

CASTANER

NEWSLETTER

BRETHREN SERVICE PROJECT

BRETHREN SERVICE COMMISSION

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THE P.R.R.A. PROJECT AT CASTANER IN RELATION TO THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPROVEMENTS OF THE RESETTLERS

The program for the economic rehabilitation of Puerto Rico was started during the second half of the year 1935 under the auspices of the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration, better known as P.R.R.A. This organization was created by law of the United States Congress, appropriating up to 1939 considerable money for that purpose.

The rural rehabilitation was an integral part of this economic reconstruction, specially the coffee region, including the economic and social improvement of the agricultural laborers of the areas affected. To accomplish this rehabilitation, besides the support to the coffee farmers, P.R.R.A. bought large farms from absentee landholders. One of these big farms is what is known as the Castaner Project.

The first step after acquiring the land was the establishment of training camps with the double purpose of immediately employing a considerable number of laborers, among which were the future resettlers, and train them in the modern agricultural practices and social usefulness. Once trained they were installed in small farms.

Each farm is made up of one or two acres of land with a concrete or brick house with a privy, a small hog pen, a small hen coop and a small barn. After a donation of 55% of the value of this homestead the resettlers pay the rest in an installment plan of 25 years. There are 212 of these farms. There is also a Vocational School with a Junior High School and a sufficient extension of land for the training of vocational agriculture for the resettlers' children. The Church of the Brethren, which thru the Martin G. Brumbaugh Reconstruction Unit was established in the late 1942 also bought around 50 acres of land where they have built a rural hospital and a Senior High School. After deducting all these and the lots for the churches, administrative buildings, roads, etc. there are left around 1250 acres of land in a central service farm, planted to coffee, bananas, plantains, citron, vanilla, fruits and pasture land for grazing animals.

The farmers work in these plantations receiving a minimum wage of 15¢ an hour, working eight hours a day. Besides they work in the neighboring sugarcane plantations where they receive a higher wage and also on their own farms. The produce of their own farms, crops and animal products, belong to them and they sell it either for cash or use it for subsistence.

Besides the facilities provided for in the Project, including the Recreation Hall, Medical Center, Hand-craft shops, the Vocational Junior High School, play grounds, etc. there are other enterprises for public purposes, such as, a good aqueduct supplying potable water, electric lines supplying electricity and good roads and farm trails for the transportation of the farm goods. Lots have been sold to the Catholic, Episcopal and Baptist Churches where each one has built their own chapel for religious services. The Pentecostal Church is on the way to buying a lot also. The Church of the Brethren after establishing a rural hospital has been doing social and recreative work among the resettlers. Lately they began to build a Senior High School and those students of this community that can afford to, will not have to travel every day to the towns of Adjuntas or Lares for their high school training.

Before coming to Castaner, these laborers lived in huts or in barracks which were roughly made. They provided the farming hands for the landholders and with very few exceptions were not allowed to raise anything. Their wages ranged between 50 to 60 cents for a working day of ten or twelve hours. Their standard of living was excessively low. No shoes were worn and the clothing, household utensils, and furniture were very poor and scanty. They could not depend on any kind of public facilities as schools, waterworks, electricity, roads, churches, or recreation, except unlawful games. The schools, if any, were most of the time from one to two or three miles away and provided instruction for the first two or three grades only. Those families with a nearby school considered themselves fortunate. For religious services they had to go to town and that was done only on special occasions.

The supply of drinking water was obtained from wells or springs, sometimes at a great distance from the houses and this water was far from potable. As to medical services the situation was much worse. The hospitals and doctors were in town and some of these small inland towns did not have either a doctor nor a hospital. The poor people had to depend on quacks for the treatment of their diseases and ailments.

Today the picture is very different for those living at Castaner and other P.R.R.A. Projects. There is a great contrast when both lapses of time are compared. Besides the advantages above mentioned they can work the whole year round receiving much higher wages, and with the income from their own farms they have been able to increase their capital to almost seven times to what they owned before. The increase in the value of clothing and household equipment is very significant and it may be stated, without any doubt, that the resettler and his family are now better fed and clothed. With a greater knowledge of the modern agriculture and soil conservation practices they have been able to increase the yields of their cash and subsistence crops, proving that they are much better farmers.

Better homes, road facilities, potable water for household purposes, proximity to medical dispensary and hospital, Community Center, play grounds and churches have helped considerably to develop community life among them. It has promoted better public health and developed a finer type of citizen. In this way Castaner has contributed greatly to the economic and social improvement of its resettlers.

BOYS CAMP

On Friday the 27th fourteen boys and six leaders from Castaner loaded their equipment on the unit truck and headed for Maricao Insular Forest for three days of Boys Camp. The El Guacío project, with eight boys and two leaders, joined the Castaner boys at the camp. By evening the camp was organized and a schedule made for classes, recreation, work, and rest periods. The boys were divided into four groups with an adult leader for each.

The theme of the camp was taken from St. Luke 2:52 - "And Jesus increased in WISDOM, in STATURE, and in favor with GOD, and MAN." The boys each made, in crafts class, a square from a coconut shell, which represented the physical, mental, spiritual, and social aspects of the verse. At the end of camp, each boy received notches in his square corresponding to how he had developed during his stay in camp.

Saturday morning classes begun in crafts, athletics, nature study, and knot tying. They met Sunday and Monday mornings for classes too. In the afternoons the campers swam in the swimming pool and then played soft ball. After supper and a rest period, all gathered around the camp fire for stories, songs, and a talk by the Camp Director, Rev. Don Dod.

Each leader with his group had devotions dwelling on the camp theme before retiring for the night. The boys were definitely interested in the spiritual side of life which was a very new thing to most of them.

As the camp came to a close on Monday afternoon each boy realized more than before the importance of clean living, clean thinking, necessity of spiritual growth, and a living together in fellowship.

Dean Rohrer

WEDDING BELLS

On Saturday night, May 21, several of the unit members found their way to another wedding of the season. The bride was one of the nurse aides, Angelita Santiago, and the groom, Enrique Carrera had just returned from army service in Panama.

The marriage took place in the home of the bride's parents. Angelita was very charming in her beautiful white gown and veil. The gown was fashioned with long sleeves, fitted bodice, and a full floor length skirt with a train. Her hand bouquet was of white daisies which she and the matron of honor had arranged shortly before the ceremony.

Father Bauza conducted the regular Episcopal ceremony in Spanish before approximately fifty guests.

We were very glad for the opportunity of both sharing the happiness of the couple and their friends, and also to be able to learn more of the customs and practices of the Puerto Rican people from first hand observations.

Lorna Mae Miller

MORE WEDDING BELLS

On Sunday, May 29th, at four o'clock Fern Irene Kring became the bride of Alfonso Luis Troche. The vows were said in Spanish before a crowd of American and Puerto Rican friends. The ceremony was performed by Father Bauza in the new Episcopal Church. The altar was decorated with two large bouquets of bougainvillea and shower of orchids. On the altar was two small matching bouquets and six white candles. On either side of the altar was a candelabra with six white candles each.

Senorita Yolanda Cerezo played the small organ, beginning the music with "I love you truly". Then Miss Barbara Hershberger sang "Prayer Perfect" and immediately following the bridal march was played. Father Bauza entered from the small room on the right of the altar, followed by the groom dressed in a cream tropical suit. The Padrone (best man) Dale Roesch, in an aquamarine gabardine suit followed. The bride was proceeded down the middle aisle by the Madrena (Matron of honor) Norma Roesch, dressed in an aqua crepe formal. She carried a bouquet of flowers matching those on the altar. The bride was lovely in a white floor length dress made of angel skin material. It was fashioned with a sweetheart neckline and long sleeves that came to a point over the wrists. The full skirt was gathered to a scalloped low waist line. Her veil was floor length and was held in place at the top with real orange blossoms. She carried a large bouquet of gardenias, forget-me-nots, asparagus fern, with two white ribbon streamers with gardenia buds and forget-me-nots. After the ceremony and blessing and while the couple were still kneeling, Miss Hershberger sang "The Lord's Prayer". This was followed by the recessional. The couple paused at the door for congratulations and posed for pictures.

The ushers were Lynn Burke and Confesor Troche. They had buttonhole bouquets of forget-me-nots. The groom and attendant wore gardenias. The pianist, soloist, and the two Mothers had corsages, small replicas of the bridal bouquet.

The reception was held immediately following at the home of Dr. and Mrs. Homer Burke. The table decorated with bouquets, white candles, and a four-tiered wedding cake was placed in the yard where the guests gathered to toast the bride and groom. Over one hundred guests were served fruit jello, ham salad sandwiches, lemonade and cake.

The bride wore a yellow linen dress trimmed with mahogany buttons for her going away dress. The groom was in a dark blue light weight suit. They left in the usual shower of rice, etc. They spent a week in San German with friends and then returned to their work at the hospital.

Norma Roesch

PERSONNEL

On the 9th of May Pastor Ebey and his family (also Wilma Stern and Violet Harris) had the joy of meeting, at the airport in San Juan, one of their former parishioners, Barbara Hershberger, from Woodland, Michigan. Barbara comes to us as a nurse and is working in our Castaner General Hospital.

Barbara is the daughter of Loren and Mary Harshberger and the youngest of four children. Although born in the Woodland, Michigan community Barbara spent her grade school years living near North Manchester and Warsaw, Indiana. While

living in those communities she with the rest of the family attended the Liberty Mills and the North Winona Churches.

After graduating from the Woodland, Michigan High School Barbara spent one year at Manchester College. Following this she took her nurses training at Butterworth Hospital, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Upon graduating from nurses training in September, 1948, Barbara found employment as a nurse in the same hospital where she was born, Pennock Hospital, Hastings, Michigan.

We welcome Barbara with her quiet ways, her cheerful smile and her musical contributions. Barbara says, "I am enjoying it very much here. There are lots of things to keep one busy."

Mrs. Lorna Sellers Miller was chosen Superintendent of Nurses on the resignation of Fern Kring Troche who will soon be completing her two year term of service with the unit.

Ruth Ebey

VACATIONS

After postponing the date several times, Violet and I finally started on our vacation May 9th. We had the use of a cabin at the Disciples of Christ McLean Conference Grounds near Bayamon. The first week we scarcely moved from the place. We slept, ate, and read. We felt the need to relax and rest though it sounds as if we were lazy.

The second week we ventured forth: Sightseeing at the usual historical spots about San Juan, visiting the Presbyterian Hospital, Methodist's Robinson School, and also attended the English services at the Union Church, all in Santurce. We enjoyed learning of the activities and seeing the new High School Building (Baptist) at Barranquitas. We visited old friends and made new ones. We learned how small this world really is when we found mutual acquaintances with new made friends. We found we could get around by ourselves. We enjoyed our travels but found our own community the best in climate, class, and clowning.

Wilma Stern

MORE VACATIONS

Here comes just a word from the boys just back from vacation. As we could have a better time and share our expenses much better in a group, four of us boys (John Kidwell, Duke Messmer, Virgean Birkin, and Harold Mason) took off around the Island in a covered pickup. We slept in the truck and cooked our own food for the trip.

We went to Aguadilla and followed right around the Island staying near the coast all the time. We had plenty of time (two weeks) so we could really take time to enjoy ourselves.

Daily swimming in the ocean was one great pleasure. We visited several nice National Forests also. We found the Island a very beautiful place. Having cameras we were able to get many fine pictures. But we are ready and glad to be back at work here on the project.

Harold Mason

SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

A Visit to a Sugar Central

As one travels through Puerto Rico, frequently are seen trucks struggling around the many curves, carrying huge loads of sugar cane to one of the 42 different Sugar Centrals. The largest one is at Guanica. It ranks second to the largest one in the world (in Cuba). Into its gates come an average of 300 trucks a day. (For six months of the year) These are emptied by one of two ways; with special rigging, a truck may be tipped to the side or backwards sliding the cane off onto small boxcars that carry it inside the central; or the truck may drive inside where chains fastened through and under the load lift it by cranes and dump it in the machines.

At the time of our visit three machines were in operation, the average load being 120 tons of cane per hour. 7500 tons of cane are run in 24 hours, resulting in 500 tons of sugar. The first machine chops the cane into smaller pieces and shoves it on into rollers whose pressure reaches 10 tons per square inch. Here the crushed cane is washed four times. Each washing is boiled down until the darkest thickest syrup is called "black Strop Molasses" used mostly in the alcohol business in the States. (I remember also some good molasses cookies). The only fuel used for these machines is waste cane material making steam. 3% of sugar remains in the waste materials. Frequent testing keeps the sugar waste at or under 3%.

The cane juice is weighed to determine the percentage of water it still contains. Colored matter is removed by straining and is used for fertilizer. (Wax, also a by-product, is used in plastic manufacturing.) Then the brown juice is heated twice to 90 degrees and once to 100 degrees with lime and carbon added each time; lime to establish alkalinity, carbon to lighten the color. Each time the juice is settled. The clearer juice which rises to the top is then heated and then settled again. The last settling leaves the juice an amber color. Next the juice is evaporated by four boiling processes. Syrup used from the first boiling is called table syrup. Each tank boils 25 tons at a time. The syrup thickens and thickens until it finally becomes crystalized. 1% of the water remains in the sugar. Still an amber color, the sugar is dried four times by swirling and then ground at the rate of 400 bushels a minute. This brown rough sugar is bagged, labeled, and sent mostly to the States.

For refined sugar the dried brown sugar is mixed with water and carbon and boiled down. The resulting white syrup is crystalized, dried again and ground to standard size for shipment to other countries and for use here in Puerto Rico. 80,000 tons of brown sugar and 15,000 tons of refined sugar are put out in one season from the Guanica Central.

They maintain a large laboratory, testing day and night, to insure a product of required color, grain, and moisture content. Washings are analyzed to guard against losses of sugar in waste material.

Little do we realize the amount of work that goes into the teaspoonful of clear white sugar when we put it into our cup of coffee or on a dish of cereal. How much more our ancestors must have valued it, for the arrival of the machine age had not yet saved men the labor by human hands.

Violet Harris

A FISHING TRIP

On Saturday morning May 14th, ten sleepy-eyed Castanerites rolled out of bed and crawled into the pickup and started for La Paraguera (ten miles west of Guanica Bay). Anyone who has traveled the road from Castaner to Yauco knows there are enough curves in the road to make an old "salt" light of stomach. (This crowd proved to be no exceptions). We arrived at LaParaguera at 5:45 A.M. and climbed aboard. Five minutes after we were headed for the open sea and just in time to see a beautiful sunrise. The Captain made the lines ready and fishing began. The enthusiasm ran high until we hit the open sea and then some other things began to rise. About 8:00 A.M. the first sucker hit our lines. It was a three pounder. The remainder of the morning was spent cruising up and down the south coast from Guanica Bay to the southwest tip of the Island. During that time only one other fish was caught; this one was slightly smaller than the first. We then anchored off shore for some bottom fishing. Chet pulled another three pounder aboard which completed our day's catch. We came back rather dizzy and sunburned but what fun!

Dale Roesch

CLUBS

Club work with the children of the community is quite encouraging. The average Sunday's attendance is between 50-60, hitting peaks of 89-94 on special Sundays.

May 1st was a great picnic day. With more than 100 persons (counting teachers) we started for a nice picnic place after class sessions. After a real Puerto Rican meal of rice and beans and all the trimmings, everyone was full and happy. Then came the rain! The first down pour of the season and we all were well soaked. We packed back into the truck and pickup and started for home.

The last Sunday in May was another "special" as it marked the close of our first five months of the year. Awards were given to those who had attended one half of the Sundays or more. Of the 94 present 56 received crosses or pictures depending on the percentage of their Sunday attendance.

June 1st marks a new period with Lila Peckover as Superintendent and Ruth Ebcy assisting. Big things are expected depending upon your prayers.

Alys Haag

BACKWARD GLANCES

Our Visit to the Unit

On December 13, 1948, we left home in Indiana to go to Puerto Rico, arriving there December 16th. We enjoyed our first airplane trip from Miami and were very happy to see our dear loved ones, our daughter, her husband, and children. We were amazed at the great beauty but also at the great need of the country.

On January 1, we went to Castaner to help on the project there. We saw at once the great need for workers in the moving and building of the new hospital. Since the hospital is in religious hands it has the opportunity to help spiritually as well as physically those who have never heard the Gospel.

We wish to express our gratitude to Dr. and Mrs. Burke and all the workers for their kindness to us while we were there. It was really the most worthwhile vacation we have ever had. After all, people are the happiest when they are working for the Lord.

Dolbert and Ferda Buss

Five Years Later

When some of us came to the C.P.S. camps in the Caribbean some five years ago, we hardly expected that we might be back taking stock of the same projects long after the dissolutions of C.P.S. and while the P.R.R.A. itself is being liquidated. However, those of us who have had the privilege to do just this are aware of some changes in each area which would be interesting to those who followed the annals.

The first project, Zalduonda, has now become the Yuquiyu Rural Life Project headed by Ivan Chatham. He has assistance in crafts from Orme Greene and in farming from Ule Trimbley. Their efforts to build a cooperative community are encouraging to the casual visitor. It is due to the steady, firm, quiet, and persistent democratic leadership that the project has enjoyed and through this attitude that a permeation by osmosis has taken place. The community has responded. It is not a case of getting something for nothing, but team work for mutual benefit such as road building, house and school construction, and community betterment.

Justice Holzinger and Wilbur Nachtigall, two old timers, are back at La Platta. Of course Dr. Troyer is the medical mainstay of the valley. Like Castaner, the volume of "assistants" is in constant change. I suppose the name of "Los Menmitas" has gone farthest among the people of the Island. This term applied generally to all persons connected with the C.P.S. Camp. La Platta Hospital continues to meet the medical needs of its vicinity. The personnel are recruited mostly on an eighteen months basis. A few of them become adept in the use of Spanish and thus have succeeded in becoming a tightly knit continental colony which undoubtedly is offering a specific pattern of "methodical good" to the surrounding communities. At present the hospital is making an attempt to establish a full year's training in practical nursing which can meet the licensing requirements for this sort of employee so badly needed on the Island. If this can be established it will be offering a great service which will spread beyond the local area.

At Castaner many changes have taken place, not only in the physical moving of most P.R.R.A. buildings from the old project site to Llinas finca, but also in the progressive efforts of some of the members to get out among the people. In learning about the past and planning for the future by earnestly attacking the language, by trying to establish centro-communal activities, by an active revival of the "Puerto Rican Study Group" which invites visiting speakers, and by offering a hospitality which continues to spread the fame of Castaner. A great number of persons whom we meet in the metropolitan areas have now heard of Castaner or have been there. The annual boy's camp is an affair that is anxiously awaited by fellows in many other communities as well as at Castaner.

In Castaner valley itself, one notes the new buildings which have sprung up --- three model homes near the old unit site, in addition to the many granja's --- and an abundance of churches dot the prominent spots of the valley.

This is the picture one sees now, five years later. It is not a great spectacle but does show that a long term plan effectively manned and administered can and does meet the changing picture of progress which was described in an earlier Newsletter by one of the oldest survivors of C.P.S.

Harland Gibson

VISITORS

May 13 - The Don Dod family and Paul Olson from El Guacío were here on business.

May 14 - Harland Gibson spent the night with us and shared with you in the former article his observations, in part.

May 17 - Jose Sifonte and Mr. Max Weisman, both from the Department of Veteran Education, spent the night and then made a tour of the unit, also inspecting the Veteran school at the second unit.

May 22 - Dr. Meyrs and family spent the day with the unit.

May 29 - Dean and Mrs. Eby from Polytechnic Institute at San German and Dr. Ida Eby, sister of the Dean, who practices in Goshen, Indiana, called here for a short visit. Dr. Ida is spending a two week vacation seeing and enjoying Puerto Rico.

May 29 - The Dr. Myer family and the Walter Keiser family also were here in Castaner. They came primarily, of course, for the Troche-Kring wedding.

May 31 - The Dr. Myer family and guest Margaret Swenget, Professor of English in the University of Puerto Rico, enjoyed with the unit a wiener roast given by the Robert Eby family. The occasion gave us opportunity to bid farewell to Caleb Frantz who will be spending his summer vacation with family and friends in the States before he returns to his teaching position in the Second Unit School.