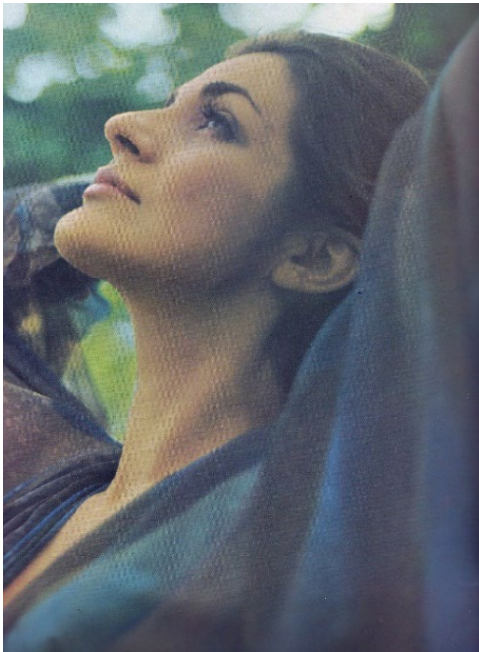


*Francis and Albert Gomez:
From Sevenoaks to Trinidad*

Last year's edition of *Sennockian* magazine featured a piece by an Upper Sixth student, Becky Cain-Renshaw, describing her experience of historical research into two Old Sennockians and brothers from the early twentieth century, using the school archives.



Since the piece was published, more information on the lives of Francis and Albert Gomez, both before and after their time at Sevenoaks School, has come to light through Jill Gomez, the distinguished opera singer, who is Albert Gomez's eldest daughter and to whom we are most grateful.

Jill, pictured left on the cover of her 1974 LP *A Recital of French Songs*, introduces the brothers.

This archive article is indebted to the memories and discoveries of Jill, her sister Wendy (right) and her cousin David, eldest son of Francis Gomez.



It is a fascinating tale of how Old Sennockians have made an impact on world developments over the years.

Francis Joseph Gomez and Albert Clyde Gomez were born in 1914 and 1915 respectively in Trinidad and Tobago in the West Indies. The brothers came from a very ancient family. According to the Heraldic Department of the Prado, their "ancestral homes were in the mountains of Burgos and Santander. The family extended throughout the peninsula during the Reconquest and proved its nobility in various eras, entering Military Orders (or services), the Court of Nobles of the Royal Chancery of Valladolid and in the Royal Court of Oviedo." The young Captain Don Simón Gómez de Calderón had embarked from Cadíz on 24th November 1569: the Prado continues the story, "when he came in the Expedition of Don Diego Fernández de Zerpa, first Governor and Captain General of the Province 'Nueva Andalucía' in the New World..." as part of an expedition sent by King Philip II to install good governance in Spain's new territory. Don Simón was one of the first people with the name of Gómez to arrive there, bringing his new wife Doña María Coutiño, and travelling with her parents, Captain Don Tomás Coutiño and his wife Doña Luisa López de Villena, together with her grandmother, the aristocratic Doña Mencia Alvarez. All military members could only stay in the New World if they got married in Spain and could begin a family and be considered true Spaniards.



*Dr Patrick Carnegy and Jill Gomez
at the Festspielhaus, Bayreuth, 2002*

He and his descendants lived in Cumaná, Nueva Andalucía [now Venezuela] for some three hundred years until the terrible day when Frank and Albert's grandfather Francisco José Gómez Jimenez, a General in the Venezuelan Army, was, according to Albert and Frank's younger sister Lucilita "in the Embassy in Ciudad Bolívar and on hearing gunfire went outside to look but was tragically killed by a stray bullet from the revolutionaries". At the time of Don Francisco's assassination his poor wife Doña Trinidad Gómez de Machado, pregnant with their sixth child (Frank and Albert's father, Ernesto), was visiting Port of Spain. She was a direct descendant of "Martín Martínez Machado, the son of the King of Portugal, Don Sancho II in the 1190s. He was the first knight named Machado, which denomination he received when fighting alongside his father the King and breaking the gates of the Ville de Torresnovas with a hatchet strike, or 'machado'. He married Doña Loba Gómez, founder of the Convent of Saint Martín Carracedo, daughter of the Count Don Gómez Núñez de Celanova y Barbosa and of Doña Elvira Pérez de Trava." Doña Trinidad gave birth to my grandfather Ernesto Gómez de Machado in the following year, 1885, and never returned to Ciudad Bolívar. Thanks to this tragedy, the rest of the family also left Cumaná, Venezuela, in 1884 and became British subjects of Trinidad and Tobago.

Ernesto married Lucila Gutiérrez, the third of six daughters of Don Jacinto Gutiérrez (1835-1901) and Ana Tello in Caracas. He was the celebrated lyrical poet "who leaves a body of work which will forever honour Venezuelan letters and which can compete with that of any of the Spanish poets".



From 1864 onwards he served in many Ministries and in 1870 he became Minister of Foreign Affairs, moving on in 1875 to serve as Venezuelan Ambassador in New York where Lucila, the third of his six daughters, was born. After his death in 1901, and thanks to yet further unrest in the country, she and her other five sisters were also forced to leave Caracas for Port of Spain where Lucila met Ernesto. He spoke no Spanish since his father's killing in Venezuela and she spoke no English, only French and Spanish! But this proved no obstacle to the creation of their five children, Anita, the Old Sennockians Francis and Albert, and finally Lucilita and Leonard.

*Jacinto Gutiérrez Coll, poet and diplomat,
my father's maternal grandfather*

Sally Robbins, Archivist at Sevenoaks School, describes the boys' school careers:

Francis (Frank) and Albert were sent to England for their education, first, in 1922, to Hodder (the prep school for Stonyhurst) in Lancashire and then on to Sevenoaks School in September 1927. Only fourteen months separated the brothers in age and their school journey was undertaken in parallel from the moment they were placed in Form IIIa together. They were known during their time in the school as Gomez (i) and Gomez (ii). Both boys were also among the first intake of boarders in a new House, Johnsons, under the care of its Housemaster, Ernie Groves.

Their time at Sevenoaks was characterised from the start by participation in a variety of sports. There is hardly an edition of the *Sennockian* that does not mention some involvement, accolade or achievement – School, House or individual. Francis' earlier years at the school were marked by achievements in the annual swimming sports in the old Baths behind the Cottage Block – swimming lengths and “plunging”. By 1930 he was a member (and remained so for the rest of his time in the school) of the First XV (“a sound tackler...falls on the ball fearlessly and is not easily stopped when running”) and First XI (“once more he looked in every way a natural wicket keeper...if he gets rid of this tendency [to dismiss a batsman at catches or stumps through snatching at the ball] he ought to become quite first class”).

Albert, too, had early triumphs in swimming competitions; he also excelled at gymnastics winning both individual medals at junior and senior level, and leading the Johnsons' team to House success in 1930, 1931 and 1932. In his last two years at school he was, with his brother, a member of the First XV (“has good hands and tackles well but is slow in attack and apt to run into the scrum or waste his kick”) and First XI (“his batting improved sufficiently to give promise that he will develop into a real run-getter in time. His slow bowling was always useful...only requires improved length and a rather faster pace through the air to be a most dangerous bowler”).

In their last term, in addition to their sporting activities Albert gained his School Certificate; Francis the credits towards his, won Mr H D Burnett's Senior History Prize and served as a House Monitor. Albert found time to return to his alma mater in Sevenoaks on several occasions and kept in contact with the Old Sennockians community both in the West Indies and in England. His death in 1973 was marked by an obituary in the Old Sennockians newsletter.



Both brothers in the Johnsons junior rugby team that won the House Challenge Cup, 1929



James Higgs Walker presenting House Challenge Cup to the Johnsons' cricket team, 1931; Albert Gomez, pictured right

Jill Gomez continues:

In July 1932 Francis and Albert returned to Trinidad, determined to pass on their new skills and love of rugby. In that same year they both played in the Trinidad Northern Rugby Team, one of the most successful teams in the country.

In 1936 Frank was a member of the Trinidad team that took on British Guiana in the Intercolonial Rugby Tournament. Very little rugby was played during the War due to the shortage of players, but when it was over Albert threw himself into reviving the game. In 1946 he became manager and captain of the Trinidad team which beat British Guiana, 14 - 8, in the first intercolonial rugby tourney at Georgetown.

In the course of one of their rugby tours to Barbados in 1943, Frank met his future wife Helen Clarke. They had four boys, Michael, Peter, David and John, and there are teams of sporty grandchildren. The Trinidad Northern Rugby Team still exists and they now have a women's division started in part by David's daughter Robyn.

Frank joined Barclays Bank, Port of Spain, and Albert studied organic chemistry, specialising in sugar technology at the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture.

Their younger sister Lucilita married Roderick Gibbon and they had five children, Kathleen, Rosemary, Ion, Roderick and Mary.



*The 1932 Northern Rugby team;
Albert, bottom left, Frank, bottom right*



*Wedding Day 1943:
Frank and Helen Gomez*



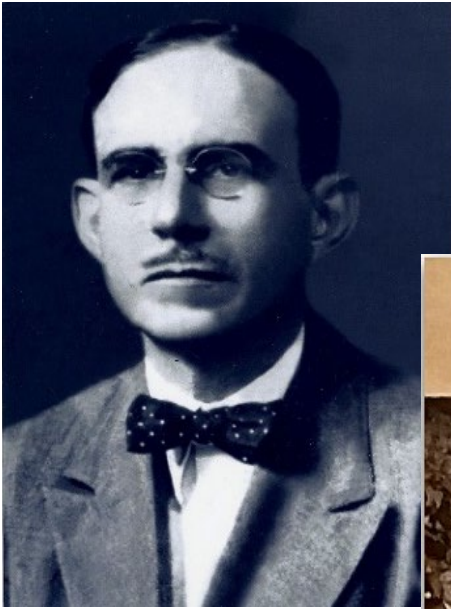
*Lucilita, my father's younger sister,
marrying Roderick Gibbon*



*David and Wendy Gomez with their
children and grandchildren*



*Ion Gibbon, student at the University
of the West Indies, meeting the
Duke of Edinburgh in November 1964*



Their father Ernesto, left, had become the Brazilian Consul and Dean of the Consular Corp in Trinidad and ran the family import/export company Gomez & Miller. He was reputedly charming and greatly loved by all who met him.

After Ernesto's death Frank joined Gomez & Miller.



Trinidad Consular Body, New Year 1948. Ernesto Gomez is fifth from the left in the front row. On his left is the Governor General Sir Mark Young.



My father Albert, pictured left, was first employed in 1941 as a sugar technologist by Bookers, Skeldon Plantation, British Guiana, which position he had taken up after my beautiful and brilliantly talented mother Denise Price Denham had declined his proposal of marriage.

Denise, pictured bottom left, had arrived in Trinidad from Bermuda in early 1941 having been sent to Bermuda in 1940 by the Wartime Civil Service Censorship to continue her work abroad after training in Inverness. It was also the training ground for the RAF, the Russian Allies in their subs and the Allied ships where they had all gathered at the start of the war.

But once her talent in all things musical and theatrical was discovered, she was commandeered into providing entertainment for the troops.



News of her thespian and musical gifts came before her and she was immediately roped into theatricals in Bermuda. But she became bored with the age disparity and asked for a transfer to swinging Trinidad!

My father met her in 1941 at the height of her popularity and success in Port of Spain revues, pantomimes, notably as Prince Charming in Cinderella, and jazz sessions with W.V.D.I. the American Armed Forces Radio Station with the "Scuttlebutt Seven" where the rave reviews christened her 'The Lady who'd been blitzed'. But my mother had had second thoughts while he was away and sent a telegram accepting his proposal. He raced back to PoS to collect and marry his happy bride-to-be before she changed her mind again.

The war-wedding in PoS was a simple but stylish affair in which the bride looked beautiful in her charming dress designed and made by herself thanks to her own resourcefulness with leftover lengths of shark silk, lace and lengths of wide ribbon for her beautiful flapper-style sash tied just under the hips. She carried a lovely bouquet of white stephanotis. The accompanying photo shows the happy wedding group. There they stand, my mother supported by her dear friends the Maylings, my father and his brother Frank, the two star athletes of Sevenoaks, the younger one, my father, about to run a very different kind of race.

After their marriage on the 10th January 1942 in Trinidad and honeymoon in Tobago they returned to Skeldon. I was born on 21st September 1942 in New Amsterdam, BG, on the stroke of midnight, having nearly made my first appearance in the taxi commandeered on the estate to take my mother to hospital, but saved by my theatrical instinct for timing. My father, however, was increasingly unhappy with Bookers' attitude to the cane cutters and insisted they provide proper facilities for their rest and refreshment. Bookers eventually agreed to do this but my parents were eager to leave 'the bush' and return to easier living conditions in Port of Spain for looking after a baby. Getting back to Trinidad in wartime was not so easy as it was a question of waiting for a plane to show up, any plane however small and dilapidated that would brave the terrifying journey back to Port of Spain. This was thanks to the constant presence and carnage caused by German U-Boats in the Caribbean en route to guarding the Panama Canal but taking the opportunity of attacking even the Lady Boats from Canada bringing fruit and vegetables and medical supplies to Bermuda via some of the other islands.

Eventually, a three-week-old baby and her nervous parents boarded an old jalopy along with about eight other people. The roar of the engines caused terrible pain in my eardrums, and my mother did her frantic best to help by sticking her fingers in my ears. When at last we landed at Piarco Airport and the propellor blades had slowly spun down into stillness there was, my mother told me, a pin-dropping silence in the cabin, rudely broken by shrieks of laughter issuing forth from my powered-up lungs and vocal chords. My debut performance was much appreciated by the highly relieved audience who clapped and cheered with gusto which, as a future opera singer, must surely, I think, have given me a taste for such things forever after. My sister Wendy was born some 16 months later on 31st January 1944.



Denise Gomez, far right, at barracks concert party, Inverness 1940



Left to right, Frank the Best Man, Phyl Mayling the Maid of Honour, Albert, Denise, and Stanley Mayling who gave the bride away



The Angostura Distillery in 1949

Albert Gomez



origo of this drink! Nor does it end there, for the very special flavour and aroma added to cordials, punches etc proved to be a great enhancement when added to stews, soups and sauces, or sprinkled over chopped nuts on ice cream or whipped crème fraiche with peaches or strawberries – the list is endless! They were a hit from the start and very soon became well known internationally, acquiring a world-wide reputation after the first shipments to England and to Trinidad in the 1850s.

Thus, did Albert go on to create the first gin ever made in Trinidad, in the teeth of derision from all those who said they'd never consider anything but Gordon's Gin! He christened it not unreasonably Angos Gin! He also christened a baby alligator, found in the swamp outside the distillery, 'Blue Label' in honour of the first blend produced by the Angostura distillery at Laventille. He went on to broaden further the distillery products with a first coffee liqueur called Mokatika, and in 1956 was appointed a Director of the Board of Angostura Bitters.

On Albert's return he was invited by his childhood friend Robert Siegart, now at the head of the Siegart dynasty's world-renowned Angostura Bitters distilling company, pictured left, to join him in 1943 as his assistant chemist. My father had long wished to expand the production of some of the old rum stocks lying around the old bond at George Street, Trinidad, from Ciudad Bolivar days and build a new factory outside Port of Spain where new blends could be developed. His secret dream was to create the finest and palest distilled rum in the world to the point where, if you closed your eyes, inhaled the bouquet and rolled the golden liquor around your mouth, you'd imagine you were drinking the finest French cognac...a trick my father was to play on many an unsuspecting guest after dinner. Robert helped him to fulfill this dream and in 1947 my father became Robert's chief chemist and was given full rein to design and build a new factory at Laventille.

The distillery opened in 1949 as Trinidad Distillers Ltd, which was established as a wholly owned subsidiary of the House of Angostura of which he was appointed the General Manager. He couldn't wait to take my sister Wendy, six and myself, eight, on a tour of the factory where we found ourselves overwhelmed by the extremely pungent yeasty aroma rising up from the enormous vats of dark molasses. We were rewarded by Daddy dipping a long-handled cup into a smaller vat of molasses for us to taste to a somewhat raised eyebrow from our mother.

In 1954 he became Managing Director of the firm, exporting some of the finest distilled pale rums in the world including the very popular Old Oak and Royal Oak blends.

A later blend, Angostura 1824, a twelve-year-old hand-casked rum aged in charred oak barrels, was named for the year after the end of Simon Bolívar's Independence War, 1810-1823, when Dr J G B Siegart, the German doctor and apothecary to the dictator, created a potion from the medicinal herbs, plants and roots that thrived in the ancient forest that brought comfort to the sick and the wounded who overflowed the field hospitals. It turned out to be a brilliant remedy for dysentery and he originally called it "Amargo Aromatico". But these aromatic bitters soon found another use when Don Carlos, Dr Siegart's eldest son, showed Londoners in 1862 how to make the monotony of gin into an exciting drink by christening it 'pink gin', the *fons et*



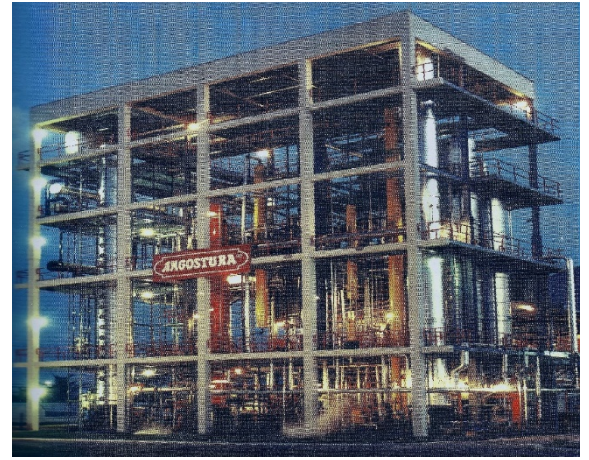
Angostura Bitters with its Hummingbird Gold Medal, 1985

Very sadly, our father died in 1973 at the tragically early age of 57 after a long battle to survive not only one but two of the earliest attempts in England to replace a faulty mitral valve.

He had already set in motion the construction of a new state-of-the-art distillery, which was completed in Laventille in 1985 on the same site as the old one. Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II was invited to visit the new plant on 1st November during her state visit. Happily my mother happened to be in Port of Spain at the time and was able to represent our father. The Bitters is very popular with the Royal Family thanks not least to Pink Gin! No surprise that it has for many years been honoured with the Royal Warrant, as also from the royal households of Prussia, Spain and Sweden and is the only company in the West Indies to be so honoured.

Senator Tommy Gatliffe, then Angostura's chairman, greeted the Queen and President Clarke and delivered the address after which he presented the Queen with a gift from the House of Angostura. The Queen then unveiled a plaque marking the distillery expansion: "Unveiled by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II to mark the completion of the Angostura distillery expansion, 1st November, 1985."

In Trinidad Distillers Ltd, Old Sennockian Albert Gomez had created the most modern rum distillery in the Commonwealth Caribbean. This was recognised in 1985 when it became the first company to receive the prestigious national award – Hummingbird Gold – "for loyal and devoted service to Trinidad and Tobago" on account of its contribution to the local economy and the development of the Trinidad rum industry.



The new Angostura distillery, 1985



H.M. Queen Elizabeth II visiting the Angostura Distillery, 1985, with at right Tommy Gatliffe, chairman, and Sir Ellis Clarke (centre), President of Trinidad and Tobago



Albert, Denise and Jill Gomez arriving for an Institute of Directors garden party at Buckingham Palace, 1970