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About the Institute

The Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation, a research division of Carnegie Mellon University, specializes in the history of botany and all aspects of plant science and serves the international scientific community through research and documentation. To this end, the Institute acquires and maintains authoritative collections of books, plant images, manuscripts, portraits and data files, and provides publications and other modes of information service. The Institute meets the reference needs of botanists, biologists, historians, conservationists, librarians, bibliographers and the public at large, especially those concerned with any aspect of the North American flora.

Hunt Institute was dedicated in 1961 as the Rachel McMasters Miller Hunt Botanical Library, an international center for bibliographical research and service in the interests of botany and horticulture, as well as a center for the study of all aspects of the history of the plant sciences. By 1971 the Library's activities had so diversified that the name was changed to Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation. Growth in collections and research projects led to the establishment of four programmatic departments: Archives, Art, Bibliography and the Library.

Heath, Gove and Bell
Architects

January 4, 1939

*Dear Wilson -
She may interest you.
Louis*

Mr. Louis Adamic
c/o Harper & Brothers, Publishers
New York City, New York

Dear Sir:

Last year one of my most prized Christmas gifts was a copy of your delightful book "The House in Antigua."

It is possible that you may have run across or heard of Verle Annis, Professor of Architecture of the University of Southern California. He worked for the writer in his student days and I have followed his career with a great deal of interest.

Linking up of the Spanish Colonial traditions and architecture with the originals in Spain has been his main hobby. If you do not know him I hope you will have the opportunity of making his acquaintance some time. The enclosed manuscript is a copy of the report made on his return from his latest trip to Spanish lands and which he sent to me.

To us who haven't the time, money or strength to see these beauty spots, the pictures which you fortunate ones write and photograph for us are some compensation.

Sincerely yours,

George Gove
George Gove

GG:HW

COPY OF NOTE
on
PROF. ANNIS' CHRISTMAS CARD OF 1938

to George Correll

I haven't had time to write as I should. In desperation I am sending a mimeographed copy of a news letter that I had to write for my architectural fraternity magazine. My apologies that it is not altogether what I want to tell you but at least it will fill in the gaps of my career until I can do better. I am working hard now to try to get my measured drawings and photographic material in final form - a joy that will take several years I fear. My spare time is not very plentiful as I have a heavy load at the University and there are many other interruptions.

When are you coming to California? I have so much I would like to show you and tell you.

As ever, yours

Verle Annis

ON LEAVE IN GUATEMALIA

It is not always that a second visit improves a first impression, but Guatemala was no disappointment. It was even more enjoyable. As weeks lengthened into months I found that its charm never diminished. And as the time approached for my return to the States I discovered that I was violently homesick for GUATEMALA. I hated to leave, and I began then to plan another return. I only hope that the intervening time will not be too long.

In my first visit to Guatemala in 1934 I had about seven weeks to sample its delightful climate, natural beauties, picturesque life, and historic sites. In planning a second visit for 1938 I knew what I would see, where I wanted to go, and especially what I wanted to do. I thought that approximately six months would be ample time. Now I wish I had allowed myself a year. Probably I still would not have been satisfied.

But I doubt if you would agree with me in my feelings toward Guatemala. At least not in its entirety. And why should I try to sell you the idea! Many visitors to Guatemala have wondered how I could spend more than a week in Antigua. These individuals do not believe me when I say that I found five months there too brief. It is hard to account for such likes or dislikes. Everyone enjoys a bit of vacation travel thru this delightful country but they do not agree in the amount of the doses to be taken. But if you go there I hope that you will enjoy it as I have. In the meantime, perhaps I had better tell you why I was there and what I did.

To start at the beginning I will merely give a few facts. Guatemala is my subject but I need to account for my prolonged absence from Los Angeles and my method of arriving in Antigua. After ten years of work at U. S. C. the administration decided that I might have a sabbatical leave for one semester to follow up my two major hobbies - Colonial Spanish architecture and photography. So in February I packed the lightest bag I could find - it had to be under fifty-five pounds total weight including nearly twenty pounds of photographic equipment - and boarded a plane for Mexico City.

From Mexico City I hopped over to Merida, Yucatan. I did not want to waste the time usually required to reach this area. But I was determined to see the Mayan ruins of Uxmal and Chichen Itza in order to round out my third hobby - archaeology. Having seen the ancient ruins of Mexico, Guatemala, Peru and Bolivia I wanted those of Yucatan for comparison. And it was well worth the effort. I only wish I could have spent more time there, too, but a week later I flew back to Mexico, spent part of a week in Puebla, and then flew from Mexico City to Guatemala City. In this way I had saved about ten days in travel time which compensated for the side trips that I had just completed.

The flight from Mexico to Guatemala is certainly one of the most magnificent on this continent, an easy hop of but five hours as compared to nearly four days by train. In these few hours the plane passes by Ixtaccihuatl and Popocatepetl and over continuous ranges of mountains

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to the Gulf of Tehautepec. After following the coast for a time it swings in thru the volcano studded Guatemalan Highlands. The entire geography of this area unrolls beneath the plane like a great relief map. I had seen most of this area from the ground on my former visit to Guatemala and the view from the clouds was doubly fascinating as a result. I could recognize the many towns and villages as they came within our broad range of vision. And one of the greatest thrills of my life came and went in the few minutes we circled the rim of Santa Maria volcano which is still decidedly active. To look down into that angry, tumbling mass of smoke in the crater was a sight I shall never forget. And the contrast a few moments later of looking down upon that gorgeously serene body of water, Lake Atitlan, which is also in a crater-like setting, was another unforgettable picture. During the months that followed I made four more flights over several parts of the Guatemalan Highlands and to Copan, Honduras. Each furnished their own particular enjoyment, but time will not permit a description of these experiences.

After my arrival in Guatemala I immediately established my residence at the pleasant little Hotel Manchen in Antigua. Sr. and Sra. Mann, who own the hotel, were more than hosts. They were friends dating from my former visit. And their flower filled patio is one of the loveliest spots in Central America. Certainly it was no hardship to face five months in such a setting. And I might add that the food was not only plentiful but excellent in quality.

Antigua is unique in the New World. It was one of the three great centers of the Conquest after the year of 1524. For several centuries it was only surpassed by two other Spanish Colonial cities - Mexico City and Lima, Peru. In unchanged colonial interest it can be compared only to Cuzco, Peru, and yet it is so different from Cuzco that they are not rivals in my mind. Antigua is but six years younger than Lima, and yet it is the third Capitol of Guatemala. It will celebrate its four hundredth anniversary in 1941. But it is unique in the fact that it was almost completely abandoned after the great earthquake of 1773, and as a result remains a perfect example of Colonial Spanish architecture at the climax of its development.

This city had grown large and powerful during its history of more than 230 years. It was the seat of government for all Central America, the headquarters of a long line of Captains-General sent from Spain to rule over this area. It was the home of many noble families, colonists to the New World, as well as the proud descendants of the Conquistadores. It was a great religious center, nearly sixty ecclesiastical institutions having been founded within its city limits and suburbs. There were eight powerful monasteries, six large convents, and a number of hospitals, schools, and orphanages under the guidance of religious organizations. In addition to the great monastic churches there were numerous other churches, hermitages, chapels and shrines. And, of course, there was a great Cathedral with its adjacent Palace of the Archbishops. And the University was second only to the one in Mexico City in age. There were other colleges and seminaries. In every way it was a great Colonial city, having a population of sixty or seventy thousand at the time the great catastrophe of 1773.

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The location of Antigua is unusually beautiful. The site was well chosen in the middle of the fertile valley of Panchoy. On one side the majestic Volcan de Agua rises to about 12,400 feet, while on the other side of the valley are the Volcans de Fuego and Acatenango of over 13,000 feet. The valley itself is just a little over 5000 feet above sea level and therefore has a perfect climate for the tropics. It is never hot or cold, and the plants of the temperate zone and the tropics thrive equally well. Antigua is now the center of the coffee culture of Guatemala. The people of Guatemala tell the World that their coffee is the finest grown. It is not hard for me to agree with them.

Beautiful as the volcanoes are, and serene as the setting seems, the history of the valley has been a long series of calamities. Most of the trouble has originated in the Fire Volcano which is still active. Since the Spaniards chose this valley as their capitol in 1526 the Volcan de Fuego has erupted fifty-two times, the last time in 1932. It smokes continuously, and earthquakes are frequent. There have been many heavy earthquakes, and the city was badly damaged and restored several times prior to the year of 1773. Since that date the city has been left in ruin for the most part. Only a few thousand inhabitants now occupy the site. By order of the King of Spain the Capitol was moved about twenty-five miles to the present location of Guatemala City.

In the 165 years since its abandonment Antigua has slowly aged, and mellowed, and fallen further into ruin, but it remains a museum of unadulterated Colonial Spanish architecture. Twenty years ago the new Guatemala City was destroyed by earthquake, and rebuilt anew. Antigua remains the one and only magnificent link with the past. If one has any interest in bygone days it would be impossible to elude the charm of this venerable background. Only in Cuzco, Peru, and in Antigua have I felt that I could actually be in contact with the real Colonial period. Here it is tangible and vivid. It isn't necessarily a surface appearance. May visitors only see piles of stone where monasteries, convents, churches, government palaces and the residences of nobles once stood. And there are more magnificent piles of stone in the Old World, they say. But these are unimaginative souls, I say. I love to read a living history in this debris of the old period. I think archaeologists and architects are privileged to be able to see what others have to be told. Perhaps that is why I liked Antigua, and why I never tired of it, where the average tourist is bored in a few hours with the casual inspection of but two or three of these ruins.

It is a miracle that these badly damaged buildings have withstood repeated earthquakes, torrential rains, the growth of heavy tropical vegetation, and damage at the hands of humans. Yet many great structures still stand in magnificent dignity, and in fair state of preservation. But most of these great buildings would not survive another great earthquake. Many have fallen year by year as it is. Sooner or later this Colonial picture will be erased. It may take another half century of weathering, or it may be an earthquake of tomorrow. The city was built to withstand centuries under normal conditions, but with the neglect of man and the ravages of the elements it is fast disappearing now. How I wish I could have seen it fifty years ago!

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No record had ever been made of these Colonial buildings in Antigua. When I was there four years ago I decided it would be very interesting to start the work. In fact I started it then, but time was limited and I merely took photographs - about two thousand of them. This trip I added nearly four thousand more photographs, many in color, and a considerable footage of color motion pictures as well. But pictures were not enough and I spent a large part of the months from March to the end of July in measuring all that I could of this material. Altho I worked alone, or with only the help of an Indian boy, I know that I have the cream of the architectural remains now recorded. There is much more than I would like to add to the collection, and I will do so when I can return, but I am satisfied that I did not waste my time on this trip.

In collecting my material an attempt was made to get a cross section thru the Colonial period. And so my drawings included complete plans of two of the largest monasteries, two convents, the Cathedral and Archbishop's Palace, the University, and a half dozen typical old residences both large and small. Of these plans I might mention that one - San Francisco Monastery - was a building that covered about six acres of ground, or approximately four of Antigua's city blocks. A large portion of this great monastic establishment was two and three stories in height. No plan record exists for any of these large institutions. And the written accounts are meager.

The remainder of my measured drawings included about fifty panelled doors and shutters, wood grilled windows, ceilings, patios, residential details, iron work and hardware, and a variety of furniture. And, of course, my photographs not only include all these details but hundreds more that I did not have time to measure.

By now you are fed up with my story, but before I stop I must add that it was not all work and no play. In all Latin American countries there are many fiesta days. One can not avoid the spirit of the country, and so I saw many interesting Indian ceremonials, religious processions, and fiestas. Of the religious events the several weeks of pageantry preceeding Easter were outstanding. I considered myself fortunate to have the opportunity of being in Antigua at that season. Then, too, I travelled about over most of the highlands of Guatemala, hunting the scattered Colonial remains and at the same time enjoying the scenic beauties, the picturesque Indian villages, and native markets, between work periods in Antigua. On one occasion I joined a group in chartering a special plane to fly over to the Mayan ruins of Copan, Honduras. And, of course, I climbed the Volcan de Agua, an interesting story in itself. But if I started to elaborate on these items of personal interest you would never reach the end. The whole was a grand experience. It had to come to an end, and, tho that time arrived too soon, it was properly climaxed by flying back to Los Angeles. Only a day and a half in the air separated scenes that belong two centuries apart.

By Verle Annis