Retiro
An eternal busy place

View of San Martín Square towards 1918. Col. Dirección de Paseos, Museo de la Ciudad.

Este Boletín electrónico tiene como objetivo difundir las actividades conjuntas realizadas entre las Juntas de Estudios Históricos de los barrios porteños y la Gerencia Operativa de Patrimonio en el marco de la Resolución 1534/GCABA/MCGC/2011 de creación del Observatorio del Patrimonio Histórico-Cultural de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires. Mensualmente publicaremos información sobre cada uno de los barrios de la ciudad, notas relevantes, agenda de las Juntas de Estudios Históricos, etcétera.
Retiro: An eternal busy place

In 1692, Miguel de Riblos presented a request to the Cabildo to obtain the pieces of land that cover today’s corner of Florida and Marcelo T. de Alvear until Maipú and Arenales. In 1696, these pieces of land were then transferred to the governor Agustín de Robles, who built his residence here. It was one of the most luxurious residences of the city, and it was known as Casa de Retiro (located where the American Express building is currently at, on Arenales and Maipú). In 1700, Robles was accused of contraband and was then sent to Spain to be imprisoned. He sold his luxurious house to the French company Compañía de Guinea, and to South Sea Company afterwards. These were the first companies that were licensed to trade slaves in the Río de la Plata. In fact, in the 18th century, that seat served as a front for Great Britain’s illegal trade in the city. The house was demolished in 1819. By then, this place was strongly connected to Gral. San Martín and his Mounted Grenadiers, who had trained in what was known as Campo de la Gloria and then, Campo de Marte, which gave origin to today’s San Martín Square.

Campo de la Gloria was used as a battle field during the British Invasions. The First Bullring of Buenos Aires was located on the northwest corner of Santa Fe and Florida. It was designed by the engineer Martín Boneo and was built by the master builder Francisco Cañete. It had a capacity for 10,000 people and they city barely had 30,000 inhabitants. It was opened in 1801 and demolished along with the Casa de Retiro in 1819. There were two ways to access this place, through two streets that had been paved until this place: Florida and Maipú. This place had a military nature. The Escuela Práctica de Artillería (Artillery School) was located next to the Casa de Retiro (extension of Arenales, San Martín Square), which would later be known as the Cuarteles del Retiro.

The Iglesia del Socorro (church) was a small chapel originally. It was built on the pieces of land donated by Alejandro del Valle (Suipacha y Juncal) in 1750. The area was poorly developed; it was surrounded by country houses. The cemetery of the dissidents was located in what used to be the graveyard of this church, which belonged to the Corporación del Cementerio Inglés. It was inaugurated in 1821 (before the first public cemetery of the city, the Cemetery of Recoleta) and it operated until 1833 when its capacity limit had been reached. The North-American Minister Rodney was buried there after he passed away in 1824 in Buenos Aires: the ceremony was the city’s first high-class procession.

The gas lightning in the city began in 1855 when the Compañía de Gas was created. The following year, this company inaugurated an establishment in today’s Plaza Fuerza Aérea Argentina (former Britania) (Argentinian Air Force Square) and it was the first piece of land that was taken from the Río de la Plata. The first part of the FC del Norte (Buenos Aires Northern Railway), today Mitre, reached Belgrano and it was inaugurated years later. The terminal was built in front of the establishment of the Compañía de Gas. The following year, this line was extended until San Isidro: a lot of passengers traveled in this line to spend the weekend in their country houses. Afterwards, Britania Square was built in the piece of land of the gas factory. In 1916, the Monumental Tower was inaugurated. This was a gift
from the British community to the city to celebrate the 100th anniversary of May Revolution.

The Plaza de Marte (San Martín Square) became a park in 1860 and, two years later, the first monument honoring San Martín was set up here. The works came to an end in the beginning of the 1930s when the blocks surrounding the slope were demolished. At the top, where the building of the barracks had been, the Argentinian Pavilion was set up in 1893. It had been part of the Universal Exhibition of Paris of 1889, and the Museum of Fine Arts had been located here. In front of this place, the Plaza Hotel was inaugurated in 1909. It was the first luxurious hotel in South America. The Kavanagh building was finished in 1936 and, for a number of years, it was the tallest construction of Latin America. After the demographic movements caused by the 1871 yellow fever epidemic, these surroundings, as well as those near Carlos Pellegrini Small Square, had started to abandon the image of a country house area, where a number of aristocratic palaces were built, such as the Anchorena (Foreign Affairs Ministry), or Paz (Círculo Militar). One of them had been built in 1925 for Enrique Lastra. The Embassy of Israel was located here, and it was destroyed in 1992 after a terrorist attack that killed 22 people and left 242 people injured.

Towards late 19th century, the Government decided that the immigrants who came to Buenos Aires could stay at the Immigrants Hotel for 5 days. For this reason, a new hotel was created which was known as the “redondo” of Retiro. It was a building on the coast that had been conceived as a “projector”. Afterwards, a new hotel opened between 1911 and 1953. It then became the Immigration Museum. The majestic Retiro Station of FC Mitre (Mitre Railway, former company of Norte y Central Argentino), opened in 1915 and it was the most important within Latin America. By then, this line was not the only one that could take you to this area: the station of the FC Belgrano Norte (Belgrano Norte Railway, former Central Córdoba) was finished in 1914, and the FC San Martín (San Martín Railway, former FC al Pacífico) was temporarily finished in 1912. This area was undoubtedly one of the most important transfer areas of the city. Line C (subway) opened in 1936 and the Bus Terminal, in 1983. Retiro became “that eternal busy place”.

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Kavanagh from San Martín Square.
1696
Governor Robles requests an authorization to build his “retreat”.

1715
Slave settlement of the South Sea Company.

1801
Bullring opening.

1806
Reconquest of Buenos Aires.

1812
Mounted Grenadiers train in San Martín Square.

1821
Socorro Cemetery, first Protestant cemetery.

1856
Setting-up of the Gas Factory.

1862
First service of *FC del Norte*.

1888
Authorization of the “rounded” Immigrant Hotel.

1893
Setting up of the Argentine Pavilion.

1916
Inauguration of the Monumental Tower.

1936
The construction of the Kavanagh building came to an end.

1950
Final construction of Av. 9 de Julio.

1983
Opening of the Bus Terminal.

1992
Terrorist attack in the Embassy of Israel.
... the Embassy of the Nazi Germany was located at the Balcarce Palace on Av. Quintana 161?

... Seaver Narrow St. finished off in a staircase and it is today’s access to Illia Expressway?

... the Priest Ladislao Gutierrez, Camila O’Gorman’s lover, was a priest of Socorro Church?

... *Patio Bullrich* (a former cattle auction house) was the first shopping mall that opened in Buenos Aires in 1988?

... there is a replica of the Winged Victory of Samothrace at Estrugamou Palace on Juncal 783?

... that the first radio transmission of Latin America took place on August 27th 1920 from the terrace of the Coliseo Theatre?

... that in the block of the slope of San Martín Square there was a narrow street called Falucho?

... that Bieckert Brewery, located on Juncal and Arroyo, was one of the most important industrial establishments of the city between 1866 and 1908?

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**View of Seaver Narrow Street towards late 1960s.**
*La Prensa Newspaper*

**Bieckert Factory towards late 19th century.**
*Witcomb Collection*

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**Former names of some of the streets of Retiro**

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<thead>
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Legends and curious stories of Retiro

As in the case of the most important cities of the world, Buenos Aires has a magical space: there are a number of myths, legends, and stories that make up a considerable part of its collective memory, and they took place in the city, in Retiro precisely. Here are some of them:

• The ghosts of the Nöel Mansion: towards mid 1920s, Carlos and Martín Nöel built a neo-colonial residence on Suipacha 1400. Years later, it was sold to the municipality of the city. The Isaac Fernández Blanco Spanish-American Museum is located here. According to tradition, the so-called “slope of Suipacha” was related to ghost legends of remote times. People say that in 1928 the future North-American president Herbert Hoover stayed at this house and complained about the noises. It is said that a girl with a crinoline and an ornamental comb lives in the house.

• Negro Raúl: one of the most mythical important characters of Buenos Aires was “Negro Raúl”. Even though no one denies his existence, a number of events in his life are surrounded by a halo of mystery. Legend has it that some of his odd jobs took him to the racetracks of Buenos Aires, where he met the descendents of the city’s high society in the evenings of the studs. He was their clown. Many things were said about him: that he lived in the corner of Córdoba and Esmeralda (where the neighborhood of Isaac Fernández Blanco Museum.

Retiro begins), that “rich children” painted on him with lime, and that he had gone to Mar del Plata in a coffin that was sent as a parcel. People say he was one of the citizens with the most obituary notes since, every time he went missing, people thought of him dead. He died towards the 1950s, alone and insane, in a mental institution.

• A baby in the oven: one of the most famous urban legends in Buenos Aires during the 1940s was related to a baby in the oven. It was said, especially in anti-Peronist environments, that there was a young couple who lived in a mansion in Retiro that hired a girl to do housework and babysitting. One night, this couple decided to go out and when they came back, they saw that all the lights of the mansion were on. The maid was wearing the woman’s wedding dress and she said she had prepared a big party. She pointed the center of the table. On the table, there was a silver platter with the baby, who had been baked in the oven with potatoes.

• The first serial killer: one of the most shocking police cases of our city took place in Carlos Pellegrini 1438, where there is an old tree that had been previously planted at the Toribio Tedín Small Square. Rosa Ponce de Nicola’s house had been here. She was Domingo Cayetano Grossi’s concubine and murdered five of the children he had had with the daughter of his wife. He is believed to be the first serial killer that was sentenced to death for these crimes and was then executed in 1900 in the National Penitentiary. Some people say that he may have buried one of his children under that old tree.
1. **Immigration Museum**: the Immigrant Hotel operated in this building between 1911 and 1953. The immigrants stayed here as they arrived to Buenos Aires.

2. **Catalinas Norte Collection**: it was built in the pieces of land that had belonged to Las Catalinas Company, property of Francisco Seeber (See Top 5 Buildings of Catalinas Norte).

3. **Centro Naval**: it is one of the most important exponents of French academicism. It is a work created by Gastón Mallet and Jacques Dunant, and it opened in 1914.

4. **Plaza Hotel**: it was inaugurated in 1909 and it was the most luxurious hotel in South-America. Today, it is one of the city’s most important hotels.
5. **Kavanagh Building**: one of the most important architectonical works of the city. It was the tallest Latin-American building by 1936. It has 35 stories and it is 120-metres-tall.

6. **Basilica of the Holy Sacrament**: the Anchorena family ordered its construction. It is an eclectic-style temple and it was inaugurated in 1916. It has 5 towers.

7. **San Martín Square**: it is one of the oldest squares of the city. It was originally known as *Campo de Marte*. Towards 1812, the Grenadiers of San Martín trained here. In 1930, it was broadened with the block surrounding the slope.

8. **Monumental Tower**: it is known as Torre de los Ingleses (Tower of the English) and it was donated to Buenos Aires by the British residents. It was inaugurated in 1916.

9. **Retiro Station of the FC Mitre**: it was the most important Latin-American train station in 1915. It was built by the FC Centro Argentino (Central Argentino Railway), today Mitre Railway.

10. **Former Pirelli Building**: this 1970s building was the first building of the city with a heliport. Today it belongs to IRSA.

11. **San Martín Palace**: it was designed by the architect Alejandro Christophersen for the Anchorena family. It is made up of three different buildings in one construction. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs operates in this building since 1936.

12. **Mihanovich Building**: it was commanded by the naval entrepreneur Nicolás Mihanovich. This 1920 skyscraper was inspired by the Halicarnaso Mausoleum.
13. Isaac Fernández Blanco Spanish-American Art Museum: this neocolonial-style house was the residence of the Nöel brothers. A museum occupies this house since 1947.

14. Plazoleta de la Memoria (Remembrance Small Square) – Embassy of Israel: the Embassy of Israel used to be located here. It was destroyed after a terrorist attack in 1992. There is a small square used as a remembrance place.

15. Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church: it is one of the oldest churches of the city. It was created in 1750 when Alejandro del Valle donated a piece of land for its construction. The first British cemetery was located in its graveyard.

16. Surroundings of Carlos Pellegrini Small Square: the surroundings of this small square, created in 1914, houses some of the most luxurious beaux-art palaces of the city (see Top 5 Surroundings of Carlos Pellegrini Small Square).

17. Casa del Teatro: one of the most important art-deco exponents in Buenos Aires. It was designed by Alejandro Virasoro. It is a house of culture, a theatre hall and a house for artists with financial needs.

18. Libertad Square – Coliseo Theatre: it was born as Hueco de Doña Engracia. Libertad Square was one of the oldest squares of the city. The Coliseo Theatre had been located in front of the square since 1905, although today’s building goes back to 1961.

19. Teatro Nacional Cervantes (Cervantes Theatre): it was founded by the actors María Guerrero and Fernando Díaz de Mendoza. This theatre hall is located in a building with facades inspired in the University of Alcalá in Henares. It was opened in 1921.

20. Círculo Militar: it was the biggest residence of the city. It used to belong to José C. Paz. It has an academicist style.
1. **Conurban Building** (Av. Eduardo Madero 1020): it was designed in 1969 by the architects Kocourek, Katzenstein and Llorens. It was the tallest tower in this complex.

2. **Carlos Pellegrini Building** (Av. Leandro N. Alem 1067): it was built for the Argentinian Industrial Union. It was opened in 1974. It was 120-metre-tall. At the time, it was the second tallest building of the city.

3. **Bank Boston Tower** (Della Paolera 265): created by the architect César Pelli, this tower belongs to the ICBC nowadays. It came to an end in 2001.

4. **IBM Tower** (Ing. Enrique Butty 275): this tower has an audacious design and it was designed in 1979 by Mario Roberto Álvarez & Associates. It was finished in 1983.

5. **Sheraton Buenos Aires Hotel** (San Martín 1225): it has a rationalist style. It was inaugurated in 1972 and it was the first building of the complex and the first hotel of an international chain in Buenos Aires.

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**Skyscrapers of Retiro**
For many years, Buenos Aires stood out for its skyscrapers. Many of the tallest buildings of the world, outside United States, were in our city, in Retiro precisely. Towards, 1975, these were the tallest:

1. Carlos Pellegrini Building: 120 m.
2. Kavanagh Building: 120 m.
5. Air France Tower: 101 m.
6. Sudamérica Building: 97 m.
7. Conurban Building: 95 m.
8. Mihanovich Building: 80 m.
1. **Former Ortiz Basualdo Palace (Cerrito 1399):** it is one of the most important beaux-arts exponents of the city, built for the Ortiz Basualdo family. The Embassy of France has been located here since 1939.

2. **Former Pereda Palace (Arroyo 1130):** Celedonio Pereda ordered its construction. Today, it is used as the Embassy of Brasil. It has an academicist style and its construction came to an end in 1936.

3. **Former Álzaga Unzué Palace (Cerrito 1455):** designed by the architect Roberto Prentice. Félix de Álzaga Unzué ordered its construction. Today, it is an annex of the Four Seasons Hotel.

4. **Jockey Club (Av. Alvear 1345):** this institution operated in a palace that belonged to Concepción Unzué de Casares and it was designed by Juan A. Buschiazzo.

5. **Former Atucha Residence (Arroyo 1099):** it was designed by the architect René Sergent for Jorge Atucha. Today it is an apartment building.

Buenos Aires from Retiro in 1934. *La Prensa* Newspaper.

*El Cuartel del Retiro*, Pellegrini, 1841.

Libertad Square late 19th century, Witcomb Collection.

Gas factory, Esteban Gonnet, 1864.

View of Retiro from Puerto Madero, 1910.

Av. Leandro N. Alem and Falucho Narrow St., in 1931.
Central Board of Historical Research

by Arnaldo Ignacio Adolfo Miranda

The Central Board of Historical Research of the City of Buenos Aires was created on October 31st 1968 as a non-profit association dedicated to the rescue, preservation and promotion of the historical heritage of the city and its neighborhoods. Currently, it comprises seventy-three entities that, with special diligence and dedication, have reactivated the study of the city’s past.

The institutions are divided into four statutory categories, such as, permanent members, acceding members, correspondents and institutional honorary members. In this sense, it is important to stand out that, from the aforementioned entities, forty-four act as permanent members representing each of the forty-four neighborhoods of the city. Currently, the presidency of the board is led by Prof. Nélida Rosa Pareja.

In order to provide the board with a definite institutionalization and better organization, towards 1997, a new statute that was presented to the General Inspection of Justice was passed on August 2nd 1999, and it has been operating as a legal entity since then. From then on, the membership was limited to the four categories that were previously mentioned. The president of each institution is the natural delegate. There can also be a permanent and substitute member for each federate member.

The coat of arms of the City of Buenos Aires has been used as a logo since 1981. It was created at the request of Governor Jacinto de Láriz in 1649. This coat of arms corresponds to the second Coat of Arms of the city-port, which was made official in the session of November 5th, 1649.

The long path of the Board can be guaranteed due to the fulfillment of a number of works carried out throughout its history with the assistance of all its members. Some of the activities are:

- Expert advice to public organisms.
- Library and newspaper library specialized in the history of the city and its neighborhoods.
- History Congresses of the City of Buenos Aires every 3 years.
- Institutional agreements with public and private entities dedicated to training, teaching education, exchange of publications, academic cooperation and fulfillment of investigation projects.
- Courses, seminars and conferences.
- Book Fair of the History of the City of Buenos Aires Magazine Históricas de la Ciudad, unique in its type.
- Various publications.
The Cultural-Historical Heritage Observatory was created under resolution 1534/GCABA/MCGC/2011 and it functions as an agreement between the Gerencia Operativa de Patrimonio of the DGPMMyCH and the different Historical Research Boards of the neighborhoods, through the Central Board of Historical Research of the City of Buenos Aires. Its main goal is to work with the Historical Research Boards (through the Main Board) in different topics related to the Cultural-Historical Heritage of our city. Its responsibilities are: a) gather information and investigate on the heritage values of the neighborhoods of the City of Buenos Aires, b) cultivate knowledge and information related to the city and its neighborhoods, C) promote training lectures, archive courses, investigations related to our work at the Gerencia Operativa de Patrimonio, d) indentify potential archaeological and/or paleontological sites and e) organize a network that would identify and monitor buildings and/or a collection with heritage interest for a future preservation.

Among the actions carried out with the Boards of Historical Research, you can find:

- Maps “Memory Tours”: aimed at rescuing its valuable existing tangible heritage in the 48 neighborhoods of the City of Buenos Aires.

- Cycle “Urban Prints”: aimed at rescuing areas of the city’s urban layout with peculiarities worth highlighting.

- Cycle “Football Landmarks”: aimed at rescuing all the sites of the city used to create the history of the most popular sport of our city, which has the most stadiums in the world.

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