

Our Transportation System is in Crisis – 352

What's in a name? It is selected to remember an individual or place at a specific time due to the recognition of a significant action or achievement. Documenting this remembrance constitutes history. During the lifetime of the person or place, and action or achievement, it is our memory that keeps these pieces together. When forgotten or changed, history is dealt a fatal blow.

The new four-lane highway from San Fernando to Point Fortin, when completed will be the longest roadway ever constructed at a single period in TnT, at more than 30 km. In a few months a name will be given to it. Will it be according to the tradition of southern roads, by naming them through connecting the key places, such as San Fernando-Siparia-Erin Road (SS Erin Rd), or Naparima-Mayaro Road, etc.? So, can we expect the San Fernando-Point Fortin Highway? Or, will the process be more complex, and it will be named after an individual, or individuals? Or, would it be an additional extension of the Solomon Hochoy Highway?

The Solomon Hochoy Highway is also a four-lane highway 30 km long between Chaguanas and Golconda. It was originally built in the 1970s from Chaguanas to Tarouba for a length of 25 km, and named after Sir Solomon Hochoy, the last British Governor of TnT and our first Governor-General. The highway was extended in 2001 to Golconda.

The Churchill-Roosevelt Highway (CRH) is also a multi-lane highway 24 km long

between Barataria and Wallerfield (with six divided lanes in some segments, and four divided lanes in others). According to Michael Anthony in Historical Dictionary of Trinidad and Tobago (2001), it was built at a two-lane, two-way, single carriageway by the US armed forces in 1942, and named after the two wartime leaders, Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt. It was originally reserved for connectivity to their army bases, but it was handed over to the Government of TnT in 1949.

The formal naming of the San Fernando-Point Fortin Highway might come after many years, and so in the rest of this article I would like to express caution in so doing.

The name George the Fifth Park in POS was recently changed to Mandela Park. I have heard that it was first known as Pompeii Park (pronounced locally, Pom-pee-eye). I am sure that each name has its own significance and purpose, but is it right to simply replace names because it is convenient? Should historical recognition of a person or place be only for a time? If so, I think there should be clear justification.

Likewise, when the two-lane, two-way, single carriageway Princess Margaret Highway between Chaguanas and the CRH was expanded to four divided lanes in the mid-1980s, it was renamed the Uriah Butler Highway. Later, when that highway was extended to the Eastern Main Road in Champ Fleurs, it was referred to as the

Uriah Butler Highway extension, and now simply the UBH.

Wrightson Road is 2.5 km long in POS from St Vincent Street in the east to O'Connor Street in the west. Sir Walsh Wrightson was an Englishman who held the post of Director of Public Works of the Government from 1895 to 1907. He was responsible for the construction, in 1900, of the original Wrightson Road. He built this road from the western end of Charles Street to gain access to town's sewerage pumping station sited at Mucurapo Point on the Maraval River. The road followed a path along the sea shore on the Woodbrook Estate. At that time its length was 1.6 km.

Sometime around the period 1938-1940, the entire "sea-edge" Wrightson Road was planned, designed and re-built as a dual carriageway highway by a young Public Works engineer from India, and transformed into a route connecting the east and west communities, including the immediate local roads in Woodbrook, and the recently re-claimed lands its southern side.

Ranjit Kumar (1912-1982) was born in the Punjab State in India, and migrated as a young child to the UK. He graduated as a civil engineer from the Imperial College of Science.

He was certainly a pioneer in the field of civil engineering in TnT, particularly in constructing highways in mangrove terrain, as in the 1940's this project was deemed almost impossible. It is said that when the Americans had decided to extend Wrightson Road eastwards, he was hired as

a consultant to work on the project.

Engineer Kumar entered politics in 1943 served in the POS City Council and the Legislative Council of Trinidad and Tobago. In 1950, Ranjit Kumar Street in St. James was named in his honour. There is also a village in Gasparillo, known as Kumar Village, said to be named after him.

The upgrade of Wrightson Road has served as an important influence in commercial and financial development, including hotels and conference facilities. There would certainly be no Audrey Jeffers Highway with it.

The Audrey Jeffers Highway is a 3 km four-lane divided highway connecting Wrightson Road and Western Main Road. It is named in honour of Mrs. Audrey Jeffers, who was born in Woodbrook, and became a well-accomplished social worker, and TnT's first female Member of Parliament in 1946.

So, Ramjit Kumar was an engineering innovator, and then a Member of Parliament in 1943.

During my tenure with the Ministry of Works, I had the good fortune of knowing and working with several bosses, leaders, colleagues, and mentors, some of whom have passed on, retired, and some are about to retire. Names that come readily to mind are Curtis Knight (dec) – engineer par excellence; Derek Comissiong – Chief Technical Officer; Joseph Allard – Director of Highways; Hilton Charles – Director of Highways; Shaffie Khan – Chief Planning Engineer (Roads); Rossini Castro – Chief Bridges Engineer and Director of

the National Highway Programme; Dr. Trevor Townsend – Chief Traffic Engineer; Kenrick Burgess – Director of the National Highway Programme; Roger Israel – Chief Traffic Engineer and Deputy Permanent Secretary; Leverson Boodlal – Chief Traffic Engineer and Chief Planning Engineer; Rudin Austin – Director of Maintenance and Deputy Permanent Secretary; James Howard (dec) – Director of Highways and Deputy Permanent Secretary; Solomon Sun Kow – Chief Technical Officer; Dr. Carson Charles – Engineer and Minister of Works; and, Roger Ganesh – Director of Ganesh. I have not put their names to embarrass them, but I know much of our decision making is not on a technical basis. Those who are alive are important resource persons. They hold much technical and historical information.

Shaffie Khan was the father of Minister Dr. Fuad Khan and businessman, Alberuni Khan. When he retired as Chief Roads Planning Engineer, he passed on all his notes to me – not even to his children. I plan to use this and other information in the future.

Next week, historical fatal flaws in Chaguanas.

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