

## «Sociedades económicas de amigos del país»

by CHARLES W. TOTH

This is merely a short introduction to a few items of scholarship which I should like to bring to the attention of students interested in the history of 19th century Spanish-America, and which deserve further exploration. In 1951, Syracuse University Press published Robert J. Shafer's *The Economic Societies in the Spanish World, 1763-1821*. The study is primarily concerned with the western hemisphere, including the islands of the West Indies. The few pages devoted to Puerto Rico in that study are excerpted after this short introduction.

Shafer devotes a considerable portion of his book in tracing the origins of those economic societies, including the conditions which gave rise to them. At the beginning of the 18th century the Spanish Bourbons inherited from their Hapsburg predecessors a truly diseased economy, to which was added such chronic 18th century problems as currency inflation, rising prices, and a stagnant industry. None of these problems were unique to Spain, but in combination they contributed to a serious lag compared to the other European powers as Europe approached the 19th century. As the ideas of the Enlightenment penetrated European society, Spanish officialdom in Spain and the Creole leadership in the Americas, indulged in a growing criticism of the «system». The rise of the eco-

conomic societies in Spain naturally extended Spain's influence into the so-called «New World».

Although primarily moderate in character, and essentially non-political, the Spanish-American societies represented an infusion of liberal thought amongst a portion of the Creole intelligentsia. The direct result, in certain areas of intellectual leadership, was the increasing concern with respect to Spanish economic policies, and the consequent growth of criticism with of Spain's imperial policy in general.

Between 1770 and 1820 some seventy *Economic Societies of Friends of the Country* (Sociedades Económicas de Amigos del País) were formed in Spain. By 1822 at least fourteen were either created or suggested in the colonial possessions. The Puerto Rican society was organized between 1813-1814. The reader will be interested to know that the only extended treatment of Puerto Rico is the unpublished masters thesis (UPR, 1971) by Prof. Jesús Cambre Mariño, *La Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País de Puerto Rico* (Orígenes, Fundación y Primeros Años). This fine study which is presently being prepared for publication.

The influence of the American and French revolutionary movements industrialization on the periphery of the «Atlantic Community», and the breakdown of mercantilist ideas all need further research and exploration as pervasive influences. Interestingly, while there was an interchange of ideas and peoples, the American societies had virtually no close relations one with the other, and even less so with the societies in Spain. Very few members belonged to more than one society. Distances were great even in the West Indies. One of the few exceptions was Alejandro Ramírez who was a member of the Guatemala Society when he was chosen, on the advice of Ramón Power, to organize the Puerto Rican Society in 1813.<sup>1</sup>

What made the American societies distinct from those in Spain was the emphasis on local problems, which in turn stimulated or gave voice to what might be called a «growing Americanism». Or to put it otherwise, there arose a distinct feeling of a separate iden-

1. With regard to its origins, see the articles by Jesús Cambre Mariño in *Cuadernos Americanos* (May, 1971 & March, 1974). Also the *Revista de Historia de América* (1972), published by the OAS. Prof. Luis González Vales has a fine introduction in his edited work of Alejandro Ramírez *Diario Económico de Puerto Rico*.

tity not unlike that which occurred earlier between England and especially its more advanced colonies in the western hemisphere.

Following is the material from Robert Shafer pertinent to Puerto Rico, including portions of his Appendix and annotated bibliography.

## THE PUERTO RICO SOCIETY

The Puerto Rico Society was unique among those of America in that it was ordered founded by the government in Spain—the brief, liberal resistance government of Cadiz during the period of constitutional crisis.

Puerto Rico long has been in an evil economic case. In 1765 royal commissioner Alejandro O'Reilly reported on contraband trade there, the inadequacy of the armed forces, and the numerous vagabonds, including sailors who found it easy to exist in that climate without working.<sup>2</sup> The connections of the island with Spain were poor, especially after the beginning of the great French wars, no correspondence at all being received from the mother country in 1805.

There was, however, some scientific and intellectual advance in these years, with vaccination being introduced from Danish St. Thomas in 1803, before the Royal Spanish vaccination expedition under Balmis arrived at Puerto Rico; and the press was introduced, also from St. Thomas, with the *Gaceta de Gobierno* commencing in 1806.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, however poor the economic situation may have been, the population grew steadily, from about 44,000 in 1765, to some 93,000 in 1785, and more than 220,000 in 1815 or 1820.<sup>4</sup>

An Economic Society was suggested from Puerto Rico by Bishop

2. Cayetano Coll y Toste, «Historia de Puerto Rico. Conferencia 24.ª Segunda Mitad del Siglo XVIII. Rectificaciones Históricas». BHPR, XII (1926), 129-39, at 133.

3. Coll y Toste, «Historia de Puerto Rico. Conferencia 26.ª Principios del siglo XIX hasta la implantación en la isla de la constitución de Cádiz, en 1812. Rectificaciones históricas», BHPR, XII (1926), 277-84.

4. Iñigo Abbad y Lasierra, *Historia geográfica, civil y natural de la Ysla de San Juan Bautista de Puerto Rico* (Nueva edición, anotada... por José Julián de Acosta y Calbo, Puerto Rico, 1866), 306; Lidio Cruz Monclova, *Historia de Puerto Rico (Siglo XIX)*. T. I (1808-1868) (Puerto Rico, 1952), 93. Cf. George Dawson Flinter *An Account of the Present State of the Island of Puerto Rico* (London, 1834), I-3, on the poor economic condition of the island before 1815, and 114, a table of «Amount of Imports and Exports from 1803 to 1830.»

Juan Alejandro de Arizmendi, in a representation to the king in 1801, mentioning the «felices efectos» of such bodies in other places, including Guatemala;<sup>5</sup> but this suggestion seems to have had no result.

A few years later, Puerto Rico elected Ramón Power y Giral (1775-1813) its representative, successively, to the Central Junta, the Council of Regency, and the Cortes in Spain, where he became identified with the liberal group of American deputies.<sup>6</sup> «Instructions» for Power were drafted by the town council of San Juan and by the towns of Arecibo, Aguada, and Coamo. The San Juan instructions declared that while «education is the primordial base of the state», in all the island there were but three schools of primary letters, three classes of Latin, two chairs of philosophy and theology, and one of the «exact sciences». They asked a university, instruction in science and the humanities; a hospice where the mechanical arts could be practiced since idleness was bad for a society; a charity hospital; permission to trade freely with friendly foreigners; and the formation of guilds in the hope of improving the quality of goods.<sup>7</sup>

The Council of Regency in November, 1811, ordered the creation of an intendancy for Puerto Rico, with the intention of promoting the prosperity of the island, and on the advice of Power selected for the position Alejandro Ramírez, then resident in Guatemala. The Regency's order, showing the great value it put upon the Economic Societies, also directed Ramírez.

Ultimately, with the view of planting and fixing an instructive and solid method in the administration of this isle, to aid industry, to put in practice all the best possible, to make its labor and agriculture flourish, and to propagate useful knowledge, the same intendant will take care to create and organize an Economic Society of Friends of the Country, under the rules and statutes, with

5. Cruz Monclova, *Historia de Puerto Rico*, I, 66-67 n. 124, quoting the representation from the Archivo General de Indias.

6. Neumann Gandía, *Benefactores de Puerto Rico*, I, 343-54; Coll y Toste, «Historia de Puerto Rico - Conferencia 26.ª», *loc. cit.*, 282, 284. Power, born in Puerto Rico of a Basque father and Catalan mother, in 1787 went with his brother to study at the Seminary of Vergara, later studied in France, and then entered the School of Marine Guards at Cadiz in 1792, and was in 1811 a frigate captain when elected Puerto Rican representative to the Central Junta.

7. «Instrucciones y Poderes dados al diputado don Ramón Power por el Ayuntamiento de San Juan y las villas de Arecibo, Aguada y Coamo», BHPR, X (1923), 102-38. The instructions are dated 1810.

which those of Spain were established, with the differences, which the diversity of countries and the variety of ends dictate, making in due time a regulation, and sending a copy [to Spain].<sup>8</sup>

Ramírez, leaving his membership in the Guatemala Society, and his other interests there traveled to his new post via Campeche and Havana, and took over his functions in February, 1813. He drew up statutes for the Economic Society the same year;<sup>9</sup> they were approved by the government in Spain by the middle of 1814, and published in the *Diario Económico de Puerto Rico*, itself a creation of Ramírez in collaboration with José Andino.<sup>10</sup>

The statutes said the Society was created, «like the others of its class», to advance agriculture and industry, to circulate light and knowledge in those fields, «which are the fundament of the public felicity», and to introduce new methods suitable to the island... Four permanent «commissions» with three to five members each (a modest enough membership) were provided: 1) The commission on agriculture would collect seeds, instruments, and machines; cultivate an experimental field; give prizes; and issue sheets explanatory of new techniques. 2) The industrial commission would try to find means for occupying the idle of both sexes; import new techniques; give prizes; and create a school for drawing. 3) The commission on population would regularize local police regulations; import laborers and find them work. 4) The public instruction commission would push primary letters, without prejudicing the work of the town councils in that field; try the Lancasterian method of mutual instruction; establish a circulating library and a periodical paper «destined to economic matters, accommo-

8. «Real Orden de 28 de noviembre de 1811 ...», in Zamora y Coronado, *Legislación ultramarina*, III, 619-20; and for an assertion that the Regency ordered, December 11, 1811, formation of an Economic Society at San Juan, cf. *Acta de Junta pública celebrada por la Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País de Puerto Rico el día 27 de Junio de 1844* (Puerto Rico, 1844), as reprinted in BHPR, VII (1920), 354-72, at 355. *Supra*, 61-62, for the attitude of the irregular governments of Spain toward the Societies in the period of constitutional crisis.

9. «Fundación de la Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País ...», in BHPR, I (1914), 295-96; Alejandro Ramírez, Primer Intendente of Puerto Rico, to the Gobierno Superior, Puerto Rico, August 27, 1813, in *ibid.*, VI (1919), 212.

10. «Fundación de la Sociedad», *loc. cit.*; «Estatutos de la Real Sociedad Económica de Puerto Rico, Aprobados por S. M. en Real Orden de 2 de Julio de 1814, por el Ministro Universal de Indias», BHPR, VII (1920), 56-62; José Toribio Medina, *Notas bibliográficas referentes a las primeras producciones de la imprenta en algunas ciudades de la América española ...* (Santiago, 1904),

dating them to the common intelligence»; give literary prizes; and at opportune times found classes or schools of mathematics, experimental physics, chemistry, botany, practical agriculture, and civil economy.

The statutes listed as ex-officio members all parish priests, and most other influential persons, including the town councils, the ecclesiastical chapter, the merchants, and the military. Anyone could be a member who applied to the director with the proper display of public spirit. But while *socios de número* could include anyone voted in by the membership, they had to be Spanish (that is, not a foreigner or a Negro), a *vecino* or resident of the capital, of good conduct, and with a decent occupation. Except for a few of the officers, the members were to take their seats at the juntas in the order of their arrival, «without ceremony or etiquette». No elections were to be by acclamation, and all re-elections required two-thirds of the votes. Presumably these last were devices to forestall the gravitation of the offices permanently into the hands of men prominent in the community.

Ramírez became the first director of the Society, but there was little activity before he left, in 1816, to assume the superintendency of Havana. The government of Ferdinand VII, after his restoration in 1814, apparently reposed no immediate great hopes in the Society.<sup>11</sup> A general junta was held in 1821, but it is not clear that any were held earlier.<sup>12</sup>

11. Cf. Real cédula de S. M., la que contiene el reglamento para la población y fomento del comercio, industria y agricultura de la isla de Puerto-Rico, August 10, 1815 (*Apéndice a los tomos I, II, III y IV de la obra decretos del rey d. Fernando VII ...* /Madrid, 1819/, 45-54), which grants quite extensive privileges to Puerto Rico for the improvement of its economy, but does not mention the Economic Society.

12. For a suggestion that the Society did not exist in 1815, see Zamora y Coronado, *Legislación ultramarina*, II, 239-40. Cruz Monclova, *Historia Puerto Rico*, 118, has it organized in Ramírez' time, without specifying date, and notes (p. 148) that it received a new impulse from the constitutional regime instituted in Spain in 1820, having scarcely existed before then. Richard J. and Elizabeth Van Deusen, *Porto Rico. A Carribbean Isle* (New York, 1931), 87-88, 257, can cite no Society activity in 1813-20. See Appendix for the Puerto Rico Society in 1821-98.

## APPENDIX and ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Independent America had almost no interest in Economic Societies on the model of Compomanes, but promoted its economy by the agency of its new governments and by private bodies of its own development. Guatemala was an exception; the Society there lasted, with some interruptions, from 1825 to 1881, when its functions were taken over by a government agency. Of the colonial Societies, the Puerto Rico lasted until 1898, the Manila until 1890; and the Havana Society exists today. The nineteenth-century Societies are chiefly of local interest.

The Puerto Rico Society, formed in 1813, apparently was not active until 1821. A record remains of general juntas in 1821 and succeeding years, but it is not clear that any were held earlier.<sup>13</sup> The Society statutes were revised in 1829.<sup>14</sup> In 1844 the Society had 68 members in San Juan, and 91 corresponding members, mostly in other parts of Puerto Rico; and heard at a public junta that although it had not been rich since the Regency ordered it founded in 1811, its spirit was good, and it had always tried to promote education and agriculture.<sup>15</sup> The Society was dissolved in 1898, both because it was inactive and because of long-continued conservative opposition to a body noted for its relative liberalism.<sup>16</sup>

13. Antonio S. Pedreira, *Bibliografía puertorriqueña 1493-1930* (Madrid, 1932), 233-34, listing a number of Society publications, but nothing earlier than 1821, but noting that there may be others. The Bancroft Library, Berkeley, has several Puerto Rico Society publications for 1823 and later.

14. «Nuevos Estatutos de la Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País de Puerto Rico, Reformado en 1829», BHPR VII, 158-68.

15. «Acta de la Junta Pública Celebrada por la Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País de Puerto Rico el día 27 de Junio de 1844», BHPR, VII, 354-72.

16. Julián Blanco to Dr. Cayetano Coll y Toste, San Juan, December 31, 1898, in BHPR, VII, 319-20, under title «Por qué se suprimió la Real Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País». Cf. «Acta de la Real Sociedad ... de 13 de Noviembre de 1836», BHPR, VIII, 379-80; «Acta de la Junta pública tenida por la Real Sociedad ... en 1859», BHPR, XIII, 243 *et seq.*; Cruz Monclova, *Historia Puerto Rico*, 213, *et passim* for considerable miscellaneous and unorganized information on the activities of the Society after 1821; Van Deusen, *Porto Rico*, 207, 222, 257.

Society publications available for the period to 1821 totaled some 10,000 pages (over 6,000 for Spanish Societies, over 3,000 for American). Manuscript material in the Archivo General of Guatemala provided necessary additional evidence on the Society of that place. A considerable amount of evidence on the Societies was gleaned from non-Society publications of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. For Spain these were largely the writings of literary figures and government officials, as Jovellanos, Sempere y Guarinos, and Fernández de Navarrete. For America more information was derived from periodicals, as the *Gazeta de Guatemala*, the *Mercurio Peruano*, and the *Telégrafo Mercantil*.

Sources available for the Spanish Societies were a satisfactory sample for the present purpose; much more material is available in Spain. The materials for the American Societies were more nearly exhausted. The most important publications of the Havana and Guatemala Societies were exploited. It is doubtful that much can be added to the small printed product of the other American Societies. Manuscript sources in Spain and America certainly can provide further information on the American Societies, but it is doubtful that such information would seriously alter the picture of the American Societies presented here.

Previous studies of the Economic Societies are of restricted value. There has been no study of any magnitude of all the Societies—Spanish and American—or of all the American Societies. Studies of individual Societies tend to be based on too little evidence, are usually badly organized, and spend much interest on origins, motives, and general attitudes, and relatively little on chronology, statistics, and physical accomplishments to say nothing of a precise and orderly analysis of ideas and objectives.

This bibliography is of works cited. It does not list the many works consulted in vain for Economic Society data,<sup>17</sup> or the many more that deal briefly—and often inaccurately—with one or another of the Societies. A very few works are cited, but not listed in the bibliography. A very few publications of the Valencia Society are in the bibliography, but are not cited; they were consulted by the author. In a few cases bibliographical works have been listed with contemporary materials, rather than with secondary works or studies. Items cited in the text in connection with the short-

17. E. g., Eugenio Larruga, *Memorias políticas y económicas sobre los frutos, comercio, fábricas y minas de España* (45 vols., Madrid, 1787-1800).

lived Vera Cruz and the proposed Mérida Societies are not listed in the bibliography. Items cited only in the Appendix are not listed here. Abbreviations used in the bibliography are those listed in the Preface.

The bibliography is arranged by areas, in the following order: Spain, Colonies in the Eighteenth Century, Havana and Santiago Societies, Guatemala and Chiapas, Lima, Quito, Mompo and Bogotá, Buenos Aires, Puerto Rico, Caracas, Manila. Items containing information relevant to more than one are listed only once.

### Puerto Rico

The Regency's order to Ramírez to create a Society in Zamora y Coronado, José María. *Biblioteca de legislación ultramarina en forma de diccionario alfabético*. (Madrid, 1844-1846.) 6 vols. *Legislatura ultramarina*, III, 619-20: «Real Orden de 28 de noviembre de 1811...» Other sources for the foundation are: Alejandro Ramírez, Primer Intendente of Puerto Rico, to the Gobierno Superior, Puerto Rico, August 27, 1813, in BHPR, VI (1919), 212; «Estatutos de la Real Sociedad Económica de Puerto Rico, aprobados por S.M. en Real Orden de 2 de Julio de 1814 por el Ministerio Universal de Indias», BHPR, VII (1920), 56-62, reprinting from the *Diario Económico de Puerto Rico*, November 18, 1814; and Cayetano Coll y Toste, «La Propiedad Territorial en Puerto Rico. Su Desempeño Histórico» BHPR, I (1914), 239-310, of which sec. xxii (pp. 295-97) is subtitled «Fundación de la Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País. Impuestos al Tabaco y al Aguardiente». There is a small amount of useful information on the Society in Lidio Cruz Monclova, *Historia de Puerto Rico* (Siglo XIX). T. I (1808-1868) (Puerto Rico, 1952).

The following were of minor usefulness, most of them having nothing directly on the Society before 1821; Iñigo Abbad y Lasierra, *Historia geográfica, civil y natural de la Isla de San Juan Bautista de Puerto Rico* (1782) (Nueva edición, anotada... por José Julián de Acosta y Calbo, Puerto Rico, 1866); *Acta de Junta pública celebrada por la Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País de Puerto Rico el 27 de Junio de 1844* (Puerto Rico, 1844), as reprinted in BHPR, VIII (1920), 354-72; Cayetano Coll y Toste, «Historia de Puerto Rico, Conferencia 24.ª Segunda Mitad del Siglo XVIII. Rectificaciones Históricas», BHPR, XX (1926), 129-39, and «Conferencia 26.ª Principios del

siglo XIX hasta la implantación en la isla de la constitución de Cadiz, en 1812», BHPR, XX (1926), 277-84; «Instrucciones y Poderes dados al diputado don Ramón Power por el Ayuntamiento de San Juan y las villas de Arecibo, Aguada y Coamo», BHPR, X (1923), 102-38; George Dawson Flinter, *An Account of the Present State of the Island of Puerto Rico* (London, 1834); José Toribio Medina, *Notas bibliográficas referentes a las primeras producciones de la imprenta en algunas ciudades de la América española...* (Santiago, 1904); Eduardo Neumann Gandía, *Benefactores y hombres notables de Puerto Rico* (2 vols., Ponce, 1896-99); Richard J. and Elizabeth Van Deusen, *Porto Rico. A Caribbean Isle* (New York, 1931). There is nothing helpful on the Society before 1821 in José Géigel y Zenón and Abelardo Morales Ferrera, *Bibliografía puertorriqueña* (Barcelona, 1934); written in 1892-94); or Antonio S. Pedreira, *Bibliografía puertorriqueña 1493-1930* (Madrid, 1932).