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# WOMEN WORKERS

## *In Paraguay*

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR  
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## LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR,  
WOMEN'S BUREAU,  
*Washington, Oct. 18, 1946.*

SIR: I have the honor to transmit a report on women workers in Paraguay. It is a product of the project of cooperation with the other American republics which is part of the program of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Scientific and Cultural Cooperation of the State Department.

The survey was made and the report written by Mary M. Cannon, Chief of the Women's Bureau International Division, who visited Paraguay as Inter-American specialist of the Bureau.

Respectfully submitted.

FRIEDA S. MILLER, *Director.*

Hon. L. B. SCHWELLENBACH,  
*Secretary of Labor.*

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# Women Workers in Paraguay

## INTRODUCTION

Twice in less than 70 years Paraguay was torn by wars which depleted the nation's natural resources and decimated its population. The road to national recovery is slow and Paraguayans know what it means to rebuild a country without sufficient manpower.

For Paraguay is literally a "land of women." Estimates vary, but women outnumber men at least five to one, possibly eight to one. With a population of more than 1,000,000 less than 175,000 are males. Any account of Paraguay must therefore of necessity recognize that women are the labor supply and that their position is probably unique in the Western Hemisphere.

Tourists do not overrun Paraguay, although foreigners who visit the country usually come away with a strong enthusiasm for the dignity of its people and an appreciation of the potential value of its natural resources. One of the two inland countries of South America, Paraguay depends on the Paraguay-Paraná river system for most of its commercial traffic. The 935-mile trip from Asunción, the capital, to Buenos Aires takes 4 days by steamer, 5 hours by air.

The Republic of Paraguay is slightly larger than California and lies about two-thirds within the temperate zone, one-third within the tropical zone. Its climate resembles that of Southern Florida but is more subject to stimulating changes. The average annual temperature ranges between 70° and 74°. The Gran Chaco in the western part of the country is open savannahs and dense forest, but the eastern part is rich farming and cattle-grazing country with areas of valuable forests. Not only do most of the people live in the eastern section, about one-fifth of them live in the four chief cities, and more than 100,000 live in Asunción alone. Paraguay has the smallest population of any country in South America.

At one time or another Paraguay has waged war with all the countries that surround it—Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia. In the López War of 1864-70, Paraguay fought Uruguay as well as Argentina and Brazil. In the final years of that war boys of 12 and old men of 70 were called into military service, and the civilian population was completely mobilized to give the army full support. A cholera epidemic added to the disaster by taking a heavy toll of the army and civilian population. When the war finally ended in 1870 few able-bodied men were left, and historians claim that Paraguay had lost over four-fifths of her population. Most of the survivors were women and small children.

Not until 1920 did the population reach the level of 1860, but women remained in the majority. War with Bolivia over the famous "Green Hell" of the Chaco broke out in 1932 and lasted until 1935. The loss of men this time was proportionally as great as that of France in the First World War.

## WAR AND THE POSITION OF WOMEN

The nation survived these disasters because the women worked with remarkable endurance and often considerable skill, at whatever tasks had to be done. They still do. Women are the farmers, the shopkeepers, the factory workers, the school teachers, and in many instances they are the mainstays of the family. As one North American who had lived several years in Asunción observed, "To all intents and purposes a matriarchy prevails in Paraguay. Women's position vis-à-vis men is one of respect and tenderness mixed with a complacent conviction that women should do the work and shoulder all family responsibilities. Women exert a tremendous influence on the men." Women of higher-income families do not, as the poorer women, "do all the work," but they exercise great influence.

Ask any well-to-do Paraguayan woman, "When, in recent years, did attitudes begin to change noticeably concerning women's place in the social and economic life of the country?" The immediate reply is always the same, "After the Chaco War." During the 3 years of the war (1932-35) women of Asunción, led by the wife of the man who was then President, broke many traditions by working all hours of the day and night at Red Cross centers and hospitals caring for the sick and wounded. Women of good families did not hesitate to leave their homes at night to meet incoming hospital trains and boats. They took convalescents into their homes after they were discharged from the hospitals and cared for them until they were able to return to the army or to civilian life. This volunteer work, the women say, gave them new confidence in themselves and proved their abilities to others. One important consequence has been the matter-of-fact acceptance of regular employment outside of their homes for young women of higher education and family prestige. No longer is there a stigma attached to such work.

The poorer women, many of whom are descendants of the Guaraní Indians who lived on the land many years before the Spaniards arrived, cultivated all the crops during the Chaco War years, supplied the army and civilian population with food and clothing, and actually increased Paraguay's agricultural exports. Paraguayans of all classes proudly recount how the women of the market place set aside each day a portion of their produce for the soldiers and refused to sell it to civilians. The Guaraní women worked doubly hard, but the Chaco War did not mark any significant change in their status. Spanish codes of conduct had never been followed by Guaraní women, since their own traditions had always permitted them much more freedom and prestige.

### GUARANÍ BACKGROUND

The Guaraní Indian heritage is sharply evident in present-day Paraguay and must be given attention in any review of the country and its people. The word "Guaraní" means warrior, and the Guaranís have a tradition of bravery and disciplined courage. An agricultural people, the Guaranís fortunately had no gold or silver to provoke the more ruthless Spanish conquistadores, and perhaps for

that reason they escaped the fate of other Indian nations. Authorities seem to agree that the Guaraní conquered their Spanish masters as much as they were conquered by them.

The Paraguayan population shows an extraordinary degree of homogeneity. There is a complete intermingling of Spanish and Guaraní ancestry in the majority of the people. The pure-blooded Indians live for the most part in the Chaco. There is no "white oligarchy" as in some other countries of the hemisphere.

One of the most unusual survivals of the pre-conquest era is the Guaraní language. It is still the favorite spoken language of the people and is understood throughout the country, although Spanish is the official language. The story goes that even the most sophisticated Paraguayans, meeting in a foreign country, always talk together in Guaraní.

The Guaraní attitude toward women has left a permanent mark on Paraguay. A well-known Paraguayan author and woman leader summarized many of the outstanding customs of the Guaraní with respect to women in an article, "Condición Social de la Mujer Guaraní," published in the February 1941 issue of the Buenos Aires *Revista Geográfica Americana*. According to this writer:

Since they [Guaraní women] were never idle, they acquired a reputation of being oppressed by work; on the other hand even though they worked hard, their position was superior to that of women now. Historians say the Guaraní women were beautiful and had a certain air of superiority. The poise and self-control characteristic of the Guaraní people were strongly manifested in the women.

Women decided by their vote a tie in the selection of the chief. They were consulted about plans for war and their advice was followed. They shared with the men the dangers of combat and carried supplies of food to the front.

One historian found the Guaraní women in a superior position and enjoying more liberty than that which Queen Isabella gave to the women of Spain.

The practice of magic was the common office of both sexes. Women treated injuries, cured illnesses, practiced medicine more than men.

Young women could choose their husbands, even from the sons of the chiefs; there were no social distinctions.

The cultural heritage of Paraguayan women flows from two sources, Guaraní and Spanish. Many of the contradictions have not yet been resolved.

## SPANISH BACKGROUND AND EARLY INDEPENDENCE

Paraguay's relationships with Spain differed from those of any of the other colonies, and she even secured her independence without bloodshed in 1811. In search of a "northwest passage" to the mines of Peru and Bolivia, many explorers made their way up the Río de la Plata-Paraná-Paraguay river system. Some forts were built and a series of settlements were established along the Paraguay River. Asunción, the first permanent settlement, was founded in 1535, and is one of the oldest cities in South America.

For nearly a century and a half there was another important force within the country—the Jesuits, who played a dominant role in Paraguay from 1609 until they were expelled in 1769. They established colonies, known as "reducciones," which formed a powerful autocratic "state within a state." The purpose was to "reduce" the Guaraní Indians to civilization, hence the name "reducciones." Each "reducción" was ruled by two priests, a religious leader and a secular

leader, and at the height of their power the Jesuits had 32 of these colonies with some 150,000 willing Guaraní subjects.

The Guaranís were taught agriculture, weaving, carving, metal working, and some painting. Under the Jesuits they built handsome churches, learned to make guns and ammunition, and established an export trade in "yerba mate," the Paraguayan tea which became the popular beverage of several South American countries. Probably one of the most lasting contributions of the Jesuits was that they made of Guaraní a written language. In their libraries were about 1,000 books in the native tongue.

Following the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1769 other priests and administrators tried to carry on but failed. Within a quarter of a century the churches were falling into ruin, the orange trees and yerba mate plantations had returned to jungle, and nearly a million head of cattle were lost.

Ideas of freedom and independence had grown up outside the Jesuit colonies. Paraguay was the scene of one of the first popular uprisings against the Spanish crown. "The authority of the people is superior to that of the king himself," was the battle cry of the "comuneros" (men of the people) who held out against Spanish officials from 1721 to 1735.

Paraguayans, however, refused to join with the revolutionary "junta" of Argentina in demanding independence from Spain. They fought off an expeditionary force sent by the junta in 1810 to persuade them to join a confederation of La Plata states. Captured Argentine prisoners convinced the Paraguayans of the benefits of liberation but failed to persuade them to join forces with the other colonies against Spain. Instead, Paraguay simply cut itself off from Spain without bothering to fight and set up a self-governing council which included the Spanish Governor as one of the members.

Within 5 years Dr. José Rodríguez de Francia ("El Supremo") had made himself an absolute and ruthless dictator. To isolate Paraguay and establish its economic self-sufficiency he closed the post offices, stopped foreign trade, encouraged agriculture and industries. Subjected to his tyrannical cruelties, still Paraguay at the death of "El Supremo" in 1840 was consolidated and prosperous. His successor, Carlos Antonio López, recognized by the Paraguayan people as one of their best presidents, reopened the doors of the country to its neighbors, improved commerce and education, sent Paraguayan citizens to Europe in order to study governmental matters, and brought European professors to Paraguay. Under his government the first constitution was adopted, the first railroad was built, and the progress of the country was improving in many ways when he died two years before the end of his second 10-year presidential term. His son and successor, Mariscal Francisco Solano López, plunged his country into the tragic war with its three neighbors, and the reliable economic prosperity and stability Paraguay had obtained was quickly dissipated. As a result of the efforts toward internal peace of its first dictator, and the wars provoked by its third, Paraguay during a third of the nineteenth century was untouched by the political and cultural ideas of Europe which so strongly influenced many other South American countries.

## RESOURCES FOR INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT

Agriculture has been and continues to be the basis of Paraguay's economy. As already indicated, the climate and soil of the eastern part of the country are particularly favorable for farming, livestock, and forest products. The principal industries are closely related to these products, particularly beef, hides, quebracho, timber, cotton, tobacco, sugar, and rice.

Industrialization is still in the beginning stages, but manufacturing is increasing in variety and volume. Meat packing and the processing of animal byproducts account for considerably more than half of the total manufactures. Preserved meats, meat concentrates, hides, animal fats, and tallow are the standard products. Some of these are prepared for export.

There is a diversity of smaller establishments for canning fruits, preserves, and fruit juices and for manufacturing shoes and leather goods, cigarettes, matches, perfume, soap, furniture, and general woodwork. The output of these factories goes into the domestic market almost exclusively.



WORKERS IN KNIT-GOODS SHOP

The textile industry may climb to a leading position as a national industry, although it still is too new and too small to supply domestic needs. Plans for further expansion had to be curtailed during World War II because of the difficulty of securing additional equipment. Four large mills produce cotton yarn, burlap, duck, canvas, and other types of coarse cloth. Knitted goods are made in smaller shops. Several moderate-sized woolen mills are equipped for spinning and weaving. Silk weaving on a modest scale was begun with one establishment in 1939.

Paraguay has no heavy industry such as steel, and it is not likely that any will develop, because of the inadequate supply of essential raw materials. The main industrial objective is to fill domestic consumer needs insofar as possible. With the establishment of these consumer-goods industries, more and more women are being drawn into factory work. This is true, not only because there is a shortage of men, but because consumer-goods industries, i. e., textiles, food processing, shoes, tobacco, etc., in all countries employ a large percentage of women. Paraguayan industries are no exception.

### WOMEN IN INDUSTRY

The Inter-American specialist of the United States Women's Bureau visited a number of industrial establishments in Paraguay selected by the director of the Paraguayan National Department of Labor as representative of woman-employing industries. Paraguayan industries are not large-scale enterprises; but, as might be expected, women are found in large proportions in almost every type of plant and are employed on a variety of jobs. Most of the women industrial workers are young.

#### Numbers Employed

Of the industries visited, two meat-packing plants had the largest number of employees; in one plant two-fifths of the workers were women, in the other, one-half. Although employing fewer persons, each of the four textile mills visited had a higher proportion of women employees; taking the four mills together, 86 percent of the total number of persons employed were women.

The work in the meat-packing plants is seasonal and, therefore, employment fluctuates with the work at hand. In the busy season one of the plants employs from 1,400 to 1,600 persons. The other plant employs as many as 1,200, of whom 50 percent are women, in the busy season, and maintains a skeleton crew in the off season.

*Employment in 7 manufacturing plants visited by Women's Bureau representative, by industry and product*

Industry and product	Total employees	Women	
		Number	Percent of total
Meat packing:			
Beef extract, canned beef.....	1,500	600	40.0
Corned beef, brisket, tongue, etc.....	600	300	50.0
Textiles:			
Cotton bags, canvas cloth.....	400	370	92.5
Woolen yard goods, civilian and army blankets, ponchos.....	175	150	85.7
Wool and cotton ponchos, blankets, woolen yard goods.....	140	105	75.0
Knitwear, cotton socks, sweaters.....	36	24	66.7
Match factory and print shop:			
Matches, pamphlets, playing cards.....	130	90	69.2

#### Jobs on Which Women Are Employed

Women were observed at work on such jobs as they ordinarily perform in consumer-goods industries. In one meat-packing plant women were trimming meat, some were cutting meat for canning, and others

were working in the casing room. At machines they were shaping the cans and soldering. In the canning room they were doing a variety of jobs, such as packing, weighing, and vacuum-sealing the cans. In this plant women were inspectors, and a few were supervisors.

In a match factory visited, which did some printing, women were working at the printing presses. They also worked at the waxing machines, and at cutting, hand-packing, and other processes involved in producing waxed matches.

The small knit-clothing shop had women operators on the smaller hand-propelled knitting machines and sewing machines, and at hand-finishing, but not on the large hand-propelled machines.

### Hours and Wages

The 8-hour day and 48-hour week were generally observed, but there were exceptions to both. One plant had a shorter workweek, while in another employees worked more than an 8-hour day when the work demanded.

Two plants were on a 24-hour schedule of three 8-hour shifts. In one, some women were employed on the night shift.

Climate as well as custom determined somewhat unusual shift schedules. During the hot months, for example, one plant worked from 6 a. m. until 2:30 p. m., with a half-hour for lunch at 11 a. m. In one meat-packing plant women began work at 3:30 and 4 o'clock in the morning and left at noon, the next shift coming on at noon and working until 8 p. m. In one textile mill employees worked an 8-hour day in two separate 4-hour periods. When this plant was visited the workers who had put in 4 hours from 6 to 10 a. m. were returning at 6 p. m. to work the second 4 hours.

Wages are not high in relation to living needs. At the plants visited, wages ranged from 104 pesos to 400 pesos a day.<sup>1</sup> Women averaged 200 pesos a day in one textile mill. In another mill the women started on beginners' jobs at 144 pesos a day, advancing as they became more efficient to earnings of 160 to 200 pesos a day. On the looms women earned 300 and 400 pesos; job vacancies for weavers were filled from the ranks of winders and other lower-paid jobs.

Hourly and daily rates were paid in meat-packing plants. One plant gave this report on wages:

The work is divided into three classes: Women in the first class earn 14.50 pesos an hour, or 116 pesos a day; in the second, 14 pesos an hour, and in the third, 13.50 pesos. Time and a half is paid for overtime. A forelady who has been with the company for 12 years receives 8,500 pesos a month.

### Plant Conditions

The plants are fairly new and were built with large windows providing air and natural light. However, the buildings did not have ventilation systems equal to the problems created by the industrial processes. Some of the workrooms in the meat-packing plants and the textile mills were too hot for sustained worker efficiency. A new cotton mill was operating some departments without any ventilation other than large windows with the result that excessive amounts of cotton lint were on the floor, in the air, and on the machinery. The weaving room had humidifiers and less lint. Where the lint was

<sup>1</sup> At the time of the visit 1 United States dollar equalled 320 Paraguayan pesos.

thickest, some of the workers had tied gauze over nose and mouth for makeshift protection. At the request of the workers, management had ordered respirators. These, however, may be worn for only short periods and are an inadequate substitute in plants where the general exhaust systems, imperative in all textile mills, are difficult to install. The manager was aware of the need for a real solution to the problem and was investigating the possibility of installing a ventilating system.

Drinking-water facilities varied from fountains with cooled water to barrels with a common cup. One company had a well which supplied pure water for the entire community as well as for the factory.

Toilet facilities were fairly adequate and generally clean but there were no rest rooms. A 10-minute rest period was given morning and afternoon in one plant, and girls who were on more strenuous jobs were shifted every hour. Chairs or stools were not provided except where the work could not be done standing. Half-hour lunch periods were the rule except for those working split shifts.

Some women wore uniforms on the job in most of the plants and made a very good appearance. White uniforms or aprons and caps were worn in the meat-packing plants; very attractive uniforms, requested by the women themselves, were worn by the workers in the knit-goods shop. Only a few women in one textile mill wore uniforms; the managers said that the companies could not afford to furnish them to the workers because the employee turn-over rate was too high and most women could not afford to buy their own uniforms.

### **Health and Welfare Facilities**

Well-equipped medical and first-aid clinics were maintained by the two meat-packing plants. An attendant was on duty at all times, and a physician came several times a week. In addition to the medical certificates required by the Public Health Office both plants required preemployment examinations and an annual recheck for renewal of certificates. Both provided medical services and medicines for the workers, and one for its employees' families also. The match factory gave similar medical attention to its workers and their families and some assistance in case of hospitalization. One of the textile mills reported a health-aid plan.

Various employee welfare and benefit plans were in operation. The match factory had a retirement plan under which workers with 25 years of service received a pension from the company. After 10 years of service an employee, man or woman, received a gift of a small house and lot. The company had built schools and helped with the construction and maintenance of a clinic and hospital.

Two companies reported that they gave women workers maternity leave with pay before and after confinement and guaranteed their jobs on their return to work.

One of the meat-packing companies made loans to their workers for building small homes. More than 100 workers had borrowed from the company under this plan.

### **Absenteeism and Turn-over**

The reasons for absenteeism and turn-over were as varied as the plants here reported. No accurate records were kept and no actual figures were available. One textile mill was said to have difficulty

with beginners but had no special problem with more experienced women who had been with the company several years. Another textile mill had available "extra" employees who could be called in, but even so could not always man all of the machines. One meat-packing plant reported a high absenteeism rate among the women despite the fact that many of them were the family wage earners; the other meat-packing plant had little difficulty. Absenteeism and turn-over were low in the knitwear shop and the match factory where working conditions were better.

Several explanations were given for the amount of absenteeism. One theory was that women were less accustomed to factory work in Paraguay than in some South American countries and, according to some observers, consider it more dignified and therefore preferable, to work independently than to work in a factory for a daily wage. Other factors are the extreme heat in the summer, a long season, and the home responsibilities demanding the women's attention.

### Women in Trade Unions

Unions are not strong in Paraguay for thus far the labor movement is still in the beginning stages of its development. No particular study of women in trade unions was made by the Women's Bureau Inter-American specialist at the time of the visit, but reports on women's activities were gathered from several sources. In a textile mill which operated under a collective agreement, young women were members of a labor-management committee responsible for handling grievances and for increasing production. In another of the plants with a large percentage of women employees, where working conditions and employer-employee relationships were above average, the workers were organized and had a contract.

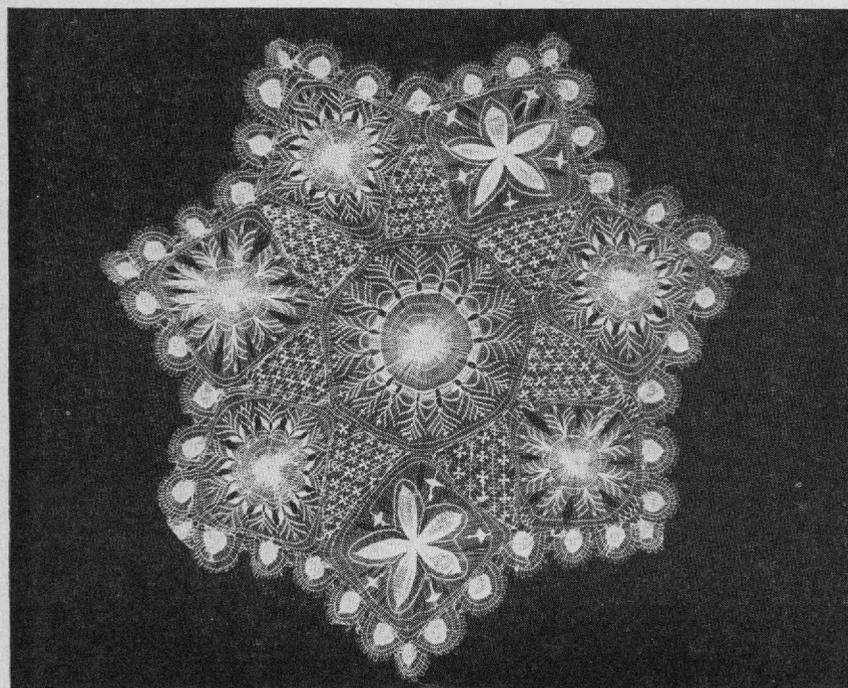
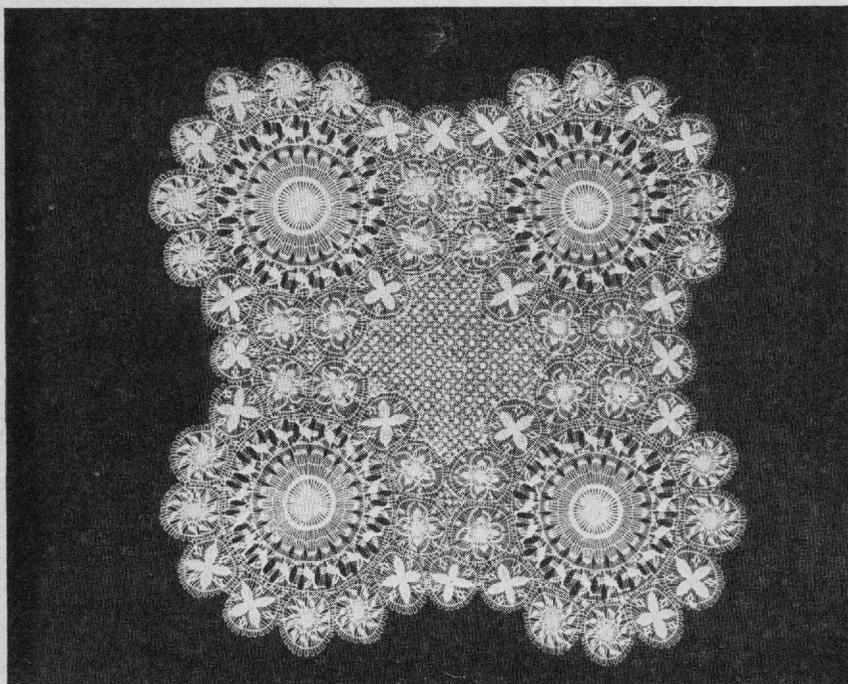
### HOME INDUSTRY—ÑANDUTÍ LACE

Paraguayans call the exquisite, delicate lace, which hundreds of women make in their homes, by the descriptive Guaraní name of ñandutí, meaning "cobweb." Ñandutí lace-making is a traditional craft handed down from mother to daughter. The sale of the lace generally supplements the family income. The prices asked are not low but in view of the time and skill required for making each piece cannot be considered unduly high.

The Guaraní women undoubtedly learned their lace-making from early Spanish missionaries. It is an imported craft, so thoroughly mastered and adapted that it has come to be typically Paraguayan. Ñandutí is made on frames from linen, cotton, or silk thread and in design imitates the spider web from which it takes its name. The fundamental pattern is circular; typical motifs are flowers, birds, and insects which are familiar to the women. The favorite designs are the flat flower of the guava tree, the honeysuckle, the rosemary, the scorpion, the tiny bird, and the parrot's beak. White predominates but occasionally pieces are made in pastel shades or in brilliant combinations of colors. Most of the pieces are round doilies the size of dinner plates or smaller, but handkerchiefs, collars, oblong and square pieces are also made.



ÑANDUTÍ LACE MAKERS IN THE VILLAGE OF ITAGUÁ



SAMPLES OF ÑANDUTÍ LACE

The most important center for ñandutí is the small, ancient, clean village of Itaguá near Asunción. Practically all of the women make lace in Itaguá. Grandmothers, mothers, daughters, sit on low chairs in patios or inside their white thick-walled houses working for hours over the lace frames in their laps. The lace may be purchased in shops where Paraguayan handicrafts are sold, or from women and girls who bring a variety of pieces into Asunción to sell on the hotel steps, at the river-boat docks, at the airport, or in the homes of customers.

## LABOR AND SOCIAL SECURITY LEGISLATION

Labor legislation in Paraguay had its real beginning in 1925. The only labor law that is on record before that date dealt with labor-management relations in the lumber camps, in the "yerba mate" (Paraguayan tea) plantations. On the statute books of Paraguay are laws establishing the 8-hour day, 48-hour week, 1 day-of-rest in 7, certain legal holidays, maternity benefits, and authority to set minimum wages.

All factories, shops, and business houses (with some necessary exceptions) must close on Sundays and legal holidays. This is one of the country's oldest labor laws, in effect since 1925.

### Minimum Wages

The machinery for fixing minimum wages for all workers in Paraguay was provided for by decree (law No. 620 of October 2, 1943), which states that all workers regardless of sex or nationality are entitled to a minimum wage sufficient to satisfy their normal requirements for food, housing, clothing, health, transportation, culture, and "honest recreation." The decree applies to employees of the National Government, of municipalities, and of public service corporations, as well as to those of private enterprises.

The law provides for orders establishing wages on a graduated wage scale. The determination of these wages is supposed to take into account the cost of living for the worker's family (giving consideration to time and place) and, when necessary, the nature of the work performed. The minimum wage is defined as the minimum pay per legal workday for a worker 18 years of age or over.

Minimum wages for persons engaged in piecework or in home industries, according to this law, shall be such as will assure the worker remuneration equivalent to that paid for similar work at the time rate.

### Maternity Benefits and Social Security

Provision for maternity leave of 15 days before and 30 days after confinement was included in a law of December 1937. This law guarantees a woman her job upon her return and prohibits dismissal because of pregnancy.

The social security system adopted in February 1943 and modified in October and November of that year makes provision for maternity care and benefits, as well as for insurance against sickness, disability, old-age, industrial accidents, and occupational diseases. The plan is to extend coverage eventually to all employed persons, including agricultural and domestic workers.

Under the maternity benefit provisions, which apply to all women whether legally married or not, the woman is entitled to professional medical attention during pregnancy and confinement. She must go to the maternity clinic and must follow the prescriptions and directions given by the doctor in order not to have maternity and other benefits suspended. Also, she must not work for 21 days before or 40 days after confinement, and during that time she will receive from the social security fund 40 percent of the average wage or salary which she earned during the previous 3 months. Should she work during this rest period she forfeits her right to the social security payments.

Should the woman still not be able to work after the 40 days of leave following childbirth, she is entitled to sick benefits under the social security system; that is, she is entitled to 40 percent of her wages and medical attention for 26 weeks, which may be extended to 52 weeks in case of necessity.

The schedule of payments into the social security fund, as set forth in the law, is: Employee contribution, 3 percent of the weekly wage; employer contribution, 6 percent of the weekly pay roll; government contribution, 1½ percent of the weekly wage of each of the insured. Other provisions have been made for increasing the social security fund.

Until the social security system is in a position to provide an adequate number of medical clinics, all companies with 150 or more employees are required to furnish free medical treatment for their workers. The same requirement is made of smaller companies if the National Department of Health deems it necessary.

### **Labor Department**

The National Department of Labor, as a division of the Ministry of the Interior, was established by a law passed in 1936. The Labor Department is authorized to: establish a factory inspection service; investigate the working conditions of women and children and to make recommendations for the improvement of those conditions; set up a register of unemployed workers, and establish placement offices under the direct supervision of the Department; enforce sanitary regulations for the establishment of healthy working conditions. The Labor Department also concerns itself with labor-management disputes and issues regulations concerning trade unions.

### **WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE**

A large proportion of the people work the land, and in Paraguay that means that women are the farmers. Some women manage and a few own large farms. Comparatively few men have been available for agricultural work since the López war over three-quarters of a century ago.

The red soil is rich and yields at least two crops a year. Enough grain is produced to meet national needs, and the sugarcane, tobacco, and cotton raised account for over a fourth of the nation's total exports. Mention has already been made of the fact that during the Chaco War of the 1930's the women on the farms produced enough not only to feed the army and civilian population but actually to increase agricultural exports.

Women market their farm products as well as raise them. Those who live near enough to the cities come on foot or by burro with their garden produce and poultry. In the market place everything is "woman's work," including cutting and weighing meat.

### WOMEN IN THE PROFESSIONS

Women are represented in all the leading professions and, it was reported, do not encounter special difficulties in practicing their professions in Paraguay, as they do in some other countries. An increasing number of young women are enrolling in the professional schools of the National University, some of them from outside Asunción. The first women graduated from the university school of law at the turn of the century. In 1942 a young woman received one of the prizes awarded to the four best students of the medical school.

The 1942-43 enrollment in the professional colleges of the university indicates the trends in the interests of these future professional women. The school of dentistry had enrolled the largest number of women—86. A close second was the school of medicine with 76, of whom 33 were registered in the school for midwives. Chemistry and pharmacy had 44 women. Six women were taking the recently established 7-year course in the physical sciences and mathematics, and two of them were in their fourth year.



NORMAL-SCHOOL TEACHERS

### Teachers

As in most countries, the largest group of professional women are the teachers. No statistics are available, but it is estimated that 95 percent of the teachers of Paraguay are women. Normal schools train most of the teachers but some lawyers, doctors, and members of

other professions find their way into teaching in public and private secondary and normal schools.

Women hold administrative positions in the educational field. Some of them are directors of girls' high schools and of coeducational normal schools; they are also municipal and national school inspectors. Women direct as well as teach in the night schools, primary, secondary, and commercial schools.

Aside from their immediate teaching responsibilities, some of the teachers have been working to raise professional standards. The director of the girls' high school in Asunción was president of the teachers' association. One woman educator, who was director of the normal school in Asunción until her recent retirement, served on the National Council of Education.

### **Social Workers and Nurses**

As recognized professions, social work and nursing are still somewhat new. The School for Social Workers and Public Health Nurses was established within recent years. By 1942 nineteen girls had completed the course and were working in such institutions as the children's hospital, the workers' hospital, the tuberculosis clinic, the public school medical service, and the national maternity hospital.

### **Doctors and Pharmacists**

There were 12 women physicians in Asunción but not all of them were engaged in full-time practice. Some were teaching courses related to their technical training. Several were directors of first-aid and medical clinics.

A number of women pharmacists have made outstanding records. A young woman who was chief of pharmacy in the National Department of Health was awarded a fellowship to study, in the United States, the medicinal qualities of Paraguayan plants. A woman was serving as inspector of pharmacies for the Health Department; another manages the pharmacy in the university; and still another is administrator of the Botanical Garden.

## **WOMEN IN GOVERNMENT SERVICE**

As may be seen from the brief résumé already given of the types of work being done by professionally trained women, a large portion of the positions are in government service. The key government jobs are held by men, although a few women are secretaries in the ministries. Women have held other positions, such as defender for delinquents in the juvenile court. A large number of women are clerical workers in the municipal and national governments.

## **WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS**

Women of Paraguay, in accordance with tradition, carry on charity work under the sponsorship of the Catholic Church, as do women of other South American countries, but activity in other kinds of women's organizations is limited to a small group. Various charity institutions and the Red Cross absorb the interest of most of the women who have time for volunteer work.

In addition to the traditional organizations, there are other groups of particular interest. The "Consejo de Mujeres" (Council of Women), a relatively new group, is organized into committees each of which is responsible for promoting a particular phase of the council's educational program. The committee on temperance has been the most active.

The program of "Acción Católica" (Catholic Action) in Paraguay resembles that of other South American countries and is organized by parishes. The groups are set up on an age, sex, and occupational basis. Special educational activities are carried on among workers.

A family welfare society, known as "Sor Josefa Bourdette—Obra de Beneficencia a Domicilio," is the unique work of a tireless woman of indomitable will and determination. She founded the organization and continues to direct it, in spite of her poor health, with the aid only of volunteers and a member of the Catholic clergy acting in an advisory capacity. Its purpose is to give material and moral assistance to needy families. Efforts are made to rehabilitate and hold families together, to help the wage-earning members find employment, to keep the children in school. The active members of the society make home visits, report for consideration cases that need help, and raise funds for carrying on the work.

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With all of its long history, Paraguay remains a frontier country. It has substantial natural wealth waiting to be developed. Not the least of its resources is the courage and unbreakable spirit of the Paraguayan people in facing repeated national disaster.

The women of Paraguay, as women of no other country in the Western Hemisphere, have had an important part in the building and rebuilding of their country. Undoubtedly the future will see Paraguayan women making vital contributions to the social, economic, and political life of the nation and the hemisphere.