

Castaner Newsletter

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BRETHREN SERVICE COMMISSION
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BRETHREN WORK IN PUERTO RICO

by Claude Wolfe

The short time that we have been in Puerto Rico does not qualify me to speak authoritatively on the work that is being done here. And yet one cannot work in such a place long without drawing, at least for himself, some conclusions. Thus it is with me.

We who have but recently come to Castaner have only a small idea of, and too little appreciation for, what has actually been put into this Project to make it what it is today. The community knows better than we the change that has been wrought through their efforts. They were certainly hard-working, forceful people who put their full energies into this work of the Church of the Brethren. This is not to minimize the work of the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration (PRRA) in establishing their resettlement project here, building decent homes for the people, giving them a chance to own their homes, and also helping to raise their wages. Through the cooperation of the Insular government and PRRA with the Church of the Brethren this community has changed from a backward rural mountain community to a progressive, cooperative group striving successfully to raise their standard of living. The change has been amazing, and is noticed by every outsider who visits this community. The contribution of those who have given their time and lives cannot be measured in monetary values. The Church and the community owes them a debt of gratitude.

Man, because of his very nature, is a religious being. Each of us seeks something to which we can attach our lives. Many have not yet found the highest thing as the center of their worship, but are struggling about from one thing to another in search for this higher power. This is the first work of the church. When the church sets men in their right relationship with their Creator, then it must function in the realm of ridding their lives of disease, filth, ignorance, and a host of other things that keep men living on an almost unbelievably low level of life.

Already much has been done here to raise that standard, but we need to give these people a higher motivation for raising this standard, and to give it permanency. If we can now add to what has already been given a message of hope through the knowledge of Jesus Christ, and make this religion applicable on every level of life, then we shall have done that which will be valuable and lasting.

The Puerto Ricans want us to stay here. But in order that they may want us to stay in the future, we must be alive and grow, perhaps not in actual size, but in depth so that each day we are here someone's life will be helped more, and life will take on a new significance for them. In order to accomplish this, those who volunteer for this work must come, not as masters, but as servants, giving themselves unselfishly that these people might have life and have it more abundantly.

BRETHREN LOVE FEAST

On Tuesday evening, January 27th at 7:30 o'clock the living room of the Casa Grande was the scene of a beautiful and very inspirational communion service, which was the first complete Brethren Love Feast in the history of the Unit. The service was conducted entirely by candle-light.

After several of the Unit members had acted as deacons and made the physical preparation, Claude Wolfe officiated at the service. Rev. and Mrs. J. H. Mathis of North Manchester, Indiana, visiting here during January, added much to the planning of the service. Brother Mathis conducted the examination service. This was followed by the ceremony of feet-washing. Then the Lord's Supper, or fellowship meal, was partaken. The service continued with the breaking of the bread and the drinking of the cup. After singing a hymn the service was dismissed.

Twenty-nine Unit members and friends participated in the service, and several others attended.

THE CITY OF ADJUNTAS

Before the year 1815 the people who lived in the area which is bounded by the southern part of Utuado and by the western part of Ponce often gathered at the shore of the Cidra (Citron) River in a little church to which a priest frequently came to offer religious services. About this time the people had begun to build several houses to the east of the Cidra River. This later developed into a small commercial and agricultural settlement. Shortly after this, a town was founded which was named Adjuntas, or "meeting-place" because of the previous religious meetings at this location.

Today Adjuntas is located on Highway No. 6 running from Ponce north to Arecibo on the north coast. It is 29 kilometers north of Ponce and 20 kilometers south of Utuado. It lies in a small valley surrounded by the three mountain peaks of Monte Guilarte, Silla de Calderon and El Gigante (The Giant). There is not only physical geography, however, but also political geography. Adjuntas is a municipality in the Senatorial District of Ponce. The entire Island of Puerto Rico is divided into six of these Senatorial Districts, and these are in turn divided into municipalities, of which there is a total of 77. Each municipality has as its center some city or town, but also includes the outlying barrios (counties). The Municipality of Adjuntas includes 16 barrios.

The Castaner Project is not in the Municipality of Adjuntas, however. The Rio Guayo which flows by our Project is the dividing line between the Adjuntas and the Lares municipalities. However, we are nearer to Adjuntas and have more contacts there. Also, two of the Unit members live in a house across the river, so are actually living in Adjuntas, as do many of the persons who work in our Project.

The principal products of Adjuntas are sugar cane, coffee and citron. There are cooperatives for the coffee, citron and vanilla industries. Other smaller industries established in Adjuntas include an ice plant, a bakery, a furniture shop and a shoe shop.

The Municipality of Adjuntas has about 25 schools with a total enrollment of about 2000 students and about 80 teachers. The 1940 census showed about 26,000 inhabitants, of whom about 5000 live in the city. The city has recently completed construction of a fire station. At present they are constructing a small hospital and medical center which will help to relieve the Castaner Hospital. At present Adjuntas has one doctor, a public health clinic, and there are several drug stores.

ANOTHER NEED

Last summer one of our Unit members was able to obtain for us a pair of old-style telephones that had been lying around unused in an attic where they were doing no one any good. These have been put to use at Castaner between the hospital and one of the doctors' houses. (see August 1947 Newslettter, page 5) They have saved many steps, but we would like to save many more. The director's house is at one end of the project, while the doctors' houses are at the other end, while the hospital is somewhere near the middle, and the administrative office is in the Casa Grande next door to the director's house. Further, there is the possibility of the project obtaining the house of the Llinas farm which is a mile from the present project. So, we could use as many as six more telephones to good advantage if they are obtainable. If anyone has, or knows someone who has, any old, unused telephone that might be contributed to the work of this project, any such contribution would be greatly appreciated and put to good use. We would gladly pay the transportation costs--just pack them and mail them and postage will be refunded if desired.

FOR THE BOOK SHELF

A CENTURY OF LATIN AMERICAN THOUGHT, by W. Rex Crawford. Published by the Harvard University Press, 1945. \$3.50

This book is an introduction to the writers and thinkers who have moulded the thought of Latin America, and to the ideas which have shaped the attitude of their countries toward freedom, democracy and social progress. It should help to dispell the idea that nothing but poetry and prize novels are produced by the Latin Americans. It contains extensive quotations from 38 writers plus introductions, commentaries and conclusions on the work of each of these. It is a fair sampling of the thinking of all of Latin America--both South and Central America, as well as the West Indies--for the past 100 years. One of the 38 thinkers is a product of Puerto Rico. Eugenio M. de Hostos was a sociologist and an educator, and might be termed the Herbert Spencer or the Lester F. Ward of Puerto Rico. His birthday, January 12th, is a holiday in Puerto Rico, so much is he esteemed on the island. The other writers flourished in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela. The author is apologetic for not being able to include thinkers from every country--although he has excluded no one for his views, for some like the United States, others hate us, some like Spain, others hate it, there are Catholics and atheists, and even a communist and a fascist. But there are omissions. Except for Mexico there is no Central American representative, nor is there anyone from Haiti (which has three million French-speaking citizens), and Colombia and Paraguay have also been omitted.

COUNTRIES OF THE CARIBBEAN. Published by the National Geographic Society in Washington, D. C. in October 1947. This is a map which includes Mexico, all of Central America and all of the islands of the West Indies. Produced since the war, it incorporates much new information derived from the military coverage of practically every square mile of this area. There are insets of Puerto Rico, Cuba, the Panama Canal Zone and eight islands. The map is available either in the paper edition for 50¢ or the linen edition for \$1.00, and an index is also available for 25¢. The index is important because the map contains 6,954 place names. The size of the map is 41 by 25 inches. The latest information on ocean depths and mountain heights and most recent boundary changes are given. As usual with Geogrphic maps, this one is also in ten colors.

MISCELLANY

Swimming with Lions--On January 6th, Three Kings Day in Puerto Rico, the members of the Unit were guests of the Adjuntas Lions Club. The day was spent at their clubhouse and grounds, swimming, meeting their club members, and was concluded with a grand lechón asado (roast pig) dinner with all the trimmings. The Lions Club has a concrete and tile swimming pool in which it was a real treat to enjoy a lively morning of swimming and water games. There is also a large terraced flower garden on the grounds. After the dinner there were a few games. We are grateful to the Adjuntas Lions Club for their hospitality on this festival day.

Registration--In Adjuntas and other polling places, on January 17th and 18th, the registration of voters for the 1948 elections were held. These dates were immediately receded by much party activity by the several political parties in the area. 1948 is election year in Puerto Rico, too--and although Puerto Ricans, in spite of being citizens of the United States, are not allowed to vote in the presidential election, they, nevertheless will vote for their own governor for the first time in their history in the coming fall elections. There are several active political parties on the Island, but their issues are quite different from those of the political parties in the United States. We hope in an issue of the near future to present an article or two on the political situation in Puerto Rico giving some account of the various issues at stake and the stand taken on them by the different parties.

We Visit Our Local Industries--All of the Unit members who are new since this time last year, or who were unable then to do so, made a tour of PRRA coffee mill and of the Vanilla Curing Plant. The tour of the coffee mill was conducted by Mr. Ramon Moreno, agronomist for the PRRA Castaner Central Service Farm, on Wednesday afternoon, January 14th. All of the PRRA farm's produce is distributed through cooperatives on the Island. (A full account of the operations of the coffee mill appeared last year in the November 1946 Newsletter on page 5). The visit to the Vanilla Cooperative Curing Plant was on Wednesday morning, January 21st, and was conducted by Mr. Rafael Santiago Esbri, manager of the curing plant for the cooperative. The cooperative has not yet been able to procure the machinery for extracting, and also will need a technical advisor, who is not yet available. (A full account of the vanilla curing operations appeared last year in the March 1947 Newsletter on page 10).

PERSONNEL NEWS:--On January 12th Walter and Alys Haag returned to Castaner for a second term of service for one year, after taking a two-month furlough between terms in the States which they spent visiting Walter's folks around Thanksgiving time in Whittier, California, and Alys' folks around Christmastime in Altoona, Pennsylvania. Walter has taken over supervision of the farm work, and Alys will take over supervision of the Women's Needlework Industry.

CASTANER VISITORS FOR JANUARY:--Rev. and Mrs. J. H. Mathis of North Manchester, Indiana and parents of Andy Mathis, director of the Community Center, visited our Project during the month of January. Rev. Mathis preached at three morning services, and Mrs. Mathis conducted a Vesper service. Rev. Mathis also took an active part in the communion service (see page 2), and both helped in the work of the Project. Before leaving the Island they visited Mennonite work at La Plata and Pulguillas, and the Congregational hospital at Humacao (Ryder Memorial) and the Congregational Project at Zaldondo.

Other visitors include Dr. and Mrs. Edward G. Seel, president of Polytechnic Institute at San German; Miss Mary Alice Lamar, Dean of women at Polytechnic; Ruth Idleman, student and school nurse at Polytechnic, ex-Castanerite; Rev. and Mrs. Donald Dodd, director of the Presbyterian Project at El Guacio, and their children, and George Furse, ex-Castanerite, who is social worker at Las Marias.