

Castaner

Newsletter

BRETHREN SERVICE PROJECT
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Castaner, Puerto Rico

BRETHREN SERVICE COMMISSION
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THANKSGIVING DAY IN PUERTO RICO

Thanksgiving Day carries with it a number of ideas and customs which are closely related to it by most of us, -- such as family gatherings, big dinner, crisp, cool weather and often snow. But Thanksgiving is not a matter of geography, climate, or even of one's companions, but of an attitude of heart and mind. God is with us and blesses us wherever we are and we are thankful.

Here in Puerto Rico we did not have the cold weather which many of us have been accustomed to nor were we privileged to meet in family gatherings, but we observed the day in an appropriate and enjoyable way. The day was lovely, and after a good, bountiful dinner we met in the yard under a breadfruit tree and had our Thanksgiving service of songs, poems and a talk. John Metzler, Jr. spoke very fittingly to us on giving, and we were made to realize the responsibility of being a good giver. The rest of the day was spent as each member chose.

The day is a holiday here, but other than that we heard almost nothing from the native people about the meaning or observance of the day. Can it be because they are not aware of the blessings they receive and that they are not sufficiently acquainted with the giver of the blessings? Could this be another challenge to us?
-- Martha Cocanower

LA PLATA PLAY DAY

"Weigh - Hay, and up she rises, Early in the morning." With a few modifications, the words of this old sea chanty could have aptly applied to the Castaner group on the morning of November 19. Early (about 6:00) on that day, we piled into the pick-up and a car and headed La Plata-ward. Yes, this was to be another play-day.

There were no mishaps on the way, unless a flat tire on the pick-up at Aibonito could be labeled such. We were to arrive at La Plata, the site of a Menonite project, around 10:00 and nearly made it by then. Because of showers, volley ball was called off and team games were played in the recreation center. Although food was the object in two of the games, it is doubtful the contestants enjoyed the food to the fullest. One race was of the pie-eating variety-hands behind back with a quarter of heavily meringued chocolate pie on a plate. The other was a type of apple bobbing, only the large apples were hanging from strings. And even though the two teams were mixed both as to sexes and units, Castaner members won both contests: Charles "Duke" Messamer, the apple bob; Harold Mason, the pie-eating race.

Talking, ping-pong, and enjoying children's antics, then to the dining hall for fuller enjoyment of food. Next item on the schedule was visiting the project buildings and homes. It was interesting to be at a layout on comparatively level ground. Rest period followed; and then, despite threatening clouds, a ball game got underway. The first game was another mixed set up; and in the second, the men took over with unit versus unit -- Castaner was defeated 10 to 13. Back to the dining hall for a refreshing supper, and it was then time to pack up ourselves and head home.

Play-days are restful days in that they provide changes from daily routines. May we have more such enjoyable ones.

-- Anita Metzler

THE CLOSING OF THE VANILLA GROWERS COOPERATIVE

For the last two years the price of cured vanilla beans in the United States market has dropped tremendously. During the war years the price of the Puerto Rican vanilla, second to Mexican, was around \$10.00 per pound. After the war it fluctuated between \$6.00 to \$8.00 per pound. At those prices it was good business to raise vanilla. The Cooperative was operating efficiently and the farmers were having benefits.



The price for last year was \$3.80 per pound, and this year it was sold at \$2.75. At these prices both the Cooperative and the farmers are losing money. The farmers are discouraged and have decided not to raise any more vanilla, and as the tendency is for these low prices to continue in future years the members of the Co-

operative voted unanimously to dissolve it.

Although there is concern at Mayaguez, The Mayaguez Tropical Products, Inc., that buys vanilla from the farmers, the price offered is so low that probably very few, if any, will be sold to them by those farmers that may have pollinated some.

This means the closing of one industry that was providing some work for the members of this community and less work for the laborers of the vanilla farmers. This is a blow for this country which is engaged in a big program of industrialization.

-- Ramón Moreno, P.R.R.A. Farm Manager
Castaner

NEW BARN AND GARAGE

At last we have completed the barn and the garage. At least the job is almost finished. The barn is not like most barns in the States but more similar to the Spanish word estable or stable. Although small (40' by 20') it has enough room to house all our animals. We have room for our five milk cows with two extra stanchions. There also are two bullpens with adjoining outside pens. Two shoats and two sows with pigs are kept in the small inside pen and the large outside pen and shelter roof. We have yet to build an inside and outside pen for calves before we can call the job completed.

The garage is the same size as the barn but was much easier to build because it mainly consists of a roof. It is a lean-to type of building, leaning against a high bank conveniently walled up with cement which was the foundation of the old coffee mill. It has room for four cars or trucks. The cement floor has yet to be put in, but since this is not so important we plan to put it in later after we get some of the other work caught up.

-- Charles Messamer

FAREWELL FOR THE B.V.S. BOYS

On the evening of November 21st, the unit members and Puerto Rican unit workers joined together for a farewell part in honor of Vergean Birkin, Paul Cheeks and Harold Mason. These boys came from the New Windsor training center last year to give one year of volunteer service. Their work consisted chiefly with construction in the moving program, and the farm.

The party got under way with a vigorous game of volleyball which was played under the lights of the cancha. For some games which were less active we retired to the Casa Grande living room. There we also enjoyed ice cream, cookies and coffee, after which we saw some movies. The next morning quite a number of people were up in the "wee" hours to tell the boys good-bye.

-- John Kidwell

TRIP TO AGUADILLA

Tuesday, November 8, Mrs. Burke, Jeneba, Vern, and Elsie Hoffman "jeeped" their way to the northwestern side of the island to the city of Aguadilla and Ramey Air Field, which is located just outside of the city. At these places our project was given a little more publicity during the afternoon and evening.

Previously Rev. Santiago, the minister of the First Presbyterian Church of Aguadilla had written to Mrs. Marguerite Burke requesting her to come to the air base and tell about the Castaner Project to the club of the wives of the non-commissioned officers. She also was asked to bring along some of the Industry articles to show and possibly to sell.



Mrs. Burke gave a very informative and accurate talk, telling of the beginnings of the project and as it is at the present time. The women showed much interest and stated that sometime during their stay in Puerto Rico they would like to come over and visit the project. They

bought much of the handiwork after it was explained that anything bought would help the women at Castaner that much more. To some of the families, this work is their main means of support.

In the evening, Rev. Santiago took the Castanerites to his church in the heart of the city. Here at a Ladies' Missionary Meeting, Mrs. Burke again told about the project and again the handiwork articles were displayed.

A very pleasant day was enjoyed, and we wearily returned to our homes feeling that the "Gospel of Castaner" had been spread a little farther.

-- Elsie Hoffman

VISITORS

November 1

Justus Holsinger (the director of the La Plata Project), his wife and children brought Mr. Holsinger's sister and brother-in-law, Rev. and Mrs. Charles T. Good, from Harrisonburg, Va., to visit our work here.

November 12 and 13

Evelyn Keim, Cleveland; Anna Farrell, Michigan; Mary Ellen West, Iowa; Ilo Steward, Wisconsin; Dr. Marianne Goettsch, Mary Aguayo, Felix Aguayo, Stephen Fromm, and Harland Gibson were guests here.

November 27

Virginia Cordero, Amelia Cordero, Rosa Principe, and Dr. Harry Thomas (Public Health Dep't) spent the afternoon with us.

PERSONNEL

On the evening of November 2, after Spanish prayer meeting, a large group of us went to Fern and Alfonso Troche's little home and gave them a "house-warming". We had a grand time eating, singing, and talking together. I'm sure we all wish ~~them~~ our sincere best wishes for a happy married life.

--Barbara Hershberger

Since Lila Peckover has left there has been no one to fill her place as head of the kitchen. However, Marguerite Burke has graciously consented to help out until someone else is found. Fern Troche is also lending a helping hand along with the Puerto Rican help.

We have had four boys that have volunteered their services for one year. Of these four, Vergean Birkin and Harold Mason are returning to the States permanently. Paul Cheeks has found Puerto Rico such an interesting place that he plans to return after a short stay at home to work on the island, probably in San Juan. Charles Messamer plans to stay on another year. He is in charge of the laundry and is helping with the farm and maintenance work.

We are glad to have Ruth Ebey and her two girls, Mary and Alice, back with us again. They left about two months ago because of the sickness Ruth's mother. We are happy to hear that her mother has improved.

Elsie Hoffman
Editor