

Jesuit Block and Estancias of Córdoba (Argentina)

No 995

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	The Jesuit Block and the Jesuit Estancias of Córdoba
<i>Location</i>	Province of Córdoba
<i>State Party</i>	Argentina
<i>Date</i>	29 June 1999

Justification by State Party

Note The text below is an abridged version of the justification in the nomination dossier.

The Society of Jesus established an extensive system, above all religious but also social, economic, legal, and cultural, within the Spanish Empire in the form of the Province of Paraguay between 1604 and their expulsion in 1767. Seven of the missions created in the Guaraní region are already on the World Heritage List. The core of this system was Córdoba.

From 1616 onwards, a series of rural establishments, the *estancias*, was set up to provide the necessary resources for the noviciate, the Colegio Máximo (university), the members of the Order, the political, administrative, and legal bodies, and retreats. These were large establishments, which incorporated the breeding of cattle and mules and other forms of farming, artisans' installations, factories for producing lime, tiles, metals, and glass, and warehouses. Other works included irrigation systems, dams, reservoirs, dykes, waterwheels, and mills. The *estancias* were linked with Córdoba by means of a system of roads and rivers.

The *estancias* fulfilled another important function. They provided employment for Indians and black slaves brought from Africa. New relationships were established between these communities and the Spanish settlers and missionaries. The social and economic structures that were created have survived to a considerable extent in this region to the present day.

For this nomination, two elements of this system have been selected. The group of buildings in Córdoba contains the core

buildings of the Jesuit system: the university, the church and residence of the Society of Jesus, and the college. The five *estancias* reflect both the original environment in which they were implanted and the way in which they transformed the surrounding landscape, as well as their subsequent history after the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1767.

The Society of Jesus block in Córdoba and the *estancias* are the expression of a relevant and substantial exchange of human values during a specific period in a defined area of the world.

Criterion ii

They are exceptional constructions in the history of architecture, unprecedented in the Americas or elsewhere in the world.

Criterion iv

The Southern Cone of South America has developed a common culture resulting from contact between the indigenous peoples and Europeans. This is due in no small measure to the educational work carried out by the Society of Jesus in the 17th and 18th centuries. The philosophical theories of Father Francisco Seers played a fundamental role in this process: this had profound repercussions in subsequent centuries for its challenge to absolutism, leading to the achievement of independence by colonial territories.

Criterion vi

Category of property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a series of *groups of buildings*.

History and Description

History

The Society of Jesus was founded in 1540 by St Ignatius Loyola, as part of the Counter-Reformation. The missions established by this hierarchical organization in non-Christian countries had as its principal activities spiritual guidance by means of retreats and teaching. It was governed by its own code of laws.

The Jesuits were late in arriving in the Spanish American colonies, having been preceded by other orders such as the Franciscans and Dominicans. However, the southern part of the continent was still being explored at the end of the 16th century, providing opportunities for the Jesuits. The Spanish monk Diego de Torres was sent by the order to organize the new Province of Paraguay in 1607. Itinerant missions had already been operating in the region since 1588. Missions were sent from Córdoba, the centre of the new Province, to set up colleges and preach the Jesuit message.

The town of Córdoba had been established by Jerónimo Luis de Cabrera in 1573 and laid out on the standard Spanish colonial checkerboard pattern. In common with the other orders, the Jesuits were allocated one of the seventy blocks of the original city, but they did not take possession of it until 1599.

One of the first acts of the Jesuits was to build on this block in 1610 the Colegio Máximo (which was to become the Royal and Pontifical University in the following decade), where teaching was in accordance with the teaching plan *Ratio atque Instituto Studiorum Societatis Jesu* (Method and System of Studies of the Society of Jesus), created in 1599 and applied throughout the world by the order. Other monastic buildings followed, including the university and the church and residence of the order. These underwent a number of transformations and reconstructions, both before and after the expulsion of the order in 1767.

The estancias, which concentrated on agriculture, textile production, and mule breeding in addition to their spiritual functions, were highly successful economically. They came into the possession of the Society in various ways, including by purchase and as bequests. Alta Gracia was a cattle ranch owned by Alonso Nieto de Herrera who entered the Society, to which he bequeathed it when he died, whilst La Candelaria was created on lands donated by Francisco de Vera y Mujica in 1678. Caroya was purchased in 1616, Jesús María in 1618, and Santa Catalina in 1616. All were sold to private individuals when the property of the Society was auctioned off by the Boards of Temporalities after the expulsion.

Description

- The Jesuit Block in Córdoba

The *National University of Córdoba* was originally the Colegio Máximo of the Society of Jesus, and it has remained in use as an institution of higher education since that time. Its buildings are arranged round a central open space, which was originally a botanical garden, of which only the raised beds planted with trees and shrubs survive. It is constructed in stone and brick, with spacious colonnades around the courtyard. Marble is used for the floors and column bases. The main entrance and the Hall of Honour have elaborately carved doors and windows from the late 19th century. The library contains many important volumes and documents from the Great Library of the Society of Jesus.

The *Society of Jesus Church* is a massive domed structure with two squat towers at the west end. It is built principally in stone, with brick in the upper levels. It is a single-nave building, with an unusual form of wooden roof structure in the form of an upturned boat bridging its 10m span. The interior is richly decorated, the retablo of the main altar and the pulpit being outstanding examples of Baroque style.

The *Colegio Nacional de Nuestra Señora de Montserrat* (formerly an ancillary building of the Colegio Máximo) is entered through an imposing portal. As in the university, the buildings are disposed round two open spaces. It is built in the same style as the other structures in the Jesuit Block. There are galleries surrounding the cloister, and the facades are richly decorated.

- The Estancias

The *Alta Gracia* estancia originally comprised a church (now a parish church), the priests' residence (now a museum), quarters for the slaves and workers (demolished), cattle pens

and vegetable gardens (missing), a textile mill (now a private technical school), a reservoir (*tajamar*), and other mills.

The estancia is in the heart of the town, with two spacious patios. The two buildings of the residence and the church form three sides of a square patio, the fourth being closed by a high wall pierced by the main entrance. The most outstanding feature of the domed church is its elaborate facade. The textile mill (*El Obraje*) is in the same style and form as the residence, but slightly smaller. All the buildings are in stone and brick, with vaulted cloisters; the church is barrel-vaulted. The reservoir provides an elegant background to the residence.

The *Santa Catalina* estancia is a rural establishment in the beautiful landscape of the Córdoba *sierras*, made up of a church, the priests' residence, workers' quarters, the novices' house (now ruined), a mill, and a reservoir. The ground plan, the largest of all the estancias, is in the form of three patios, the central of which is the main one. It is enclosed by a vaulted gallery and has a central fountain. The main feature is the admirably proportioned church, the plan of which is a Latin cross. It has an imposing Baroque facade; the plain interior is dominated by the fine altarpiece.

The components of the rural *Jesús María* estancia are identical with those of Santa Catalina. Cloisters enclose two sides of the central patio, the others being formed by a storage building and a high stone wall. The complex is entered through a gate leading to a smaller patio, in which the church is located. This is a single-aisled barrel-vaulted structure with a strongly articulated vaulted transept. There is a central dome but no belfry; however, there is a bell gable with three openings behind the church. Bricks constitute the principal building material.

Furthest from Córdoba is the rural estancia of *Candelaria*. Unlike the others, it is located in a sheltered part of a bleak, windswept hilly region. It is a smaller establishment than the others, consisting of a chapel, priests' residence, workers' quarters (now demolished), and cattle pens. The simple church is built in stone, like all the other structures, with a roof supported on wooden rafters.

By contrast, the *Caroya* estancia is an imposing ensemble, in a more luxuriant landscape. Its mill and reservoir are now ruined, but the patio, surrounded by cloisters and quarters for the boarders of the Colegio Nacional de Nuestra Señora de Montserrat, is striking in its proportions and dimensions. The chapel is a modest structure by comparison with the other buildings, with a single nave and no transept or belfry. The chapel is built in stone, but brick is used exclusively elsewhere in the estancia. It is currently in use as a museum.

Management and Protection

Legal status

All six properties included in this nomination have been designated National Monuments and receive maximum governmental protection under Federal Law 12.665 and its

Regulating Decree 84-005/41, as amended in 1993. Additional protection is granted under Córdoba's Provincial Law 5543 for the Protection of the Province's Cultural Resources. Three of the sites, the Jesuit Block and the Estancias of Alta Gracia and Jesús María, have additional protection to both the site and the buffer zone through Municipal Preservation Ordinances in their respective municipalities. In the case of La Candelaria, the rural setting is protected through legislation concerning the natural environment, flora, and fauna.

Taken as a whole, the legislative apparatus seems appropriate and effective, and it is the highest affordable under Argentine law.

There are, however, some protective irregularities because of the geographical imprecision in the monumental designations. The exact monumental or protective boundaries for sites designated in the 1940s and 1950s (Alta Gracia, La Candelaria, and Santa Catalina) are ill-defined and vague. In Jesús María, some areas deemed to be integral to the site's integrity and significance are excluded from the designated area.

Management

Under Argentine federal law, any work done inside the property boundaries of all six sites and their vicinity must be reviewed and approved by the National Commission of Museums, Monuments and Historic Sites. The Commission has two members in charge of monitoring all work in the Province of Córdoba. The Commission has oversight responsibilities, but no managerial charge, this being left to each site's owner.

Managerial responsibilities are more complicated than the nomination form indicates. This is because the fragmented property/user structure assigns management responsibilities to two or more institutions at all the sites apart from Caroya. In addition, some important areas fundamental to the sites' significance are either not included in the nomination (Alta Gracia, Santa Catalina, La Candelaria, and Jesús María) or are not part of the declared monuments (Jesús María), and/or are in private land, where they receive no special management (Alta Gracia, Jesús María, La Candelaria).

The Jesuit Block in the City of Córdoba and the Estancias of Alta Gracia and Jesús María are owned wholly or in part by the Federal Government, but they are assigned to different users who are responsible for management of their part of the site. To complicate matters further, parts of Jesús María and Alta Gracia are under municipal, ecclesiastical, and private management. Santa Catalina is privately owned and managed by Presidential Decree, the Federal Government concedes the Province of Córdoba managerial jurisdiction of the two estancias in the latter's ownership (Caroya and La Candelaria), but, again, a portion of La Candelaria is private property.

Federal, provincial, and municipal management ranges from very good to excellent in terms of conservation, monitoring, and interpretation. Private management varies

from owner to owner, and within the single ownership of Santa Catalina from area to area. On the whole, however, there are excellent communications and a common sense of purpose between the federal and provincial heritage management offices, and also with the various municipal governments responsible for protecting the areas surrounding the sites. Except for a case of squatter occupants in Jesús María, all private owners are committed to the conservation of the sites under their stewardship.

Overlying all these site managerial structures is a regional cultural tourism master plan for the entire Province of Córdoba currently being completed by the Provincial Government. The plan is clearly respectful of the sites under consideration. However, management plans will need to be expanded to manage the increased visitation.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

Early monumental designation of most of the sites resulted in protection of the buildings and ruins, plus some interventions. As with management, the conservation history of each site is different. Within each site, the areas under different jurisdictions have also received different treatments and varying levels of preventive conservation.

After the expropriation of the Jesuit properties in 1767, the estancias were bought at auction by private individuals who either did not need the full infrastructure built by the Jesuits or did not command the technical skills to run the complex hydraulic works on which the estancias once depended. For these and other reasons, many of the slave quarters, retention basins, dams, water conduits, lime kilns, and mills fell into disuse and eventually into ruins. The cloisters and churches, however, continued their ecclesiastical and residential use, and were fairly well maintained into the 20th century.

The lasting influence of the Jesuit experience in the Province and growing recognition of their historical and aesthetic significance made these sites objects of concern, as manifested in their early declaration as National Monuments. On occasions, this designation attracted a number of well intentioned restoration and rehabilitation projects that reflect the thinking of their time, but which under today's canons would not be undertaken.

In recent years, in a sequence of actions by both federal and provincial governments, the estancias have begun to undergo restorations based on extensive and careful research, usually accompanied by a new assigned cultural use as museums or cultural tourism attractions. Clearly, the projects that began earlier have achieved greater maturity in both physical and functional stability of use (eg the federal museums).

Recognition that significance of these sites goes beyond the central architectural core to the larger landscape has driven an increasing number of archaeological studies to rescue, identify, and stabilize the ruins of the lesser works that made up the estancias.

It is also significant that the need to preserve and interpret these sites has achieved unprecedented support in all sectors – governmental, institutional, private enterprise, the mass media, and, perhaps more importantly, the general population.

Authenticity

The authenticity of the various architectural and landscaping vocabularies that the Jesuits used to mark the Province of Córdoba is unquestionable. From the outstanding curvilinear walls that define the Baroque space of the church at Alta Gracia, to the vernacular expression of La Candelaria, to the Baroque facade and atrium of Santa Catalina, to the extraordinary vaults of the Compañía Church in Córdoba, to the intricate hydraulic engineering works in every estancia, the original Jesuit imprint on the land is discernible and true in all sites in its full aesthetic, technical and emotional impact.

Taking into consideration the various ICOMOS Charters and doctrinal documents, and with special attention to the Nara Document, the Charter of Brasilia, and the Recommendations of San Antonio, there is a high level of authenticity in all the sites, but each of a different type.

All the estancias retain with adequate integrity the full range of functional components that explain and document the original aesthetic, technical, functional, spiritual, and social intents. The Jesuit Block in Córdoba, the epicentre of the former Jesuit Province, retains the grand architectural expressions and the full spatial qualities that eloquently express the spiritual and temporal powers that it once housed.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS expert mission visited all six sites in Córdoba in January 2000.

Qualities

The Jesuit block in Córdoba and the five estancias graphically illustrate the origins and the core of the missionary activities of the Society of Jesus in South America. The ensembles and the individual buildings are material testimony to the unique religious, social, and economic system of the Jesuit Province of Córdoba for more than 150 years.

Comparative analysis

There are no other contextual groups for the unique socio-political and religious experiment of the Jesuits in southern South America. Like the missions, the estancias and the Jesuit Block of Córdoba are an outstanding manifestation of a cosmic vision and its aesthetic outlook of an era of human activity that shaped large areas of the world. There are other Jesuit estancias, but none constitute a tight administrative network, none retain the integrity of the ones in Córdoba, and none had such a central role in sustaining

the Jesuit centre of power in the Spanish Empire during the Counter-Reformation.

ICOMOS recommendations

ICOMOS makes the following recommendations:

1 That the nominated areas be expanded as follows in order that all the principal character-defining components be included in the World Heritage List:

- In Estancia Alta Gracia, include the *tajamar*, the *acequias* (irrigation channels) adjoining it, and the ruins of the mill;
- In Estancia Santa Catalina, include the *rancherías*, the *tajamar* and its immediate *acequias*, and the ruins of the mill;
- In Estancia La Candelaria, include the area of the *tajamar* and related ruins of *acequias* and mill;
- In Estancia Jesús María, include the 1760 *perchel* and mill, and the *molino deheza*. The late 19th century adobe house of the town founder near the *perchel* may also be included as a manifestation of the site's "second history."

That the State party ensure that all significant areas and portions of each of the six sites are clearly within the stated boundaries of declared National Monuments.

3 That for each of the six sites the State Party submit scaled maps or site plans clearly identifying a. the exact boundaries of the area designated as a National Monument; b. the exact boundaries of the area being nominated to the World Heritage List; and c. all buildings, constructions and landscape features inside such areas, whether contributing to the significance or not.

4. That the State Party submit copies of agreements with pertinent owners for those portions of Alta Gracia (the ruins of the mill), Santa Catalina (entire site and buffer zone), La Candelaria (ruins of the *tajamar*, mill, and *acequias*) and Jesús María (both mills, *acequias*, and *perchel*) being nominated, with irrevocable covenants committing current and future owners to the management and conservation of the properties proposed for listing. Alternatively, proof should be provided of expropriation of such sites to the benefit of the national or provincial governments for integration into the managed historic sites.

For the longer term, the following recommendations are made:

5. That additional conservation effort be focused on the mill ruins, extant machinery, and the identification of the hydraulic works inside the nominated areas. To this end, archaeological surveys and the implementation of computerized GIS are fundamental tools.

6. That conservation work in the *rancherías* of La Candelaria be determined with caution and through interdisciplinary consultation of preservation specialists, and not assuming that total reconstruction of the ruins,

even though based on documentation, is the only answer to halt ongoing deterioration.

7. That the State Party continue to identify, inventory, designate, and protect other sites that will complete the full understanding of the extent of the estancias, such as the large-scale hydraulic engineering works and the multiple secondary posts (*puestos*), the lime kilns, etc inside the original farmlands of each site. The same applies to other sites related to the pervasive Jesuit presence in the City of Córdoba, such as the original college building and subterranean crypt, as well as throughout the Province, such as La Calera, Candonga, and the ruins of the San Ignacio estancia, in order that this World Heritage Listing continue to be expanded in the future to form a true World Heritage cultural itinerary, as envisaged in the Cultural Tourism Plan of Córdoba, and conceptually in UNESCO's cultural policy.

8. That, given the intention of fostering a more active cultural tourism in the Road of the Estancias, management plans be expanded to include the avoidance of site erosion, management of visitation, controlling the expanding infrastructure, assessing the visitors' experience, development of scaled interpretation programmes, etc.

Brief description

The Jesuit Block in Córdoba and the five estancias contain religious and secular buildings that illustrate the unique religious, social, and economic experiment carried out in South America for over 150 years.

Recommendation

That these properties be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria ii and iv*:

Criterion ii The Jesuit buildings and ensembles of Córdoba and the estancias are exceptional examples of the fusion of European and indigenous values and cultures during a seminal period in South America.

Criterion iv The religious, social, and economic experiment carried out in South America for over 150 years by the Society of Jesus produced a unique form of material expression, which is illustrated by the Jesuit buildings and ensembles of Córdoba and the estancias.

ICOMOS, September 2000