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COLOMBIAN NEWS AND VIEWS

The Official Organ of the Mennonite Brethren Mission in Colombia

VOL. II—NO. I

JANUARY, 1952



Rev. and Mrs. Dan A. Wirsche, Stanley, Wesley, and Peter. When there were practically no hopes of their being able to get their reentrance permits renewed to return to Colombia, the Lord undertook. They arrived on the field July 20th for their second term of service. Mr. Wirsche is president of the Missionary council. They are now serving in Istmina.

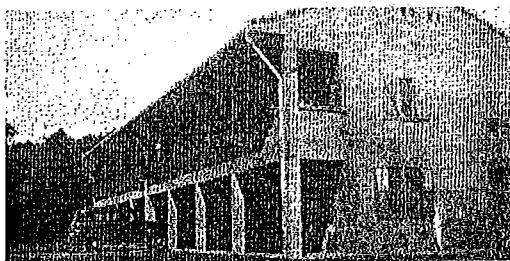


Rev. David Wirsche also arrived on the field July 20th just four days before the expiration of his reentrance permit. Trusting the Lord to do the impossible, Mrs. Wirsche stayed behind. As a new missionary she was not able to get an entrance to Colombia from the Colombian consul in North America. When applying for it in Colombia the Lord did the exceeding abundant in that the visa was granted, and on September 14th she joined her husband on the field.

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GOD

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The Missionary Children's School is now being occupied. Some interior floors, walls, fixtures, etc., need to be completed. A car for La Cumbre had been a great necessity for that station since the beginning. In March the above car arrived on the field.



The National Day School in Noanama which was permitted to function this past year though midst difficulties.

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The Mission launch in Istmina with missionaries and a group of young people and adults taking the Gospel to a town downriver on Sunday afternoon.



The young people from Istmina studying in the Bible Institute in Palmira in preparation for service for the Lord. They are Francisco, Alfredo, Belarmino (respectively) and Marcelana (not pictured). (The playing of instruments is pretentious.)

Dr. Miller Visits LaCumbra



On August 13th. and 14th. Dr. Minnie Miller, head of the Spanish department at Kansas State Teachers College of Emporia, Kansas, visited the La Cumbre compound. Dr. Miller was spending her vacation touring several of the southern republics acquainting herself more with the customs of a people whose language she teaches, and has taught to many. Her purpose in visiting La Cumbre was to see face to face several of the M. B. missionaries who have been her students through the correspondence department of the college. We want to thank Dr. Miller most heartily for her visit.

From Our Home Churches

It was a great encouragement in receiving the returns of the recent questionnaire (as to how many copies of the Colombian News and Views each church could use) to find added such notes as the following:

Yarrow, B. C.—I personally welcome every news from the mission field and definitely believe that the publicity our mission work is gaining in the last years is a definite step to the furtherance of the cause of Christ. I would therefore encourage our mission workers to inform the churches of their joys and hardships in the work, to enable us to praise the Lord and more definitely intercede for the work.

Wichita, Kansas—We have been especially praying for the work in Colombia, especially that the Lord may keep the doors open.

Atwater, California—The Colombian news will be greatly appreciated by all our families and will keep them informed how our workers on the field are doing. God bless you in the publishing of the news is our prayer.

Waldheim, Saskatchewan—We are always glad to hear from you and enjoy reading Colombian news. I generally bring the needs of the field to our mid-week prayer meeting.

Hillsboro, Kansas—It is good that some of the experiences and happenings on the field be recorded and made known to the constituency. I believe that I can assure you that many Christians in North America are praying earnestly for the work abroad. And when we think of Colombia, we have a feeling that the work is not easy and we are conscious that it could be dangerous too.

Justice, Manitoba—Wir brauchen mehr Besuch von unseren Missionsfeldern, so auch von Colombia, denn bis uns hier kommt sehr selten ein Missionar, dann wäre ein Blättchen in jedem Heim doch ein schöner Besuch.

P R A Y E R



List of Prayer Requests

(1) Pray that the eyes of the behighted Colombians may be opened to the Truth as revealed in God's Word. In the picture (left) multitudes are following a Passion Week procession in Medellin. Note that the Virgin Mary (considered the "Mother of God" and Savior of the world) comes first and Christ last.

(2) Pray that Alejandro (center) as well as the other children of our believers in Istmina may be able to get a schooling. Our evangelical day school was not permitted to continue functioning this year. In the government school they are obligated to attend Catholic

mass, abstain from attending our services, etc.

(3) Pray that don Abraham (right) as well as don Anibal, Cholito, and others of Istmina (as well as of the other stations) may be able to win their wives to the Lord. They refuse to attend any of our services.

(4) Pray that new missionaries may enter now while the doors are seemingly open. Not only are missionaries essential to expand the work but missionaries on the field are having to stay longer than their term because there are not enough to carry on the work.

(5) Pray for the financial needs of the field.

LaCumbra VIEWS Noanama



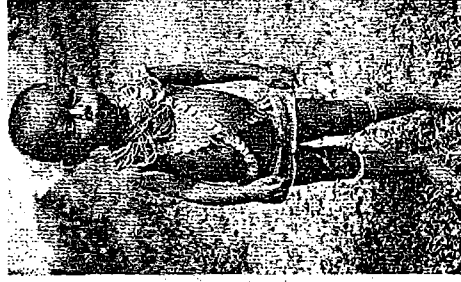
This is the class of the 1950-1951 school year of the Missionary Children's School. The names left to right are: (front row) Peter Shillingsburg, Bobby Crosby, Malcolm Clyde, Roland Dyck and Patricia Crosby; (back row) Helen, Johnny and Grace Shillingsburg and Miss Lillian Schaefer, the teacher. Rev. and Mrs. E. J. Fadenrecht (not in the picture) served as houseparents to the children.



Here you see the National Day School as it operated in the year 1950-1951. The children come from various parents and many from ungodly homes, but praise the Lord, during the school year a goodly number of them accepted the Lord as their Savior. In the back row are seen the staff members: Miss Ruth Joewen (left), the matron, Miss Annie Dyck (center) and Sra. Teresa Rodriguez (extreme right), the teachers.

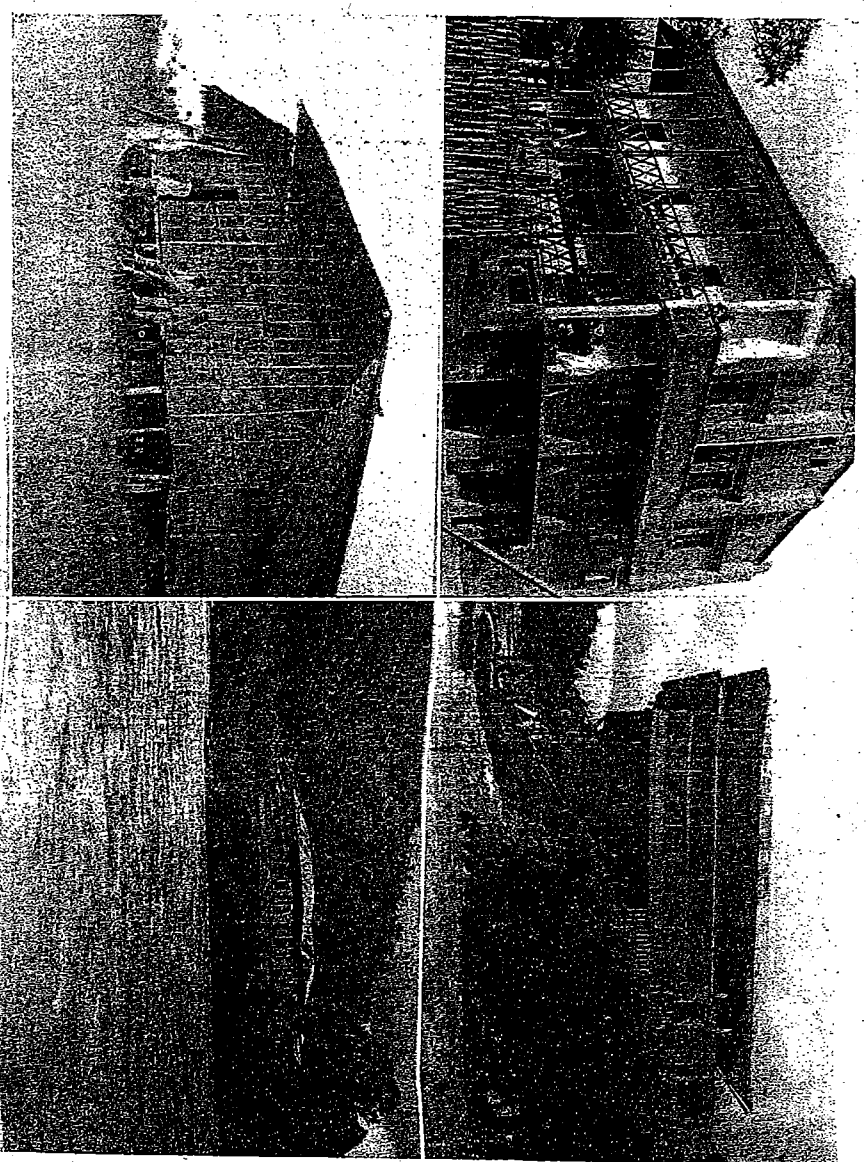


This picture gives you a good view of part of Noanama station in the Choco. At the left you see part of the plantation of the Mission farm. In the center you see the "lambo" the Indian house where sick Indians who come to the dispensary may pass the night and where also the informant for the Loewens lives when at Noanama. It is a typical Indian structure built by one of the friends of the Mission. At the right flows the majestic San Juan River.



The little Indian boy is here showing off his "best-Sunday-go-to-meetin' suit." This is a typically dressed up youngster. His apparel is all beads.





1. Main Mission Building, La Cumbre



4. Main Mission Building, Istmia

"ALL ABOARD

"The time is at hand."—Rev. 1:3
Orientation

In our last issue we left you in La Cumbre (our first Colombian Mission station which is located in the mountains in the state of Valle). Next on our tour is Istmina. The recently established air service makes it easy to get there. The Mission car takes us to Cali. From there in 55 minutes a plane flying over mountains, valleys, rivers, and jungles takes us to the state of Choco. A truck in a few minutes brings us to Andagoya from where the Mission launch takes us to Istmina in half an hour. It is now our pleasure to present to you, ISTMINA.

"He hath brought us into this place"—Deut. 26:9
Introduction By Elsie Wirscho

Istmina, the flourishing capital of the St. John (San Juan) province is situated at the confluence of the St. John River and its tributary the St. Paul (San Pablo) River. The city's altitude is but 65 meters above sea level. This, together with the heavy rainfall—an average of one inch a day—periodically subjects the city to floods during the two rainy seasons of the year. Its population of approximately 2,100 consists predominantly of the black race.

Points worthy of mention are the main buildings which constitute the nucleus around which the life of the city revolves.

In the educational field there are four schools. The Industrial School (see picture) teaches four arts: carpentry, shoe making, making of jewelry and tailoring. The Rural Normal School is not equal to Canadian or U. S. Normal Schools. The student that has finished primary school is entitled to an entrance. The primary schools are separated—one for girls and one for boys. The first 4 or 5 grades are taught.

On September 7 of this year an important part of the business section of the city burned down including the municipal building, one of the two primary schools for girls, most of the important stores (consisting of some 8 buildings), a few private dwellings and the largest part of the market place.

Then there is the hospital, a relatively modern brick building. It is under the supervision of the Sisters of the Most Holy Sacrament and therefore excludes almost entirely the evangelicals as in-patients.

The Catholic Church is located on a higher crest away from busy streets. Many fanatical worshippers adhere to it. Our proposed evangelical church (see map) will also be located on a high crest overlooking the main part of the city.

The river port, busy from early till late, is located at the junction of the St. John and the St. Paul rivers. Concrete steps, built by the M. B. Mission, lead down to the river where passengers gather to board the motor launches or hand-paddled canoes. At the head of these steps advantageously located are the Mission headquarters, lending a view of the majestic St. John to the south and the calm St. Paul to the west with the green jungles beyond.

The city enjoys also a good aqueduct (installed in 1950), electricity (supplied by the Mining Co.) telephone, telegraph, and marconigram service; likewise regular and air mail service.

A gravelled road links this city with Quibdo the capital of the Choco. Twice a week there is plane service to the Mandinga airport (since 1950). It is easily reached by launch (or canoe) and car and thus connects Istmina with the other important cities of Colombia.

"Serve the Lord with gladness."—Psalm 100:2
Personnel by *Martha Bartel

Now about attending a "real life" drama with the station personnel as viewed through the eyes of a narrator? The curtain opens upon Act 1, scene 1:

Three little black faces are peering in at Kathryn Lentzner's office door. They scamper away, returning soon after with something for the Senorita. What? A fine fountain pen! Some little "chocolate drop" had managed to slip into her office (he may have had a razor blade hidden in his hand with which he cut the screen and unhooked the door) and ran away with Kathryn's pen. After offering a tip to the one who finds it, the pen comes back.

The curtain opens on scene 2: This time we find her dealing with a young negro teenager about his soul. After that we see her poring over station account books, taking care of secretarial duties, preparing lessons and taking charge of the bookstore.

Again the curtain opens. Act 2, scene 1: A man with a wound on his dog that won't heal comes into the dispensary. Slowly he sits down in front of the white clad figure. With deft precision and skill Lydia Golbel applies the necessary medicine.

"THE LORD WROUGHT

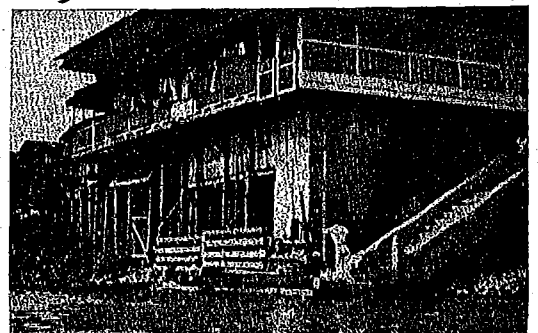
2 Sam. 23:12
History by John A. Dyck

The first of our M. B. Conference to visit the Choco, our present mission field, was Rev. G. W. Peters on his tour through Colombia in the year 1943. In the year 1946 Rev. Dan and David Wirscho made a trip through part of the Choco, returning with a very encouraging report. In the beginning of 1947 Rev. and Mrs. John A. Dyck while in language school in Medellin visited Quibdo, Istmina, and Andagoya. Misses Kathryn Lentzner and Mary Schroeder went as far as Quibdo.

A few months later Rev. John A. Dyck, then at LaCumbre, and two national students from the Palmira Bible Institute went into the Choco by way of Buenaventura. In less than a month an apartment had been rented in Istmina (the house now owned by the mission) which was cleaned and made liveable for Mr. Dyck to bring in his family. The people showed great interest in the newcomers. Many came to the house to see for what purpose they had come. On the way back to LaCumbre Mr. Dyck had severe attacks of malaria and bed bug fever from which it took him over a month to recover. Mr. and Mrs. Dyck and the two boys moved into the Choco by way of Buenaventura, August, 1947. Since then San Juan River was very low, the boat could only get as far as Dipurdu. From there they left at six in the morning in a canoe with two bogas (oarmen). After suffering alternately from the tropical heat and torrential showers they arrived at five in the afternoon at the Mining Co. in Andagoya. A launch then took them the rest of the way upriver to Istmina.

The work then began. After two months the Misses Mary Schroeder, Kathryn Lentzner, and Annie Dyck joined them. Meetings were started in the Casa Evangelica (mission chapel), Pueblo Nuevo, Carretera, and in the market place. Many came out to listen to the Word of God. Several special evangelistic campaigns were held. Souls were saved in these as well as in the weekly meetings. In January, 1949, the first believer was baptized. A year later five more took the step and the church was organized. Others now are also ready for baptism.

People from far and wide called at the house and gave special invitations to visit their town. There was one great obstacle,



The city port and the Casa Evangelica which was

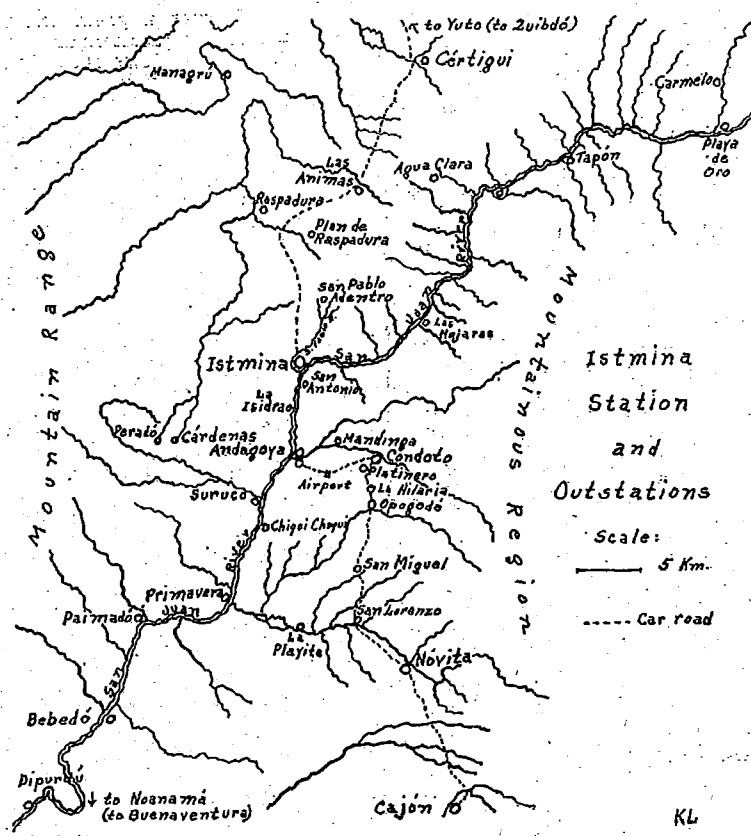
FOR ISTMINA"

A GREAT VICTORY"

how shall the workers travel? Again God's people at home were shown an opportunity to give for God's cause and a launch was supplied. Now La Isidra, Andagoya, Andagoyita, Suruco, Primavera, Bebedo, Condoto, Novita, Las Mojarras, Tado, and others could be visited. Meetings were held in homes or large halls which the people were willing to give for the occasion. Bibles and other evangelical literature (a bookstore was soon established in Istmina) were sold as gospels and tracts distributed.

In the fall of 1949 all services outside of the chapel right under the same roof with the mission living quarters had to be discontinued because of political unrest which also brought religious persecution. The mission house was threatened—many nights were spent in watching. An attempt was made to shoot our launchmen but the gun wouldn't go off. One night the missionary women and children were sent to the neighboring Mining Company town for safety but nothing happened. God heard the cry of workers and believers and friends in the homeland—gradually in 1950 most of the work could again be taken up.

Beloved friends, God has opened the doors, souls are waiting for the peace and joy the Savior gives. Why shall we delay any longer to give the Word out into the uttermost parts of the Choco? Many are still waiting to hear because few are the laborers.



The pioneers of the work in the Choco (as they appeared then). Left to right: Kathryn Lentzner who is still laboring in Istmina. Annie Dyck whose services were later required at LaCumbre but now is in Canada on furlough. Mary Schroeder who is in charge of the dispensary work in Noanamá. Rev. and Mrs. John A. Dyck, Roland and Rodney who were transferred to La Cumbre August, 1950, because of health reasons. At present they are on furlough in the States and Canada.



"The river is mine."—Ez. 29:9

Evangelization by Launch and Canoe by Dan A. Wirsche

If you examine the map of this issue you will notice that the territory around Istmina has a great network of rivers and streamlets. These rivers serve as roads and highways for the people. All towns and villages are situated close to them.

You will also notice numerous places marked, beside these imagine at least another time as many not marked. All these places are open for the Gospel—some more than others. The question how to reach all of them still remains to be answered.

We would like to show you how some of these places are being visited. About two weeks ago two native boys packed their hammocks, some food, extra clothing, and some literature in a canoe and started down the St. John River. They had no set time just how long they would stay at one place. If the interest was good, as they found it in Bebedo, they stayed eight days with services every night. If the interest was not so good they did like the disciples of old: shook the dust off their feet and went to the next village. During a stay in the village they also visited all the homes, talked with the people about their souls' salvation and left literature with them.

Another example: This was a Sunday afternoon. Missionaries with a group of young people crowded into the launch and went down the river to Suruco, from where they had received an invitation to render a temperance program. Arriving there the group divided and went from house to house inviting the people and leaving a tract with each one. At the appointed time some 40 gathered for the program and message. After the service opportunities presented themselves to deal with some individuals. On the way home they got drenched in a tropical rain (torrential downpour).

Every trip has its own peculiarities, difficulties, and hardships but also its joys. The seed that has been thus sown has not been in vain. Some have become more interested and acknowledge the Gospel as the Truth, while others are saved. May this challenge you to pray more for this phase of the work.

We see others come in: a boy with a cut finger, a lady whose baby has worms, a man whose foot has been chewed by a rat the night before, and someone with general aches and pains.

Scene 2 finds Lydia holding a gospel service in the dispensary. At another occasion she is out on the street in the home of a sick lady. After giving her an injection she speaks to her of spiritual healing.

Act 3 in Istmina: An old man knocks at the door. After a "Buenos Dias" and "Como esta," the man says to Harry Bartel, "I came to confess to you. (He thinks the protestant pastor also demands confession.)" "My religion is too expensive," he adds. Harry with an open Bible explains the way of salvation and emphasizes that our sins must be confessed to the only One who can forgive. What was feared to be only a farce to get something out of Harry, resulted in true repentance.

Again the curtain opens to find Harry busy supervising the multitude of station duties: outstation work, national evangelists, various school problems, answering the many callers, and preparing lessons for the Bible classes.

The curtain rises upon Act 4: This time we find ourselves on the village street. Four figures are sitting close to the doorway of one of the homes. A closer glance reveals Martha Bartel with two negro women and their brother. An hour is spent talking about the Lord, reading the Word and prayer. The next day one of the women appears at the mission home. "Teach me that prayer," she says, "I had some difficulties yesterday and now they are all gone. I believe its because you prayed. I want to learn that prayer and pray it every day." Again time is taken out to explain that the first prayer to be learned should be that of the Publican and accepting Jesus as one's Savior.

*Rev. and Mrs. Harry K. Bartel were transferred to La Cumbre in August.

"Whosoever will"—Rev. 22:17

Istmina Spiritual Work By Kathryn Lentzner

A bell rings. The men's class is gathered in the provisional church. From the back patio (cemented back yard on stilts over the river) the women's class comes in. The children file in from the waiting room of the dispensary. And from Miss Lentzner's front room the young people join the rest for the closing exercises of the Sunday School. The attendance today is 53, though the enrollment is much higher. The offering totals \$4.80. Many of these are ready to go in the afternoon in the launch to present the Gospel in a neighboring village (other times walk to a nearby village).

As the invitation is given to some 30 gathered Sunday evening for the illustrated lesson and evangelistic message, two respond (often none and at other times as many as six). The Lord has just begun a work in their hearts. To those especially to whom the Gospel is new it takes much prayer and teaching before they are able to leave the old life with its sins and vices and "walk in newness of life."

"I want to buy the book, Elementary Studies," says one of the young believers walking into the bookstore on Tuesday night just before the Bible Study class. Others already have a copy and eagerly follow the study with it in one hand and the Bible in the other. We trust that some 10 to 12 more of these may be ready for baptism in January.

As we enter a certain home in Pueblo Nuevo on Wednesday night the late-eaters scurry with their plates to the kitchen as table and sewing machine are put to one side and the saw-horses and boards are arranged for the weekly service—30 to 60 attend.

"Is there church today for the little ones?" asks a little chap of Miss Lentzner just an hour before the Thursday afternoon Bible Club. Meeting after school hours, from 10 to 25 children take part in the illustrated lesson and handwork. One little boy said, "I would like to accept Jesus as my only Savior" but did not do so because his mother would object. He comes to the services when his mother is not aware of it and thus often gets called out as are also others.

With another service on Friday night which was formerly held in the market place especially for the country people (we were forced to give it up) the round of public services for the week closes.

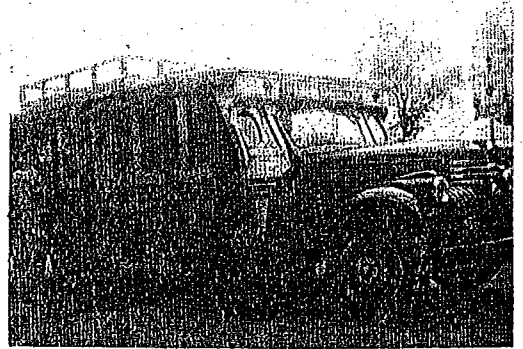
"Yes, I believe you people have the truth." Thus in the almost daily house visitations made many listen and agree readily. Often, however, it is very discouraging to see that they do not become enough concerned about their souls' salvation to do anything about it. "Yes, I will be at the service" many also say but out of sheer politeness (lying is generally not considered a sin). Many would like to come but fear the priests' threats or criticism of relatives and friends. "Oh, but I was told the Gospel was bad," said one lady when she was invited to the services. "Why don't you come and see for yourself?" She has quite faithfully attended since then.

Though there are many disappointments in the work, it is a joy to "cast our bread upon the waters" and see here and there lives transformed by the power of His Word.

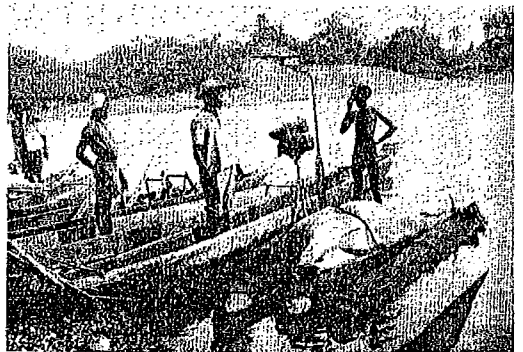
Bought in 1941 and completely remodeled to provide two living apartments, chapel, and dispensary. It is a wooden structure, with a tin roof.



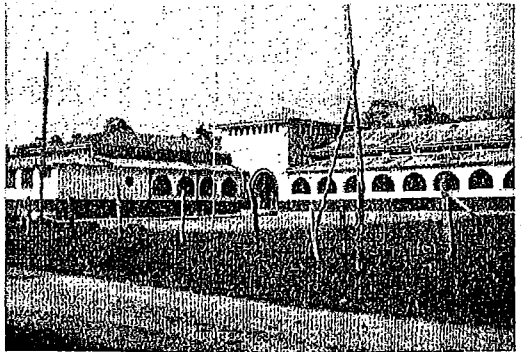
A Sunday School congregation in front of the chapel (Mission house).



A bus such as is used in cities and between cities all over Colombia. Such buses make daily connections (part way, latter half by launch) between Istmina and Quibdo.



Here at the river port you see a beef (cow) strapped to a raft as it is being floated down river to the village where it will be butchered. The clothes of the oarmen are kept dry on top of the sticks set upright. Also note the five canoes.



This is only part of the School of Arts' cement building consisting of classrooms, workshops, and dormitories. All students are strictly forbidden to attend our evangelical services.

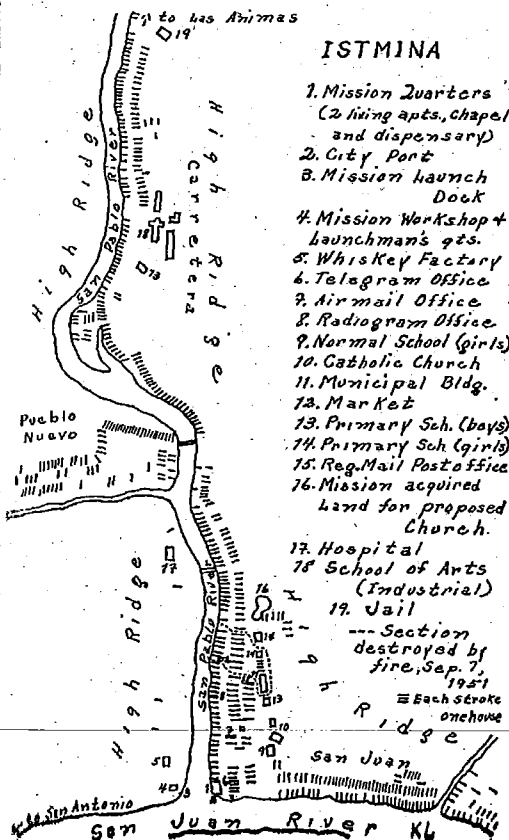
A typical house along the rivers. These houses with palm (sometimes board) floors, mud-plastered palm-walls and straw-thatched roofs are on stilts because of the heavy rainfall. All laundry is generally washed in the river and dried spread out on the ground.



Don Isidora (in front seat of canoe), one of our national workers from the Valle, is going to Condoto for several days' of evangelistic work. The oarman is don Anibal, one of our believers.



Popular mode of carrying, especially along jungle trails.



"Go in and possess the land."—Deut. 1:8

Evangelization by Jungle Trail by Kathryn Lentzner

Whom do I see walking along a mushy dense jungle trail? It is none other than our national workers, don Alfredo and dona Maria (his wife). Don Francisco, one of our most faithful believers, is with them with a pack on his back (see picture).

These faithful workers are out on one of their regular treks in the jungles to visit certain villages. They wade through one brook, then another, and still another. Each one has a stick in his hand so that when they walk over a pole laid in a very mushy part, they don't slip so readily.

A rooster crows, a dog barks, or someone is calling—and then they come to a clearing with the thatch-roofed, mud-plastered palm houses on short stilts clustered along a stream, in a row, or in a circle.

They come to the house of one especially interested in the Gospel. While they take off their canvas shoes, wash them, set them out to dry and put on dry ones, the friendly hostess (black of course like all the rest) serves a drink made from corn (semi-thick with the kernels in it).

From the pack don Francisco carried, come tracts, books, and hammocks, and some rice, lard, etc. to prepare a few meals. The hostess permits dona Maria to cook in her kitchen on the open charcoal fire. And even he's in fanning the flames.

At dusk those of the village who are in the mines (hand-dug ones or in the river digging for and panning gold and platinum) or on their little farms of corn, yucca, platano, banana, etc. come home. After all have had their evening meal they gather in a comparatively small candle-lit room (largest one available) and there don Alfredo tells the way of salvation to an overflowing audience.

After the benediction, while don Alfredo goes into further explanation with several especially interested, don Francisco presents the gospel literature and makes a few sales.

Finally at 11:00 or 12:00 o'clock they string up their hammock. The host offered a bed (without springs and mattress of course) but there is too much danger of bed-bug fever. With a deep sigh and trusting that the Lord will give the increase to the Word sown they fall asleep.

Such are the experiences of the workers as the precious Gospel is taken inland. Sometimes it is only walking part way and part way one goes by bus or canoe. Sometimes it rains and other times the sun beats down tremendously. But, there is joy in serving the Lord and seeing the Word take root in certain individual lives.

"The power of the Lord was present to heal them."—Luke 5:17

*Dispensary by Lydia Golbek

From the beginning of our missionary work in Colombia, the medical work was considered as one phase of service to be fostered. The opportunity for this service was quickly realized in the Choco where little of this work is being done for the hundreds upon hundreds of people suffering from diseases of most every description.

A simple dispensary service was started by Mary Schroeder after a few individual cases had been treated. Evil forces soon were at work and local health authorities put a stop to the worthy enterprise despite protests of the public. However, Brother John Dyck went to higher authorities in Bogota who granted a permit to continue the work.

In April, 1948, there was a change of personnel because of Miss Schroeder's health. The remodeling of the mission house provided new quarters for the dispensary and also better facilities. Several assistants were hired and trained to do "curaciones" (dressing). A spiritual service was held by a national worker or by a missionary two or three times a week. Tracts were given to those who could read. Thus we hoped to awaken their consciousness to the spiritual lack in their souls.

Of course in a dispensary such as ours we cannot accept surgical or hospital cases, such we have had to advise to go to the hospital or to the government health center where doctors are available. Most of the people, however, are too poor to pay the doctor's fees. In the past year, a change of doctors and health officials at the city's health center brought about an improvement in its services so that the number of our patients has diminished somewhat.

One of the Choco's real needs is more medical missionaries, trained in minor surgery, dentistry, laboratory technic, etc., as well as soul-winning. Who will come and fill this need?

*Miss Golbek is on furlough. The dispensary is closed now for the lack of medical-trained missionaries to supervise the work. Ed.