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ASUNCION

PARAGUAY'S INTERESTING CAPITAL



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ASUNCION, PARAGUAY'S INTERESTING CAPITAL

ENDEAVORING to find a river route to the reputed rich lands of the Incas in Peru appears to have been one of the incentives that spurred early Spanish explorers up the practically unknown waters of the Plata, the Parana, and the Paraguay—sectional names of the great stream which affords to-day, as in past ages, a fluvial artery to the very heart of South America. Sebastian Cabot, not content with answering “the call of the wild” in North America, plunged deeper into the unknown in South America, and with his little band of wanderers touched the borders of the country we know to-day as Paraguay about 1526–27, or several years before Pizarro reached Peru. Cabot is therefore credited with the honor of being the first European to see Paraguay, although it appears that he never ascended the river as far as the site of Asuncion.

Subsequently Juan de Ayolas and Domingo Irala and their fellow explorers sailed up the Paraguay to a point where the eastern shore of the great river changes from lowlands to rolling hills and verdure-covered cliffs; where nature provided then, as at present, a vast lagoon or bay extending eastward from the main stream. Here the explorers halted and began to plant the seeds of civilization; here they met the Guaranís, who, in their primitiveness, offered comparatively little resistance, although it is related that the fiercer natives on the opposite side of the river proved to be more resentful.

Whence came the original inhabitants, the Guaranís, to the land of Paraguay is a question that has not been definitely settled. Like many other primitive peoples, tradition plays a prominent rôle as to their origin. To many the oft-told story of Tupi and Guaraní is familiar and fascinating; traditionally they were brothers somewhere in Brazil and they quarreled; Guaraní finally led his people far to the southward through the wilderness to a country known at present as Paraguay. There they prospered and multiplied; and, if imaginative, we may draw a mental picture of the meeting of the descendants of these people and the imposing Spaniards on the slopes of Lambaré near the still waters of the bay where picturesque Asuncion now stands.

The “Province of Paraguay” during the era of early exploration embraced the vast area east of the Andes and south of Brazil; but in

¹ By William A. Reid, Pan American Union staff.



A SECTION OF THE RIVER FRONT, ASUNCION, PARAGUAY.

Paraguay's capital and also the largest city of the Republic is situated on the east bank of the Paraguay River nearly 1,000 miles from the mouth of the Plata. Opposite Asunción the Paraguay is about 600 yards wide, but the bay, which extends eastward from the river and on which a large section of the capital is built, affords a harbor of far greater dimensions. The large structure seen on the left is now used for the various departments of the Federal Government.



WHARF AND RIVER AT ASUNCION.

This picture shows a phase of the shipping industry at Asuncion. The larger steamers at the wharf ply between Buenos Aires and carry many passengers in addition to large cargoes. The port of Asuncion is about 200 feet above sea level.



GENERAL VIEW OF A PART OF ASUNCION.

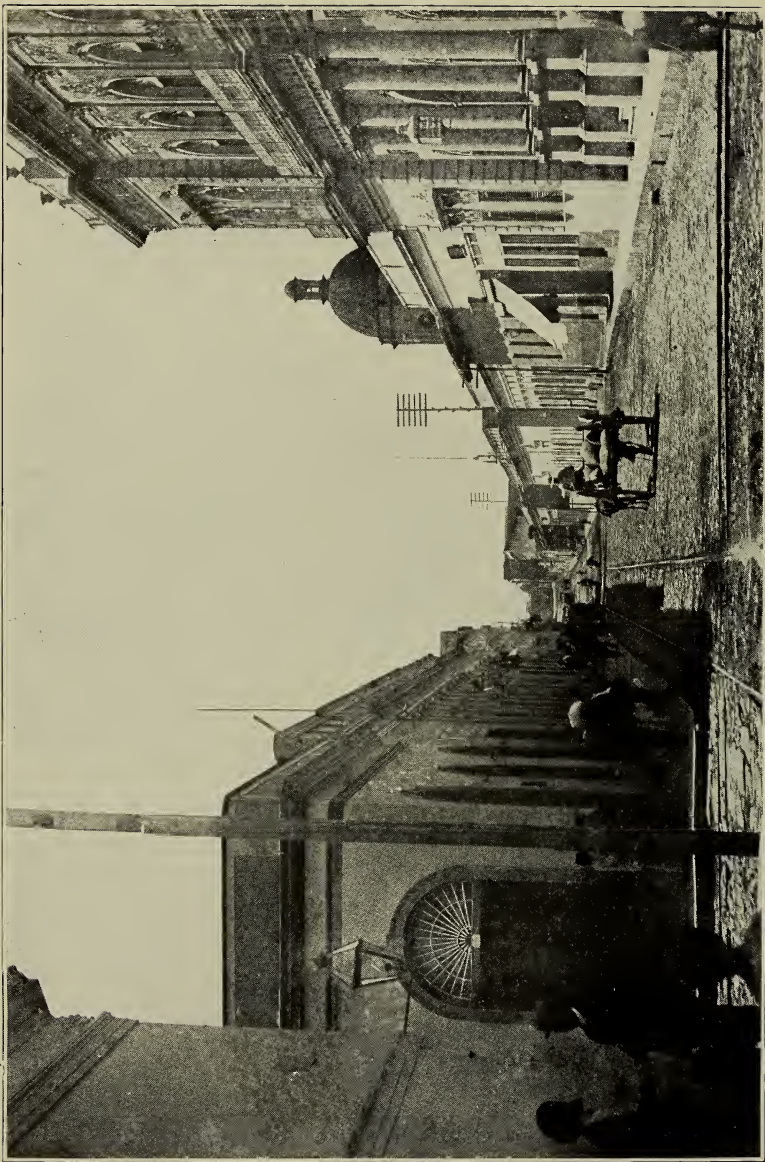
The city now has a population of about 90,000, and although immigration from European countries has been comparatively small in recent years, there are in the city many residents of European birth and a still larger percentage of Argentines, Uruguayans, Brazilians, etc. The picture was made from a central point looking westward toward the water front.

1617 by royal decree the region was divided into two provinces and the seat of government established at the newer town of Buenos Aires. Asuncion, somewhat like a far inland gateway to a still more remote and unknown region, was accessible by water and was frequently visited by daring explorers in quest of riches and adventure, and the place seems to have met the expectation of the wildest dreamers. History, romance, adventure, cruelty, oppression, and delight seem to have been liberally blended, so that many historians and scholars refer to Paraguay as the most romantic of all South American countries. No land could hardly pass through more vicissitudes; but we must leave the story of the country, the wonderful work and the expulsion of the Jesuits, the wars and unrest, the gallant fight against the combined forces of three neighboring nations, and other phases of growth, to the readers of historical books.

Passing rapidly onward, we note that the people of Paraguay declared their independence from Spain on August 14, 1811. The Spanish governor at that time, Velasco, being in sympathy with the movement, was chosen a member of the Junta or governing board. On October 1, 1813, a constitutional congress met in Asuncion, adopted a national flag, and vested the administrative power in two consuls. In 1844 the form of government was changed and a President elected for a 10-year term, Carlos A. Lopez being the first official to occupy the Paraguayan presidential chair. He was succeeded after a second term by his son, who died in 1870. Shortly thereafter the Government was reorganized and a new constitution proclaimed, which provides for a republican form of government with legislative executive, and judicial departments. Asuncion being the political capital as well as the country's chief commercial city, has witnessed stirring times in the gradual molding of a stable government.

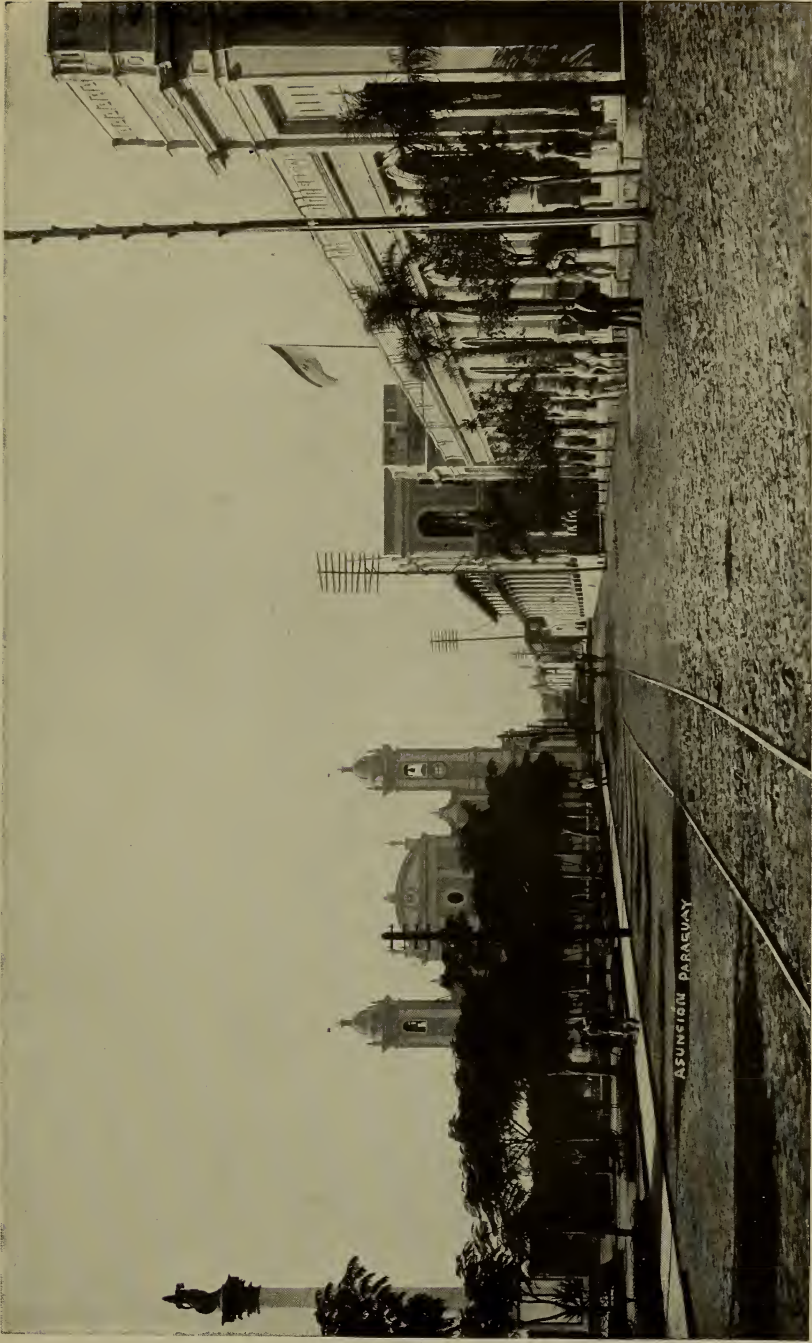
Asuncion, lying about 1,000 miles from the mouth of the Plata, was founded in 1536; and the fact that this event occurred on August 15—the day of the Assumption—gives rise to the city's designation. The construction of a crude fort, a result of the Ayolas-Irala expedition, formed a nucleus of settlement. Ayolas is said to have pushed onward up the Paraguay and never returned to civilization, while the place called Asuncion, with its few Spaniards and aborigines, became the pride of Irala and grew slowly, very slowly, through passing years.

The present-day Asuncion excites a rather queer curiosity, an indescribable interest akin to "the tang of the Orient," on those of us who have tarried within its confines and who are not in quest of the more modern phases of municipal development. It especially appeals to persons who are versed in the region's early history and who know of the soul-stirring events that have marked the city's growth. Asuncion is built largely on the bay which extends eastward from the Paraguay, but confluence of bay and river are so near the city



CALLE PALMA IN ASUNCION.

This picture affords a fair view of one of the older streets and the cobblestone paving still to be seen about the capital. We also have depicted here some of the newer and taller structures that are replacing the ancient one-story houses.



A CORNER OF PLAZA CONSTITUCION AND PARTIAL VIEW OF CATHEDRAL.

Over the tops of the trees one has a glimpse of the towers and upper part of the cathedral, one of the stately structures of the city.

that we may stand on the hills back of the city and see the movement of steamers bound up or down the river. Asuncion's streets were laid out in rectangular form and in the larger division of the city run approximately from northwest to southeast, and are crossed at right angles by those from opposite directions. Many city blocks are 240 feet square, while numerous streets are 45 or more feet wide, contrasting with the usual narrow streets of the average Spanish-planned municipality. Leading thoroughfares bear such names as Libertad, Presidente Carnot, Benjamin Constant, Igualdad, General Díaz, Bermejo, Rio Apa, etc., while some of the cross streets are known as 15 of August, 25 of November, Colombia, Independencia Nacional, Montevideo, United States, Oriente, etc., all of which are indicative of the patriotic tendencies of the people in perpetuating names of leaders of thought and action as well as notable dates in the country's history. Plazas Independencia, Uruguaya, and Patricios occupy prominent places in three different localities of the city, while Plazas de Armas and Constitucion, jointly covering a large area, are situated nearer the bay; still closer to the water's edge stands the famous palace built by the second López; not far away is the new wharf and customs building. From this oldest section of Asuncion the streets and houses have gradually extended backward to slightly higher ground. In a section known as Barrio Cachinga the streets are laid out nearly with the directions of the cardinal points. Topography is responsible for a good natural drainage which Asuncion has always enjoyed despite the fact that the more modern systems of sewerage have not been generally adopted. Dashing rains also help to keep the city clean and generally healthful.

Dwelling houses of Asuncion are largely one-story structures, but in recent years taller edifices have become more numerous. Ground, however, appears never to have been unduly expensive when homes were needed, so they are spread out rather than built upward. This style naturally lends itself to the ever-popular South American features of inner courts, fountains, and flowers. From the outside a home may appear extremely plain, but within its massive stone, brick, or adobe walls there is often a spaciousness in courtyards, corridors, living and sleeping rooms that surprise the stranger. Extremely high ceilings are the rule. In Asuncion there are also examples of beauty in plain construction; we see architecture of Spanish-Moorish type yet differing in detail from that observed in other South American capitals, with the possible exception of Bolivia's chief city, La Paz. The roofs of Asuncion also attract the stranger's attention; many are constructed of heavy red tile and follow such graceful lines that artists are wont to portray them on canvas.

In public buildings Asuncion has numerous interesting structures, some of which bear the marks of age and traces of vicissitudes which



THE PALACE OF GOVERNMENT, ASUNCION.

This splendid structure was erected under the supervision of Francisco Lopez for his palace. It now houses the various ministerios or departments of the National Government. Its large airy corridors and rooms, some of which are sumptuously furnished for receiving foreign diplomats and other distinguished functionaries, are delightfully pleasant and imposing. Since the above photograph was taken some changes have been made in the gardens surrounding the building.



EL BANCO AGRÍCOLA, OR THE AGRICULTURAL BANK, ASUNCION.

This institution was established in 1887 and since that time its importance has been gradually extending by lending money to farmers and thereby aiding agricultural enterprise.

from time to time have enveloped the city and nation. Just as St. Louis, Denver, and Salt Lake City were scenes of stirring events in pioneer days in the United States, so has Asuncion witnessed the youthful period when life and property suffered. To-day, however, the buildings that have stood the test of time still reflect the taste of their architects and builders.

One of the city's famous buildings dominates the water front and the lower part of the city. It was constructed during the reign of Francisco Lopez for his own palace, but accommodates to-day the various offices of the National Government. With a placid sheet of water bounding one side, broad and well-arranged lawn and flower beds on the other front, and the building itself rising high above surrounding structures, this sentinel stands reminiscent of the vaunting ambition of a former ruler. From its tower or upper story one may see far across the Paraguay into the terra incognita region of the Gran Chaco. Still farther in the distance we catch glimpses of the winding Pilcomayo, flowing through a region practically unknown.

If the visitor to Asuncion is interested in historical lore he will be delighted with the Biblioteca Nacional (National Library) and the Biblioteca Americana, wherein are preserved many rare volumes relating to the early discoveries, the Jesuits and the part they played in carrying civilizing influences to this interior land, etc. Some of the works date from about 1534 and chronicle events down to 1600, while hundreds of more modern books are also preserved. This famous collection, like the city, has passed through strenuous eras but yet retains many of its most-prized volumes. The books were carried away on horseback and in carts, it is said, to save them from destruction by invading armies, and some volumes remained for years in the homes of ignorant natives far back in the forests. When tranquillity finally came they were collected and are now valued among the most important works in existence on South American history.

Other well-known buildings are the National College, that of the police department, the city's six bank buildings, Encarnation Church, postal and telegraph building, public hospital, House of Congress, the National Theater, Museum of Fine Arts, the new market, etc.; and very recently the Asuncion Chamber of Commerce has occupied a new and commodious structure, another ornament to the city.

The Central Market in Asuncion is a place of special interest to most visitors because one there mingles with the more humble citizens; he sees the coming and the going of the itinerant female trader with her head closely wrapped in a mantle of black, who with fruits and goods sits complacently on the meandering burro; we see at the market the mingling of people of country, town, and capital city; we note the variety of foods offered for sale, such as oranges, eggs, cheese, cigars and cigarettes, and an array of vegetables entirely novel to



THE MUNICIPAL BUILDING IN ASUNCION.

This structure represents a type of the more modern architecture to be seen in various parts of the city. The heavy doors immediately on the street and the numerous balconies of the upper stories are features more or less popular all over South America in both public and private buildings.



TYPICAL VIEWS WITHIN THE CAPITAL.

Upper: A scene photographed from the top of one of the buildings, showing sections of a military parade. Note the heavy tile roofs and the various slopes, all of which add a touch of picturesqueness to construction. Lower: A close view of the comparatively new Palace of Justice.

those unfamiliar with subtropical production; there is the usual medley of voices in Guarani, Spanish, etc., while the general scene covering largely a whole block indicates the preponderance of female over male population, a feature of Paraguay's history. This market place, however, fails to draw the ladies of the better classes, for in Asuncion, as in other Latin American lands, the wives and daughters of men of affairs are not to be seen in the marts of trade, at least at such public places as a market; the duty of purchasing foods for the family is delegated to servants.

The water front of Asuncion is one of the busy parts of the city. It is the meeting point of the larger steamers that ply up and down the Paraguay and its tributaries with lighter draft vessels which operate from Asuncion northward to Concepcion, Corumba, and other far inland river ports. Traffic from Buenos Aires and the outer world bound for the far interior must be transhipped here, and this business furnishes employment for many workers, so the hum of voices in different languages is no less interesting to the stranger than are the various commodities handled. Recently a through line of small steamers initiated service between the ports of Suarez in Bolivia and Rosario in Argentina, and these traders of course pass by Asuncion and doubtless land and take away cargo.

Large passenger steamers which ply between Buenos Aires and Asuncion draw alongside the customhouse piers and travelers enter the stately edifice after passing up broad stone steps and through massive arches. Passenger traffic was somewhat altered a few years ago when the railway from the south was completed into Asuncion; this route is now largely used by the public, especially on the northern journey, but when returning southward the steamers appear to be more attractive to the average traveler, as they afford opportunities for visiting numerous smaller ports all the way to Buenos Aires.

Paraguay's trading relations with the nations of the world are represented normally by a value of more than \$13,000,000; the export figures alone for the last normal year, 1913, amounted to nearly \$8,000,000. Many commodities represented by these values pass in and out through the port of Asuncion, although the railway above mentioned draws freight as well as passengers away from the several river steamer services. On the whole, however, the business of the port is growing and for some years the Government authorities have been endeavoring to improve and enlarge facilities; ambitious plans were prepared to such an end, but the beginning of the great war, curtailing as it did the importation of materials and supplies, temporarily thwarted the work. Ere long we may confidently expect to see its consummation. While speaking of harbor facilities it is interesting to note that Paraguay recently modified custom duties on certain upbuilding commodities, like the motor car for business



TWO POPULAR INSTITUTIONS OF ASUNCION.

Upper: A sectional view of the National College, founded in 1870. The bachelor's degree in science and letters is conferred here, after which graduates may enter the National University and pursue courses in law, medicine, or other technical subjects. Lower: The National Theater, which from time to time is visited by theatrical talent of European centers and from various cities of South America. Asuncion's population, like that of the average city, is fond of amusement, and this playhouse is especially popular.



THE SPACIOUS STATION OF THE CENTRAL RAILROAD AT ASUNCION.

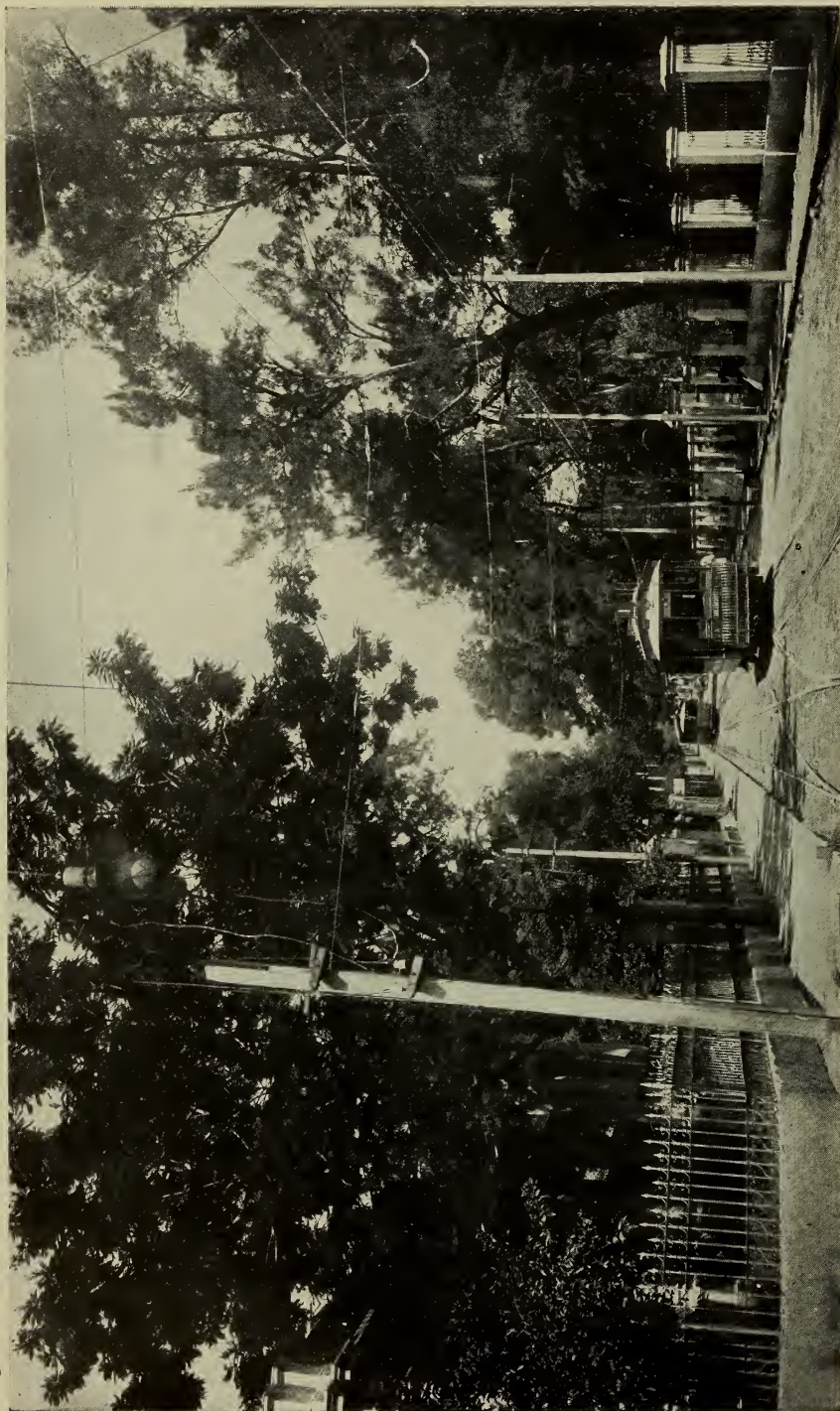
Like the railway station of the average city, this new and commodious building is the scene of great activity, especially upon arrival and departure of the through trains between Asuncion and Buenos Aires, which usually have a large number of coaches. The leading pleasure resort of San Bernardino is also reached by train from this station. The imposing columns of the building itself and the trees and foliage of the park immediately in front serve to make the station especially attractive.

and pleasure, and now these may be imported free of duty. Various other changes were inaugurated in connection with importations, which will be especially noticeable in Asuncion.

Public amusements are not so numerous as in larger cities, but Paraguay has a liberal number of legal holidays during which all classes enjoy relaxation from the usual prosaic routine. May 14 and 15 are the days on which national independence is celebrated; the anniversary of the founding of the city of Asuncion on August 15, 1536, is also a gala day in the capital, as is New Year's, Christmas, Columbus Day, and a half dozen or more other holidays. In recent years such sports as regattas, football, tennis, horse racing, etc., have become more or less popular. Clubs and societies numbering at least 20 are also features of life and amusement in which the younger members of society freely participate. The motion-picture theater has become as popular with the masses as in other places, and films from various lands are extensively used, those manufactured in Buenos Aires being the most easily available. In normal times the European film and that made in the United States are also shown to Asuncion audiences.

The pleasant resort of San Bernardino situated on the shore of Lake Ypacarai has become a most popular rendezvous not only for well-to-do Paraguayans, but is also visited by many persons from Argentina, Uruguay, and other parts of South America. The lake is a beautiful sheet of water 15 miles long and 3 miles wide, lying a short distance east of Asuncion and on the main line of railroad between Encarnacion and Asuncion. The building of the road made the lake easily accessible from the capital, and the increasing number of patrons is responsible for the erection of larger hotels and amusement features common to pleasure resorts. Prominent families of Asuncion maintain their homes on the lake during certain seasons of the year when the capital is not at its best; the railroad trip to the southern shore of the lake is made in about an hour and the visitor is transferred by small boat to San Bernardino on the opposite side of the lake. The resort itself nestles picturesquely amid tropical foliage, trees, and flowers. One may enjoy amusements, somewhat limited to be sure, or stroll out to the quietude of surrounding forests or participate in boating pleasures on Lake Ypacarai; there are social functions from time to time at the hotels or at private cottages; while for those who seek complete rest and quietude San Bernardino opens wide its hospitable gates.

Speaking of health and pleasure resorts brings us to the subject of climate. Paraguay, lying about two-thirds within the temperate zone and one-third in the tropics, enjoys subtropical weather; and hardly more than three months of the year—December, January, February—can be termed hot, although March and November are



AVENIDA ESPAÑA, ONE OF THE CITY'S MOST ATTRACTIVE STREETS.

Here we have depicted the modern electric street car service which replaces the ancient horse car. This avenue leads through a new and beautiful section, and along its course are numerous fine homes with large lawns and flower gardens. Also note the fine foliage.



LOOKING ACROSS PLAZA INDEPENDENCIA, ASUNCION.

This plaza is situated in the heart of the older section of the city and is surrounded by interesting streets and buildings that have been the scenes of stirring events in the early days of construction.

sometimes about as warm as the midsummer months. The remaining portion of the year is cool or cold, and at times frosts occur and light wraps are needed by the people. In other words, summer lasts from October to March, and winter from April to September. The mean temperature at Asuncion varies between 71° and 73° F. The maximum has reached 105° F., but there are many years when the heat does not register more than 98° F. Expressed still differently, about 40 days are cold, 100 days hot, while the remaining 225 days may be considered quite agreeable, many of them having a delightful temperature. The heaviest precipitation occurs about March and the least in August, but more or less rain may be expected each month of the year. The average year at Asuncion has 79 rainy, 72 cloudy, and 214 clear days. Winds from the south bring cool breezes while those from the north are warm.

All things being considered Paraguay, and especially its capital, is regarded as possessing a pleasant or even delightful climate; and this fact alone is largely responsible for the increasing number of people who visit the country in search of health, rest, and outdoor recreation. Horseback riding, popular with so many persons as a health-giving exercise, finds full freedom in Paraguay; indeed, the Paraguayan is truly "the man on horseback" and he is ever willing to act as guide and scout for the stranger, provided he is aware that the latter's mission is not unworthy of confidence.

Municipal government of Asuncion is based on the organic law of municipalities passed by the National Congress. This law stipulates that Asuncion shall have a junta or council consisting of six members and three alternates, and an intendente or mayor. Councilmen are elected by direct popular vote, as are national deputies and senators, and serve for a term of four years; and they may be reelected. The mayor is appointed by the President of the Republic and receives a salary from the municipal revenues. Alternate councilmen replace regular members in case of death, resignation, or disability of the latter. Sessions of the council are usually held once a week or oftener if occasion demands; and questions are decided in accordance with the majority of votes. As in other municipalities, the council looks after the general welfare and progress of the capital, providing rules and regulations for raising municipal revenues, promoting or regulating public works, traffic, streets, markets, public health, sanitation, charity, the police, etc. The selection of a president, a vice president, and other municipal officers and employees is made by the council and by the intendente.

The policing of the city and the general appearance of these public guardians is highly interesting to the stranger within Asuncion's gates. Organized on a military basis and accustomed to regular drills, one sees squads of marching privates going to or from duty



AMERICAN LEGATION IN PARAGUAY.

The home of the American legation in Asuncion is a large marble structure situated in the best part of the city. It is surrounded by large shade trees and beautiful lawns.



STATUE OF LIBERTY.

The statue of liberty in Asuncion, in Constitution Park.



THE COMMERCIAL BANK.

Upper: El Banco Mercantile, or the Commercial Bank, one of the country's leading banking institutions. Founded in 1891, it soon grew beyond its facilities and a new structure was erected, which is here shown. In midsummer the bank is closed several hours during the heat of the day; its busiest hours are the early forenoon and the late afternoon. Opposite the bank is one of the city's pleasant parks. Lower: Exterior of the Commercial Bank.

in about the same methodical manner that is observed at guard mount at military encampments. The individual is not so large in stature as the average policeman of London or Philadelphia, but is brave and capable of undergoing extreme hardship and fatigue as occasion arises; mounted or on foot he is both an ornament and a protector of which the city may be justly proud.

Going to Asuncion or returning therefrom is not the tiresome journey that imposed itself upon the traveler in former days. Neither is it advisable to take the wandering route across Brazil as did de Vaca and his men long ago when they spent 130 days in reaching Asuncion. To-day the proper course is to leave Montevideo or Buenos Aires, preferably the latter, by river steamer or by railway train. One may board the train in either city and proceed northward, but in starting from the Argentine capital several connections are avoided and the traveler goes all the way to Asuncion without change of cars and in the shortest time, or in about 48 or 50 hours, the distance by rail being nearly 1,000 miles. Passing over fertile pampas and through the historic Misiones region of Argentina, with train ferry service over the Paraná at Ibicuy and the Alto Paraná at Posados, the ride across Paraguay is especially interesting if one is inclined to inquire into stockraising and agricultural possibilities. The traveler's section of the through sleeper (section has 2 to 4 beds) is comfortable the dining car supplies nourishing and well-cooked foods, although naturally the various dishes are different from those of more fully developed countries. At Asuncion the train draws into a commodious station where alert coachmen await the traveler, and with baggage and self he is soon en route to the hotel, drawn by galloping steeds as is customary in so many South American cities. The ride is both novel and interesting.

The traveler who reaches Asuncion by railway should by all means leave the city by river steamer if he wishes to embrace the opportunity of seeing the great Paraguay river and its commerce. If one has time, say, several weeks, Asuncion provides a favorable starting point for various up-river towns and landings where conditions are still less modern but where foreign capital is developing large enterprises. Steamers are available at frequent intervals for this trip. Between Asuncion and Buenos Aires there is very good steamer service, and in going on the southward flowing current the trip is made in almost half the time required for ascending the river, or in about three days, the time depending on cargo and number of ports visited en route. Delay at the small ports, however, is often productive of much information if one has an inquiring mind and is not limited as to time.

In conclusion, what is the future of Paraguay and its interesting capital? The country is endowed by nature with a productive soil,



Courtesy of American Museum Journal.



SCENES IN THE PARAGUAYAN CAPITAL.

Upper: This view represents orange dealers and piles of the delicious fruit offered for sale at a mere pittance. Paraguay is a land of oranges and consequently the markets of the capital are always well supplied. Middle: Looking down Asuncion Avenue, along which stand many stately trees. Back from the street and somewhat secluded are pleasant homes surrounded by flowers and vines. Lower: One of the beautiful private residences of Asuncion. These houses stand back from the street and are placed in the midst of lawns and shade trees.

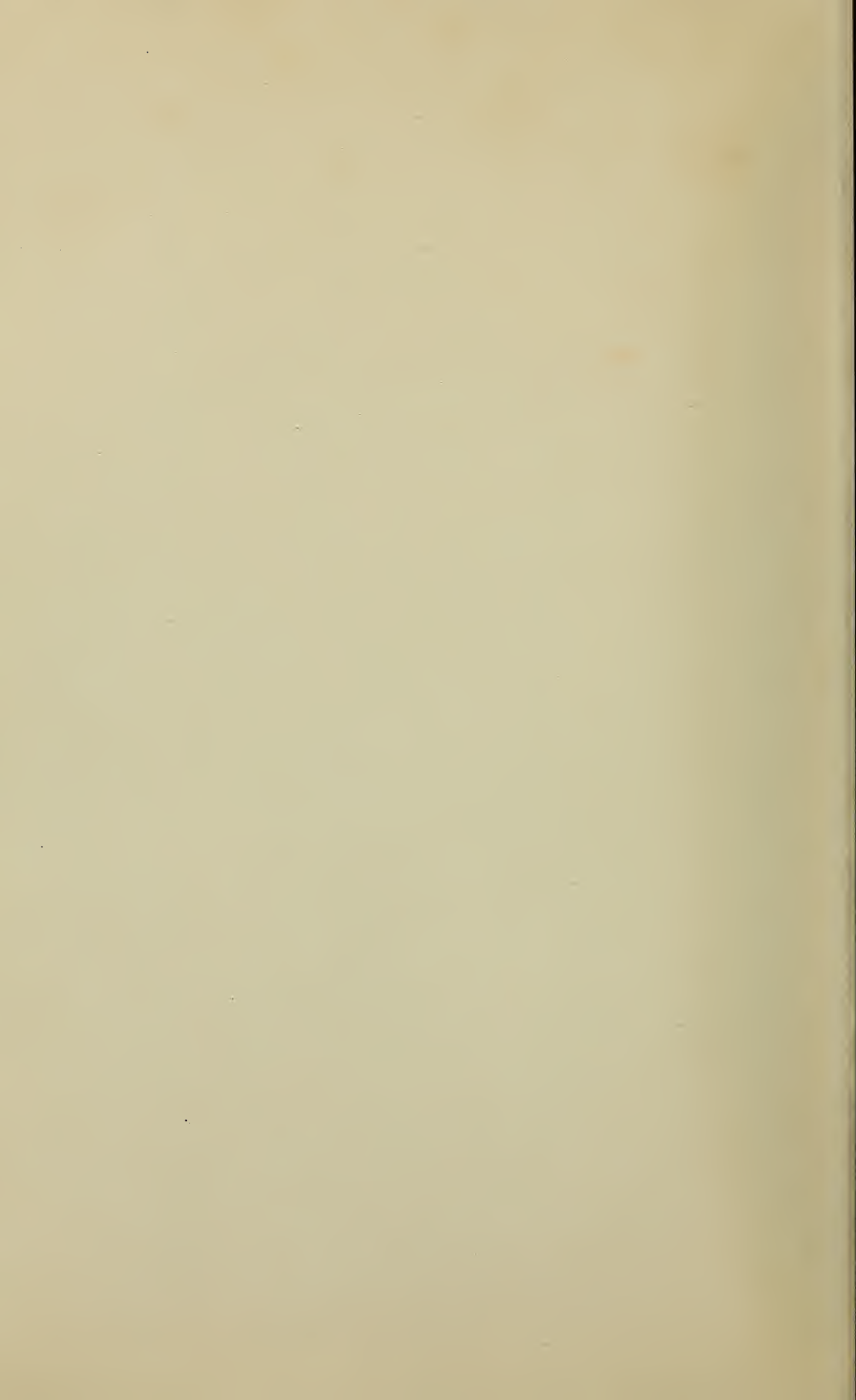


PUBLIC BUILDINGS OF ASUNCION.

Upper: Paraguayan National Library and Museum. Middle: The Encarnacion Church, which is the largest church in Asuncion. It is in use, but has not yet been completed. Lower: Asuncion police headquarters, facing a beautiful park. To the left is a large drill ground for the police.

with a climate healthful and often charming, with sufficient rainfall to grow the grasses for millions of stock, with numerous large and small rivers to bear the steamers of commerce and with innumerable smaller streams to provide water for the herds. Paraguay invites the capitalist to aid in a development that is surely if gradually coming. With a full realization of the importance of building up natural resources to keep pace with food and other demands of densely populated nations, officials at Asuncion are extending the hand of welcome. In response capitalists of the United States have recently invested millions of dollars (about \$7,000,000) in Paraguay land and cattle industries; a sum, no doubt, that will be multiplied as these industries and others of a similar nature settle down to serious activity after the lethargy caused by the great war.





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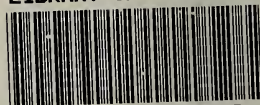
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