

Brief historical review of Cárdenas

Category: A little bit of history

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Only 9 km from Varadero, the most beautiful beach in the world, and just over a hundred from the island's capital, is the city of San Juan de Dios de Cárdenas, head of the Cárdenas Municipality, a territory located on the coast north of the province of Matanzas.

With a population of about 156,000 inhabitants, the wealth of the Municipality is divided between agricultural, fishing and industrial production. A good percentage of its inhabitants work in the tourist pole of Varadero while the other is employed in the production of sugar and its derivatives, such as rum and alcohol; the fishing industry, the manufacturing centers that produce equipment, pieces, food, etc., agricultural activities, the cultivation of henequen and activities of service and care for the population.

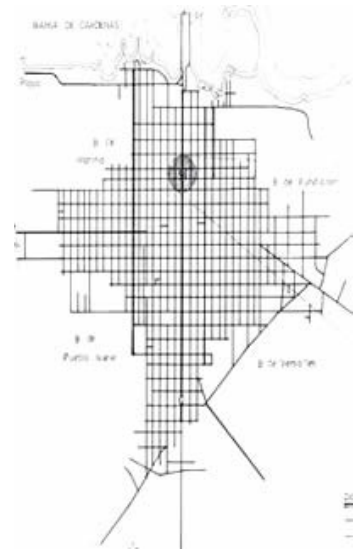
The City is located in the vicinity of the bay of Cárdenas. The landscape around the City has been transformed almost entirely by the human hand. However, you can

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find in the Cantel - Camarioca area a very interesting natural environment, characterized by its Miocene formation, although land of Pleiocene origin also appears in the region.

Among the geographical features that distinguish this area, the Camarioca plain stands out, one of the main ones among those existing in the Municipality of Cárdenas; the Boca de Camarioca; the picturesque valleys that, covered with a varied vegetation, form the elevations of Cantel and the so-called Tits of Camarioca

The flora and fauna of this territory is similar to that existing in the entire region of Cardenas, however, the presence of the Melocactus Matanzano, an endemic species of the Matanzas province but little represented in our municipality, stands out.

Aboriginal period.

The region gathers valuable archaeological and historical testimonies that document the uninterrupted passage through the area of human beings from about 7000 years B.C. - the oldest man in Cuba was found in the Calero Cave in Cantel - until the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors to the Island.

It is very significant the fact that in the territory it is possible to find the presence of all the aboriginal groups that inhabited the Cuban archipelago before the "discovery of America". Some archaeological sites of importance that we can mention are: the already mentioned Calero cave, which not only reports the oldest man found on the Island to date, but also constitutes the largest aboriginal underground cemetery excavated in the Cuban archipelago, the cave Santa Catalina Funeral Home, recently declared a National Monument, and the El Mamoncillo site, to cite just a few examples.

Today, thanks to the patient and systematic work of archaeologists, the "Oscar M. de Rojas" museum in our city preserves, in its Cuban Aboriginal culture room and its rich collections, an important collection of archaeological objects from the most various corners of the local geography.

Colonial period

During the 16th to 18th centuries, the Cárdenas region did not constitute one of the main settlement areas of the Island. However, three economic activities, the extraction of salt in the Punta de Hicacos salt flats, the wood cuts for the Royal Treasury and the extensive cattle ranching major and minor, gave it a certain popularity and importance.

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It was not until the end of the 18th century that local and foreign colonists and landowners turned their attention to this area on the north coast of the Island, as a direct consequence of the revolutions in Haiti and Santo Domingo and the lack of fertile and profitable land in the regions near the cities of Havana and Matanzas.



For this reason, very soon the region is invaded overnight by haciendas, coffee plantations and work sites, which soon look for an outlet to the sea for their products. Shortly after, in 1827, dozens of local neighbors - among them a large number of French immigrants, North Americans and of other nationalities, asked Dionisio Vives, Captain General of the Island, to establish a town on the shores of Siguagua Bay or Siguapa.

On March 8, 1828, after some setbacks had expired, the town of San Juan de Dios de Cárdenas was founded on 4004 yards of land acquired for this purpose by the Royal Treasury. The town grew rapidly, largely due to the fact that its well-sheltered port guaranteed the efficient and rapid exit of agricultural products produced in the extensive jurisdiction, which soon became



the main sugar producer on the island.

At the end of the Ten Years War, to which it also gave an important contribution, and less than 50 years after its founding, the then city of San Juan de Dios de Cárdenas, had large workshops, tanneries, sugar refineries, foundries, distilleries, gas street lights, aqueduct, a beautiful market square, Dozens of factories, flourishing artisans and shops, theaters and even a bullring.

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During this period, many of the events that gave Cárdenas the title of City of First Fruits occur. Among them deserve to be highlighted: the lifting for the first time in Cuba of our national banner brought by the annexationist of Venezuelan origin Narciso López on May 19, 1850, the inauguration of the first solemnly public statue unveiled in Latin America to Admiral Christopher Columbus on 26 December 1862 and the inauguration on September 7, 1889 of the first public electric lighting service available to the



Island.

At the outbreak of the 1995 War, the Cardenians did not hesitate to join it and, led by General Carlos María de Rojas, Chief of the Cárdenas Brigade, or from the ranks of the Cuban Revolutionary Party, did not hesitate to give their best, to achieve Homeland independence. As a consequence of this attitude, 238 sons of the territory offered their lives and a good part of the agricultural and industrial wealth disappeared under the effects of the incendiary tea policy or the deep economic crisis that affected the Island.

On December 16, 1898, the Cuban flag floated again, free and sovereign, in the streets of Cárdenas, this time in the hands of the Mambises and the people. Gone are 4 centuries of Spanish colonization and domination and the tragic days lived by the Cardenas during the

Spanish - Cuban - North American War, during which the city was bombed on May 11, 1898 by Yankee naval forces.

Republic period

Considerably reduced its territory, product of the new territorial divisions and roughed up its agricultural and industrial wealth as a consequence of the War of 1895, Cárdenas looks into the 20th century submerged in a deep economic and social crisis; which is sharpened during the period of the dictator Gerardo Machado's rule.

Added to the above, the penetration of North American capital at the local level, which absorbed companies and killed numerous local initiatives, a phenomenon that was joined by the ups and downs of national politics, the so often promised and unfulfilled dredging of the local port and the weather disasters, especially the cyclone and ras ras mar that hit Cárdenas on September 1, 1933.

The 57 years of pseudo-republic that the Island suffered, were for Cárdenas years of constant struggles for workers and social demands. Strikes, altercations and other similar events happened at the local level over and over again with almost no concrete and visible results. During the Batista dictatorship the fight intensifies and numerous Cardenians fall again defending the freedom and true independence of the Homeland.

Notable events of this period are: the foundation of the Cárdenas Museum and Public Library in 1900, the second institution of this type established on the Island; the visit made on August 6, 1925 by Julio Antonio Mella to the Vatalav Vorovski, the first Soviet ship to arrive in Cuba and the births of José Antonio Echeverría, undisputed leader of the Cuban student body and of José Smith Comas, Captain of the Vanguard of the yacht Gramma.

Revolutionary Period

The revolutionary triumph of January 1, 1959 put an end to all the calamities emanating from the Pseudo-republic. Immediately the people of Cardenas joined in the defense of the conquests of the Revolution and their presence was felt during the Agrarian Reform, the Literacy Campaign, the Battle of Girón, the Escambray clean-up and the internationalist missions.

New Cardena martyrs joined in this period the heroes of the Homeland, along with new industries - the Victoria de Girón Shipyards, the America Libre smelter, the Oil Drilling and Extraction Company and the Valdés Reyes and Horacio Rodríguez Companies, among others - they joined the local economic outlook.

Currently, in the 562.5 km. squares that the municipality has, dozens of schools, hospitals, children's centers, cultural institutions, polyclinics and family doctor's offices, are eloquent testimony of the social development experienced by the territory in these years of victorious revolution.

In recent times, Cárdenas has been an important scene of the battle of ideas waged by all our people under the correct leadership of his Party and Fidel.

Today, as a new millennium begins, we can proudly affirm that the land that was the cradle of José Antonio Echeverría, José Smith Comas and many other heroes and martyrs, is on the right path, offering its modest contribution to the consolidation of our Revolution and of our Socialism.

Mus. Ernesto Alvarez Blanco.