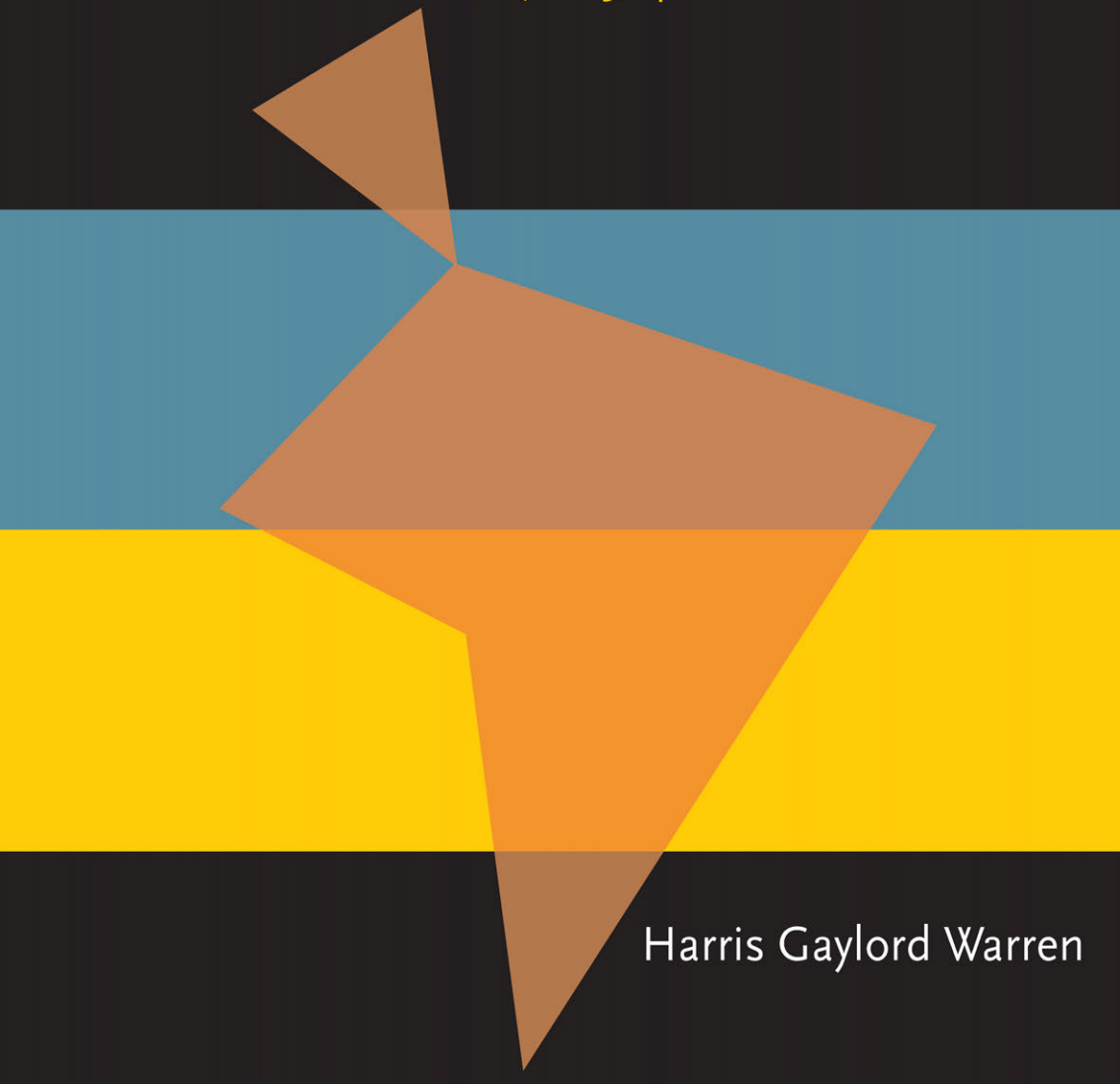
Rebirth of the Paraguayan Republic

The First Colorado Era, 1878–1904



Harris Gaylord Warren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The First Colorado Era, 1878–1904

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For Grandchildren
Sharon and Douglas
Kevin and Jason

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Preface

The division of a country's history into periods, especially if those periods are relatively short, is a convenient if somewhat misleading device, misleading because significant historial continuities are easily slighted in the effort to construct an accurate, intregrated account. I have attempted to minimize this danger in writing the history of Paraguay from the watershed years of 1869–1870 to the Colorado defeat in 1904. In the first decade of this thirty-five-year span, studied in *Paraguay and the Triple Alliance,* Paraguayans gradually recovered basic national bearings, struggled with outstanding success against the machinations of Argentina and Brazil, adopted a liberal constitution, and entered actively on the way to laissez-faire capitalism under guidance of the emerging Colorado party. Colorado political control and Colorado economic policies were firmly established under presidents Bareiro, Caballero, and Escobar who dominated the country from 1878 to 1890. Colorado political supremacy was increasingly threatened by intransigent Liberals who finally succeeded in their revolution of 1904. By that time the Colorados had institutionalized their economic objectives, an achievement the Liberals were unable, or unwilling, to change significantly before the Chaco War engulfed the country.

Reborn under Colorado guidance, the Paraguayan Republic was greatly changed from the Paraguay of the three dictators who ruled from 1815 to 1869–1870. Under them the state owned nearly all the land, operated many estancias, monopolized trade, and permitted none of the political and economic freedoms associated with laissez-faire capitalistic democracy. Under the Colorados, freedom of entrepreneurs to exploit natural resources and the available labor supply was zealously promoted by the state to create a modern capitalist society. The function of government was to provide the legal

framework within which the broad economic goal could be accomplished.

The first Colorado era in Paraguay has hitherto lacked a comprehensive history based primarily on archival sources. No resident Paraguayan would add to his popularity by publishing an unvarnished history of the Colorado era in which General Bernardino Caballero figured so prominently.[1] This hero of the Paraguayan War is second only to Francisco Solano López in the Colorado—indeed in the national—pantheon of heroes. As every researcher in modern Paraguay knows too well, access to pertinent unpublished personal and official sources is so severely limited as to be pratically impossible. Consequently, one must go to foreign archives, to London, Washington, Buenos Aires, and Rio de Janeiro especially, for most of the reliable sources. Reliable published materials for the period are very scanty, indeed. This is especially true of newspapers, only short runs of which are available in most cases. Except for copies preserved in foreign archives, time and insects have ravaged most of what remain. For those that are available, grateful acknowledgment is made to Señor Carlos Alberto Pusineri Scala, director of the Casa de la Independencia in Asunción and an historian-anthropologist of great expertise. Confronted by so many difficulties, why does the scholar persist in devoting so much of a short life to the study of a very small country buried in the heart of South America? There is much truth in the comment of a brilliant young Paraguayan historian, Juan Carlos Herken Krauer: "Paraguay is not a country—it is an obsession."

For support in pursuing this obsession, I am deeply indebted to the American Philosophical Society for grants from the Penrose Fund and to the many archivists and librarians in three continents who were uniformly gracious, patient, and helpful in meeting my many requests. I am especially grateful to Dr. Marta Gonçalves, chief of the Arquivo Histórico, Ministério das Relações Exteriores, Itamaraty, Rio de Janeiro; to my daughter, Mrs. William D. Elliott, and to my son, Dr. Gordon H. Warren, for providing copies of fugitive materials; and to Mr. Thomas Whigham of Stanford University for his aid in the use of the Godoi Collection at the University of California, Riverside. Sr. Juan Carlos Herken Krauer sent me a copy of his carefully researched "El Paraguay entre 1869 y 1913: Contribuciones a la historia económica regional del Plata." Published in 1984, this study is a most valuable addition to literature on the Colorado era.

Rebirth of the Paraguayan Republic

Prelude: The Heritage of War

The War of the Triple Alliance was for Paraguay a disaster of such magnitude as to defy complete understanding. More than one-half of the country's population perished during the long conflict with Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay from 1865 to 1870. Epidemic diseases swept unhindered through the civilian population fatally weakened by malnutrition and outright starvation. Military hospitals were overcrowded and unsanitary, grossly undermanned, and woefully short of medical supplies. The thousands who perished in battle and from disease, starvation, and execution were a fearful price to pay for Paraguay's release from a half century of dictatorship.

The country's physical wealth suffered far less than its people, although much of it was destroyed or abandoned. Agricultural production had practically ceased by 1869; a once thriving cattle industry disappeared; the short railway was wrecked and its rolling stock was unusable; vacant farmsteads fell into decay, and scores of villages were ghostly reminders of more prosperous days. Allied armies demolished the iron works at Ibicuy (or Ybicuí), the shipyard and arsenal at Asunción, and the telegraph line to Humaitá. These public works had been constructed by foreign technicians under Carlos Antonio López, the *obrero máximo* (very great builder). Grandiose buildings—a national theater, the oratorio, and the government palace—were still unfinished in Asunción when Francisco Solano López challenged the armed might of Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay. Appalling ineptitude on both sides needlessly prolonged the war which finally was nearly over when the Allies occupied Asunción in January 1869. But it was not until March 1, 1870, that Brazilian cavalry finally destroyed the pitiful remnants of Paraguay's army at Cerro Corá, and legend has it that there the marshal-president, Francisco Solano López, exclaimed, "Muero con mi pa-

tria!" as he died on the muddy banks of a small stream. Paraguay was not dead, although the conquerors did practically nothing to revive the shattered country.

Paraguay benefited from the traditional antagonism between Argentina and Brazil as the Allies prepared to enforce terms of the Triple Alliance treaty of May 1, 1865. Brazil was in a very favored position. Uruguay had dropped out of the war long before its end, and Argentina had been forced to withdraw many units to quell rebellious provincial caudillos. Brazil's fleet controlled the rivers and its victorious army had overwhelming superiority over Argentina's contingent. President Domingo Faustino Sarmiento wisely ordered Argentine troops to occupy Villa Occidental, capital of the Chaco, leaving eastern Paraguay to the Brazilians. Argentina's princely territorial demands included all of what is now the Paraguayan Chaco, and the move across the River Paraguay to Villa Occidental provided a strong military presence in the disputed area while avoiding possible clashes with Brazilian troops.

One of Brazil's fears was Argentina's dream of reconstituting the old Viceroyalty of Río de la Plata, an event that would reunite Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay. With this concern always present, it was not at all strange that Brazil refused to support Argentina's extreme territorial demands, no matter how clearly granted by the Triple Alliance treaty.

Allied concern over Paraguay was almost entirely political. Before Paraguay could sign treaties with the Allies, a government must be created. Brazil's representative, José Maria da Silva Paranhos, Visconde do Rio Branco, controlled this process. His was the difficult task of restraining Argentina, reconciling Paraguayan factions, and guiding the formation of a credible government. Neither General Julio de Vedia, the Argentine commander, nor Rio Branco had orders or possessed the means to relieve the starving and diseased war survivors who crowded into Asunción. Paraguayans returning to their ruined country quickly formed rival political clubs, foreshadowing creation of the Liberal and Colorado parties and of the factions that developed in each of them. Prominent among leaders of the emerging Liberals were the brothers Decoud, especially José Segundo and Juan José, whose father had commanded the Paraguayan Legion. This unit, formed by Paraguayan exiles in Buenos Aires, had played a minor role in the Argentine army. A principal associate of the Decouds was Benigno Ferreira, a skillful politician who had left the Legion to serve under an Argentine general. Dr. Facundo Machaín, a brilliant young lawyer who had been educated in Chile, commanded the respect of all Liberals. Juan Silvano Godoi, who was going to school in Argentina when the war began, was an impetuous and daring schemer whose unbridled am-

bition far exceeded his political ability. All these Liberals were young men, most of them in their twenties, who had been nurtured on the writings of Voltaire, Montesquieu, Rousseau, and Jefferson, and had at least dabbled in the classics. Although hatred of the López clan was the principal bond that held the Legion together, many of its members soon made common cause with the lopiztas, an amorphous group of conservatives, war veterans fiercely loyal to the memory of López, government officials and a few diplomats returned from abroad. Their most prominent leader was Cándido Bareiro, a López agent who had returned to Asunción in 1869. These rival groups published newspapers and contended for influence in the political organization of Paraguay. (For the Colorado party, see chapter 5.)

With Rio Branco directing events, the Allies set up a Triumvirate as the provisional government, a move that precipitated intense activity among the Colorados and the Liberals. Rio Branco's choice to head the Triumvirate was the ex-sergeant Cirilo Antonio Rivarola. Scion of a prominent family, Rivarola was a brave man whose moderate ability was unequal to the task of surviving the devious intrigues that kept Paraguay's political scene in constant turmoil. After a year of bickering, Argentina and Brazil finally agreed on a preliminary treaty that all parties signed on June 20, 1870, and the Triumvirate could proceed with efforts at reconstruction. Having no resources and receiving almost no aid from the Allies, Rivarola accomplished very little as the extent of war's catastrophe revealed itself.

A provisional government having been organized, the next step in political reconstruction was the election of delegates to a constitutional convention that would draft a charter to guide the creation of a permanent government. In the contest for delegates to the convention of 1870, Liberals won a numerical advantage but were outmaneuvered by Bareiro's followers. Godoi, one of the *convencionales,* persuaded the convention to replace Rivarola with Facundo Machaín as provisional president, only to have Bareiro undo his scheme promptly with a coup that had Allied approval. Bareiristas then removed Liberals from control of the convention but kept the Decouds and Machaín to write the constitution. The convention finished its work quickly, elected Rivarola as constitutional president, and on November 25, 1870, a Te Deum in the cathedral celebrated the installation of Paraguay's new government.

Rivarola was only slightly more effective as president than he had been as a triumvir, but he tried valiantly. During his first few months in office, a Brazilian favorite, Juan Bautista Gill, emerged as a powerful politician. His questionable conduct in office precipitated a series of events that caused Rivarola to dissolve Congress and to order new elections, after which he promised to resign and to allow

the new Congress to elect a president. The Allies made no attempt to interfere with these blatantly unconstitutional moves. The new Congress was duly elected, and Rivarola, true to his promise and thinking that he had Gill's support, submitted his resignation and retired to his country estate. Much to his chagrin, Congress accepted the resignation and replaced him with Vice-President Salvador Jovellanos in December 1871. The Rivarola regime had been badly shaken by plots and a revolt in November led by two war heroes, General Bernardino Caballero and Colonel Patricio Escobar, who were destined to dominate the first Colorado era.

To negotiate a general treaty with Paraguay, Brazil replaced Rio Branco with João Mauricio Wanderley, Barão de Cotegipe. Argentina's envoy was Dr. Manuel Quintana, a brilliant lawyer-politician whose best arguments could not persuade Cotegipe to honor territorial commitments of the Triple Alliance treaty. Cotegipe proceeded to negotiate a treaty with Paraguay by which Brazil gained all its territorial objectives. He then returned to Brazil, leaving Juan Bautista Gill without his main support in the struggle for power with Benigno Ferreira, the strongman of the Jovellanos cabinet. Ferreira soon forced Gill into exile. Two scandalous loans floated in London in 1871 and 1872 netted Paraguayan politicians about $400,000 in gold and burdened the country with a debt of £1,562,000, a debt that weighed heavily on Paraguay throughout the Colorado era.

The years 1872–1874 were tumultuous as revolts masterminded by Bareiro enlisted the support of Caballero, Escobar, Gill, and Rivarola in a successful attempt to force Ferreira from power. Although Gill had played a minor role in the revolt, he had Brazilian support in the election of 1874 and became president for the term ending in November 1878. Gill sincerely wished to see the end of Brazilian occupation, a goal made possible by signing the Machaín-Irigoyen treaty with Argentina in 1876. Since Argentina and Paraguay agreed to submit their Chaco dispute to arbitration, Brazil hastened to evacuate its troops. Delighted with this development, President Gill turned his considerable talents to dealing with the awesome social and economic problems which had defied solution. However, he had only a few months to enjoy his new freedom from the Brazilian presence. A plot by Juan Silvano Godoi resulted in his murder on April 12, 1877, giving him the dubious honor of being the only Paraguayan president to be assassinated while in office. Vice-President Higinio Uriarte completed the term, and then gave way to Cándido Bareiro.

Part I

THE COLORADOS' PARAGUAY

"It is impossible not to feel pity for this unfortunate but singularly interesting country, which, from no fault of its own, but rather from adversity and the long reigns of tyranny, has been so suddenly plunged from its former position of an influential, rich, and rising Republic, to its present comparatively unknown state. However, it cannot be denied that with peace and the steady-increasing prosperity, and with enlightened and liberal statesmen (such as the present Government) to promote the welfare of the people, in encouraging foreigners to come out by offering them reliable securities, by settling pending claims, by showing themselves to be in earnest, and thus, finally, bringing their country to the favourable notice of Europe, Paraguay has every reason to hope that she will regain her former prosperity and rank among the great South American Republics."

Arthur G. Vansittart
Buenos Aires, November 15, 1882

1

The Land, the People, the Towns

The Colorados inherited a Paraguay greatly reduced in area by the Brazilian and Argentine treaties of 1872 and 1876 and with its claim to the Chaco Boreal challenged by both Argentina and Bolivia. The Paraguayans, except for a few fringe settlements like Villa Occidental (later renamed Villa Hayes) on the right bank of the Río Paraguay, lived east of the Indian-infested, forbidding Chaco. Often called a paradise by poorly informed writers whose exaggerated description bore little resemblance to reality, eastern Paraguay could not be developed without a tremendous amount of work and a continuing struggle against natural forces. Although Spanish colonization had begun in 1537, Paraguay in the 1870s was still an undeveloped country whose small population was grouped into struggling villages and towns or scattered widely in less than one-half of the area east of the river.

The Land

The total area occupied by Paraguay could not be determined accurately or even approximately until ownership of the Chaco Boreal had been settled, and this was not done until the boundary was agreed upon in 1938, after Paraguay had won the bloody Chaco War (1932–1935) against Bolivia. Eastern Paraguay was 61,719 square miles of savannah, swamp, and forest, approximately equal to the area ceded to Brazil and Argentina after the Paraguayan War. The Chaco Boreal extended northwestward toward Bolivia. Although Paraguay eventually obtained title to 95,328 square miles of this area, there was no Bolivian-Paraguayan boundary during the first Colorado era.[1] Not until the 1890s was there any serious or extensive effort by Paraguay to develop the neighboring Chaco. Except for the

few occupied spots on the right bank, the Colorados' Paraguay was the 39,500,160 acres lying east of the river.

Most of Paraguay was very poorly known as late as 1890. The French geographer-explorer, Emmanuel de Bourgade la Dardye, found many errors in existing maps because of difficulties presented by the terrain: "The vast virgin forests extending through the east and north have presented an obstacle to travellers before which they have recoiled. Beyond the valley that reaches from Asunción to Villa Encarnación, except for a few roads that have been opened for the purpose of exploring the forests of yerba-maté, there are hardly any highways of communication, almost all transport being conducted along the rivers, upon the banks of which the population is mainly concentrated."[2]

The two great rivers, the Paraguay and the Paraná, served as boundaries for most of eastern Paraguay. At the southwestern tip of the country, the Paraguay flows into the Paraná at an altitude of 180 feet above sea level some eight hundred miles north of Buenos Aires. this is the lowest point in Paraguay and contrasts sharply with a couple of hills northeast of Asunción which exceed two thousand feet. The swampy, thinly populated Ñeembucú Plain in the southwest is drained by the meandering Tebicuary River. To the north, in a belt of hills and fertile valleys formed by volcanic upheavals, most of the Paraguayans lived in villages and on small farms. Low conical hills dot the basaltic plain that extends east to the Paraná Plateau. The hills within Asunción rise to three hundred feet or more above the river. North of this central hill belt is the extensive central lowland that continues across the Rio Apa into Brazil's Mato Grosso. The Paraná Plateau comprises one-third of the country from the Encarnación area in the southeast to the Brazilian border on the north.[3]

Affluents of the Paraguay drain most of the country. Except when they flow down from the Paraná Plateau, Paraguayan rivers are shallow, meandering streams. Only the Paraguay itself is navigable by craft larger than rafts and *chatas* (low-lying barges, sometimes armed with a small caliber cannon). Nevertheless, the Tebicuary in the south, and the Manduvirá, Jejuí-guazú, Ypané, and Aquidabán north of Asunción were important transportation routes in a country where roads were practically nonexistent. Except for the Río Monday and Río Acaray systems, nearly all the rivers that flow eastward or southward to the Paraná are short streams of little economic significance.

In attempting to attract immigrants, many nineteenth-century writers greatly exaggerated the fertility of Paraguay's soil. Misled by the great expanse of dense tropical forests, the exuberant and varied vegetation that flourished in a generally mild climate, they composed extravagant rhapsodies. Of eastern Paraguay's less than 40 million

acres, about 30 percent, or 12 million acres, can support intensive agriculture if scientific practices are followed, a condition met poorly if at all in the nineteenth century. More than one-half of the area of very good soils is in the forested Alto Paraná region, which was very sparsely inhabited. Only about 400,000 acres of rich land lie in the central area where the largest cities, Asunción and Villa Rica, scores of villages, and a large number of small farms (or *chacras*) were located. Altogether, about one-half of eastern Paraguay can be cultivated with expectation of fair results. Application of proper fertilizers is necessary to provide such essential minerals as phosphorous, calcium, and magnesium.[4]

Eastern Paraguay has few metallic minerals, a frustrating fact in view of the abundance of such resources in neighboring Brazilian states. There is some iron ore near Ybicuí, about forty kilometers south of Paraguarí, which was capably exploited under the direction of English engineers imported by Carlos Antonio López. A few other important deposits were largely ignored. Sandstone, limestone, granite, clays, talc, and glass sand are abundant in several areas. Excellent bricks and tiles were produced in the Villa Hayes area of the Chaco and at scores of kilns in eastern Paraguay, especially at Areguá and Villa Rica. Many industries using marble, limestone, basaltic stone, sandstone, and other minerals could be established, but there was almost no capital for such enterprises until well into the twentieth century.

Paraguay's wealth was primarily vegetable, and nature had been lavish in endowing the country with a bewildering variety of plants, ranging from microscopic organisms to gigantic trees that reached heights of more than one hundred twenty feet. Travelers to Paraguay invariably noted the lush vegetation that blanketed the palm-studded savannahs, covered the hills with forests, and grew with wild abandon in the great swamps of the southwest. South and southeast of Asunción there were large areas of good grazing land, and even the swampy Ñeembucú Plain could support large herds of cattle. The variety of flora made Paraguay a great laboratory for the botanist and naturalist.

Magnificent forests covered about one-half of eastern Paraguay, and large stands of quebracho, palm, and other varieties relieved the monotony of the Chaco. Probably the most imposing and richest tropical, or pseudotropical, forest occupied much of the plateau from Encarnación north to the Río Acaray. Agricultural colonists in this area were required to expend a great amount of labor, first to clear the forest and then to prevent its encroachment on their fields. Large stands of native yerba (*Ilex paraguayensis*) occurred in many areas and formed the basis for numerous Paraguayan fortunes.[5]

The climate of eastern Paraguay generally is described as being

Map 1. Eastern Region of the Republic of Paraguay
Adapted from Adolf N. Schuster, *Paraguay* (Stuttgart, 1929), p. 16.

subtropical. Masses of hot, humid air from the north blanket the country in the summer, while cold air from the south can make the winters miserable. There are no mountain barriers to the flow of these air masses. Paraguay's summer, roughly from November through March, brings periods when the temperature rises above 100°. These miserably hot and humid days generally end with torrential rains that bring temporary relief. For a short time after a heavy rain there may be some pleasant weather before the oppressive heat again closes in. Annual precipitation in eastern Paraguay averages fifty-five inches in Asunción, fifty-nine inches in Villa Rica, and sixty-seven inches in Encarnación. Most of the rain falls in the summer months, although there is no well defined rainy season.

Paraguayan winters, while usually not severe, can be cold enough to cause considerable discomfort. Temperatures range from about 30° to over 90° F., with averages in the sixties. Frost occurs every year somewhere in the country, generally on the Paraná Plateau. The threat of frost in May, June, July, and August is very real. In 1878 there were sixteen days of frost in these months, three in 1880, and ten in 1881 when ice formed in rural areas and coffee trees suffered severe damage. Despite the obvious climatic shortcomings of very heavy rains, frequent droughts, extreme heat, stifling humidity, and raw winter days, nineteenth-century observers generally agreed with the secretary of the British legation in Buenos Aires who stated in his very thorough report of 1882 that "it may be safely said that the climate of Paraguay, on the whole, is a healthy one, and can be compared very favourably with that of any other country in South America."[6]

Nature often is harsh in Paraguay. Heavy rains frequently cause floods both east and west of the Río Paraguay. Rivers overflow their banks and create broad swamps, or *esteros,* cut new channels, and leave behind numerous oxbow lakes. These lakes and stagnant pools provide ideal breeding places for swarms of mosquitoes and contribute to the prevailing high humidity. A torrential rain is reason enough for people to stay home despite the importance of a scheduled event. Many an unwary pedestrian has been stranded on a street corner in Asunción as flooded streets become swift-flowing streams. Fortunately, enterprising men provide moveable sidewalk "bridges" and accept small gratuities from grateful pedestrians who prefer not to remove their shoes and hosiery in order to wade across the streets, or to wait for the flood to subside. In rural areas, small, easily forded creeks and rivulets turn into boiling torrents. Unless built on high ground, the farmer's hut or little house becomes isolated in a muddy sea, and the thatched roof often fails to shed the downpour.

Severe droughts occur with sufficient frequency to cause great agricultural losses. To these visitations are added swarms of locusts whose depredations increase the general misery. Resulting crop fail-

ures cause widespread hunger as plantings of maize, beans, and mandioca are destroyed. The three disastrous winter droughts of 1889, 1893, and 1897 contributed significantly to the financial problems of three Colorado presidents and coincided with economic depressions. The drought of 1889 caused such severe distress that both the national government and individuals sent relief to the hungry. *Jefes políticos* (local party leaders endowed with minor executive and police powers) were charged with distributing both money and food to the needy in their districts.[7] Four years later the Brazilian minister reported: "As a result of the prolonged drought that has also occurred in this country, a general despondency prevails in the interior, because of the pitiful condition of the crops. Serious future consequences are feared, not only for agriculture but also for animal husbandry."[8] In 1897, when for four months there was almost no rain, nearly all crops died and locusts devoured what did survive. The government cancelled import duties on maize which the Banco Agrícola bought in large quantities to distribute at cost. The British consul, W. J. Holmes, reported that this drought had serious economic effects:

> There has been no improvement in the trade and commerce of this consular district during the year 1897. On the contrary, a succession of bad seasons and other misfortunes seriously interfered with trade and caused an almost general failure of crops. A cold and almost rainless winter was followed by an exceptionally hot and almost rainless summer. Wells and springs were dried up—in many places are dry still—and the crops, when they did not fail entirely, gave but a scanty yield. To add to the distress brought about by unpropitious seasons, large swarms of locusts made their appearance about the middle of September, first at Villa del Pilar and afterward in other parts of the country. . . . The agricultural classes—who at the best of times lead more or less hand-to-mouth existence—having in consequence of these visitations little or no produce to sell and, indeed, barely enough to live on, were without money to purchase either seed for sowing or other necessaries. Country traders and shopkeepers consequently were unable to dispose of their stocks, and the wholesale merchants in Asunción, in their turn, were not only obliged to put up with reduced sales, but could not obtain payment of the sums due to them by their country customers.[9]

Low water reduced traffic on the Paraguay and Paraná rivers, and large numbers of chatas loaded with yerba were left stranded on interior streams. Steamers from Buenos Aires could approach no closer than Angostura, thirty-two miles below the capital. This drought, one of the longest on record, continued to September 1898. Indeed, there was inadequate rainfall from 1894 to 1898, and for the seven years ending in 1898, locust infestations practically ruined agriculture.[10]

The People

Determining the size of Paraguay's population has always been an exercise in frustration. The difficulties and pitfalls encountered by the demographer were graphically described by a careful investigator:

> The estimates that have been made as to the aggregate population of Paraguay are of the most conflicting character. Scarcely any writers agree in their statements, and amongst the numerous returns that have been put forth, not a few have been wilfully or carelessly misleading, whilst others are in flagrant violation of every law which governs such statistics everywhere. If a summary recently published in a local review could be accepted, it would be certain that Paraguay must have experienced some strange convulsions of the ordinary conditions of human reproduction—entire families being obliterated by sterility, and others being multiplied with the fecundity of a rabbit-warren.[11]

There was only one comprehensive count between 1785 and 1872, that of 1846, the results of which remained generally unknown until Dr. John Hoyt Williams unearthed about twenty thousand pages of documents in the Archivo Nacional in Asunción. This census yielded 238,862 persons in eastern Paraguay. On the basis of this count, Williams estimates that the population might have been about 400,000 when the Paraguayan War began in 1864. At the close of the war, the Allies estimated the population at about 176,000 natives and 56,000 foreigners. All estimates merely guessed at the number of Indians in the Chaco and east of the Paraguay River. Excluding Indians and the occupation forces, a figure of 232,000 may be assumed to be fairly accurate for 1872. In 1876 a large number of foreigners left when the Brazilians evacuated their troops, but no one knows how many. Again, assuming an annual increase of about 3 percent, which seems reasonable, there were about 200,000 people in eastern Paraguay in 1880, considerably fewer than the 346,048 reported by the government in 1879.[12] A Brazilian consul-general estimated the 1884 population at 320,000, including 19,600 foreigners (see table 1). The Mulhalls, leading Argentine publishers, reported a total of 180,000, including 3,000 foreigners, in 1885. A census of sorts in 1900 estimated the population at 635,571, including some 80,000 Chaco Indians.[13] From these questionable data, it is possible for the daring to conclude that the population of eastern Paraguay during the first Colorado era increased from less than 300,000 in 1880 to nearly 600,000 in 1900, a figure that approximates an annual increase of 3 percent.

A large majority of Paraguayans lived in small towns, villages, and on ranchos (small farms) scattered throughout the country. The largest center of population was Asunción, which numbered about

Table 1
Estimated Foreign Population of Paraguay in 1884

Country of Origin	*Number*	*Country of Origin*	*Number*
Italy	8,500	Germany	500
Spain	8,000	England	100
France	800	Argentina	100
Brazil	800	Uruguay	100
Portugal	600	Others	100

Source: Pedro Ribeiro Moreira, "Relatorio commercial e politico do anno findo de 1884," RCBA-0 238/3/7.

18,000 in 1880. Outside of the capital, only Villa Rica (Villarrica), the center of a rich agricultural area, was of any considerable importance. Even this very old city had only 13,000 people in 1880. Concepción, northern center of the yerba trade, was third with about 11,000. San Pedro, north of Asunción at the mouth of the important Río Jejuí, was fourth in size with about 10,000. Encarnación, the terminus of the Paraguay Central Railway to the southeast, was destined to become relatively important, but its population was insignificant until after 1900 (see table 2). Villages of a few hundred people were numerous and by 1904 had become a dominant demographic feature. Paraguay was still very thinly inhabited at the end of the Colorado era. Nevertheless, the trend toward urbanization was well under way. Fifteen years after the Colorado era ended, William Lytle Schurz observed accurately: "If a line were drawn in a slightly southeastern direction from the Apa to the Alto Paraná, passing through Horqueta, San Estanislao, and Colonia Hohenau, the country to the east of this line would include the most undeveloped portion of the Republic, except, of course, the interior of the Chaco. There are probably not more than 25,000 inhabitants in all this region, which comprises considerably over half the area of eastern Paraguay. For all practical purposes, most of this country is farther from the capital than is Buenos Aires."[14]

The Paraguayan War left the surviving population with a great disparity between the sexes. Although all figures for the postwar period are inaccurate, the Allies in 1872 reported that of Asunción's 17,350 civilians, 11,066 were females. This ratio of females to males may have held for much of the country. The official census of 1879 showed 230,000 females and 116,000 males, or about two to one, a much more likely state of affairs than the frequently repeated nonsense that there were ten or more females to every male. By 1900, the normal balance between the sexes had been restored, but during

Table 2
Principal Centers of Population, 1879 and 1897

City or Village	*1879*	*1897*
Asunción	16,000	45,000
Villa Rica	12,600	19,000
Concepción	10,700	10,000
San Pedro	9,700	8,000
Luque	8,800	9,000
San Estanislao	7,400	7,500
Itauguá	6,900	7,100
Itá	6,300	6,500
Paraguarí	5,300	5,700
Humaitá	3,800	3,700
Pilar	3,700	3,722
Yaguarón	3,400	3,600

Sources: H. G. and E. T. Mulhall, *Handbook of the River Plate,* (5th ed., 1885), p. 626; Meulemans, *La République du Paraguay,* p. 3.

most of the Colorado era females undoubtedly outnumbered males. The problem was further exacerbated by the tendency of males to seek employment in neighboring Brazilian and Argentine provinces. Although Colorado governments made efforts from time to time to promote the immigration of industrious Europeans, they had little success in competing with countries that offered greater stability and more attractive political and economic conditions.

Principal Cities and Towns

Viewed from the vantage point of Cerro Tacumbú, a hill to the southwest, Asunción was a picturesque city of closely packed houses with roofs of red tile, bordering sandy streets lined with orange trees except in the central area where the lack of trees was painfully noticeable. One could see the few large buildings near the river and a variety of craft anchored in the bay protected by the Banco San Miguel, and the muddy Río Paraguay bordering the Chaco. The view was enchanting to Ernst Mevert who noted that many houses facing the streets were built around flower-filled patios where a central well provided water for family use.[15] A British observer noted that "dense orange groves surround the numerous 'Quintas' which encircle the town whilst in the far west of the picture the Chaco is discerned and to the south rises the Peak of Lambaré."[16]

The general appearance of Asunción changed so little during the

Colorado era that one who might have left the town when Caballero seized power in 1880 could have returned fifty years later without finding any need for reorientation. The Colorados added no imposing buildings to those left by the López family. The Cabildo, where Congress met, the unfinished Oratorio, now the Panteón Nacional de los Héroes, with its imposing dome, the cathedral, railway station, López Palace, customs house, and National Theater remained as principal landmarks. The English journalist W. F. Mulhall from Buenos Aires had little to say that was complimentary about either private dwellings or public buildings: The López Palace was "out of all proportion with the size of the town. . . . The majority of buildings in Asunción are extravagant luxuries, out of place in their narrow surroundings and too big for Asunción. . . . These ruins of past greatness, glaring at the wretched buildings all around, looking down on the poverty-stricken people that wander under their rumbling pillars, tottering arcades, and dangling rafters, are unique. They are not grand, rather the reverse, but they must have appeared colossal to a people living in primitive dwellings." The whole effort at grandeur was a spurious brick-and-mortar attempt to copy the granite of France.[17]

The marketplace, extremely busy for a short time after daybreak, provided both color and odors in the downtown area. In the 1890s, this market was still a threat to public health, a focus of infection "that continually omits its unhealthy odors and contaminates the entire neighborhood."[18] Housed in a large building with colonnaded walls, the market was the gathering place for scores of barefooted women who had risen before dawn to carry their baskets of corn, beans, peas, short cigars, mandioca, meat, chipá (buns or cakes made of mandioca flour and cheese), fruits, and other produce to market. The shopper could also buy mate, *ñanduti* (spiderweb) lace, leather goods, and small bundles of firewood. At the end of the century an American found it strange that "notwithstanding the large forests, the firewood of Asunción is sold in little bundles at the markets. A bundle costs five cents, and the average housekeeper buys her wood from day to day, and carries it home along with her vegetables and meat."[19] Although the more affluent sellers occupied stalls, most of the women sat on the ground with their goods arranged before them.

Asunción had plenty of hotels to serve the traveler. Best of all was the Hispano Americano, formerly the mansion of Benigno López, on Calle Palma, noted for its "handsome glass-covered patio, beautifully adorned with stuccoed columns that produce the most agreeable effect." Transients of modest means preferred the Hotel Crimea or the Oriental.[20]

Reflecting increased business activity resulting in part from public land sales, Asunción grew considerably from 1885 to 1890. Home building and rental units failed to meet the demand for hous-

ing; two new hotels provided some relief but living costs were high, especially for foreigners who demanded more than the natives. Some Paraguayans joined critical foreigners in deploring the condition of their city. After nine years of Colorado rule, one editor complained that nothing had been done to improve the capital:

> The foreigners who come to visit this capital have good reason to accuse us of being a forsaken disorderly city, and especially because the central and most heavily populated area is the filthiest and most neglected part of the city.
>
> Outsiders and natives immediately notice the high and unsightly weeds along the main streets that elicit justified condemnation of the indolent city government that does not require inhabitants and every proprietor to clean their property to the edge of the sidewalk on every street.[21]

A traveler in 1888 commented on the beautiful trees and flowers that were allowed to grow untended in the plazas which were without benches for the visitor. The unadorned city, more than a decade after Caballero had seized power, had not been improved. The major old buildings were in disrepair or remained unfinished, although a new theater was being built to replace the skeletal remains of the ambitious theater planned by the Italian architect Alejandro Ravizza. An influx of European influence would yet make Asunción an important metropolis. However, by 1913 Asunción had changed little. The red tiled roofs, barred windows opening on the street, the Andalusian patio, and other features of Moorish origin, had not disappeared. Homes in the more traditional Western European style were being built as the city thrust outward.[22]

A sympathetic visitor from Buenos Aires believed that one week was plenty to spend in the capital. The majority of tourists returned by the steamer that had brought them on a leisurely trip up the winding Paraná and Paraguay rivers, "bearing with them impressions which mainly depend on the social surroundings into which they have been thrown. A few may have enjoyed themselves, but the greater number go back with the conviction that Asunción is a wretched place, half in ruins, intolerably hot, miserably dull and destitute of all interest, and they are right to a certain extent."[23] Two decades later, a semiofficial publication indulged in extravagant praise of Asunción as a flower garden of paradise for the ill to convalesce and for the tourist to revel in the "mixture of primitive and civilized."[24]

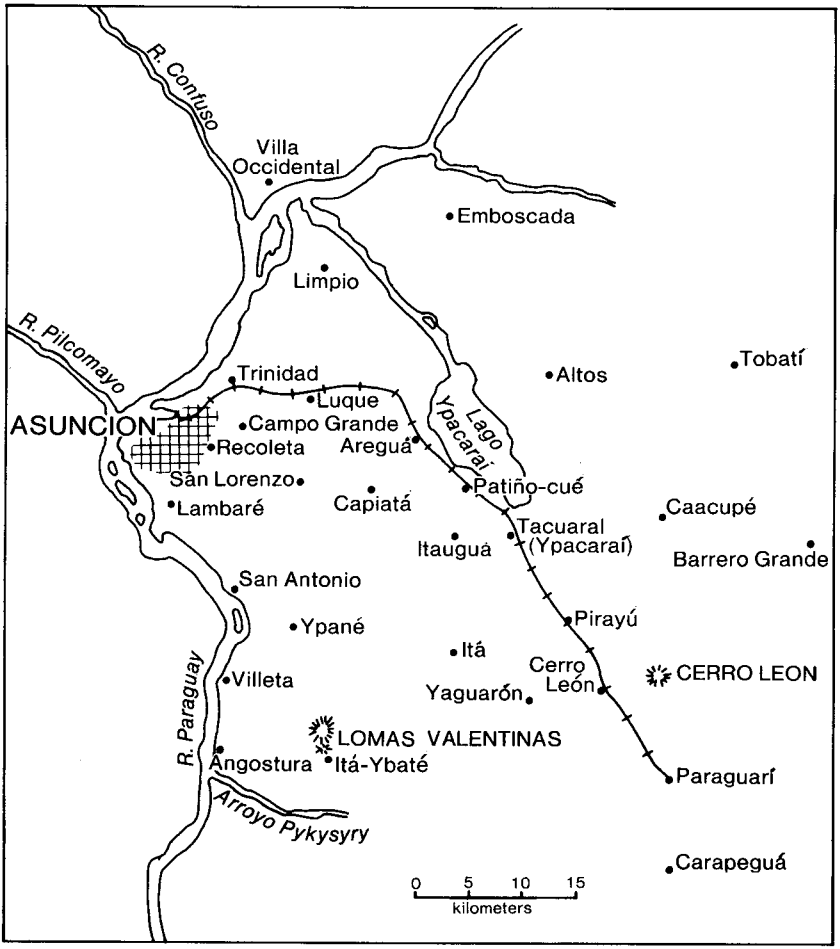
A real estate boom in the mid 1880s caused land prices to double in a few months. Both foreign and native speculators made small fortunes as rural residents succumbed to the lure of the capital, and a small flow of immigrants more than doubled the city's population in two decades and outran the ability of the *municipalidad* (city gov-

ernment) to provide needed services. The city's shortcomings were obvious: unpaved and unlighted streets, irregular sidewalks, poor drainage, no central water or sewage systems, inadequate public transportation, and a very indifferent police force.

Starting with relics of the López era, the Colorados achieved more in planning than in construction of public monuments. The López Palace, finally finished in 1888 except for painting, provided quarters for the president and other officials, but several agencies had to share the old unfinished theater. In the 1890s, several new buildings were completed, and plans were drawn for repairing and enlarging existing structures. The Public Works Commission enlisted the services of José Segundo Decoud, Emilio Aceval, and other prominent citizens when it was created in 1887, and despite limited income did manage to contract for dredging the harbor and repairing many public buildings. This commission planned wisely, and eventually its projects for an insane asylum, new wharves, bridges and roads, a new port, park and street improvements, schools, and completion of the Oratorio, were realized.[25] Economic depressions, almost chronic during the Colorado era, caused many needed projects to be postponed. Despite various efforts to provide a central water supply, such as the concession to Ricardo Antonio Gonçalves in 1893, Asunción depended upon wells, cisterns, springs, and windmills until well after World War II.

The capital's streets were in a deplorable condition when the Colorados came to power. In fact, they showed little improvement from the time of the dictator Francia and deteriorated badly during the Allied occupation. At the end of 1878, the Brazilian chargé observed that "gas lighting, sewers, running water, drains, etc., improvements which always go with civilization of a people, are all unknown in Paraguay, which for many years to come will be without them, such is the state of misery and of prostration in which the city exists."[26] Gradual improvement in lighting increased the sense of security in pedestrians who rarely ventured out at night except in groups large enough to repel would-be footpads. The 350 kerosene lamps that provided dim light in 1870 had been increased to 1,000 by 1896 and gave employment to a score of men who replenished the kerosene, cleaned the globes, and lighted the lamps at dusk. Hopeful enterprisers who obtained concessions for gas lights in 1872 and 1886 were unable to carry out their plans. Concessions for arc lights were granted by 1900, but resulted in nothing more than a few lights by 1904.[27] President Escobar asked Congress to use $f2,000,000 from land sales for public works. High on the list was improvement of the capital's all but impassable streets and construction of bridges and roads in the interior to facilitate transportation of agricultural products.[28]

Travel on Asunción's streets was always an adventure for the daring—and still is. Because much of the city was sixty or more feet above the river, the streets sloped enough to create intermittent streams that came with every rain and left several inches of sand while washing away accumulated debris. Pedestrians were well advised to avoid the narrow sidewalks at night because they varied suddenly and unpredictably in height and were in constant disrepair. Congress on July 30, 1874, approved a contract with Sinforiano Alcorta, an Argentine enterpriser resident in Asunción, to pave some of the central area with granite. Several years later little progress had been made, and one editor noted that "the condition of our streets



Map 2. Asunción Area

with their big puddles is shameful."[29] An Englishman who knew Asunción well has left a graphic description of the city's streets:

> There are no public carriages in Asunción, and, indeed, no other vehicles than rough bullock carts. I believe that there is a State carriage stowed away somewhere, which is brought to light now and then, in order to convey a Foreign Minister to his official reception, and there may be two or three others, the property of rich Brazilians, which are used for journeys outside the town, but to drive in a carriage through the streets of Asunción, would be a feat which would certainly end in the collapse of all the springs, and probably in that of the occupants.
>
> A sort of red iron rock-stone is the foundation of the streets; where it is very hard, a point or a little hillock is formed; where it is softer, the ground is worn into a rut. There are natural springs almost everywhere, and rivulets running through the streets, which during heavy rains become torrents.[30]

City officials had little success in collecting taxes to pay for street lighting, cleaning, improvements, and patrols to stop the stealing of lights and to drive off the animals that wandered freely through the city. With aid from Congress, they succeeded in paving some sixteen thousand meters with stone from nearby quarries before the Liberals took over in 1904, and by 1910 about forty thousand square meters of wooden blocks and stone paving had been completed in the capital.[31] The block pavement on Calle Palma was so well done that it was in good condition thirty years later.

Two tramway companies were doing a big business in Asunción by 1890, and a telephone company was operating successfully. The first tramway was proposed by James Nelson Horrocks for a group of English capitalists on April 1, 1871. Congress granted the concession, and the first portion of the line, running for about thirteen blocks from the port market to the railway station, began operating on January 19, 1873. Cars drawn by horses and mules made nineteen round trips daily between 6:40 A.M. and 8:30 P.M.[32] In the 1880s, another tramway company, El Conductor Universal, built a line running from the port to La Cancha Sociedad, an amusement park and playing field on the northeast edge of the city. Dr. Francisco Morra bought the Horrocks tramway and obtained a concession to extend it to the Recoleta church and cemetery to the southeast. This is the area of the present Villa Morra development. Morra's extension began to operate on September 29, 1887. An English capitalist with Argentine ranching experience, Campbell P. Ogilvie, bought the profitable tramway for £45,000 in 1889 and extended it to San Lorenzo del Campo Grande, then ten miles from Asunción.[33] Traffic increased through 1892, then fell off somewhat as streets improved, service deteriorated, and personnel became insolent and incompetent. Altogether the Villa Morra Company had fourteen miles of track, monopolized the tramway service, employed 1,770 men, used 150

horses and mules and five locomotives to haul forty-four passenger cars and twenty-three freight wagons. In 1898, 698,000 passengers rode the cars, a considerable decrease from the 1,500,000 riders in 1891.[34]

Hundreds of people went on outings to the Recoleta cemetery, a rather grim place for social amusements, but one that provided a fine view of the city. A spacious lawn in front of the plain church provided a playground for children while their elders cleaned the houselike mausoleums or decorated graves with lace and ribbons. A fine Italian restaurant beside the cemetery was a favorite place for fashionable breakfasts.

Foreign influence made such an impact on Asunción that some travelers refused to accept the small capital as typical of the country. Disliking the "European varnish" that was causing the city to lose "all of its original and striking features, the traveler who wanted to see the 'real' Paraguay had to visit the interior." Riding from the railhead at Paraguarí to Villa Rica in 1887, a distance of about forty miles, P. A. Freund and W. F. Mulhall of Buenos Aires preferred the crude comforts of farmers' huts to the attractions of Asunción. Entering Villa Rica at noon on a hot day, they found the streets deserted and were appalled by the number of houses in ruins. "Not a soul to be seen; not a dog stirring; not a sound to be heard, beyond the tramp of our horses' hoofs; no hotels, no inns: this in the midst of a thriving, industrious, and populous settlement."[35] The travelers should not have been surprised by such inactivity. After all, it was siesta time. Before the war, at least eighty commercial houses were doing business in the city, and "often one hundred bullock carts left for Tacuaral and Paraguay [Paraguarí] laden with tobacco, rice, maize, etc. Today [1887] there are not eight stores and not a dozen carts leave the town in a week. In every street you see the decay of past prosperity: old brick houses in ruins, roofs falling into pieces, new dwellings of small size and wretched appearance springing up alongside the massive walls of old days."[36] This hardly conforms to the picture of a "thriving, industrious, and populous settlement." Many buildings, including the old church, were in ruins but many substantial houses were being built, and the new church in the center of town was well kept and crowded with worshipers on Sundays and religious holidays.

Villa Rica, Paraguay's second city in size and importance, was founded in 1676 after having been moved from its original location in Guayrá in southwestern Brazil in the early seventeenth century to escape the raids of *mamelucos* (mestizos) from São Paulo. Temporarily located at other sites, the city was finally built on a pleasant plateau about six hundred feet above sea level. Surrounded by fertile fields, the city prospered and rivaled Asunción until the war nearly destroyed it. After the Paraguayan War, Villa Rica attracted foreign