

A nighttime photograph of the Cathedral of San Luis Potosí, a grand Baroque structure with a prominent bell tower and a highly detailed facade. The cathedral is illuminated with warm white lights, highlighting its intricate carvings. In the foreground, the Fontana de la Virgen is visible, featuring a large, ornate stone basin supported by a central column. The scene is set in a public square with a paved area and some greenery. The sky is dark, and the overall atmosphere is one of historical grandeur.

# *The City of San Luis Potosí*

María Isabel Monroy Castillo\*





Elsie Montiel

Patio of the Autonomous University of San Luis Potosí central administration offices.



Elsie Montiel

Stone water reservoir, the symbol of San Luis Potosí.

The city of San Luis Potosí dates back to the end of the sixteenth century when the mines of San Pedro Hill were discovered. Since San Pedro Hill did not have enough water, the Spaniards sought a nearby place to settle that would offer them the necessary space and natural resources for both their subsistence and the work in the mines.

The mines were located in Chichimec territory, so the Spanish inhabitants had to fight the bloody, 50-year Chichimec War to conquer them. Only with pacification, brought about by the border captains and the Franciscan monks, was it possible to establish new Spanish settlements in this northern part of the viceroyalty of New Spain.

In the San Luis Valley, located close to San Pedro Hill, groups of Guachichils had settled not long before; they were pacified by border Captain Miguel Caldera and the Franciscans who arrived in the region, including Friar Diego de la Magdalena. In 1591, to consolidate the pacification and the transformation of the nomadic Chichimecs into sedentary peoples, a group of 400 families from Tlaxcala were sent to north. Some of them settled at the San Luis post in the San Luis Valley.

The Guachichils settled in what we now know as the Plaza of the Founders, where there was abundant water; however, Captain Caldera convinced them to move a little further north, near the Santiago River. There, they founded the towns of Santiago del Río, inhabited mainly by Guachichils, and Tlaxcala or Tlaxcalilla, where the Tlaxcalan migrants lived. These arrangements made it possible to ensure that the town of San Luis was inhabited by Spaniards. The town was legally founded on November 3, 1592, and on the same day, Mayor Juan de Oñate laid it out, decreeing that it would be the site of the Plaza Mayor, the parish and the royal houses, headquarters for the new town's government, and designating the location of lots for local residents and ore-processing haciendas. The Franciscans established a monastery as their headquarters for spreading the Gospel among the Guachichils.

The ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the town of San Luis came under the authority of the bishopric of Michoacán. The first parish church was provisional, so, in 1596, the inhabitants decided to expand it, concluding in 1609.

In the first months of 1597, Mayor Luis Valde- rrama Saavedra granted some Mexican indigenous who lived in Tlaxcalilla some lands next to the San

---

\* Professor and researcher at the San Luis College.



Founders' Plaza.

The outlying indigenous towns were incorporated into the city as neighborhoods in 1862, and during the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz, the city came to look as it does today.

Francisco monastery. There, they created the town of San Miguelito, with its three neighborhoods: San Miguel, San Francisco and Santísima Trinidad.

The Guachichil population diminished rapidly, prompting the migration of Tarascan Indians who were familiar with the work in the mines. They settled in the towns of San Miguel de la Santísima Trinidad, Santiago and San Sebastián. Around 1599, the Augustinians arrived in San Luis, and despite Franciscan opposition, managed in 1603 to get vice-regal permission to stay. One of the arguments that favored the decision was that the Augustinians ministered in the Tarascan language, and there was already a sizeable Tarascan population in the indigenous towns around San Luis Potosí.

Most of the religious orders established houses in the town of San Luis during the seventeenth century, with support from generous donations from the inhabitants. The Juaninos, or members of the Order of the Hospital of Saint John of Jerusalem, founded the San Juan de Dios Hospital in 1611; the Jesuits established themselves in 1624, and the Mercedarians in 1626.

In 1656, the town of San Luis Potosí was raised to the status of “city.” From then until the end of the eighteenth century, it underwent intensive construction.

Many of the buildings erected in San Luis Potosí during the eighteenth century are very original: the Aranzazú and Our Lady of Remedies Chapels, in the San Francisco cluster of buildings; the Loreto Chapel, annexed to the church of the Society of Jesus; the Our Lady of Health or of the Rosary Chapel; the Our Lady of Guadalupe of the Sacred Desert Church; the new parish church of the city of San Luis; the new royal houses and the public granary; the San Nicolás Obispo Beatific School for Girls; the tower of the San Agustín Church; and the new Sanctuary for Our Lady of Guadalupe, among others. However, the most noteworthy because of its amalgam of artistic styles, its magnificence, its origins and the expression of its spaces, is the Carmen Church.

The city would grow toward the east with the San Cristóbal del Montecillo neighborhood in the first decades of the eighteenth century. In mid-century, the largest towns surrounding the city were San Sebastián and Tlaxcalilla.



Their inhabitants practiced different trades, raised chickens and stud bulls, cultivated gardens and cared for the canal where the water flowed. The town's streets were clean. They supported themselves by their labor and with the fruits of the earth (corn, squash and chili peppers) and by selling firewood and charcoal. They also had schools where the children learned to read in Spanish. The inhabitants of Montecillo were also weavers and made shoes and hats. By then, the permanent population of San Luis and the surrounding indigenous towns was 2,147 families, of which 519 were indigenous.

While disturbances were not frequent in the city of San Luis Potosí, information has come down to us of rebellions throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The most important ones were the "Tumultuous Times" of 1767, a series of uprisings between May and October of that year in the city of San Luis Potosí and the towns under its jurisdiction.

The city was an important center for commercialization during the viceroyalty. For that reason,

the 1810 insurrection in Dolores that began Mexico's independence movement became known even before it happened thanks to a regional network of conspirators linked to Hidalgo in Guanajuato and San Luis Potosí. Sympathizers of Hidalgo and Allende in San Luis Potosí were jailed in the Carmen and San Francisco Monasteries and from there the conspiracy spread.

Although the city was invaded several times by the insurgents, most of the population of Spanish ancestry supported the royalists. Once independence was won and the federal republic established, the province of San Luis Potosí became the Free Sovereign State of San Luis Potosí and elected its own Congress. The first governor, Ildefonso Díaz de León, made efforts during his administration to improve the city: he promoted paving the streets with cobblestones and laying down sidewalks, supplying the town with drinking water by beginning the construction in the Cañada del Lobo; he introduced the government printing house and founded the mint. He also supported the construction of the Alarcón Theater,

From 1899 to 1902, building activities gave the city a new look that it still has today: the Peace Theater, the penitentiary, the Industrial Military School, the Ipiña Building, the Crystal Palace and several distinguished homes that are now public buildings.



The Porfirian Ipiña Building.

Elsie Montiel

with its flat vault designed by architect Francisco Eduardo Tresguerras.

Most manufactured items like shoes, skin bags for wine, shawls, blankets, tools, porcelain and paper continued to be made using craft methods. The first industrial activities in the city were mining, textiles, wine-making and tobacco processing.

After independence, the history of the city of San Luis Potosí was linked to the history of neighboring regions and the country as a whole. That is why throughout the XIX century there were continuous uprisings and rebellions by different groups. As a result, the city's buildings underwent profound changes.

After the 1859 law was passed stipulating that the goods of the secular and regular clergy became property of the nation, the Carmen Monastery was turned into the Palace of Justice and the penitentiary, and its garden became a public walkway. The La Merced Monastery became a home for the poor while the San Francisco Monastery became a school.

The outlying indigenous towns were incorporated into the city as neighborhoods in 1862, and during the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz, the city came to look as it does today, at the same time that a new period of intensive construction began.

Important public works were built in this period, like the San José Dam. The installation of railroad, telegraph and telephone lines allowed San Luis to communicate with the rest of the country and the world. From 1899 to 1902, building activities gave the city a new look that it still has today: the railroad station, the Peace Theater, the penitentiary, the Industrial Military School, the Ipiña Building,

the Crystal Palace and several distinguished homes that are now public buildings,

like the ones that house the National Mask Museum, the Cultural Institute, the State Historical Archives, the Federico Silva Museum and the buildings on old Concepción Street, today Zaragoza Street. The introduction of electricity in 1890 also gave the city a new look.

The Mexican Revolution changed Mexican society profoundly, and San Luis



Elsie Montiel

The city's cathedral.

was no exception. The city grew slowly after the Revolution, but there was new expansion in the 1940s. The new railway station, the state Normal School, the Peaje Dam, the Hidalgo and Tangamanga Markets, the Central Hospital, a new water and drainage system, the Alameda and Avenida Cinemas were all built then. Industry also began to grow, pushing ahead in the 1960s with the opening of the industrial zone south of the city.

San Luis grew in all four directions. However, in recent years, it has expanded particularly vigorously to the west. Growth to the east has also been intense, joining the city with the neighboring municipality of Soledad de Graciano Sánchez. To the south are new housing projects, relatively near the industrial zone, although probably the most important work in this area is Tangamanga Park, a large recreational area. New roads have also been built that allow local inhabitants to go from one end of town to the other in just a few minutes.

The city of San Luis Potosí offers its inhabitants and visitors its downtown area, busy with government, financial, commercial and cultural activities; its traditional neighborhoods that testify to the local way of life; its markets and malls; as well as entertainment and recreational venues.

In addition, there is also the internal city, the one that can only be experienced behind the walls of businesses and homes. Seeing that gives us a more intense feeling and taste for what the city of San Luis Potosí and its inhabitants are really like. **MM**



Elsie Montiel

Detail of a bench in the Arms Plaza.