

ONCE UPON A TIME IN BRITISH GUIANA

27 POEMS

By Dmitri Allicock



LITTLE SCHOOL CHILDREN OF 1900

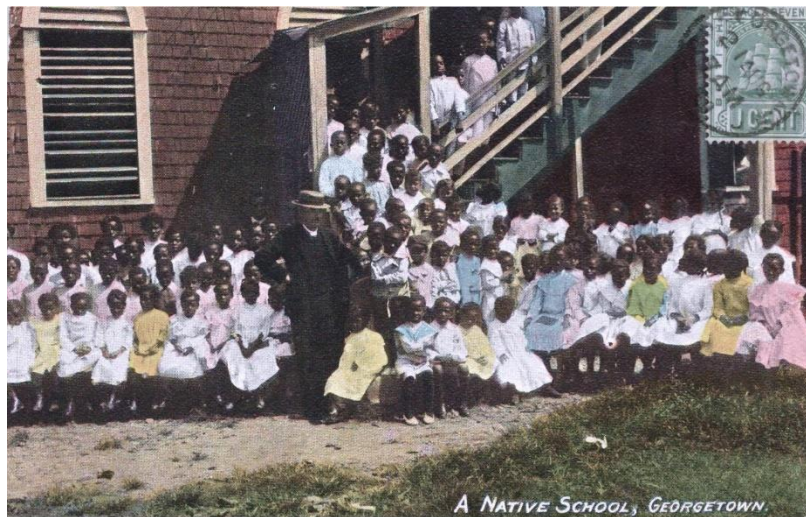
[Georgetown, British Guiana]

Little children, love another of long ago
And a 1900 Georgetown School, it is so
Little school children, God loves you all
Their precious teacher said, standing tall

Little children, love another, as you grow
Dawn of a bright and new century to know
Little school children, charmingly dressed
Gather around, you're British Guiana's best

Little children, love another, God is love
And he is watching over you from above
Little boys, little girls, let us sing a song
Run in Demerara's sun and grow strong

Little children, love another in days of yore
Look to the Georgetown's horizon and soar
Little sweet ones are our ancestors, the brave
The golden heritage of Guyana that you gave.



A NATIVE SCHOOL, GEORGETOWN.



LAD BY THE GATE

[Austin House-1896, Georgetown- British Guiana]

It is Georgetown, the year 1896 in the sky
A lad standing by the gate, I wonder why
In the fading British Guiana's light
It is a once upon a precious 1800s' sight

House of the late Bishop Austin is where he stood
Dear Lord William Piercy Austin, a man of good
An 1844 Queens College, 1870 school, Bishop High
1892 St. George's Cathedral, nearby seagulls fly

It is almost like reading a precious history book
This quiet lad by the gate, and I continue to look

I hear these words 'Little children, love another'
Last sermon of this Bishop, a father and a brother

The lad by the gate is looking out at a golden time
On the horizon, the dawn of 1900 is soon to chime
I peer into the dim light and the lad seems to drift
Soon he was gone into the fog and vanished swift.



WALKING WITH ANCESTORS

[1900 Georgetown, British Guiana]

The dawn of a new century, it is so
A road scene of over a 100 years ago
The children playing, folks passing by
It is beneath a dear British Guiana's sky

I love to look into history's blur
Often wonder who these people were
And as I watch them there
I think of the stories they would share

Those moments that made them smile
Our different worlds, we could chat for awhile
Walking with our ancestors is indeed divine
Holding them closely, in the sunshine

Two worlds of fascination, no doubt
Precious souls of time, walking about
Echoes on the winds when the Atlantic blows
A scene to cherish of over 100 years ago.



A TRAGEDY OF 1847

[Watooka, Upper Demerara- Guyana]

The Demerara has been flowing from the start
Upon its tides are some stories of the heart
Off the Watooka shores and out in the deep
It is my 3 times great-grandfather of whom I speak

It was 1847, in the Upper Demerara's shine
This River of life took this ancestor of mine
David Paterson, his name and was only twenty nine
Swept beneath the waters as the river winds

Early British Guiana days when tragedy knocked
He left a baby Catherine and widow, Nancy Allicock
The black- water river where secrets hides
Those influences of old which came on the tides

Catherine Jane to grow up fatherless and eternally yearn
Chosen to pass down this story for others to learn

Her father of Christianburg whom she never knew
My dear ancestors lives, when yesterday was new.



RIVER OF LIFE & DEATH

[Malali Rapids- Upper Demerara- My maternal 3 x great-grandfather -Henry Bremner- drowned near this spot on November 21, 1825]

Out in the deep where the Demerara Flows
Live stories of death and tears that it knows
Black water River that knows no time or places
Flows on with memories of lost souls and faces

The Demerara River of life and also death
The river where my ancestor took his last breath
It was Henry Bremner and 1825 was the sad year

His boat capsized, his young family left in tears

Laid to rest in his family plot along the green hills
Far away from his origin, Scotland and New Mills
The eternal river of life that still runs on through
I think of this dear ancestor that this river knew

A story which lives on through time in its sorrow
The bond of family love for all the tomorrows
The not so gentle river flowing pass sacred ground
The tortuous Malali Rapids and my heritage found.



THE HISTORICAL 1824 WATER WHEEL OF CHRISTIANBURG

On the shores of Upper Demerara lies one of a kind
A precious Water Wheel that takes you back in time
A treasure of forgotten history that can be seen still
Only remnant that is left of the Paterson's Sawmill

An amazing relic which has survived the ages of old
A symbol of Upper Demerara's rich history to behold
The story of Guyana's wood and the greenheart king
The echoes of an early British Guiana that still rings

The village called Red Camp with roofs painted red
The birth of Guyana's second largest town that it led
The year of 1824, when it was erected on this ground
Waters of Catabulli, a wheel turning round and round

Transferring the power to blades with belts and gears
A wheel of ancient time and frozen for so many years
So silent, amidst the weeds where the Demerara goes
Story of a Water Wheel and the Catabulli Creek flows.



GONE WITH THE WIND [1959]

[The 1800 home of the Paterson family- later became a rest house and court house until the fire of 2011] Upper Demerara, Christianburg -British Guiana in the year 1959].

In my heart there lives a special place
For the memory of a dear time and space
A sacred place where my heritage is found
Along Demerara River's hallowed ground
A place where many graves stands arrayed
The journey of the winds of time on parade
Over two centuries of Upper Demerara to keep
Where many now lie peaceful, in eternal sleep
A fountain of stories and amazing history for me
That exist in that sanctified place across the sea
A story of time and space that I try to understand
My dear ancestor's blessed place, in another land.



NOITGEDACHT REVISITED [Nooitgedacht]
[Upper Demerara, Circa 1960]

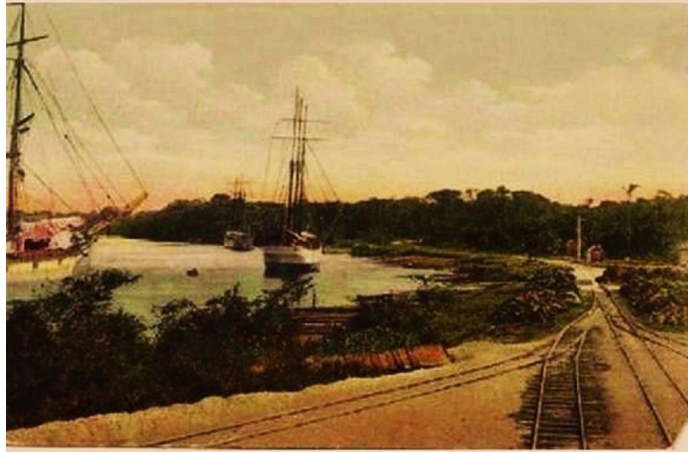
Once upon a late 1700s' star
My forefather, Robert F Allicock, from afar
He arrived and will never again roam
Dropped anchor and called Noitgedacht his home

He built his dwellings and cabins
Noitgedacht meaning never thought or imagine
And for two hundred years, it was so
As the story of time and the wind of change blow

Then in the year 1916, a bauxite king was born
Within that jungle oasis, two plants and a horn
New fortunes and sparkling jewels for a crown
That will eventually lead in 1970, to Linden Town

Houses built by DEMBA and those lovely places
I am sure, only smiles on my ancestors' faces

The Noitgedacht today is symbolic of that time
A story of family bonds and my bloodline chimes.



SAILS OF TIME

[WISMAR, 1900 British Guiana]

Three ships came sailing in
With cargo and passengers' grin

Three ships came sailing when
My grandparents were children then

Three ships came in the 1900 sunrise
Bringing hope for my ancestors' eyes

Three ships on the tide way back
To meet the Wismar/ Rockstone railway tracks

Three ships came in the Demerara sun
Sails of time where the soft river runs.



MOUTH OF THE CACKATARA

[Circa 1900] Upper Demerara- British Guiana.
Note the 1897 Wismar/Rockstone Railway across the
Demerara.

Today, Cackatara Creek is barely a small stream
It's historical significance to Linden but a dream
But Cackatara it was when the bauxite king was born
In 1916, the glory of Upper Demerara and the horn

Before it became Mackenzie, Cackatara was its name
The symbol of Guyana's bauxite, fortunes and fame
Cackatara once ran from Kara Kara Creek to the river
Passing in front of the Bauxite Plant and a life giver

My great grandparents lived on its banks before 1910
And moved along with many other relatives back then
Grave of my great grandfather, David, beneath the shed
The area developed and to Mackenzie, in 1918 it led

So it was Mackenzie after the 1916 death of George Bain
Living on for 100 years thru decline, fortune and fame
And the mostly filled in Sweet Cackatara still flows
Trickling pass those forgotten souls and history as it goes.



THE CATABULLI STILL FLOWS

[Christianburg- Linden- Guyana]

The shallow waters of Catabulli Creek still flows
Running quietly to the Demerara River as it goes
For the early Dutch, Kathapoety Creek, is was so
Where the 1700s Demerary Winds once blow

The cool- tea waters of this creek running strong
With the ripples of a 1800s hardwood song
At its mouth, a Christianburg Waterwheel belong
When the historical Paterson's Sawmills came along

Flowing with history and to a channel swift
Spinning a wheel where the clouds of memories drift
Flowing from the shallow to the deep
Flowing passed the graves where ancestors sleep

Lead the way to the creation of Linden Town to behold
The pure water of the Catabulli from the days of old

Flowing from the days of yore when men were bold
And the amazing stories of Upper Demerara were told.



PICTURE ON THE WALL

[My paternal great grandfather, John Daniel Van Lange
1834- 1906]

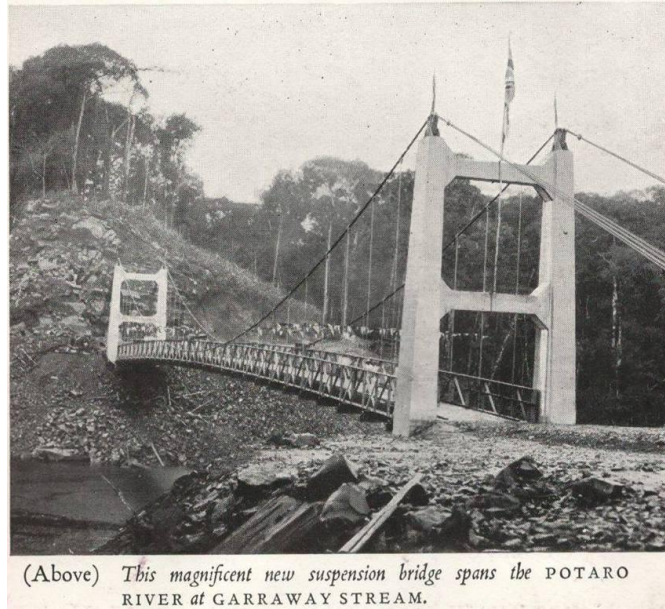
Hanging picture illuminates my room once more

Spectral shadows and divine soul restore

Son of oceans, wooden shoes and sailing boats

Born in the land of waters, jaguars and sloths

Smiling surreal face with such stillness gaze
A moment of forgotten times frozen in amaze
Centuries of heritage of Guyana's deep past
But only a second captured in this photograph
Lonely picture held in my eternal embrace
Blossoms of life surround you with grace
World of color presented in black and white
Eighteen hundreds I wonder what it was like
Tough but gentle eyes how did he spend his days
Changing world and few clues left of his ways
And so before him silhouettes of life are cast
Momentous family treasure of future and past.



BRIDGE ON THE RIVER POTARO

[The New 1933 Denham Suspension Bridge- Essequibo
Guyana]

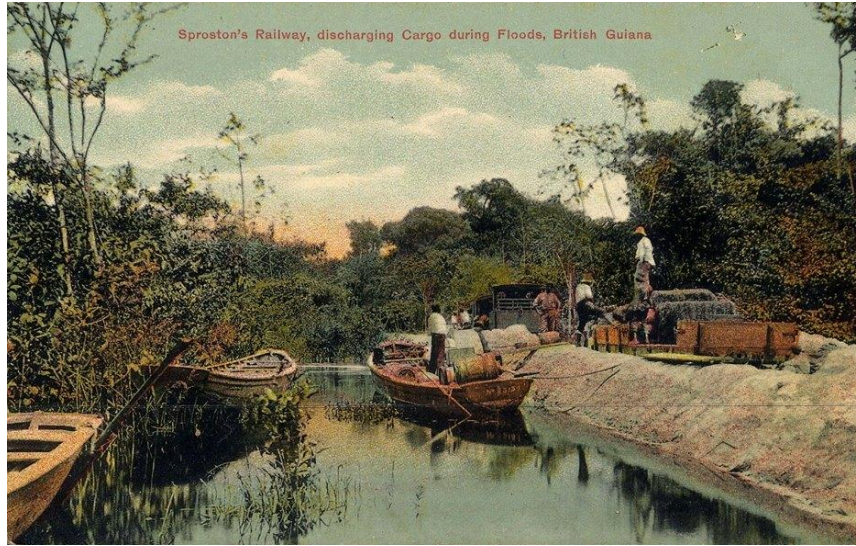
Like a gem in Guyana's crown
A bridge over the Potaro's brown
The gold of El Dorado and fables
A suspension bridge of steel cables

The richness of gold and dreams
A place called Garraway Stream
Gold and village of Madhia's shout
Porknockers in the lush digging about

Constructed in British Guiana in 1933
Young men of hope, wanted to be
Many arriving on the 1897 Wismar Train

In the sweltering sunshine or the rain

A gold bridge in the heart of the jungle
Where water rushes and the falls tumble
Shouts of gold for the 1933 souls, so bold
Denham Bridge of gems and glistening gold.

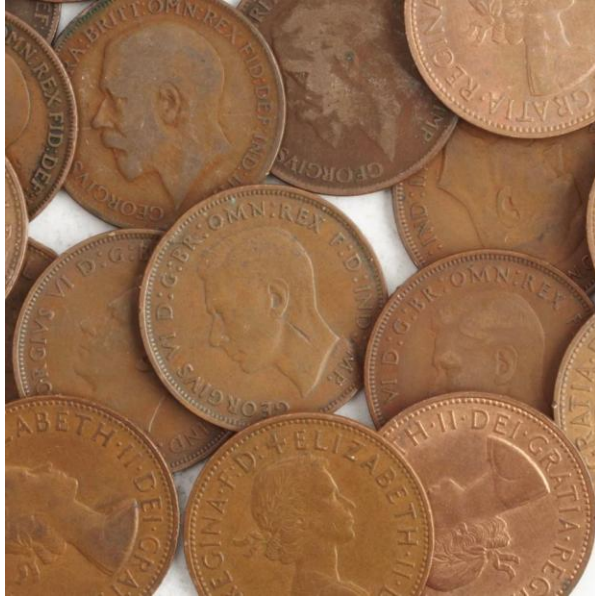


A GHOST TRAIN

[The 1897 Wismar/Rockstone Railway- British Guiana]

In the land of floods and rain
Here comes the dear 1897 train
In Demerara's haze a whistle to soothe
Bringing hope, needed supplies and food

Rhythm of a river overflowing its banks
The Wismar/ Rockstone Train, they say thanks
The crates and barrels delivered to the waterway
A story of a lost time but there is an image to stay.



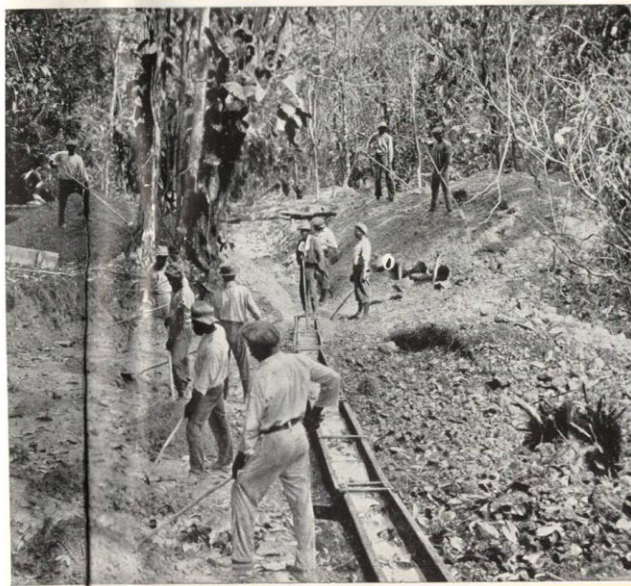
A PENNY WELL SPENT

[British Guiana- 100 years ago]

I took some pennies and went to the store
To buy sugar, flour, oil, salt- fish and more
What is the soft drinks going for I asked?
Fetching my shopping bag home was a task

I needed some pigtails, salt- beef weighed
My hands in my pocket, the pennies I paid
A handful of big pennies of copper- brown
My overfilled shopping bag and I frowned

I wanted a tub of butter, cheese and lard still
Sweet fresh baked bread, I bought for a gill
I almost forgot the rice when I checked my list
Then I walked into the dim 1918, Guiana's mist.



Gold is won from rich hills mainly by hand labour, and by dredging the creeks and flats.

GOLD AND DAYS OF OLD

[British Guiana circa 1940]

Shouts of Gold! Gold! Gold!
Yellow, hard and cold

Shouts of Gold! Gold! Gold!
Tales of Porknockers of old

Shouts of Gold! Gold! Gold!
The risks we must take to hold

Shouts of Gold! Gold! Gold!
Many stories still untold

Shouts of Gold! Gold! Gold!
It's the land of El Dorado's mold.



FORTUNES OF A DAIRY FARM

[Demba 1940- Upper Demerara

Along Demerara where the songbirds sing
Demba's dairy farm when bauxite was king
It originally provided for the Demba's staff
Supplying fresh foods, comforts and laughs

In the old days there were cows that moo
Stocks of assorted chickens and pigs too
From the Pullman, it was the farm and me
The well raised animals that I wanted to see

There was that cock-a-doodle-doo alarm
When our boats went by the dairy farm
The rich organic manure was put to use
Grew all sorts of delicious leafy produce

I remember eggs of bright yellow yokes
And priced reasonable for us village folks
A lovely dairy farm that came on the tide
Today, in ruins that the forest tries to hide.



LADIES WITH A DOG

[1935 Mackenzie, Upper Demerara- British Guiana- Mrs. Kerr and Harriet Platt- near a riverboat]

Ladies with a dog near riverside drive
It is dear Mackenzie, in the year 1935
The fortunes of bauxite in the haze
And the glory of Upper Demerara days

Besides the river, peace is the atmosphere
4 short years before a World War of fear
And increased demands for Alumina booms
The kilns of DEMBA and the smoke plumes

But for now all is quiet where the river flow
Only a bark of a dog when the wind blow

Mackenzie was to be fully secured by 1939
And the 24 hour shift of WW2, yet not a sign.



Valuable hardwoods are found in the forests. Squaring a 70-foot greenheart log.

THE SQUARER

[British Guiana 1940]

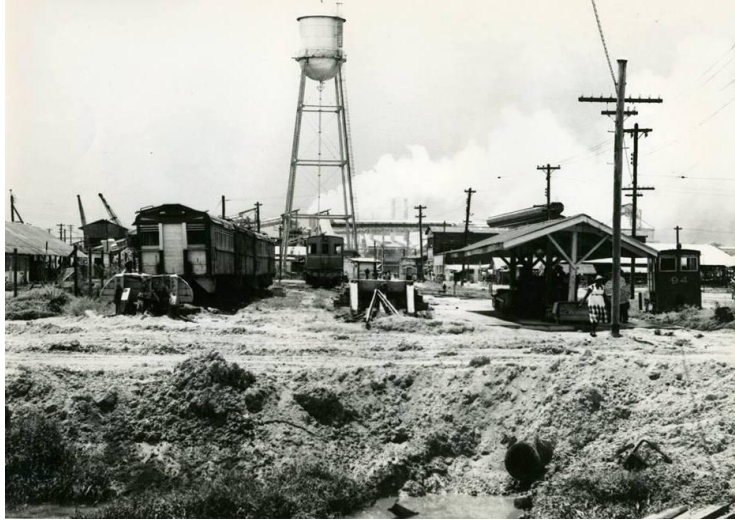
In the wild of Guyana hardwood is king
Squaring with a broad-axe, is the thing
A greenheart timber of 70 foot in length
Being squared by men of great strength

An endless jungle of jaguars and snakes
The quiet squarer must do what it takes
To earn a living he must watch his toes
High on a greenheart log the story goes

Squaring from the days old and is done still
Before the timber is dragged to the sawmill

Working timber has no room for the weak
Mighty logs coming by the rivers and creeks

Men of leather and steel the land has known
Only of blood and sweat, the Squarer's tone
Working from dawn to dusk, without doubt
A hammock when he is weary and petered out.



RIDE THE PULLMAN ONCE MORE
[DEMBA]

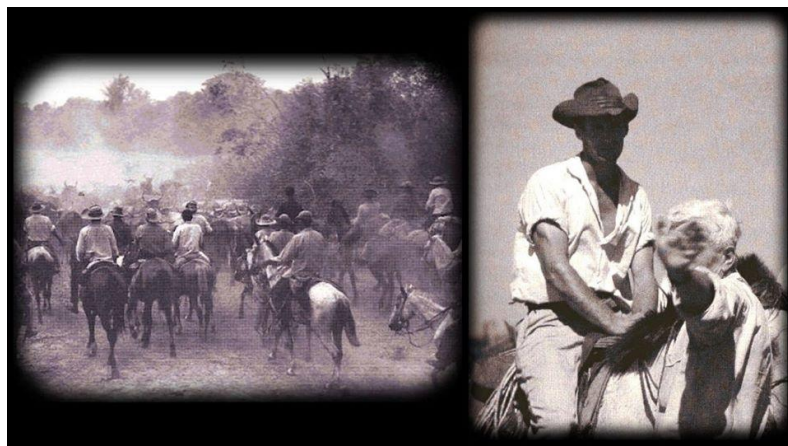
Mackenzie- Upper Demerara]

Scintilla of a dear old Pullman's shed
Along the Demerara, the tracks lead
Its 5.30 am in the early morning dew
A train ride of childhood's sky of blue

Workers and passengers ride for free
Next to my dear Dad, I wanted to be
Smiling faces of welcome they greet
Friends and conversation in every seat

The lush by the tracks waiting to be seen
Then a whistle and the light turned green
The back and forth, train picking up speed
In the dim light a newspaper, trying to read

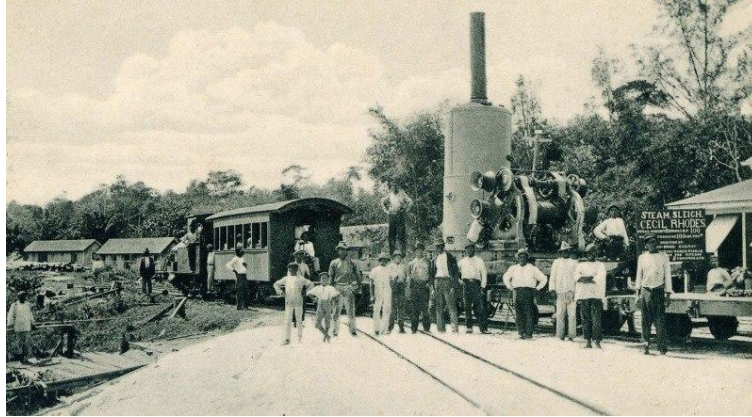
It is now full steam ahead, away we go
Around the river's bend, we would slow
The refreshing morning breeze passing by
See the waving folks of a Pullman's goodbye.



GHOST RIDER IN THE SKY

[British Guiana]

Ride the Rupununi Cattle Trail in the sky
Ride once more, rolling savannah up high
Saddle up for that last round up, and ride
Like a ghost in the sky, I'll be your guide
Stay steady in the saddle, use guiding reins
Ride to the coast thru shine and stormy rains
Ride meandering trail, where monkeys howl
Cross the rushing rivers, passing jungle growls
Brave the reptiles, mosquitoes and hot weather
Echoes of hoof beats & vaqueros as tough as leather.



A STORY OF A 1900S TRACK

(Wismar circa 1900- Upper Demerara, British Guiana)

Way up the Demerara on a 1900s' track
Is an 1897 steam train going clickety clack
Ranges of houses of the bright Wismar Sky
The smell of wallaba smoke filling the sky

It is the story of a train and a 1900s' tale
Foundation of a growing town on the rail
A story, long before there was a Silvertown
Before DEMBA's 1916 bauxite took the crown

The train from Rockstone coming in a dream
Ships from Georgetown, powered by steam
A story of my ancestors and many brave souls
Story of sweet hardwood and Eldorado's gold

The train tracks, later became the main road
And brought hope for so many folks abode

It was a story of time and those distant days
A story of a Wismar/ Rockstone train in the rays.



SPROSTON'S SHOP & REST HOUSE

[Became Sue Tang later, Upper Demerara]

It's 1935 and we are going to the grocery store
We will go by boat as we have done before
We will travel on the Demerara with the tide
And fasten our boat safely by the Wismar Riverside

We shall gather on the Wismar shop's landing
For a brief look around from where we're standing
We can see the tall chimneys with smoke blowing
Of the Bauxite Plant and dear Mackenzie growing

We look to the Wismar Shore and we can hear
The toots and clangs of the train as we stare
We can feel the vibration of the trembling tracks
Coming in the haze is the 1897 train from way back

We shall step into the store and greet the many faces
Family, friends from along the river and places

It is a lovely Saturday Morning of life all around
A one- stop 1935 shopping where everything is found.



THE FLAT IRON FOR WRINKLES

Twas a time to press in the pleated fold
With a flat iron heated by embers of charcoal
Add a sprinkle of water and then the steam
Ironing pockets, cuffs, hems, were the scene

It was a job that was sweaty and quite hot
One iron in use and others on the coal- pot
The hot iron was gripped with a cloth or pad
And since the Middle Ages was the best we had

There was no knob for the temperature set
Some spit on the flat iron was good as it get
And the golden age of the flat iron again twinkles
Gone with time, the stories of ancestors' wrinkles.



FROM THE DECK

[Demerara River]

From the deck we follow the inland river trail
And up the gentle Demerara River we will sail
Leaving the rough, muddy and wide river mouth
To the narrowing valley and calm waters of the south

From the deck, we are not in a rush
It is a great chance to enjoy Demerara's lush
We look for the birds of the monotonous green
We can feel the quiet of the river it seems

From the deck as we travel from the coast
We see the toucans and macaws the most
We pass rafts of drifting hardwood in the light
The kingfishers at water's edge winging their flight

From the deck we pass the many homesteads
A river that have seem brighter days it is said
And the ship's horn will blow around the bend
From the deck we wish the journey will never end.



SWEET CHLOE

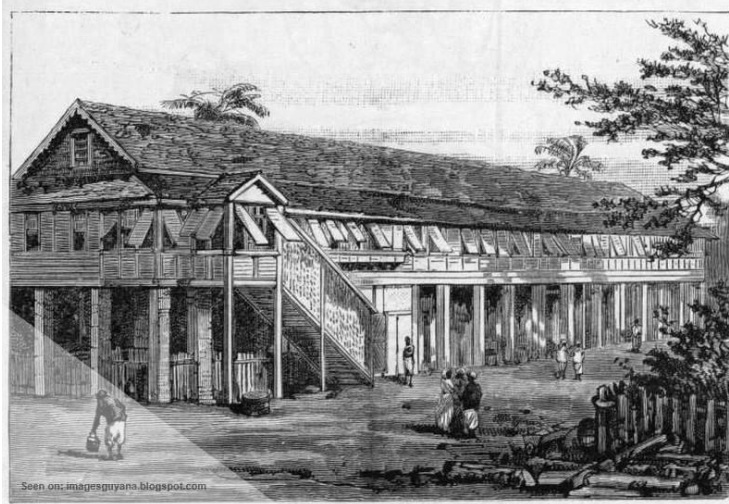
[1910 Virol Tonic Ad- British Guiana]

Little Demerara Child, arms akimbo
Sweet Chloe of the year 1910, glows
Dear Demerara Child, so far away
Healthy are her cheeks this Virol ad say

British Guiana and a precious girl
Standing bare feet in a different world
Natural her medicine and tonic she drinks
Staying well and keeping her complexion pink

Little Chloe smiling dreamlike in the light

Mostly lamps in the dark of Georgetown's night
Long before antibiotics was under the sky above
Sweet Chloe standing proud and surviving with love



THE NURSE WITH A LAMP

[An Estate Hospital-1889 British Guiana].

It is 1889 in British Guiana's daze
And I see a nurse in the gaze
An angel, dressed in white
And she is carrying a lamp for light

I was in hospital for a snake bite
And the doctor said I will be aright
There is a poultice on my affected foot
And into the shadows of the room, I look

I can hear the cries of "oh Lord!"
Coming from nearby in the ward
In the lamp's spectral glow, I see a bed
A nurse with a lamp caring for the dead

In the darkness of night, I will pray
For the bright dawn of the new day
For the capped angle, my dear champ
I say goodbye to that nurse with a lamp.

THE END.