

● Amy advises Jamaican women

'Get involved and improve production'

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This is the third article in a series based on the memories of Miss Amy Bailey. Today, this woman who has lived for nearly a century, speaks about her own experiences and how she thinks Jamaican women can contribute to the current drive towards production.

By Yvonne Grinam

Forty-six years ago, with the princely sum of one hundred and five pounds in her bank book, Miss Bailey started the House Craft Training Centre for Girls. It was a place that would over many years turn out thousands of young Jamaican girls skilled in the 'art' of home-making.

"In November 1945 we saw a piece of property being sold for 150,000 pounds. It was an old Georgian Home at 4 Rosedale Avenue in St. Andrew. Back then I had a little over one hundred pounds in

my bank-book. I paid down the hundred pound, leaving five pounds.

"At the time I was a teacher at the Kingston Technical school where I had begun in 1920. But I always had the feeling that young girls should have the opportunity to be trained to work in the home. Everyone looked down at house work then, but what is wrong with being a maid?

"Anyway I got the place and we started with six students. The course was a one year course and the programme was very rigid. We taught the girls to cook, bake and make use of all our native products. We offered courses in house-keeping and dining room service. When our girls left there, they left feeling that they were important. And they were in great demand too. We sent them to the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada. We never gave them a certificate until they had worked in a home for at least three months. Of course I insisted that our girls be paid more than the others, after all they had had the benefit of our training. When I left the Centre in 1978 we had trained some six thousand girls.

"I think people in the Home Economic sector should take a very firm hand in helping Jamaica at this time. They should push for the use of local and native products, like for example cassava wafers which, not only can be used here in Jamaica, but also exported all over the world. I know people living in Jamaican communities abroad would be too glad to get these things. This sort of thing would help to build up the local cassava industry.



Miss Amy Bailey

We could also do more in bee-farming and I submit that teachers in the Home Economics Department in schools could find out the ways of using sweet potatoes and breadfruit. I know that these can be used to make beautiful cocktails. The more these things are made, the more the farmers are able to plant. I remember when we were at the centre we taught some members of the staff how to can ackees, we saw the possibilities then and now it has been taken up by some big company. The pimento is another thing, I don't think it is being exploited as it should be. You can make pimento oil from the leaves of this plant.

And what about the school gardens? Children at school could go in for this. They could plant things like escallion and thyme in tins which could be sold to help offset some of their costs for books and things like that.

"I think that Informal Commercial Importers, the higglers, have a good idea but they are not doing their thing in an orderly way. They need to be trained in how to do book-keeping and the clerical part of their job.

But there are also a lot of women at home sitting down doing nothing, they can get involved in some type of cottage industry and try to do what they can. There is a lot of potential out there in improving Jamaica's production."