble functioning smoothly and needed the assistance of the RTC. The RTC's influence therefore included work that would normally fall under the jurisdiction of the LSA of each community.

The effectiveness of the RTC can be judged from several angles. To an outsider it first appeared that their influence was greatly diminished by the infrequency and sporadic nature of their planning meetings. Although they could count on the assistance of perhaps 40 experienced volunteers, the members of the RTC tended to see themselves both as planners and



LOCAL ASSEMBLY MEMBERS, AUXILIARY BOARD MEMBER AND PROJECT EXTENSION MEMBERS MEETING TOGETHER IN QUEBRADA LORO



Community meeting in Boca de Remedios in a project school house that doubles as the local Bahá'í Center

implementors. They were literally worn out from trying to follow through with their plans personally. On the other hand, the consistency and depth of their service was a tribute to both them and the Guaymi Baha'is as a group. In short they appeared to need a little more direction and some energetic new blood to function smoothly. Regardless, many of their responsibilities were met by individual initiative or by the more active Cultural Committee. Cooperation from Local Assemblies, other committees and the Guaymi Baha'is was strong.



BAHA'I YOUTH LEARNING TO FUNCTION AS CENTER
EXTENSION VOLUNTEERS VISITING REMOTE COMMUNITIES.

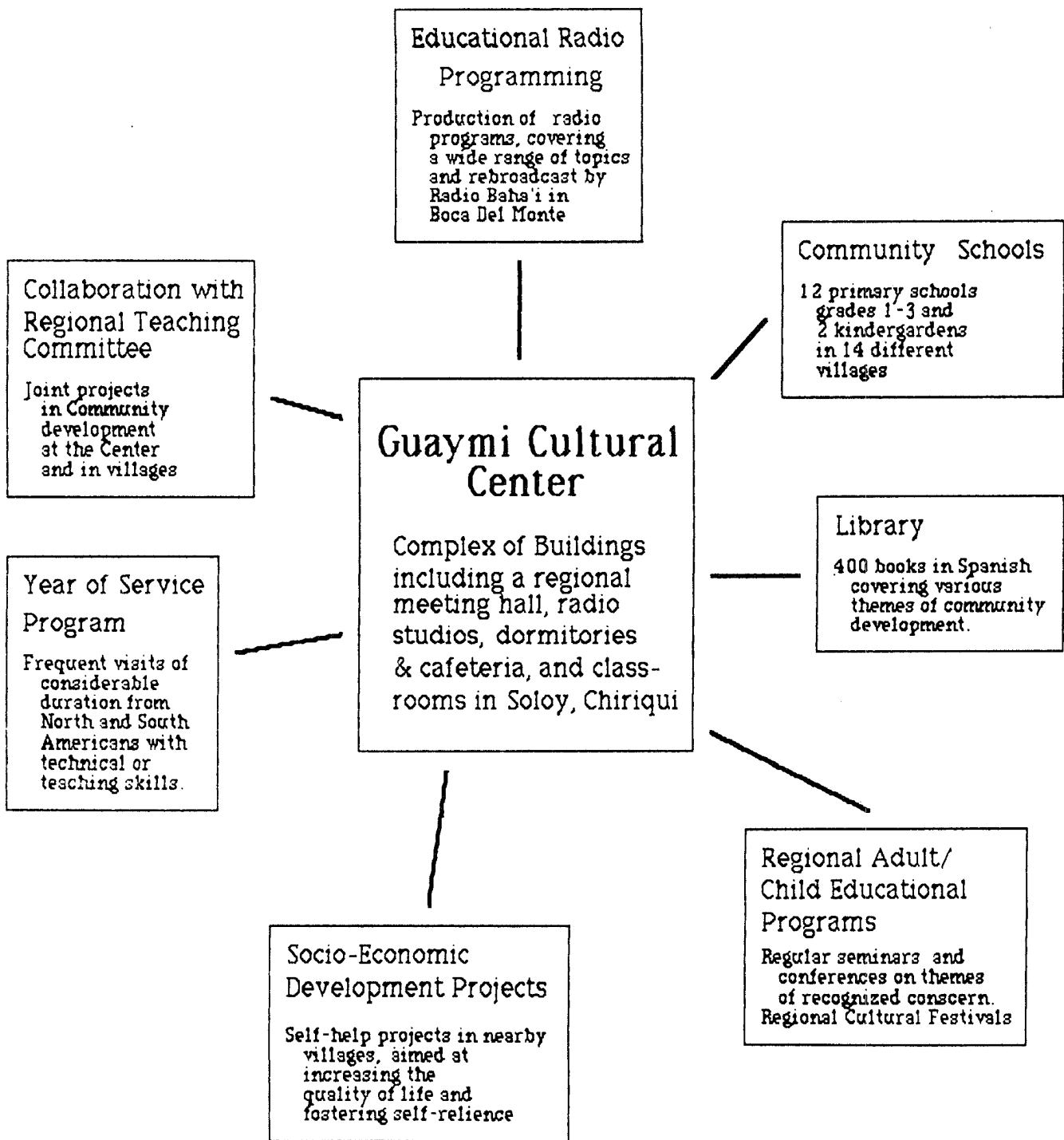
d. The Guaymi Cultural Center

The Guaymi Cultural Center is a new addition to the Guaymi Development Project. The center which began as an increase in conferences and projects which focussed on socio/economic development has evolved into a complex of small buildings and a variety of programs.

The Center is administrated by the Guaymi Cultural Center Committee which generally consists of three Guaymis and one outsider. All individuals working for the Center are volunteers with the exception of the Centers primary school teachers who receive a small stipend for their services. The number of volunteers available varies depending on the time of year and the nature of the task at hand. There is a pool of about 40 capable individuals from which the Teaching Committee and the Radio Station also draw their personnel. Many more people with less qualifications are available in the 40 or so communities in which the Project works.

The physical plant of the Cultural Center is located on the top of a small hill in Soloy. It consists of the Ruhiyah Khanum meeting hall (capacity 500), a radio studio, a small house and a recently completed multi-purpose building. The latter contains two dormitories (capacity 40 each), a kitchen and dining hall and two classrooms.

Components of the Guaymi Cultural Center



Since the center was begun its programs have been and/or are being expanded to include the following components.

1. Regional Adult and Child Education

The Center regularly hosts conferences and seminars for Guaymis of all ages. A typical conference generally lasts about three days and is attended by individuals from many communities. Conferences which are generally publicized by radio are held on a particular theme and aimed at specific Guaymi audiences. Attendance can range anywhere from 30 to 3000 depending on the nature of the program. Guaymis generally run all aspects of the programs though usually outsiders are asked to speak or facilitate at least some of topics covered. All events are free with meals, if their are any, covered by a special fund. Participants either stay with friends and family in Soloy or at the Center. From time to time, events are held in the villages to facilitate increased participation.

Recent events included a children's festival, several management courses for Local Assembly Members, a seminar on child education, Ruhi correspondence courses and a youth conference. Plans are being made to host more collaborative seminars in conjunction with institutions such as the Cooperative Extension Service and the Ministry of Education.

2. Socio/Economic Development Projects



LOCAL ASSEMBLY MEMBERS AT A CONFERENCE - GUAMMI
CULTURAL CENTER BUILDING BEHIND.



ROHIYAH KHANUM MEETING HALL AT THE GUAMMI
CULTURAL CENTER IN SOLOM

Increasingly the Center is becoming involved in the promotion of development projects in the communities. Projects such as initiation of community owned crops, local cultural centers, cooperative stores, and the building of community centers or schools have already been undertaken. In the near future programs will be started in the areas such as crop improvement, health education, handicraft production and animal husbandry. The number of Local Assemblies managing such programs will be expanded.

3. Educational Radio

The radio studios at the Center were completed in 1986. By February, 1987 programs at the Center were being recorded relayed to the radio station in Boca del Monte and aired live. By August 1987 a permanent crew was working at the Center studio. Their purpose is to fill the gap between Boca del Monte which is off of the reservation (because of its favorable transmission characteristics) and Soloy.

While currently radio program production capabilities at the Center are far more limited than those at the Radio Station, they are being expanded to cover much of the educational programing done by the Station.

4. Year of Service Program

For the past several years, volunteers from North America have come to live at the Center to aid in their programs. These individuals been given responsibilities, usually in the area of

teaching Ruhi Institute Courses and aiding in the visiting of communities. So far most of the volunteers have been young and semi-inexperienced. Individuals with expertise in health and in agriculture have expressed wishes to participate in the program in the upcoming year.

5. Community Schools

Perhaps the most established and organized aspect of the Center are its 14 community schools. Initiated originally almost 30 years ago through a true grass roots effort the one-room schools provide formal education remote villages not serviced by the Ministry of Education. The schools roughly follow the government curriculum for grades 1-3 (or in some cases kindergarten) and are administrated by a Center school director/supervisor and the Local Assemblies.

D. Personal Contact with the Guaymis

1. First Visit

a. Local Assembly Leadership Training Conference

Arriving in Panama City for the first time I was stricken by its modern appearance and relative opulence compared to other areas of Central America.

Because Eloy was involved in conferences for about five days at a local hotel I had a lot of time to myself and spent it wandering around the city and visiting old friends who in turn brought me to see sites of interest (projects in poor neighborhoods, the canal, beaches, etc.).

At least a week passed until we got up to the radio station in Boca del Monte and two more days until we got to the Cultural Center.

Boca del Monte a small, steamy cattle town, lies in the province of Chiriqui about three kilometers off of the Panamerican Highway; 7 hours from Panama City) and 45 minutes from David (Pop. 80,000). Soloy, the home Cultural Center lies about 27 kilometers due north of the Radio Station in the foothills of the mountain range that runs the length of Panama. To get there from Boca del Monte one must travel for about 1.5 to 3 hours along a dirt road that has put an end to many a four-wheel vehicle.



BOCA DEL MONTE HOME OF
THE GUAYMI RADIO STATION



CENTER OF SOLOY - MUNICIPAL BUILDING IN
THE BACKGROUND

Our ride up to Soloy in the Project pickup truck nearly put an end to our spinal columns and even so people were commenting on how much the road had been improved in recent years. Young (1971) tells us that as late as 1965 there were no roads in the Guaymi reservation. The one we were riding was the product of General Torrijos' efforts during the late 1970's.

As we road into Soloy I was taken aback by its small size general neglect. As you ride up to the Center you first pass the dusty middle school and the seemingly abandoned medical center. After driving another 5 minutes you pass a few huts and a trading outpost. A mile further up the road is what one might call the center of the town, two trading posts, a few thatch roofed shacks and an unpainted cinderblock municipal structure, 3 stark rooms, which serves as jail, court and records office. In all there are about 60 huts in Soloy but only a few are in town. Even so Soloy is to the Guaymis the equivalent of an urban center.

To get to the Cultural Center you drive straight through town (its the only way you can go) and then shortly before the road ends you veer off to the left and what seems like straight up. After about 100 yards and an avalanche of tumbling stones in your wake you come to the top. There in front of you is the Center.



COUNCILOR ELOY ANELLO AND A GROUP OF LOCAL
ASSEMBLY MEMBERS AT THE CULTURAL CENTER

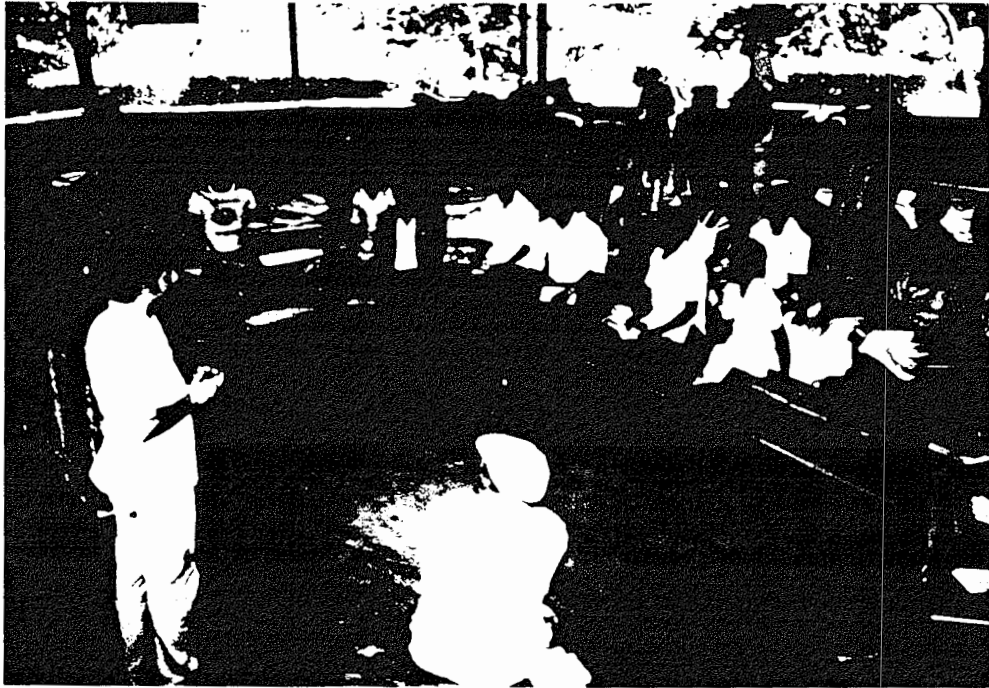


THREE GUAMI WOMEN LISTENING ATTENTIVELY
TO A SPEAKER IN THE MEETING HALL

We arrived at the Center, together with a group of perhaps 6 people, and quickly made ourselves at home in the Ruhiyah Kahnum Hall. The Guaymis that stayed at the Center before the dormitories were completed were accustomed to either sleeping outside the hall or putting together two of the 12 foot long benches and bedding down (bedding not included). We chose our benches and unloaded our luggage.

For the rest of the afternoon only a few Guaymis were to be seen at the Center. The majority of those were busy putting the finishing touches on the new Cultural Center building. To be seen among them was Paol Jensen a Danish jack-of-all-trades and member of the National Assembly who had also directed construction on the radio station, the radio studios and several other structures.

Toward dinner time the members of the Cultural Committee appeared and began putting together an itinerary for the conference. They sat together at a picnic table together in one corner of the hall with Counsellors Eloy Anello and Ruth Pringle and Auxiliary Board Member Fidel Vejerano and wrote made up a list of speakers for the night. Fidel who owns a store Soloy was given \$50.00 US from a fund and agreed to provide enough rice, salt, sugar and oil at cost to feed the participants.



Management Training Program at
the Guaymi Cultural Center

At around seven o'clock other Guaymis began appearing through the darkness. By 8:00 the numbers had swelled to several hundred; women with their children, men with their flashlights; all standing or sitting around the fringes of circular hall.

The conference was opened with prayers and songs. In the front of the hall facing the speakers were about 70 members of 13 Local Assemblies; school teachers, and visitors like myself. Surrounding them both on the inside and the outside of the hall the rest listened stoically.

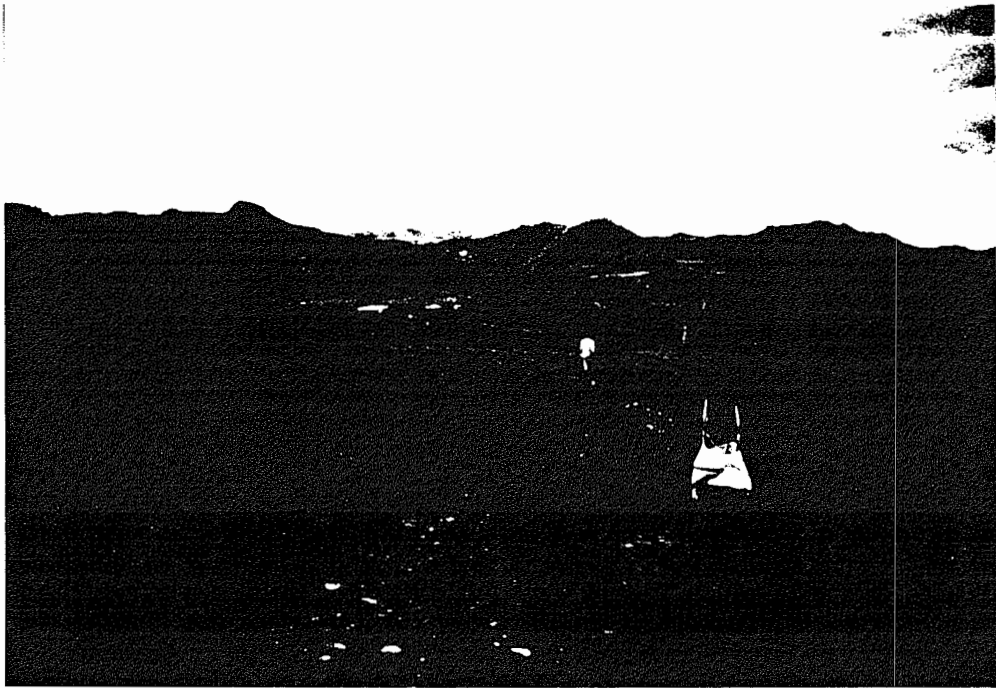
In what I would later learn was true Guaymi tradition one by one the Guaymi individuals on the schedule who rise and speak. They spoke about the future of the Guaymi people, about the importance of unity and their gratitude to those who had come to visit. Over and over they repeated their messages in Guaymi which in turn were translated into Spanish. Finally, beginning at about 11:30 that night the Counsellors each spoke. Perhaps more significant than the message they brought was the love they conveyed. For four days Eloy Anello presented his course, each day the information that was conveyed was a revelation for those involved, but the heart and soul of the conference, the feeling of love and service was never lost.

This same atmosphere was present to some degree at all of the subsequent conferences I was to attend or help present. It is a characteristic that distinguishes the Guaymi Baha'is from many other groups.

b. Visiting Local Communities

After the conference when the Assembly Members, the outsiders and the onlookers had gone home I became a good excuse for the Cultural Center Committee, the Regional Teaching Committee and the Auxiliary Board Member to organize a community visit marathon which was to last 10 days and present travel to in 8 villages. Within 24 hours volunteers were sought out, supplies were bought and the group which fluctuated between four and 8 persons during the expedition was ready to start out within a day.

Getting from one community to another is no easy task on the Guaymi Reservation. It took about four hours to get to our first destination Cerro Banco which I estimate was about 10 miles away. We accomplished the task by following crossing two cable bridges, a ranch and then crossing a seemingly endless string of hills until we got to the village. When we got there we went to see one of the Members of the Assembly who had heard on the radio that we were coming. While three of us went from hut to hut advising people of a meeting that we were going to hold, the rest were served a dinner of rice and a fragment of sardine. As we continued with our publicity task we came upon a compound that our host assured us was the former home of Mama Chi (the founder of the Mama Chi movement). Those



Extension team arriving in Cerro Banco

present were openly hostile to me as an outsider. When I told them I was not Panamanian their attitude changed to one of guarded distrust.

As darkness descended the local Baha'is began appearing in the government school house where we were to have our meeting (This was the one community that we visited that had such a school. Usually we met at the Baha'i schools). Two candles that we brought with us were lit creating eerie atmosphere; women with small children sat on the concrete floor like so many stones, refusing to speak; men talked among themselves until the host introduced us. In all there were about 35 people present.

Each of us had prepared to talk about a different theme. One talked about a trip they had made to Colombia to visit the Gujira Indians and the positive aspects of the Guaymi culture. Another discussed ways to improve community life. The lone woman of our group, shouted forth a convincing argument about how and why women could begin to exercise their rights to be the men's equals (starting right then). I spoke about what it meant to be a Native American and the importance of learning and maintaining Indian culture. The meeting went on for several hours until we all had spoke. Throughout that time songs were sung, prayers were said and most importantly action plans were made. In this case they had a burning desire to use some donated land to build a community center. What they were lacking was the \$200.00 U.S. they needed for the roof but even this was not

an insurmountable problem for them. The meeting ended at about 12 o'clock after which time we slept on the benches and the floor. I was the only one that had so much as a sheet with which to cover myself.

In the morning we were served oatmeal and coffee after which, with the exception of the topics that were covered there was a repeat of the night before. At noon I visited about 6 houses to conduct a radio survey and by 2:00 we took some group photos and then departed on foot.

This same process including the transportation part, in each of the eight village that we visited. Although there were differences in terms of the number of individuals that participated in our programs and the size and make-up of the communities, generally speaking the communities contained about 10 houses, the majority of the people were Baha'is (the balance were Mama Chi) and the project schools were the dominant feature and rallying point of the community.

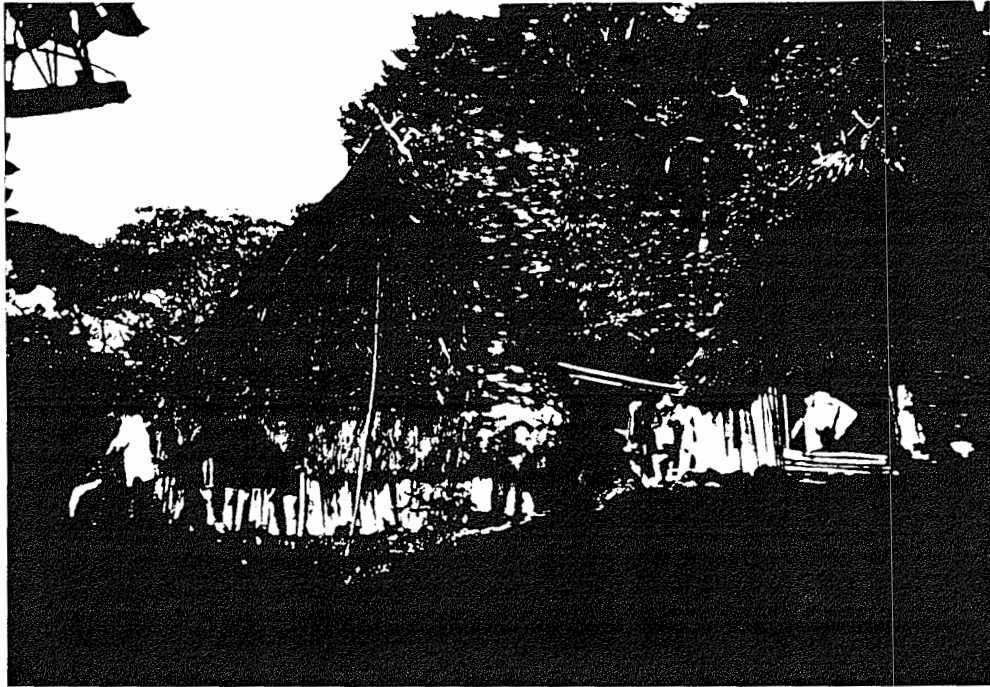
As we got further and further up into the mountains Guaymi culture grew stronger and stronger. The furthest community Perdiz was like traveling to a different world from Soloy. Men all wore uniforms...face paint, dairy boots, a Panama shirt and baseball caps. Women, in addition to the usual colorful Guaymi dresses, wore a rainbow assortment of necklaces and bracelets, multi colored stacks of hair clips, nose rings, face paint and had chiseled their teeth to points. Also notable were the closed hogan type houses with tiny igloo like entrances. After four hours of



Team member on the way to Perdis



Family compound near Perdis



Two Houses in Perdis



Inside of a house



Crossing a Guaymi bridge



Taking a break

talk, figuring everyone was getting board I make the mistake of suggesting we turn in. There was an outburst from the 70 or so community members, "We want to take advantage of your visit." "We are only just getting started!". Needless to say the meeting went on till morning but not before everything that had been said was repeated at least once and picked apart by the group the way New Englanders eat lobster. No morsel was left untouched.

Likewise as the trip went on I found myself learning more and more about the Guaymi Culture, usually the hard way. Many things that were done seemed to have a significance different from what they would in the Latino culture; who talks when, who walks in what order, how food is eaten. Luckily the Guaymis I was traveling with had a considerable amount of experience with visitors like myself: They were able to explain my actions to those less knowledgeable. Even so I wish that there had been someone to give me an orientation.

An interesting thing happened which I think is pretty revealing about the Guaymis and many Indian peoples in general. The trip was over and I was hiking back to the Panamerican Highway with one of the members of the group named Arcenio Cuevas. He had hardly spoken a word to me during the whole trip and all of the sudden we found ourselves chatting away about some sensitive and personal

II. INTRODUCTION p.40

subjects. I asked him why he had opened up. He told me "I was observing you to see whether you were worth talking to."
"I have made my decision."

c. Parting Thoughts

In a sense I had made a decision too. I had undergone physical hardships which I had seldom experience before. Even so, I felt committed to come back and do more. Everywhere I went I interviewed people and discussed ways they thought they might be able to solve problems they were having.

One area that interested me was the idea of forming a system of community cooperatives. Two of the three stores in Soloy were owned by Latinos who were essentially living on the reservation illegally. Even one of them was becoming enormously rich, not just through the sale of mechandize but by lending money, purchasing coffee at bargain prices, running their own bus service, leasing large tracts of cattle land almost for free and passing money under the table to Guaymi politicians that might have something to say about their activities. Nobody would dispute the fact that generally speaking the store owners and their families were hard working industrious people but they were completely dominating the area economically. There was enough expertise and capital to set up a system of community stores which could purchase goods from and sell coffee to Guaymi owned cooperative in town at favorable prices.

A second area which I researched had to do with helping to improve food and cash crop production in the area. While I was traveling from town to town I couldn't help but notice

the scarcity of food in the villages. For two consecutive years the Guaymis had been experiencing extended droughts during parts of the year that it should have been raining. This had not only resulted in widespread hunger but had lead to a decapitalization of the general populous and financial dependence on Latino store owners. Many people died from hunger related illnesses.

The function and organization of extension activities of the project was an area which also appeared to need to be improved. While the Guaymi Baha'is were to be commended on their degree of dedication it seemed as though too few people were carrying on too much of the load. Everyone had to make a living but those who served the most had very little time to be with their families and ensure both harvests and a source of cash income. Arsenio and Venancio who took me up into the villages typified this condition. Venancio's family was starving (Venancio himself had tuberculosis) and Arsenio hadn't even seen his family for a month before were went to stay with them on the way out of the reservation. It was clear to me that new volunteers had to be sought out and oriented to take some of the work load off of the existing volunteers.

In terms of organization both the Cultural Committee and the Regional Teaching committee were operating at a sub-optimum level. Plans were generally made and carried out with the intervention of institutions such as the National Teaching Committee or the National Assembly or when

visitors were present. The Guaymis were capable of being more autonomous but were not accustomed to having regularly scheduled or self initiated activities at the regional level. Much could be done in the area of creating autonomous action plans and delivery systems.

Many people I talked to be it at the National, Regional or Local level expressed the desire that some type of high school level program be developed by the Cultural Center. The shape of such a school ranged from a Vocational Agricultural High School to a rural university such as the FUNDAEC Model in Colombia to an expansion and systematization of the current Center adult programs. There were unique benefits and drawbacks with each. Because I felt I understood each of the directions fairly well, I felt that I could be of use in addressing this issue.

Finally, as I came in more and more contact with the Center's community schools it began to dawn on me that it was a program without much direction. Teachers in the rural communities made noble efforts to perform their duties but there was a lack of many of the inputs that formal schools generally count on that it was remarkable that year to year the school system was relatively stable. A representative of the National Assembly was working with the teachers on this problem but I felt that I could be helpful in the area of organizational development.

II. INTRODUCTION p.44

Upon returning to Panama City I discussed these points with Counselor Ruth Pringle. She was particularly interested in the development of a Rural University at the Center and agreed to help me find partial funding for a return visit of two months later on in the year.

2. Researching the Literature and Preparing for a Second Visit

After returning to the University of Massachusetts I continued working on the problems that I had identified. My efforts took the form of researching the literature, enrolling in courses and seminars in areas that I felt my experience was lacking and putting together a collection of materials that I could bring back to Panama.

My first discovery was that compared to other Indian Groups such as the Cunas or the Mayans, there is not much written about the Guaymis. The books that I was able to find however, dated as they were in anthropological terms quite revealing (mostly based upon the writings of Young). By researching at local libraries I was able to find out much about things like local customs, heredity, and political organization, but very little about education, cultural perceptions and agriculture. Information about most technical areas such as health or sanitation was completely lacking. There were many areas that I felt that I would have to research myself on the reservation.

While in Panama I found that the courses I had taken at the University had been helpful in understanding many aspects of the Guaymi Project and the Guaymi Communities. There were some area that I felt I would like to know more about. One of those areas was educational supervision. I took such a course and found it quite deficient in content

but useful in the general supervisional model it presented. I had a similar experience with courses in school administration. More useful were the courses I took in international educational planning and agricultural education. These classes served as a basis for directions that I would later attempt to pursue with the Guaymis.

By the time I was ready to return to Panama I had amassed quite an assortment of materials that I thought would be helpful while working with the Guaymis. Among the items were training materials, a slide show, 6 books written about the tribe and a number of technical manuals. Also present were a compact camera, a tape recorder for interviewing, and a small radio. Somehow I had also managed to collect an assortment of people for the trip, five college students from Idaho and the University of Massachusetts and my wife, a doctoral student in International Education.

Perhaps the most significant item I had collected was a greatly reduced idea of what I wanted my Master's Project to focus on. By the time I was ready to leave I was convinced that I would like to design and conduct a teacher training conference for the Center School Teachers and their director. I believed that the focus of such a conference should be practical ways that the system could be improved. I was not sure what form it would take but was convinced that the Guaymis should have a say in its design and implementation.

3. Second Visit

My second visit to the Guaymis was characterized by a flurry of activity. Coupled with this was sobering learning process which culminated in a new level of understanding about the Guaymis and a decision to return to work with them for the period of a year.

The process was facilitated by increased exposure to a wide range of Administrators, Government Civil Servants, Guaymi Volunteers of all classes and communities. Interaction took the form of interviews, shared work and volunteer experiences, observation, participatory research, research of documents and responses at conferences. Many of the conclusions that I had reached during my first visit were changed resulting in an increase of effectiveness on my part and why acceptance by the Guaymis.

My mandate or reason for being there was supplied by the Counsellor Ruth Pringle although much of my itinerary had to be negotiated with the National Assembly, the National Teaching Committee, the Regional Teaching Committee, and the Cultural Committee. I was able, with the help of my wife, to complete everything planned but not without considerable effort because of the difficulty of communicating between so many parties and across such distances. Fortunately everyone involved was patient and understanding.

Rather than enter into a long explanation of the specifics of the second trip I am presenting its major points in outline form.

ITINERARY:

December 11	Arrival of and Eloy Anello and Grant in Panama City. Planning sessions, meet with Youth Committee of Panama City.
December 15 - 19	Help conduct the Leadership Training Course for 11 Guaymi Assemblies in Soloy.
December 20	Arrival of Marisa in David from Costa Rica.
December 20 - 21	Attended Donald Witzel's Course for Guaymi school teachers in Soloy.
December 22 - 23	Visited with the Nasroula Hashimi, Executive director of Radio Baha'i at his home in David.

II. INTRODUCTION p.49

- December 24 - 27 Attended Baha'i summer school at Villa Virginia near Panama City. Spoke on "development."
- December 28 - 1/4 Both down with the flu and recuperating at the Lucas' home in Panama City.
- January 6 - 7 Helped with supervision of construction at the Guaymi Cultural Center in Soloy.
- January 8 - 11 Directed the youth training conference for 36 Guaymi Youth and 2 visiting US youth. Aimed at identifying and orienting more Center volunteers.
- January 12 - 19 Directed Youth Village Consolidation program. 2 Teams of trained youth visit 12 distant Guaymi communities.
- January 20 - 23 Visit and study Radio Baha'i, Boca del Monte.

II. INTRODUCTION p.50

- January 23 Marisa travels to Panama to stay at the home of the Director of Special Projects for the office of the President of the Republic. She departs the following day for Medellín, Colombia.
- January 24 - 25 Direct Leadership Training Seminar in Quebrada Loro for Guaymi Assemblies in the eastern part of Chiriqui.
- January 26 - 27 Direct travel teaching team visit to the Tolé district of Chiriqui.
- January 27-30 Orientation/planning course for Guaymi elementary school teachers at the Cultural Center in Soloy.
- January 31 - 2/1 Travel with a group of 17 Guaymis to present traditional dances and participate in a race at a fair in Concepción, Chiriqui. Meet with representatives of the Banco Nacional de Desarrollo Agripecuario and the Vice President

II. INTRODUCTION p.51

of the National Medical Association to discuss possibilities of collaboration with the Guaymi Projects.

February 2 - 6

Training program in Boca del Monte to prepare Latino and Guaymi youth for a National Teaching Committee teaching project in the Latino communities near Radio Baha'i. Organization and initiation of the project in San Lorenzo. Meetings with representatives of the Ministry of Education and the MIDA (the agricultural extension bureau) to find information and investigate ways to work together to serve the Guaymis.

February 7

Meeting with representatives of the NSA in Panama. Departure to the U.S.

4. Teachers Conference as Master's Project Focus

As the schedule of my second visit demonstrates my activities were both intensive and extensive. The major thrust of these activities were to attempt to better understand development options among the Guaymi Baha'is and provide a series of activities in the area that would address some of the most pressing problems they were facing. It quickly became evident that in order to make significant changes in such a broadbased area I would have to work with the Guaymis over a period of years. Much of my actions and research were intended to fit into a long-term vision of what some of us felt was needed. Subsequent visits have had as their aim the objective of following through with that plan.

A more mundain aim of my visit was to try to conduct research on alternatives available to the Center community schools. This research was intended to be used as the main focus of my master's project. From the time I arrived it beacame part of my daily schedule. The rest of this paper deals with some of my findings, a teacher's conference which was a natural outcome and some of the findings I made there.

**III. BACKGROUND ON
THE
GUAYMI SCHOOLS**

A. Traditional Nonformal Education

To date I have not been able to find more than a few words devoted to the subject of education among the Guaymis. This may be in part because of the late arrival of formal schooling in the area and in part due to the need to explain a narrow definition of the subject.

My own research indicates that nonformal education played a significant role in traditional Guaymi culture. Several traditions which were conducted periodically guaranteed the passing on of cultural knowledge or the communication of news from other areas.

While festivals such as the Balseria and Chicheria were important because they result in the reunion of distant groups and the sharing of information, dances, songs and other traditions, two traditions were probably of greater importance in terms of the knowledge they imparted, the Gueto and dreams.

The Gueto or exorcism was held whenever someone had a bad dream. To the Guaymis dreams are very significant and it is believe that a severe one can even kill them. Therefore when a someone had a bad dream a Sukia or Divino would be called in. After performing a series of elaborate ceremonies including the erection of crosses at the entrance of the settlement, all the members of the village would unite under the direction of the Sukia. A weak cacao drink would be made and during the period of four days and nights those present would shun sleep and fast, drinking only the chocolate. The significant educational aspect

of this ceremony is that the Sukia would spend a significant part of the time lecturing, chanting and telling stories to the group. At the end of this period it was believed that the victim was saved.

Although the literature discusses the major purpose of the Gueto as that of exorcism, many of the people I interviewed said that it could be held for any reason. Indeed there is considerable evidence that similar meetings were held for purely educational purposes as evidenced by the modern day custom of serving cacao staying up talking all night whenever important visitors come. This happened in almost half of the villages I visited and did not happen the one time when crosses for exorcism could be found at the entrance to town.

Another important and widespread type of education was education through dreams. Through dreams Guaymis, especially the Sukyas, received knowledge about the future, about the health of family members and about things around them such as the use of medicinal plants. As one young Sukia told my wife, the spirits gave her specific informations about healing in her dreams but always at a price. With each bit of knowledge came a difficult test, one which should she fail it would kill her. These dreams are inherited by relatives of Sukyas that have passed on. They play an important role in the training of new Sukyas (Alphonse, 1956, p. 121) I have seen many cases where other Guaymis believed that they had communicated with the dead and later seen that which was told come to pass.

Regardless of which mechanisms were used to pass on education it is clear that if the present is indicative of past tendencies former Guaymi educational methods relied heavily on the repetitive, drawn out lecture as a major means of instruction.

B. Formal Education

I have not been able to find information on the exact date that formal education came to the Guaymis. It is important however to consider that the Guaymis once inhabited the costal planes on both sides of the central mountain range. The Latinos who initially came to live among them were successful at socializing the majority of them into the what became Western Panamanian culture. Only those who retreated into the more inaccessible mountain areas retained their Guayminess.

By 1945 it has been postulated that no Guaymi had ever completed high school. Elementary schools however were common in Guaymi areas though probably almost exclusively in the larger towns such as San Felix, and Tolé.

Since that period there has been a steady increase in the number of schools in the area with the exception of a period in the sixties when the members of the Mama Chi movement withdrew their children in an attempt to avoid contact with Latinos. (Young, 1971, pp. 214-15)

From what I was able to ascertain from the Ministry of Education in Chiriqui there are probably no more than about 80 elementary schools in the Guaymi area. Typically these schools are staffed by Latinos who have been certified through the Normal high school program. They earn about \$300.00 per month and prefer to commute to school and return home on weekends.

Government primary schools are tin roofed, cinderblock structures which usually contain anywhere between 1 and 4 rooms and a complement of as many teachers. Curriculums are watered down versions of the national curriculum. Teachers generally have to teach more than one grade simultaneously in the same room and sometimes as many as 6. The schools are responsible for teaching the students numeracy and literacy but capable students must go to live in Latino towns to complete high school. Many of these students never return to the reservation.

Several agricultural middle schools make it possible for exceptional Guaymis to attend regional vocational boarding high schools near the reservation. Scholarships make it possible for a handful of Guaymis to attend a teachers high schools although the Guaymis are severely handicapped by the low quality of education they receive at the primary level.

Significant problems faced by the Ministry of Education in Chiriqui with respect to the Guaymis are teacher absenteeism, poor supervision, insufficient money for materials and school repairs, and poor progress on the part of students. The people I talked at the ministry appeared to be operating in crisis mode, trying to keep up with new demands for education with very limited human and financial resources.

Mirando Palacio a supervisor for the San Felix area stated that it was very difficult to motivate teachers. Teachers tended to want to live in the major cities and with few resources it was almost impossible for him to check up on his 20 schools which were widely scattered throughout the area.

The director of statistics at the Chiriqui Ministry of Education was at a loss for solutions as to what to do about the Guaymi schools. She explained that it was all they could do to guarantee that there were enough desks at the schools. The failure rate averaged about 25%. Guaymis that made it to the city were seen as charity cases. Their language and mathematics levels were so poor that only the best were able to get by.

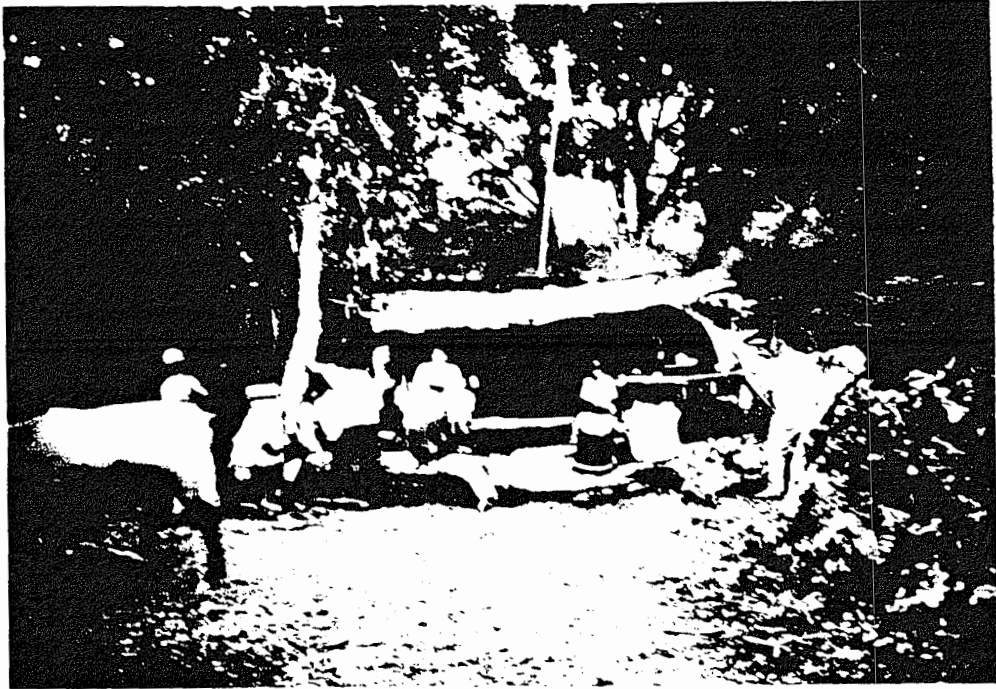
The Guaymi children in one settlement told me that they didn't go to school because it was too far to walk. Other's told me that the teacher was mean. Many parents keep their children home because they distrust the Latino run educational system.

Parents in Soloy said that there is a high turn-over rate at the local middle school. Teachers didn't understand the Guaymi students and the Guaymis didn't understand them.

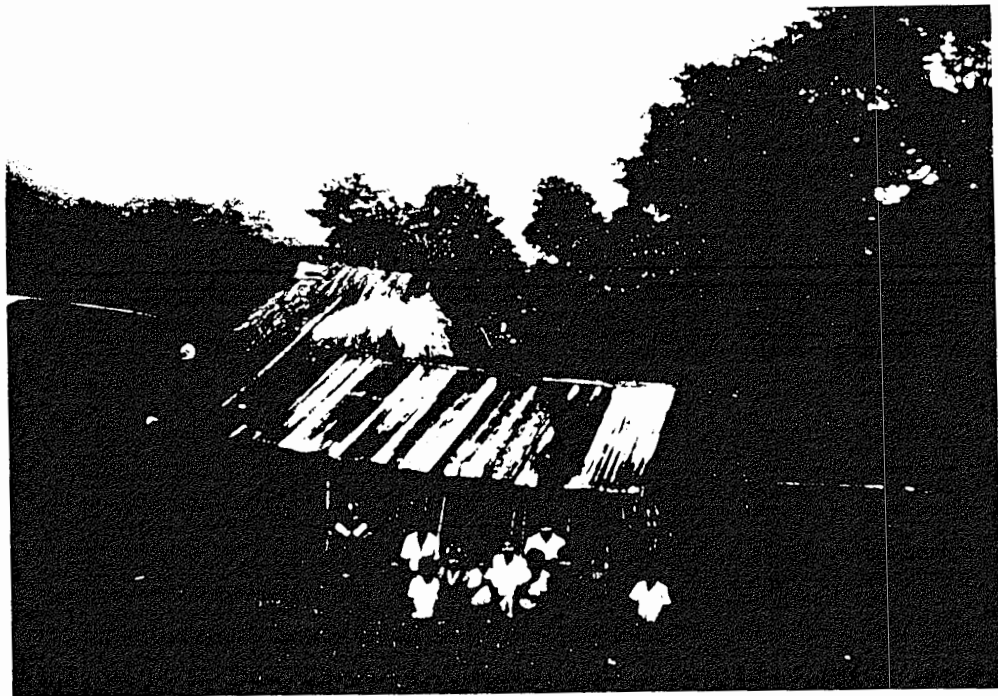
C. State of the Project Schools

Prior to holding the teachers conference in Soloy I was able to able to interview a considerable number of knowledgeable people about the Baha'i community schools. Bonifacia xxxx the National Assembly representative to the Cultural Center; Ruth Pringle, Counselor; Donald Witzel, ex-Counselor; Fidel Bejerano, Auxiliary Board Member; Gregorio Sanchez, director as well as a host of others were able to provide information about the school, this coupled with some rather sketchy records from the National Assembly Offices and personal observations and interviews in the villages served as my main source of information about the schools.

The typical school, there were 14 of them, was a one-room structure made from wooden posts pounded into the ground and covered with a tin or thatch roof. The schools, were located at the center of each settlement and had enough makeshift benches (a plank placed upon a "Y" shaped branch) to seat each student. The 25 or so students at each school were generally divided into three grades all taught simultaneously by the same teacher. School location was determined by several factors. Generally there had to be a strong Local Assembly to sponsor them but there also had to be a demonstrated need (large numbers of children within walking distance and a no government school). There also



Project school near Boca Balsa



Project school in Alto Mango