

Calendar Dates as Street Names in Asuncion, Paraguay

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Taking my first 30 minute walk after arriving in downtown Asunción I crossed three streets with calendar dates for names. Riding buses around town brought another half dozen similarly named streets to my attention. Perusal of available large scale maps showing street names¹ brought the total up to 34, including one that has been suppressed. There may be more because many streets that show on large scale maps are unnamed. Paraguayan towns follow closely the street naming patterns of the capital city. With their smaller numbers of streets to be named my impression is that calendar dates form an even larger fraction of the street names. I have noticed at least one date that is not represented in Asunción, *15 de Mayo* in Luque. It is an alternate date with *14 de Mayo* for celebrating Paraguay's independence. Many an individual of local distinction rates a street name in his home town but not in Asunción.

Naming streets is an official act in Paraguay. In the nineteenth century placing a name or altering one was by presidential decree. More recently the act has been carried out by a municipal ordinance or a

¹ *Plano turístico de la ciudad de Asunción*, Dirección General de Turismo [1978], Asunción, scale 1:40,000; the four sheet topographic map of Gran Asunción, scale 1:25,000 of the Instituto Geográfico Militar.

municipal resolution in Asunción. Thus there is official documentation for the history of almost all street names, and it has been compiled by the municipality.² Osvaldo Kallsen, an amateur historian, has published a substantial volume³ in which he attempts to account for the origin of every street name in the city, providing, as appropriate, a discussion of the event or person commemorated. As stated in the book's introduction, these discussions constitute a concise history of Paraguay; actually the best balanced history I found in that country of intense historical partisanship. From these sources as well as discussions with informed long time residents I have prepared the following annotated list of calendar-date named streets:

31 de Enero	Battle of Corrales, 1866. Paraguayan victory over Argentina	N
3 de Febrero	Day of San Blas, patron saint of Paraguay	RN
28 de Febrero	Undetermined, but on modern 1:25,000 topographic map	-
1 de Marzo	Battle of Cerro Corá, 1870. Death of Francisco Solano López and effective end of the War of the Triple Alliance	N
9 de Marzo	Battle of Tacuarí, 1811. Defeat of a force from Buenos Aires making possible Paraguay's declaration of independence two months later	N
1 de Mayo	International socialist holiday. The street name has been suppressed	I
2 de Mayo	Battle of Estero Bellaco, 1866. Paraguayan defeat	N
3 de Mayo	Day of the Holy Cross	R
14 de Mayo	Independence of Paraguay, 1811	N
24 de Mayo	Battle of Tuyutí, 1866. Paraguayan defeat	N
25 de Mayo	Important date in the Argentine independence movement, 1810	I

² Municipalidad de Asunción, Sección Catastro Libro III, June 1970, "Datos de la Ciudad-Nomenclatura Barrios, Avenidas, Calles, Pasajes."

³ Kallsen, Osvaldo, *Asunción y sus Calles: Antecedentes Históricos*, Imprenta Comuneros, Asunción, 1974.

8 de Junio	Battle of Picada Diarte in War of the Triple Alliance, 1869, last Paraguayan victory	N
12 de Junio	Signing of protocol to end the Chaco War, 1935	N
14 de Junio	Cease-fire ending Chaco War with Bolivia, 1935. Replaced 12 de Junio on the same street as the more significant date and 12 de Junio was applied to another street	N
22 de Junio	1876. End of the occupation of Asunción by Brazilian forces, six years after the end of the War of the Triple Alliance	N
25 de Junio	Undetermined, but on modern 1:25,000 topographic map	-
4 de Julio	Beginning of second attack on Nanawa (Fortín Presidente Eligio Ayala) in Chaco War, 1933. Paraguayan defensive victory. (Not the United States holiday)	N
14 de Julio	Bastille Day, French holiday	I
18 de Julio	Culmination of the Battle of Boquerón y Sauce, 1866. Paraguayan defeat	N
20 de Julio	Governing Junta sent letter to Buenos Aires declaring independence, 1811	N
15 de Agosto	Day of the Holy Virgin of the Assumption, founding of Asuncion, 1537	RN
25 de Agosto	Proclamation of independence by Uruguay, 1825. Also noted as the date of the new Paraguayan constitution, 1967	I,N
8 de Setiembre	Undetermined, but on modern 1:25,000 topographic map	-
11 de Setiembre	Founding of the Republican (<i>Colorado</i>)	
11 de Setiembre	Founding of the Republican (<i>Colorado</i>) Party, 1887	N
22 de Setiembre	Battle of Curupayty, 1866. Paraguayan victory	N
29 de Setiembre	Capture of Fortín Boquerón in Chaco War, 1932	N
12 de Octubre	Columbus Day, discovery of America	I
23 de Octubre	Commemorates the deaths of student protestors, 1931	N

1 de Noviembre	All Saints Day	R
3 de Noviembre	Birthday of President Stroessner, 1912	N
27 de Noviembre	Date associated with Fortín Gabino Mendoza, established in 1934 during the Chaco War and now on the Bolivian-Paraguayan boundary	N
8 de Diciembre	Day of the Virgin of Caacupé	RN
11 de Diciembre	End of the fifty-day battle of Zenteno-Gondra (Campo Via) of the Chaco War, 1933	N
25 de Diciembre	Date chosen in 1842 as the <i>de jure</i> date of Paraguay's independence. Earlier independence under Dr. Francia was from Buenos Aires, not necessarily from Spain. The coincidence with Christmas is not mentioned in the official records.	N
Año 1811	The year of Paraguay's Independence is the only year commemorated in a street name	N

The classes of events commemorated are:

- N - an event of national significance
- R - a religious holiday
- RN - a religious holiday of special national significance
- I - an event of primary significance to other countries

Three dates are noted as undetermined because I found no official record of what they commemorated. *8 de Setiembre*, for example, could refer to the beginning of the Battle of Boqueron in the Chaco War, 1932, but it might celebrate another event.

There seems to be no record of officially naming streets in Paraguay's long colonial history though undoubtedly the residents identified passageways with descriptive terms. In 1788 the governor commented that houses were randomly placed and streets or paths wound around them. The official grid plan described in the Laws of the Indies, and almost universally applied in Spanish America, was not followed in colonial Asunción. A map of the city prepared about the same time by the distinguished Spanish surveyor and naturalist Félix de Azara showed only two regularly aligned rows of buildings, parallel to the northern waterfront, that could define a street.⁴ The dictatorship of Dr.

⁴ *Historia Edilicia de la Ciudad de Asunción*, Departamento de Cultura y Arte, Municipalidad de Asunción [1966], pp. 55-57 and end paper insert map. On the map 16 major buildings are identified, but not the passages connecting them.

Francia, which kept Paraguay isolated from the world until his death in 1840, similarly did not bother with street names. The government of President Carlos Antonio López, as part of its bringing the country into the modern world, named 45 streets in Asunción by presidential decree on April 1, 1849.⁵ The first efforts to pave these and other streets did not begin until 1874.⁶ Of these named streets, eight bear their original name although one of them, *El Paraguayo Independiente*, was known for most of the past century as *Buenos Aires*.

Of the initial complement of street names, two consisted of calendar dates, *14 de Mayo* and *25 de Diciembre*. The former survives unchanged, but the latter was renamed in 1927 and *25 de Diciembre* was given as a street name in another part of the city.

Using dates for street names and for other features or institutions is not uncommon in Latin America. It is supported by the fact that the Gregorian calendar was used through almost all of Latin America's post-conquest history, a situation not available to the English-speaking lands. The Paraguayan distinction is that such usage was so common and goes back to the very first street naming in what was and remains the center of Asunción. A recent street map of Caracas, Venezuela,⁷ a much larger city, shows only five streets with calendar date names, two of them being *1 de Mayo*. All are in outlying *barrios* and three such *barrios* themselves have calendar dates for names, something that does not occur in Asunción. Santiago, Chile,⁸ again a city four times as large as Asunción, has seven date-named streets, but in this case two of them are near the city center.

In Buenos Aires there are three date-named streets in the city center and four more were identified in outlying suburbs.⁹ Both in Buenos Aires and in provincial cities, parks or plazas are likely to be named with calendar dates; *25 de Mayo* and *9 de Julio* are commonly chosen for this purpose. In the provincial cities of northwest Argentina—Sal-

⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 93-99.

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 101.

⁷ *Rutas de Venezuela*, Langoven, Caracas, 1980.

⁸ *Chile: Guía Turística y Plano de Santiago*, ESSO, 1963.

⁹ *Mapa Carretero de la República Argentina*, ESSO, 1968.

ta, Tucumán, and Jujuy—date-named streets figure more prominently, but in these smaller places only two or three streets are involved.¹⁰ In contrast calendar dates have been popular in Argentina as names for settlements. Seventeen such settlements were located on the ESSO road map and some have grown to be substantial towns.

Montevideo, Uruguay, which like Asunción refrains from having streets designated by numbers or letters, also comes closer to the Paraguayan pattern of calendar date-named streets. On a map showing about two-thirds of the city,¹¹ still a larger and more populous area than all of Asunción, 18 date-named streets were identified. Two pairs, however, were duplicated in different parts of town, suggesting that street naming in Uruguay is a less rigorously monitored process than in Asunción. A number of major avenues hold dates as names as well as some short streets in close-in and outlying areas. It may be speculated that both Uruguay and Paraguay, squeezed between two much larger powers, have felt more need to keep their national histories constantly in public consciousness. Like Argentina, Uruguay uses calendar dates to name settlements.

In Paraguay dates are used to name infantry regiments, but the most popular usage is as names for provincial football clubs. Perusal of the sports pages of the Asunción newspapers yielded no less than 38 clubs with such names playing in at least 15 relatively small towns. Sometimes all four teams in a small town's league have calendar dates for names. Curiously this practice has a faint reflection in professional sports in the United States with the San Francisco 49ers and the Philadelphia 76ers.

Since the naming of streets in Paraguay is an official act and not one left to the discretion of real estate developers, names are bestowed with great political consciousness. Street signs offer a means to establish national identity and honor figures deemed meritorious in national history. Even foreign relations may figure in the process, with friendly countries or chiefs of state having important streets named after them. The opportunity to thus use a street name is too valuable to squander on a logical system of numbered or lettered streets. Battles and parti-

¹⁰ *República Argentina, Carta Turística*, Automovil Club Argentino, 1970, Hojal.

¹¹ *Mapa de la República Oriental del Uruguay*, ESSO.

participants in the War of the Triple Alliance (1865-1870), even Paraguayan defeats, began to be commemorated as soon as Paraguay regained its sovereignty. The location of a battle, its date, and sometimes one or more Paraguayan participants would each get a street named for them. As Asunción began its rapid expansion after 1945 it was decided to honor with a street name every officer who died in the Chaco War (1932-1935) under honorable conditions. A modest number of enlisted men received the same honor for especially meritorious service, but only senior officers got a street name while still alive.

These practices put a severe strain on a finite number of streets, (now about 1,200), and one approach to relieve this pressure has been to apply different names to different sections of the street. This may be done where the street takes a slight bend at an intersection or at the crossing of any of several axial thoroughfares or at any intersection. Since a downtown street or a principal avenue is more honorific than a residential street in a poor neighborhood, the municipal council has frequently bumped a central street name to the outlying district to permit a more worthy person or event to have a higher honor bestowed on it.

As the record of the 45 streets named in 1849 by Carlos Antonio López suggests, a street name in Asunción has an expected half-life of about fifty years. My impression is that streets named with calendar dates refer to events so deeply involved in Paraguay's history that in general such names have been and will continue to be more durable than the name of the average street. There are almost certain to be exceptions, especially when the name refers to an event or idea associated with a political party or ideology. The suppression of *1 de Mayo* is a good recent example. *11 de Setiembre*, *3 de Noviembre*, and *23 de Octubre* could well have their names changed should the Colorado party lose its long time political ascendancy. Dates of significance to foreign countries rather than to Paraguay may be in a similarly precarious position.

Looking over the whole calendar of date-named streets, an instance of real geographic or climatic influence, if not determinism, is apparent. The winter half year (May through October) provides the names for 23 streets, the summer half year only 11. The difference is statistically significant at the .02 level. Eliminating from the list dates of undetermined significance or of northern hemisphere association gives a ration of 17:7, with a slightly stronger statistical significance. The

bulk of chosen dates commemorate battles or political assemblages. Paraguay's hot, muggy summers are a very poor time to carry on a military campaign or to conduct a political assembly.

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