

Castañer Newsletter

BRETHREN SERVICE PROJECT

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Castañer, Puerto Rico

BRETHREN SERVICE COMMISSION

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GLIMPSES OF THE NEW HOSPITAL

The construction of the 33 bed General Hospital with Personnel Housing Unit was started December 15, 1958. The contractor, Mr. Miguel Sastre Frau, had most of the concrete work completed by the end of May, 1959. The completion of the building is scheduled for April 9, 1960.

The new building is being built around and joining the existing vanilla plant building. The existing building which will be used for dining rooms, kitchen, general and kitchen storage, laboratory, and x-ray, will be reconstructed to match the architecture of the new building.

The new hospital is planned for efficiency and will be a beautiful building located in a growing community. There are many local people working on the construction of the new hospital.

On March 8, a nice crowd of people gathered at the site of the new hospital for the laying of the cornerstone. Special guests who appeared on the program were: W. Harold Row, representing the Brethren Service Commission and the General Brotherhood Board; Doña Inés de Muñoz Marin, the wife of the governor of Puerto Rico; Luis Santaliz Capestany, a representative; Francisco Arrillaga, a lawyer and the coordinator of the hospital fund campaign; Hon. Ernesto Ramos Antonini, the president of the House of Representatives of Puerto Rico; and Samuel Quifones, president of the Senate. The cornerstone is of gray stone with white lettering. It is placed at the main entrance to the new hospital.

The campaign to raise funds for the new hospital has been expanded to the states among the Puerto Rican residents and others. Efforts so far have centered mainly in Chicago and New York where large numbers of Puerto Ricans reside.

Efforts are also being made to revive the campaign in the local area. Since the construction is progressing so rapidly, it is necessary for us to raise the remaining amount soon.

PROJECT GLEANINGS

Dr. and Mrs. C.A. Ainslie arrived at the project on April 29, 1959. Dr. Ainslie was director of the American Hospital in Guatemala for 35 years. He is now retired but has been traveling and helping out in hospitals over the world. He will help in the medical department here for two or three months.

Two new nurses have arrived to work in the hospital. They are Christine Ruhl from Pennsylvania and Velma Lutz from Ohio. Also to arrive this month are Mr. and Mrs. Joe Utley, who will be here for the summer months and Mr. and Mrs. Roy Neher, who will be coming for a year of service here.

Mr. and Mrs. John Forbes and Gandhi left for a two month furlough to the States on May 17. They plan to spend the time visiting relatives and friends.

Dr. Francoise Hall was granted United States citizenship on May 18th. She was formerly a citizen of Belgium but has been living in Canada and the United States for a number of years.

The expanded dairy project here seems to be going quite well. With the ten heifers sent down by Heifer Project, the milk production has been greatly increased. Plans are now being made to fix the dairy so that it will be possible to sell Grade A milk.

In April we saw the departure of one of our BVS'ers whose term here was completed. Gene Hartman had been working here in the maintenance department for the past two years. He was a member of the March, 1957, B.V.S. Unit. Most recently Gene's main function was to serve as caretaker at the Girls' College here. In case you didn't know, the Brethren Academy has been dubbed Girls' College since the laying hens moved in this past year. Besides Girls' College, Gene had chickens in several other sites around the project. When not busy with chickens, he continued to help the maintenance department with anything that came along, from the unpredictable boiler to fixing leaky pipes.

Besides work here, Gene was involved in many community activities. He served on Recreational Council and had the job of helping keep track of the Recreational Council's pennies.

Last but not least, Gene was shortstop for the Castañer Class A baseball team. When nippy autumn and cold, cold winter take over up North, that's when Puerto Rico's ball fans come to life and Gene helped a lot this past year in getting Castañer's team on its feet.

Gene left for his home in Maryland on April 22nd, and is planning to enter Bridgewater College this fall.

COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

The community of Castañer is still involved in many and varied activities. Some of course, taking more time and energy than others, but nevertheless, all being very important toward community growth.

The Church of the Brethren had a very successful dedication of the church in February. Various speakers were brought in for a series of meetings prior to the dedication. The new Baptist church is also nearing completion. Changes will take place when work is started to turn the old church building into a parsonage for the minister and his family. All of the churches in the community cooperated in Holy Week services and the Easter Sunrise Service on Easter morning. Again, various speakers were brought in. It was a very successful week with many people attending. Offerings from these services go toward the expenses of Vacation Bible School. Bible School, under the direction of Violet Crespo, will be held during the first two weeks of June this year.

Later in June, El Guacio Project and Castañer will again co-sponsor boys' and girls' camps. Various people from both projects will serve as leaders for these camps.

The project is continuing to move in the outward direction in working with the community center. The recreational council has been soliciting funds from various municipalities in order to become more self-sufficient and independent from the project. The council brings in much of its income through movies and other activities. In order to strengthen the community center, the council is trying to obtain financial help as well as leadership from the community organizations. The council has definitely had its financial problems but with the new and renewed interest on the part of the members of the council, gradually much more is being accomplished each month.

The community center is cooperating with the Class A baseball team in such ways as lending equipment and offering some instruction on the part of the director. The team didn't get off to a very good start in the season, but as the season is progressing and coming to a close in the next few weeks, it is continuing to become much stronger. The record now stands at 8 wins and 8 losses but should become more one-sided in favor of wins before the season closes. This record is much improved over last year's as is fair play much more evident this year. Castañer is a very small community for a Class A team but the way the interest is growing, Castañer will be one of the top teams in the future. Plans are also underway for a Class B team next year.

Many other activities are going on and will be going on within a short time. The cooperatives are continuing to grow and the schools are continuing to better educate the children of the valley. It won't be too long until the high school seniors will be graduating, many of which are looking toward possibilities of going to college, some in the states and some here on the island.

IMPRESSIONS OF HAITI

By Mildred Townsend

We spent six days (April 17-22) in Haiti, Ralph having been requested by B.S.C. to investigate the famine situation there. Immediately on arrival Friday morning, allowing an hour to get through customs, we contacted the U.S. Operations Mission to Haiti headquarters and were introduced into a meeting just then in session, including a representative from Church World Service, Catholic Relief, and the man in charge of the U.S.O.M. to Haiti. They were making plans for the distribution of food from the U.S. surplus food storage to the people of the drought-stricken area in the northwest peninsula. They told us that if we wanted to see the situation of this area firsthand that we could probably go the next day with Rev. Wallace Turnbull of the Baptist Mission, located 15 miles up the mountain from Port au Prince.

The next four days we spent with the Turnbulls, traveling by jeep through the bush country of the southern part of the northwest peninsula, meeting with local Catholic priests and village officials to set up distribution centers for the food, to arrange for a census of the families and the issuing of food ration cards. This whole area west of Gonaives to Bail de Henne, which is as far west as there is a resemblance of a road, is extremely dry. The only evidence of productivity left was some old dried-up millet and corn fodder stalks. Banana tree leaves were dry and shriveled. Only occasionally was there water from a spring and the rivers in that area were dry. Many places the land was arid and desert, it being mostly barren of trees, cleared from generations past for dyewood and at present some being used for charcoal making. This lack of trees is one of the long range problems connected with the drought conditions and is recognized by the people in the U.S.O.M. and the missionaries. There were some foods in the village markets that we visited such as corn-meal, millet, raw brown sugar rolls, goat meat and some vegetables. The small fishing villages on the coast survived only from the fish they were able to catch.

We saw evidences of mal-nutrition, which on the surface is a difficult thing to measure. Many children had a yellowish-red tinge to their hair, which indicated a protein deficiency. Many looked thin and were very undersize for their age. They ordinarily have only one cooked meal a day. We were assured by the Turnbulls that the people we were seeing were those in the better condition, that the worst would be back home, too weak to come to the village or market.

The officials in charge of the food distribution estimated that they have enough U.S. surplus food (rice, flour, cornmeal, farina) on hand to give each family up to five members, twenty pounds plus five pounds of powdered milk per week for six weeks. Families over five are to get double this ration. The most urgent need in addition to these foods is for protein foods such as beans, multi-purpose food, cheese, and codfish. Seeds are also needed for when the rains come.

We stayed one night at the Albert Schweitzer Hospital at Deschappelles and were shown through the hospital the next morning by Dr. W. Larimer Mellon. This modern, well-equipped hospital is the Mellon's tribute and living memorial to Dr. Schweitzer. It was our impression that they and all the other people serving there are truly dedicated and have caught that underlying spirit - "Reverence for life".

This glimpse into this foreign country with all its poverty, superstitions, and primitive practices, only a couple of hours away from here, impresses us even more strongly of the need for constructive technical, educational, and religious assistance all over the world. What U.S. resources now going into the missile program could do for a country like Haiti.

MEMORIAM

Lita Francoise Hall, infant daughter of Doctors Tom and Francoise Hall, died suddenly on February 17, 1959, after a short life of three months.

PLAY DAY

On the morning of May 9, the truck and stationwagon, loaded with the people ready for a day of play, started on the long trip across the island to "Monte del Estado" (State Mountain) where the El Guacio Presbyterian project was the host for Play Day. The Play Days are held every six months with the different church sponsored projects on the island as the hosts. The group enjoyed visiting, a delightful variety of games, and a worship period during the day. Castañer, El Guacio, Aibonito, and Robinson School were represented. The next Play Day is to be held at Castañer in October.

VISITORS

The following were overnight visitors at the Project:

Mr. and Mrs. Fisher, Interamerican University, San German, Puerto Rico
Mr. Cox, Interamerican University, San German, Puerto Rico
Dr. and Mrs. Curtis Bowman, Aurora, Illinois
Mr. and Mrs. Don Dice, Aurora, Illinois
Mr. and Mrs. Hyde, Aurora, Illinois
Dr. and Mrs. Ernest Horsely and family, Bella Vista Hospital, Mayaguez, Puerto Rico
Mr. and Mrs. Russell Latimer, San Juan, Puerto Rico
Mr. and Mrs. Bob Pope and family, San Juan, Puerto Rico
Mr. and Mrs. Ray Petersime, Gettysburg, Ohio
Rev. and Mrs. Moyne Landis, West Milton, Ohio
Mr. and Mrs. Henry Torrence, Toledo, Ohio
Mr. and Mrs. Harold Steiner, Wooster, Ohio
Ray Thornberry, Fort Buchanan, Puerto Rico
Rev. M. Guy West, York, Pennsylvania
Dr. W. Harold Row, Elgin, Illinois
Dr. and Mrs. Don Wimber, Upton, New York
Dr. and Mrs. Dennis Rupel, Humacao, Puerto Rico
Lonnie Wood, El Guacio Project, Puerto Rico
Carol Ginder, El Guacio Project, Puerto Rico
Mr. and Mrs. Elmer Ginder, Florin, Pennsylvania
Mrs. Helen Oorganion, Irvington, New Jersey
Gene Yeazell, El Guacio Project, Puerto Rico
Orlando Lebron, El Guacio Project, Puerto Rico
Kenton Harris, El Guacio Project, Puerto Rico
Mr. and Mrs. Rafael A. Cruz, San Juan, Puerto Rico
Dr. and Mrs. Paul Roth and family, Aibonito, Puerto Rico
Mr. and Mrs. Hostettler, Goshen, Indiana
Don Erickson, Robinson School, Santurce, Puerto Rico
Mr. and Mrs. Bob Erickson, Schenectady, New York
Mr. Charles Gauld, Interamerican University, San German, Puerto Rico
Mr. Paul Coombs, Interamerican University, San German, Puerto Rico
John Hall, Renneslaer Institute, Troy, New York
Dr. Livingston Hall, Concord, Massachusetts
Rev. and Mrs. Watson Custer and girls, Interamerican University, San German, Puerto Rico
Dr. Quinter Miller, New York, New York
Dr. and Mrs. John Grasse, Aibonito, Puerto Rico
Dr. and Mrs. Ben Kenagy, Aibonito, Puerto Rico
Dr. and Mrs. William Pletcher, Humacao, Puerto Rico
Dr. Roger Feldman, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Dr. and Mrs. Marvin Sukov, Minneapolis, Minnesota
Judy Royer, Chicago, Illinois
Henry Hamilton, Fort Buchanan, Puerto Rico
Hazel Peters, Elgin, Illinois
