

# CASTANER

# NEWSLETTER

BRETHREN SERVICE PROJECT  
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CASTANER, PUERTO RICO

BRETHREN SERVICE COMMISSION  
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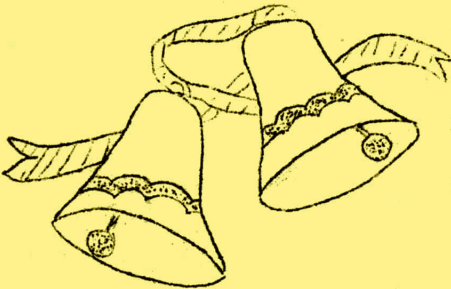
IN MEMORIAM \*

Elzie Ray Holderreed--November 26, 1943

## CHRISTMAS AND WEDDING BELLS TOGETHER

On the day before Christmas at 2 o'clock in the afternoon, friends and relatives gathered together at the church meeting place to witness a big event in the lives of Eudelia Cordero and John Kidwell.

For such a happy occasion the weather was not very cooperative, for it was a rainy and dismal day. The room was decorated with a bright Christmas atmosphere with a Christmas tree, fern branches, poinsettias and a set of candles on each side of the center aisle.



Pastor Robert Ebey performed the double ring ceremony in Spanish before an audience made up about equally of Puerto Ricans and Americans. Appropriate music accompanied the ceremony, with Barbara Hershberger singing and Violet Harris playing the piano.

After the newlyweds paused at the back of the room to be greeted by their friends and posed for a few pictures, we proceeded to the home of the bride for delicious refreshments of noodle soup, roast pig, cookies, cake, coffee and fruit juice. Soon after the reception John and Eudelia hopped into the unit Ford and started on their twelve day honeymoon to other parts of the island.

John has been working with the unit for the past seventeen months as laboratory technician and teacher in the Brethren Academy. Eudelia is one of the Puerto Rican Nurses aids employed in the unit hospital. They plan to stay on as permanent members of the project, continuing in the same work. They are now living in one of the newly constructed family apartments.

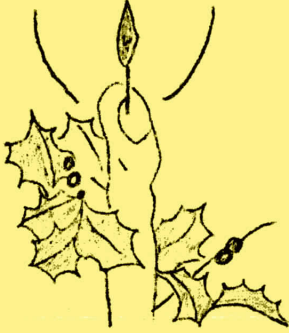
-- Vern Hoffman

\* This should have appeared in the last Newsletter.



## CHRISTMAS EVE IN THE UNIT

" 'Twas the night before Christmas, and all through the " houses -- that is, some of the houses -- preparations for supper were under way. What supper? Which houses? Well, have you ever spent Christmas away from home -- really away? And, being accustomed to snow, have you ever spent Christmas in a land of no snow and relatively moderate temperatures? Christmas -- away from home -- no snow -- warm weather. This combination can easily breed homesickness. And what to do about it? Well, a preventive we formulated resulted in suppers in houses; houses with Christmas decorations and suppers with a Christmasy touch. Now thirty five people (we had with us for this occasion the Everett Myers and Martha Bunton from Adjuntas, the Walter Keisers from San German, and the Delbert Busses from Indiana) seemed to be too many to have in one house for a meal and a "family group" type gathering after the dishes have been done; and wanting the "home" atmosphere eliminated using the dining hall. So-o-o, we divided ourselves into three groups: one at the Burke home; one at the Hoffman's; and one at the Metzler's. Each group worked out their own menus and evening doings, but peace, candlelight, cranberries, and potatoes were high on all lists. Perhaps it wasn't a snow-filled night in Chicago, or a fireplace-warmed house in Michigan. But it was an evening filled with good fellowship, religious inspiration, and calm, deep enjoyment.



-- Anita Metzler

## HISTORY OF CHRISTMAS IN PUERTO RICO

For a long time Christmas in Puerto Rico has been celebrated chiefly in three days of the so-called Christmas season: the day of the Nativity; the day of the Circumcision and the day of the Epiphany, better known as Three Kings Day (Jan. 6).

Nine days before the Nativity, there were held in all the Roman churches in the towns and cities, "aguinaldo" masses at 5 o'clock in the morning. This was followed by music and funmaking. The people who then went to the masses, paid very little attention to the important service of holy communion and it can be said that very seldom people made their communions. Only a few valued the great occasion. These nine masses culminated on the midnight mass called in Puerto Rico, "Misa del gallo" because the cock (gallo) crows at that time. People from the rural sections came to the nearest church and both Christians and non-Christians celebrated the big aguinaldo (offering of Christmas folk songs).

Later came the observance of Baby Jesus Day, preceded by Holy Innocence Day, when people masqueraded and stole children for a night in remembrance of what Herod did when the Magi cheated him. The ransom was paid by a "fiesta" in the home of the stolen baby who was brought back home by the "thieves", accompanied with typical music such as guitars, cuatros, tiples, guiros, and marocas and of course, the inspired and appropriate "aguinaldos". The people then presented gifts one to the other in the name of baby Jesus.

After this present giving, there began the seven days in honor of the Three Kings (the Magi). One could see the families on the roads walking in numbers sometimes of ten, even with the dog, and perhaps the goat or cow. They were on their way to invade a home of a grandmother or a godparent or any relative, until the Epiphany Eve. Then the Magi would bring presents for the children. They



would celebrate then with "arroz con dulce" (a rice pudding rich in ginger, cocoanut, milk and spices and sugar) and with the classical roast pig and "almojabanas", another rice and flour dish. Pasteles, hoyacas, and empanadas (made of yuca) were also served. Wine was often present also. Not always the invaders were poor. Often they would bring the pig for the roast and the chicken and the indispensable rum, made from sugar cane molasses.

Today the Puerto Ricans are learning more of the real reason for the celebration of Christmas and you may see people gathering around a Christmas Tree on the Great Eve. Families gather on New Year's Day and go to visit the oldest grandmother or grandfather. Sometimes even dances and parades are organized to celebrate the meeting, the oldest person being the leader regardless of position.

The Christmas spirit is in the people at this time and we exchange messages of congratulations and felicitations from December 15 to January 15. I would say, however, that the situation for Christmas is only 50% from its goal in Puerto Rico. The religious side is strong only in small groups but the social side has been taken very deeply. Although indulgence with the worldly is common yet, we can say that the spirit of Christmas is still maintained.

Rev. Lauro Bauza  
Minister of the Episcopal Church

#### CHRISTMAS DAY IN THE UNIT

When Christmas comes one thinks of home, family circles, gifts and snow. For us in Puerto Rico this one was different, for families and close friends were far away and the weather man did not send us snow. Christmas came on Sunday this year so we enjoyed Monday as a holiday.

Nine o'clock on Sunday morning found the unit members wending their way to the academy building for the regular Spanish church services. Here were the Metzlers - John pulling the new-red wagon in which Margaret sat behind Susan in her basket which was being held in place by Anita. It was difficult to even imagine snow when seeing the sweat on John's brow as he tugged up the hill. And here was Burke's jeep, loaded to capacity with their family, in-laws, and the kitchen workers. Others walked in groups of two's and three's. The services were conducted by Dr. Burke and included a special feature, a male quartet consisting of Bob Ebey, Caleb Frantz, John Miller and John Metzler.

Immediately following the services the Spanish Sunday school classes convened. There were a number of new faces present - wonder if Christmas had anything to do with it. At the closing assembly a New Testament was presented to each pupil and Spanish teacher.

The next big event of the day was dinner and all were present and on time! We were well nourished with baked ham, sweet potatoes, peas and carrots, cabbage and tomatoe salad and mixed fruits for dessert. Each found a rosette of nuts and candy at his plate as a favor.

Although it was Sunday, and Christmas, the ox was in the ditch and since we have scriptural backing we could take it out. Immediately after dinner the men gathered up some ropes and trudged up the hill to pull her out. Knowing they would need some expert advice, some of the women went along. After panting and puffing, we arrived only to find we were too late for the cow had died. We were thankful, however, because it was one that had been sick for a few days.



The rest of the afternoon was spent in reading, resting, the children opening their packages and playing with their toys. For the evening English services we sang Christmas carols, after which we visited and played carols on the record player. Candy, (gifts from home), coffee and chocolate were served in the living room. Thus ended a lovely Christmas away from home and families but with a larger family and new-found friends.

-- Martha Rupel

#### UNIT CHRISTMAS PARTY

December 30th was the date chosen for the Unit's Christmas Party as half way between our Christmas Day and the Puerto Ricans' Three Kings Day.

At 7:30 we climbed the hill to the schoolhouse and entered the gaily decorated classroom where the chairs and benches were arranged in a large circle. After lighting the kerosene lanterns (there is no electricity in the school yet) and hanging them on the rafters above and chatting a little, we seated ourselves in preparation for the program. During the evening we played several games which were: group singing game, balloon bursting relay, laughing handkerchief, candle relay and guess the leader. Much fun and fellowship was evident while playing these active games.

In preparation for the refreshments napkins were passed out and boxes of oranges were placed in the center of the circle. Several fellows then peeled the oranges and passed them around the circle. Homemade Christmas cookies and candy sticks were also enjoyed.

As the refreshments began to disappear a knock was heard at the door. The children were told to open the door and there stood Santa Claus with a large pack of presents on his back. After the gifts were distributed to everyone Santa was discovered to be Delbert Buss (that is, if it hadn't been discovered before). The outstanding gift of the evening was a safety razor to Mr. Claus.



We then gave the floor a sweep, arranged the chairs in order once again and picked up our belongings and carried ourselves happily home.

-- Elsie Hoffman

#### NEW YEAR'S EVE WATCH PARTY

Most of the unit members gathered in the Llinas Casa Grande parlor at 10:00 P.M. on Saturday, December 31, 1949, in order to catch an early glance at 1950. Until 11:40 P.M. rook and other games were played and then everyone remained quiet for a period of religious music and a short worship service which was planned by Vern and Elsie Hoffman. The last five minutes of 1949 were given over to silent prayer and meditation.

-- Robert Ebey

#### CAROLLING

To many people the best way to attain the Christmas spirit is to sing the well-known Christmas carols. In a land of Christmas with no snow or cold, it is more difficult, traditionally. So I think some of us sang more than ever.

As last year, we continued learning Spanish carols. Most of their songs are not written but have been carried down from person to person. Thus there are a great many differences in the way the Puerto Ricans sing them. You can well imagine the difficulties we continentals have learning them by ear.



One evening we hiked to the Colón Finca for an hour of fun and singing. Another evening between Christmas and Three Kings Day, twenty-five continentals and Puerto Ricans sang in the community, interspersing English with Spanish carols. We stopped at various homes, and were served coffee at the Ebey's. Next year, if not too many oldsters leave us, we should be able to abound in Christmas spirit in song, even in Spanish.

-- Violet Harris

#### PERSONNEL

Last year Mr. and Mrs. Delbert Buss left Indiana's cold wintry weather to come to Puerto Rico to visit their daughter, Mrs. Walter Keiser and her family in San German, and to spend some time here at the unit. Evidently the environment of Puerto Rico agreed with them for they have returned again this year to spend a few more winter months with us. They arrived on December 4th, and are living in one of the newly constructed apartments. They are helping out with the work program while visiting.

On January 4th, W. Harold Row, Executive secretary of the Brethren Service Commission from Elgin, Illinois, came to spend approximately two weeks here. While he is here we plan to hold intensive meetings on all phases of the project.

#### VISITORS

Tuesday, Dec. 6, The Walter Keiser family from San German visited the unit and friends. On the same day Dr. Myer and his family and Martha Bunton came from Adjuntas. Dr. and Mrs. Sargent and their daughter, friends of the Myers, visited us from Mayaguez.

Friday, Dec. 23, Mr. and Mrs. Walter Keiser and three children came to spend a short vacation with us.

Monday, Jan. 2, we had four visitors. They were Vernon Fortanain, San Antonio, Texas; Lasca Fortanain, San German; Carey Parsons, Tenn.; and Juan de D. Quinones, Moca, P.R.

Friday, Jan. 6, Mrs. Marjorie Banks from Syracuse, N.Y. stopped here at the project for about an hour. She was making a tour of several of the Caribbean Islands in connection with her work in the States.