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AN INTERLUDE

Let us turn aside from my school in San Germán. I wish here to recount the historical data of El Instituto de Agricultura, Artes y Oficios de Lajas, ^(Agricultural, Arts & Trades School) founded by don Juan Cancio Ortiz, and later confused with FIPR. ^(Polytechnic Institute of Puerto Rico)

The factual account herein related is based on Catalog No. 1, printed by don Manuel Ramírez on his Excelsior Press in San Germán, of July 15, 1907, prior to the opening of the Instituto de Agricultura, Artes y Oficios on September 1, 1907, and on Catalog No. 2 for the school year of 1908-1909, printed by the "Primavera" press, Allen St. 28, San Juan; and on first-hand information given me at the time by Paul E. Taylor, who lived on Luna St. in San Germán near our home.

^(District Superintendent)
Taylor was Inspector of Public Schools under E. G. Dexter, the Commissioner of Education of Puerto Rico. Taylor was one of the many men sent to Puerto Rico to help develop the Schools of Puerto Rico after the American occupation. Taylor was one of the Directors of the Instituto de Agricultura, Artes y Oficios of Lajas, appointed by the Lajas City Council on March 21st, 1906, to help organize the ~~Instituto de Agricultura, Artes y Oficios~~. Taylor was the guiding hand and Benito Cumpiano of Lajas Public Schools was liaison man in the set up of this school. ~~IAAG of Lajas~~.

Soon after the occupation of Puerto Rico by the Americans, 20 young men were sent to the States by the Department of Education to be prepared for teaching in the Public Schools of Puerto Rico. One of that number was a brilliant lad whose family lived on one of the Vivoni Plantations near Palmarejo, ^(a rural area) where don Juan Cancio Ortiz lived. The boy's name was Arturo Grant. He was sent to Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. He wrote a long letter to don Juan Cancio Ortiz about Tuskegee Institute. There also appeared in "El Tiempo", a daily in San Juan, a story of the life of Booker T. Washington and ^{the} Tuskegee Institute, which he founded. Dr. Calso Barbosa was the writer of the article and Editor of "El Tiempo". Don Cancio later told me that this letter from Arturo Grant and this article in "El Tiempo" impressed him so deeply that

he was led to propose such a school be established in Lajas. [Incidentally, José Guina was one of the 20. He was sent to Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania.]

Don Juan Cancio Ortiz was a farmer and merchant, a man of wealth, and President of the Lajas City Council. I quote from Catalog No. 2, page 7, under General Information:

"On March 21, 1906, don Juan Cancio Ortiz, President of the City Council of Lajas, presented a very luminous project of an Agriculture, Arts and Trades School to be located in, or near, Lajas; in the realization of this school he asked that the City Council appoint a committee for the organization of this school, which committee later was named as the Board of Directors of the Instituto de Agricultura, Artes y Oficios of Lajas."

The City Council forthwith named the Committee composed of the following:

- Hon. Governor of Puerto Rico, honorary President
- Hon. Commissioner of Education, S. G. Dexter, Honorary Vice-Pres.
- Hon. Juan Cancio Ortiz, was named President of the ~~Committee~~ *Commission*
- Hon. Fernando Calder, was named Vice-President

The other ^{Committee members} directors were:

- Hon. Paul E. Taylor, Inspector of Schools
- Hon. Quintin Ramirez, President of School Board of Lajas
- Hon. Francisco Faliu, an Agriculturist
- Hon. Benito Cumpiano, Secretary and Professor of Lajas Schools

The catalog does not state it, but I understand that Juan Cancio Ortiz subscribed \$1,000 for the proposed school. It ^{was} stated in Catalog No. 2, page 7, that a total of \$4,000 was raised--including the \$1,000 given by the Guánica Central. With this \$4,000 there was erected a two-story wooden house, 60 feet long by 30 feet wide, and an adjoining cistern for rain water with a capacity of 75,000 ^{gallons} ~~litres~~. The second floor was used as a boys' dormitory. The first story was used for classrooms, dining room, kitchen and small office.

Don José ("Cheo") Ramirez and the Zapata family each ^{donated} ceded two acres of land, a total of four acres. On one acre of this land the four buildings were erected.

An appeal was made for contributions to all municipal governments, to individuals and to the Legislature. Response was considered good; even women and girls moved ~~with~~

See page - - -

the appeal, subscribed to the school paper, "El Escalador", "para arrancar de las calles a niños desamparados", a forerunner of Boytown decades later.

The Legislature, on motion of Representatives Vincente Trelles Olivia and Santiago Vivaldi, voted a contribution of \$3,000 yearly. Luis Sánchez Morales secured the approval of the Executive Council of the Legislature's \$3,000 yearly contribution. City Councils paid the expenses of homeless and abandoned boys whom they sent to the Instituto de Agricultura, Artes y Oficios in Lajas. Thus, some thirty boys came as boarding students. The Rural Public School of Palmarejo was brought in as day students and others from homes near by were enrolled. The Lajas School Board united the Palmarejo Rural School with that of Don Cancio's, making a total of 159 for the first year, under Taylor as Superintendent.

With the additional \$3,000 annual gift from the Legislature, three more buildings were erected--a total of four houses, the second building was used for classes which were under the supervision of Fernando Taylor. Teachers were supplied by the Lajas school board with approval of the Commissioner of Education.

Juan Cancio Ortiz attempted to supervise the ^{boarders} ~~LABERROS~~ and to ^{teach} ~~instruct~~ in agriculture for 1907-1908. Fernando J. Rodil was ~~later~~ sent by the Commissioner of Education to be the principal ~~from~~ 1908-1910. Juan Cancio Ortiz had rapidly increasing responsibilities as owner of three stores, extensive sugar cane plantations and cattle ranch which demanded all his time and thought. Taylor, ^{probably} the only man connected with the Board of Directors with a ~~probable~~ knowledge of Tuskegee Institute, had returned to the States in 1908. Juan Cancio Ortiz ^{did not know} ~~not having seen~~ Tuskegee Institute ^{He} was a brilliant business man, a ^{and President of the school} fine Christian gentleman, but a ^{man} self-educated and could not organize what he had never seen nor attended, ^{an} industrial school, ^{of} all schools the most difficult to plan and direct.

The school building was furnished with desks, books, wall maps, etc. by the government. The courses of study ^{there} followed were the courses of the Department of Education for the first eight grades ^{of school}. The school had two typewriters, and a proposed business course, purchased an anvil and a bellows, but had no one who could teach

Representative, respectively, of

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their use.

On page 17 of catalog No. 2, it is stated: "No habrá religión oficial. Cada alumno estará en libertad de asistir al culto que estimare conveniente de acuerdo con sus padres y sus propias creencias. En los ejercicios de apertura los profesores alternando desarrollarán un curso de moral." ^(There will be no official religion. Each student is at liberty to attend the church of his choice according to his own and his parents' beliefs.)

The ideal of don Juan Cancio Ortiz was Tuskegee Institute adapted to the needs of Puerto Rican boys, especially for those whose fathers had no interest in their betterment and had never recognized them as legal children; boys who could be trained how to support a family as worthy Citizens of La-Patria. This was the urge in the soul of Juan Cancio Ortiz and what he wished to see done in this school but did not know how to do it. His directors modeled the school after the Public schools under supposedly private direction. That is what Juan Cancio Ortiz saw developed in his school, a forerunner of ^{Public Schools} BOITOMAS of today. "The industrial training of boys to work would never work in Puerto Rico, if these boys reached the 8th grade," was the opinion Juan Cancio became convinced of as his school got into operation.

Student life of the boarding Department left much to be desired. The straw that broke the camel's back was when one of the students was killed in a fight; along with other things that caused the Legislature in 1909 to advise the Directors that the \$3,000 would not be allowed after the scholastic year of 1909-1910. Automatically this prohibited gifts from City Council. So, ^{in it} 1909-1910 was conducted ^{with a view to closing the school} toward a close-down in June, 1910.

President Juan Cancio Ortiz offered the property to the Presbyterian Home Mission Board as a site for the Theological Training School in Mayagüez. The Presbytery of Puerto Rico met in April, 1910 in Palmarejo to consider ^{this} President Juan Cancio Ortiz's offer. It was there discovered that the buildings were good, but had been erected on land the title of which was held by two different owners, both of whom wished to have the buildings removed. The other three acres originally ^{and} ceded to the Instituto (de Agricultura, Artes y Oficios) had been repossessed and planted in sugar cane. Presbytery

1) "La Betina" Cathedral, a frequent term for Puerto Rico by Puerto Ricans

acts as follows:

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"In ~~meeting~~ meeting of Presbytery in Lares, September 13-14, the Committee appointed to consider and get approval of the Presbyterian Board of Home Missions, reported that the Board of Home Mission replied that while it looked upon Sr. Ortiz's offer with deepest interest and sympathy, nevertheless it was impossible to accept Mr. Ortiz offer.

Don Juan Cancio Ortiz then moved his family to Mayagüez, put his two boys, Ernesto and Alfredo, in the Theological Training School of Mayagüez and his charming daughter, Ernestina, in the Colegio Americano under the Home Mission Board of the Presbyterian Church and saw his hopes vanish and his ^{Directors'} Board dissolved in June, 1910.

MAYOR JUAN CANCIO ORTIZ LUGO, MAYOR OF MAYAGÜEZ, OFFERS ME A SITE FOR MY SCHOOL

Mayor Enrique Rossy's offer of the San Germán Barracks to me in 1909 was blocked ~~by the opposition~~ in 1910, as stated in a previous chapter.

I then turned to my acre adjoining the property of the Presbyterian Church in San Germán, perfected the plans for a building, staked out the foundation lines for digging the ditches the next day ^{and} was checking on the exact positions of the corners, when don Juan Cancio Ortiz rode up on his horse from Lajas. His poncito came trotting along behind him to take the horse back to Lajas after don Juan Cancio caught the 5:30 P. M. train at the lower station for Mayagüez, his new home.

Don Juan Cancio sat on his horse, looked at the cords and asked what I was doing. I told him that I had failed to get the ^{of} Barracks for my school. Don Isidro Palmer had hauled the gravel and sand and I was going to start building at once. The "Hoja Suelta" of the San Germán opposition had reached Lajas. He had read it and that was why he rode by to see me. He said: "San Germán ^(is covardia) es Cobardic. I am not afraid of all the priests in the Island--not even of the Pope at Rome." He urged me not to spend my money in

building and offered to give me the buildings and site in Lajas for my school. "Take your school away from this unworthy town." I asked him if he had the right and power legally to give me his buildings and also if I could buy more land adjoining his buildings. I knew that the land on which the buildings stood belonged to José ("Cheo") Ramirez and to the Zapata family. Don Cheo had forty-two acres on which two of the buildings stood and don Juan Cancio thought that I could buy the forty-two acres from don Cheo whose wife and family were members of the Presbyterian Church there. This was very encouraging to me and it looked like the Lord had opened a real way for me to get a site big enough for the beginning of my College, ^{of which I had dreamed as a student in Park College.} I felt quite certain that if don Cheo refused to sell his forty acres that don Juan Cancio would let me have all I needed out of his extensive holdings in Lajas.

Don Juan Cancio and I went over ^(to San Germán) to see the Attorney General, Hon. Foster V. Brown, concerning don Cancio's power to transfer the property of his defunct I. A. A. O. in Lajas to me for my school in San Germán. The Attorney General said there were no conditions attached to the Legislature's act which was voted to encourage don Juan Cancio in his attempt to help the needy fatherless boys of Puerto Rico and don Juan Cancio could do what he pleased with the buildings.

Returning to Lajas don Juan Cancio tore a leaf out of his ledger and wrote a simple short transfer from himself as ^{former} once president of I. A. A. O. of Lajas to Rev. J. Will Harris, not to the Presbyterian Church or Presbytery of Puerto Rico, but to Rev. J. Will Harris, for his school in San Germán. Mr. Greif, ~~N.E. of San Juan Central,~~ the largest contributor to the I. A. A. O. of Lajas, approved the transfer.

Prof. Fernando J. Rodil was ^{principal} head of the I. A. A. O. of Lajas during the two last years 1908-1910, and was still ^{with} in the Palmarejo Public School ^{services} of Lajas, Puerto Rico. He was an Elder whom I ordained in the Palmarejo Presbyterian Church as was also don Juan Cancio. Rodil proposed to me that we try to enlist don Juan Cancio in the revival of his old school, reorganized with a definite religious program. Rodil sent out circulars to families of ^{meant} ability who could pay all their boys' expenses. Eleven boys enrolled when the Public School opened in September with Rodil as principal. Doña

Guesa (elderly lady from Holland) continued as ^{director} ~~director~~ of THE BOYS. Rodil also solicited funds from individuals for what was proposed ^{as} the "Palmarejo Institute" so as to distinguish it from the ^{Instituto de Agricultura, Artes y Oficios} ~~I. A. A. O.~~. Four of his eleven boys soon ^{left} ~~left~~ for their home. Don Juan Cancio refused to have anything whatsoever to do with the revival of the I. A. A. O., even under the new name of "Palmarejo Institute".

While Rodil was making this effort to enlist don Juan Cancio's interest, I was trying to buy more land than the acre on which the buildings stood. Otherwise, I would not transfer my school to Lajas from San Germán. Don Cheo ^{had} ~~had~~ agreed to sell the forty-two acres, then postponed all decisions ^{of} the sale of his property. I offered him \$50.00 per acre. He raised it to \$100.00 per acre. I accepted the \$100 figure. When the deed of contract was presented to him he ^{said frankly} ~~said~~ he would not sell ~~the property~~. I then asked don Juan Cancio for a site. Don Cancio hesitated, but finally took me to see a sixty-acre tract nearby. After walking over it with me he decided it was not a proper site for my school. I called on don José Ortiz, don Cancio's brother, but he did not want to sell. I ^{saw} several others in Lajas, to no avail. In fact Lajas, like don Juan Cancio, did not want to revive the I. A. A. O. or anything else like it.

Prof. Fernando J. Rodil decided his endeavor to revive the I. A. A. O. of Lajas was impossible and resigned at the end of October, 1910 as teacher under the Department of Education, entering ~~into~~ private business. ~~Professor~~ ^{Mr.} Acevedo remained in charge. I am glad to have had the pleasure of marrying Rodil to an attractive and winsome young lady teaching in Hornigueros.

Both Rodil and I gave up Palmarejo, November 1st, 1910, as impossible. (~~As~~ ^{he} ~~shook~~ ^{the} ~~the~~ ^{his} ~~dust~~ ^{feet} ~~as~~ ^{he} ~~left~~.) I was left holding four buildings ⁱⁿ ~~in~~ my hands and no place to put them down. Lajas Public School Board continued to use two of the buildings for two years while erecting the present ^{rural} ~~rural~~ School Building in Palmarejo.

AGAIN LOOKING FOR A SITE

Senator José Castillo of Sabana Grande found a nice sixty-acre tract on the highway

- 1) ^{Mr.} ~~Mr.~~ ^{Castillo,}
- 2) ^{Senator} ~~Senator~~ ^{José Castillo,}

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near Sabana Grande. It belonged to two ~~ladies~~ spinsters. I went with ~~don~~ ^{Don} ~~Castillo~~ to see them. My ears had become irritated with "We do not want to sell our land". I hoped these ladies would be tender-hearted. But they too, like the others, looked at me--a penniless missionary preacher--and gently ^{said} ~~gave us~~ their decision "We do not care to sell". They were all afraid I would get on their land and never pay for it.

(~~All this took place over forty years ago~~) The I. A. A. O. of Lajas had been commonly called "El Instituto". Unfortunately my school only three miles away was also called "El Instituto", following closely on the I. A. A. O.'s death. Few people outside of San Germán ever knew that I had ^{had} a school of 150 students in San Germán since November, 1907 with Guillermina Nazario as its ^{Director} and Eva Espada as assistant.

In ^{the} articles of ^{the} Incorporation of April, 1911, I proposed "College of Puerto Rico" as the corporate name for my school ~~located~~ on the Hills of Santa Marta. Drew Carroll, the Executive Secretary of Puerto Rico, refused to incorporate my school under name of "College of Puerto Rico", because it might be confused with the proposed University of Puerto Rico, and also because a private girl's school in San Juan was called "College of Puerto Rico". The Polytechnic Institute of Puerto Rico had been ^{Proposed} ~~suggested~~ by Rev. E. A. McDonald. ^{Rev. E. A. Odell} suggested that I present that as the name instead of "College of Puerto Rico". Carroll accepted the name and incorporated my school ^{as} "Polytechnic Institute of Puerto Rico".

The popular mind outside of San Germán confused the names of the Lajas School and mine in San Germán because of the popular allusion to both as "El Instituto". Few of the Lajas people ever heard the ^{name} of I. A. A. O. de Lajas for it was referred to always as "El Instituto". When the I. A. A. O. de Lajas ~~was~~ closed down and the following year my school in San Germán had been incorporated as The Polytechnic Institute of Puerto Rico, it soon became known as "El Instituto" for short. The people of Lajas thought "El Instituto de Lajas" had been transferred to San Germán and that the Polytechnic Institute of Puerto Rico was simply a continuation of the I. A. A. O. de Lajas--were they not still hearing "El Instituto" applied to the P. I. of P. Rico? No one investigated the origin of the two schools. Many of the next generation in Lajas really

believed the two schools were one and the same. ~~and~~ Don Juan Cancio knew the difference. All the older generation of San Germán knew the difference, for they had offered me a site in 1907, the Barracks, for my then school which had outgrown its clothing.

Let me restate the origin, history and purpose of the two I. A. A. O. de Lajas and the Polytechnic Institute of Puerto Rico, hereinafter referred to as Ortiz and Harris for brevity.

Gonzalez Ortiz and Harris

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whose expenses were paid by the thirty municipalities. The classrooms were furnished with desks, maps, books, etc. and teachers by the Lajas School Board with the consent of the Commissioner of Education. The definite plans were to bring in the abandoned boys off the streets who had approved the 3rd Grade work, as boarding students. No provision was made for girls. When so few came the Palmarejo Rural Public School was brought in as a part of the classroom group in order to have sufficient students to begin a school like Tuskegee Institute, after which Ortiz tried so nobly to copy, but found no qualified cooperation (to help him realize). During the first year the boarding students gradually decreased.

The course of classroom work was that of the Public School System of the grades 1-8th, the Inspector of Schools appointed by the Commissioner, at the time Paul E. Taylor, officially visited the classrooms and reported to the government. Lajas School Board appointed the teachers.

Ortiz school permitted no religious instruction of students, and no religious services were held on the grounds. Don Juan Cancio Ortiz was ordained by me as an Elder in the Palmarejo Presbyterian Church and built a chapel near by, but not on the campus of his school. To this chapel students were welcome but few ever attended from the internes. A U. S. Army Chaplain heard of the Chapel and paid don Cancio the cost of it.

The Ortiz institute prospered so long as the Legislature voted its yearly \$3,000.00 fund to help in the maintenance. When that was withdrawn in June, 1910, the Ortiz School closed down.

I had never been connected in any way with the Ortiz school and had nothing to do with its founding or operation. Don Juan Cancio Ortiz had nothing to do directly with the founding or operation of the Harris Institute of San Germán. I can only recall two visits made by don Juan Cancio Ortiz to the Polytechnic Institute. One was shortly after I contracted to buy the 100 acres from Lagarde when he remarked as he rode down to the entrance: "It is no good for agriculture. It will not sprout weeds." The other time was when I tried to get the eighteen members of the Board of Trustees to a meeting which was the first and only time the Board ever met, in June, 1912.

dear friend, Mrs. Adah Brokaw McAfee, wife of J. E. McAfee, Secretary of the Home Mission Board in New York, and sent us monthly the \$25.00 salary of Guillermina Nazario. I advanced the money for the concrete building which was repaid to me by the Women's Mission Board in the way of rent by the month.

This concrete building could not hold comfortably over 100 enrolment and it was necessary to run a double header--one section in the A. M. and another section in the P. M.--hard on the ^{teachers} teachers but never a complaint for they taught to serve and to advance the children, not merely for their monthly \$25.00 check.

I then bought an acre of land adjoining the property of the Presbyterian Church in San Germán from José M. Acosta, on which I proposed to begin to provide for imminent demands for higher education. San Germán offered the Barracks for my proposed enlargement into a more advanced schooling. When that failed Juan Cancio Ortiz offered me his I. A. A. O. de Lajas which had bloomed and died. That ^{fell through} ~~too~~-failed. Then came the 100 acres from Francisco Lagarde on the Santa Marta Hills, which had been reserved for four centuries by the Lord for the coming of what is now ^{(1952) still} ~~wrongly~~ named the Polytechnic Institute of Puerto Rico. The objective all the way from the first was to secure students from the ^{best} best though poor families, to advance new standards within the needs and demands of the development of youth in Puerto Rico for a way of life to be lived for man and God and centering around the Christian home as the greatest institution in the world. I always had both sexes enrolled.

Ortiz's school--I. A. A. O. de Lajas--was proposed by Juan Cancio Ortiz to the City Council of Lajas, a civic corporation, on March 21, 1906, which council immediately appointed a committee to raise money first from the Legislature of Puerto Rico, second from other City Councils of the Island's municipalities, from sugar corporations and individuals. Generous response provided the Ortiz school with even more money than the Directors knew how to use to rightful ends in the development of a school with the objective of educating abandoned boys (no girls) for worthy citizenship of La Patria. A large two story building was erected and the proposed school was opened September 1, 1907 with an enrolment of 159 students the first year. Of that number some 30 of the 75 municipalities had selected and sent to the Ortiz school around thirty abandoned boys.

Harris opened his school in San Germán, without a name, in November, 1907 in a very small house of a poor family with a handful of little tots who could not find a seat in the San Germán Public Schools, with Miss Guillermina Nazario of La Pica as teacher. Benches made of boards served in the absence of anything better. There were no books, only a small homemade blackboard, on which Guillermina wrote words and the children learned to read and to write and to cipher on cheap paper tablets with pencils. They memorized Bible texts, studied the Sunday School lessons for the following Sunday in the Church....learned to sing the hymns and "America"...also learned to pray for their parents, brothers and sisters, neighbors and the children of heathen lands who had not heard of Christ. It soon outgrew the small room. I bought a lot (from don Pancho Rivera by the side of don Juan Ortiz Perichi's house) on Luna Street. He did not want the school so near, so traded me a much better location at the top of the hill near where Luna St. turns left and the Javilla ^{Street} ~~Street~~ begins to the right within a couple of blocks of Porta Coeli. There I built on North side of Javilla Street a concrete one room school, reinforced with barbed wires, which was used on Sundays for Sunday School and Church services. Miss Eva Espada was added to the teaching staff and the school gradually grew in numbers of enrollment and finally to the Sixth Grade as the lower grades found admission to the Public Schools and were discontinued. Doña Pepita Nazario, ^{with} ~~de~~ Rev. José A. Martínez, was our Bible ^{reader} who visited the children's mothers in their homes regularly for prayer and Bible instruction.

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We started out with no financial backing, depending on the Lord's leading and on small weekly fees of 5, 10 and 15 cents, ^{or} nothing from those who could not pay. The fees increased with the years. The Presbyterian Woman's Board heard of us through our

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Don Juan Cancio Ortiz, with all sincerity and frankness, said at the time he gave me the paper of transfer of buildings from I. A. A. O. de Lajas to me for my school in San Germán, that he would never give any financial aid in my schools' development. He never did give a dime to the Polytechnic up to the time I left March 2, 1937.

If Lajas had been willing to sell me sufficient land for my (San Germán) School, the Polytechnic Institute of Puerto Rico might have been today in Palmarejo....that IF!...in which vacuum God stood and turned me to the Santa Marta Hills of San Germán. The only thing in the I. A. A. O. de Lajas that I learned was how not to do it. ¡Que este asunto en paz descanse!

He dicho

J. Will Harris, 1952.

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