

P.R.'s 1st female freedom fighter



Por Natalia de Cuba
De el San Juan Star
En Portfolio

Lunes 20 de octubre de 1997 pág. 30

She was perhaps the toughest lady of her time. María de las Mercedes Barbudo, born in San Juan in 1773 to a Spanish soldier and a mulata creole, became the first female *independentista* in Puerto Rico, managing to get herself jailed, expelled and be in more or less constant trouble for her rabble-rousing activities. She was also a clever businesswoman, who, in exile in Venezuela, gained such power and influence that her remains were placed

in the Cathedral of Caracas, an honor reserved only for the church hierarchy and the very rich.

There are no records of female independentistas gotten, if it weren't for Raquel Rosario Rivera and a chance, encounter with a dusty archive.

Rosario was in the General Archives doing research for her thesis on Venezuelan immigration to Puerto Rico in the years 1810 to 1848. Along the way she found reference to a political activist – Maria de las Mercedes Barbudo- who was found to be harboring political exiles from around the Caribbean.

Intrigued, Rosario finished her immigration research, published a book and then went to find out more about this titan of woman.

You can read about the life and times of Maria de las Mercedes Barbudo in Rosario's new book by the same name, now available in local bookstores. It includes illustrations and photos of the original documents that Rosario dug up in her research.

“I went to Spain four times, to Caracas and Curacao’ she said “I had to do a great deal of traveling to find the material”

She also began to live her material. The cover illustration is an original painting she did herself “I was inspired by a dream I had of her”, Rosario said “The most marvelous things happened while I was preparing this book.”

She also came across the cross-dressing Enriqueta Faber, a Frenchwoman who dressed as a man to become a doctor, and who served time in prison along with Barbudo. Quiet by chance Rosario found what be the only existing photograph of the prison where Barbudo was kept in Cuba.

Now Rosario is busy pitching her book the public. She published it herself, as she did another of her books. *“La Real Cédula de Gracias de 1815 y sus primeros efectos en Puerto Rico”*. Her Thies book is *“Los emigrantes llegados a Puerto Rico procedentes de Venezuela entre 1810-1848”*.

An associate professor of the Technical University College of the University of Puerto Rico, Rosario Holds degrees from UPR, Center of Advanced Studies and a doctorate in philosophy and letters from the University of Valladolid.

“Maria de las Mercedes Barbudo: Primera mujer independentistas de Puerto Rico 1773-1849”. Is available at selected local bookstores.