

Wycliffe Translators Live With Indians in Southern Mexico

(Editor's note: "Sam" Lambert Huffman, a publisher from Winona Lake, Indiana, recently returned from Mexico where he visited American translators working with isolated Indian tribes to bring them a written language. In a series of dispatches, he tells of the dedicated linguists and their work.)

By "SAM" LAMBERT HUFFMAN
Written for UPI

"Guess next time he comes, we'll just shoot him and eat him," said Elizabeth Murane as she cooked biscuits on a mud stove in the Mexican jungles near the Guatemalan border. Her 5-month-old daughter played happily nearby.

She was talking about her face-to-face meeting with a boa constrictor, large, calf-swallowing snakes that abide in the rain forests near La Victoria, Mexico, in Chiapas state.

She explained that when she and her husband, John, first arrived they had to build their own "champa," a hut made of cane poles. Before it was finished they slept outside.

Slept in Sleeping Bag

"I had to feed the baby so she and I slept in the sleeping bag on the ground. I think it was about the second night," she said.

"I heard a faint noise like a freight train off in the distance. I knew there was no train here, so I listened and



TRADE CENTER - The tiny village of Las Cosas, Chiapas, Mexico, is trade center for many tribes of southern Mexico. Wycliffe Translators - a nondenominational group of linguists dedicated to giving unlettered people around the world a written language - go out among these tribes to learn their languages and bring Christianity to them in the Indian's own previously unwritten tongue. (UPI)

finally decided it was some animal moving through the dry underbrush.

"I wriggled my flashlight out of the sleeping bag and flashed it on. There, about 10 feet from us, was a boa constrictor in an attitude of watchful waiting, sort of trying to decide whether he should retreat or coil up for the night."

"What did you do?"

"I called John. When the snake heard John stirring in

the hammock, it just disappeared in the underbrush."

"What will you do if he comes back again?" I asked.

Both Elizabeth and John laughed.

"Guess next time he comes," Elizabeth smiled, "we'll just shoot him and eat him."

As the 28-year-old brunette Elizabeth, who couldn't weigh more than 110 pounds, finished breakfast and tidied up

the mud-floored champa, I asked her why she had come to the jungle.

She has advanced nursing degrees from Columbia university and religious education training at Biblical Seminary in New York. Her husband also studied at Bible Seminary after getting a degree from Stanford.

"It's the challenge - the challenge to help others, to do God's work," she said.

"Life back there seemed empty and purposeless," John broke in. "I now have a calling, a purpose, a goal, and I'm able to measure my progress here mentally, physically and spiritually day by day."

John and Elizabeth are Wycliffe translators, non-denominational missionary-linguists who live with remote tribes around the world while they study the spoken language and reduce it to writing. Then



AT JUNGLE CAMP - Sam Lambert Huffman, a publisher from Winona Lake, Ind., recently returned from Mexico where he visited American translators working with isolated Indian tribes to bring them a written language. Here, Mrs. Elizabeth Murane, a Wycliffe Translator, holds her baby, Marianne, while standing in front of banana supply at a Wycliffe jungle subsistence camp, where new translators are given final training before going to live with tribes whose language they hope to decipher. Mrs. Murane's husband, John, is also a translator, and the entire family will "move in" with a tribe, in the remote Mexican jungles. (UPI)

they teach the tribe to read their own language.

Founded in 1935 by a missionary named Cameron Townsend, Wycliffe translators, named after the late famed English Bible translator, are working in 266 languages now. Of these, 200 have been reduced to writing and the New Testament translated into six of them.

There are about 5,000 known languages in the world today, and only 1,170 of them have been reduced to writing. After Wycliffe finishes the job, denominational church missionaries are encouraged to come in and take over the tribal church and use the

native language New Testament.

John and Elizabeth Murane were at the Wycliffe jungle subsistence camp where new translators are given final training before going to live with the tribe whose language they hope to decipher.

Translators stay with their tribe for five years at a time and get monthly salary of \$115 for each adult and \$50 for each of their children. Also at the jungle camp were Lee and Lynn Henriksen. He had been a construction worker in Philadelphia. She was a nurse. Married just 10 months, they considered

the jungle training a honeymoon.

Down the path from their cane hut lived 23-year-old blue-eyed blonde Donna Hetteck of Lucerne, Calif., and brunette Marjorie Crouch, 22, Northridge, Calif.

Alone, the girls had built their champa and had killed a possum for Sunday dinner. But before they could get it cooked, army ants ran them out and ate the possum. Undaunted, they returned.

When I went by they were frying bananas in lemon-flavored teflon weed.

Nearly all Wycliffe translators are college graduates,

many with masters' degrees and 20 or more with Ph.D.'s. Before being sent out, they attend a summer institute of linguistics where they learn how to break down the unwritten language, form an alphabet, and finally, teach Indians how to read in their own tongue.

They also study at the advance camp, main camp and at Wycliffe's translation center in Mexico City before being assigned to a tribe where they will work.

This is what they're working for—to live with, help, study, understand, and instruct the Indian tribes.

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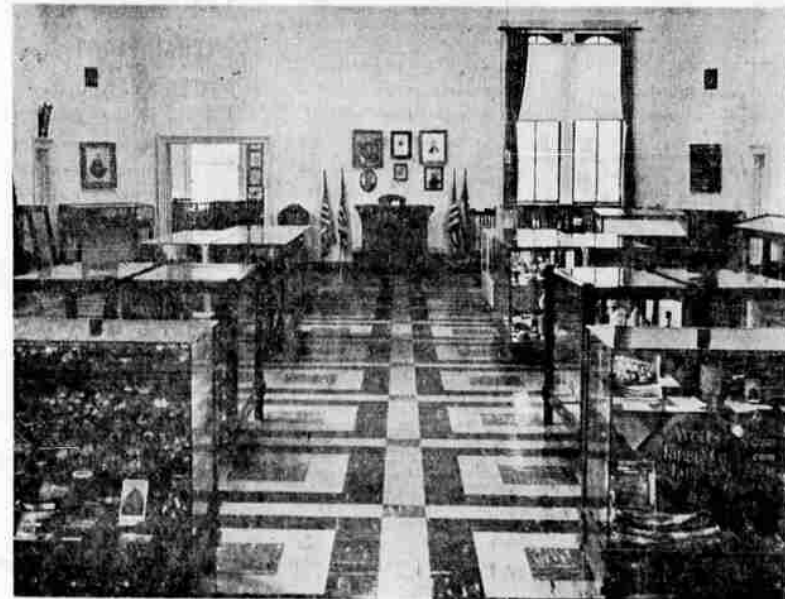


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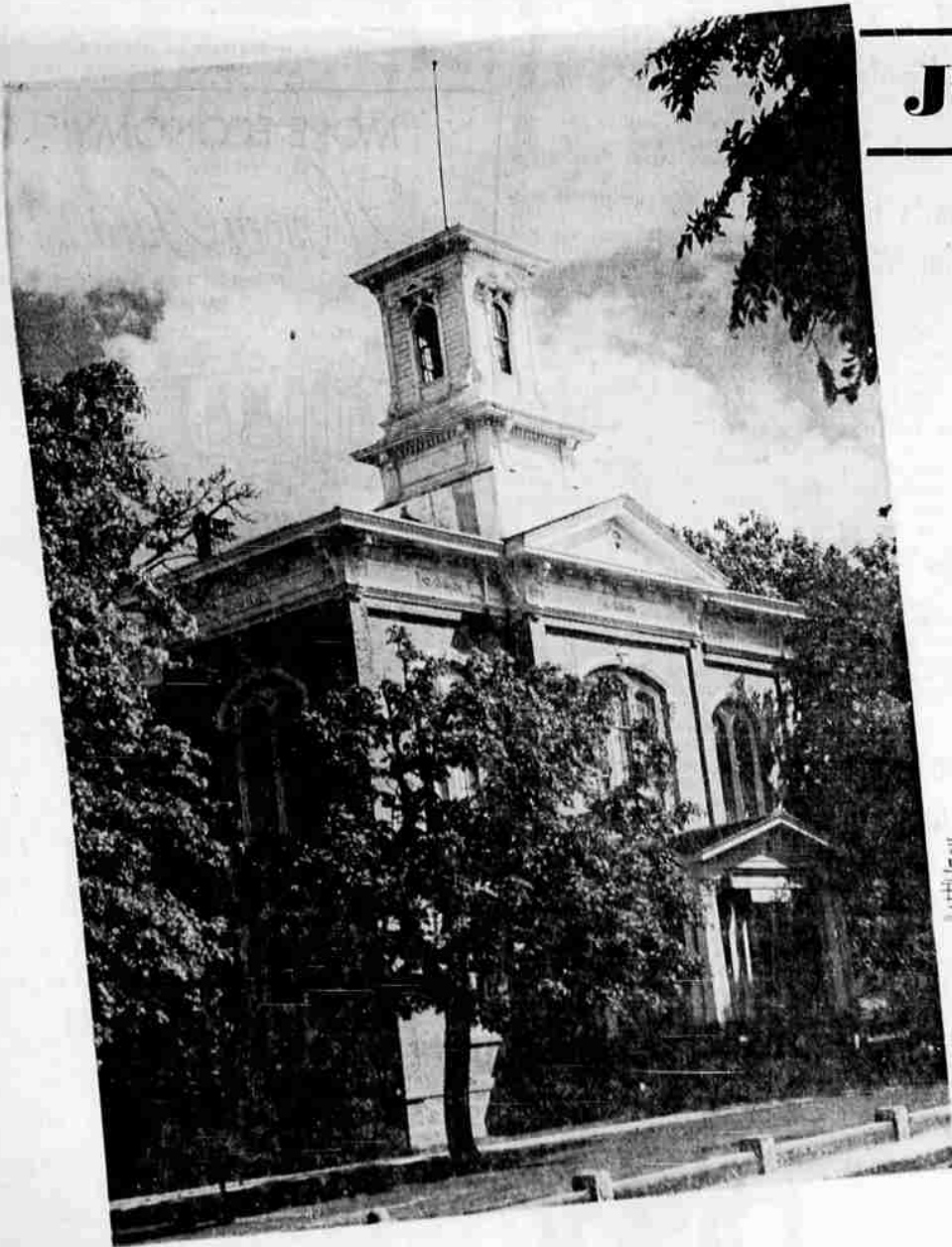


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The attractive old brick courthouse that houses the Jacksonville Museum is, itself steeped in the history of the days before the turn of the century. The former seat of Jackson County government, dating from 1883-84, this venerable old structure was scene of many bitter court cases, the most sensational being the trial of the D'Autremont brothers, train bandits, and the trial of alleged Ku Klux Klan members for an attempted lynching. To accommodate the growing number of exhibits, the Southern Oregon Historical Society has added buildings adjacent to this old courthouse—all open to the public... all free!