

## Book Reviews

*Narciso Rabell Cabrero (1873-1928):*

*Naturalista y Servidor Público Pepiniano – Biografía y Notas Genealógicas*

by Ángel M. Nieves-Rivera and Edgar J. Maíz López. 2014

Lulu Books. Mayagüez, Puerto Rico. 88 pp.

ISBN: 978-1-312-39047-8 (softbound, in Spanish)

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Textbook history teaches us the highlights, as seen by the authors. In doing so, the richness of the events through time and, sometimes, the real history, is missed. As those interested in delving deeper into what really happened uncover original documents, the true nature of events becomes evident.

In the case of the history of science in Puerto Rico, such is the case of the life of Narciso Rabell Cabrero (Licentiate in Pharmacy), a pharmacist by training, whose credentials were recognized both in Spain and the USA. Rabell Cabrero was also a scholar in numerous other areas of the natural sciences, such as paleobiology as well as botany, served as mayor of his native town, San Sebastián, and as a Member of the Junta de Síndicos (a governing board) of the University of Puerto Rico.

Using original material, sometimes including zealously guarded written documents and images from private collections, Nieves-Rivera and Maíz López outline numerous aspects of Rabell Cabrero's life, including his privileged education in western Puerto Rico. As I read the book, I remembered the many people I have met while doing field work who are passionate for the sciences and yet have another endeavor as their "regular" job. When the authors mentioned Salto Collazo, in San Sebastián, one of the collecting localities of Rabell Cabrero, I remembered my visit to that site and my memories acquired a greater meaning. Also, I imagined "don Narciso", as the authors refer to Rabell Cabrero, doing fieldwork in the limestone hills of northwestern Puerto Rico and could not but wonder if he may have come across amber, or fossilized resin, first mentioned for Puerto Rico, as far as I know, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century for that area of the island. When Nieves-Rivera and Maíz López revealed that Rabell Cabrero's communicated with some of the first American natural historians, I realized how were some of those "contacts" established and the subsequent valuable scientific exploration of the island Rabell Cabrero facilitated. Finally, it did not escape my attention the numerous references made by Nieves-Rivera and Maíz López to unavailable (perhaps forever-lost) documents and research

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specimens of potential importance to their research, as well as to the local “cofradías”, or cliques, that, sadly, often hamper scholarly endeavors everywhere.

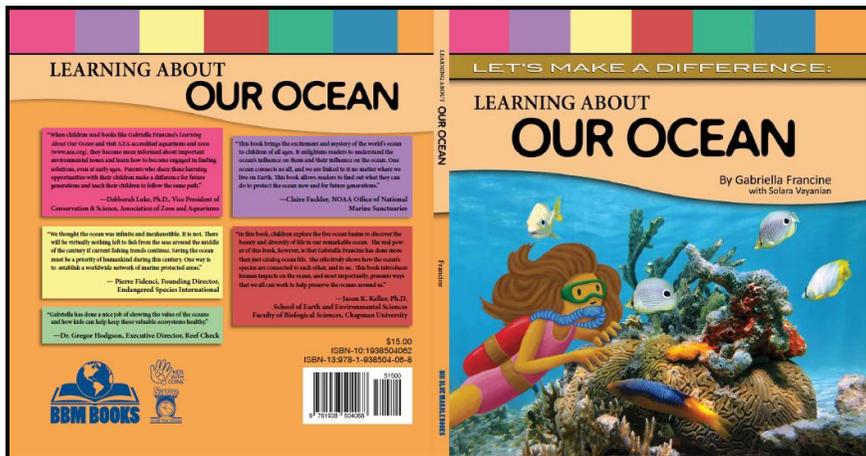
This book gave me valuable insights into a more textured history of science in Puerto Rico in late 19<sup>th</sup> century and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and should be a valuable addition to anyone interested in the nuances of the history of science.

**Acknowledgments**

I am profoundly grateful to authors Nieves-Rivera and Maíz López for their comments on a original draft of this book review.

***Let’s Make a Difference: Learning About Our Oceans***

by Gabriella Francine with Solara Vayanian. Illustrations by Phil Velikan. 2014  
 BBM Books. Newport Beach, California, USA. 29 pp.  
 ISBN – 10:1938504062, ISBN-13:978-1-938504-06-8



A few days ago, a medium size package came in the mail containing a lavishly colored, hard cover book. It was Gabriella Francine’s *Learning About Our Ocean: Learning About Our Oceans*, written in collaboration with Solara Vayanian and luridly illustrated by Phil Velikan. In 29 pages of cartoons and/or gorgeous tropical marine images, this children book (recommended ages 5 to 7) packs tons of information, highlighting life in the oceans, where biodiversity, particularly of invertebrates, is the highest on Earth. Huge creatures, from the blue whales that welcome readers as one opens the book, or the kelps (p. 4) to

the microscopic crustaceans that the freely diving girl is observing with a hand lens (p. 3), join the book as the actors and actresses in the drama of marine life. This book is about: 1) natural history, from which our love for nature begins, 2) marine ecology (e.g. photosynthetic organisms, such as algae, produce oxygen which is used also by non-photosynthetic organisms, such as animals, including people), and 3) importantly, about conservation biology. *Learning About Our Ocean* is filled with fun facts, such as the origin of the names of our oceans and about deceptively simple concepts, such as the analogy of ecosystems to puzzles. I prefer to compare ecosystems to a constantly-moving sort of puzzle, like the staircases of *Harry Potter's* Hogwarts. The last third of the book deals with practical applications of conservation marine biology, hence the name of this planned book series, *Let's Make a Difference*. There, Francine et al. encourage cleaning our beaches (p. 18), testing for water chemistry (p. 19), oceanographic research (p. 20), the role and development of women as scientists (p. 21-23), and the things that we all can do on behalf of our environmental awareness and to safeguard our environment (pp. 24-29). *Learning About Our Ocean: Learning About Our Oceans* includes an abbreviated list of organizations that promote the environment (p. 30), which is suitable for schoolteachers and anyone with passion for learning.

*Learning About Our Ocean: Learning About Our Oceans* is the first of a contemplated series of books on nature and this one certainly will get your attention. Wouldn't it be wonderful to find a sponsor so this book could be printed in non-English languages and give to less fortunate children so they can grow up learning to give to others?