

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foreign Affairs Oral History Project
Information Series

JOHN J. EWING

*Interviewed by: G. Lewis Schmidt
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INTERVIEW

Introduction

Origins And Development Of The Binational Centers Program

Mr. John Ewing was for many years a Binational Center contract employee. The following two transcripts are made from recordings done by Mr. Ewing himself at his home in Eugene, Oregon, at the request of the USIA Oral History Project.

They deal with the development of the Binational Centers (BNCs) in Mexico City and more broadly, throughout Brazil. The BNC program was a separate phase of the USIA experience, initially outside the direct jurisdiction of the U. S. Information Service (USIS) offices overseas. Although there were Binational Centers established in countries other than those of the Western Hemisphere, (notably in Germany and Austria immediately after World War II) the BNC program was initially, and remains predominantly, a Latin American phenomenon. Its genesis was in Latin America under the auspices of the Rockefeller interests, and was known in and somewhat before WWII days as Nelson Rockefeller's Institute of Inter-American Affairs (IIA). With the formation of The Office of War Information, IIA came under the latter's general control and financing, and so remained for the duration of the War. The nature of the program in its beginning, and its development into a much wider cultural enterprise, is covered in the texts of the two part presentation that follows.

By the end of the War, BNCs were already booming in Latin America, and were rapidly becoming highly popular, as well as effective instruments of American Public Diplomacy. However, they did not remain directly an arm of the US Government immediately after the termination of OWI. In 1948, the so-called Smith-Mundt Act was passed by Congress,

providing authority for a US Government-operated public diplomacy program. The US Information and Education program--USIE--one of the predecessor agencies of USIA--was established as an office in the State Department, which soon took over the USIA offices (USIS) abroad that had been established under OWI, and from that time forward, operated USIS in each country as a section of the Embassy.

The Binational Centers, however, remained as autonomous entities, outside direct USIS supervision. In some cases such as is outlined in Part I of the following summary of the development of the BNC in Mexico City, the State Department assisted the centers with grants to university language institutes to help set up English language training, and later, by direct grants to individuals to work in the Centers as contract employees of the Information/Education part of the State Department. Gradually Binational Centers Boards of Directors, usually half resident Americans and half host country nationals, were established. These Boards generally set operational policy, and hired host country staff. The U. S. Government, through USIS, provided considerable financial support, and supplied a Center Director (as well as, on occasion, one or more other American staff members) to direct the "hands on" BNC activities.

When, in 1953, USIA was created, and separated from State, USIS offices abroad were operated by the new Agency. The Americans in the Centers were still not for some years made USIA officers. Although they were recruited and trained by the Agency, they were still taken on as contract employees, entitled to none of the career perquisites of retirement benefits of regular USIA Foreign Service personnel. It was only in the 1960's that USIA was able to bring these dedicated employees into the Agency's Foreign Service, and make them career officers. When integration into the Foreign Service finally came, another waiting period elapsed before legal authorization was obtained giving them retirement credit as Agency Foreign Service Officers for their years in BNC contract status. The BNCs themselves, however, in most countries, have never become US Government entities, even though directed by USIS Officers. Financial as well as personnel support is often given by the Centers' autonomy remains intact.

Well before the American Center personnel were integrated, USIS treated them as part of the USIS team, integrated their program planning with USIS cultural programming, and, in fact, conducted a large part of the USIS directed cultural program overseas through the centers in countries where they existed. Since, however, the BNCs raised substantial portions of their own funds--in many cases a majority of their operating expenses--through English teaching and other activities, they were in large part self supporting. And since they each had a board of directors, often containing some of the leading and most prestigious host country nationals, there were frequently times when the BNC Board's ideas of operational priorities clashed with Embassy/USIS preferences. But that is another story. It is enough to remark that when this condition existed, it often placed the American personnel of the Center in a difficult position. (Written by Lew Schmidt)

The Genesis Of The Binational Center Program
Mexico City, June 1946 To May 1950

EWING: This recording concerns the beginning of one of the Binational Centers that was to make a significant contribution to one of the most successful public relations programs ever undertaken by the US Information Agency or its predecessor agencies. As early as 1919, President Woodrow Wilson made the observation at the Paris Peace Conference that, "It will not suffice to satisfy governmental circles anywhere. It is necessary that we should satisfy the opinion of mankind."

It was not, however, until during World War II that our nation's overseas diplomacy was to begin to establish institutions to help do this. It began as a series of small American libraries in a number of important cities throughout the Allied world. They first functioned under the auspices of the Office of War Information. These libraries were based on the now-proven theory that many people, among them many opinion makers, would like to satisfy their curiosity about us by reading the books and magazines that were available in the United States but hard to find in other countries. These same small libraries provided exhibits, films, and introduction as needed to native English speakers and language study. These budding information centers were an outstanding success from the beginning.

After the war, appropriations were cut, and this early experience with the dispersal of successful overseas diplomacy through information that was made available in small grassroots institutions came to an end. The outcry and protests by those who had benefited was quick and loud. The foreign information program was soon to be revived and its scope broadened. The State Department's international institutes and libraries reopened the old wartime libraries, and new ones were established, among them, the Benjamin Franklin Library on the Plazo de la Reforma in Mexico City. The popularity of this institution by 1946 was hard to believe. It was the only lending library in Mexico and it was used intensively by the government opinion makers and by the general public.

English Language Teaching Becomes A Central BNC Program

As the post-war exchange of persons program developed with the United States, and between educational and government institutions, a great need to learn to speak English arose. It became evident that English language classes must be made available by the library. The University of Michigan was invited to send down a team of English-teaching specialists and linguists, to make a linguistic analysis of how to teach English to Spanish-speaking people.

In the process of doing this, the study group established within the Benjamin Franklin Library a center for learning English. The well known Dr. Freize of the English language Institute at Ann Arbor was to direct this extension institution and the English language research team. The American Institute of Learned Societies volunteered to help fund it. The future efficiency of USIA worldwide English teaching program and the many new Binational Centers that were to soon come into existence in Latin America all benefited greatly by the research and tests materials developed by the University of Michigan team.

The director of the library, Dr. Andy Wilkinson, recruited me to teach part-time while I was doing graduate work in Latin American Studies at the National University of Mexico. My salary was paid by the American Institute of Learned Societies. I had previously had experience in administration and teaching English to Mexicans in a school on the Mexican border, and in Montemorelos, in the northern part of Mexico.

Ewing Becomes Grant Employee of Mexico City BNC

In the spring of 1947, I was recruited by Dr. William Cody, the cultural attaché of the American Embassy, to apply for a State Department grant that would permit me to join the team of the English Language Institute officially at the Benjamin Franklin Library. I went to Washington and was interviewed by Elizabeth Hopkins, who in those early years was the personnel officer for the Binational Center grantees. These grantees, after training, were being sent to newly established Binational Centers overseas.

I returned to Mexico City with a grant that permitted me to teach and participate full-time in the research and writing of materials. One of the most valuable benefits for me was the in-service training seminars conducted by Dr. Freize and his assistant, Margaret Moyam. In these training sessions and seminars, the philosophy of English teaching and methods of teaching English as a second language developed that was to spread to all of Latin America. The oral method was further developed there, and ear training and speaking of conversational English by Spanish-speaking students became popularly known as the hearing-speaking method. Importance was given to teaching conversational English that brought quicker and more satisfactory results than the old translation method. The structure of the language was drilled and taught in understandable classroom experience. Learning more easily took place in a hearing and doing experience. The language was introduced and drilled into oral fashion, but the four skills of language--hearing, speaking, reading, and writing--were experienced in parallel classroom exercise.

Demand For English Instruction Overwhelms Mexican Center

The results obtained in a relatively short period of exposure soon flooded the institute with requests for enrollment by Mexican government employees, business concerns, and schools. The program was too successful for the space available and the quarters available to us in Benjamin Franklin Library. It was evident that there was a real need for a Binational Center in Mexico City. I shall never forget registration day, the period before we moved into our Yucatan 63 building. That was made possible by a State Department grant in 1947. We had needed as large an enrollment as possible if we were soon to meet the expense of maintaining the rent of our own building, so we put our first ad for students in the newspaper. To our horror, the line of people to register was over three blocks long. We had to call for the help of the police to keep order until a solution could be worked out. We took all we could, which was only a few over 300. Then we mimeographed an announcement

that we would have room for everyone at the new location in about 12 weeks. The publicity of this event in the newspapers guaranteed us a full house when the BNC opened that fall.

The excellent work of the University of Michigan's extension institute was coming to a close. Its personnel left or had been converted to BNC grantees. Frank Thompson, who had been serving as the director of courses in the transition period to BNC personnel, was transferred. I was assigned as director of courses for the new BNC. I had been the understudy of Margaret Moyam, whose work I tried to carry on as we set up the expanded new center. With the help of other BNC grantees, we had to organize and train 50 new teachers in order to meet the needs of the new enrollment. The enrollment was to increase from a few hundred professional people at the Benjamin Franklin Library to more than 3,000 at the new location by May of 1950. We no longer were just a very successful English language institute; we were now a fully organized Binational Center, with a local board of directors and a full cultural relations program.

To indicate the expanded program, our new name was El Instituto Mexicano-Norte Americano de Relaciones Culturales --the Mexican-American Institute of Cultural Relations. We had the full program support of our mother institution, the Benjamin Franklin Library, and its personnel. Dr. William Bias was recruited from the University of Illinois International Institutes and Libraries to be our first administrative director.

Mexico City BNC Further Expands In Both Size And Program Scope

An auditorium was built on the premises. Lectures by visiting American professors were scheduled, concerts of American music and exhibits of life in the United States, as well as a regular schedule of documentary and informational films, were all part of the center's cultural program. This was made available to both students and members of the center. The American community was encouraged to take part in the cultural and social activities of the center. It was popular not only to become a registered member of the center, but many became students of Spanish, which we taught using the same successful methods we had learned to us in the English Language Institute.

The BNC grantees such as Jim and Katherine Passereli, Molly Moore, Virginia Williams, and I helped with this cultural and social program, as well as continuing to perfect the English teaching materials left behind by the University of Michigan team. They were soon published in book form, books one to eight. I was in charge of writing a new introductory course of study that we called preparatory, which we required all new students to take for 12 weeks before they took placement tests to be enrolled in homogeneous groups in the regular courses of one to eight.

In future years, these original materials were to develop into an improved series of textbooks that were to be shared and sold in many other Latin American countries. Even in the early years, American cultural content was built into these books. It was the precept of

Dr. Freize that our language is best taught in context with the culture of our country, our vocabulary best taught in a phrase, and our intonation in conversation.

USIA Becomes Center Sponsor--Conducts Its Cultural Programming Through Center

The Binational Center was sponsored by USIA, and their activities were to come the closest to education in the purest sense of the word. By 1954, there would be 35 Binational Centers in the principal cities of the free world. Unfortunately, in those early years, the American grantees often had to return to their universities after a short assignment. This became an administrative weakness in institution building. Dr. Bias could only stay away from his university one year. When he left, I became acting director for eight or nine months until Dr. Elmendorf arrived in 1949.

Center Membership Becomes A Status Symbol Among Mexicans

In 1948, we had issued attractive enamel membership pins displaying the two flags in color as a part of a membership drive that was looking forward to the day, not far off again, when we would have to move to larger quarters in order to accommodate those who wanted to be a part of the Mexican-American Cultural Relations Program. These pins could be seen in government offices, at the university, and in many business establishments. It was in style to be a member of the Binational Center in those years.

By 1949, we had established two branch centers in different parts of the city. A few months before my transfer to Brazil in 1950, I was sent to Guadalajara to select and train teachers for the new Binational Center that was opening in space that had been made available by the University of Guadalajara. The parent center in Mexico City at Yucatan 63 by that time was bursting at its seams. Its popular cultural program was seriously handicapped for the lack of space to accept all who wished to participate. The center was soon to move again into larger and more permanent quarters that were more suited to a successful cultural exchange and English teaching program.

Success Of BNC Programming Demonstrates That Cultural Activities Are An Integral And Vital Part of U. S. "Propaganda" Overseas

In many years since, this very special Binational Center has enjoyed high prestige, not only in Mexico, but in Latin America at large. By 1953, members of the United States Advisory Commission on Information were able to state in their report of January 1953 that our work in the field should become less and less that of Americans conducting propaganda on foreign soil, and more and more a partnership arrangement between Americans and others, to the mutual welfare of both.

In 1955, Oren Stephens, the USIA Deputy Assistant Director for Policy and Programs, was to write in his book, *Facts to a Candid World*, the following: "Of all propaganda, the most effective is that which has the least appearance of propaganda. The greater seeming objectivity of the material, the more it will be accepted as disinterested and reliable information on which the audience can base a judgment."

The Binational Center program was right on course, and it would expand dramatically during the period from 1950 to 1960, especially in Brazil. I was transferred to Porto Alegre, Brazil, in May of 1950. This assignment was to begin with further training in Washington in linguistics and American Studies under Professors Smith and Trigor. Binational Center grantees were being taught to be cultural ambassadors to the overseas Binational Centers, where they would serve as administrative directors, directors of courses, or directors of activities. Each would be a catalyst in a Binational Center for the United States information program.

BNCs Are Largely Self Sustaining

One question remains, and it was often asked by those who were not well acquainted with the BNC program: "How could USIA afford to pay for such an extensive program, especially during periods when Congress was reluctant to allocate funds for the overseas information program?"

The truth of the matter is that for every dollar USIA invested, another four were soon being generated locally through the income from English teaching and membership fees. More and more through the years, the BNC grantees became the secret of success for the Binational Centers. They furnished the administrative know-how and the catalysts for dispersing American cultural and information. Without them, the center would soon take on the personality of a host country institution. Once a center was well organized, it could roll with the fortunes of the annual USIS budget, as well or better as far as materials and equipment were concerned.

The one thing they could not do without and remain binational in its program for very long was its Binational Center grantee personnel. Each person who studied English paid for his classes 12 weeks in advance. Each member of the center paid for his membership fee 12 months in advance. It is true that the BNC director had to learn to be a good businessman, but the director of institutions anywhere must have that quality. One of the most successful parts of the program was the recruiting and training of BNC grantees at the Washington level. USIA and its predecessor agency were fortunate to have the same personnel officer from the '40s through the '70s. We all considered Elizabeth Hopkins our Mother Superior in almost everything that made things tick.

Part II Of An Interview With John J. Ewing
Establishing The Brazil BNC Network

For USIA Alumni Association Oral History Project

August 31, 1988
Conducted by Lew Smith

The Brazilian Binational Center Program,
September 1950 to December 1952 and
September 1955 to May 1960

EWING: During the five-year period of 1955 to 1960, five new centers opened in 30 cities in Brazil. Before I speak of the rapid expansion of the Brazilian Binational Center Program during the five-year period of 1955 and 1960, I wish to record my experience as Director of the Porto Alegre Center because it was to become the prototype for new Centers when I became USIS country Binational Center Officer in 1955.

After having spent the summer in Washington attending seminars and lectures in American studies and applied linguistics taught by Professors Smith and Trager, I arrived in Porto Alegre, Brazil, as Director of Courses for the recently founded Binational Center. Porto Alegre was the capital city of Rio Grande do Sul, the home state of President Getulio Vargas, who had been Brazil's dictator since 1937. It was Getulio Vargas that had made the notable "March to the West" speech as early as 1940. Though President Vargas' dream was not to be implemented until 1955 and by another president, the dream was firmly planted. It had only been delayed during the political turmoil and during the war years.

Beginning Of Porto Alegre's Binational Center
Rise To High Success

Nevertheless, Porto Alegre was very much alive in the fall of 1950. Progress was very much on the minds of everyone. The big question was what method should be used to get there. The lines were being drawn between socialism, nationalism, and Pan Americanism. Rio Grande do Sul was also the home of a future disaster in the making and a future president, Joao Goulart, a young protégé of President Vargas.

A Brazilian American Binational Center was very much needed to help establish a cultural exchange program that could diplomatically and yet effectively educate an interested public concerning the culture of the United States of America. They wanted to learn the English language and to learn firsthand about the country that had made it possible to defeat Hitler's plan for the world.

The Center had been opened on the main street of the city. The quarters were small and limited in space for meeting the needs of a full cultural program. There was not enough space for all those who wished to learn English. Our enrollment was around 600 students. We began to look around, and a few weeks after my arrival, an opportunity presented itself for us to lease space on the eleventh and twelfth floors of a new 12-story building in downtown Porto Alegre.

The Director of the Center, Dr. Solmonson, had to return to the United States. I became Executive Director, and Gloria Wasaluski became Director of Courses. Howard Hill was the USIS branch public affairs officer. This was to be the American team that worked together to build one of the finest Binational Center institutions anywhere.

Our first task was to find a progressive experienced administrator to be president of the Board of Directors. For political reasons, we determined that the president of the Board of Directors should always be a Brazilian. Dr. Acho was recruited. He was a former president of the Porto Alegre University of Rio Grande do Sul. Dr. Acho enthusiastically joined our team and not only contributed to the building of a strong and respected Binational Center, but his ideas of organization and ways of reaching the Brazilian public carried over into the period when I was country BNC officer from 1955 to 1960 in Rio de Janeiro. Dr. Acho's idea was that an institution, especially a Binational Center, would be stronger if no one individual was permitted to dominate his position for longer than three years at a time. This would be a built-in insurance policy for an embryo democracy in a country that had had very little experience in democratic government.

To get it all started, our team chose an executive committee of three members to serve on the Board of Directors. Dr. Acho was to be the president of the Board, with a vice president and a treasurer. Each of these men was to serve three years. Three others were appointed, each to serve two years as chairpersons of the program, library, and academic committees. The remaining three on the Board of Directors of nine were to serve one year as chairpersons on the social, scholarship, and art committees. At the end of the first year, three members of the Board would be replaced each year to serve three years. The retiring Board members each year would become members of the Binational Center Council. This arrangement kept the Center from taking on the personality of the strong man on the Board of Directors. This already had become a problem in some of the older Binational Centers in Latin America.

The Board of Directors met once a month, and each working committee met at least once a month. The American grantee executive director was a member of each of the working committees. The American grantee director, of course, was a member of the academic and scholarship committees, and an ex-officio member of the Board. This was an important arrangement because in the absence of the grantee executive director, the grantee director of courses was to serve as the executive director. The USIS public affairs officer also was a member of the Board of Directors. Though the two American grantees and the USIS branch PAO were members of the Board, they were ex-officio members. They were there to give and receive information. Nevertheless, their leadership was vital to the success of the plan. They, along with the president of the Board, were the catalysts. The president of the Board often attended a working committee to give and receive program information.

The involvement of each member of the team in the program and the dedication of the area USIS officer to the BNC program was the secret of success. In later years, when BNC grantees became USIS officers and BNC objectives and projects were written into the USIS

country plan, all this became more institutionalized and it became much easier to accomplish an ongoing rapport with BNC leadership.

Whenever possible, the Board of Directors was made up of five Brazilians and four Americans. Anyone reviewing the early history of Binational Centers may feel that a democratic rotating Board of Directors was not such an important historical event to record, but certainly in 1950 it was. It is even today in many parts of Latin America.

State Department Grant Assists Necessary Move To Larger Quarters

Once the basic organization of the Center was taken care of, we were ready to push ahead with moving into our new quarters. This move was helped by a State Department grant. This grant made it possible to furnish beautiful quarters for an auditorium, library, offices, and classrooms. The beautiful terraces at each end of the building provided additional space for social activities. They looked out over the city of Porto Alegre and its harbor. Being the tallest building in town, everybody knew it. The Center was a showplace in the city, and it became popular immediately.

The academic department under the dedicated leadership of Gloria Wasaluski prospered. The enrollment increased by over 1,000 students within a period of months. Students participated in the library activities, and many attended cultural and social programs. Our goal was that they should remain members of the Center after their study of the language had formally ended. The age group in these classes ranged from 16 to 60. Children were provided with cultural and social activities, which brought popularity to the Center from among its membership. Within months after moving into the new quarters, people were coming to join the Center. Some of them spoke English, but they wished to enjoy the cultural activities and to have library privileges.

BNC Becomes Popular As Source Of Learning About USA - Reverses Anti-American Feelings

The library of American authors and reference materials provided by USIA supplied a hungry audience and an audience made up of from among government workers, universities, and schools, as well as from our own membership. The library opened onto the terrace, and it was a very pleasant place to read an American magazine or to do reference work. The library staff carried on a full schedule of library-related activities for its members. The American grantees took part in scheduled discussion groups and forums. Our auditorium and our social hall provided a meeting place for the State Department Exchange of Persons grantees and American visitors. A monthly newsletter and calendar of activities were mailed to members and advertised in the newspapers.

In 1952, we put together an album of pictures and graphs of the Porto Alegre Binational Center Program and mailed it to ICS in Washington to be used in the BNC grantee training program. This had been prompted by a suggestion by someone at the Lima Conference of

Cultural Officers and BNC Grantees for South America that was held in November of 1951. I had presented the democratic principles of organization under which the Porto Alegre Center had been operating. Our success had seemed of interest to others. In every way we were accepted by the end of 1952 in what had been a very nationalistic city. The American story was being heard and it was becoming much more difficult in the community to be anti-American because of the effectiveness of the American cultural and social programs at the Binational Center.

A few weeks before I arrived in Porto Alegre in 1950, the entrance hall of the American consulate had been painted with tar by vandals. During all this period of growth and popularity, there was never any vandalism against the Binational Center.

Interludes In Guatemala And Dominican Republic

After helping with the seminar for national teachers of English in Santiago, Chile, in 1953, I was transferred to Guatemala City as Director of the Binational Center, to help hold it together during the Arbenz revolution. This fascinating experience I will leave to another recording, because it is a story all in itself.

After Casilio Armis marched into the city from Salvador and all American personnel was transferred out and replaced by new blood, I was transferred to Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic. It had been renamed Ciudad Trujillo. As Director of the Center, I was still working as a State Department grantee. The Binational Center had the blessing of dictator Trujillo, even though I had reorganized this Board of Directors on the Porto Alegre pattern and it was functioning well as a micro-democracy.

When it came time for me to put license plates on my car, I was not entitled to diplomatic plates because I did not have a diplomatic passport. President Trujillo insisted, to my embarrassment, that my car carry official plates. This meant that all traffic stopped for me at intersections and that I was always given the right-of-way. His reasoning was that the American Cultural Center was binational.

1955: Back To Brazil As Country Director Of BNCs

After 11 months as Director of the Binational Center in the Dominican Republic, I was appointed as a USIS staff officer, and transferred back to Rio de Janeiro to serve as the area BNC officer for Brazil. My wife and I arrived there in September 1955. This, then, begins the second part of my recording which concerns the rapid expansion of the Brazilian Binational Center Program.

Upon my arrival in Brazil, again, in September 1955, I was pleased to learn that the Binational Center family had increased to 17. When I had gone to Porto Alegre in 1950, there had only been seven Centers in the whole of Brazil. In January of 1953, the United States Advisory Commission on Information had stated in their report to the Agency that, "Our work in the field should become less and less that of Americans conducting

propaganda on foreign soil, and more and more a partnership arrangement between Americans and others for the mutual welfare of both." This statement and the general curiosity about Americans after the war had served the cause of Binational Centers well in Brazil.

After I was able to set up my office in USIS Rio de Janeiro, located in the Embassy, I felt that it was necessary to visit each of the Centers and meet with their Boards of Directors. This gave me a good understanding of what was being accomplished among them as a USIS binational tool. Many of the Centers at that time were little more than English-language institutes, much like the Mexican City Center had been before it became a Binational Center, but with much less professional guidance. Some of the larger Centers, such as the Centers in Sao Paulo, Santos, Porto Alegre, Curitiba, and Rio de Janeiro, were true extensions of USIS. The obvious problem would be how to bring all of them into a pattern that would serve the needs of the State Department's Embassy, which had only five or six consulates in a country half the area of South America and nearly the size of the United States.

Facts to a Candid World was published in 1955. It was written by Oren Stephens, the USIA Deputy Assistant Director for Policy and Programs. What he had to say in that book rang a bell with many of us: "Of all propaganda, the most effective is that which has the least appearance of propaganda. The greater the seeming objectivity of the material, the more it will be accepted as disinterested and reliable information on which the audience can have a judgment." Mr. Stephens' counsel was excellent for American Binational Center grantees who found themselves playing the role of cultural ambassadors in a country that had been governed so long by a dictator, and where the democratic style was so little known.

President Getulio Vargas had committed suicide only the year before, in 1954, bringing his 17-year rule to an abrupt end. The new president that took office in 1955 was a charming and politically wily doctor named Juscelino Kubitschek. He had campaigned hard on a platform that stressed democracy and rapid economic progress. He had promised 50 years of development during his five-year term from 1955 to early 1961. By the time I arrived in September of 1955, his efforts were already under way to make Brazil's dream come true. He soon founded the national auto industry. In time he built hydroelectric power plants and steel mills throughout the country. One could feel the wave of euphoria that even a sudden burst of inflation did little to dampen.

President Kubitschek's Building of New Brazilian Capital (Brasilia) Spurs Rapid BNC Expansion

His most flamboyant gesture, outside of restoring democracy, was to resurrect a postscript to Brazil's first Constitution of 1824 that called for a capital to be known as Brasilia, to be constructed somewhere near the center of the country. Locking hard on this idea, Kubitschek was to start the "March to the West" that Vargas had dreamed about in his speech in 1940. He hired two prominent architects, Lucio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer, and mounted a crash program to build the new capital high on Brazil's central plateau. It would

be a full 16-hour drive northwest of Rio de Janeiro. It was this great expansion to the West and into the interior of Brazil that gave the American Binational Centers their opportunity to follow the frontier.

In the near future, Brasilia was to become the launching pad for conquest of the Mato Grosso [Large formidably underdeveloped area in Brazil's South Central interior, encompassing (but exceeding in area) the Brazilian State of the same name] and Amazonia [a similarly large and underdeveloped region in North Central Brazil]. In the meantime, the new roads being cut to it from Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo would bring to many villages thousands of new inhabitants that would make of them cities in the interior. They were hungry for schools and education to meet the challenge of the frontier. This frontier gave them land and opportunities for business undreamed of for generations. The Rotary Club and the Lions Club began their work, along with the American Binational Centers that came into these new and booming cities. It was a time of high spirits and courage, all sparked by a wily president who dared to do all this in the name of democracy.

Organization Of A Country-Wide BNC Network Enabled BNCs To Penetrate Schools, Universities, Media, And Cultural Establishments And Gain Brazilian Government Support

After my return from visiting all of the existing Binational Centers, I was certain that the only way USIS would be successful in meeting the challenge being presented to it would be to tie closely what we were able to do with these Centers into the country plan. USIS would have specific goals and projects to support each fiscal year. These goals and project must, in order to be successful, meet with the approval of the country team. From the very beginning, the program had the full support of Ambassador Briggs, the country public affairs officer, John McKnight, his deputy, Lew Schmidt, the cultural affairs officer, Larry Morris and, later, his replacement, Dulaney Terret. These men, including the USIS executive officer Jim Opsata, gave program support to the American Binational Centers, to me, and to the BNC grantees whom I helped supervise. Without this coordinated effort by the country team, the program would soon have died on the vine.

It was determined by USIS that we needed a system that would formalize our recognition of a Binational Center that wished to receive the official help and guidance of the Embassy. Impressive certificates of recognition were printed. When the Center, either new or long established, met the requirements for Embassy recognition, a certificate signed by the USIS cultural officer and the president of the Board of Directors was presented to a joint session of the Board of Directors and the Center's council. This method presented an opportunity to update the Center's government on BNC standards and their significance.

During 1955 and 1956, we had laid the groundwork for the USIS BNC program in Brazil. I had visited all the existing Centers and explained the countrywide standards that had been set by the country team. We were then ready to start responding seriously to the many requests for organizational visits from would-be Binational Centers.

The workload of the country BNC officer had increased to the point that he could no longer travel as much as was required and keep up with the office work at the Embassy. USIA Washington agreed to give the country BNC officer a deputy and one more local employee. Jack Fawcett, the Director of the Curitiba Center, was appointed an FSS officer and deputy BNC country officer for USIS Rio De Janeiro. This permitted one USIS BNC officer to be at the Embassy and another in the field at all times. Regularly, after a month of travel, I came back to the office and my deputy left to catch up on requests for help that had occurred during the month. During my first 18 months in Brazil, I slept in 30 different cities in all parts of Brazil.

Our travel was by plane whenever possible, but very often there was no way to get to some of the cities in the interior but by car or jeep. On the Amazon, we had to travel by boat. In 1957, the USIS office in Sao Paulo had received a request for training seminars for Binational Centers in Piracicaba and Barretos. After my wife and I had spent a week in each city, we decided to answer requests for a visit by a new city on the border of the Mato Grosso and in the northwestern part of the state of Sao Paulo. This was Votuporanga. President Kubitschek had suggested to one of its Rotary members that what Votuporanga needed was an American Binational Center. So we decided to visit the city fathers and their Rotary Club, to see what possibilities existed for such a Center.

After having been presented with the keys of the city by the mayor of Barretos for the English teaching and BNC leadership seminar, we had left Barretos early in the morning in our specially built Hillman-Minx, which had oversized shock absorbers and springs, as well as a heavy-duty cooling system and an extra low gear. None of the roads were paved as we headed west and further into the interior.

Across the northern part of the state of Sao Paulo, we didn't meet another car all morning. Finally, in the early afternoon when we joined the main newly cut highway to Brasilia, we began to meet trucks and jeeps. We had to leave the main highway to Brasilia near Mirasol, where we had organized a Center the previous year.

Our trip had been complicated by a heavy rain the night before. The ruts in the red clay road were becoming so deep that our car was in danger of getting hung up on them. Sure enough, the inevitable happened about 3:30 in the afternoon. We were stuck fast. I had been told when I left Mirasol that in case we needed help, a caravan of trucks on their way to Gernandopolis would be along in the late afternoon. We saw no other traffic. Finally, sure enough, about 4:00 o'clock, we could see the trucks coming over the horizon of red mud. In those days, Brazil's truck drivers were, as now, a very special breed of men. Along with Kubitschek's march to the West, they provided the wheels and the good natured helpfulness to travelers, no matter who they were. Twenty of these frontiersmen surrounded our car and lifted it out of the deep rut so I could drive straddling it. The caravan of eight or nine trucks followed. About 5:00 o'clock, we reached the outskirts of Votuporanga. Across the highway was strung a meter-wide banner in red and blue on white, that read, "Welcome John J. Ewing!"

Our little Hillman and ourselves, covered with mud, drove under the banner, along with the caravan of trucks with all horns blowing into the city to be received by the welcoming committee. Some of these special men were to spend evenings on layovers at Binational Centers en route from and to Sao Paulo. Old USIS magazines from BNCs circulated among them.

Votuporanga was to have its Binational Center. The next year we visited them again for an additional training seminar, but by that time, USIS had a four-wheel-drive jeep that we could use for such trips.

My wife, Bertha Irene Ewing, who had been a Binational Center grantee in Chile before I married her, was an invaluable help on these trips. Bertha is a graduate of Hunter College and holds a master's degree from Middlebury College. She was also a temporary instructor at Radcliffe and Harvard, where she was doing graduate work before she joined the BNC program. When she was not traveling with me or conducting a seminar on her own, she tutored the daughters of President Kubitschek at Laranjeiras Palace in Rio de Janeiro. All of this was volunteer work for Bertha, because in those days USIS wives could not be employed by the US Government.

By 1958, I had been able to recruit a person to fill the new slot provided for in the USIS budget for locally hired English teaching specialists that could begin to offer continuity in our English teaching efforts throughout the country. I had persuaded Hal Madison to leave our competition in Sao Paulo, and join our USIS BNC staff at the Embassy in Rio de Janeiro. He became the author of an excellent series of textbooks that were used in Binational Centers, secondary schools, and colleges throughout Brazil. He had the help of USIS BNC officers in making the series of books one of the best courses of study available. With the help of Mr. Madison, we were able to carry our program into the schools and universities of Brazil.

Each of the 23 BNC grantees participated each year in English language seminars to help train English teachers in these schools. The seminars were held in ten or 12 of the larger Centers, at least one in each state, to which private and public school teachers could come for training during the summer months.

Once a year, these same large Centers, under the supervision of American grantees, administrated the University of Michigan Proficiency Examination and the University of Pennsylvania Examination in American Studies. These examinations were sponsored by USIA in cooperation with these two universities. The certificates were issued by the universities for those who qualified and they were presented in an annual ceremony by USIS and the Binational Centers.

The annual seminars for National Teachers of English were one of the best public relations activities ever undertaken by USIS Brazil. They met with high approval and encouragement from the Brazilian Government. While in Curitiba, Jack Fawcett wrote an

anthology and textbook of American literature for teaching American literature in Brazilian schools. This invaluable text became popular in Brazil. Upon joining the USIS BNC staff in Rio, Jack also wrote a USIS English teaching course of study for radio. Attractive booklets were published and placed in radio programs throughout the country for mailing to listeners. Each USIS officer had his role to play.

The book presentations program provided American works in both English and Portuguese for BNC libraries. USIA ICS provided basic libraries as each Center qualified. These were added to on an annual basis. ICS also provided audio-visual aids and equipment as needed. Educational exchange officers conducted many educational exchange efforts within a Binational Center context, thus helping to promote the program and scholarship committees within the Binational Centers. This provided educational exchange experience for both countries. The Binational Center Scholarship Committee often served as scouts for finding well-qualified candidates in their area for the Embassy or Consulate's educational exchange program.

The film section of USIS Rio obtained and dispersed film programs that circulated among the Centers and often through them to schools and colleges. There was also a USIA BNC speaker exchange program that was coordinated in the USIS office in the Embassy.

1957: Public Law 480 Funds Authorized For Building Improvement Grants To BNCs

The press section of USIS paid attention to returning State Department grantees and to BNC cultural programs and released information on these activities to the Brazilian press. In 1957, our USIS executive officer, Jim Opsata, hit upon the idea of using the PL 480 funds to make capital improvements among the Brazilian Binational Centers. The first dispersal of these funds was to come in 1958 to seven Binational Centers. The PL 480 funds in the end would come to a considerable sum of over \$4 million. We tried to find a way to set up a Binational Center Foundation that would be the holding agent for making loans to over 50 Binational Centers then in existence, and let the money flow back again for reuse as needed by all the Brazilian family of Binational Centers. The country team was in full agreement, but we could not get the agreement for the plan approved in Washington.

Grants were finally made to those Centers that qualified. Most of them were building grants that permitted them to move into their own buildings. Some of the grants were used by smaller Centers to make capital improvements or to take out long-term leases on more adequate quarters. These grants were made each on the condition that each Center raise an equal amount to match the funds to be received from the PL 480 grant. This grant system gave stability to each Center, as well as an opportunity to seek out local commitment and local support for the Binational Center program. Attractive, well-equipped quarters became a boon to the program. Most of the well-established Centers were able to raise matching funds within a year after they became available.

Some of the USIS officers in Rio de Janeiro were, in time, transferred to branch offices as branch PAOs. This was a great asset for the area they went to. Jack Fawcett was to be assigned to Porto Alegre, and Fred Dickens to Salvador (Bahia). Howard Hill, my old colleague in Porto Alegre, had already been transferred to Recife. These men kept alive the Binational Center philosophy that had developed over the years we had spent together.

I will relate here only the experience of Fred, who had been so helpful when he was country educational exchange officer in the Embassy USIS office. In my opinion, one of Fred's most creative efforts on behalf of Binational Centers took place in Salvador (Bahia). Following the experience I had in Guadalajara, Mexico, Fred proposed to the rector of the University of Bahia that the university provide quarters, teachers, and staff for a university Binational Center to be called the Institute of North American Studies. When the rector accepted the idea in principle, Fred obtained clearance and support from USIS Rio. Binational Center grantee Isabel de Herwig was named director. All university faculty privileges and facilities were made available to her. A small building with classrooms and a library of new books in English and in Portuguese was provided.

My wife and I went to Salvador (Bahia) and gave a two-week training seminar for the teachers of the Center. In the first year, 1,300 university students enrolled in the English language study and others in American studies. Hundreds more were to view films and slide shows. This was the first university Binational Center in Brazil, and expenditure of USIS funds was minimal.

Fred Dickens and Isabel de Herwig's great success in this adventure was building upon the outstanding success of the Bahia mother center that had been so well served during the tenure of Jeff Sandel, the BNC grantee director who had preceded Isabel. By the spring of 1960, there were 23 American Binational Center grantees hard at work in 17 of the largest cities in Brazil. All had area duties and they helped supervise and train local personnel for 40 other Centers. Every major city on the Atlantic coast of Brazil had a Binational Center. Centers had also been established in the larger of the interior cities, as well.

The new center in Belem, at the mouth of the Amazon, was now prospering. Belem had become a beachhead for another push into the interior by President Kubitschek, this time from the north to Brasilia in the central plateau. A 2,100-kilometer highway, over half of which would be through very dense tropical forest, two million people would soon settle along this road. Trucks and buses between the two points became crowded with goods and people. Amazonia was now integrated with the rest of the nation.

We had already established a Binational Center in Manaus in early 1958. On that trip I was the only passenger on the plane from Manaus to Brasilia. I sat in the copilot's seat while he took a long nap. In 1959, my wife and I took a ship at Belem after the training seminar there, and traveled six days and six nights to Manaus on annual leave. Others from USIS met us there, where we held a seminar for national teachers of English for all of Amazonia. The seminar was sponsored jointly by USIS and the Binational Center.

I was transferred to Washington in May of 1960. Jack Fawcett, my deputy country BNC officer, was transferred to Porto Alegre as branch PAO. I suggested that Sidney Vertz of the Rio de Janeiro Center be made country BNC officer. The political climate had almost been perfect while the country was under the administration of President Juscelino Kubitschek, but after Juscelino, Brazil once again fell into political disarray. His elected successor was Janio Quadros, a brilliant but unstable politician. He had campaigned with a broom as his symbol and announced as his laudable, if quixotic, goal, the elimination of widespread corruption in government. The Congress was apprehensive and failed to corroborate his election for over six months. As a result, he resigned. In 1961, the presidency passed into the hands of his vice president, Joao Goulart.

Goulart was from Rio Grande do Sul, as had been Vargas. The primary shortcoming of President Goulart, who, for long was widely accused of being far too soft on the left, if not a Communist himself, was not his radicalism, but rather his incompetence to govern. Under his administration, disorder became commonplace. Shortages, strikes, and a runaway inflation all took their toll.

Finally, on March 31, 1964, a military coup took place, and Goulart, along with many leftist politicians and academics, clandestinely left Brazil.

These years were hard on the morale of Binational Centers. The real and imagined dangers to these micro-democracies put them in jeopardy of losing their hard-won popularity. I will leave this new era and its story to my colleagues who followed me. Many of these very special binational institutions still are healthy and strong. The Rio de Janeiro Center recently celebrated its golden anniversary.

As long as there are men around like Dr. Belchior, who has been the real Binational Center guardian angel ever since the 1950s, and men like Dr. Acho of Porto Alegre, the miracle of the human spirit will live on. These Brazilian Binational Center leaders have projected their dream and our dream far beyond their own harbors. Yes, there will also be a Brazilian president again who promotes progress through democracy, as did Juscelino Kubitschek.

End of interview