

History and Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting

By G. ARZONA

THE RAPID development of public health in the Island during the last few years, the recent establishment of a Department of Public Health within the School of Tropical Medicine, the importance of public health in the program of national defense as well as the place of Puerto Rico as a stronghold in the defense of the Western Hemisphere, the interest shown by the different Federal agencies in the health of the people of the Island, all favored the organization of the Puerto Rico Public Health Association. Previous attempts had been made to bring together all those persons interested or professionally engaged in public health but, circumstances not being favorable, final organization had to be postponed. Nevertheless, the seeds that had been planted were destined to bear fruit. Last July the members of the American Public Health Association in the Island discussed again the idea of creating a local association affiliated with the national public health organization. The terrain was fertile, the idea took root rapidly.

A provisional committee was appointed to go ahead with the organization. Perhaps it is well to mention here our good fortune in having with us at the time Dr. James A. Doull, Professor of Public Health and Hygiene at Western Reserve University, a Fellow of the American Public Health Association, and a member of its Governing Council and Executive Board. Dr. Doull stimulated everyone into action. As chairman of the provisional organizing committee he made good use of the coöperation offered by the twenty-two original members, which resulted in the successful organization of the Puerto Rico Public Health Association.

The first organizational meeting was held late in July, 1941, when a provisional constitution was adopted and a number of committees were appointed to go ahead with the solution of the many problems that had to be met. To these committees should go a great deal of the credit for the work done. The committees appointed were:

Organization Committee

Dr. James A. Doull, *Chairman*
Dr. Guillermo Arbona, *Secretary-
Treasurer*

Planning Committee

Dr. Eduardo Garrido Morales
Dr. Pablo Morales Otero
Dr. Thomas H. D. Griffiths

Dr. Myron E. Wegman	Miss Johanna J. Schwarte
Mr. John M. Henderson	Miss Kathleen Logan
Miss Johanna J. Schwarte	<i>Auditing Committee</i>
Dr. James A. Doull, ex officio	Mr. Manuel Pérez
Dr. Guillermo Arbona, ex officio	Dr. Morton Kramer

Membership Committee

Dr. José Chaves
Dr. Ernesto Quintero
Dr. Marta Robert de Romeu
Dr. Joseph Dean
Dr. Ezequiel Martínez Rivera
Dr. Jerome S. Peterson
Mr. Charles T. Wright
Mr. John M. Henderson
Miss Beatriz Lassalle

Publicity Committee

Dr. Tomás Blanco
Dr. Guillermo Arbona

Constitution and By-Laws Committee

Dr. Joseph Dean
Mr. John M. Henderson
Dr. Ezequiel Martínez Rivera
Miss Kathleen Logan

On the twenty-third and twenty-fourth of September, 1941, at the School of Tropical Medicine in San Juan, was held the first annual meeting, marking the culmination of efforts to establish the Puerto Rico Health Association. Over 150 members, in addition to a large number of visitors, attended, many of them participating actively in the discussions.

The first session was a scientific one. The papers presented, which gave rise to much interesting and profitable discussion, are published in this issue of the *JOURNAL*.

In the afternoon of the same day a business session was held, during which the final constitution and by-laws were adopted and the officers for 1942 elected. Perhaps the objectives of the Association can best be stated by quoting the Preamble of the Constitution.

In order to promote public health by bringing together in closer association persons professionally engaged or interested in public health, by furthering their scientific advancement, by helping to spread public health and hygiene, by aiding in the adoption of legislation in the interest of public health and by volunteering assistance in times of stress or need, there is hereby created the Puerto Rico Public Health Association.

The following officers were elected for the year 1942:

President	Dr. Eduardo Garrido Morales
President Elect	Dr. Pablo Morales Otero
Vice President	Dr. José Chaves
Secretary	Dr. Guillermo Arbona
Treasurer	Miss Kathleen Logan
Delegate to the A.P.H.A.	Dr. Oscar Costa Mandry

Members of the Board of Directors:	Dr. Ernesto Quintero	1943
	Dr. Thomas H. D. Griffiths	1943
	Dr. Ezequiel Martínez Rivera	1943
	Miss Johanna J. Schwarte	1942
	Mrs. María P. Rahn	1942

The inaugural session held the evening of the same day was the climax of the meeting. Dr. Eduardo Garrido Morales, Commissioner of Health of Puerto Rico, and newly elected president, presided. He opened the ceremonies with an address explaining the progress made in public health in Puerto Rico during the last few years. He mentioned the importance of Puerto Rico in this period of national emergency as defense outpost for the Caribbean region, and also its importance in the good neighbor program of President Roosevelt.¹

Dr. Garrido then introduced Dr. Rexford Guy Tugwell, Governor of Puerto Rico. This was one of the first public appearances of Dr. Tugwell after his appointment as Governor of the Island. He remarked, in the course of his speech, that this meeting was a sign "that Puerto Rico was no longer a place to which missionaries came, but rather a place from which missionaries went."

The speaker for the occasion was Dr. Reginald M. Atwater, Executive Secretary of the American Public Health Association. Dr. Atwater was so kind as to come from New York to help in the organizational work and to be with us during our first annual meeting. His speech, "Public Health; a Profession at the Cross Roads," was very stimulating and enlightening, and is published in this issue of the *JOURNAL*.

The session was closed by Dr. James A. Doull. He described some of his experiences during the six months that he had been in the Island studying and teaching, and emphasized the importance of an association such as this in furthering public health work.

The words of greeting and advice by different speakers were deeply appreciated by the Puerto Rico Public Health Association. They all realized that this young association had its place in Puerto Rico, and it was going to fill it satisfactorily.

The second day was dedicated to group meetings. In the Association there are different professional groups specializing to a certain degree within the broad field of public health. It was felt that if

1. A translation into Spanish appears in this *JOURNAL*, while the original version is to be published shortly in the *American Journal of Public Health*.

these groups discussed among themselves subjects of interest to them, and then brought before the whole group a summary of their discussions, it would be of benefit to all concerned. Thus health officers, sanitarians and sanitary engineers, public health nurses, social workers, and laboratory workers could meet independently and discuss their own problems. They did this, and then later all met together, and the chairman from each group made a report.

The topics were of unusual interest, and the practical recommendations which were made are indicative of the seriousness and thoroughness with which the different subjects were discussed, as well as of the active participation of every one of the members in the discussions. The following are quotations from the reports of the group chairmen:

Health Officers Group:

The health officers' discussion dealt mostly with the control of transmissible diseases; mainly, the control of malaria and typhoid fever. The necessity for better reporting of cases by private physicians was considered. The poor condition of public water supplies and the difficulties in improving them were also brought under discussion. Many suggestions for improving control measures were made and fully discussed. The procedures to be put in practice in cases of outbreaks or epidemics were given ample consideration.

Public Health Nurses Group:

The following points were brought out: (a) number of hours given to a service as compared to the required number of working hours per month; (b) distribution of the nurse's time; and (c) percent of time spent on the various services.

The presentation of this information brought about an interesting discussion. It was decided that a study of this type would be an excellent plan for the next meeting. Dr. Kramer offered to assist the nurses in the collection of material, and the use of statistical data for such studies.

Sanitarians Groups:

Numerous suggestions were made for accelerating the water supply improvement program of the Insular Health Department. Some of these were routine technical or administrative matters suitable for presentation by the Bureau of Sanitary Engineering directly to the Commissioner of Health. Others involved support and action by other professional groups, and also fall within the scope of the general Association.

In the field of education it was the sense of the meeting that several series of mimeographed talks and articles on water supply subjects for

insular-wide distribution should be prepared jointly by the Office of Public Health Education, the Bureau of Sanitary Engineering, and other affected bureaus of the Insular Health Department.

In the field of legislation it was the sense of the meeting that municipal ownership and operation of public water supplies have been tried and found gravely wanting. It is believed that these deficiencies will increase during the period of national and insular stress lying ahead.

Social Workers Group:

It is well known that the medical profession no longer considers merely the specific disease condition but goes beyond and thinks in terms of the total individual in his social and economic setting. We believe, therefore, that in this approach to the patient as a person, social work can make a specific and valuable contribution. Because of this, the group recommends that in the consideration of public health problems the social workers actively participate in the coöperation with other personnel, both in the planning and in the practice of effective methods of solution.

Laboratory Workers Group:

With a very large attendance of technicians and four physicians devoted to clinical pathology, the following problems were discussed in round table at the meeting of the laboratory section of the Puerto Rico Public Health Association.

1. Should public health laboratories do research work?
2. The advisability of attendance at conferences for an interchange of ideas, methods, and technics.
3. The centralization of laboratory work.
4. The coördination of public health laboratories in national defense.
5. The merit system for laboratory technicians with appropriate salaries.
6. The check-up system for public and private laboratories.
7. The supervision and control of private and public laboratories.

A new association, the Puerto Rico Public Health Association, has made its debut. It started as a strong, healthy, fighting organization. Its sole concern is the health of the people of Puerto Rico. It offers its coöperation to official organizations as well as to private organizations with similar interests.