THE MENNONITE COLONY IN PARAGUAY

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The Mennonite colony is located in the Paraguayan Chaco some 225 kilometers west of Puerto Casado. To reach the colony from Asuncion one goes by river steamer to Puerto Casado, and thence by narrow gauge railway for 135 kilometers. The remaining 90 kilometers is by automobile, horses or carts. The railway is completed for 135 kilometers, while the right of way is constructed for some 50 kilometers more. Rails are being laid at the rate of four kilometers per month. The road from the end of the rails to the beginning of the colony, a distance of 70 kilometers, is very bad in wet weather, but can almost always be travelled. Under the worst conditions the trip from Puerto Casado can be made in 18 hours, and in dry weather less than half this time is required.

At the present time the colony, which consists of 280 families or 1500 people, owns a strip of land 43 kilometers long by 13 kilometers wide, consisting of 55,827 hectares. There are 14 villages, each containing 15 to 20 families and a school. The villages are laid out so that each family lives on a fenced-in plot of about 12 hectares. These plots were surveyed as nearly equal as possible, and then distributed by drawing lots. The remainder of the land has not yet been divided.

The houses are of sun-dried brick or galvanized (corrugated) iron. The former are cool and comfortable, and offer ample protection against the elements. Clay suitable for brick manufacture is easily available, and the more temporary structures will doubtless be replaced by brick ones in due time. The land contains considerable timber, though most of it is so hard that it is difficult to cut. While this causes much difficulty in the construction of fences, the wood lasts many years, and it is unlikely that posts will have to be replaced in less than 40 years. All the plots in the villages have now been fenced.

The lands of the colonists are rather flat, but appear to be sufficiently rolling to insure good drainage. Part of them are covered with such trees as quebracho and palo santo, but a large portion is grass land, which needs little or no clearing. Various analyses of samples of the soil appear to indicate that it is excellent for

farming, but the best indication is the luxuriant garden plots which most of the families seem to have. Corn grows to a height of ten feet, pumpkins weigh fifty to sixty pounds, and peanuts and potatoes are well developed. Sorghum and cotton also do remarkably well, while most of the colonists have excellent watermelons and mandioca.

It should be remembered that the Mennonites came to Paraguay from Canada, and consequently have little knowledge of the crops which grow in warm climates. Their knowledge of wheat and other grains is of little value in the cultivation of cotton, mandioca, or watermelons. However, they appear to be learning rapidly, and their present crops are but little inferior to the average found in the southern sections of the United States.

The Paraguayan Corporation, from which the lands were purchased, has established an experimental station at the colony. This is under the direction of an European agriculturist who has had several years experience in Paraguay. The station appears to be doing excellent work, and has already proved its value as a source of technical information. It is helping in the selection of proper seeds, and is of general value as a sort of pathfinder for the colonists.

There is every indication that the colony will eventually be able to produce the following for export: cotton, peanut products, mandioca products, castor bean products, flax, linseed oil, various varieties of fruits and vegetables, oil of petitgrain, etc. Tobacco, sugar from both beets and cane, and tea are also possibilities. At a later date the writer may be able to suggest a crop which shows greater apparent possibilities than any of these.

For local consumption the colony is able to grow corn, alfalfa, oats and vegetables. There is a large potential profit in dairy products and eggs, as will be realized when the price lists given later on are considered. In general, most of the food needs of the colonists can be supplied by themselves. The land is potentially capable of growing any product now found in the Carolinas or Florida. While many years may be required to do so on a commercial basis, there is every favorable indication.

The colonists have had considerable difficulty in securing adequate pastures. While some of the villages have sufficient pastures near at hand, others have been forced to have their cattle driven several kilometers. The higher lands are partly covered with bitter grass, which the animals will not eat, except when it is young and tender. It has been found, however, that by merely

plowing the soil the bitter grass gives way to other varieties which soon spring up. Grasses such as elephant, Para, Rhodes, Guinea, and Soudan are now being experimented with, and fodder crops are also being grown. As some of the low lands near the colony are suitable for pasture in their present state it does not appear that this problem will long remain unsolved.

The maximum temperature likely to be encountered in the summer is 115 degrees Fahrenheit, while the minimum in the winter is 25 degrees Fahrenheit. These are extremes, and not often met with. No extended data has yet been compiled, but it may be said in general that the average summer temperatures are approximately equal to those encountered in the cities on the lower Mississippi river. The elevation of the lands has not yet been accurately measured, but it is believed to be about 1000 feet above sea-level.

From the meager data gathered thus far, the annual rainfall is indicated as between 35 and 55 inches. While the wet and dry seasons are not sharply divided, the rainfall appears to be least in July and August, and greatest in January and February. The nights are cool, and the climate cannot be considered unduly burdensome. Millions of white people live in climates which are far worse.

The health of the colonists appears to be excellent. At the present time there is an epidemic of sore eyes, but it is not considered serious.. It is understood that when the colonists first came down, there was a considerable number of deaths, but at the present time the death rate can be considered as normal. Only about 180 have died since arriving and as the total arrivals numbered more than 1600 this cannot be considered high when the complete change of climate and surroundings is taken into consideration. The Paraguayan Corporation has offered inoculation against typhoid fever free of charge, but only a few of the colonists have taken advantage of this. At the present time there is no physician at the colony, although there is one at the "Fortin" known as "Coronel Martinez", some 75 kilometers distant. It is understood that the Corporation will secure the services of another physician to replace the one who left a short time ago.

Five of the fourteen villages do not yet have satisfactory water, as that from the wells has proved too salty for human consumption, although quite acceptable to animals. Water for these villagers has been hauled from others near-by in dry weather, and in wet weather rain water has been used. This problem does

not appear serious, as most of the wells are only fifteen feet deep, and it is possible that continued drilling will result in better water. In any case, it is not difficult to impound enough water during the rainy season to last through the drier months, as was done by some of the Mennonites on their Canadian properties. There are no rivers or creeks running through the property, but there is an occasional shallow lake.

In wet weather the mosquitoes are very troublesome as far out as 150 kilometers, but at the colony itself they are no more so than, for example, in northern Florida. They give very little trouble in the daytime, and the use of a net at night enables one to secure sound sleep. These mosquitoes do not appear to carry either yellow fever or malaria. The writer was bitten several hundred times, and has apparently suffered no permanent ill-effects.

The chief crop pest has been the ant, which did considerable damage in the first stages of the colony. This has been largely overcome by the use of cyanide and sulphur dioxide. As many of the ant hills are ten feet in diameter by three feet high, it is an easy matter to kill a large number of ants at one time. Worms have damaged the corn at various times, but not seriously. During the first season, when crops were small, birds also did much damage, but with the present large crops this is negligible.

Snakes are comparatively rare; only two of the colonists have been bitten, and both recovered. At the very worst they are no more of a menace than in Georgia. The Chaco is said to contain a species of small wild cat, but if so they have given no trouble to date.

The following wild animals and birds are found in the district: foxes, rabbits, pigs, deer, ostriches, storks, ducks, perdices (a kind of partridge), and several others. These were all observed on a recent visit and appear to be plentiful. As none of them is dangerous, the district may be regarded as very desirable from the sportsman's point of view. While not an important source of food, the wild life of the Chaco may be considered as offering good prospects in case of temporary need, and for variety.

About 300 native Indians of the Lengua tribe are now living on the property. They are very peaceable, and have proved helpful as laborers. They work nine hours for the equivalent of 37 United States cents, and are very useful for clearing land. Their wants are very simple, as they use only temporary brush huts and wear very little clothing. While they own a few goats, their average wealth does not amount to five United States dollars per capita.

They assert no claims to land ownership, and merely wander where and when they please. The young women of the "flapper" class paint a few green stripes on their chins, and own a few beads. There appears to be a sort of leader for each dozen or so Indians, called the "Cacique." He may usually be distinguished by the fact that he wears pants (second hand).

There has been no trouble with these Indians except for a few cases of minor pilferage. They show an Ethiopian fondness for watermelon, and the colonists have won their good will by supplying this delicacy, together with old clothes and empty tin cans. Their only arms are bows and arrows, with which they show no great skill. It is fairly certain that they will never offer any problems of importance.

The costs of domestic animals in the Chaco, in terms of United States dollars per animal, is approximately as follows:

Mares	$34.00
Horses	45.00
Mules	58.00
Oxen	34.00
Milk cows	38.00
Butcher cows	20.00
Steers	26.00
Sheep	.07 per kilo live weight

Costs of the usual necessities are as follows:

Sugar	$ .22 per kilo
Rice	.28 per kilo
Lard	.34 per kilo
Coffee	.75 per kilo
Tea	1.80 per kilo
Canned butter (from B. Aires)	1.42 per kilo
Flour	.09 per kilo, free

of duty, and 16 cents with duty.

Flour is one of the articles which the Mennonites have the right to import for ten years free of duty. However, stocks sometimes run out for a few days, at which time the higher price must be paid. Potatoes cost 18 cents per kilo, while dried fruits such as prunes, peaches, pears, and raisins cost 63 to 85 cents per kilo. Gasoline and kerosene cost 40 to 43 cents per gallon.

None of the colonists is without food. Those who are unable to buy it may obtain what they require at the stores of the Corporation on indefinite credit. One Mennonite informed the writer

that the Corporation had advanced more than $2000 to the families of his village alone. The Corporation is also arranging to give the colonists such oxen as they need. Their gardens insure an ample supply of fresh vegetables, and such things as flour and sugar may be obtained from the stores of the Corporation. The writer observed no want or suffering, and many of the men talked to admitted quite frankly that the Corporation was doing more than could be expected.

The chief anxiety of the colonists seems to be the present lack of what farmers call a "quick cash crop." They have been put to heavy expenses in getting settled, and naturally desire to obtain some of what they have spent. The large expenses and the insignificant returns have made them somewhat nervous.

It is believed that this problem will be solved in due time. The large quebracho plants at Puerto Casado and Pinasco operate the year 'round, and it is possible that many colonists can obtain employment in the off-season. As these plants employ thousands of men, there is a good opportunity for the colonists to profit through supplying such needs as vegetables and dairy products, as well as potatoes and tapioca flour. The absence of the boll weevil indicates a good opportunity for cotton-growing. This staple is now being raised in other parts of Paraguay, and can be sold for cash at almost any time. The fact that it matures in six months after planting makes it a very good crop for quick cash return. There is little doubt that the problem of cash returns will solve itself as soon as substantial crops can be harvested.

The question of transportation is always to the front, but is not serious for a pioneer colony. The agreement with the Casado interests, from whom the Corporation acquired the lands, provides that the railway freight rates can never be higher than those of the Central Railway of Paraguay. At the present time they are understood to be some 30% less. The rates on cotton and linseed from kilometer 150 have been fixed at the equivalent of $3.75 per metric ton, while on corn, wheat, beans and flour it is $2.36 per ton. While these may be considered high, they are not prohibitive.

The railway of the International Products Company from Pinasco reaches a point some 90 kilometers from the southeastern corner of the colony, so that it is possible that there will eventually be two rail outlets to the river. There will still be the long river haul to Buenos Aires or Montevideo, but this is a difficulty which applies equally to all of Paraguay.

The haul by truck or wagon from the colony to the railway is

of course a difficult one, but it decreases as the rails are extended, and at any rate in all new localities wagon hauls on bad roads must be expected. The Corporation has two trucks which can be used most of the time, while wagons pulled by oxen can get through at all times, wet or dry.

It should be clearly understood that the colony is still in the pioneer stage. Hardships are inevitable, but appear in the process of being overcome. In the writer's opinion the colony will show substantially successful results within five years and will eventually form the nucleus of a much larger and more prosperous community. Many of the more disagreeable features of the early pioneering stage have been left behind. The colonists are now located and hard at work. The inevitable initial errors and misgivings have been conquered. When it is considered that the colonists came from a land having an entirely different agriculture, transportation system, and climate, it must be admitted that they have done reasonably well, and that the sacrifices have not been as great as might have been expected from the nature of the difficulties overcome.

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