

HISTORY OF THE
U. S. FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION

History of the
San Juan, Puerto Rico Station
by:
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Written By

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The Station was opened in 1911, located at the third floor of the Post Office Building. The Custom House was using the same building on the first floor.

The Station occupied four rooms, two for the laboratory, one for the office of the Chief Chemist and Chief of Station and library, and the other for the secretary or chief clerk.

Mr. Willford J. McGee was the chemist in charge and Mr. Angel Pesquera, second chemist. Mr. Luis Trigo, who worked as clerk for only a few months, resigned in July, 1921. I took his place after my graduation. Also, Mr. Daniel Rodriguez worked as laboratory helper and inspector.

This was the only Federal Laboratory on the Island of Puerto Rico. It was under the supervision of the Eastern District of the Food and Drug Administration at New York, 201 Varick Street, 10th Floor.

Due to the small staff, we had to work with the cooperation of the Insular Inspectors under the supervision of Dr. Del Valle Sarroga, Chief of the only Insular

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Laboratory at that time, located next to the new Custom House Building at the Marina section.

There were no major drug manufacturing plants in Puerto Rico, the first one was opened sometime in 1960 by a U.S. drug company, so we had to work mostly with imported drugs and canned foods shipped not only from foreign countries, but from the United States too. Samples were taken from local warehouses and from the U.S. Custom warehouse and brought to the laboratory for examination and analysis for shortage of contents, ingredients, false and misleading labels. Samples of fresh milk were also taken and analyzed, and if found adulterated, we called or informed the Insular Inspectors for seizure and destruction.

At that time most of the work of the Puerto Rico station was done for the U.S. Custom Service, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the Prohibition Department. Of course, many factory inspections were made around the whole Island, including bakeries, drug stores and warehouses.

For U.S. Customs we examined and analyzed many imported goods. Codfish for moisture contents for duty purposes; cheese for quality and quantity of butterfat to see if it was made from partly skimmed milk or not; olive oil for net contents and specific gravity; canned sardines, tuna, other fish for weight and kind of oil used; all kinds of liquors

for quantity of alcohol by volume, etc.; cloth for amount of wool, rayon or cotton threads or other fibrous substances for tariff duties, etc. etc.

For the U.S. Department of Agriculture, we had to go to all the citrus fruit farms to take samples of the grapefruit, oranges, pineapples and other fruits to see if they were already matured for shipment to the mainland.

For the Prohibition Department, located on the same floor of the laboratory, we analyzed all samples of liquors seized for court action.

As to my specific work in the Puerto Rico station, I was in charge of all the clerical work. Also, I went around with Mr. Daniel Rodriguez and made several factory inspections, taking samples, labels and propaganda for examination at the laboratory and if found misleading, adulterated or falsely labeled, seizure was made and I prepared the libels myself for action to the U.S. District Court. Among the best seizures I made was hundreds of boxes of a French product commercially known as "Cloretilo" (ethyl chloride aerosol perfume) brought by the firm of Pedro Giusti & Co. of San Juan, P.R. for use in Puerto Rico during the celebration of Mardi Gras every year. This product was seized under Section 6 of the U.S. Food & Drug Act as dangerous to the people of the U.S. Since then, 1928, no more "Cloretilo" was imported to the Island. Thousands of

cases were seized and destroyed by the U.S. District Court. Also, hundreds of drums of black cod liver oil sold in the market as a medicine for human consumption and not for poultry were seized and destroyed. Also ten or fifteen bakeries were found using adulterated flour and seizures were made.

Mr. Willford J. McGee, Chief of the Puerto Rico station, was in the U.S. when it was ordered to close the office in 1932 - he already knew the station was closing because he never came back to Puerto Rico. He died in New Jersey where his daughter was living.

I took care of packing all the books, most important documents and laboratory utensils to be shipped to the Eastern District at 201 Varick Street, New York City.

Mr. Daniel Rodriguez and myself, Mario Brau, Jr., the only two members left, were transferred to the office in New York under the direction of Mr. Wharton.

At New York, Mr. Rodriguez started to work as laboratory helper and I was sent to the office of Mr. Charles Hutchinson, tea expert in charge of the Tea Inspection Division. Although the tea was free of duty, the fancy containers had to pay duty according to the kind of containers, most of them of porcelain and beautiful straw baskets. The tea was examined for quality and kind of foreign materials. At that time, 90 million pounds of tea

were imported from Ceylon, India, Java, Formosa, China and Japan through the port of New York only.

I worked with the U.S. Food & Drug Administration until the year 1939, when I was transferred to the U.S. Customs Service at San Juan, P.R. at my request due to my father's illness.

At San Juan Custom House, I started to work as Customs Entry Officer. When Mr. Matias Ramos, head of the Entry Division, retired, I was appointed Supervisor of the Entry Division and Acting Assistant Collector. I stayed in this position until my retirement on July 31, 1961.

My grandfather was the last Collector of Customs during the Spanish regime and after the American occupation of Puerto Rico in 1898, he was kept in the same position. He resigned five years later in 1903 to write the first book of the history of Puerto Rico and other books about the colonization of the Island. He died in 1912. His name was Salvador Brau.