

Of Duty & Service

The Legacy of Raglan Riviere –Webmaster and Co-Founder of the Dominica Academy of Arts & Sciences (DAAS)



Introduction:

Sometime in 1999 I came across the website “Sir Raglan Presents.” It was an internet portal designed by Dominican born civic leader Raglan Riviere, then resident in Canada. From what I could discern, his website was focused on spotlighting the achievements of Dominicans and those of Dominican heritage, at home and abroad. For instance if a child of Dominican parents graduated from university with honors, his website would pay tribute to such academic excellence and spread the good word. Raglan’s website also featured information on our current affairs, history, culture and Pan Africanism. As a young nation, such promotion of sound values in education, or recognition of our heritage, is the veritable glue which binds a group of people into that body we call “a nation.” Impressed by Raglan’s work, and considering the need for an on-line entity to bind Dominicans together in meaningful development endeavor, I contacted Raglan on or about August 1, 2000 and suggested we form a Dominica Academy of Arts and Sciences (DAAS). DAAS would unite Dominicans at home and abroad into a skills directory online, and so partner with government and private sector to promote development on Dominica. Raglan, a former Dominica Grammar School cadet, Royal Air Force veteran, hospital administrator and author, needed no prodding and he agreed. The DAAS was born on November 1, 2000. The DAAS was incorporated in the US and Dominica and Dr. Clayton Shillingford became its first President in December 2000. The online Academy was formally launched at the Dominica Diaspora in the Development Process Symposium held on December 7, 2001 in Brooklyn, New York, which was organized by the Roosevelt Douglas Foundation. At the 2002 Dominica Diaspora in Development Symposium held in Roseau, Dominica, Dominica President Vernon Shaw presented Raglan Riviere with the RDF Medal of Honor for his work; in Raglan’s absence that

award was received on his behalf by his brother Hon. Osborne Riviere, then Trade Minister in the Dominica Government.

The DAAS has been instrumental in rendering assistance to Dominica in many fields; notable areas being the revival of the Dominica cadet Corps <http://www.dominicaseacadet.yolasite.com> , creation of the Dominica Botanic Gardens website <http://da-academy.org/dagardens.html> and restocking medical supplies at the Princess Margaret Hospital Medical Stores after it was destroyed by fire in 2005. More details of the DAAS' accomplishment in that regard may be found here <http://www.da-academy.org/daaschronicle01.html> .

Every nation rises or falls based on a common understanding of its heritage. It is for that reason I saw fit to record the legacy in nation building of Raglan Riviere. Mr. Riviere's voluntary efforts in co-founding the DAAS, and being its webmaster for twelve years, is worthy of being recorded and being paid tribute to.

Interview with Raglan Riviere

By Gabriel Christian

1. **Where and when were you born?**
 2. Massacre Village, Dominica, on Sunday, September 01/1935
3. **Who were your parents and name them and your immediate siblings?**

Father – Leonce Alexander RIVIERE
Mother – Uella
Siblings – Arlington, Osborne, Doreen, Mervyn, William
4. **What was the occupation of your father and mother?**

Both were teachers
5. **Which schools did you attend on Dominica?**

Elementary- Colihaut, Portsmouth
Secondary – Dominica Grammar School (DGS)
6. **What was the impact on your life of your enrolment in the DGS cadet program?**

The program had a major impact on my discipline. My deportment and attitude to life became important to me. It taught me to become a responsible leader as the Company Sergeant Major (CSM). It instilled pride and patriotism in me up to this day.
7. **What were the events in early life on Dominica you remember? Tell us what you remember about WWII and events which made news in your teens; how did you get news etc.**

As a child: I heard the airplanes overhead during WWII. No other recollection.

In my teens: Camaraderie with DGS school friends – the debating society, the cadet corps; no significant events to recall. We received news via short wave radio and by word of mouth.

8. **Which world leader or leaders shaped your view of the world?**

I lived according to the teachings of Jesus Christ. At one time I considered the priesthood as a possible profession but didn't answer the call. My role models were my parents. My view of the world was shaped by world events, as understood at the time, and not by leaders.

9. **Describe social relations in Dominica during your youth; describe issues of culture, technology, food, pastimes, class, consciousness of Africa, the role of famous black leaders you recall at home and abroad and how black and Carib Dominican viewed themselves.**

Culture: A very traditional, patriarchal family upbringing; respect was central particularly to elders; participation in community events was encouraged; education was paramount.

Technology: The kerosene lamp was predominant for lighting; cooking was by coal pot and coals; travel mainly by foot or by sea to Roseau from the village and Portsmouth; music was via radio, HMV hand-operated gramophone and 45rpm records.

Food: Locally grown foods was basic, lots of fruit and vegetables; rice, sugar and flour was bought from local store; sweets, juices and delicacies were locally made – lime squash, coconut cake (tablet), a variety of jams, farine, etc;

Pastimes: Sea bathing, local dances, scouting, gardening, story-telling on moonlight nights, cricket (coconut bats, rubber balls locally made), and soccer and school athletic competitions.

Class: No real consciousness of class. A head teacher was considered an important individual in the community, which was also accorded to his children; we had to be models to other youth;

Africa: Considered Africa the home of our slave ancestors; no real consciousness of colour developed in my youth, but later in life while I was in the United Kingdom, where I experienced some racial prejudice;

Black Leaders: Black leaders made no impact on my upbringing. I learnt about Mahatma Ghandi, Marcus Garvey, Martin Luther King, Fidel Castro and Mandela later in life after my character was well-formed.

Black and Carib Relations: Never really had any social dealings with the Caribs but realized they were of different race. Mutual respect was shared.

9. **Describe what it meant to attend the DGS in those days; how you got into the DGS; your teachers, friends and activities during your DGS days.**

I attended the DGS from 1948 to 1955. I won a local common entrance scholarship at age twelve (12), one of five (5) for boy sat that time. I passed the Cambridge School Certificate in 1953 and completed sixth form in 1955.

DGS was a character-building experience; strict discipline in study, dress and deportment, even outside school bounds. Our teachers were models to emulate and respect for them was the order of the day.

I became captain of Dawbiney House, Company Sergeant Major (CSM) of the Cadet Corp, a school prefect and secretary of the school debating society.

The friendships formed at DGS would be lifetime. Such was the camaraderie in those days.

10. Why did you migrate to the UK; early life in the UK and what you did once you arrived;

I migrated to the UK to join the British Royal Air Force with the ultimate goal of furthering my education.

Following my discharge I attended the Regent Street Polytechnic, part-time, and obtained an honours degree in Sociology (B.Sc. Soc) from the London University.

While studying I worked full-time with the Ministry of Housing and Local Government in Whitehall up to 1968 as a social researcher, when I was recruited back home by the Dominica Civil Service as an Administrative Cadet.

11. Why did you join the RAF; give us some details on your service (what you did in service; travel, uniform ware, rank etc) and name any Dominican you know who served in the RAF. How were you treated in the RAF and was there any racial discrimination against you or black members of the RAF.

I was recruited into the RAF from an interview in Dominica by the British Government. It was an opportunity to further my studies, which I seized.

I spent five (5) years (1959-1964) in the RAF and served at the Central Medical Establishment, London and overseas at RAF Pergamos, Cyprus, Near East Air Force as a Senior Aircraftman.

I was treated with respect while in the RAF because of my level of education and ability to learn. I became a marksman and leader of my troop. I was being recruited to the commissioned ranks but turned down the commission because the minimum service period would have been nine (9) years, which would have interfered with my study plans.

No direct racial discrimination was experienced, but subtle behaviours suggested such discrimination.

12. To who are you married? Children's names and your career path.

My wife, Ruby Denise, nee MacIntosh, is Grenadian born, the daughter of a head teacher. We have two children, Jacqueline and Emile.

My Career Path: As mentioned above, in 1968, I was recruited by the Dominica Civil Service as an Administrative Cadet at the Ministry of Home Affairs, where I was promoted to Assistant Secretary.

While there, I worked with the Social Development Division where Mr. H.L. Christian (later Minister of Education and Social Welfare in the Government of Dominica 1970-1980), deceased, was the Social Development Officer. Together we conducted studies in the village of Grandbay with a view to get at the root of youth unrest at the time, which resulted in the recommendation and implementation of Arts and Craft projects to create youth employment.

In 1970 I was promoted to Hospital Administrator designate at the Princess Margaret Hospital (PMH) and later awarded a World Health Organisation fellowship to study Health and Hospital Administration at University of Ottawa, Canada, where I graduated with a master's degree (MHA) and became the first trained Hospital Administrator at the Princess Margaret Hospital in 1972.

I resigned from the Civil Service in 1978 because of political interference in my administration of PMH and migrated to Canada. Back in Canada, I joined the Civil Service as a Correctional Officer with the Ontario Correctional Institute dealing with the rehabilitation of criminal offenders and retired in June 1998.

Since then I have given more attention to my Creative Writing and to date have published three novels, viz. *Rum Punch and Prejudice* (1998), *Born Too Late* (2005) and *Colonial Deception – Book One* (2005).

This led to my interest in the computer and the electronic highway. I trained myself as a webmaster and webpage designer and eventually created my first website, *Sir Raglan Presents*. The mission of the website was to promote Dominica and share news and other important information to its viewers, who were mainly Dominicans.

Two of its main sections were the compilation of papers written mainly by Dominicans for discussion and the building of a directory of qualified Dominicans at home and abroad, who may be willing to offer their expertise to the development of Dominica. At the suggestion of Gabriel Christian, Esq., in 2000, I agreed to turn these sections into what is now the Dominica Academy of Arts and Sciences (DAAS).

13. Why you decided to create the DAAS and manage the site; comment on volunteerism and national purpose - or lack thereof - among Dominican; discuss the positive and negative traits which have helped of hindered the development thrust born of the DAAS.

DAAS has expanded into a huge website as can be seen by its [Sitemap](#). Its stated Mission is “*To engender a high quality of life at home and abroad by creating a unified global Dominican community committed to leveraging our intellectual, financial, and relationship capital to execute effective national development initiatives.*” It is a member-based, volunteer, online organisation.

While the website exists, however, membership has turned apathetic and is declining. For whatever reason, the enthusiasm with which DAAS started has waned and it has received its share of

political interference. This latter aspect has severely divided the organisation and is probably the main cause of its declining membership.

DAAS overall successes have been significant for an online, global organisation, covering all Dominicans and friends of Dominica around the world. It completed and presented a commissioned study on a proposed [Dominica-Diaspora Policy](#) for the Government of Dominica in 2004, which implementation is still awaited; it has built a sub site on the [Botanic Gardens](#); it contains a virtual reference library of [Submission Papers](#); and a [Professional Directory](#) of trained and qualified Dominicans, among other achievements.

14. What are your hopes for Dominica and its people?

Socially: I would like to see Dominica return to a society where people genuinely cared about one another. Today, our focus is on competition for material possessions causing a vast gap between the rich and the poor and a growing number of dispossessed and welfare-dependent people.

Economically: Ideally, all able-bodied persons should be gainfully employed. Dominica is blessed with rich agricultural land and should become the bread basket of the Caribbean. However, not enough emphasis is given to agricultural development, which results in our unnecessary importation of processed food and little exportation of our produce. Dominicans should eat what they grow.

Today, much emphasis is placed on eco-tourism without adequate planning of infrastructure to support its viable, sustained development. Tourism would be enhanced by an international airport of appropriate size, an increase in hotel and motel accommodation, access to our rain forest attractions, boiling lake, valley of desolation, etc.

Politically: Unfortunately politics in Dominica falls well short of the expectation of the imposed Westminster model of the British Parliamentary system. My views on this topic are recorded in my paper, [A Non-Party Political System](#).

My hope is that our people become more politically aware and are able to participate meaningfully in the political process. Respect for the Constitution is tossed aside when it suits the political leadership. Independent Institutions designed to ensure proper accounting have become ineffective, paving the way either for anarchy or dictatorship, if the trend is not arrested.

It is my fervent hope that the principles of democracy become practice in Dominica. But, to achieve this, those in leadership must be willing to put country before self and/or party in all their decisions. This is the only way true democracy can survive in Dominica.

15. What is the legacy of the DAAS and what did its coming into being mean for Dominica?

As a co-founder and webmaster of DAAS, I am satisfied that my efforts have not been in vain. As our Mission Statement clearly declares, it is all in the interest of a better Dominica. The website has survived the current division among us and the falling membership.

What have we learnt from our endeavours? Let me itemize:

- An idea, which is viable, can materialize only if those in positions of leadership remain committed to its mission.
- Enthusiasm and volunteerism appear to diminish if there is not much in it for participants.
- Any organisation will fail where management decisions are challenged by those who believe they can do better but choose to remain on the sidelines.
- Management must speak with one co-ordinated voice to avoid misdirection, confusion and lack of trust.

What has DAAS meant for Dominica? DAAS is well known in Dominica. Its message has been clear and unequivocal. Unfortunately, some detractors have chosen to criticize its messengers and ignore its message. Such detractors have been those who disagree with the personal, political beliefs of members of its management. That is the only negative impact of DAAS on Dominica.

All else have been positive. One only has to view the pages on its [Achievements](#) to appreciate what DAAS has meant for Dominica. We have impacted positively on nearly all areas of life in Dominica. The DAAS story should take a turn for the better as we grapple with efforts at restructuring its management and operational procedures to fall in line with pressing requirements at home. *Where there is a will, there is a way.*