

Part IV Fat Cows and Lean Cows

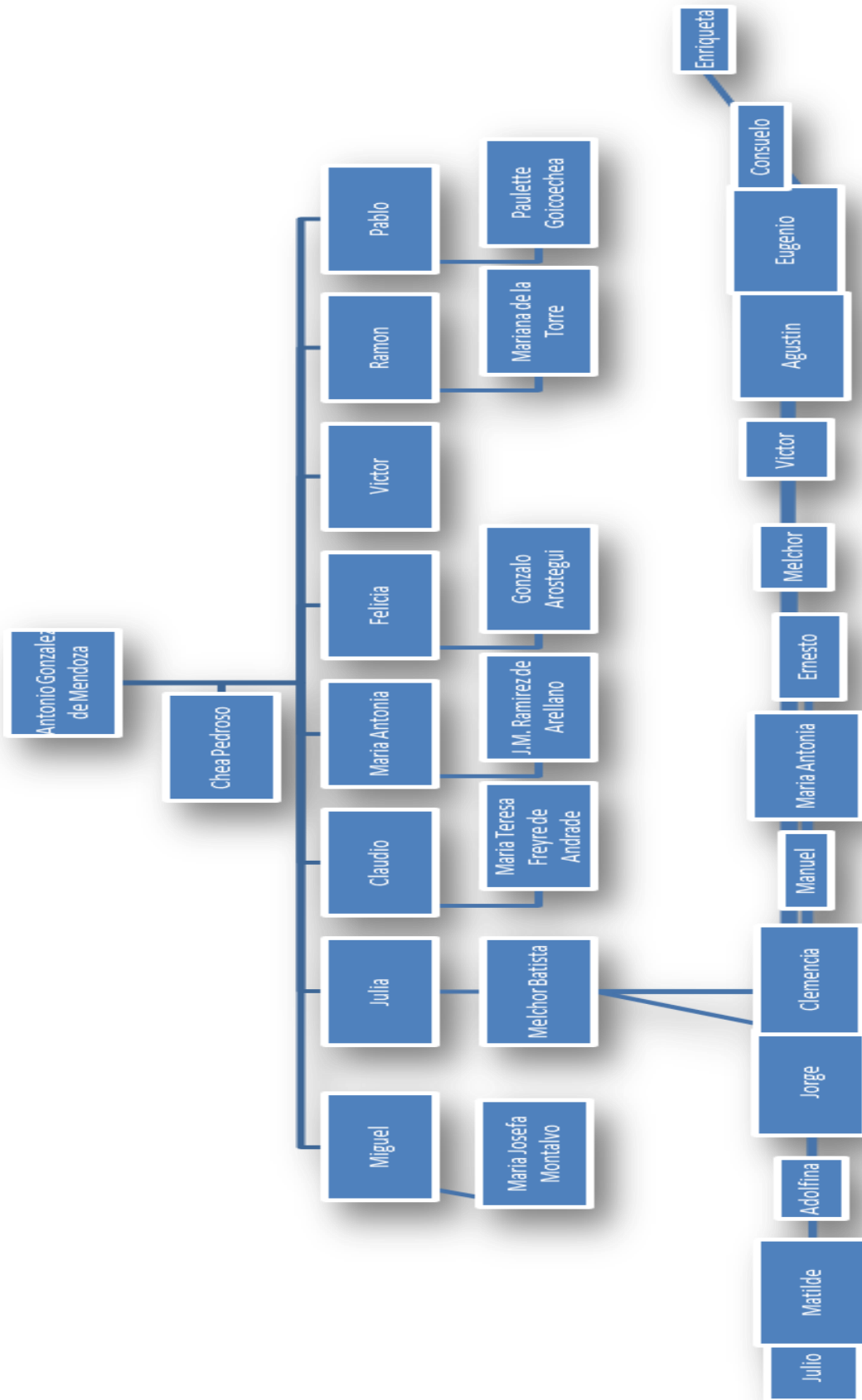
The First World War caused Cuba's single-crop economy to undergo a dramatic rise with the price of sugar in world markets, a trend that was dramatically reversed with the end of the conflict. This period became known as one of *vacas gordas y vacas flacas*, the years of fat and lean cattle after the Old Testament prophecy of seven years of abundance followed by an equal time of privations. The windfall and slump economy along with the growing inequity between rich and poor was fertile ground for popular discontent and radical politics.

The modernization that was the hallmark of the republican years extended to the sugar plantations. Electricity, an important new element of the urban grid and a source of energy for mills created a growing dependence on the privately owned electricity companies. By the 1920s, major stockholders of these companies such as President Gerardo Machado and millionaire Laureano Falla enjoyed a dramatic concentration of wealth thanks in part to the low rates to power their mills.

In 1903 Ramon Mendoza founded the Cuban Automobile Club along with a group of friends. The organization sponsored the first professional races in Havana. Set in the city, the races underscored the glamour of the car and heralded their popularity as a means of transportation to such places as the resorts and subdivisions that were sprouting up west of the city. These, along with the first bridge that made possible for cars to cross of the Almendares River, were among Ramon's key investments. The Mendoza brothers, most notably Pablo, Victor, Claudio and Miguel were among a privileged group that, having the confidence of both American investors and the Cuban governments, made fortunes in property during the boom of the twenties. The building activity in the four decades after the First World War benefited such architects as Eugenio Batista, who along with others, enjoyed patronage among the cosmopolitan middle and upper classes.

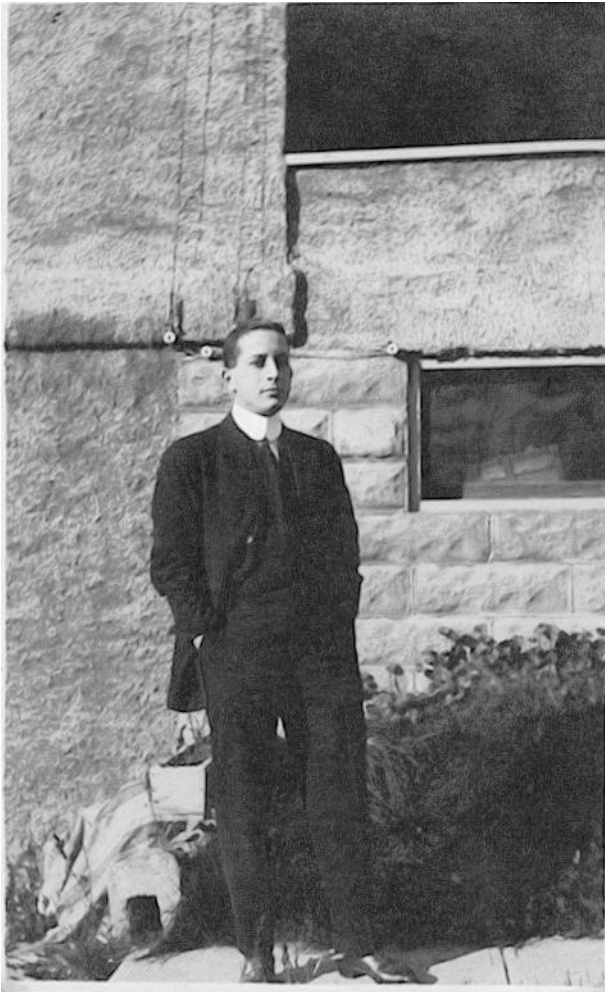
Not everyone was so lucky. The fortune of the tobacco millionaire Eduardo Casas disappeared almost overnight through ill-advised real estate investments by his widow. In the volatile economy many other families lost their money. The situation translated into a tolerance of strong-man political leadership that could guarantee stability.

Opposition to the broad corruption perpetuated by Cuban economic elite in partnership with American business interests took its leadership from student groups. Ramon's son Ignacio, a student in the 1920s, embodies this crisis of faith in the political leaders who had consolidated their power with the backing of Cuban entrepreneurs. He and his cohorts, many who were the children of the self-made men of the boom years, felt dispossessed of the promise of a free Cuban republic. Nevertheless, if they wanted distraction from the maddening political situation, Havana, a city that had transformed itself into a tourism and entertainment mecca, had it in spades.



Chapter 11 The Electrified Mill

Transformation of the sugar mill into electric plant and factory town; sugar industry's geographic shift east; American economic penetration; the cannibalized ruins of once monumental electric mills— today's marketable symbols of the Special Period



Jorge Batista, Cornell Electrical Engineering Class 1914

Jorge Batista Mendoza was 25 years old in 1914 when he graduated as an Electrical Engineer from Cornell University. In an undated portrait he stands before the cut stone and brick façade of Franklin Hall, home of the Engineering Department.¹ Other Cubans who had attended the New England college included Mario García Menocal, an 1888 graduate of the same program, who served as the country's president from 1913 to 1921.

¹ "Phillips Hall, the Early Years", Cornell School of Electrical and Computer Engineering website <http://www.ece.cornell.edu/dir-history.cfml> (Accessed 30 July 2012).



[Cornell University Campus 1892](#)

Although Cornell prided itself on being the most forward-thinking school in the Ivy League, certain traditions were strictly maintained. Freshmen were kept in their place by having to wear gray caps, being barred from certain salons, the best stands in the athletic field, and the front seats in the theatre.² Lacking dormitories, all students lodged in the fraternity houses in nearby Ithaca, New York. National fraternity houses gave foreign students a connection to home. The Cosmopolitan Club hosted lantern-slide talks on the social customs and industries of these students' countries. At the conclusion of the well-attended "Argentine Night" on May 16, 1913, a senior from the College of Mechanical Engineering pronounced, "It is a special duty which men of my country have assumed, to strive always for the uplift of the Latin race."³

Cornell was only one of the many institutions of higher learning that were booming in attendance. Indeed, campus life had acquired a special place in the American imagination for it was popularly believed that "the college man", an amalgam of brains and brawn, would lead the nation into the modern age. Thousands turned up regularly to cheer the individual drive and skilled teamwork on display at intercollegiate athletic events across the country. Competition was equated with egalitarianism in particular at Cornell, distinguishing students by merit and

² "Absolute Social Equality Rules at Ithaca Despite the Strength of Its Fraternities," *The New York Times*, January 5, 1913

³ "Ithaca's Argentine Night," *The New York Times*, May 17, 1913

setting the college above the elitism that prevailed in older Ivy League colleges.⁴ “All the managers of the athletic teams, the musical clubs and the masque and the managers and editors of Cornell’s ...dozen publications are chosen solely on the basis of ability shown in competition,” claimed a 1915 *New York Times* article entitled, “Absolute Social Equity Rules at Ithaca.”⁵

Electricity in Havana

Engineering, along with Law and Medicine, were the three principal careers to which bourgeois Cubans aspired. Beyond what personal appeal it may have held for Jorge, engineering had long been a requirement of the sugar industry in Cuba. Already by the 1860’s many Cuban mills had a seasonal resident in the form of an American machinist-engineer who was on-hand and able to repair the American-manufactured equipment at a moment’s notice during the sugar harvest. For Cuban mill owners Yankee know-how was embodied in this familiar figure.

Although mills transferred from steam to electrical power beginning in the second decade of the 20th century, electricity had already been introduced in large cities. In 1885, three years after Edison patented his discovery and four years before Jorge’s birth, the Compañía Eléctrica de Cuba, a General Electric subsidiary, introduced electricity to Havana with the installation of a 100-kilowatt generator at the Tallapiedra docks.⁶

Electricity altered Havana’s spaces at night. It ushered a nocturnal human flow into such promenades as the Prado, enhanced the entertainment nightlife and added to the other-world atmosphere of the annual carnival. Irene A. Wright,⁷ a journalist working in Havana in the first decade of the century, rhapsodized about the public illuminations. “...thousands of tiny colored electric light globes, strung from Punta to La India Park made all the promenades between seem fairyland. Then golden apples grew on the palms of Central Park, and the laurels of the Prado bore a crop of lights of national colors.”⁸

⁴ Cornell was founded in 1865.

⁵ “Absolute Social Equality Rules at Ithaca Despite the Strength of Its Fraternities,” *The New York Times*, January 5, 1913

⁶ Perez, Louis A. Jr , *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture* (UNC Press, 2000).73

⁷ Irene Aloha Wright, American writer and journalist, was born in 1879. She became a special writer for the *Havana Post* (1904 - 1905) and city editor of the *Havana Daily Telegraph* (1905 - 1907). She was owner and editor of *Cuba Magazine* (1908 - 1914). In 1910, Wright published *Cuba* which described the revolution of 1906 in Cuba. Wright also published several histories of Spanish Exploration in the New World.

⁸ Wright, Irene A. *Cuba*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1910)
<http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.b270357;page=root;view=image;size=100;seq=13> (accessed. 28 June 2011). 81

The metallic filament encased in a glass bulb and lit by an invisible energy was the palpable fruit of human ingenuity. The Columbia Industrial Exhibition, held in Chicago in 1893 and widely publicised through press photography, used millions of bulbs to highlight its idealized civic structures and parks. Electricity, rendering the ordinary monumental through public lighting, was the pinnacle of civilization and the glow extended to the shores of Cuba.



Agricultural Building at Night, from North West. With spotlight or beacon of light shining across the lagoon Large photographic print from *The White City (As It Was)*. Photographs by William Henry Jackson. World's Columbian Exposition. 1893. [World's Columbian Exposition Collection at The Field Museum](#)

On Becoming Cuban is Louis Pérez's breakdown of how Cubans' sense of themselves has been forged through an intimate and creative dialogue with American culture. He quotes a Cuban woman who in 1892 exalts in the novelty of a machine she encounters for the first time in the north: "...what I like most and would like to take to each house in Cuba, are the electric fans, in the shape of a windmill, that rotate with such velocity that the blades disappear... and eliminate the heat to the point where one feels cold."⁹ Electricity took visible form in seductive domestic appliances that brought Cubans closer to a modern ideal of an American lifestyle.

American Investment in Sugar Industry at the outset of the First World War; Cunagua, the Cuban-owned, Electric-powered mill; Jorge's work in Mendoza sugar mills

Electrical engineering was a good career choice for Jorge Batista for his uncles planned to convert their major sugar mill to a fully electrified plant. In 1906 Julia had sold her portion of Santa Gertrudis to her brother Ramon for \$50,000 with the agreement that a future sale would

⁹ Pérez, 67

entitle her to a percentage of the profit.¹⁰ In 1916 the mill complete with cane lands, machine shops, stoves, workers' houses, offices, residences for the managers, cane carts, oxen, hundreds of miles of rail and locomotives was sold for 2.7 million to the Cuba Cane Sugar Corporation. The latter, a newly formed American consortium, bought out the ten highest yielding mills in Matanzas just before the United States entered the First World War.¹¹ It was known that a cut-off of beet sugar supply from Europe would result in a spike in the demand and price for sugar.

\$75,000 was Julia's share of the proceeds from the sale of Santa Gertrudis to the Cuba Cane Sugar Corporation, a price she considered fair in light of the degree of renovation that her brothers had made to the mill.¹² However, a March 15th Wall Street Journal headline, "Cuba Cane Sugar Firm Investment Foundation—Plantations Secured at Bottom Prices on Options Beginning Before War's Outbreak"¹³ reflects the general perception that such estates as Santa Gertrudis were undervalued. They were being sold for a combination of shares of the new American corporate entity and cash. Six months after the founding of Cuba Cane Sugar only sixteen of the sellers of the Matanzas estates retained shares...¹⁴ The likelihood was that the Mendoza brothers sold because they needed capital for an ambitious new investment. This was Cunagua, a fully electrified mill that was constructed the following year and was ready for harvesting and grinding by 1918.



["Central Cunagua Ciego de Avila 1918" Cuban Heritage Collection](#)

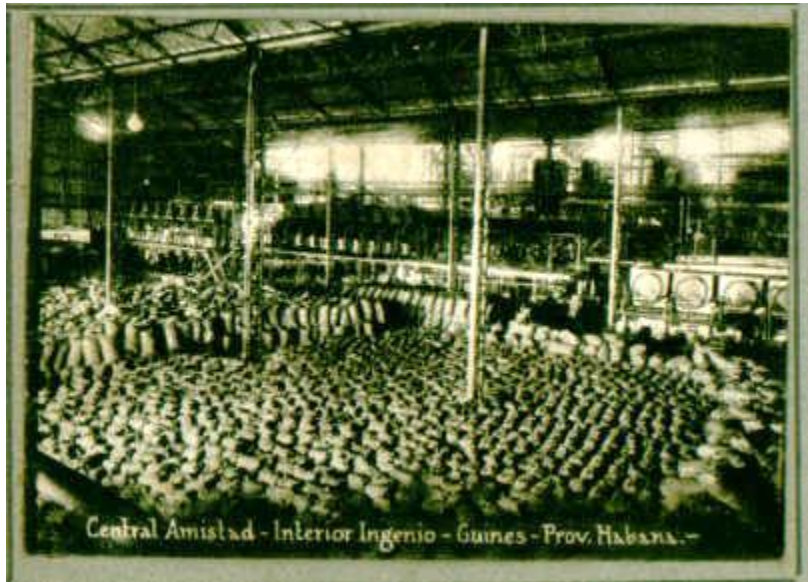
¹⁰ Julia Batista

¹¹ McAvoy, Muriel. *Sugar Baron, Manuel Rionda and the Fortunes of Pre-Castro Cuba*, Gainesville: University of Florida. 2003. 109

¹² Julia Batista

¹³ McAvoy, 86

¹⁴ McAvoy, 90



Central Amistad, Cuba en 1925, Susini *El Cigarro Sin Rival* Album for souvenir pictures enclosed in tobacco products. Images of politicians, buildings, and places of interest of the six Cuban provinces in 1925. detail p. 40. [Central Amistad 1925 postalita](#)



Interior view of machinery at the Soledad sugar mill, near Cienfuegos, circa 1930 – 1940, from the Atkins family photographs, Massachusetts Historical Society. [Soledad Mill, Atkins Family Photographs](#)

Like many of the American-owned mills, the Mendoza's new mill was situated in the province of Camaguey. There, a new railroad along the northern shore and a newly dredged port was available to connect product to market. As the *Mundo Azucarero* announced proudly it was

“...one of the island’s giants and a source of pride to Cubans as uniquely Hispanic.”¹⁵ Not long after, in November 1919, Miguel Mendoza and Cunagua’s two other owners sold it to the American Sugar Refineries for 14 million.¹⁶ Victor remained to run the mill and the Batista brothers Jorge, Victor and Melchor (Melchorito) all tried their hand during the following years, with mixed success, at managing various aspects of the operation.¹⁷



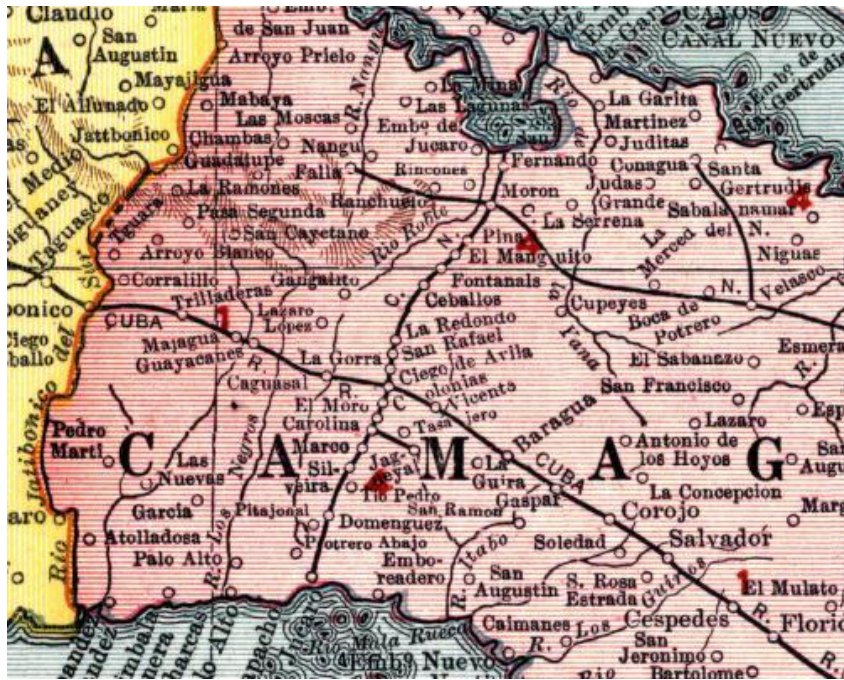
Cuba, Commercial Atlas of America. Chicago: Rand McNally and Company. 1921

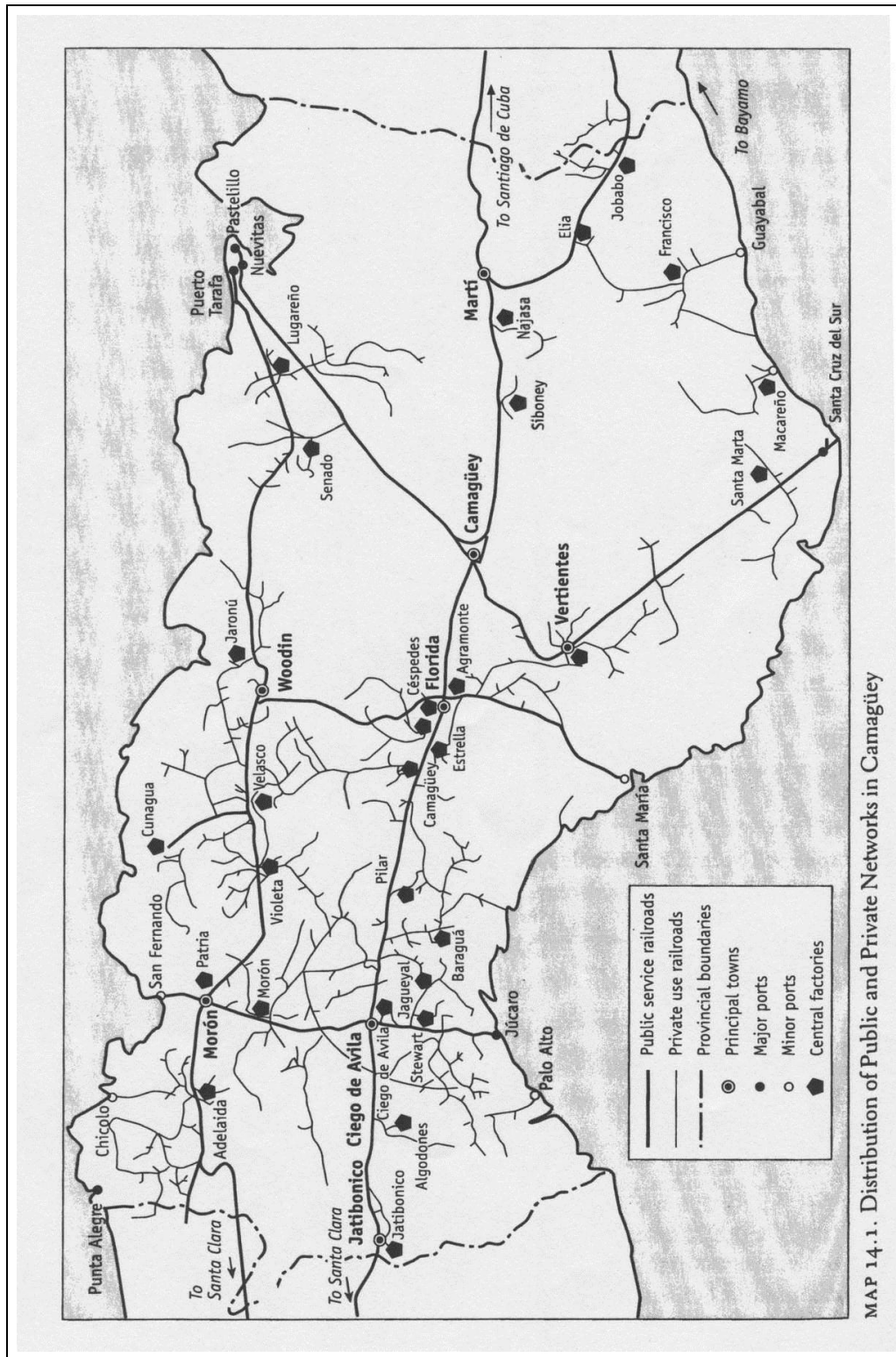


¹⁵ Miguel Diaz and two other planters also figured as owners of Cunagua.

¹⁶ McAvoy, 109

¹⁷ Julia Batista





map reproduced from Garcia and Zanetti : Sugar and Railroads

The details of Jorge's involvement with the sugar industry through his family's plantations are rather sketchy. In 1915 he suffered severe burns to his arms in an accident at the Amistad sugar mill in Güines. Julia notes in her memoirs that he was forced to drive himself home (likely to Havana to receive suitable treatment) "suffering terribly."

A smaller mill or colono, Jaronu, (now Brasil), was established as part of Cunagua's operations. Between 1924 and 1926 Jorge, with Julio's financial backing, attempted to make a profit running Jaronu. Unfortunately, sugar prices fell during this period and they abandoned the enterprise.¹⁸ During this time, Jorge had a bad fall while working in the mill and broke several ribs; he returned home to Havana to recover. More than likely he abandoned this line of work after 1926 because it had become clear that his epilepsy made working in an industrial facility a dangerous proposition.

Machado, corruption, repression and dictatorship

In 1925 Gerardo Machado came to power by pledging to clean-up corruption, repeal the Platt Amendment and rollback American economic control. To distract attention from his inability to keep these campaign promises he initiated an ambitious program of public works including improvements in social services and the building of both a national highway and a White House look alike congress building, *el Capitolio*. In the first years this earned him immense popularity and served to keep employment and graft levels up to what was considered essential to the smooth running of Cuban society. However, his support plummeted by 1928 when he amended the constitution in order to extend his term six more years. Along with the curbing of civil liberties he began to brutally silence opposition with his personal army of thugs nicknamed *la Porra* (the Hell).

Machado had infiltrated the civil service by appointing army members to key positions. Public projects were directed to individuals with connections to the president. Nepotism, bribery and clientelism were the foundations of the economy and the safeguards of his political power. He had promised American and Cuban industrialists that he would not allow a strike to last more than 24 hours and he kept his word through brutal repression of all labour organization and action. As his opposition grew, most notably in the form of student protest movements, Machado's hit-men targeted the leaders of this organized dissent.

Machado and Falla: mutually beneficial relations

Sugar production was restricted to stabilize its market value, unemployment rose and labour unrest ensued. Alarmed, Machado and his army tightened their control through fear and intimidation of the populace. At stake was not only his political survival but his rich portfolio of investments many of which intersected with those of the Mendoza family.

¹⁸ Julia Batista

Jose Miguel Gomez, president from 1909 to 1913, had made Machado Minister of the Interior. For his success in maintaining control he had subsequently rewarded this former army chief with the vice presidency of the Cuban Electric Company,¹⁹ in which, incidentally, Laureano Falla had a major stake. Handling the concessions for electrical plants for the province of Camaguey was Machado's entry ticket to lucrative investments in the newest fleet of mills. He had investments in the Patria, Manuelita, Adelaida and Cieneguita mills.

The Central Adelaida was the country home and major mill of the Falla family. Laureano Falla had bought the Nauyú farm from an American company in 1915 and began the construction of a state of the art mill, named Adelaida after one of his daughters. The village that grew up around the mill was named Falla. The central directorate of the mill included Alejandro Suero Falla and Viriato Gutierrez Falla. The latter was the husband of Adelaida, and after Machado was elected, he became his right-hand man. The Falla y Bonet family became linked to that of the Mendozas through the marriage of Maria Teresa Falla, Adelaida's sister, to Agustin Batista y Mendoza in 1926. Adelaida Falla would, through Viriato's connections, provide government sinecure positions to the newlyweds Jorge Batista and Guillermina Villareal y Bonet around 1929-1930.²⁰



Portrait, "Dr. Viriato Gutierrez y Valladora, Secretario de la Presidencia", Machado Government. Cuba en 1925, Susini *El Cigarro Sin Rival* Album for souvenir pictures enclosed in tobacco products, The images represent politicians, buildings, and places of interest of the six Cuban provinces in 1925. detail p. 8. [Viriato Gutierrez postalitas](#)

In 1933, after Machado's fall, the village of "Falla" would revert to Nauyú in order to distance the property from association with the former dictator. Beginning in the 1930s workers' strikes and protests would be a dominant part of the history of this mill, a fact that must have made for a strong sense of danger immediately beyond the horizon of the plantation house gardens where Laureano's widow, Lola Bonet, grew prize orchids. The Central Adelaida had a private airport. In 1958 Viriato Gutierrez Falla, the grandson of the founder, Laureano was still in charge of Central Adelaida; it was nationalized in 1960.²¹

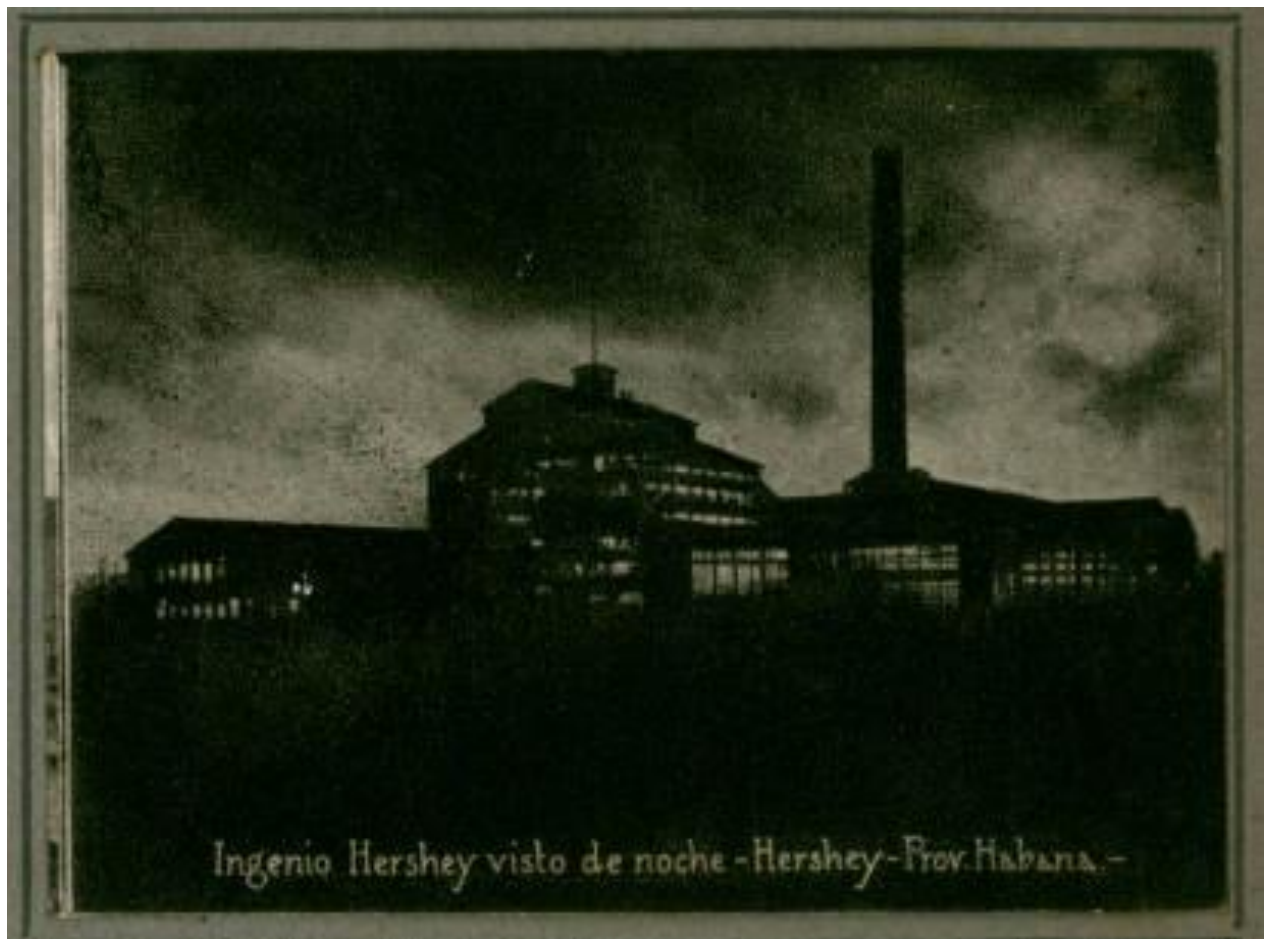
¹⁹ McAvoy, 149

²⁰ Teresita Batista

²¹ McAvoy, 164

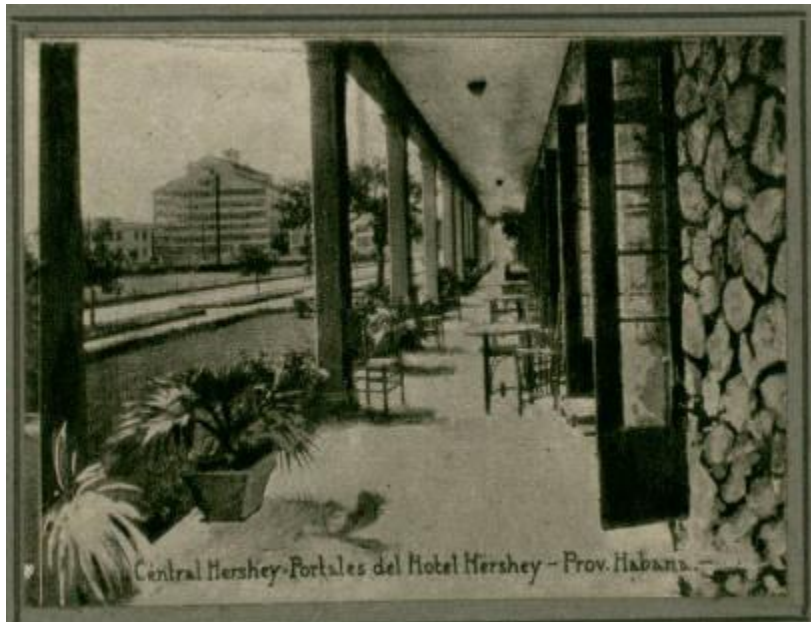
The model factory town

Sugar-intensive food manufacturers such as Hershey and Coca-Cola during the war had become aware of the benefits of moving their refineries to the island. In 1917 Milton Hershey, the chocolate magnate, built a sugar mill between Havana and Matanzas. Around it he built a village following progressive planning trends for factory towns. There were bungalows surrounded by green areas, a free school, a clinic, a baseball diamond and a golf course as well as a general store. An electric train that ran from to Havana and Matanzas with Central Hershey as a stop in the middle was owned by Hershey and used not only for company workers but to bring American visitors to see the workings of the mill and how its Cuban employees lived, worked and played. Tourists could stay at the hotel for six dollars, room and board, or rent one of the bungalows and enjoy the landscaped tropical gardens under the shadow of the belching smokestacks.²²



²² Varona González, Enrique “Central, antiguo Adelaida”, Centro Provincial de Patrimonio Cultural Ciego de Ávila. Copyright © 2009
http://www.patrimonio.ciego.cult.cu/APP/Patrimonio/Industrial/Save_Industrial.asp?Id_PInd=4

Hershey Mill Night View, Cuba en 1925, Susini *El Cigarro Sin Rival* Album for souvenir pictures enclosed in tobacco products. Images of politicians, buildings, and places of interest of the six Cuban provinces in 1925. detail p. 39 [Hershey Mill Night View postalita](#)



Hershey Workers Village, Cuba en 1925, Susini *El Cigarro Sin Rival* Album for souvenir pictures enclosed in tobacco products. Images of politicians, buildings, and places of interest of the six Cuban provinces in 1925. detail p. 39 [Hershey Workers Village postalita](#)

The line continues to operate to this day but the scene is far from the postcard-pretty picture of cheery industry. Canadian Julia Steinecke described her 2006 visit to the former Central Hershey, designated on maps as the town Camilo Cienfuegos:

The Electric Train pulls up only half an hour late. Rust has turned its roof reddish brown. On top is a transformer that looks older than electricity. Four bent poles reach for the sagging cables that miraculously manage to deliver power to the engine. Slowly, we sway through miles of overgrown fields, some seats swaying considerably more than others. I feel like I'm inside the skeleton of a double-jointed contortionist. We stop in one-shack hamlets to pick up peasants dressed in their business best for a trip to the city of Matanzas. Several riders get off with me at the clay-roof Hershey station. The first thing I notice is the mill, now a jumble of twisted frames and patchy sheet metal. Fidel Castro's government took it over after the 1959 revolution and sold sugar to the Soviet Union. In the 1990s, when Cuba's Russian lifeline fell away, there were few markets and fewer spare parts to keep the industry afloat. Efficiency went down and prices dropped. In 2002 Cuba shut down half its sugar mills, including this one. Hershey became a one-industry town without an industry, hollow at the core. Today, the mill is still being dismantled. Ancient Russian trucks rumble around the un-building site, preparing to ship any useable parts to other functioning mills. Behind many homes I see storage sheds made of scrap metal. Cheerful billboards pop up all over town, with messages like, "The Electric Railway will be rejuvenated," "Sports are the right of the people"... The paint is peeling on the tiny bungalows surrounding the mill, but they still look like they were transplanted directly from the post-war suburbs of America. Each has its own porch and wee lawn outlined in pebbles. I feel like I'm in a Communist Pleasantville, twice-frozen in time, evoking two opposing dreams.²³

Cunagua heritage architectural site in near-ruin

In November 2002, Cubanet, a website for non-partisan Cuba news, posted a release under the head-line "Cuban national monument in danger of disappearance." It quoted the director of the municipal museum of Morón, Heberto Izquierdo, who announced the imminent collapse of Cunagua, a site designated a national monument two years before. He stated that the settlement was nearly beyond recovery, the commercial and residential sections were in at state of ruin. Stressing its unique character within Cuban architectural history Izquierdo specified that it had been built in 1918 as an exact copy of a workers' village in the American south. The only structure that has been restored, he informed, is the home of the mill administrator that now

²³ Steinecke, Julia. "Bittersweet death of a small town in Cuba", *The Toronto Star*, 16 January 2006

serves as a recreational facility for the mill workers. “The settlement will die if the conservation of the buildings is further delayed,” he warned.²⁴

Rewind two years to the March/April 2000 issue of the Cuban journal *Patrimonio Cultural*. It ran an illustrated essay “La Arquitectura de la Agroindustria, Los Bateyes de Madera.”²⁵ Part of a series on the history of the island’s wood architecture, it cites Cunagua as an outstanding example of a type of built environment that was once common throughout the country and is now at the point of disappearance due, in part, to the rapid decomposition of wood in a tropical climate. “These are fragile buildings not only due to the construction materials but also to the fact that they are humble, popular forms of architecture and, as such, not likely to be designated as historically valuable.”²⁶ The author, Nelson Melero Lazo, doesn’t bother mentioning the obvious: that the planned communities built to supply the behemoths of capitalism with ready labour are not favoured historical sites on the island. Instead, less controversially, he mentions that the building type seems part of the landscape and therefore not considered worthy of conservation. While other communities built around *centrales* dating from the same period retain individual buildings from the original settlement, Cunagua preserves in its entirety the original 1918 design because the community grew around its edges, leaving the centre untouched.

Melero Lazo outlines the characteristics particular to Cunagua: it was constructed entirely of pine wood in 1918 by Victor G. Mendoza’s company not only following North America models of residential and urban design but an actual plan of a community already in existence in the American south. Organized around a central park the workers’ village extended outward along a central axis composed of, on one side the church and on the other the administrator’s residence. Within the 10 block residential grid were twenty five cottages for administrators and technicians, 80 row houses arranged so that each backs onto a collective yard or central patio in which there were four buildings with collective washrooms. A service area, arranged similarly to the old slave *barracones* (quarters), housed the grocery store, clothing store, hair dresser/barber, hardware store, cafeteria, restaurant and facilities for social gatherings. Two buildings were dedicated for the school, one for each gender; there was also a hospital, the mill headquarters with its offices, the homes for the farm managers, the priest’s residence, the church, a theatre-cinema and a sports field. The article closes with an urgent plea for the restoration of the buildings, many of which were falling victim to rot and fungus at the time of writing.

²⁴ José Manuel Caraballo, APLA / www.cubanet.org (<http://www.cubanet.org/CNews/y02/nov02/21a4.htm>) (Accessed 8 July 2011)

²⁵ Patrimonio Cultural, marzo-abril. año VI. No. 36. 2000, (Accessed 8 July 2011) <http://www.vitral.org/vitral/vitral36/patrim.htm>

²⁶ *Estas estructuras constituyen elementos muy frágiles tanto por las características propias del material con que están ejecutados, como por su condición de ser expresión de una arquitectura de marcado carácter popular a la que resulta más difícil que le sean reconocidos sus valores representativos de identidad, tipología e históricos; lo que hace que los mismos se encuentren bajo un constante peligro de desaparición.*

Like the Central Hershey/Camilo Cienfuegos mill, Cunagua/Bolivia's has closed and the community faces a future as a ghost town. While it has no electric train to lure tourists, a nearby nature reserve often attracts visitors staying at the Cayo Coco beach resort on the keys off the coast. Could Bolivia possibly hitch its wagon to tourism, the economic mainstay of the island? Possibly this was the hope held by residents of Bolivia before 2011. That year however, a post from this village to the photo sharing website Panoramio, picked-up on Google Earth, shows Cunagua's church in mid-disassembly. The provincial cultural heritage website that promoted its unique architectural history as recently as two years ago no longer exists. The rescue to Cunagua, the potential tourist attraction, never materialized. Now only the Hershey plant offers the Cuban vision of an early 20th North American transplanted design for a capitalist sugar mill utopia.



Web. 2009

http://www.patrimonio.ciego.cult.cu/APP/Patrimonio/Industrial/Detail_Industrial.asp?Id_PInd=3



http://www.patrimonio.ciego.cult.cu/APP/Patrimonio/Industrial/Detail_Industrial.asp?Id_PInd=3 (Accessed. 5 August 2010).



["Central Cunagua Ciego de Avila 1918" Cuban Heritage Collection](#)



http://www.patrimonio.ciego.cult.cu/APP/Patrimonio/Industrial/Detail_Industrial.asp?Id_PInd=3 (Accessed. 5 August 2010).



[Cunagua Today](#) (Accessed 8 July 2011)

Jorge and the Fickle Nature of Electrical Power

Jorge Batista must have known of the risks he faced when he chose to work among the machinery, stairs and vertiginous platforms of the sugar mill. His intent to pursue a career in the sugar industry despite his epilepsy reveals the strength of his interest in the new technological field and his identification with the family enterprise. Fortunately, the family's economic reach and its related employment opportunities extended to Havana, where a less dangerous work environment was to be offered to Jorge.

The word "epilepsy" is derived from a Greek word meaning "a condition of being overcome, seized, or attacked." In a seizure the brain is hit by an abnormal electrical discharge from a group of cells and temporarily shuts down.

Electricity came to the fore again in a recent chapter of Cuban history. Part of the challenge of the Special Period that began in the early 1990s was adapting to the daily failures of the antiquated electrical grid. The frequent black-outs caused havoc to economic production and upset every aspect of daily life. It can be said of that period that the capricious ebb and flow of energy mirrored the tides of tolerance and crack down by which the government controlled the population. The net effect was a collective sense of defeat and insecurity.

Mill Ruin Picturesque and the Patronage of Cuban diaspora

In 1920s postcards, sugar mills were icons of an economy in full gear. They stood for Cuba's participation in the modern world after centuries languishing as the final colony of a decaying European imperial power. Nowadays tourists take photos of the same mills appreciating them as industrial ruins. Left to rust, depleted by people scavenging for building materials and choked by tropical growth, they are, literally, hollowed out symbols.

The husband and wife artists Juan Luis Morales and Teresa Ayuso in a 2004 series of photo-based works entitled "Los Ingenios: Patrimonio a la deriva" " in their words have created, "a tale of loss and an ode to poetic memory. Cuban-trained, Paris-based Morales and Ayuso were inspired by the lithographs of Eduardo Laplante documenting principal mills and published in the 1857 publication "Vistas de los ingenios principales de Cuba."²⁷ "We wanted to rescue the romantic charge that Laplante brought to his lithographs in the 19th century with illumination, composition and color," Morales says. "You don't see the cruel world of slavery in the plantations, and we wanted to recuperate that beautiful part. It's not a negation of the bad part of history. We wanted to show that history, good and bad, being erased, disappearing." Morales hopes people will want to collect his sugar mill prints, as Cubans did a century ago with Laplante's popular lithographs. The works are closer in sensibility with the popular genre of Romantic painting in which calm-sea-after-the-storm shipwrecks are depicted replete with

²⁷ Digital reproduction: The University of Miami Cuban Heritage Collection
<http://merrick.library.miami.edu/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/chc9999&CISOPTR=2787&REC=4>

ragged sails and listing hull. Cuban-American collectors attending that year's Miami-Basel art fair embraced the couple's digital photography and gouache images, likely seeing in them a metaphor of a revolution in tatters and a recognition that memory is the sole means for an exile's return.



“Tinguaro” Juan Luis Morales and Teresa Ayuso, 2004 [Atelier Morales, Miami bienial](#)

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Varona González, Enrique “Central, antiguo Adelaida”, Centro Provincial de Patrimonio Cultural Ciego de Ávila. Copyright © 2009
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Havana will be architecturally one of the most beautiful cities in the world, and it will be due to the genius of American and Cuban architects.—Pablo G. Mendoza

The New York Times, February 22, 1920

Havana had been transformed by the time Jorge Batista left to study at Cornell University in 1910. Paved streets, electric streetcars, telephone, and water and sewage services were the legacy of the two periods of American occupation. The improved infrastructure allowed the city to move outward.²⁸ Within its expanded grid, Jorge's uncles would stake out tracts of land for profitable development.

High rent was one effect of the building boom and the return of exiles into the capital. In the hot property market Havana residents shifted dwellings frequently to elude rent hikes and take advantage of bargains. Between 1906 and 1913 Julia Batista changed addresses four times. One of these moves was to an apartment in a building owned by her brother Claudio²⁹ who was in the thick of the real estate speculation.

Another reason for Julia's housing hop-scotch was the changing shape of her family. The Batista-Mendoza family was reduced by the death of Manuel in 1905. After moving from Amargura in 1906, the household continued to shrink in number as members set out for the convent, for marriages, or for their education in the north.³⁰ Melchor divided his time between Havana and Camaguey.³¹ The two eldest girls Matilde and Adolfinia were among the first to leave home. After becoming full-fledged nuns, Adolfinia eventually rose to become the director of the Tejadillo Street branch of the Sagrado Corazon School while Matilde was sent to teach in the religious order's schools throughout Latin America.

The boys who were in the middle of the family birth order, Victor and Melchorito, after graduating from LaSalle and Lawrenceville were sent by their uncles to Fordham University and Amherst Agricultural College respectively as preparation for joining the web of family enterprises. Maria Antonia and Clemencia married and became mothers. Consuelo, the youngest, graduated from Sagrado Corazon in 1921. She and Enriqueta remained at home until Julia's death in 1933.³² Later, Consuelo became a private secretary to her brother Agustín and then to Washington-based Cuban diplomats and, in time, she herself became the first woman to be

²⁸ Many of the public works projects between the end of the nineteenth century and the 1940's are documented in photograph on the internet on the photo sharing site Panoramio on this link; [edithesca](#)

²⁹ Julia Batista

³⁰ The Batista brothers attended Lawrenceville, a preparatory school in New Jersey for a year before university.

³¹ Teresita Batista

³² Julia Batista

registered as a diplomat in the American capital. Enriqueta joined the Sacred Heart order in her later years.³³

The eldest Batista, Julio, likely took over as the primary breadwinner in 1907 when he joined the Mendoza law firm now headed by Claudio and Ramon. In 1916 his uncles opened Mendoza & Co., one of the first banks on the island to be chartered. Cubans who had safeguarded their money in American accounts during the war now had sufficient confidence to bring it home and real estate was considered among the safest of all investments.³⁴ Mendoza Trust Company bank offered mortgages and loans for the numerous developments sprouting in the city whose population now neared one million. In 1920 its headquarters in “Little Wall Street” stood alongside the growing financial fraternity in Old Havana that included the Royal Bank of Canada, the National City Bank of New York, the Banco Nacional de Cuba and the Trust Company of Cuba.³⁵

Envisioning Modern Havana

Many of Julia’s children attended the world fairs held in various cities of the United States. These were absorbed and discussed within the family.³⁶ It seemed to the young adult Batistas that, coming of age between two centuries, three political regimes and two cultures, they were being invited to re-build their world.

Ernesto and Eugenio became architects, contributing to the family’s sense of being in the centre of a grand re-visioning of the built environment in Havana. The two would have been keenly aware of the ornamental imitation palaces that mushroomed around their neighbourhood. Many El Vedado residents insisted on designing their own grandiose homes while others, not wanting to be accused of bad taste, hired architects to copy architectural styles with due accuracy and restraint.

Their cousin (the daughter of Miguel Mendoza, Margarita, and her husband Manuel Carvajal) in 1915 commissioned American architect Thomas Hastings to design a residence at Seventeenth and I Streets in El Vedado. Hastings, a leading exponent of the American Renaissance style created a mansion in which Classical symmetry was solidly anchored by colossal twin

³³ Teresita Batista

³⁴ Joseph L. Scarpaci, Roberto Segre, Mario Coyula. *Havana Two Faces of the Antillean Metropolis*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press. 2002) 57

³⁵ “Realty Outlook; Prediction is Made That Population May Reach 1,000,000” “The greatest building and real estate boom in the history of the republic of Cuba is now on and will continue notwithstanding the price of building materials of all kinds having increased greatly... The financial centre of Havana known as “Little Wall Street,” contains many modern bank buildings, namely, the Royal Bank of Canada, the National City Bank of New York, the Banco Nacional de Cuba, the Trust Company of Cuba and Mendoza and Company. ... Private houses for rent are very scarce and the rentals are correspondingly high. *The New York Times*, May 9, 1920

³⁶ Agustin Batista

Corinthian columns supporting a two-story portico that, in turn, was flanked by twin royal palm trees and guarded by a pair of bronze dogs cast from the originals at a French chateau. The house was bought by Isabel Falla and her husband David Suero in 1932.



Margarita Mendoza, Havana Yacht Club, 1920's, Regata en la Bahía del Malecón de La Habana. Vimeo [Havana Yacht Club 1920s](#)



[Regata Habana Yacht Club contra el Vedado Tennis Club](#)



Cuba en 1925, Susini *El Cigarro Sin Rival* Album for souvenir pictures enclosed in tobacco products. Images of politicians, buildings, and places of interest of the six Cuban provinces in 1925. detail p. 23. [Hastings-designed residence](#)

The commission was cited as evidence that good taste existed among Habaneros despite the showy vulgarity of other grand homes. Architectural historian José Gelabert-Navia who has traced the argument in the contemporary press writes: “In *Les annales* the French writer Paul Morand wrote derisively about the monumental residences that dotted El Vedado as *des Petits Trianons en beurre*. The notable Cuban architect and historian José María Bens Arrarte, outraged by this comment, suggested in a 1929 articlethat there was artistic value in particular examples of architectural ostentatiousness...and in this category belonged the house at Seventeenth and I.”³⁷

The eclectic nature of home design was made possible by the fact that builders were often employed to carry out all aspects of design and construction. With a new capacity to pour plaster and concrete into any imaginable shape, these took their orders for fanciful, heavily ornamented structures from clients who borrowed ideas higgledy-piggledy from “elegant life” magazines. Most residences, in the Beaux Arts spirit, featured hybrid styles and original one-of-a kind touches. Architecturally successful or not, as a whole they reflect a historical moment of the free-wheeling artistic license driven by new money and encyclopaedic tastes. This amorphous yearning for the beauty of the past became the context for Eugenio Batista’s development of a rigorous aesthetic vocabulary drawn from Cuba’s colonial traditions.

Eugenio Batista and the Importance for Modernism of Colonial Architecture

³⁷ Gelabert-Navia, Jose A “American Architects in Cuba: 1900-1930,” *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts*, Vol. 22, Cuba Theme Issue (1996) 138

Eugenio Batista (1900-1981) is recognized as one of the pre-eminent creators of a distinctively Cuban architecture. His great contribution was to synthesize, with modern materials, the three archetypal elements of a Cuban home, namely the courtyard, porch and louvers (blinds). In 1960 Eugenio outlined the practical reasons for these:

In making of their houses a defence against our torrid tropical sun, our ancestors found three splendid resources, a legacy we would be inconsiderate not to use today: *patios* (court yards), *portales* (porticos or porches) and *persianas* (louvers), these being the three "P"s that constitute the "ABC"s of our tropical architecture. These three achieved their ultimate development in the 'quintas" (town villas) of El Cerro and Vedado neighbourhoods built in the XIX century, although it is not only in this late colonial period that these elements are to be found in Cuba. I believe that ...by giving our houses the expressive character of the temperament and the lifestyle of our people, ...this character will be in tune with the age in which we live as we come to utilize modern techniques and materials, and I believe that it will be faithfully expressive of what is ours if we follow the tradition of patios, portales and persianas in the material realm, and of rhythm, gaiety and cleanliness in the spiritual.³⁸

Because there has been scant construction in Havana after the first half of the twentieth century, El Vedado, and such later western subdivisions as Miramar are now prized as open-air museums of Beaux Arts, Art Deco and Modernist domestic architecture. For those architects who began their practice during the economic boom during and shortly after the Second World War, the imperative for the middle and upper classes to build their own homes was a windfall. As Eduardo Luis Rodríguez points out, "...it was the construction of private houses that allowed for experimentation and the appearance of important formal and conceptual advances."³⁹ Nena's reminiscences reflect the intense architectural activity that came with the growth of the residential districts as they spread westward. In the 1940s she had her cousin, Eugenio Batista, design a house for a pie-shaped wedge of property in the Miramar district. It became a case study on innovative residential plan for an unusual lot shape.⁴⁰

Eugenio Batista's 1939 design for Eutimio Falla's Miramar home

In *The Havana Guide, Modern Architecture 1945-1965*, Rodríguez lists Batista's two most celebrated designs as the seaside home of Eutimio Falla, and the architect's own home. The former, the most emblematic of Batista's approach, re-invents the spirit of the courtyard house in the design of a luxury seaside villa. The architect had spent his early childhood in Amargura, the mid-19th century colonial mansion built by his great-grandfather. Colonial Havana's side-by-side stone houses and narrow streets meant that the latter was forced to build higher and buy the surrounding properties to ensure ventilation from bay winds. These passed through the third-

³⁸ *Artes Plásticas*, Vol. 2, 1960

³⁹ Rodríguez, Eduardo Luis. *The Havana guide: modern architecture, 1925-1965* (Princeton Architectural Press, 2000) 1

⁴⁰ del Río, Natalia Bolívar. *Vértigo del Tiempo, Memorias de Nena Aróstegui*, (Habana: Ediciones Boloña, 2006)

storey windows, entering the courtyard and cooling the entire home through doors opening onto it.

In the Falla residence, built between 1939 and 1940, Batista takes the colonial home and uses its traditional features to new ends. Most notably, while still serving as the home's focal point, the courtyard does not serve as the cross-roads of residents' disparate activities but, being open on two sides, embraces the natural elements. The house meets the atmosphere of the sea, allowing it through sympathetic design to penetrate the living quarters. In another improvisation on tradition, while in such colonial homes as Amargura the wide upper-floor galleries overlooking the courtyard were reserved for the family, in the bachelor Eutimio's home the equivalent area is a wide *portal* or veranda⁴¹ overlooking the pool area, and beyond, the Gulf of Mexico. The tranquil pool, focus of the courtyard, provides a counterpoint to the changeability of the ocean, reflecting the elegant, private containment that is this home poised between sea and land.



Eugenio Batista, Falla Bonet House, Havana, 1937-1939 [Rodriguez](#)

Eutimio's home was created to sustain casual intimacy rather than tribal formality.⁴² Far removed from the commerce and mixed society of the colonial house and city, the suburban villa

⁴¹ The *portal* had already been re-interpreted through the design of the villas in el Vedado, and el Cerro -the outskirts of late 1800s and the early 1900s Havana as well the beach houses in Varadero. In its newer forms it was inspired by the Italian loggias and the veranda of the Anglo-Indian bungalow. Amoruso, Cristina and Orestes del Castillo, "Life and Death of the Courtyard House Migration, Metissage and Assasination of a Typology", <http://www.periferia.org/publications/patiohouse.html>

⁴² It has accommodations for the extended family in the form of two neighbouring houses constructed at the same time.

is a stage for a lifestyle of leisure as much as a balcony on the natural panorama. Accordingly, it encapsulates elements of both the mid-twentieth century suburban ideal in its remove from the urban as well as those of the colonial home in the sophisticated dialogue with its environment.

The ideas behind this design of Eugenio Batista were seen a century and half earlier in the form of the Neo-Classical style home in the fashionable country town of el Cerro. The construction of the road, Calzada del Monte had transformed a village into a fashionable hamlet, a bedroom community of Havana. El Vedado was an elaboration of the concept of el Cerro much as Miramar would later be a re-translation of El Vedado. These were oases from city life where new homes and gardens showcased the taste of ascendant society.

The economic viability of such subdivisions as Miramar across the Almendares River depended on widespread car ownership as well as a bridge to support high volume vehicle traffic. The car in combination with roads and bridges, like the volante, the extramural spaces, and El Cerro in colonial times, made it possible to escape the physical discomforts and social contrasts of the old city into sites where familiarity and calm prevailed.⁴³



Parque

Mendoza en la Vibora/Mendoza Park, Vibora Quarter postcard

⁴³ Despite its elegant aura, El Vedado was socially mixed, with a wide spectrum of dwellings that were disguised behind classic facades. The mixture was under the rule of the upper class who dictated the look and patterns of behavior in public spaces. Scarpaci: 56 citing (Coyula: 1999c)

Mendoza Subdivision and Real Estate Development, a Political Success Story

As developers of a number of prime tracts of land on the outskirts of the city the Mendozas and the Arellano-Mendozas, who had a building company, played a real-life game of Monopoly with the new parts of the city. Roads were paved and parks, avenues and sidewalks were designed to make formerly anonymous tracts of land a picturesque setting for homes. “Parque Mendoza,” for example, landscaped along the rise of a hill in the neighbourhood of la Vibora, featured a pergola, stone benches, and curvilinear stairs and promontories that looked over the older districts of the city.

The most lucrative stretches of property however, would prove to be those to the west across the Almendares River. Rosalie Schwartz in *Pleasure Island, Tourism and Temptation in Cuba* underscores the Mendozas’ command of the economic opportunities in this particular area. She highlights Claudio Mendoza’s leadership in tourism and real estate ventures, claiming that, along with other members of his tightly knit family including his six sons he headed “Havana’s most affluent family in the 1920s.” Working with Carlos Miguel de Céspedes, who as public works secretary facilitated the passing of the Congress tourism bill that led to the 1919 construction of the iron bridge over the Almendares, the Mendozas developed the subdivisions and financed homes in Miramar and Marianao, that became *the* locations of deluxe residences. The municipal officials made sure that laws were passed guaranteeing the dominance of the private interests of the casino and country club developers over public claims.⁴⁴



HAVANA - THE ROAD TO MARIANAO BEACH, 4 MILES LONG.

Havana-The Road to Marianao Beach, 4 Miles Long, *Cuba, the wonder-land of America*, album published by the Instituto Cubano de Turismo, p. 19, undated, University of Miami Cuban Heritage Collection, [Cuba The Wonder-Land of America](#)

⁴⁴ Schwartz, Rosalie. *Pleasure Island: Tourism and Temptation in Cuba*, (U of Nebraska Press, 1997) 37

Piloto's Mozarabic Style Castle

Havana land speculation was at its peak when Rita Bacallao, as a widow in the 1920s, invested a considerable amount of her late husband Eduardo Casas' savings in the new neighbourhood of Lawton Batista in one of the hills south of the old city but farther east than those immediately south of El Vedado. As a demonstration of her confidence in the future elegance of her neighbourhood (she claimed that the elevated location would prove irresistible to the well-heeled) she bought properties and had a spacious house built there. Sadly, the land values descended along with the rest of her fortune during the ensuing decades. Ricardo Piloto, on the other hand, invested in a mansion in a prominent location the corner of 19th and O in El Vedado. An architectural curiosity even in its day, this Mozarabic architectural fantasy sits beside El Nacional Hotel, isolated in its fairy tale splendour at the foot of a busy boulevard. From her hillside property Rita Bacallao would forever resent what she saw as the airs that residents at "el castillo" gave themselves down in El Vedado.

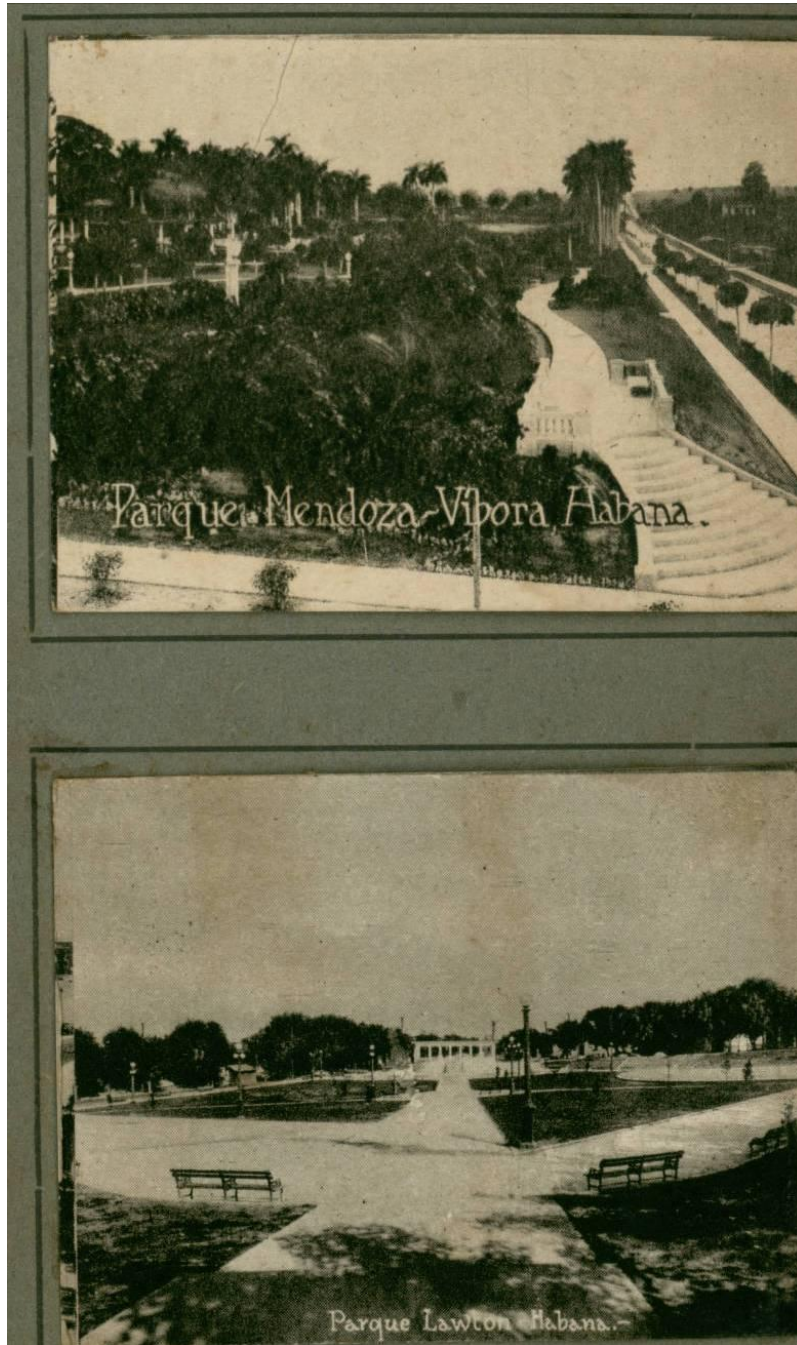


Rita Bacallao Coca ca. 1918



”el castillo” Ricardo Piloto’s home in El Vedado, 2009. Above external and below interior view (photo T. Casas)





Cuba en 1925, Susini *El Cigarro Sin Rival* Album for souvenir pictures enclosed in tobacco products. Images of politicians, buildings, and places of interest of the six Cuban provinces in 1925. detail p. 13. [Parque Mendoza - Parque Lawton postalitas](#)

Mendoza: Tourism and Hotels

Identified as a banker and President of Mendoza & Co., in a 1920 article in *The New York Times*, Pablo G. Mendoza is quoted: “Never in the history of Havana has there been so much building as at the present time. Contractors are rushed to death with orders, and new buildings are rising where historical landmarks once stood. Havana will be architecturally one of the most beautiful cities in the world, and it will be due to the genius of American and Cuban architects.”⁴⁵ His breathless remarks reflect the heady pace of development in the years just after the First World War and at the dawn of prohibition in the United States, an event that opened the floodgates of tourists to the island. Many of the most prominent buildings under construction were dedicated to the increasing number of pleasure-seeking visitors from the north.



Cover, *Cuba, the Wonder-Land of America*, album published by the Instituto Cubano de Turismo.undated, University of Miami Cuban Heritage Collection, [Cuba, the Wonder-Land of America](#)

With the advent of air travel and faster steamers, tourism became a common habit. Nowhere was its impact greater than in Havana. In a 1919 *New York Times* article, “Cuba: Refuge of the Frivolous and Thirsty”, a reporter tips readers on the deal-making on the island that, in light of prohibition, was red-hot. “...Syndicates to build palatial chain hotels have been proposed, and in one or two instances are said to have been organized. John McE. Bowman of the Biltmore-

⁴⁵ February 22, 1920

Commodore string and the du Pont interests have been approached. Agents of various wealthy American speculators are now in Cuba.”⁴⁶

Hotels and resorts became a focus of investment attracting the biggest players in North America. Among the most important Cuban investors were the Mendoza brothers. The Sevilla Biltmore Hotel had been first designed and constructed by the firm of Arellano and Mendoza in 1908.⁴⁷ The American architectural firm of Schultze and Weaver in 1921 created a much celebrated addition to the hotel after which they became the leading hotel designers in the United States.⁴⁸



Havana-The Prado, Sevilla-Biltmore Hotel on Right, *Cuba, the Wonder-Land of America*, album published by the Instituto Cubano de Turismo, p. 5. undated, University of Miami Cuban Heritage Collection, [Cuba, the Wonder-Land of America](#)

Schwartz points out that the Mendoza brothers were an important element in the synergy between American investors and the Cuban government of Menocal and later, Machado. They were key players in the formation of the Cuban American Realty Company which in turn spawned the Havana Biltmore Yacht and Country Club Company and the Havana Biltmore Realty Company. The companies’ boards were composed of key American investors and Cubans

⁴⁶ “Cuba: Refuge of the Frivolous and Thirsty” *The New York Times*, August 31, 1919

⁴⁷ Gelabert-Navia 142

⁴⁸ Gelabert-Navia 142

who could shepherd projects through the complex system of graft and patronage as well as the necessary legalities.

“Bowman presided over Cuban American, with Charles Flynn as vice president, Cuban Transport commissioner Juan Arellano as secretary, and Rafael Sánchez as treasurer. New York businessman Thomas Pratt and Cuban tourist official Miguel Sánchez as treasurer. ... The Biltmore Yacht and Country Club named Machado kin José Obregón its “commodore” and tourist official Miguel Suárez, its treasurer. Two members of the investment/banking/real estate Mendoza clan (father Claudio and six sons)—Fernando and Nestor—were secretary and vice-secretary. (Nestor often entertained friends at the Jockey Club with impressions of Broadway stars George M. Cohan and Eddie Cantor.) Alberto Mendoza was a director, along with Machado’s friend and political supporter Henry Catlin, the land baron José Gómez Mena ... the banker Guillermo de Zaldo Jr., and Juan Arellano. The contracting company of Arellano and Mendoza supervised construction of the yacht club, first blasting away the shoreline’s coral and replacing it with fine sand. When completed, the palatial structure rose above the beach, its wide archways separated by ornate columns, a broad stairway sweeping from the veranda down to the beautiful expanse of white sand. Empty land for future home sites stretched from the club to a roadway in the distance.⁴⁹



Havana-Almendares Golf Course-Showing Hotel in Background, Cuba, the wonder-land of America, album published by the Instituto Cubano de Turismo, p. 16, undated, University of Miami Cuban Heritage Collection, [Cuba, the Wonder-Land of America](#)

⁴⁹ Schwartz, 58

The Mendoza family's familiarity with American business practices and culture gave them an inside track on the real estate deals spawned by the rise of Havana as a tourist mecca. Pablo Mendoza built the Hotel Almendares in 1920. Hotels were essential hubs for crafting deals with visiting North American magnates. They provided the properly bucolic atmosphere that, more than the objective real estate, was the product in which investors were buying shares. At the Sevilla Biltmore, the rooftop patio offered a birds-eye view of the city and the Gulf Stream beyond. Horizons of enormous returns unfolded with the view, especially when aided by cocktails and balmy sea breezes. The Mendozas stood at the ready with the necessary documents prepared for signing.

The Miami Biltmore, in which the 2007 Gonzalez de Mendoza reunion was held, was a 1924 design that followed closely the architects' Havana precedent. The current meeting ground for the Gonzalez de Mendoza family, it underscores the family's roots in the economic interchange between Cuban and the United States that intimately shaped the island's first six decades of the twentieth century.



Hotel Sevilla, foyer to roof garden, Havana, University of Miami Cuban Heritage Collection [Hotel Sevilla interior](#)

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Timeline

Abbreviations: b-birth m-marriage d-death

- 1885 Compañía Eléctrica de Cuba, a General Electric subsidiary, introduces electricity to Havana
- 1908 Arellano and Mendoza real estate company build the Sevilla Biltmore Hotel, Havana
- 1914 Jorge Batista graduates as an Electrical Engineer from Cornell University

sugar becomes immensely profitable export during World War I
- 1915 Laureano Falla buys an American sugar mill in Camaguey and begins construction of a state of the art mill “Adelaida” the nearby village, Nauyú is renamed “Falla”

Jorge is burned in the arms in an accident at the Amistad sugar mill; he drives himself home “suffering terribly”

Margarita Mendoza (daughter of Miguel) and her husband Manuel Carvajal commission Thomas Hastings to design a residence at Seventeenth and I Streets in El Vedado in the American Renaissance style
- 1916 Sta Gertrudis is sold to Cuban-American Sugar Corporation for \$3 million. \$75,000 is Julia’s share of the proceeds. She gives up her father’s \$300 allowance that had been continued by her brothers

Mendoza brothers, notably Victor, Ramon, and Miguel invest in land in the Jucaro-Ciego de Avila-Moron axis, area extending northward to the bay of Nuevitas, extensive plain throughout the breadth of Camaguey province. Construction of railway linking these mills along with Central Adelaida, Falla’s mill to newly dredged Nuevitas port

Mendoza Trust Company bank opens to finance the numerous real estate ventures around Havana, it is located in “Little Wall Street” in the centre of the colonial city

Menocal wins fraudulent election

1917

Liberals organise armed revolt “La Chambelona” in 1917 headed by Jose Miguel Gomez and 3 men who would serve as presidents in next 20 years—Alfredo Zayas, Gerardo Machado and Carlos Mendieta—Menocal asks American president Woodrow Wilson to intervene. Americans send troops to protect their citizens’ investments in the sugar mills in Camaguey and Oriente but do not intervene militarily—Menocal violently represses revolt.

m: Ernesto Batista and Maria de los Angeles Heydrich

1918

Cunagua efficient, new electrified mill, completely Cuban-owned along with it, Mendoza brothers est. Jaronu (now called Brasil (Camaguey), Cunagua (now called Bolivia, Ciego de Ávila) other efficient new mills in the region include Falla’s Central Adelaida

Cunagua and Hershey Mills in Matanzas built at the same time set-out to create a historic urban planning precedent in their model factory towns

Ramon Mendoza among other investors build “the iron bridge” over Almendares River and so open-up Marianao and Miramar to car-based residential developments as well as deluxe beach-front clubs and resorts

1919

Menocal invites Americans to carry out new census and improve electoral system

Ramon G. de Mendoza and other investors are given approval for the building of an iron bridge to span the Almendares River and make Marianao and Miramar districts easily accessible by car

1920

Prohibition begins in the United States fueling the tourist boom and hotel profits, the Sevilla Biltmore, and the Almendares Hotel, bought by Pablo in 1920, are managed by members of the Mendoza family

sugar price controls lifted in 1919 leading to overnight fortunes as value skyrockets, however not long after it plunges; this period becomes known as “the dance of the millions”

By September the banking system collapses

November: Alfredo Zayas, now a Conservative becomes president, backed by Menocal and assisted at the polls by “military aides” m: Maria Antonia Batista and Roberto Fernandez Morell

1921

President Zayas requests loan from US banks

Condition of loan is curtailment of official corruption U.S. government representative sent to administer the terms for re-opening banks

Congress passes a new electoral code, cuts budget, and sets presidential one-term limit; central highway to be built; secretaries of departments to report on fiscal responsibility

The American architectural firm of Schultze and Weaver create a much celebrated addition to the Sevilla Biltmore Hotel, Havana

1922

Melchorito becomes ill in Jaronú plantation where he is working but recovers and returns

m: Clemencia with Jorge Hernandez Trelles who works as a mill administrator in Bagüanos

Julia visits Adolfina in Santiago, Clemencia in Bagüanos, Jorge in Jaronú (near Ciego de Ávila)

1923

sugar prices rise

1924

Jorge breaks his ribs as a result of an accident in the sugar mill and goes to Havana for treatment and convalescence

Eugenio travels in Europe invited by leading Havana architect Leonardo Morales

Ernesto builds the Sacred Heart convent in Santiago, Cuba

1925

May 20 Gerardo Machado becomes president thanks in part to campaign funds from Laureano Falla. Viriato Gutierrez, Falla's son-in-law is appointed by Machado as his right-hand man

1926

m: Agustin to Maria Teresa Falla, daughter of Laureano Falla and Dolores Bonet

Drop in sugar prices

Jorge and Julio resign from managing Jaronú after several years of low cane yield; Melchorito stays in Jaronú as "mayordomo" of the colonia Mirjal

Jorge returns to Havana to live at his mother's house

1927

Melchorito resigns from Jaronú

Ernesto and Mary move to house they have built in new suburb of Miramar

1928

Sugar prices continue to fall

1929

m: Jorge to Guillermina Villareal in chapel of Torrecilla, move into small apartment M and 48

1930

Eugenio receives MFA from Princeton. After teaching at that institution he returns to Havana and helps to define the principles for a national style and expressing these in such homes as that commissioned by Eutimio Falla and built in 1939-1940