Dilley Rancher Changed
Puerto Rico's Education

By GAYLE HAYES
State Editor

DILLEY.—Rev. J. Will Harris, a native Texan who founded
Puerto Rico's present system of
public schools, doesn't feel that
farming and ranching can be
taught from books.
Harris is convinced the only way
to teach practical farming is by
putting people on the soil and show-
ing them how to handle the earth
and Mother Nature.
"All this F.F.A. and 4-H education
is fine," Harris will tell you,
but he wants to take the discussion
much further. "And after all
the theories are exhausted, then
you have to put your fundamentals
knowledge to work. That's why
I left Puerto Rico and came back to
Texas to buy 4,000 acres of Texas
gold along the Pito River.

"What we need to do is take
farms and ranches and
farmers and ranchers and
put them up with about 200 acres of
land and teach them how
to make a living on it. And
making a living those days, on
the farms and
ranches is not
too great a
problem.

Along the
Texas
Highways

"Yours son, when I was a boy,
my daddy had to keep his steers
for years at a time, waiting for the
market. There were no losses in
those days, and there was — on
our ranch at least — plenty of
water.

"One day F. E. Collins, for
whom the Collins Gardens area in
San Antonio is named, came down
to see my father since the two
had been comrades in the Civil
War. Collins was selling windmills
and told my daddy there was
plenty of water that the windmill
could pump and the water was only
120 feet deep. And my daddy dug
the first well in this area from that
conversation.

"BACK IN THOSE DAYS ranch-
ers had very little money. They
traded for what they needed and in
fact they didn't need a lot. I was
just a boy, and when I looked over
the good Texas land I vowed I'd
buy a ranch for myself some day
when I got enough money. It took
a long time, but I reached my goal
in 1917.

"Back in 1905 I married and
soon after that the Presbyterian
Church sent my wife and myself
to do missionary work in Puerto
Rico. We stayed with the church
until 1912, when we opened a
school of our own at St. German,
with just one pupil. But the school
grew out of a disbanded building
with the one student into a liberal
data college. The boys built the
buildings and did the work on the
10 acres of land. The girls did the
cooking, laundry and inside work.

"That school revolutionized
education in Puerto Rico. Until
that everything had been "mixed learning" but we gave industrial training
and after the Puerto Rican
government scowled at us for
a while, they saw the benefits and
switched to our system as official
for the school system there.

"But Harris still had his boy-
hood goal of a Texas ranch. And
when he felt he had done as much
as possible in Puerto Rico, he
returned to Dilley and bought his
"Owern Ranch" and went about
improving it. He and a few hired
hands built a concrete home, roof
and all, and Harris began raising
Brahman steers. In spite of the fact
his daddy had been partial to
white-face Hereford.

"Harris fattened the steers and
found ready market. He'd tell you
he does not need a lot of money,
but is confident the soil can care
for him the rest of his days.
Recently Mrs. Harris, who had
been a companion for nearly half
a century, died.

"But Harris plans to carry on on
his ranch. "After all, I am a
native Texan," he says. "I was
born near Dripping Springs and
even though I spent a lot of time
in Puerto Rico, I still consider
myself a Texan. And I'm going to
spend my few remaining years
here on the Hhalf-circle
ranch. It's my home."

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