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AL SERVICIO DEL CLIO: THE OFFICE OF THE OFFICIAL HISTORIAN OF PUERTO RICO

"You don't do all you should; you do what you can"

Antonio S. Pedreira, *Aristas*

Introduction

In facing the task of preparing these words, an obligation that comes with accepting the honor, and recognizing the fact that the position I currently occupy, at the disposal of the Legislative Assembly and the Governor, is about to reach the centennial of its establishment, I thought it might be appropriate to pay homage to those who have preceded me in that post, focusing on their contributions to the history of Puerto Rico. The first part of my comments are dedicated to them. In the second part, I will talk about my vocation as a historian and conclude with a personal evocation of Antonio S. Pedreira.

We live in the final decades of the century, the most significant moment in the course of Puerto Rico history. The construction of our history has been the work of generations of historians. In a presentation in Caracas in 1998, at the Sixth Congress of the Association of Ibero-American Academies of History, I pointed out that historical research in Puerto Rico was going through one of its best moments, both in quantity and in conceptual and methodological quality. The subject matter of the research has been greatly expanded and much of the research has incorporated the so-called "people without history." As I noted in that presentation, we are seeing a boom in the field of general history research that has made available to future generations a wide variety of works with varied and interesting themes. This is not the time to expound broadly on this assertion. Anyone who is interested can review the historical bibliography from the 1970s on to confirm what I have said.

The current phenomenon cannot be understood without knowing and assessing the true value of the work of the generations of historians to precede us. If we can see broader horizons today, it is because we are carried on the shoulders of the giants who came before us.

The Official Historian of Puerto Rico: Francisco Mariano Quiñones

The history of the post of Official Historian dates to the beginning of this century when it was created "as a pension for Francisco Mariano Quiñones, who had sacrificed his future and his life and had dedicated himself to the common good of the island."

It is important to point out that the law that established the post and appointed Francisco Mariano Quiñones was approved the same day, March 12, 1903, as the approval of the law that established the University of Puerto Rico. A little more than three years from now, both institutions will celebrate their first centennial.¹

In its first section, the Law stated that the purpose of the designation of Francisco Mariano Quiñones as historian was "to collect and preserve historical information about Puerto Rico, particularly those documents and data that can be obtained about the abolition of slavery in Puerto Rico." We must not forget that Francisco Mariano, along with José Julián

Acosta and Segundo Ruiz Belvis, had been Puerto Rico Commissioners to the Information Board from 1866-67 and had written the *Proyecto para la abolición de la esclavitud en Puerto Rico*.² In referring to the Puerto Rico Commissioners in a speech to the Spanish Cortes on June 20, 1870, Emilio Castelar described their work as one "that will be their honor and their glory ... and that the future would place alongside the declaration of the rights of man of August 4, 1789."

The Law required that the information and documents collected be compiled in a convenient form and archived in the office of the Secretary of Puerto Rico.

The second section authorized the historian to "establish his office in a site that is most convenient for the performance of his duties..." Because Francisco Mariano was a member of the First House of Delegates, established under the Foraker Act, the law stated that the position of historian was not incompatible with being a member of the Puerto Rico House of Delegates. The post provided compensation of \$100 per month.³

Was this a political perquisite to recognize the contributions to the island made by Quiñones, who had also been Chairman of the First Autonomous Cabinet and had declined the presidency of the House of Delegates because of his declining health? I have no doubt that this distinguished patrician had well founded qualifications for holding the position. His *Apuntes para la historia de Puerto Rico*, published in Mayagüez in 1888, of which three editions exist, and his *Historia de los partidos, Reformista y Conservador de Puerto Rico*, the first history of the island's political parties, are evidence of his work in the field of history.⁴ Francisco Mariano Quiñones remained in the job until his death in 1908.

That first Legislation established the nature of the post with its title, Official Historian of Puerto Rico - as well as the role of the legislative bodies in selecting the person to hold the job. It also established an office to execute the job's duties.

Had there been any precedent, prior to that moment, for creating this position? The answer to the question is affirmative. It is not necessary to go back to the beginnings of the Spanish colonization in the Americas or the minutes of the Castilian Cortes to confirm that fact. There is a clear example in our history. In 1896, the Puerto Rico Provincial Delegation had created the post of Provincial Chronicler, designating Salvador Brau to fill the position.

The minutes of its Excellence the Puerto Rico Provincial Delegation, which are held by the General Archives, contain the details of the appointment. The action was taken at the Regular Meeting of April 29, 1896. Provincial delegates Manuel Egozcue and Alejandro Villar were the proponents of the motion, which, according to the minutes, reads as follows:

The undersigned delegates have the honor of proposing that Mr. Salvador Brau, who has been writing the history of this island, be named to the position of Provincial Chronicler that was just created in the budget for the coming year 1896-97.

The delegates considered the issue to be "urgent" and approved it unanimously. The decision was certified by the Secretary of the Delegation, Félix L. Benet y Rivera, according to the document signed the following May 5.⁵

Salvador Brau not only held the post of Provincial Chronicler in the twilight of Spanish rule over Puerto Rico, but also held the honor of succeeding Francisco Mariano Quiñones as the second Official Historian.

Salvador Brau y Asencio: Second Historian of Puerto Rico

The appointment of Salvador Brau was the result of the death of his predecessor and was also done through a Law that was approved on September 18, 1908 and amended the previous law.

The new legislation modified the first section of the previous law. The amendment eliminated the specificity of the original and established the duty "to collect and preserve historical information referring to Puerto Rico". This section named Salvador Brau y Asencio to the position.⁶

In an essay dedicated to Salvador Brau, Augusto Malaret described him as a "...wise historian, (who) has known how to offer, with unusual efforts, his sturdy and well organized intellectual work to the admiration of Puerto Rico".⁷

What led Brau to dedicate himself to history? A quote from Brau that Augusto Malaret included gives us the key:

"Here are the conditions under which my character was determined; here I have the basis of my political ideology. I loved Spain because my Spanish parents taught me to love it; I abhorred despotism and tyranny because I had to recognize two of its victims in those who gave me life. My reason developed from these beginnings, and when I appealed to history to ratify them, that teacher of the truth, as Herodotus called it, she taught me not to confuse national spirit, which embodies the homeland, with the individual spirit, which often conceals injustice".⁸

Brau became the first Puerto Rican to gain the distinction of conducting research in the Indies Archives. His historic works are the product of that research. Isabel Gutiérrez del Arroyo, a distinguished historian who has also been honored by the Endowment as Humanist of the Year, stated in her significant essay about Puerto Rican historiography that the historical-scientific, critical-erudite school of the latter third of the 19th century began with Acosta, Brau and Coll y Toste. The patriotic impulse is latent in the work of these three, although to varying degree, and she quotes the inscription Brau uses to dedicate his work *La colonización en Puerto Rico* (1907) to his grandchildren. It says:⁹

To my grandchildren. So they know where they come from and are not deprived when they arrive where they are going.

In Valencia, Brau published a new and expanded edition of his critical research, *Puerto Rico y su historia* (1894). "With the patience of a monk" - Arturo Córdova Landrón wrote - "Brau had dedicated himself in silence to intensive research work, trying to correct the errors of our history".¹⁰

It is thanks to this research that Brau left us the legacy of his two most important works, *Historia de Puerto Rico* (1904) and *La colonización de Puerto Rico* (1907). The works of this distinguished researcher are, even today, essential works that must be consulted by anyone researching our history. In weighing the work Brau did as Official Historian, Eugenio Fernández Méndez tells us that he worked "with exemplary probity and honor, for historical truth."

Cayetano Coll y Toste: Third Historian of Puerto Rico

Law Number 16 of June 10, 1913, states: "to create and provide payment for the position of Historian of Puerto Rico and other purposes." This law created the position of Historian of Puerto Rico in the Island Library and established that the person would be named by the Governor of Puerto Rico "with the consent and approval" of the Executive Council.

In the second section, the legislation set the duties of the historian, "to compile annually a comprehensive chronicle of the political, scientific, judicial, literary, religious, legislative, sociological and economic events that occurred in Puerto Rico during the year that are of

general interest and that are worth being remembered."¹¹ The selection criteria were also established by the law.

The manuscripts containing these historical annuals would be the property of the people of Puerto Rico and be deposited in the Island Library. The publication of these works would be subject to the allocation of funds by the Legislature for that purpose. They would be distributed free of charge or sold, depending on the decision of the Island Library Board, and the money raised, if they were sold, would be deposited in the Puerto Rico Treasury.¹² The law established that the historian would earn an annual salary of one thousand, five hundred dollars beginning in the fiscal year 1913-1914.

In 1913, Dr. Cayetano Coll y Toste was appointed Historian of Puerto Rico, a position he held until his death in 1930. At the time of his appointment, most of Dr. Coll y Toste's multifaceted work had already been published. Notable among these is his essay *Colón en Puerto Rico* (1893); the *Reseña del estado social económico e industrial de la isla de Puerto Rico al tomar posesión de ella los Estados Unidos* (1899); the *Historia de la instrucción pública en Puerto Rico hasta el 1898* (1907) and *La prehistoria de Puerto Rico* (1910). Yet to come, however, was his most important and monumental work, the *Boletín histórico de Puerto Rico 1914-1927*. These 14 volumes, replete with documents from our history, conferences, historical corrections and consultations with the historian are, in our time, the obligatory starting point for almost all research that has to do with our history. As Isabel Gutiérrez del Arroyo wisely stated in the essay quoted before, the "possibilities for understanding our history have still not been completely exploited." As an interesting fact, on page 45 of the *Revista Puerto Rico Ilustrado* of February 14, 1914, No. 207, is an advertisement for the sale of this first "interesting work." The cost of a subscription was one dollar and fifty cents per year in San Juan and two dollars on the island.

Because of the breadth and depth of Coll y Toste's work, and maybe because of his temperament, Coll y Toste's work does not uniformly display the "steady persistence, the methodological rigor in the careful elaboration" seen in the works by Brau.

Mariano Abril: Fourth Historian of Puerto Rico

Coll y Toste was succeeded in the job by Mariano Abril y Ostaló, who was Historian of Puerto Rico until 1935, the date of his death. Although Abril's historiography is more limited, it is not without importance. His most important works are: *Sensaciones de un cronista* (1903) and a study, *Un héroe de la independencia de España y América: Antonio Valero de Bernabé* (1929). He also wrote: *El socialismo moderno: estudio sobre el obrerismo puertorriqueño* (1911); *Un Antillano ilustre: Salvador Brau* (1915); *Alemania ante el conflicto europeo* (1915) and *Betances y Bonofaux* (1920). He deserves a special mention for having also been one of the founders and the first director of the Puerto Rican Academy of History, established in 1934 and the oldest of our academies. I have had the honor of following in his footsteps in both positions.

Adolfo de Hostos: Fifth Historian of Puerto Rico

Of all the Historians of Puerto Rico, perhaps the one who most easily comes to mind is Adolfo de Hostos, son of the famous patriot Eugenio María de Hostos. Adolfo was appointed Historian of Puerto Rico in January of 1936 by Governor Blanton Winship.

With Adolfo, as with Mariano Abril, there is a parallelism with my career. In his early years, he was an officer in the United States Army. During the term of Governor Arthur Yaeger, Adolfo served as one of his military aides-de-camp. Posted at the Panama Canal during World War I, he was commander of the 3rd Battalion of the Puerto Rico Infantry Regiment. At the end of December in 1919, he resigned his office to dedicate himself to other endeavors in the fields of agriculture and public service.

Adolfo de Hostos' historical work preceded, in some aspects, his appointment as Historian. In 1922, he participated in the International Congress of Americanists held in Río

de Janeiro. In 1929, he was named corresponding academic to the Cuba Academy of History and that same year he was elected vice president of the History Section of the Puerto Rican Athenaeum. A year later he served as Secretary of the Committee for the Conservation of Historic Assets.

His interest in our aboriginal cultures earned him a competitive scholarship to the American School of Prehistoric Studies in France. There, he pursued studies that led to the publication of important ethnographic studies published in prestigious professional journals.

De Hostos' works were the first publications with the seal of the Office of the Historian. In 1938, *Investigaciones históricas* was published, followed by *Antropological Papers*, Vol. I, in 1942, the *Indice hemero bibliográfico de Eugenio María de Hostos*, published in Havana in the same year, and *Al Servicio de Clio*. These works were collections of research done by the Historian.

The Puerto Rico Historical Archive was created by Law No. 64, approved July 20, 1913, and the Historian served as the Director of the Archive, based on Law 486, approved April 29, 1946.

In 1948, Hostos published the work *San Juan: Ciudad murada*, in my opinion the best history of our capital city. Various editions of this work have been published. Adolfo de Hostos' most important contribution as Historian of Puerto Rico was to lead the work on the *Indice histórico de Puerto Rico* from the time it was created in 1936. The work created was an itemization of the historical literature of Puerto Rico and the existing materials in the Puerto Rico Historic Archives. Contributing to this important project were figures such as Luis Palés Matos, Evaristo Ribera Chevremont, José I. De Diego Padró and Luis Antonio Miranda, among others. The result of this effort was the creation of approximately 300,000 records on historical topics of Puerto Rico.

In the early 1950s, the three volumes of the *Tesaurus de datos históricos de Puerto Rico* were published. This was the beginning of an effort that was not completed until 1994. Thanks to the determination of the past Director of the Puerto Rican Academy of History, Aurelio Tió y Nazario de Figueroa, and the exceptional contributions of María Asunción Vda. de Hostos, who reconstructed lost or missing parts of the historical folder, the entire work could be published in five volumes. The publication was an effort of the Academy of History, the University of Puerto Rico, and the now extinct Committee for the Fifth Centennial of the Discovery of Puerto Rico and the Americas.

When Adolfo left as Historian in 1950 because of his retirement, a Reorganization Plan was issued by the Executive Branch. Article 2 of the Plan called for the transfer of the Puerto Rico Historical Archives functions to the University of Puerto Rico. It also eliminated the Director of Archives post and thus the Historian of Puerto Rico position¹³, as the same person held both jobs. Thus began a long period of forty-three years in which the position of Historian of Puerto Rico did not exist.

Pilar Barbosa de Rosario: First woman to hold the position

On June 30, 1993, the Puerto Rico House of Representatives approved a Concurrent Resolution with the Senate Resolution No. 14. The legislation re-established the post of Official Historian of Puerto Rico and appointed Pilar Barbosa viuda de Rosario as Historian. For the first time, a woman historian received this appointment. At the time she assumed the job, Pilar was ninety-four years old. Her qualifications were unquestionable. Her contributions to Puerto Rican historiography and the university faculty were many. Based on the letters of her father, Dr. José Celso Barbosa, and those of Dr. José Gómez Brioso and Manuel F. Rossy, she published various books related to her father's work and the history of the development of the Puerto Rican autonomist movement in the late 19th century. This effort is responsible for the publication of *De Baldorioty a Barbosa* (1957); *La Comisión Autonomista de 1896* (1957); *El ensayo de la autonomía* (1975); *La historia del Pacto Sagastimo* (1981); and *Manuel F. Rossy y Calderón: ciudadano cabal* (1981).

The best tribute to Doña Pilar was made recently by Professor Luis Manuel Díaz Soler in the magazine *Cultura*, published by the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture's Cultural Promotion Division, which I quote:

Here I want to make a special point that sheds some light on who this professor at our first teaching center really was. She was an outstanding member of the Republican party that was founded by her father, Dr. José Celso Barbosa. In 1943, that party still dominated the University of Puerto Rico Board of Trustees. She was influenced by the President of the Senate, the lawyer Celestino Iriarte, whose approval was necessary to aspire to any post at the University. In August of that year, there was an interim instructor position to replace Professor Antonio Rivera, who had been given a leave to complete doctoral studies at the National Autonomous University of Mexico. The Party had a candidate, a distinguished professor of pedagogy. Pilar had the courage, maybe the audacity, to recommend and debate with the Trustees the candidate she supported, making possible an appointment for ten months at a salary of \$1,500. There were the usual objections to the appointment because the person was not a member of the party, but Pilar was supported in her stand and succeeded in her effort.

As Director of the History Department at the School of Arts and Sciences, she was responsible for developing a corps of excellent professors, among them: Santos P. Amadeo, Isabel Chardón, Adela Clark, Antonio Rivera, Graciela Iguina and Nelson Chiles. She invited Canadian scholar Richard Pattee as a visiting professor of European History. He was the organizer and coach of the notable debate team consisting of Francisco Ponsa Feliú, Arturo Morales Carrión, Antonio J. Colorado and Víctor Gutiérrez Franqui, which returned triumphant from various tours competing against the most outstanding Universities in the United States. Pilar, who had a master's degree from Clark University, sent Rafael Picó to specialize in geography at that institution, which was recognized in university circles in the United States. I could never fail to mention that Pilar was responsible for preparing a new generation of promising youths who would go on to serve with exemplary dedication in the socio-economic and cultural programs brought about by the Popular Democratic Party...

She was a great woman whose life was lashed so many times by pains and injuries that never left her scarred, and who made her life one of joy that she usually shared with those around her and with those, such as this writer, who have saved a sacred corner for her, where a deep and sincere caring, an everlasting esteem, is reserved for her memory...

There is no question that her advanced age did not allow her to develop a more dynamic program as Official Historian. In the twilight of her life, the appointment was more a recognition, as in the case of Francisco Mariano Quiñones, of a life of dedication to history and to service to the island and the university staff.

The development of a vocation

Since 1997, after the death of Pilar, the enormous task of filling this role that has been made more prestigious by a constellation of giants has fallen to me. It is not for me to say, nor is this stage the time, to talk about what I have been able to do in the short time during which I have had the honor of serving as Historian. I leave that for another time, and to others. However, the story of how my vocation developed in the discipline might be stimulating, in some measure, to some young person who aspires to become a scholar of history.

My vocation for history began late in my life as a university student. Although I felt a particular interest in books and historical topics from an early age, the goal that had attracted me was to study medicine. That was the reason I enrolled in the University and focused on the School of Natural Sciences, where I studied for my first three years. I am not ashamed to say that this academic adventure nearly ended in major disaster.

It was not until I finished my third year of studies that I made the decision to transfer to the School of Humanities. At that time, the Dean of Humanities was that noble figure, Sebastián González García. For him, there was no problem or situation that could not be solved and with his proverbial good judgment, he guided my steps in the History Department and drew up a program that allowed me to achieve my goals without losing much time. At that time, my objectives were two: to finish my studies for my bachelor's degree and to obtain a commission in the ROTC Program. Those were the years of the Korean War. My father had served as an officer during World War II and I was following the same path.

In my history studies, I had the good fortune to rely on an exceptional group of teachers, Graciela Iguina, Isabel Chardón, Adela Clark, Labor Gómez Acevedo, José Antonio Gautier and Sebastián González García, teachers forged by teachers.

Today, looking back at the path of my formation, I can say that those who most influenced and marked my intellectual life were Pilar and Arturo Morales Carrión, both now deceased, and Luis Manuel Díaz Soler, the dean of our historians. The three, each one in a particular manner and a particular style, were my models of what a historian is and should be. I owe all of them my gratitude.

These three notable historians, whose ideas did not necessarily coincide, planted in me the love for the discipline, an interest in research and, above all, what they all three considered a virtue, the openness to dialogue and tolerance toward ideas that are not necessarily compatible with my own. On my scale of values, all of them are models of what a good historian is.

I remember that when the first edition of *Puerto Rico and the Non-Hispanic Caribbean* by Arturo Morales Carrión was published, I took the senior level seminar with Arturo and he had the kindness to present me with a copy in which he wrote the following dedication:

To my disciple, Luis González Vales, as an incentive for your vocation as historian.

Years later, I had the privilege of contributing, along with my teacher, to the work *Puerto Rico: A Political and Cultural History*.

After finishing my degree, I was mobilized and spent the next three years serving as an officer in the United States Army in the United States, Puerto Rico and Germany. After finishing my active military service, I decided to return to the island and join the faculty at the University of Puerto Rico as an instructor. I was helped in this effort by another of my teachers, Luis Manuel Díaz Soler, who at that time was serving as interim Dean of Humanities. From that moment, in 1955, and for the next thirty years, my life has been divided between two vocations, as a student of history and the military, the University and the militia. I must admit that the latter was the top priority on many occasions, but I did not neglect my vocation as historian and gradually I completed my graduate studies, dedicated myself to the university staff and began to publish my first works.

Since completing my services to the University and the Army in 1985, I have dedicated myself in full to the study of history. In these years, I have increased my participation in international congresses, I continued teaching, this time at the Inter-American University campus in Cupey, and in 1992 I was elected Director of the Puerto Rican Academy of History for the first time. The satisfaction I have felt over the course of my life has made the effort worthwhile.

I consider myself a student of history. Over time, I have learned that civility in disagreement is an essential quality for any historian. No historian should avoid controversy and dialogue, above all, because that is what enriches and builds history. The construction of the history of Puerto Rico is a task for each generation of historians, as history is never definitive, but is always open to reinterpretation and rewriting.

Allow me to conclude these words with a personal evocation of the teacher Pedreira. I am not referring here to the intellectual or to the erudite man whose contributions to understanding our history are known to all. Instead, these are the memories of a boy just nine years old who knew his human side.

When Pedreira moved to Río Piedras to begin his university studies, like other young people from Caguas, he came to live in the house of my paternal grandparents, Rosa Martínez Lizardi and Luis González Cabrera. A close relationship developed between Pedreira, my uncle Luis Manuel and my father, Ernesto. Antonio was the older brother. I vaguely remember that in the family albums my grandmother Rosa kept there were various photographs of Pedreira, including those taken on the ship when he went to New York for the first time to begin his graduate studies at Columbia University. Years later, I made the same pilgrimage.

As the first of the children born to those who had been like brothers to him, my parents did not hesitate to choose him as my godfather when I was born. As a student in the early grades at the University Model School, I recall on some occasions going up to the building that today carries his name to visit him in his office as Director of the Department of Hispanic Studies. Pedreira always had time to greet me with a smile, give me his blessing and, sometimes, give me a pen or a book. Perhaps I was, for him, the son he never had.

Only years later did I realize that I had been close to an intellectual giant. The quote from the prologue of *Aristas* at the top of this manuscript has been my compass.

"You don't do all you should; you do what you can"

Notas

¹Ley para la colección y conservación de ciertos datos históricos de Puerto Rico, aprobado el 12 de marzo de 1903.

²Vease la edición de 1959 preparada por el Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña con introducción y notas de Luis M. Díaz Soler.

³Ley para la Colección sección segunda.

⁴Ismael Reyes García. Francisco Mariano Quiñones: *Vida y obra*. Editorial Coquí, 1971.

⁵AGPR. Fondo Diputación Provincial, Serie: Secretaría (Actas y Acuerdos) Año 1896. Caja 548. Acta de la Reunión ordinaria del 29 de abril de 1896; Caja 547 Exp. 197 Certificación del Acuerdo.

⁶Ley enmendando la "Ley para la Colección y Conservación de ciertos datos históricos de Puerto Rico" Aprobada en 18 de septiembre de 1908.

⁷Augusto Malaret. *Salvador Brau Tipografía Boletín Mercantil*, 1910/ págs. 5-6.

⁸Ibid pag. 7. Subrayado mío.

⁹Isabel Gutiérrez del Arroyo. *Historiografía Puertorriqueña*. Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 1957 p.3.

¹⁰ Vease Arturo Córdova Landrón. *Salvador Brau: Su vida su obra, su época*. Ensayo histórico, biográfico-crítico. Editorial de la Universidad. 1949- pág. 100.

¹¹Ley 76, 1ro de junio de 1913 sección 2 a.

¹² Ibid.

¹³Edwin R. Harvey. *Legislación cultural Puertorriqueña*. San Juan, Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 1988. Pags. 206-207.