

A NEW UNIVERSITY FOR MEXICO

A report presented to Dr. Eyer N. Simpson
on the "Ciudad Universitaria de México"
by Señor Carlos Contreras, Architect

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PRESENT SITUATION OF THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

A brief analysis of the present conditions existing in the National University of Mexico is necessary in order to bring out with more force the urgent need for the construction of the "Ciudad Universitaria de México" -- i.e. the present University transferred to a suitable location, properly grouped in colleges, adequately housed, and forming a compact unit; the national cultural center of Mexico.

The Housing of the University

At present the various colleges and schools which constitute the University are inadequately housed in old colonial buildings scattered throughout the city.

The physical condition of the majority of these buildings is very bad. Many of them are either falling down or are in urgent need of immediate and extensive repairs. Most of them were designed and built for other purposes -- as convents, residences, or public offices (one for the Catholic Inquisition) -- and it has been impossible to adapt them in any very satisfactory manner for educational uses.

The isolation of the various colleges makes it difficult if not impossible to create an esprit de corps or to develop common tendencies and aims in the University.

The University buildings are lacking in laboratories, lecture rooms, assembly rooms, sanitary installations, and libraries with the proper ventilation, lighting, and equipment.

The Housing of the Students and Teachers

In view of the fact that most of the University buildings are located in the business sections of the City and that no dormitory or housing facilities are provided by the University, the large majority of the students and teachers perforce must live at considerable distance from their work. In a very considerable number of cases, students and teachers living in the suburbs and outlying districts of the City must make four trips a day to and from the School and thus lose as much as two or three hours per day traveling on buses and streetcars.

The Teachers and Alumni

A very high percentage of the professors and instructors in the University are professional men devoted to the practice of their professions and giving some of their spare time to teaching as a source of additional income.

There are properly speaking very few teachers now in the University and the need of preparing and developing full-time University professors and instructors is self-evident. It will, however, never be possible to build up a body of teachers, a group of selected men dedicated to teaching as a profession, unless better salaries are paid and the uncertainty of tenure which arises from the periodic changes in the Government is removed.

The University has not been in contact with the life of the City or of the country; having no knowledge of local or national problems, it has made no contribution to their solution. Individually and independently some members of the University faculty and some of its alumni have taken an active part in the solution of these problems, but they constitute an impressive minority.

The alumni of the University of Mexico as a group have done absolutely nothing for the institution, and they must be organized and made to realize their strength and the obligation which they owe to the University.

THE PLAN FOR A NEW NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

The Mexican Government has already considered the desirability of properly housing the University and has included in the National Budget for 1930 the amount of \$1,000,000 pesos for this purpose. The Secretary of the Treasury with the approval of the President of the Republic is ready and willing to assure the National University an annual grant of an equal amount over a period of years.

Now, as to the character which the new University must have: A University in close contact with Mexico City and with its problems, or a University in the country away from the City? Which type would be the most desirable?

The decision on this point is a very serious one and many opinions should be heard and weighed before a final answer is given.

A Proposed Site for the University

Many sites have been offered and suggested for the location of the new University. All of these sites must be studied on the merits, advantages and disadvantages, of each, with respect to the following points:

1. Topography -- nature and conditions of the ground, perspectives, etc.
2. Distance from the City and means of communication and transportation.
3. Water, drainage, and sewerage facilities.

4. Climatic and sanitary conditions.
5. Building materials.
6. Extension -- surface available for present and future needs.
7. Cost of ground.

In my opinion, the New University should be a University in close contact with the City and the site which I have chosen for its location is in Chapultepec Heights on the Loma de San Isidro, between the Barranca de Tecamachalco on the south, the state of Mexico on the west, the Barranca de San Joaquin on the north, and the road from Tacubaya to Tlalnepantla with the Hacienda de los Morales on the east. (See Map I.)

The ground area available in the above described location is 1,500,000 square meters (375 acres). In addition to this, toward the west and north exists the possibility of a future extension of the University's holdings and it would perhaps be advisable to acquire as a part of the original investment an additional area of 1,000,000 square meters from the Chapultepec Heights Company while this land may still be had for a reasonable price.

The topography of the land in question here is ideal. It is situated on a high plateau surrounded by two ravines -- Tecamachalco and San Joaquin -- old river beds ten to twelve meters below the level of the Loma de San Isidro which may be joined by means of a tunnel and made into a circular parkway around the University. The old sand mines which are found in the west ravine could be transformed into grottoes for student restaurants and meeting places.

From the highest point on the plateau, one can clearly see the Castle of Chapultepec, the Sanctuary of Los Remedios, the two

volcanoes Ixtaccihuatl and Popocatepetl, the Indian village of Tecamachalco, the residential section of Chapultepec Heights, and the whole of Mexico City.

Transportation

The distance from the National Palace, located in the center of Mexico City, to the proposed site for the New University is five miles through the Calzada de los Morales. (This road could easily be widened to one hundred feet and made into a splendid boulevard -- see Map I, Route A.) This distance can be traveled in an automobile in fifteen minutes. Another, though slightly longer, route for reaching the University would be along the Paseo de la Reforma and the Calzada de la Exposición. (Map I, Route B) Roads now exist which would bring the University in communication with the suburbs of Tacuba, Tacubaya, and Chapultepec.

The feasibility of transforming the present Cuernavaca railway into a rapid transit electric suburban railroad is being considered and may be accomplished in the near future. This, of course, would furnish another and important means of transportation to the University.

Water, Sanitation, and Building Materials

Water in abundance is available from the Ajusco range and from artesian wells. The Department of Communications and Public Works is about to complete the construction of a dam and reservoir -- the Presa de San Joaquín -- to retain the yearly flow of the Rio Consulado. The present river bed will later be converted into a circular boulevard around Mexico City.

The reservoir formed by the San Joaquín Dam would be available for water sports and as an additional source of water supply for the University.

Drainage and sewerage are made easy through the natural elevation and inclination of the land.

Building materials -- sand, gravel, and stone -- are found in abundance throughout all this region and may be obtained at a very low cost.

Description of the Plan

The preliminary plan which has been made for the proposed New University seeks to take advantage of the topography of the site. (See Maps II and III) The central element in the plan is a slightly curved dominating axis -- an avenue sixty meters wide (180 feet) with three arteries of circulation and with six rows of trees. This avenue running through the middle of the plateau from behind the Hacienda de los Morales to the center of the campus would be monumental in character and would end with the library and administration building crowned with a memorial tower and with terraces overlooking the whole property. Following the contour of the site, there will be a circular boulevard around the University inclosing all the colleges but leaving to one side the stadium and athletic field, the physical culture school, the rector's house, dormitories for students, and the homes for professors and instructors of the University.

The entrance to the University would be made through a park at the crossing of the Calzada de los Morales with the road from Tacubaya to Tlalnepantla.

To the left of the entrance to the University, and directly on the Central Avenue, would be located the National Preparatory School; to the right, the School of Commerce and Administration. Still farther along to the right is located the Physical Culture School with its gymnasium and playing field.

At another remove and on the right also of the Central Avenue, is the site for the College of Music, Theater, and Dance with an open-air theater, -- all conveniently grouped around a central court or quadrangle to strengthen the cohesion and unity of the College.

In front of the above College is the Fine Arts Group with the Schools of Architecture, Sculpture, Painting, Graphic and Industrial Arts, and City Planning, these buildings also being grouped around a central court which might very well contain some of the best examples of architecture and sculpture in life-size casts.

Next, and to the right of the Central Avenue, would be located the College of Engineering, comprising the Schools of Engineering, Chemistry, Aviation, Astronomical Observatory, Laboratories, etc.

In front of this College and to the left of the main Avenue, is the site for the College of Medicine including the Odontological School, clinics, and hospital. The Colleges of Engineering and Medicine, being the largest and most important, would also face the Main Court or Plaza of the University. The Colleges of Law, Philosophy, and Social Sciences are located at the end of the main drive facing the Main Plaza.

The gymnasium, swimming pool, stadium, locker- and dressing-rooms are located to the right of the circular road and toward the

Barranca de San Joaquín.

Estimated Costs

The urbanization of the site for the University would include drainage and sewerage work, the water supply, lighting, telephone, radio, paving, parks, and gardens. The estimated cost of this work is 3,000,000 pesos.

It is believed that it will be desirable, in order to provide for the present and near future needs of the University, to construct fifteen buildings at an estimated cost of 500,000 pesos per building as an average. This would mean a total expenditure of 7,500,000 pesos. The buildings would be:

1. Library and Administration Building.
2. College of Law.
3. College of Philosophy and Social Sciences.
4. and 5. College of Engineering.
6. and 7. College of Medicine.
8. College of Fine Arts.
9. College of Music, Theater, and Dance.
10. College of Commerce and Administration.
11. National Preparatory School.
12. Physical Culture School.
13. Gymnasium and Swimming Pool.
14. Stadium.
15. Rector's House and Dormitory for Students.

A preliminary rough estimate of the total cost of the University would be as follows:

Cost of the land.....	600,000 pesos
Urbanization.....	3,000,000
Cost of fifteen buildings.....	7,500,000
10% additional unforeseen costs..	<u>1,100,000</u>
	12,200,000
6% Architect's fees.....	<u>732,000</u>
	12,932,000
Equipment of buildings.....	<u>5,068,000</u>
Total Cost.....	18,000,000

It is my opinion that the period for the completion of this building program should not extend beyond six years.

The planning and construction of the New University would afford an unparalleled opportunity for the architectural profession in Mexico to give birth to an enduring Mexican architecture -- one that will express in stone the vigor and richness of the nation's architectural inheritance and tradition.

By the use of native plants and animals, idealized and simplified in decorative forms, by native stone carvers, sculptors, and architects, the New University should be a true synthesis of function and design -- a realization of the artistic potentiality of the Mexican people.

In my opinion, in seeking to carry out the plans which have been described here, the best results would be obtained by the appointment of a Committee made up of the Rector of the National University, the Secretary of the Treasury, an individual well-versed in the social problems of Mexico and of the University, a person

well acquainted with the economic and administrative problems of the University, and a qualified architect and technical director.

Once the location of the site for the University has been decided upon and the general principles which will govern the planning and the design for the New University have been defined, this Committee would invite ten of the outstanding architects in Mexico to prepare and present their individual plans and perspectives for the University. These preliminary suggestions would then be discussed and criticized by the Committee and by the ten architects and new propositions presented aiming to obtain a design which would express the cooperation and collaboration of ten minds working toward the same goal: the creation of a fresh, vigorous, modern, Mexican architecture.

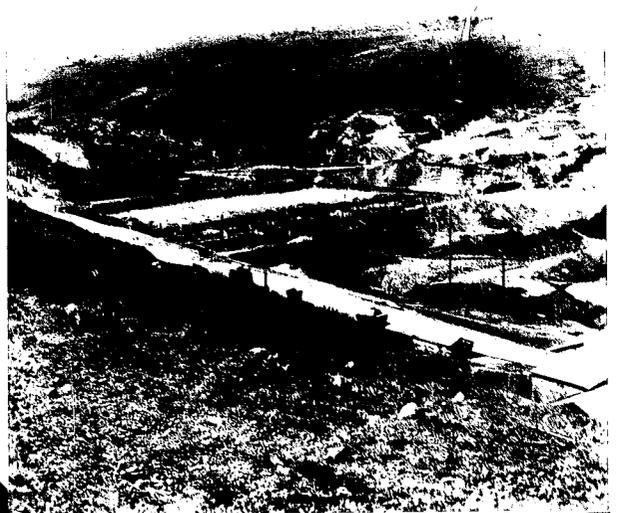
Having approved the final design of the University, the ten architects would undertake the execution of detailed projects for the various buildings, estimates, specifications, drawings, etc. And not until every single detail of design and construction had been carefully and completely worked out and approved should the construction of the National University begin under the supervision of the Committee and the architect intrusted with the realization of one of the nation's greatest needs -- the Ciudad Universitaria de México.

(signed) CARLOS CONTRERAS

November 12, 1929



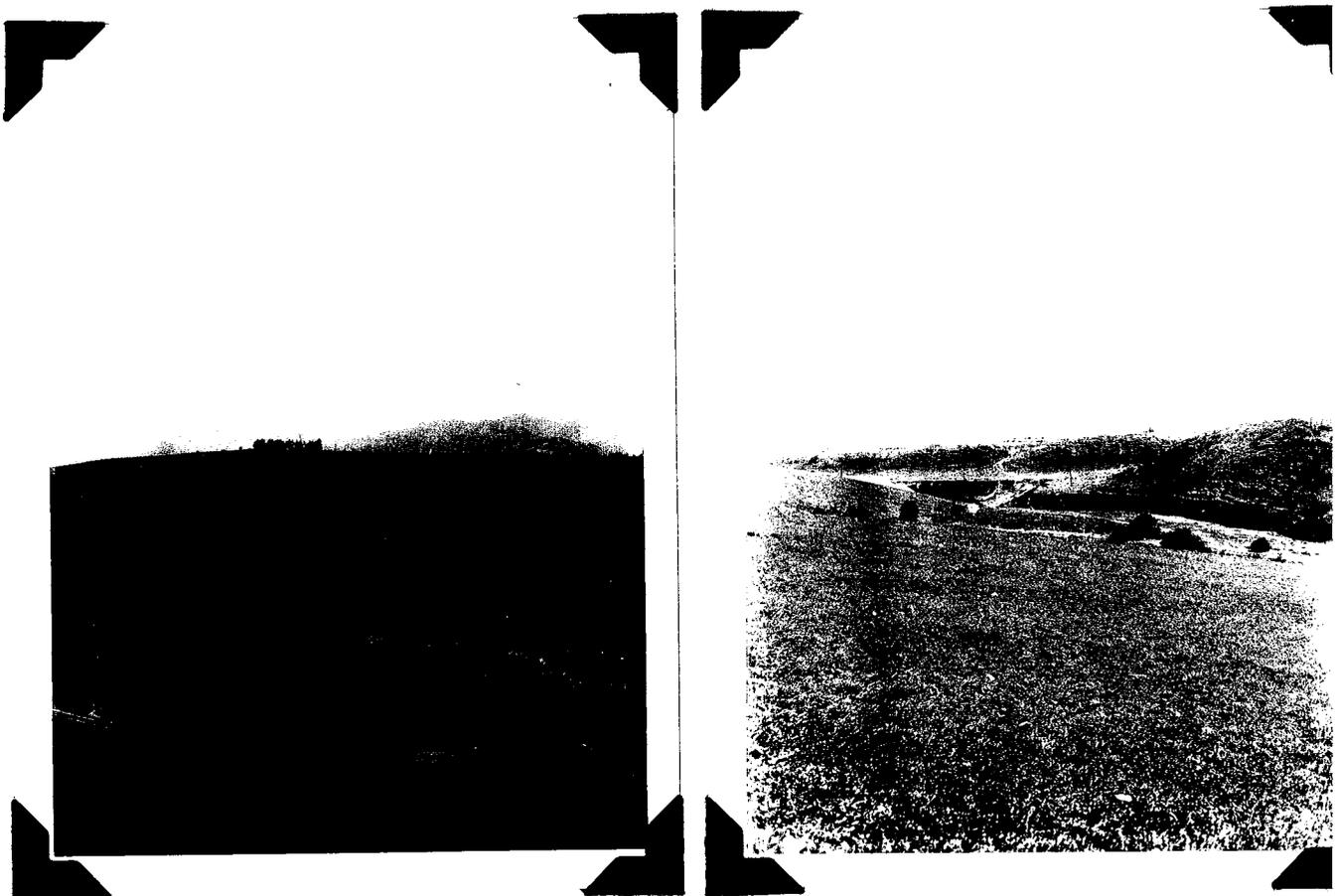
BARRANCA OF TECAMACHALCO.



VIEWS OF SAN JOAQUIN DAM.



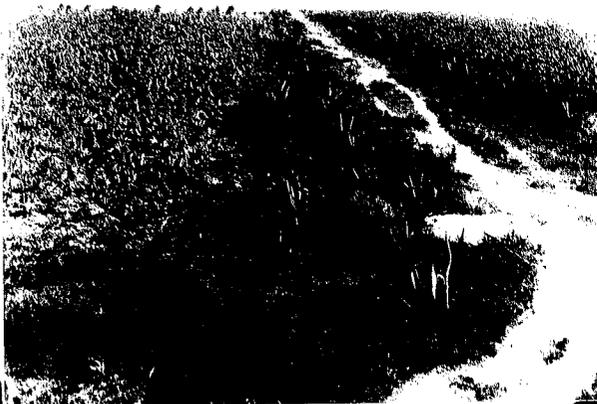
GROTTOES .



VIEWS OF THE BARRANCAS OF SAN JOAQUIN AND TECAMACHALCO .



BARRANCA OF SAN JOAQUIN.



VIEWS OF LOMA OF SAN ISIDRO-PROPOSED CAMPUS FOR THE UNIVERSITY.

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