

WORLD HERITAGE LIST

Panamá (Panamá)

No 790

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	The Historic District of Panamá City, with the Salón Bolívar
<i>Location</i>	Panamá Province, Panamá District, Parque Lefevre and San Felipe Boroughs
<i>State Party</i>	Republic of Panamá
<i>Date</i>	29 September 1995

Justification by State Party

The layout, allocation of ground plots, fortifications, and buildings of the Historic District of Panamá City reflect the importance, interchange, adaptation, and persistence of human values which for centuries have been oriented towards further inter-oceanic communications at this strategic site on the Central American isthmus.

Criterion ii

Panamanian house-types from the 16th to 18th centuries in the Historic District are exceptional owing to their narrow lots and internal disposition, which are only to be found in this part of the Americas. Surviving multiple-family houses from the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century are original examples of how society has reacted to new requirements, changes, and influences brought about by modern world-wide communications.

Criterion iv

Panamá City's Historic District is an example of how the conservation of immovable cultural property is affected by a society seeking to solve its manifold contradictions. The Historic District is threatened by the deteriorating living conditions of its inhabitants.

Criterion v

Panamá City is closely linked with the discovery by Europeans of the Pacific Ocean, the history of Spanish expansion in South America, the bullion lifeline and commercial network between the Americas and Europe, and the history of piracy in the region. The Salón Bolívar is associated with

Simón Bolívar's visionary attempt in 1826 to establish a multinational congress in the Americas, preceding both the Organization of American States and the United Nations.

Criterion vi

Category of property

In terms of the categories of property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this nomination relates to a *group of buildings* (the Historic Centre of Panamá City) and a *monument* (Salón Bolívar).

History and Description

History

The first settlement to bear the name of Panamá (now Panamá Viejo) was founded in 1519 by the Spanish *conquistador* Pedrarias Dávila. It was the point of departure for the first explorations along the Pacific coast, which had been discovered in 1513 by Vasco Nuñez de Balboa. There were originally some four hundred settlers in Panamá, living in some seventy huts. Many of these moved down to Perú when the conquest of that region was completed in 1532: there were only thirteen male Spanish settlers left in Panamá, with some five hundred Indians, by the following year.

However, Panamá eventually consolidated its key position on the transoceanic route between Spain and the Americas as the terminal on the Pacific coast (that on the Atlantic coast was first Nombre de Dios and then Portobello). Its importance is indicated by the fact that it became a *Real Audiencia* (Royal Court of Justice), the third to be created in the Americas (after Santo Domingo and Mexico City). The town, with its imposing monuments, was ravaged by the 1621 earthquake and then by fire in 1644, but it was not deserted by its inhabitants until 1671, when it was burnt by the privateer Henry Morgan, who had taken Portobello three years earlier.

The new settlement was built on a small peninsula nearby and provided with the fortifications that its predecessor had lacked. Dressed stone from Panamá Viejo was re-used: in some cases, such as La Merced, entire church facades were reconstructed on the new site. However, the 18th century saw a decline in the city's fortunes. It lost its strategic significance when bullion from upper Perú began to be transported to Spain via the River Plate: the *Real Audiencia* was closed, and the Portobello fairs were cancelled. It was also badly damaged by fire in 1737, 1756, and 1781. By the time Panamá secured its independence from Spain in 1821 the population was only some five thousand.

In 1826 *El Libertador*, Simón Bolívar, invited all the newly independent American nations to an Amphictyonic Congress in Panamá, and delegates from Perú, Colombia, Central America, and Mexico took part, along with representatives of the USA,

Great Britain, and the Netherlands. It took place in the former chapter hall of the Franciscan monastery, which had been abandoned by the community in 1821 (it was to house the first Constitutional Assembly in 1904).

It enjoyed a short boom during the California Gold Rush, since many people preferred to travel to the isthmus and cross to Panamá so as to continue by ship to California rather than crossing the North American continent by railroad. By 1870 the population of the town had reached 10,000, and this had risen to 25,000 by the end of the 19th century. A watershed was reached in 1903, when Panamá gained its independence from Colombia and the USA took over the great canal project. The town expanded enormously, with the inevitable result that, since the more desirable properties were located in the outlying districts, the historic centre fell into a decline; by 1950 most of the houses were in multiple occupation. Nevertheless, the Historic District remained the seat of the Panamanian Government: the Presidency and several ministries are still there.

Description

The Historic District of Panamá City is located 7.5 km west of Panamá Viejo on a small peninsula below the Ancón hill. It is an irregular polygon, covering 29.4 ha. The District is a densely populated urban area (largely low- and middle-income) with an orthogonal grid. There is a centrally located main plaza, and there are smaller plazas on the fringes. Many of the streets retain the brick paving characteristic of the early years of the 20th century. Part of the colonial fortifications, notably the Mano de Tigre Bastion, survive on the western end of the peninsula.

Seventeen buildings within the District are identified as being important for the country's 17th-19th century heritage. The most outstanding ecclesiastical building is the cathedral, with five aisles and a timber roof, a combination that is unique in the Americas. The monastic complexes of La Merced, San Felipe, San José, and San Francisco are also of importance. The House of the Municipality and the Post Office building (formerly the Grand Hotel) are outstanding buildings of a more recent period.

There are several exceptional examples of domestic architecture from the colonial period, and also several hundred houses built since the mid 19th century that illustrate the transition from the houses of the upper classes with one to three storeys of the colonial period to the tenements with as many as five storeys, built to satisfy the requirements of a more stratified urban society and using industrial building materials.

The present-day appearance of the Historic District is marked by the scale and quantity of its French and Early American architecture rather than the traditional Spanish colonial style, but this lends it a special quality that other colonial cities in Latin America lack (with the exception of New Orleans, where the quality of the architecture is markedly inferior).

The *Salón Bolívar* was formerly the chapter house of the San Francisco Monastery, and is the only surviving part of the 17th-18th century complex. It now forms an annex to a school complex built in the early 20th century.

Management and Protection

Legal status

All the properties making up this nomination are protected by means of two statutory instruments: Law No 91 of 22 December 1976 for "the regulation of the Historic Sites of Panamá Viejo and the Old Quarter of Panamá City" and Law No 14 of 5 May 1982, which promulgates "measures on the custody, conservation and administration of the Nation's historic heritage." Both provide for authorization to be sought from the National Heritage Office (DNPH), which is part of the state agency, the National Institute of Culture (INAC), before works are carried out that may affect the character of these two areas. No buildings above one storey in height are permitted within the defined buffer zone, and there is a limited of two storeys in areas abutting on to the exterior of the buffer zone. The Historic District is further covered by the Special Standard for the Borough of San Felipe (Resolution No 75-90 of 13 December 1990) issued by the Ministry of Housing, which regulates urban development in Panamá City.

Management

The *Salón Bolívar* and some 10% of the buildings in the Historic District of Panamá City (including the National Palace, the Presidential Palace, and the former convents) are the property of the Republic of Panamá. A further 35%, covering streets, plazas, and infrastructural elements, is the property of the Municipality of Panamá City. The cathedral and the other churches (5%) are owned by the Archdiocese of Panamá, and the remainder (50%) is privately owned.

The Government of Panamá, operating through INAC, is responsible for the administration of the *Salón Bolívar*. Management of the urban development of the Historic District is the responsibility of the Municipality of Panamá City, but INAC issues building permits in the area.

[See *Conservation History* below for details of management plans.]

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

A Master Plan for the Historic District was prepared in 1972 with the assistance of the Inter-American Development Bank. Many of its components were carried out, including restoration of the National Theatre (1974), partial restoration of the facade of the Cathedral, the main plaza, the church of San Francisco, and the Mano de Tigre Bastion (1977-85), restoration of the Town Hall (1977 and 1995),

restoration of the Arias-Fernaud house and its conversion into the *Casa de la Municipalidad* (House of the Municipality: 1979-83, 1993), restoration of the ruins of the monastery of Santo Domingo and the Jesuit church (1981-83), and repair to brick pavements and paintwork on house facades (1991).

The President of Panamá created an *ad hoc* commission for the advancement and conservation of the Historic District in 1990-91, and more recently (1995) the Mayor of Panamá City initiated a revitalization plan for the area. This updates and reformulates many of the elements of the 1972 Master Plan, with emphasis on the following strategic measures: upgrading of certain key areas (*focos de revitalización*), an updated analysis of the current social and economic situation in the entire Historic District, along with the neighbouring boroughs of Santa Ana and Chorillo, preparation of a building code based on value categories approved by DNP, redefinition of the role of the Ministry of Housing, and a plan for municipal parking in the Historic District. This plan is still awaiting official approval.

In the nomination dossier it is stated that only 5% of the buildings in the Historic District are in a reasonable state of conservation, whilst 70% show marked physical or functional deterioration. The main agents of decay are the lack of preventive maintenance by owners, the high occupation density, and the lack of adequate sanitary installations. This process began three-quarters of a century ago and little has been done to arrest it. The Salón Bolívar, which was clumsily integrated into the early 20th century school, shows considerable decay.

Authenticity

The urban layout of the Historic District of Panamá City may be considered to be entirely authentic, preserving its original form unchanged. The organically developed stock of buildings from the 18th to 20th centuries has been little changed over time, largely owing to neglect.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

ICOMOS consulted its International Scientific Committee on Historic Towns and Villages. An ICOMOS expert mission visited Panamá in February 1996.

Qualities

The Historic Centre is of significance because of its unique blend of 19th century French and Early American architecture, the result of the building of the Canal linking the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

The Salón Bolívar has special historical importance as the site of the visionary but abortive attempt in 1821 by Simón Bolívar to establish what would have been the world's first multinational and continental congress

Comparative analysis

This nomination raises again the problem of Spanish colonial towns in Latin America. A number have been inscribed on the World Heritage List since Quito (Ecuador) in 1978. Others figure on tentative lists from States Parties in Latin America. No further inscriptions should be considered until a comparative study of this type of property has been completed, since it is impossible to make a reasoned decision based on valid comparative data relating to historical significance, artistic and architectural importance, etc.

This study is in progress; it is being carried out by Professor Ramón Gutierrez (Director, Centro de Documentación de Arquitectura Latinoamericana, Argentina) and will be completed before the meeting of the World Heritage Committee in December 1997. In a preliminary report, Professor Gutierrez has indicated that the historic elements of Panamá are of World Heritage quality.

ICOMOS observations

The very extensive documentation supplied with the *original* nomination form included a preliminary proposal (*propuesta preliminar*) for the revitalization plan for the Historic District. ICOMOS *wished* to see the full document that *was* eventually approved and the resulting work-plan before making a final judgement. ICOMOS also *requested* clarification of the exact role of the Panamanian Tourism Institute (IPAT) in the Historic District.

The Bureau of the World Heritage Committee adopted in 1996 the ICOMOS recommendation that further consideration of this nomination should be deferred to await the provision by the State Party of plans showing the exact delineation of the areas proposed for inscription on the World Heritage List, and also of the respective buffer zones, supported by evidence of statutory controls within both zones. Full details of the plan for the revitalization of the Historic District of Panamá City were also requested, once this plan had received official approval and was being implemented.

In January 1997 the State Party supplied additional information about the delineation of the nominated areas and the revitalization plan, as requested by ICOMOS. This information was studied by ICOMOS experts, who were satisfied that the area of the Historic District fulfilled all the requirements for inscription.

Recommendation

That the Historic District of Panamá be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria ii, iv, and vi*:

Panamá was the first European settlement on the Pacific coast of the Americas, in 1519, and the Historic District preserves intact a street pattern, together with a substantial number of early domestic buildings, which are exceptional testimony to the nature of this early settlement.

The Salón Bolívar is of outstanding historical importance, as the venue for Simón Bolívar's visionary attempt in 1826 to create a Pan-American congress, more than a century before such institutions became a reality.

ICOMOS, September 1997