

The Immigrant hotels

In 1895, the first Argentine national census yielded a total of 1,877,490 inhabitants; the second realized in 1895 gave 4,044,911 inhabitants. An enormous amount of changes in politics, in the economy and in society mediated between both. The constitution passed in 1853 meant the triumph of republicanism and liberal creed. From that moment on, the foundations were laid for the modernization of the country. It was time to attract capital and manpower, populate the territory, gain lands from the Indian, and start a "civilizing task". And this would finally be carried out by the same European immigrants the Constitution invited. Over the next few years, until the 1880s, the National governments engaged to pass laws that were laying the foundation for bureaucratic organization of the State allowing the deployment of the capitalist economy. Economic and social changes meant the transformation of the country; railways, infrastructure works, modernization of the bureaucracy, are some of the salient features of change. GDP growth for the period 1870-1913 was 3.8%, twice as much as the European.

The legislative work that supported this path was based on laws such as the citizenship law that established *jus soli* and *jus sanguinis* to become Argentine, the immigration and colonization one, the law of federalization of the city of Buenos Aires, the common education law that turned it into free, obligatory, secular and gradual, and finally the civil registry and civil marriage law. The so-called "Desert Campaign", that annihilated the indigenous population, allowed the incorporation of thirty-five million hectares into the land market, putting it into production with mostly immigrant labor.

By 1880, the growing weight of immigration was becoming evident. Already since the middle of the 19th century there was a growing immigration flow that from the mid-1860s began to accelerate and will continue to do so almost uninterruptedly until the outbreak of the First World War, when the flow is practically cut to restart after completion. This increased flow forced the State to take a series of measures to provide protection, shelter and other facilities to immigrants who requested it.

In 1876, Immigration and Colonization Act 817 was passed, creating the General Department of Immigration under the Ministry of Internal Affairs which gave power to the Executive to appoint agents in Europe to encourage emigration to our country. The law required the state to house and keep new comers in an Immigrant Hotel for five days and to facilitate their travel to the provinces. Although there had been different sites destined for this, several were built with a specific destination: Buenos Aires, Cordoba, Parana, Rosario, San Juan, Santa Fe, Tandil are some of the cities that had their Hotel. In addition, placement offices were also established and various courses and lectures were held to guide immigrants in rural tasks.

The open-door policy remained largely unchanged until 1930 and was only affected by the economic crises of 1873, 1890 and the outbreak of the First World War in Europe in 1914. After this, the contingents again took power until the crash of 1929 slowed down the flows. However, it is necessary to note that the Law of Residence of 1902, the Law of Social Defense of 1910 and the events of the Tragic Week of 1919 had an impact on immigration, forcing those who

were involved in trade union participations or simply participated in protests to take extreme care not to be deported, or dissuading those who wanted to emigrate.

Asylums and hotels for immigrant

Concern about the arrival of immigrants made the authorities very mindful about the treatment to which they were subjected. Already in 1825, the Regulation of the newly created Emigration Commission stipulated the provision of a comfortable home for the newly arrived where they would be housed and fed for fifteen days while searching occupation; once they had obtained an occupation they had the obligation to reimburse the expenses they would have demanded. A group of immigrants arriving from Great Britain in February 1825 were the first to use these services and were housed at the Recoleta convent. This was the first "immigrant hotel". In 1833 these facilities were used again to accommodate a contingent of immigrants from the Canary Islands. Despite the regulations, immigrants were often left helpless by the violations of the state and the colonizing businessmen who brought them.

In the following years, immigrants continue to arrive in significant numbers: by 1854 there were in the province of Buenos Aires 25,000 French, 2,800 British including 4,000 Americans, 15,000 Italians and 20,000 Spaniards. In 1854 the State of Buenos Aires passed an immigration law that established the Immigration Commission to provide protection to newcomers. Two years later, steps were taken to obtain a part of Rosas' former residence in Palermo, but the land was never handed over. For this reason the Commission is sending immigrants to the Jacotin Fonda in the de La Merced St. (today Reconquista) forcing them to stay there for three days. Finally, the rent of a building in Corrientes St. 8 in the corner with 25 de Mayo Street is arranged, using the denomination of Asylum of Immigrants. Work begins immediately to adapt the building which could house 200 men and 100 women.

In 1873, a law was passed that allows notarizing a land, located in Artes St. (today Carlos Pellegrini) for the construction of an Immigrant Hotel. In May 1874 the person in charge of the Commission, Guillermo Wilcken, demanded not to delay the construction of the Hotel arguing public health issues on the basis of the epidemics that had plagued the city in previous years.

However, the inadequacy of the building and the delay in the beginning of the construction of the new hotel made Wilcken focus on the search of a place that could be reconditioned in a short time for the immigrant's installation. The place chosen was the area of the current Plaza San Martin where some wooden constructions were erected; it was expected to last one year until the inauguration of the new one but it worked until 1882.

In 1881 the national government decided to transfer the Asylum of Immigrants to the premises that had hosted the Italian Artistic and Industrial Exhibition (Cerrito St. between Juncal and Arenales). Modifications are made to adapt it but soon the facilities are insufficient given the increasing number of immigrants and despite the extensions that were made to it. In 1884, since the building deterioration was obvious, the construction of a definite building is envisaged. When a new epidemic of cholera hit Buenos Aires in 1884 the building was abandoned and the

immigrants were sent to some barracks near the forests of Palermo (today the Sociedad Rural Argentina). It was used again after the end of the epidemic and was finally deactivated in 1888. Due to the epidemic, the steadily increasing arrival of immigrants and the general condition of the building, new facilities are rented in the town of San Fernando in 1884. In 1887 another one opens in "Caballito", a neighborhood located some five kilometers from the center in the Quinta de Ocantos located between the current Av Rivadavia, Centenera, Cachimayo and Juan B. Alberdi Avenue.

In 1883, the plans and budgets for an Inmigrant Asylum were approved; its location would be at the block comprised by the streets Paseo Colon, Balcarce, San Juan and Comercio (today Humberto I^o). This project was questioned for its location and many of those consulted advised transferring it to an area up north, for health reasons, further away from the private homes.

In 1886, a new cholera epidemic occurred in Buenos Aires that forced the reopening of the San Fernando Asylum. It was still operating in 1888, although the previous year the construction of eleven hotels for between 500 to 1000 people had been decided in the interior of the country.

In January 1888 the Commissioner-General for Immigration was given possession of a building in Retiro in which a panorama worked. Work was done to enlarge and it began to operate under the name la Rotonda; however, it was still insufficient for the contingents that were arriving.

Only in 1905 in Agreement with the Cabinet of Ministers the project submitted by the Directorate of Immigration and Colonization is approved for the construction of the new Hotel, whose plans were prepared by the Ministry of Public Works according to the directives of the Directorate of Immigration.

Work began immediately with the construction of the landing site which was inaugurated at the end of 1907. The construction was undertaken following the canons of Hygienist architecture. The layout of the pavilions around a central square allowed the proper aeration of all space and offered the possibility that people could be in a sunny place avoiding crowding. The project envisaged the management and work offices at the front; then the hospital and laundry rooms; and closing the perimeter, two buildings destined for dining-room and bedrooms. A central avenue that crossed perpendicular to the landing stage united the different pavilions with the gardens.

The project which had been scheduled to be completed in twenty months was extended for six years. By 1911 the Landing, the Hospital, the Laundry Rooms and the administration building were finished and operating. The dining room and the bedrooms that were initiated that same year were pending. Thus the Immigrant Hotel was finished a year and a half later, although in January 1911 it was inaugurated with a celebration attended by President Roque Sáenz Peña accompanied by a large retinue, in a celebration open to the community.