

BIOGRAPHY

DR. SOLON NUÑEZ FRUTOS

The Solon Nuñez Medical Doctor is an example that a human being that holds clear ideals could achieve practically any goal, and his biography is to be used as a model so nobody feel themselves never dejected by the hard experiences of life. To know the achievements of this big little man is a commitment for every Costa Rican.



that will give them four grandchildren, two of them were to follow his steps as a Medical Doctor and Surgeon.

It is clearly understandable that a poor Costa Rican would never become a doctor at the beginning of the XX century, to study so it was necessary to go out of the country and preferably to Europe, something impossible for any person with that lack of resources.

Solón Nuñez was born on April 29th, 1881, from a poor family, and when he was attending to schools's second grade his mother passed away, so he and his four brothers were spread among their relatives. Solón got to live at Desamparados city and was raised by a maternal aunt and her husband. Everything would make to think that that barefoot child would become into another peasant in the XIX century's Costa Rica.

However, the fortune appears and he won the lottery. He could have spent that money over, buying luxuries he never had, or to finish his law studies, but he, as a teacher watching close the poverty and calamities of the Costa Rican people, delighted with the prize and seeing the possibility of making his secret yearning come true. Before the astonishing of family and friends, he notify that he would use the money to study medicine. Unfortunately, the only he owned was the earned amount, that had to last all the years of his studies.

Against the age manners, when the youth used to help older people at work, Solón finished the primary school, and to do so he had to travel the last two years in foot, between Desamparados and San José, because the local school had shutted down the 4th and 5th grades because of lack of funds. At the end of his primary school studies, Solón was the most outstanding student of his class, and the next year, thanks to a scholarship program, he was admitted into the "Liceo de Costa Rica" High School, where again, showed his intelligence and dedication. These years he had to walk carrying his shoes on his hands, not only so they won't be spoiled, but to avoid them from getting dirty on the ten daily kilometres travel.

Unable to take his wife with him, he left her in Costa Rica while he went to Europe by ship, find out that the Medical School of Geneva where the most suitable one to his rigid and laconic budget.

Once he finished the high school he graduated as a teacher, and he and his relatives should had felt proud when he got a teacher position on the 1st school grade in Naranjo city, being soon promoted to Mata Redonda city under his own request, because he wished to be close to the Capital City to study law. On December 20th, 1906 he got married Miss Oliva Rojas Solórzano, his girlfriend, and together they shared more than 60 years of life, with which he would have two kids, a girl and a boy,

Once in Geneva he met the one that would become his benefactor and future friend, Dr. Ricardo Moreno Cañas. Due to the big sensibility of both to help their fellowmen, they went to the warfront during the First World War and layed down at Saint Louis de Lyon Hospital to attend the French army. Due to this epic act of altruism, the French Government grant them with "Las Palmas Académicas" Honor in 1933.

Back in his country, after being graduated on 1915 with excellent degrees, and being recognized his abilities by the Genevians teachers, he was welcome with big joy manifestations from

his compatriots from Desamparados. Probably, he was the first person with lack of resources that became a medical doctor from that town.

Once he established his private's office, he started to realize the big calamities that Costa Rica people complained and how difficult it was for many of them to get medical care access.

Because of that and being possible to get a scholarship from Rockefeller Foundation that was in Latin America fighting against the parasitize diseases that affected the population, he travelled to the United States to study Public Health.

Back again at his country and knowing the Costa Rican problems, he decided to undertake the fight against the parasitize diseases and gave completely him self to the Public Health, becoming the first National Hygienist and one of the main ones in Latin America.

In 1922 he became Subsecretary of the state at the Hygiene Office, where he started to impulse and strongly defend before the Costa Rican Parliament the creation of a Health Office Board (Ministry), ahead of his time, because at that time only Cuba had such a State Ministry Department.

In 1927 Doctor Núñez became the first Public Health Minister, and remain in that position until 1936 and then again, between 1943-1948.

From that Board he carried out a tireless work, because the national lawmaking was almost nonexistent and to join that, he has to defeat a great quantity of huge conflicts.

With an amazing enthusiasm he started to fight against tiredness, as they named the intestinal anquilostomiasis disease and he got from the Rockefeller Foundation a big amount of shoes to dress up the rural Costa Rican population. At the same time, he started a national campaign of latrinization, so he had to visit every corner of the country and to persuade the people to change the black wells into suitable toilets.

As a teacher, worried about the childhood from years before, he initiated programs to decrease the children mortality and in 1920 established children clinics and prenatal services, and at the same time a Dental Profilaxis Department and two Oculist Medical Doctors positions to look after the students from San José, Heredia and Alajuela, giving eyeglasses for free to them if they were poor. In 1935 he got a budget to

provided milk to the less fortunate children, decreed free medical care for teenagers and the donation – without any cost– of quinine medicine for students, teacher and safeguards staff. The Costa Rican Pediatric Association honoured him as the first Costa Rican eagerness worried for the National Childhood.

Another one of his crusades was the struggle against tuberculosis. In 1931 he addressed a decree to change the Tuberculosis Care Center naming Dr, Carlos Durán Sanatorium and considering the disease as mandatory report.

One of his biggest achievements was the creation of the Hygiene Code, national pride that later was copied for many other countries. The projects and sanitary law given since his public activities, were innovatives, not just at his time, but were useful as the basis for the future national medicine conception, like the Health Inspectors School. The teaching of good hygiene manners became a basic part of the Costa Rican's people education.

The doctor Núñez fought against the Malaria and venereal diseases origining free payment clinics and talking for the first time in the country about sexual education. Also in the leprosy field, he was innovative and his job became visionary giving permission to the sick peoples's relatives to visit them at the "Las Mercedes" Sanatorium and the visit of some leprosy sick people to their own homes.

The doctor Núñez died at San Jose on August 3rd, 1975, at 94 years old and that year the Caja Costarricense de Seguro Social created the Solón Núñez Clinic in Hatillo city, and in 1978 the Parliament declare him Meritoriuos of the Country, maximum honor a Costa Rican can dream to become. The National Communications Direction (CORTEL) immortalize him in 1992 in a mail seal.



Figure No. 1. Mail Seal of Doctor Solón Núñez.
Cortesy: Museo Filatélico.
Edificio Central de Correos de Costa Rica S.A.

The doctor Núñez's work was fecund, intense and without personal interest, he had to struggle against ignorance and lack of comprehension from many people and with all his achievements got a meager budget.

It is important to point out that the doctor Núñez had other traits besides his hygienist labor. His literary and journalistic writings revealed him as a great writer and would be good that the young medical doctors read his literature-scientific publications, like: Jesus and Tolstoi; Juan Montalvo; The Doctor Clodomiro Picado has died...; The Tosferine or the Epidemic Influenza (applicable on this time), My Hygienic Catechism; A Few Days in Lima; The Milk: The Best Food; The Medical Libraries of Hospitals; The Medical Socialization = The New Rich and the Wise Poor; and many others.

His oratory ability was so spectacular, that the Latinoamerica, Europa and United States forums recognized many times the dialectic of his speeches, even in Spanish, English or his loved French, language he spoke always with his closer friends: doctors Moreno Cañas, "Clorito" Picado and Calderón Guardia, with whom he shared his concern to take free care of sick Costa Rican people. The doctor Núñez filled Costa Rica with glory every time he went out of the country and his opinions were taken into consideration for the sanitary authorities of the countries he visited, becoming without any doubt an Universal Hygienist.

Must remain proof that he was a personal with irreproachable manners, a father and exemplary husband, that cultivated and enjoyed with every form of art. His enthusiasm, commitment and perseverance, together with his teaching and medical vocation, where probably the yeast to make him an extraordinary human being.

Recently the Costa Rican University Medical School placed his bust, on the entrance of its main building at Rodrigo Facio University City.

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Translated by: Verónica Solano Corella