

HISTORIC RESOURCES ON THE VIEQUES NAVAL RESERVATION AND THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF VIEQUES ISLAND PUERTO RICO

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ABSTRACT

Ecology and Environment, Inc., and its primary consultant Mr. Gary S. Vescelius conducted cultural resource investigations on the Vieques Naval Reservation (VNR) between 1978 and 1984. This paper presents a preliminary discussion of historical resources located during the survey and a brief discussion of the historical development of the island. The archaeological investigations conducted on the VNR substantiate the historical record, and located 46 historic sites, including: haciendas, villages, hamlets, and homesteads. In addition, 54 historic scatters were identified. Domestic refuse was found at many of these locations indicating the possible existence of homesteads. These historic sites date from the late 1700s to the 1930s, with the majority dating from the mid-1800s to the first quarter of the twentieth century.

KEYWORDS: Centrales, Haciendas, Sugar & Cotton Production, Tenant Farmers.

BACKGROUND

Christopher Columbus was the first European to view the island of Vieques during his second voyage to the New World on November 19, 1493. Don Juan Ponce de León was a member of the crew, which sailed along the south coast of Vieques. Columbus named the island *Santa Ursula* or *Gratiosa*. He named the island group (The Virgin Islands) *Las Once Mil Vírgines* after the legendary 11,000 seagoing virgins from Cornwall who were martyred at Cologne by the Huns. The Taíno Indians referred to the island as *Buruquena*, often abbreviated *Bque*. The present name of the island, Vieques, is a Hispanic version of the aboriginal name and has been recorded in the Spanish archives since 1514. The English referred to Vieques as Crab Island because of the large number of crabs present on the island (Bonnet Benítez 1976:XV-XXII; Morison 1974:104-105, 112; Turner 1975:XV; Brau 1981:236-240; Sauer 1966).

During the 1500s and 1600s, the island of Vieques played a significant role in the struggle among the Spanish, French, English, Dutch, and Danish to control the eastern portion of Puerto Rico and the shipping lanes critical to trade and war-making in the central Caribbean (Morales-Carrión 1971:13, 46-49; Rivera Martínez 1967:12-18, 38-39; Calendar of State Papers, Colonial 1685-1688:506, 566, 552-553, 1689-1692:25).

Permanent European settlement of Vieques began during the first half of the nineteenth century. Shortly thereafter, most of the island was divided into several small haciendas for agricultural production in an export economy. The labor exploited to support these haciendas was

located throughout the island in proximity to the fields in which sugarcane primarily was raised. Outside of an urban settlement established in the 1820s in Isabel Segunda (formerly called Puerto Mulas), the settlement pattern on the island throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries consisted of isolated homesteads, hamlets, and small villages (Table 1). A large town was located at the Playa Grande Hacienda on the island's western side, but the overall settlement and the population density of this portion of the island were low (Table 2). This predominately rural settlement pattern continued essentially unchanged to the time when the U.S. Navy acquired the reservation in the 1940s.

Vieques Island is divided into eight barrios: Isabel Segunda, Puerto Diablo, Puerto Ferro, Florida, Puerto Real, Llave, Mosquito, and Puntas Arenas (Figure 1). The results of the survey are presented in this paper by barrio.

BARRIO PUERTO DIABLO

Barrio Puerto Diablo is located on the western portion of Vieques. Only the northwestern section, including the Hacienda Santa María, is not part of the VNR. The settlement pattern consisted of homesteads of agricultural laborers scattered throughout the barrio. Seafood, the remains of which are often found at the historic sites identified, supplemented subsistence.

One of the first areas settled on Vieques (along with the present barrio of Isabel Segunda), Puerto Diablo is the largest barrio on the island. Generally hilly and arid, the area has poor agricultural land incapable of supporting a dense rural population. However, three principal pockets of arable land are located in the barrio and, by 1840, a plantation had been established on each of these tracts. In all three cases the planters were Frenchmen. In the northwest corner of the barrio, Théophile Leguillou, the island's leading landowner, had acquired an estate that eventually became known as Santa María but which he originally called La Patience. On the southeast coast, Louis Cheriot had established himself at the Ensenada Honda. In the Upper Marungey basin, midway between the areas staked out by Leguillou and Cheriot, Auguste Nerón Longpré established the Hacienda Campaña. For the next one hundred years development in the Puerto Diablo area was governed mainly by the fluctuating fortunes of these three plantations (Rivera Martínez 1967).

During the latter part of the nineteenth century sugar was the barrio's principal product. To process the cane, two sizeable sugar mills (*centrales*) were established, one of them (the oldest mill on Vieques) at La Patience / Santa María and the other at Campaña. Though they prospered initially, by as early as 1870 the local sugar planters were already experiencing hard times. By World War I, cane was cultivated in significant quantities only at Santa María. Further east in the barrio, cane had been supplanted as the main product by cotton, a crop for which an extremely good market existed and one that was better adapted to the local climate. The Campaña sugar mill was converted into a cotton gin to process the increasing cotton yields (Beachy 1957; Pastor Ruiz 1947).

The early 1920s were marked by the collapse of the cotton market. The population began to decline as unemployed farmhands left to seek jobs elsewhere. Nevertheless, many people continued to reside in the barrio, having already established claims, however vague, to the land on which they lived. The population was dispersed, and the landscape was dotted with the isolated homesteads of tenant farmers. The structures that once stood on these sites were presumably modest wooden houses, virtually all vestiges of which have disappeared, although a certain amount of refuse is still

evident.

For such a sparsely populated area, Puerto Diablo was served, in 1940, by a fairly elaborate network of roads and trails, a reflection of (1) the dispersed nature of the settlement pattern, (2) previous farming ventures, (3) coconut-gleaning, which was being practiced on a rather large scale, and (4) fishing, which has always been an important minor activity along the barrio's extensive shoreline. The roads alone had an overall length of more than a hundred kilometers, and crisscrossed one another in such a way that there was hardly a spot anywhere in the district that did not lie within 500 m of at least one of them. Many of the roads were extremely primitive, few of them could be called "improved," and only one had been paved in any fashion.

The history of the Central La Campaña closely parallels that of the Vieques sugar industry as a whole. It was not until the second quarter of the nineteenth century, long after it had become the dominant crop on many other West Indian islands, that sugarcane was cultivated on a large scale on Vieques. There is no indication of the existence of a factory, or any other structure at La Campaña in 1839, when a census was made. A later census in 1845 identifies structures but provides few details. The factory building on the site today would appear to date from no earlier than 1875. Although elements of older structures may have been incorporated in it, the structure in its present form has to be assigned to the late nineteenth century on stylistic grounds.

La Campaña is unusual in its decidedly academic architectural detailing and its considered use of "Second Empire" motifs and devices. As a document of late nineteenth century craftsmanship, the plantation is unparalleled elsewhere on Vieques, and it stands as a lasting symbol of an important period in the island's history. The ruins include the remains of a "T"-shaped sugar factory, several outbuildings and secondary structures. Most visible are the walls of the main factory (the bottom of the "T"), an impressive rubble-masonry and brick structure oriented roughly north-south.

The survey of the VNR conducted for the Navy also located the sites of nine homesteads and 20 refuse scatters, which may have been associated with historic homesteads. Table 1 provides a list of the historic sites discovered on the VNR by barrio. Although substantiating it from the archaeological record is difficult, most of the historic homesteads and domestic refuse scatters identified in this barrio may have been associated with the Campaña Hacienda.

BARRIO PUERTO FERRO

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the settlement pattern in Barrio Puerto Ferro was similar to that of Barrio Puerto Diablo. A small sugar-producing hacienda, Puerto Ferro was located at the approximate location of Camp García. The remaining area consisted of the homesteads of agricultural laborers that were scattered throughout the barrio and were connected by a network of unpaved roads.

The Puerto Ferro Hacienda was settled by Eugenio Bonnet around 1850 for the purpose of exploiting the 100 *cuerdas* of land he had been awarded by the colonial government. That parcel was the nucleus of the small sugar plantation known as Hacienda Puerto Ferro. Precisely how long Bonnet and his descendants actually lived on the site is unknown. Nevertheless, they had probably abandoned it by the turn of the century, since by c. 1910 the entire estate had been acquired by Gustavo Mourraille of nearby Puerto Real. By the mid-1930s, after having passed through various other hands, the estate had become the property of the firm known as the Eastern Sugar Associates.

Mourraille probably never resided at Puerto Ferro, since he had installed himself and his family in a large new house (now known as *Casa del Francés*) on the outskirts of the village Esperanza by 1911. However, a number of tenants quite likely continued to live on the site of the old Bonnet homestead throughout the first third of the twentieth century, and various outbuildings were probably in use during that period for agricultural purposes. In addition, a portion of the site was used as an asylum, referred to as the *Campo Asilo* (the "Asylum field"), and its remains were located somewhere within the boundaries of present day Camp García (Rivera Martínez 1967).

During the cultural resource survey of Barrio Puerto Ferro, six historic sites were discovered, including a hacienda, a shell fishing station, a lighthouse, a well, a fieldstone dam, and a modern residence. Eleven historic scatters were also identified in the barrio; one is a fishing station and nine contain domestic refuse. These sites date from mid-1800s to the 1940s. Most appear to be related to homesteads of agricultural laborers scattered throughout the barrio.

BARRIO FLORIDA

Barrio Florida covers 2,913 acres with less than 25 percent, or only the extreme western portion of the barrio, on Navy property. One historic site and one historic scatter were located in the barrio. The historic site consisted of a concrete and stone rubble foundation, a red brick masonry foundation and associated feature, and the remains of a railroad track that extended from Santa María to Punta Arenas. An unpaved road, running north-south, is adjacent to the brick foundation. The scatter consists of domestic refuse dating from c. 1900 to the 1940s.

BARRIO PUERTO REAL

Only a small portion of the area along the northwestern boundary of the barrio of Puerto Real is located within the VNR. In addition, no historic sites or historic scatters were discovered during the cultural resource survey of the VNR in this area.

A sugar-producing hacienda was found in the barrio of Puerto Real in the village of Esperanza outside the Navy property. *Central Azucarera Esperanza* (Central Puerto Real) was established by Victor Mourraille and a man named Martineau as the "Sociedad Mourraille-Martineau" early in the twentieth century. Mourraille took control of the business after the death of Martineau, and upon his death Mourraille's son, Gustavo, operated the *central*. In February 1915 the AFL union organized a strike at the sugar mill and Gustavo sold the business to Enrique Bird Arias. Shortly after Arias' death in 1921, the *central* was sold to the United Puerto Rico Sugar Company, which in turn sold it to the Eastern Sugar Associates around 1923. After the 1927 *zafra* (sugarcane harvest), the mill stopped operation and sugarcane was milled at the *central* at Playa Grande thereafter. Sugar production ranged from 2,920 tons, in 1913, to a high of 6,073 tons, in 1920, when worldwide sugar prices peaked (Rivera Martínez 1967).

BARRIO LLAVE

The settlement pattern of the Barrio Llave consisted of a large village located in the vicinity

of the Playa Grande *central*, associated hamlets, and the scattered homesteads of tenant farmers. Thirteen historic sites were discovered in the barrio during the survey of the VNR. Two sites are associated with the Playa Grande Hacienda and *central* and one with the Benitez family hacienda. Two small villages and one hamlet were located, as well as seven homestead sites. The sites date from the late 1700s to the 1930s. Nine historic scatters, containing domestic refuse, were also located. These scatters appear to be associated with homesteads of farm laborers scattered throughout the barrio, and also date from the late 1700s to about 1940.

The settlement pattern of Barrio Llave is dominated by the Playa Grande Hacienda and associated land use. Although when the modern colonization of the Playa Grande area began is uncertain, a few people at a minimum were living in the area by c. 1840, since it was sufficiently populous to have its own local political official, a *comisario comandante* (Rivera Martínez 1967).

Sometime around the middle of the nineteenth century a Dane named Matías Hjordemaal acquired a portion (and perhaps all) of the Playa Grande basin with the intention of establishing a sizeable sugar plantation there. Sugar was probably already being cultivated in the district on a small scale. Shortly after establishing himself in the neighborhood, Hjordemaal began building a factory to process the cane raised on his estate. While little is known of his background, Hjordemaal seems to have migrated to Vieques from St. Croix, the largest of the Danish Islands and the only one of the group on which any appreciable amount of sugar was then being produced.

Like all planters on the island, Hjordemaal experienced difficulties, especially labor problems. He was heavily dependent on migrant laborers from Tortola in the British Virgin Islands, who rioted several times during the latter part of the nineteenth century. One riot occurred in 1874 at Playa Grande. Although the riot was quelled successfully, without large-scale bloodshed, it created lasting tensions (Rivera Martínez 1967; Pastor Ruiz 1947).

The length of Hjordemaal's ownership of his properties at Playa Grande is unknown, but well before the end of the century they had passed to José (Pepe) Benítez Guzmán, who controlled the neighboring Resolución Hacienda in Barrio Punta Arenas. José (Pepe) Benítez Guzmán lost no time in merging the two estates. By the time José Benítez died, he was the owner of most of the cane fields in western Vieques. The remainder was owned largely by his brother, Pedro Regalado Benítez Guzmán. Under the management of José Benítez, the Playa Grande *central* replaced his other, smaller and more antiquated *central* at Resolución, and all of the cane from both estates was processed by the expanding Playa Grande works. On a hill top just to the southwest of the *central*, Don José built a little mansion that became known as the *Quinta Los Jagüeyes* (Rivera Martínez 1967; Pastor Ruiz 1947).

When Don José died, his heirs, convinced that it would be unprofitable to split the plantation among themselves, agreed to form a company, and entrusted the entire business to that concern. The resulting Benítez Sugar Company prospered for a time. Between 1913 (the earliest year for which statistics are available) and 1928, the number of tons of sugar produced by the Playa Grande sugarworks rose from 3,689 to 13,088. The biggest increase occurred between 1927 and 1928, and reflected the fact that in the latter year the plant at Playa Grande was the only functioning sugarworks on Vieques. It had long since managed to outdistance its few surviving competitors, the *centrales* at Santa María and Esperanza. The Santa María plant had already shut down, and with the closing of the Esperanza factory, the Playa Grande plant had no competition. By 1928, the entire island's cane crop -totaling 112,957 tons that year- was funneled into that one plant, and, although precise figures are unavailable, the molasses produced in processing that much cane most likely amounted

to more than half a million gallons (Rivera Martínez 1967; Pastor Ruiz 1947).

Central Playa Grande became the hub of an extensive network of narrow gauge railroads. In addition, a sizeable community sprang up around the factory itself, which gave rise in turn to a number of satellite hamlets in which the *agregados* (tenant farmers) lived. The populations of the plantation as a whole must have been well over a thousand people, most of whom probably lived in the immediate vicinity of the *central*.

In 1936, weakened by a string of adverse developments, the Benítez Sugar Company went bankrupt. Three years later, a *sindicatura judicial*, which had been administering the plantation, sold it to a Puerto Rican entrepreneur named Juan Angel Tio. Tio's tenure was short-lived. In 1942 Playa Grande and La Arcadia haciendas were acquired, together with the rest of western Vieques, by the United States Navy, which has controlled the area ever since. All of the people living on the Playa Grande estate and the VNR were resettled by the Navy elsewhere on Vieques. Since 1942, the district has been completely uninhabited (Rivera Martínez 1967; Pastor Ruiz 1947).

The settlement pattern of Barrio Llave is similar to that of Barrio Puerto Diablo. A sugar-producing hacienda was the dominant feature associated with scattered homesteads of agricultural or factory laborers. However, the large village associated with the Playa Grande hacienda and *central* was much larger than those of the Campaña or Santa María haciendas.

BARRIO MOSQUITO

The settlement pattern consisted of La Arcadia hacienda and *central* and the scattered homesteads of farm laborers. Five historic sites and one historic scatter were located in Barrio Mosquito during the cultural resource survey of the VNR. The sites consisted of remains of La Arcadia hacienda and *central*, four homesteads, and a schoolhouse.

La Arcadia hacienda and *central* dominated the settlement of Barrio Mosquito. This property, as well as that in Punta Arenas, was owned by the Benítez Sugar Company from 1909 to 1936. Pedro Regalado Benítez Guzmán acquired the property about 1870. By the late 1880s, the property was owned by Jose Benítez Guzmán, and after his death became part of the Benítez Sugar Company. As previously noted, the Benítez Sugar Company went bankrupt in 1936. In 1939, Juan Angel Tio purchased the La Arcadia and Playa Grande haciendas. The U.S. Navy acquired western Vieques, including these haciendas, in 1942 (Rivera Martínez 1967; Pastor Ruiz 1947).

BARRIO PUNTA ARENAS

Five historic sites and one historic scatter were located in the barrio during the cultural resource survey of the VNR. Historic settlement of the barrio centered on sugar-producing haciendas. In addition, an extensive network of roads and trails existed in Barrio Punta Arenas facilitating transportation between settlements and Isabel Segunda. These settlements included Le Pistolet, Marquisat de Saint Jacques (Marquesado), Resolución, Experience, Boca de la Quebrada 1 (north), Boca de la Quebrada 2 (south), El Jardín, and La Palma.

In March 1839, Jean Bourdillon of Saint-Pierre, Martinique, purchased 100 *cuerdas* (97 acres [39.3 hectares]) of land in the barrio of Punta Arenas in western Vieques from Juan Antonio de

Rosario for 400 pesos. In early April, he bought from Hippolite Groult, for 500 pesos, an additional 100 *cuerdas* of adjoining land that had formed part of a farm known as Le Pistolet. Groult had acquired a considerable amount of real estate in the Punta Arenas area and had come to play a prominent role in local affairs, serving, for example, as the *comisario comandante*, the ranking political official of Punta Arenas. Still amassing property, Groult, on February 21, 1841, was formally awarded title to 375 *cuerdas* of land in Punta Arenas, one of the largest parcels in the barrio for which there is any record. Although available records do not refer to the matter, Groult's estate most likely formed the nucleus of what would become the Resolución hacienda, one of Vieques' major sugar plantations (Rivera Martínez 1967).

Bourdillon, Groult, and Théophile Leguillou had agreed to establish a joint enterprise, a sugar plantation and a small factory, to grow and process cane. Bourdillon was to finance the venture, Groult was to manage the plantation, and Leguillou, who already had a great deal of experience as a sugar planter, was to advise Groult, arrange the planting of the first crop, and oversee the construction of the factory. It was probably Groult who chose the name for the new enterprise: *Sucrerie Marquisat de Saint Jacques*.

Théophile Leguillou was a man of far greater prominence on Vieques than Hippolite Groult, and it is doubtful that Vieques would have been settled if not for Leguillou. Though he had originally landed on Vieques in search of timber in 1823, Legouillou liked the place so much that he resolved to settle there. By 1840, Vieques had become a small but flourishing outpost of the Spanish empire, and Leguillou had established himself as the island's largest landowner. He played a pioneering role in the development of the local sugar industry. According to a financial statement he filed in April 1839, Leguillou controlled 2,800 *cuerdas* of land on Vieques and had brought under cultivation 327 of them, including 180 devoted to sugarcane. For the purpose of processing the cane, he had built a small factory at La Patience (modern Santa María) on the north-central coast. Moreover, from the terms of the agreement among Bourdillon, Groult and Legouillou, the La Patience plant was to be the prototype for the one to be constructed for the *Sucrerie Marquisat de Saint-Jaques*. Although additional documents detailing the location and structural aspects of the plant on Bourdillon's property were not available, archival records merely indicate that it was situated somewhere in Barrio Punta Arenas (Rivera Martínez 1967; Bonnet Benítez 1976).

The cultural resource survey apparently identified the site of the *casa hacienda* of the Marquesado sugar plantation, and that the basic layout of the residential area was devised back in c. 1840 by Leguillou and/or Groult. It also may have served, subsequently, as the *casa hacienda* of the Resolución plantation, when Marquesado was absorbed, together with a number of other fairly small farms, into that one larger estate. The structures present at the site rank among the oldest surviving colonial structures on Vieques, and the oldest Navy-owned industrial site on the island, the oldest factory on the west end, and one that retains a good deal of integrity.

CONCLUSION

Data collected from the archaeological investigations support the historic period literature concerning the settlement of Vieques Island and provided a framework for further study of the historic properties located by the survey. The island was settled for agricultural exploitation and divided into several small haciendas or agricultural estates. These haciendas and associated sugar

mills (*centrales*) were supported by agricultural farm laborers (including slaves) who generally lived in small villages, hamlets, or the more numerous homesteads scattered throughout the island.

Structures associated with the haciendas (e.g., *quintas* and *centrales*) dominated the rural landscape of Vieques, and the owners of these estates formed the upperclass of Vieques society. The remains of these haciendas still document the riches earned utilizing the agricultural labor of a rural population.

These laborers lived in small homesteads. The remains of these homesteads were found to contain locally made brick, stone foundation rubble, cisterns, cement slabs, domestic refuse, and agricultural implements. Modern remains were found at a small number of homestead sites. Fruit trees, flowering trees, and domestic house plants were still growing at several of these sites. The locations chosen for these homesteads generally were hilltop sites in the vicinity of *quebradas* and unpaved dirt roads. The period of occupation of these sites dated from the late eighteenth century to 1940.

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Note: Portions of this report were published in *Cultural Resource Reconnaissance Survey for the Vieques Naval Reservation*, prepared by the authors for the Department of the Navy, Atlantic Division, Naval Facilities Engineering Command, Norfolk, Virginia in December 1984. Presently, the senior author, Dr. Michael A. Cinquino, is employed by Panamerican Consultants, Inc., in their Buffalo Office.

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**Table 1. Historic sites discovered on the Vieques Naval Reservation (VNP)
by barrio**

BARRIO	HISTORIC SITES(#)	HISTORIC SCATTERS(#)
Puerto Diablo	15	31
Puerto Ferro	6	11
Florida	1	1
Llave	13	9
Mosquito	5	1
Punta Arenas	6	1
Total	46	54

(Source Tronolone et al. 1984)

Table 2. Area of barrio divisions and population statistics for Vieques Island

Barrios (Hectares)	1845	1899	1910	1920	1930	1935	1940
Isabel Segunda (59)	0	2,646	3,158	3,158	3,101	2,816	2,678
Puerto Diablo (4,782)	*	*	854	584	505	687	548
Puerto Ferro (2,232)	*	879	638	1,041	839	776	570
Florida (1,216)	*	*	565	603	775	659	1,253
Puerto Real (2,056)	*	1,344	1,930	2,335	2,128	1,747	1,785
Llave (1,639)	*	1,069	1,110	1,715	1,583	1,683	1,776
Mosquito (636)	*	*	748	847	818	785	851
Punta Arenas (1,185)	*	*	922	922	1,102	833	901
Total (138,905)	1,039	5,938	9,925	11,651	10,582	10,037	10,362

*No data available

(Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Puerto Rico, Population, Washington Government Printing Office, 1899-1940, Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration; Bonnet Benitez 1976-11; and Junta de Plancificacion, Urbanization y Zonificacion de Puerto Rico, 1947:14)

Note: Hectares are recorded to the nearest whole number

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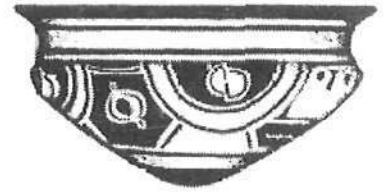
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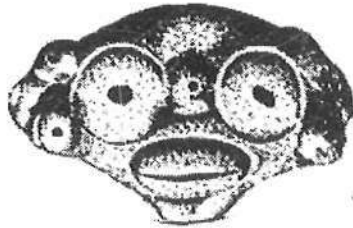
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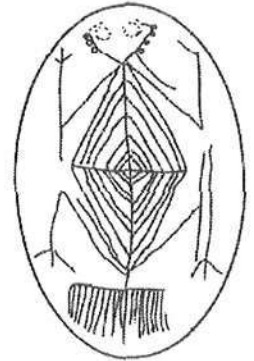
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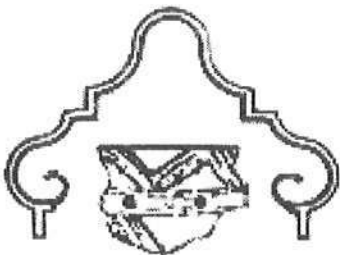
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