

The basques, present in all spheres of human and social activity in Uruguay

Euskaldunak, Uruguayeko gizamaila eta jokabide guztietan azaltzen dira. Euskaldun askorentzat Ameriketa Montevideo zen. Mito eta errealitatearen arteko dirubide erraz bat zen; hala ere, gehietsuenentzat Ameriketako aberastasunak amets huts baino besterik ez ziren izan. Hala ere dirua egin zutenak ere badira, eta hauetarikoen seme-alabak bizikera eta ekonomi egoera oparo bat lortzera ere iritsi ziren. Egilearen tesiak euskaldunek Urugayen izan duten kondaira aztertzen du. Hona hemen laburpena

The Basques and Uruguay

When talking about the contributions made by the Basques to Uruguay, we have to mention important personalities of the history of Montevideo and its jurisdiction during the colonial years. The founder of the city, Mauricio Zabala, from Bizkaia, its first governor, José Joaquín de Viana, from Alava, its first economic factotum, the prosperous shipbuilder –also from Bizkaia– Francisco de Alzaibar, are good examples of the presence of the natives of the Basque Country in these coasts. With the end of colonization this long and many-sided Basque presence acquired a new and deep significance. We may not have references as famous as those of the personalities we have just mentioned, but their influence was as lasting, for there was an anonymous crowd who chose those lands to settle.

In two historical moments the migratory flow had crucial influence in the Uruguayan society: the first one during the colonial stage (1780 - 1810) and the second one lasted 60 years of the Republic, between 1830 and 1890.

The Basques during 19th century

1- Causes of the immigration

The agricultural crisis, the growth of population, the regime of Mayorazgo (inheritance by the eldest son), the military service in France and the Carlista Wars in the peninsula, were the circumstantial motives to accelerate the migratory process which had, on the other hand, three other motives: the situation of the Iberian regions of the Pyrenees, the advantages of the lands of the Plata for the immigrants and the propaganda of the immigration agents.

The situation of the Basque regions, especially Gipuzkoa and

Bizkaia, presented a higher economic development than the rest of the peninsula. They had a diversified production including agriculture, metallurgy, fishing, shipbuilding, and they were also successful at trade exchanges, for they were free of the common taxes of the rest of the country. This gave the inhabitants of these regions more knowledge and this enabled them to achieve a successful development in America. The poverty of the rural areas expelled the farmers who only had two possibilities: moving to the cities in order to work in the factories or emigrating.

2.- The myth of Montevideo and the Rio de la Plata

Many Basques identified the image of America with Montevideo. The small city of the Plata became an irresistible magnet for young Basques.

Several poems were presented to a contest organized in Urruña (Labourdi), we have found among them «*Montevideo berriac*» written in Labortan dialect. The differences between the idealized legend and the reality are quite obvious.

I was still young, which is enough to explain
 At that age we do not think much
 As soon as I heard about the
 fame of Montevideo
 I was eager to leave the village.
 As hope is half of life
 The hardships of the voyage are
 already forgotten
 For they said there was gold and silver
 in the city
 To fill our hands with
 As one wakes up from a beautiful dream
 I saw myself a beggar among riches.

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The Euskal Etxea Euskal Erria in Montevideo.

Coming to Montevideo and «easily making a fortune» became synonyms. In mid 19th century, the Basques from both sides of the Pyrenees fought over the tickets for boarding the ships which left the harbors of Bordeaux, Bayonne and Pasajes towards Montevideo.

But the situation in Montevideo was far from those idealized legends. This reality was for many a terrible blow, but many others found in it a challenge to reach the highest economic and politic levels of their adopted country.

3.- An integrating insertion

Basque immigrants worked in several activities in the urban environment: carpenters, bricklayers, blacksmiths; others did the same things they used to do in their original rural areas, but most of them did different jobs than those they had done in the Basque Country.

Most of them materialized the main objective of the immigrant: the improvement of their economic conditions. Some made big fortunes with audacity, luck, hard work, and sometimes few scruples. We have studied fifty cases of Basques with public activities –the representatives of the economic success– and we have reached the following conclusions: 24% were landowners, another 24%

were salesmen and bankers, 25% were businessmen, 16% worked in liberal professions, 6% were artists and intellectuals, and finally 6% were priests and military.

The majority saw their hope of reaching opulence in America remain a dream. Some went back to their homeland with enough money to buy their caserío and even build a pelota court, while other less fortunate ones needed the help of their relatives to get back. But most immigrants found a new and better life in Uruguay, and their descendants obtained better economic conditions after the sacrifice of their immigrant parents.

Basque presence in 20th century Uruguay

1.- 20th century Uruguay

The Uruguayans underwent substantial changes in several fields during the three first decades of the century: technology, economy, politics and society in general varied considerably, forming a reality which was quite different from that of only some years before. The comparative advantages of agricultural production opened the access to the European market, an advantage in the measure our export brands met the requirements of Europe, that is, the suitability of Uruguayan economy and society to the European demands had an excellent relationship during those years, although it generated a dependency which was extremely damaging for the country in later moments of crisis.

**Euskaldun asko
artilea eta esnea
salduz aberastu
ziren.
Hemeretzigarren
gizaldiko bost
«aberats berritatik»
bat euskaldunak
ziren.**

The presence of Basques and Basque descendants was more evident in rural areas. Wool production provided the Basques through breeding, the economic activity more practiced and more lucrative. The fifth part of the «new rich» of 1900 were Basques in origin.

2.- The search of other economic sources

For those who came at the end of 19th century, it was

getting more and more difficult to successfully become integrated in the rural environment. As opposed to their fellow countrymen who had arrived forty or fifty years before, they found the lands taken, so many of them devoted themselves to cow farming, a particularly successful activity.

The destination of the milk production was obviously the capital, which kept rapidly growing in population. The alternatives of the market demanded to the milk producers to use audacity and the calculation which is to be expected in a commercial mentality, which was already dominating during this century.



The Lehendakari awards Alberto Irigoyen the Andrés de Irujo Prize for his work on the Laurak Bat in Montevideo.

3.- Happy Uruguay and the Basques

The economic situation of Uruguay during the decades we are studying looked hopeful to the eyes of the contemporary natives and foreigners. The businessmen and politicians of the time confided completely in the positivist and liberal principles, in progress and welfare at the reach of all people who tried hard enough to obtain them. Within the framework of a world economy lead by Great Britain, where liberal practice was a dogma, the comparative advantages of Uruguayan agriculture guaranteed a privileged relation with those nations

Uruguayko edozein giza-taldetan aurki daitezke magistratu, eskulangile, intelektual, militar edo eta periodista euskaldunak.

which provided manufactured products. The State encouraged policies for the replacement of import, favoring national industry and production.

The Basques took part in the leather, wine, wool, sugar and rice industries, among others. They showed in their way of working the typical features of their identity, such as discipline and tenacity, the bases of a menta-

lity essentially positive and pragmatic. The infrastructure needed for the new industries was based on European models. There was «Taylorism» in Europe, and here they had a mixture, and the ranch-business, which was the first



Euskaldun askorentzat Amerika Montevideo zen.

link of a production chain which started with the preparation of the raw materials and ended at the harbor for export. Refrigerators, factories and steamboats replaced forever the salting plants and the mule wagons.

Scientists, musicians, artists, teachers, writers and ... presidents

Certainly, the Basques and their descendants were present in all spheres. Some of the most prestigious were: José Arechavaleta (1838-1912), one of the Uruguayan scientists of the late 19th century; in the field of music Lauro Ayestarán (1913-1965), the son of Gipuzkoan immigrants, and a musicologist of international fame; in the fine arts there was Carmelo de Arzadum, a colorful landscape painter whose parents were from Bilbao. He was born in 1908 and he finished his studies in Bilbao and Paris. In the field of education we have to mention María Orticochea, «a teacher of teachers», who directed the Instituto Normal in 1939; Abdón Aróstegui, writer, journalist and politician; Horacio Arredondo, historian, archeologist and museum manager; Joaquín de Salterain, physician and philanthropist; Julio Raúl de Mendilaharsu, poet... These are just some significant examples of a vast group of prestigious intellectuals settled in Uruguay during the first half of 20th century. With Manuel Oribe, second president of the Republic, the presence of Basque surnames in the first magistrature of the country started. In fact, the period going from the end of 19th

century to the third decade of 20th century opened and closed with two Basque descendants in that position: Juan Idiarte Borda (1895-1897) and Juan Campisteguy (1926-1930).

Basque Centers

The Basque community started organizing itself during the last decades of 19th century. At first the American pioneer was the Laurak Bat founded in 1876, which disappeared later on; in 1911 and 1912 the Centro Euskaro and Euskal Erria were constituted. More recently, during the eighties Haize Hegoa was born, all of them in Montevideo; in the nineties several new centers were created in other departments of Uruguay, in Colonia, Carmelo, Rosario, Minas, Salto, Durazno, etc. This proves the identity kept through many generations by the descendants of those Basque immigrants, and the deep feelings of love for the ancestral Basque land and for the land that received them with open arms.

Conclusion

As a conclusion we will point out once again that the Basques took part in all spheres of human and social activity in Uruguay, and therefore we can state that their integration was complete and unbreakable.



A Basque shepherd in America, in search of fortune.