

Castañer Newsletter

BRUMBAUGH RECONSTRUCTION UNIT
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Castaner, Puerto Rico

BRETHREN SERVICE COMMISSION
June 1, 1948

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* MOTHERS' DAYS *
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* Mother's Day became reality to one of our Unit members. Alys and *
* Walter Haag became the proud parents of SHARON RACHEL at 10:00 in *
* the morning. Sharon really filled her tiny box, weighing seven *
* pounds and three ounces, since the boxes are made for our Puerto *
* Rican babies which usually weigh between five and six pounds. The *
* parents are both doing fine, and as the saying goes, Walter remained *
* as cool as a cucumber. You know daughters are born every day. *
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* They say that all good things come at once. Just five days after *
* Sharon's arrival, ANA LUISA CLICK was born. She tipped the scales *
* at seven pounds and six ounces. Evidently, her parents didn't know *
* how big little babies can be, because her toes are already touching *
* the end of the basket in which they plan to carry her home to the *
* States with them. Lois and Maurice make good use of the Casa *
* Grande washing machine in trying to keep four dozen diapers avail- *
* able. Both babies are doing exceptionally well in this ideal *
* climate. *
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CO-OP'S FIRST ANNIVERSARY

On May 7, 1947 the Cooperative de Consumo Castaner opened its grocery store in a green store building rented from the PRRA. On May 31, 1948 the Cooperative ended its first fiscal year and issued a financial report as of that date. The co-op began with 180 members, and its membership has slowly increased by about 10% during the year. For the fiscal year just ended the co-op made sales amounting to more than \$75,500. With an inventory of about \$4400 and with the payment of all expenses such as freight, salaries, depreciation and electric bills, the co-op made a net savings to its members of about \$4200, which is a net saving to each consumer member of about 8.4¢ for each dollar spent by him at the co-op store. In addition to this saving the co-op also owns a Kelvinator refrigerator, two scales, a bread box, a bottle cooler and a cash register. It is purchasing from PRRA the store building for \$3000, and has at this time paid \$300 of that amount. It has taken out two loans of \$500 each, but plans to retire one of these in six months, and the other a year later.

This co-op was also helpful in organizing the Cooperativa de Credito de Castaner, a Credit Union, last February. The Credit Union was officially incorporated in June

and has 50 active members, and 23 inactive members (these being the ones who have not completed payment on a full \$5 share of stock. This useful organization lends money at low rates of interest such as 1% while the former money-lenders charged as high as 10% or more.

AT THE CO-OP STORE

Whenever a customer enters a grocery store he always does so with the expectation of service--in quality of goods available at reasonable prices, in friendly, courteous attention, and in a neat, clean and cheerful building. Certainly the customers who enter the Consumers' Cooperative Store of Castaner find all of these; although you may not think so in comparison with the standards set by some of the super-markets in the United States. But we must judge this Puerto Rican mountain community's store by its advancement over other stores in this area.

Here you may buy bread fresh every morning from the bakery in Adjuntas, the nearest town (12 miles away) which is delivered in a large blue panel truck. And this is a service which the co-op has brought to the community, for its increased volume of business had encouraged many truck-deliverers to put this road on their routes whereas formerly there were few deliveries and this added a freight expense to the cost of goods bought here. So the co-op in this way even helps its competitors. But the bread itself--is about as large around as your arm--and almost three feet long. It is unwrapped, and the deliveryman carries the store's daily supply into the store in his arms as though it were split stove-wood. In slicing this bread you should cut it diagonally, so that the individual slices are quite a bit larger than the diameter of the long slim loaf. But here is where the service comes in--suppose you have very little money today (cash only at the co-op store) you may buy a penny's worth of this bread, and the clerk will slice it in two for you, and even put some oleomargarine on it for you, if you wish.

While you are getting your bit of bread, a little girl comes in with a small bottle which another clerk fills with olive oil for her. She has an extra penny, so she buys a penny's worth of chewing gum (Chiclets) or she might have gotten some hard candy for her penny, or even more likely a lindberg (which is a frozen colored, imitation-flavored ice on a stick, much like "popsicles" in the States). These received their nickname, people say, from the fact that they were introduced to Puerto Rico about the time the famous pioneer transatlantic flyer made a visit to this island. Meanwhile, another child has come in with a nickel to spend, and is buying some ice cream--an Eskimo pie. Also available are many kinds of pop such as Coca-Cola, Royal Crown, and two other brands of cola drinks, grape, lemon, orange, and seven-up (but strangely, no root beer or strawberry). Also on sale is canned chocolate milk which is kept ice-cold in the refrigerator, and in this land where fresh milk is a scarcity this serves as a substitute for a milk-shake.

Now there is a man at the counter with a gunny-sack in which he is putting his purchases so he can carry them home on his way from work on the PRRA farm among the bananas. He bought $\frac{1}{4}$ lb. of coffee (unroasted--his wife will do that at home, as it will be roasted much more well-done than continentals use it), and 5 lb. of dry beans and 5 lb. of rice (as rice and beans are the 'meat and potatoes' of most of the people here--not so much from preference as from economic necessity). Some people say that the habit of eating rice and beans comes from the time of the disastrous hurricane of San Ciriaco on August 8, 1899 (hurricanes are named after the Saint's Day on which they occur) less than one year after the American occupation began. So desperate was the food situation after this hurricane that the U.S. Army was compelled to feed the starving population, and did so in army style (rice and beans). That is why the staple

food for the island is this, practically all of which must be imported. The only meat staple for the island's poorer people (also available at the co-op) is dried codfish which is imported from Newfoundland.

Another man is at the counter buying some dried corn and some sugar (at the same price you pay in the States, even though sugar is the island's principal crop). Also available if the man had needed them today are wheat flour and corn meal, dried prunes, raisins, and sometimes, other dried fruits. Apparently he is a smoking man, for he has just bought two cigarettes for 3¢, as they are sold here either by the pack or individually.

If these customers had been people of more means, as some of the people are, they would have been able to buy some canned goods, for the store's shelves are as well-stocked as stores in the States with such canned fruits and vegetables as grow in temperate zone climates rather than in the tropics. There seems to be almost a superstition about the healthful qualities of pear juice in particular, although it is no better than any other, and is usually diluted to a great extent. But for their fruit diet most of the people must depend upon oranges, grapefruit, bananas, mangos, mamey, or an occasional pineapple in their seasons.

Other items available are cans of crackers (unsalted, as the salt attracts too much moisture in this damp tropical climate), and cans of powdered milk. Fresh milk is not available in any appreciable quantity here, and powdered milk is more economical, and perhaps better than canned milk. Powdered milk is as enthusiastically advertised in the press and on the radio in Puerto Rico as cigarettes are in the States. In fact the co-op store sells at least three different brands of the six or more which are available on the Island.

At one end of the long counter are dry goods items, and also miscellaneous articles such as combs, soap, tooth paste, razors (single-edge only), pencils, ink, once they even sold ball-point pens, shoestrings, pots and pans.

The clerks give friendly and courteous attention. After all, no customer can ever be looked upon as a poor customer, for no one buys on credit, and everyone is equal in the eyes of the management. Besides, all of the customers are the owners of the store, until for everyone of them it is probably the largest piece of property any of them ever possessed. And this is, in fact, such a new experience that it is not yet fully realized or appreciated. The co-op is buying the land and the store building from the PRRA, and occasional improvements are made upon it. Recently the Coca-Cola company erected one of their large new, bright, red and white signs upon the roof of the building with the name of the co-op in large letters. The co-op also has another sign in green and yellow with the two green trees in a circle, which is the official co-op emblem.

The people are more and more becoming aware of the great advantages of cooperation. They take pride in the ownership of their own store. They are very happy over the fact that they are no longer in debt for groceries and clothing, and especially happy that they have now received their patronage dividends from their past year's purchases. And if they ever need credit, they know they can secure it in their other co-op, the Credit Union.

NEW HOSPITAL SECRETARY

On May 1st Isabel Garcia began her apprenticeship as Hospital Secretary under the direction of Caryl Mathis who has filled this position for the past year. She is the first Puerto Rican to hold this responsible job of keeping all hospital and out-

patient department records and this indicates the trend to fill more positions with local personnel as we move toward a permanent staff. Upon Caryl's leaving in June, Isabel will have learned all of her job. Her willingness to learn and her courteous manner has won the respect of all those who work with her.

IN SYMPATHY

Paul and Edna Eller Snavely returned to the States on April 29th due to the illness of Edna's father, Rev. C.E. Eller. Rev. Eller passed away after their arrival. He visited us at Castaner for two weeks during December and January.

May 20, 1948

Dear Paul and Edna,

We, your former co-workers in Puerto Rico, share your sorrow in the loss of your father. His passing will be mourned by all who knew and loved him.

His memory will always remain with us, for even though his visit at Castaner was short, we learned to appreciate and love him.

Please express our sympathy to the entire family in their bereavement. May God's blessing be with you.

Sincerely,

Members of the Castaner Brethren Service
Project

PUERTO RICO STUDY GROUP

Every year at this project it is usual to have a series of study groups on Puerto Rico so that both old and new people can come to know the Island and its people better. Preceding the studies this year the unit heard a talk from its director at that time (November 1947), Claude Wolfe on "Ecuador and its People" as Claude and June Wolfe had just completed two years' work there. The Puerto Rico studies began with a history of the unit as shown by the Newsletters, presented by Cecil Wickline, the next study was on Customs and Holidays, presented by Caleb Frantz. Following these were: Economic Problems, by Knight Webster, Local Industries by Howard Wolf, and Castaner Social Work by Josephine Wolf. Maurice Click told the History of Puerto Rico during the Spanish rule (1493-1898), and Dr. Everett Myer gave the history during the U.S. rule from 1898 to 1935. The final study was by Walter Haag in May on Agriculture. The study group also heard visiting speakers, such as Mr. Ramon Moreno, PRRA agronomist for this Project speaking on the work of PRRA; Father Lauro Bauza of Bartolo, on the Episcopal Church in Puerto Rico; Rev. Harry Zeck of Ponce, who supervises the United Brethren work on the Island, speaking on Protestant Churches in Puerto Rico; and Mayor Jose B. Barcelo and lawyer Tony Bennezar of Adjuntas collaborated in bringing us the story of Puerto Rico's government and politics since 1935. The study groups were usually held every two weeks from December through May, and everyone benefited from attending them.

PERSONNEL NEWS FOR MAY--Fern Kring, Wanda Brown, and Ruth Idleman all flew to the States on May 9th. Fern is taking advantage of three weeks vacation to take the Indiana State Board Exams for Nurses in Indianapolis, and returned on the 30th. Wanda came to Puerto Rico with the Burkes, spending one year at Robinson School in Santurce, and last year was a Freshman at Polytechnic Institutexin San German. Ruth was a nurse in our hospital for 1½ years then went to Polytechnic Institute as a special student and as school nurse. Sharon Rachel came to live with the Haags on May 9th, and Ana Luisa with the Clicks on May 14th (see page 1). Luke and Martha Backman flew to the States on May 24th after two years of service. Dr. and Mrs. Homer L. Burke, Lynn and Jeneba flew to the States on May 30th for a month's furlough when they will attend the Church of the Brethren Annual Conference at Colorado Springs as well as interview prospective personnel to fill our rapidly depleting staff. Howard and Josephine Wolf, Antonio Marrero and Caleb Frantz left by boat on the 29th. Howard and Jo have completed more than two years of service and are taking Antonio with them to the States to help him complete his education. Caleb Frantz has been teaching in the local Junior High School for two years following a period of service with the unit, and will return about August 1st for another year of teaching.