

LETTERS TO, FROM, AND CONCERNING NARGANA
January - June of 1919

Nargana, 1/07/19, Schoolmistress Ana de James to Intendente:

It gives me pleasure to be able to comply with my duty, satisfying your desires with respect to the report that you ask of me in your [letter], relating to the "tamborito" that took place on the 25th of last month, in this educational establishment under my responsibility.

That tamborito,.. was improvised to bring enthusiasm and harmony to the festivities... for example, a comedy among five schoolgirls and recitations by the children... A greased pole, long distance races among the students, egg jumps,.. in the evening, after the usual civic procession [i.e. a parade] with torches, the comedy and recitations were carried out, and as it was my duty to give an invitation to the Chief of the place, which in his case was a marked sacrifice, [because he and his followers always pick quarrels], it is the teacher who takes the blame. That same day of the 25th in the evening there was a strong argument with one of his men. . . .

Now, as can be seen in my data, spirits were saddened by what had happened, [and after the singing of the National Anthem] in order to dissipate all trace of the quarrel, I improvised [a] tamborito... ("La Pollera"), which the children and their parents viewed with pleasure, and desirous of learning to dance like me, all of them without exception felt very happy; only for the chief of this island, the tamborito had the flavor and color that by his ideas he wanted to give it [i.e. he found it immoral] counselling some of the parents concerning their daughters and the tamborito. . . .

And it much surprises me that this tamborito, so in vogue, as much in the capital as in the provinces of the interior, should have reached [the intendente's] office with a scandalous character (according to them), and yet it is not immorality among them to bath naked in front of my schoolhouse in class hours; this indeed, which is scandalous for whoever wants to implant morality and discipline in a school... [etc.]

Nargana, 2/05/19, Young Men's Organization to Intendente:

We the undersigned have the pleasure of greeting you and rendering you the respect due you as well as the pres. [This letter] carries as its objective to declare to you that on the 5th [?] of this current month in the night and early hours [of the morning], being in the residence of Sr. Claudio Iglesias with all due respect and silence, Sr. Carlos Robinson, together with his fellows and his police, committed the depravity of vilely outraging us for no reason at all, . . .

You should know that we are not Americans, nor are we governed by American laws, but rather Panamanian, the same as the flag that waves above us, so we await your help... [signed by a long list of names]

NARGANA LETTERS CONTINUED

Nargana, 4/16/19, Anna Coope to a friend in the U.S. [excerpt]:

...A beautiful morning. I have been busy with my housework and now a few minutes to rest. Looking out at my door I can see the carpenters. Twenty-eight concrete pillars are going up and there are to be thirty-six. Think of it! We are preparing for other missionaries who will come. This is to be headquarters, so now it looks fine. Two weeks today they started. The foundation work is the most difficult for we are building on the beach. Oh, the enemy has been busy. On April 1st, a truly remarkable day, three Panamanian policemen came to my house, gave me a very official letter to stop building this house. Well, you can imagine my feelings...

[Coope takes a canoe immediately to Porvenir, where she confronts the Intendente:]

He said, "Well, if you have been telling them that all these six years, they ought to be converted." I told him some of them were. He said he was a free thinker, and I said, "So am I. Whom the son of God makes free is free indeed, and the Bible is the only Book that gives us freedom. By reading and obeying God would send His Holy Spirit to teach us how to live a free life."

[The Intendente forces Coope to sign an agreement according to which she will cease teaching school and only offer Christian instruction in Spanish.]

Panama, 5/ /19, President Belisario Porras to Schoolmistress de James, Nargana:

I wish to express to you my satisfaction with the services that you are donating to the country, our beloved Panama, and with the work of civilization through the instruction in the Public School that is in your worthy charge on that island; and also to beg that you endeavor, as an advance in this work of civilization and national culture, to obtain that the indian girls do not use rings in their noses nor [beads] on their legs and arms.

Nargana, 6/19/19, Ana Coope to friend in the U.S.:

... Well some policemen come up and arrested the Chief's brother and a young married man because Alfred, the Chief's brother, whose eldest girl came to my school, and all the girls have to take the ring out of their noses by order of the President. Well, I heartily approve of it and have done my very best to get them to do it: so has the Chief and he has set them the example by not having his two little girls' noses or ears pierced. Well the government is doing it in such a mighty way, demanding that they do it, that of course the Indians are mad clear thru. And while they have taken out the ring from the smallest girls, the big girls would not take out the ring, not even those who had been going to the public school. Ever since this order was issued they left school. Force work will never do like love. They love us and when we talk of anything that is bad and tell them, they agree and talk and think and change, so that before Government orders, many of the babies had no noserings

Nargana, 6/ /19, Detachment Head Garrido to Intendente:

etc. etc.

Here in Nargana Chale [i.e. Charly Robinson] has continued getting up to his tricks, but always hidden as is his custom in order to clean himself [of blame], saying that the village rose up against him because the police wasn't there. After my departure... a delegation under Chale's orders left for Panama, to meet with the President. Today Claudio followed with various of his followers, with the same goal, but the latter, as you know, is one of ours and he did it publically, the opposite of the others, who did it in the middle of the night so the police wouldn't know... etc.

Nargana, 6/22/19, Julio Carles to Intendente:

Charles Robins has just brought together the Indians with subversive purposes, telling them they shouldn't allow the police to come here, and they armed themselves with knives and staves to hit the police with; and at eight the old indians who were sent to Corazón de Jesús, attacking the indigenous police, to which we had to give aid accompanied by [Latin] rubber-tappers and thus we were able to rescue them struggling with rifles in hand and thus we are, in this moment... we are waiting arms in hand for the attack they have planned. All this took place almost within sight of Sr. Garrido as he left for Puerto Obaldía.

Your presence is needed with the greatest brevity, but you should punish with a firm hand... They have also said that from tommorrow on they will not send their children to the government schools, that they want the protestant ones.

from an oral narrative by Samuel Morris, 1/91:

People were making such a noise, a great racket. My sister, my little sister said, "Let's go see... Off we went, running. Aii! We got there, we did. To the house there, now, Claudio Iglesias's... Claudio was an unusual man, tall, and strong, strong. Two men were holding him by the arms, they couldn't get him out, he wasn't out... Aii! well look! ...old men were fighting on the ground with youths.. On and on and on. Then they pried him loose. Then they got him out. Fierce, Claudio was, umh! On the point, on Nargana's point.. there was a little jail... They put Claudio in there. In he went. . . .

Claudio sat there. You see, Claudio was inside the "pot," [i.e. in jail], smashing at things, crash! that's what he did. Knocking things down. Then the others went to him, Luis González and all, they came to get him, Claudio. When they got to him, they said, [whispered] "Claudio. Don't make a fuss. Wait for us. Wait. We're here for you, we'll get away. We'll get away! Claudio didn't make any more noise. He had a canoe, Claudio did... Then they did it. While they made noise, then they came and got him out. Then umh! he got away, Claudio. He fled to the point [i.e. Porvenir]...