

# Spanish Conservation Era (1824-1897)



1898  
Population of Puerto Rico  
953,200



**1824** – Alarmed by the extent of deforestation caused by government-sponsored farms, Governor Lieutenant General D. Miguel de la Torre issues the island's first conservation law, Circular No. 493. The law requires the planting of trees in order to stem harm to watersheds.



**1853** – By Royal Decree, two Spanish foresters are to survey, mark and manage Crown forests including the Luquillo forest.



FRANCISCO OLLER, La escuela del maestro Rafael Cordero, ca. 1890-92

**1876** – Spanish King Alphonso XII proclaims the Luquillo forest a forest reserve of 10,000 hectares (24,710 acres) with soil and water conservation and timber removal regulated and enforced by the "Inspección de Montes" (Spanish Forest Service), making it one of the oldest forest reserves in the Western hemisphere.

The newly formed "Inspección de Montes" submits a plan to regulate forest use on the island. The coastal mangrove forests are placed under the supervision of the "Inspección de Montes".



1876 – Inspección de Montes emblem

**1828** – Timber is reported to be abundant in the Luquillo Mountains.



**1839** – A Spanish Crown forest regulation is promulgated within Puerto Rico that requires permission from the government to cut down trees in vacant Crown land, prohibits clearcutting and calls for preservation of riparian (river valley) forests and the construction of a Forest Headquarters.

**1867** – First island-wide forest inventory performed by "Ingenieros de Montes" for the "Cuerpo de Montes" staffed by graduates of the Spanish Crown forestry school.



1867 – Cuerpo de Montes emblem

**1832** – Manuel Martínez Zercenán develops a silver and gold mine claim on the La Mina River.

**1870** – Forest Engineer, Juan Fernández Ledón publishes a forest inventory that covers 18,682 hectares. Exotic Eucalyptus trees (*Eucalyptus globulus*) are introduced from Australia into Puerto Rico by the "Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País" (Economics Society of Friends of the Country).

**1895** – A permit from the "Cuerpo de Montes de la Inspección de Montes" is required to extract timber from the Crown Lands in the Luquillo Mountains.



**1844** – A regulation by the Board for the Protection of Forests, Fish and Wildlife requires the appointment of Forest Guards, prohibits the burning of lands conceded by the Crown, and requires the planting of trees on the borders of Crown lands, and the reversion of such lands to the Crown if found in violation.

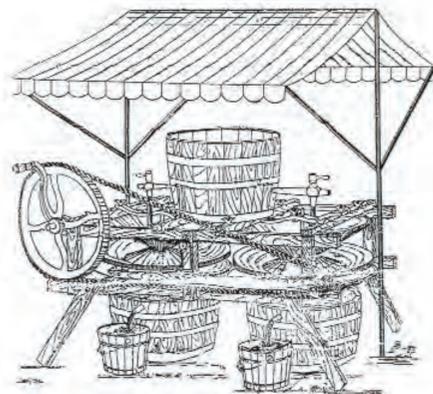
**1874** – Rafael de León, Mayor of Ponce, issues a circular describing the urgent need to conserve Puerto Rico's forests to avoid ruining the island's agriculture.

A total of 9700 hectares (23,969 acres) of heavily timbered forest remain in the Luquillo forest.

**1875** – Governor José Laureano Sanz publishes a decree that serves to regulate the utilization of the forests of Puerto Rico. The Ponce Agricultural Society imports forest tree seeds of various species to be used to plant forests thus improving the climate of the island.

**1886** – A water law is enacted that prohibits the cutting of trees in the sources and margins of rivers.

MAGUINA PARA EL LAVE DEL ORO



1832 – Gold washing device

**1853** – By Royal Decree, two Spanish foresters are to survey, mark and manage Crown forests including the Luquillo forest.



**1860** – An appropriation of Puerto Rican governmental funds for forest management was first approved. This appropriation appears in the public record in varying amounts until 1870, when due to lack of funds, the position of Forest Engineer is eliminated.

**1864** – American naturalist E.C. Taylor describes the Puerto Rican Parrot as "abundant in the eastern lowlands of the island."



**1885** – The 12,000 hectare (29,652 acre) reserve in the Luquillo forest is patrolled by one part-time guard, who in one year, presents a dozen trespass cases before the Mayor of Luquillo.

**1880** – Illicit timber extraction is eliminated in the Mameyes and Jiménez river valleys of the Luquillo Mountains.

**1873**  
The Spanish Government abolished slavery in Puerto Rico. Prior to this, approximately one-third of the population were slaves.

**1866** – Copper mining along the south border of the Luquillo mountains begins, but is abandoned in 1899 due to hurricane damage.

**1897** – Arbor Day is celebrated for the first time in San Juan, Puerto Rico.