The principal aim of this paper is to document the history of the rural village of Rio Claro, which is the largest of a series of small villages in the County of Nariva. This account was deliberately chosen because, like so many rural and neglected villages no documentation has been done on Rio Claro, and so it is necessary that it enters the main stream of historical research.

The paper attempts to examine the socio-cultural, physical, economic, and political aspects of the village's development. Simultaneously it looks at the factors which influenced and determined the establishment and growth of the village.

The paper begins with a quick analysis of South-East Trinidad in the nineteenth century - paying particular attention to the Mayaro coastal area. This wide geographical perspective was chosen to demonstrate that Rio Claro - a geographical area sandwiched between the east coast of Mayaro and the Mission of Savanna Grande, remained forested and unsettled until the early twentieth century.

Chapter Two examines the role which Rio Claro played in the 1930's labour unrest in Trinidad. This dissatisfaction of which Rio Claro was an integral part led to a definite attempt to "humanise" the society from the legacies of slavery and indentureship. In the paper the Rio Claro incident is called *The Loving Riot.*

Chapter Three focuses on the economic phases of the village economy, and its effects on the villagers. Rio Claro had both the land

and rich soil to attract planters and settlers alike; particularly in the "cocoa boom" of the early twentieth century.

The coming of the rail system in 1914 was vital to agriculture, and served to further "open-up" the village. Apart from cocoa and the rail system the chapter looks at lumbering, cane-farming, the *Moura* Valley Estate, and the surrounding oilfields and the growing importance of government agencies as a source of employment for villagers in the 1970s.

Chapter Four examines the social life and recreation of the villagers. It identifies the main social classes and their attitude to one another, and attempts to identify how each class spent their leisure time. Rio Claro from the 1930s was known for its bazaars, dance halls, hunting facilities, rum-shopping, its Carnival, *kalinda* and Indian festivals. It also had an active sporting life.

Chapter Five looks chronologically at the period 1938-70s paying particular attention to further infra-structural development, Rio Claro's physical growth, as well as its developing "sense of community". It looks also at two legendary personalities of the middle decades.

The process of attempting to document the history of Rio Claro was a problematic one; there was a definite paucity of written material on the village, and so, it was necessary to use all possible sources. Oral information was most helpful but this too was a difficult method of collecting historical data. There are very few elders in the village born before 1900 and alive today, and there was also the problem of fading memories, glorification of oneself in the historical experiences,

the problem of biases and untimely death. Thus, on at least two occasions, respondents died quite suddenly before an arranged interview could take place.

Of great importance is the fact that the French Creole and Chinese by the 1960s had chosen not to remain in the village, and they took their experiences with them. Last but not least, and not at all wide-spread was the attitude of a few villagers who refused to divulge information or personal documents to any researcher.

Despite these problems, oral information went a long way in helping to reconstruct the village's historical past. Cartographical evidence, and physical remains of the early twentieth century, for example, the railway station, were quite helpful.

As a native of Rio Claro, I also relied on my own accumulated knowledge of the village.

The paper outlines a specific geographical entity based on the "traditional" notion of Rio Claro village. This definition was arrived at from oral evidence collected in the 1960s by the Central Statistical Office. This area, as shown on Map 1, radiates outward from the four-road "junction-box" that represents the centre of the village.

On the Western flank, the village extended traditionally to the area of the Roman Catholic Church and School along the Naparima-Mayaro Road. To the east, it extended along the Naparima-Mayaro Road to the Clear Water River, a quarter mile or so past the Lapeyrouse Cemetery. To the north, it extended along the Tabaquite Road to the Navet Junction and to the south proceeding along the Guayaguayare Road, the village

reached to the Poole Valley Junction. These points were joined by an
imaginary line. It was necessary, in the paper, from time to time,
to proceed outside the defined "traditional" village area, in order
to reconstruct the village's historical past based on the activities
of villagers particularly in relation to its hinterland areas.

Rio Claro remained a village until the 1960s. To attempt to
attach the status of town to Rio Claro belongs to the 1970s and 1980s.
In this paper, the village is taken to mean a nucleated settlement with
a limited population and basically a market centre with the bulk of its
population agriculturally employed. Commerce in Rio Claro up to the
1960s was limited to the retailing of agricultural produce, imported
food stuffs, clothes and a limited range of appliances and hardware.

However, by the 1970s the population of Rio Claro had climbed
beyond 5,000. Due to improvement in the national and the village
economy, Rio Claro became very service-oriented, together with a more
sophisticated life-style and a more urban and open outlook. Rio Claro
in the 1970s in the context of the *oil boom* became a centre of
primary and secondary education, commerce, employment, religion,
government services, transport, banking, sports as well as social and
political life for the vast area of the county of Nariva/Mayaro.

The 1970s represents a stage in which it can clearly be argued
that the village had graduated to a status of a small town, there-
fore, it was chosen as a convenient point to terminate the study.
Lastly, in the paper the italicised words are explained in the
glossary.