

Photo Flateau, Panama

The Baibeia Clubhouse Theatre—1950. Stateside cities have larger theatres, but none finer. Cost almost a million dollars.

Ostensibly no profit is made by commissaries or clubhouses save for a small margin of safety. The width of that margin, however, is a popular topic of conversation in the field of unofficial conjecture. Elimination of profit, plus the absence of taxes, together with mass buying, top-shelf credit, and the markets of the whole world to shop in, combine to keep retail costs low. For example, gasoline sells at twelve and a half cents per gallon. A Panamanian merchant of sizable purchasing credit, asserts that his costs on a certain refrigerator appreciably exceed the commissaries' retail price.

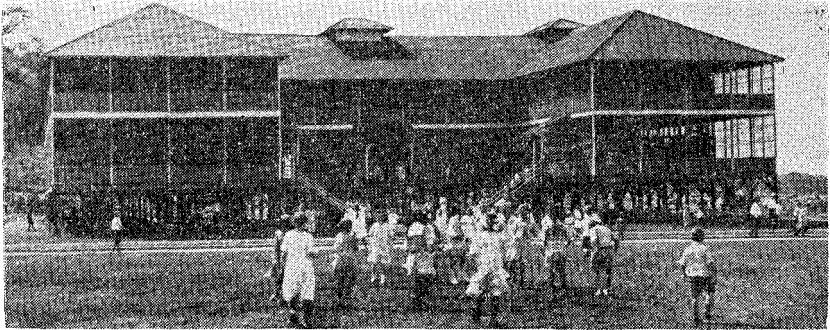
"Brat" Life

With perilous pride the local youth born in the Panama Canal Zone have dubbed themselves "brats." The species, they say, has three varieties: Army, Canal Zone, and Navy. In the contemptuous sense they are, of course, no more brats than any other cross-section of young Americans.

Their alleged allergy to the assumption of responsibilities has a familiar ring that probably echoes as far back as humanity's first "older" generation. The gradual abandonment of rural life and the rapid advent of a push-button era combine to rob

that charge, so frequently made by the aging, of its realism. In all the Canal Zone there is no such thing as a wood box to fill, coal or snow to shovel, or even a privately-owned lawn mower to push. The quality of soil and multiplicity of ravenous insects discourage private gardening. The absence of such chores, plus the presence of a maid in almost every household, leave few domestic routines to be assumed by young folk. Even spending money cannot be earned in an area which offers no private enterprise and a very few odd jobs. Doubtless the consistently high standard of family income often encourages a larger weekly allowance than is wise. If these combine to give young Zonians a false impression of life's rigid requirements, let it be remembered that they are but the victims of such circumstances. The absence of a Juvenile Court speaks volumes for the good to be found in Canal Zone homes, churches, schools, recreation programs and the "brats" themselves.

It would be difficult to find a community more conducive to good health. Medical care is excellent and within the reach of every family budget. Houses being built with screens instead of closable windows, one is literally never away from fresh air. Every day of the year playgrounds, swimming pools and beaches are crowded. There is organized recreation even during non-school months. The world offers no better fishing in ocean, lake

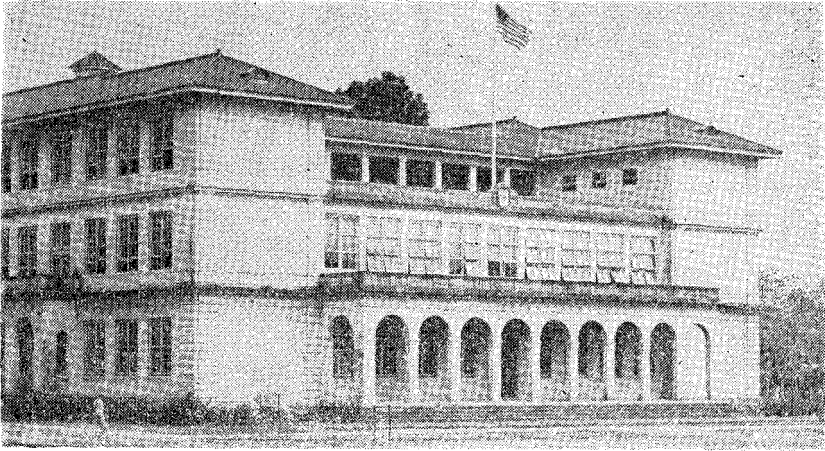


Official Panama Canal photograph
School Building--Balboa--1911

or river than in Panama. For hiking there are endless trails. No snow? What need for it with slippery palm leaves for a sled?

The school system is accredited by the Middle States Asso-

ciation of Secondary Schools and Colleges. In 1944, a survey conducted by that Association resulted in a rating of "superior" for the Canal Zone schools. There are few schools with better physical equipment. That is especially true in science laboratories and library facilities. For example, the Balboa High School alone has 11,000 volumes. A high staff rating requires that High School teachers have a Masters degree, while many of the Junior College faculty possess a Doctor of Philosophy degree. This college



Modern Elementary School Building—Balboa. On same spot as above building.

enjoys credit reciprocity with Stateside colleges. The two high schools are located in Balboa and Cristobal.

There is neither compulsory attendance in any Canal Zone school nor a truant officer, yet very few pupils "play hookey." The philosophy that schooling is not a requirement but a privilege seems to be practical—at least in the Canal Zone where there are no poor families needing financial aid from employed minors. Contrary to the pattern in most North American high schools, the senior enrollment frequently exceeds that of the sophomore and Junior classes.

Another singular value is the cosmopolitan atmosphere in which young folk are steeped at the Crossroads of the World. Influences from afar plus the local blending of cultures and unusual opportunities combine to eliminate the deadening provin-

name is debated. Those believing it to be an appropriation of the Spanish "chiva" (she goat) have supporting evidence in its amazing capacity and in its unique propensity for butting into hazardous traffic holes. Another theory is that the word resulted from the Latinization of "Chevy" since, at the outset, the Chevrolet chassis was most popular. Some of the chiva bodies are locally constructed and emphasize originality at the expense of comfort and safety. Few college yells are louder than the color choices and combinations of the interior ornamentation. The driver, who is likely to be a part or complete owner, exercises his own originality in decorations. For example, above the windshield there may be the incongruous combination of a haloed Christ and a scantily clad Pin-up. Or perhaps he has gone in for family portraiture, exhibiting a Velox parade extending from grandpa to Junior. Though the color of nearly unpainted metal predominates, the exteriors are partial to no particular color of the rainbow but utilize them all.

A radio, blasting out the Latin equivalent of swing, is as an obligato to the vehicle's prophetic coughing and pathetic groaning. The only visible suggestion of safety is a charm secured to the steering post. One harbors the incredulous hope that the charm may prove to be an effective safety device, since the guerilla chieftains who operate these screaming and swaying traffic missiles seem not to give a tinker's malediction for their customers' nerves or safety.

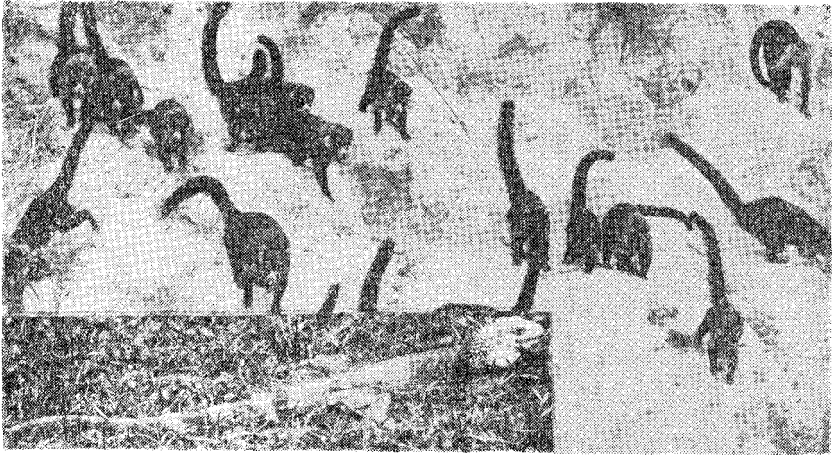
Given reasonable assurance of a tip (and being in a felicitous mood) the driver will blandly abandon his route to give his patron special service, delivering him at the door of his theater or hotel. Should the driver's "Heart throb" be aboard, the paying customers will get extra mileage for their money--unless she happens to be going their way. This lethal, four-wheeled creature with no brakes is also found in Cuba, where its alias is "Gua-gua." It is to be hoped that no other area of the world may be similarly endangered!

Jungle Life

A major portion of the Isthmus of Panama is covered with jungle growth. Save for excellent potentials in certain raw materials, it is waste land. Native Indians constitute the relatively

few human inhabitants. The social self-reliance and economic independence of these people command respect. From generation to generation the remembrance of the gross cruelties of white men centuries ago have been retained. The people are quite peaceful, however, unless they are mistreated. The remote Darien province bordering Colombia has tribes still untouched by civilization, some of whom are tree dwellers.

The Canal Zone itself is little less a jungle than it was when the first steam shovel took its initial bite, save in the localities where people dwell. To avoid the noisy machines and the annoying lights of this intrusive bi-ped, peace-loving animal families



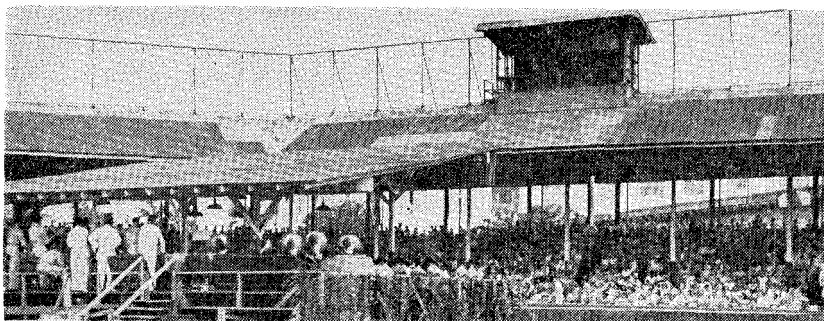
Official Panama Canal photograph
Wild animals on Ancon Hill, within three minutes walk from the Canal's Administration Building and literally a stone's throw from the Governor's mansion and other residences. The Coati is a tropical version of North America's Raccoon. Observe white faced monkey upper right. Lower left inset is an iguana, a harmless tropical lizard attaining a length of five or six feet unless served in a "chicken" sandwich before reaching maturity.

have retreated to more secluded areas. Occasionally an envoy, prompted by curiosity, may tour the haunts of great-grandfather. His journey need not be a long one, perhaps no farther than the 600-foot descent of Ancon Hill. In and around Balboa, most populous area of the Canal Zone, the author in the normal course of his duties has seen ant eater, armadillo, coati, honey bear, ocelot, possum, sloth, snakes, and howler, marmoset and white-face monkeys. He exercises a benevolent care over an iguana family which feeds on his flowers and sleeps on the parsonage roof.

Frequently the household is awakened in the early hours by deer grazing on the parsonage lawn, just two blocks from Balboa's shopping center. Black panther, alleged to be of amiable disposition, are frequently reported seen on the jungle highway at night. As this is being written the papers carry stories of hunters assigned the task of exterminating one such animal repeatedly seen on the slope of Ancon hill near the gubernatorial mansion.

The venerable cockroach, whose fecundity and cunning make him in the insect world comparable to the rat in the animal world, is the target of fabulous assertions. Nearly six years of constant residence with him has prepared this author to accept, without the proverbial grain of salt, most any story concerning his I. Q. We have not, however, actually seen him don his horn-rimmed bifocals and read the grocery list with critical eye. Miss Elsie Keyser, veteran Methodist missionary in Panama City, is fond of relating the following experience in an old construction-era restaurant, standing on the site of the Balboa Union Church, she helped conduct religious services on Sunday afternoons. The portable organ became more and more weak by the week, until finally not even a wheeze could be coaxed out of it. Investigation revealed its bellows entirely filled with cockroaches!

Ants of infinite variety, number and destructiveness are everywhere. They range in size from the barely visible to a jungle variety facetiously said to be large enough to stand at a wagon and eat oats! DDT seems to be but a good appetizer in



The Balboa Stadium, the scene of inter school athletics, lectures, band concerts, boxing matches, baseball games, etc. Official Panama Canal photograph

their diet, but a first-class baking tames those who infest one's flour supply. There is a microscopic, colorless specie that, having managed to get into the sugar bowl, becomes so thoroughly amalgamated as usually to be ignored.

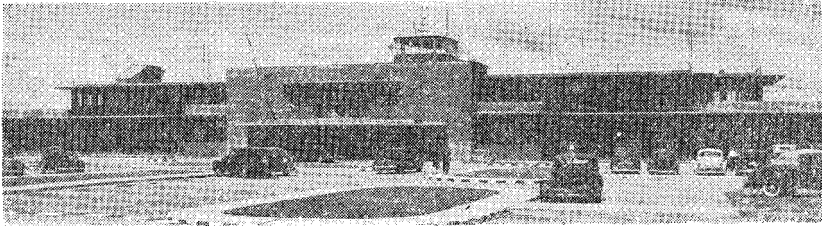
Despite the presence of a wide variety of serpents in Panama, death from snake bite is very infrequent. The Bushmaster, one of the world's most deadly, is killed on sight. The Boa Constrictor, despite its being maligned in fiction and cinema, is the most popular mascot of local soldiers. Civilians keep him as a pet, and sometimes as anti-stray-cat insurance. Currently the local press carries an account of a Boa having chosen a goat for his lunch. West Indian children, under whose house the banquet preparations were in progress, pelted the snake with sticks and rocks until he departed in disgust. The Balboa police, finding the goat badly crushed, sent him to whatever heaven awaits his breed.

The most familiar jungle visitor is the buzzard. Because of his watchful eye and amazingly sensitive olfactory nerve, it is difficult to find a dead animal whose bones have not been picked white. These birds attain the size of a grown turkey hen and are whimsically called "The Panamanian Air Force." Since they enjoy rigid legal protection, they have multiplied into millions; they frequently are so tame as to examine the area of one's garbage can with deliberate care. Finding nothing spilled, the beggar will sit on the lid in wide-eyed expectation.

The Canal Zone as Health Zone

Throughout Latin America the Canal Zone is regarded as a health resort and rightly so since it claims the lowest per capita death rate of any area under the U. S. flag. In early days it was a pest hole, breeding malaria and yellow fever so rapidly that a white man was believed to sign his own death warrant by coming to the Canal Zone. The radical transformation was wrought by Dr. William Gorgas and his army of Sanitary Engineers. Each year they cut down five square miles of brush, drained nearly a square mile of swamp land, mowed 6,400 acres of grass, collected and disposed of 1,300,000 cans of garbage, maintained the equivalent of 550 miles of drainage ditches, and sprayed human dwelling space totalling 11,000,000 cubic feet. Never

Streets are meticulously swept and nature washes them almost daily. In residential areas grass is kept too short to shade tiny pools where the larvae of *Anopheles* mosquito might hatch. Water in outlying areas that cannot be drained is kept covered with an oil that kills larvae upon coming to the surface for air. To make life really difficult for annoying or disease-carrying insects, the Health Department keeps in constant action fleets of trucks and planes equipped with insecticides. Incoming ships and planes are fumigated. Whatever the cost, these precautions are good economy, since the tiny mosquito kills many more people than all the world's jungle cats and serpents combined.



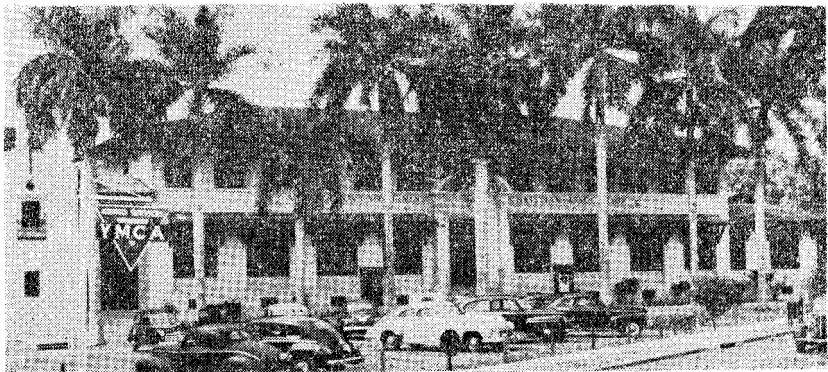
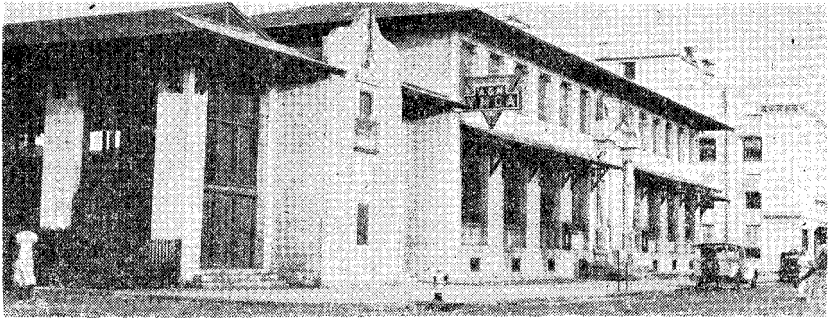
Official Panama Canal photograph

The Pacific Side Library, together with the offices of the Division of Schools, the License Bureau and other offices are housed in this building. Until 1949 it was the scene of a veritable United Nations of air travellers from all over the world. The air companies now occupy Panama's huge Tocumen air terminal.

If the immortal Louis Pasteur could witness the informed confidence placed by modern physicians in the hypodermic needle, it might compensate for any difficulty he experienced in getting medical men of his day to accept and use his revolutionary discovery. For example, during 1949, a dozen natives living in "the bush" suddenly died of yellow fever. The germs, it was discovered, were being incubated by the *Aedes Aegypti* mosquito in nearby monkeys. Immediately 474,000 preventive injections were flown from the States and promptly administered not only to Zonians but to Panamanians and San Blas Islanders and others in the most remote areas. As if by magic, a disease that might have brought death to thousands vanished. Thus has run the story since the days of the great Gorgas.

Zonians engage in much wailing over "the blood thinning effects of the tropics." A sizable percentage of them believe that they must occasionally be exposed to cold weather or decline in

health. Some scientific data, accumulated by Dr. Christopher J. Hamre, Zoological Department of the University of Hawaii, negates this notion. His findings reveal that the hemoglobin count is essentially the same regardless of climate or temperature. For example, the count is 15.10 in Honolulu; 15.83 in Kansas City; 15.87 in New Orleans; 15.06 in Boston. Dr. William Crawford Gorgas, without whose understanding of tropical diseases the Canal could scarcely have been constructed or operated, was sure that save for the debilitating effect of tropical diseases the tropics offered a better environment than the temperate zone for the growth of the world's major civilizations. He saw this profound discovery as the Canal's greatest by-product. In fact he felt that throughout long centuries it would far outrun the Canal in its benefits to humanity. His biographers reveal



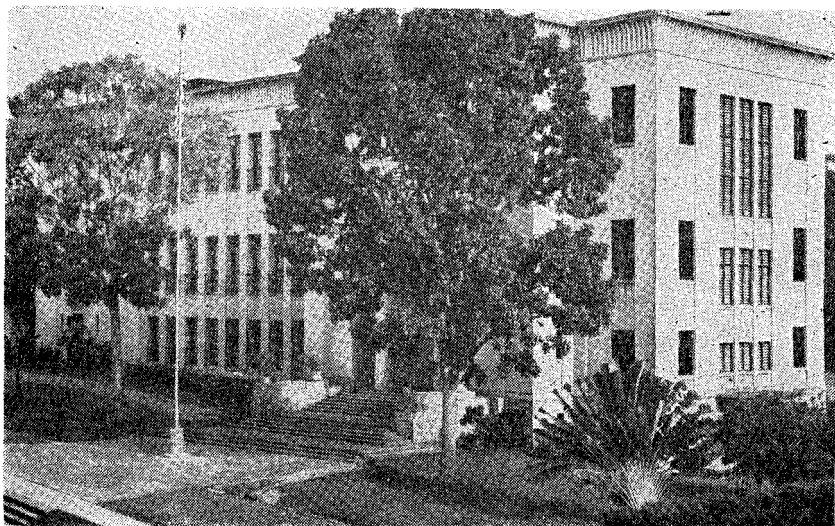
The Young Men's Christian Association during construction days was housed in Canal Zone Clubhouses. From the very beginning it has enjoyed a high place of leadership. The building above is in Cristobal; the one below is in Balboa.

that after departing from Panama in 1914 he spent the rest of his life demonstrating this discovery in other parts of the world.

Wee to the Criminal

Whether he be intent on petty larceny, reckless driving or international intrigue, life is exceedingly difficult for the criminal in the Canal Zone. In constant operation is a bewildering number of police organizations, secret and otherwise. Most obvious are the youthful and grim-faced lads who occupy the guard booths at the entrances of all military areas. Before being admitted any suspect—which includes everybody—may be required to produce a pass or a plausible story. Whether one be held for questioning or motioned to proceed appears to depend upon the mood of the lad entrusted with autocratic discrimination.

The Canal Zone Police match the favorable reputation of the Canadian Mounted Police. Confident that no superior on the Force or in the Judiciary has been bribed or intimidated, they perform their duty without fear or favor. They are trained in courtesy and in the gaining of cooperative goodwill. For example, a teenage youngster related this incident of a “disgustingly friendly” officer. On a Hallowe’en night he stopped his car to



Scottish Rite Temple, Balboa

Photo Plateau, Panama

inquire what she and her friends were up to. "Oh, just soaping this car window," she replied. "That's fine," said the officer. "Be careful not to get any soap on the paint." With that comment he drove on. "After that it was no fun," sighed the young lady. Surrounded by military reservations and adjacent to Panama's capitol city of 160,000 people, the traffic problem in Balboa is one of puzzling proportions. Yet there are few spots anywhere with safer driving or where regulation is maintained with less of the "stiff-arm" method on the part of the police.

The perilous status of the Canal's defenses at the beginning of World War II was immediately improved until the Zone became one of the best fortified areas in the entire world. If the authorities lost sight of a Japanese war vessel in the far Pacific, Balboa was notified long before it could possibly reach the Canal. Planes and surface craft operating out of bases scattered from Guatemala to Mid-South America searched the seas until given the all-clear signal. Far-flung radio and radar networks were active day and night. Half of Panama's jungle hills were crowned with anti-aircraft guns. Enormous searchlights were so abundant that a plane, flying from one end of the Canal to the other would be spotted simultaneously by a half dozen of them. Every lock, dam, bridge or other possible enemy objective was protected by heavy wire nets and grim guards. On the shoulders of nearby islands rested the world's largest coastal guns. Navy observation blimps continuously sat over waters suspected of containing enemy submarines. Until the harnessing of atomic energy, the Panama Canal was North America's most important single military tool. Precautions such as these designed for its protection are therefore understandable. Arbitrary monitors were empowered to hear, record or cut any telephone conversation which seemed inappropriate. This was particularly true if one of the conversants was known to be within sight of the Canal. Yet, there was no aroma of persecution. He who had a legitimate mission in the area, with no subversive inclinations, went unmolested throughout the war years.

Some Dates

The following tabulation of dates may be helpful in envisioning the Canal's historical setting:

- 1879—With much pomp and publicity Ferdinand Discomte de Lesseps, French diplomat and engineer, landed to attempt the building of the Canal.
- 1881—Ancon (now Gorgas) Hospital was started.
- 1903—Panama revolted against Colombia on November third, and three days later was officially recognized by the U. S. as an independent state.
- 1904—The defunct French Canal Company's holdings were transferred to the U. S. Government.
- 1906—Washington approved a lock-type Canal.
- 1914—The S. S. "Ancon" (not the present one) transited the Canal on August 15.

Some Names

The origin of the following names may be of some interest. Elsewhere are a few others.

- Ancon—(Anchorage) The name has been applied to the famous Pacific-side hill for nobody-knows-how-many centuries.
- Bohio—(Home) First called "Bohio Soldado"—soldier's home. The French intended erecting a dam near this early river village.
- Chagres River—Columbus called it "Rio Lagartos," river of alligators. The name "Rio de Chagre," from which "Chagres" evolved, came from Venta de Chagre, the name of an inn located on the old King's Highway at the river crossing.
- Corozal—probably derived from the Coroso Palm.
- Culebra—(snake) It was the Canal's construction capital and the center of the "Culebra Cut" operations.
- Diablo—(Devil) The name may have been applied to the modern village due to its proximity to a railroad crossing which, because it was the scene of so many disasters, came to be called "Devil's Crossing." Another theory is that the name was appropriated from a sixteenth century Diablo located not far from the present one. The fierce inhabitants of the primitive village were known as Cimarrones. Led by their elusive Ballane, they preyed upon the rich caravans that traversed the Isthmus.
- Empire—originally "Emperador," emperor. On the old trail that led from Gorgona to Panama City, it was a pack train station. Subsequently it was a large construction village. All that currently remains are a few foundation stones.
- Frijoles—(beans) Perhaps construction crews ate lunch there. It is known as the railroad stop where the Barro Colorado Island launch meets train passengers.
- Gorgona—probably named for an island near Colombia. Following its days as a river traffic station, it was made the center of construction machinery repair shops. It is now but a memory.

It is said that on the Gorgona Islands in Gatun Lake, not far from modern Gamboa, a few evidences of the old construction towns are to be seen.

Miraflores—(see [the] flowers). Also the name of an eminent Spanish soldier.

Panama—(many fishes). There is also the panama tree, found only in local flora.

Paraiso—(Paradise). The American builders maintained a huge locomotive repair shop there.

San Pablo—(Saint Paul). It originally was a tiny native village and was supported for many years by a nearby fruit farm. Subsequently it was the home of a construction labor camp. Appropriately enough, the name was given the short street which passes St. Mary's Roman Catholic and the Balboa Union churches.

Tivoli—The famous hotel of that name, located in Ancon, is said to occupy one hill of an early Italian's farm. To this he had given the name "Tivoli" from a hill in the city of Rome.

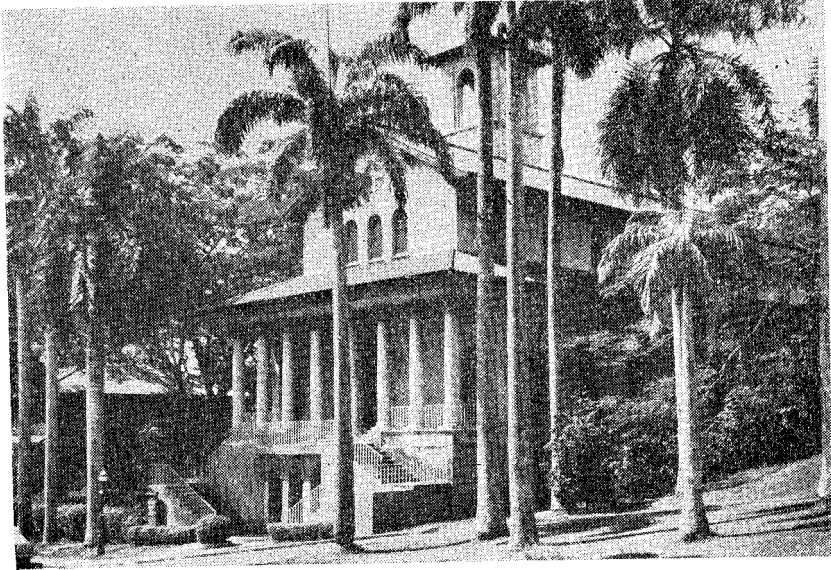
Christmas Customs

The Canal Zone, with its annual quota of 365 of Lowell's "rare days in June," lacks no essential to a completely merry Christmas—unless it be snow. Sloppy, messy snow with its impedimenta of streaming scarfs, comical ear muffs, clumsy galoshes, stalled automobiles, cold bedroom floors, too-hot or too-cold furnaces, broken water pipes, greasy black soot, encumbering overcoats, slippery sidewalks, frozen noses and bad colds. Folk in the tropics sing "I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas" with a nostalgic gusto, perhaps because a faint shiver is the worst possible outcome of a dream-revived frost-bitten memory.

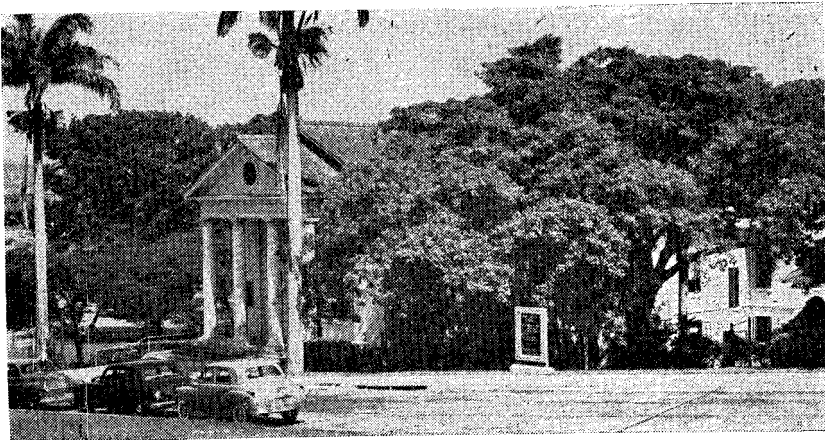
Beautiful young trees arrive direct from Canada long before Christmas. When at last the commissary drags them out of cold storage and announces their sale, multitudes driven by a madness found only in the North American Christmas shopper, rush for an advantageous place in the line, hearing in their ears the parting advice, "Be sure it is symmetrical." But with an aggregation of "angel hair," cheap tinsel, unrealistic "snow" and gaudy balls the tree won't be seen anyhow! Adding injury to insult, the helpless little tree is further encumbered with strings of completely absurd electric lights, serving no good purpose and signifying a sum total of nothing. There is reason to suspect that this temperamental gadget was designed by his Satanic

Majesty to quell, in the heart of the slave who must attend them, any semblance of the Christmas spirit.

One Christmas custom thoroughly established in the Canal Zone is the festive community burning of discarded trees. In this wholesome custom—a portion of the Twelfth Night observ-



The Cathedral of St. Luke (Episcopal), Ancon



The Southern Baptist Church, Balboa Heights

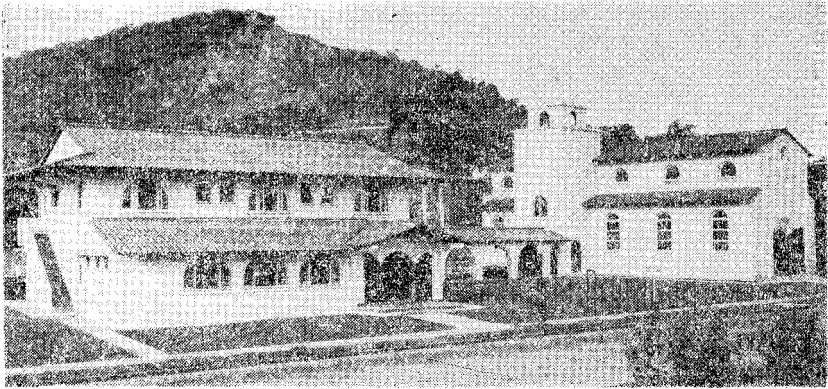
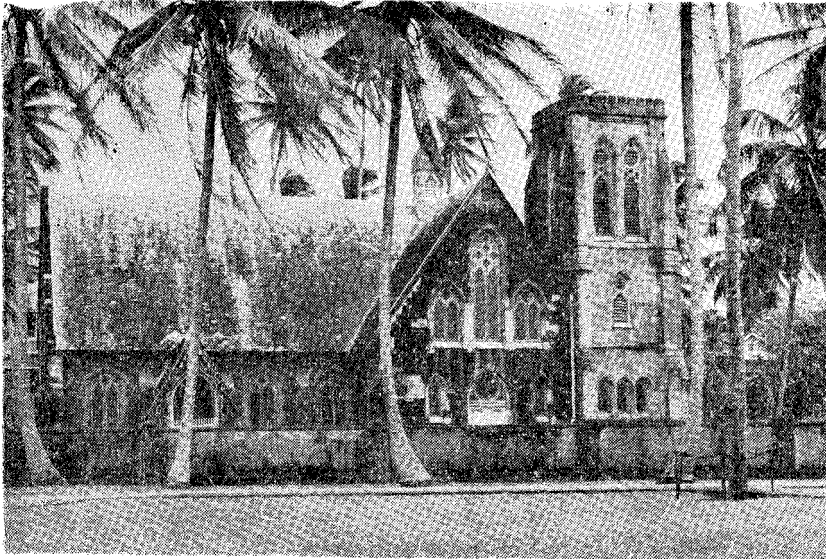


Photo Plateau, Panama
The Missouri Synod Lutheran Church and Manse, Balboa

ance—the mainspring of enthusiasm resides in adolescents who usually syndicate their interests. Early in December the potential trees are solicited from householders with enthusiasm and a “sign here” definiteness. Probable collection dates are estimated and recorded. In January the stacks of cypress and fir are dragged from places of safe-keeping and heaped into vast pyramids which, when lighted, shoot streams of orange sparks toward the tropical stars. Around the fire children romp and play with glee; neighborhood adults punctuate their chitchat by munching on pickles and wieners. Often the evenings end with square dancing in the street for everyone.

The poinsettia, an increasingly popular symbol of the holiday season, flowers in scarlet profusion everywhere, often producing blossoms over twenty inches in diameter. Each flower lasts for many weeks and is at the height of its glory during the Christmas season. To start a plant a short poinsettia branch is placed in the ground; a year later it is a bush seven or eight feet in height, loaded with blossoms. In consequence there are vast hedges of such entrancing beauty.

Of unusual significance in Christmas ornamentation is the Spanish nacimiento. During the holidays one of these occupies a corner in every church and a room in most homes in Panama. Whether the scene is simple or pretentious, the Holy Family is central. The figures, often hand-carved in Spain, are purchased through the years as family funds permit. Their quantity and



Christ's Church by the Sea, Episcopal, Colon

quality become a matter of family pride and inheritance, even as does table silver in North America. In one privately-owned collection, valued at \$8,000, we counted more than 100 figures of human beings. Some of the camel-borne Wise Men were over two feet in height. There were 89 animals and 27 houses and churches scaled to the Palestinian landscape in which they were set. Unfortunately, some Panamanian families have adopted America's overloaded Christmas tree. In blatant contrast it stands, typifying the Western World's adoration of externals.

Miscellaneous Unusuals

The Canal Zone is a place where—

- Yankee life, with its traditions, races, nobilities, prejudices, villainies and virtues are faithfully reproduced in miniature.
- Jungle orchids are cultivated in one's own yard.
- In wet season, shoes, left out of the dry closet forty-eight hours, will grow a mildew "beard."
- A one hundred-mile journey may land one amid tree-dwelling Indians who hunt with poison arrows, and probably never saw a white man.
- Temperature variances are negligible throughout the year, with

a mean 80 degrees. The lowest on record in the Government's Meteorology and Hydrography observation stations, during a third of a century, was 59 degrees, in April 1920; with the highest at 98, in 1924. Yet the equator is only nine degrees farther south. Despite this official all-time high, travellers and writers, desiring to tell an impressive story, frequently start with 96 degrees as a minimum for "the steaming jungles of Panama."

—Sunstroke is virtually unknown and serious sunburn is quite uncommon.

—An employee comes "just for a year" and remains for perhaps a third of a century, all the while he is continually planning to leave. His service is terminated at the age of sixty-two. By then he has speculated for a third of a century concerning where he is to retire; yet seldom knows even in which state he will reside.

—The only hat a man owns he has for fishing, while his wife sometimes wears one to church.

—In a single day one may swim in both the Atlantic and the Pacific oceans and have time for a leisurely dip in one of the world's most important rivers and its second largest artificial lake.

—The "hay" available for young folks' hay rides is shredded Commissary coupons.

—In round numbers and easy to remember rates, the Atlantic tide is eighteen *inches* and the Pacific tide as many *feet*.

—The annual rainfall on the Pacific side is six feet, with twice that much on the Atlantic coast only fifty miles distant.

—The 80th meridian swishes past on its way to Quito, after practically bisecting Cuba, Miami, Pittsburgh and Erie.

—The sun rises out of the Pacific Ocean and is visible on the Atlantic side some two minutes later.

—The Atlantic entrance to the Canal Zone is some 20 miles west of the Pacific entrance.

—Government employees may join labor organizations but are forbidden to strike.

—An obedient husband wears his coat from the car to the host's door where, if true hospitality prevails, he will be urged to remove it.

—A veritable army of workmen keep hundreds of acres of parks and lawns cut (to discourage mosquitoes, more than for beauty).

—It is well to shake one's shoes as they are donned, lest a sleeping scorpion be surprised into a bad mood.

—The meat in a "chicken" sandwich in nearby Panama may turn out to be iguana meat.

—Alligators are hunted by Army officers in a helicopter and by adolescents with a lasso rope.

—According to sages, "Once one drinks Chagres water, he will surely return to its valley."

And So

A score of volumes have sought to relate the enchanting story of the Canal Zone's unique and engrossing life. But, as the following refrain of James Stanley Gilbert's rhyme indicates, these volumes, with scores of others, would leave much untold;

“Then go away if you have to go,
Then go away if you will,
To again return you will always yearn
While the lamp is burning still.
You've drunk the Chagres water
And the mango eaten free
And strange though it seems,
It'll haunt your dreams—
This land of the Coconut tree.”

It is our assignment to outline only one phase of Zone life, that of cooperative Protestantism effectively and happily upholding the Cross at the world's crossroads. To that rare opportunity we proceed.