

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

FH: WSR-5.

The Turismo Hotel
Mendoza Argentina
January 15, 1942

Dear Mr. Rogers:

The Dirección Industria of the Province of Mendoza is an agricultural extension service, a tourist propaganda agency and an experimental and research institute all rolled into one. George Christiansen, a Cordobese Argentine who is in charge of filoxera research, has assisted in acquainting me with some of the concerns of the Dirección. In this way I have begun to realize the importance of this province which Mendocinos say ranks third or fourth in the nation and which they assert will some day be the richest province of all.

The future of Mendoza will have much to do with petroleum and the mining of rich ores which can be had for the effort in the twisted strata and the rocky reaches of the Andes. This week I saw the oil fields which are slowly being developed in an unseemly place, on the rolling mesa land of the foothills of the pre-cordillera. A studied inspection of the fields is not allowed because of the State of Siege proclaimed by the Argentine government. In Argentina there has been no feverish wild-cattling, no frantic drilling such as characterized the development of the oil fields in the United States. Here petroleum is the property of the government which may exercise its eminent domain over whatever land it wills by paying a fair price for the property on the basis of its agricultural value. Some are of the opinion that the petroleum industry is undeveloped because the government is the owner; it is contended that private or foreign capital would long ago have brought the fields into production on a big scale. Those who favor the government policy point out that this precious resource is in no danger of being depleted by wide-open and unrestrained exploitation. Engineer Vicente Lombardozzi, a geologist of the Dirección, gave me a short course on the mineral wealth of the province. By some quirk of nature the Argentine side of the cordillera has practically no iron ore. Coal deposits are of poor quality, with a lightness like peat. One of the few deficiencies of the Argentine is that it does not have the coal and iron to develop a steel industry, without which many heavy industries are not feasible. Nearest available iron deposits are in Brazil. The mining industry suffers from poor communications. It is cheaper to transport coal from Cardiff, Wales, to Buenos Aires than from the Andes. Since the war ascarcity of bottoms has created a coal problem. Here in Mendoza, theoretically a stone's throw from coal, the locomotives of the Pacific Railroad are fired with wood. In many parts of the Republic corn is used as fuel. For the rest--lead, copper, silver, etc.--there are deposits beyond the imagination. There is no profit in mining them at present. Only a few rare minerals, such as vanadium, are being mined and they because they are necessary in the war industries of the Democracies.

The Mendoza of today and its prosperity depends mostly on grape culture and wine-making. With respect to the grape plant, a problem has been dumped into the lap of science for solution. It is the spread of the filoxera, a quasi-microscopic insect which attacks the root, sapping it of its vitality and eventually bringing death to it. The filoxera is a North American importation, having traveled from California to France and then to the Argentine. The "bug" as yet is limited to a single area in Mendoza, that which is directly north of the Río Mendoza and which is irrigated by a common system of canals. The filoxera followed the canal system. The filoxera section, of which Christiansen has charge, is endeavoring to develop a plant which will be filoxera-resistant. The technique is to graft the Americana grape plant with native varieties. The Americana species is from California, that kind of plant hav-

ing built up a natural resistance to the pest throughout the years. It will be necessary if this is the solution which becomes practical to replant the vineyards. Experiments have disclosed that the filoxera cannot stand too much water and that if the plant root is submerged for eight days the filoxera will die. Hence some system of flooding the vineyards at the proper time of the year may prove practical in combating the "bug."

In addition to the experiments carried on to find a practical solution to the filoxera problem, the experimental stations serve the purpose of developing the proper kind of grape plants for the various sections of the province. There are differences in soil types, in temperature, in altitude and moisture conditions. Since the grape plant produces for 30 years or more on the same soil it is necessary to replenish and fertilize the ground. Most needed elements are nitrate of soda, phosphorus and potassium. I have seen three of the ten experimental stations in the province, having visited two with Christiansen, both of these in the Mendoza area, and having spent a day at the station near La Consulta, 125 kilometers south of Mendoza with Dr. Correte and Engineer Miguel Saéz. Dr. Correte, who is one of the officials of the Dirección, cites a curious climatic condition which now has to be reckoned with because of the irrigation system. Before this system became extensive in the province, a rain of any sort was quite rare. With the irrigation system spread over an extremely wide area the tendency has been for the air to be more humid with the result that fair-to-middling rains seem to come more often. Since I arrived in Mendoza there have been six rains, one of them yesterday which must have totaled a third of an inch. But the really significant thing is that the irrigation system affects the temperature, having a cooling tendency.

My activities this week also included a day with fifteen agronomy students and their professors from the University of Buenos Aires. We inspected the Bodega Giol, the largest in the world, and the Giol olive factory. The Bodega Giol is drastically unlike the Bodega Trapiche. Relatively speaking the Trapiche wines are of much better quality. Wine making in that bodega is an art; whereas the vino común is made in the Giol bodega, the cheap wine of the average working man. Because the Giol wine is made in such tremendous volume, the bodega is sometimes called a "factory." The Giol wine is aged for only a year. This bodega is a curious sight. Wine flows down canals in the factory much as the water of the Río Mendoza flows in the acequias of the City of Mendoza. The wine is aged in vats or compartments almost twice the height of a man and approximately 100 feet long. Walls are lined with cement, not with French oak as in the case of the best bodegas.

During the past week I had the opportunity to cultivate the friendship of 30 high school students from the City of Rosario. As a group and as individuals, these students were easy to know; they were alert, simpático. Again I was aware of the tremendous interest which the average Argentine has for North America. There was no end to the questions which these youths asked about the U. S. A. Each day they went on excursion trips to points of interest in the Mendoza vicinity. I was their guest on one of these occasions. Except for the language difference, they might easily have passed for North American high school students. They were forward to discuss world politics and to pass judgments on serious problems. But they really did not take such matters too seriously. The owner of the Turismo Hotel is a French lady. One of the youths hearing that the Madame was a DeGaulista gave the fascist salute to her just to provoke her emotions. The incident convinced madame--for she confided her opinion to me--that these youths were fascist sympathizers to the last one. As a matter of fact, the youth who gave the salute, as well as a number of others, are members of the British "Order of Bellows." They wore the Bellows emblem at all times. By the kind of buttons they possessed, it was clear that they had contributed many pesos to the British cause. Nine of them have given me their names and addresses and I am pledged to see them if I ever go to Rosario.

The music of the Argentine is unlike the lively rhumba, the happy music of Brazil or the spirited songs of Mexico. It is sad. It is tranquil. There is a plaintive quality to every tango. There has never been, insofar as I have been able to learn, even one happy tango. The tango dates back to the early 1900's when it succeeded the milonga. The milonga has many of the qualities of the tango. In fact the tango is an adaptation or evolution of it. The other night I heard a milonga which concerned itself with the Negro race. I was surprised, for there are but a handful of Negroes in the Argentine. In the earlier days of the Republic, however, there were a lot of them. A friend of mine explained that in the war with Paraguay the Negroes were sent to the front as tropas de choque (assault troops). Very few of them returned to the Argentine from this terrible war.

One of the most noticeable customs to the foreigner is the piropo. Men of whatever age standing idly on the sidewalk or passing in the street make remarks to women whose beauty they fancy. It is a custom which, oddly enough, seems to please the women. Although it seems to be done in the best social circles, I know I shan't speak a piropo very soon. While returning to the hotel one evening by automobile with a friend from the Dirección, the driver suddenly slammed on the brakes, stopping the car almost in the middle of a busy intersection. A young lady had paused on the corner to allow the traffic go by before she set across the street. She waved us on. My friend would not proceed until she crossed the street. I never saw such gallant showmanship in my life. I asked him if it were a kind of piropo. He told me that it was not, that it was something more special, an "atención."

Already I have a large circle of friends in Mendoza who have made it possible for me to see much of the province to which there is access. However, many travel possibilities will be exhausted in a couple of weeks. Because it is summer, there is little activity in University circles. It seems that it would be a good time to go down to the prairie provinces where the important agriculture of the country is concentrated. My friends have warned me against the "dude estancias" which many North Americans visit. They will see, in the event I go there, that I do not end up in a region where life is not typical of the Argentine. The corn is tasseling now. The pampas region is hot and humid and it will be so in February. But the summer will be half gone then and it should not be much of an inconvenience. Carlos Luzzetti, a young professor from the University of Cuyo, may call on you in a few days. He is sailing on a Chilean ship. He is a chap with a lot of good qualities and has been a great help to me.

Very truly yours,

Francis Herron