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A short history of the Rivadavia Library of Cañada de Gómez
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A SHORT HISTORY OF THE RIVADAVIA LIBRARY
OF CAÑADA DE GÓMEZ

Starting in 1920, a group of acquaintances restless with many social and intellectual ideas instituted a movement to create a public library, which they would come to call *Bernardino Rivadavia*. The charter was drawn up on 22nd April of this same year. The objective of the organization's founders, many of whom were outstanding educators from the local public schools, was to support a public library, and at the same time, *host public conferences, literary and musical auditions and, in short, act as a centre to promote the instruction and education of the public*, according to its statutes, and the first Board of Directors was **Sixto Suárez** (President), **César Bortolato** (Vice President), **Vicente Leoni** (Secretary), **Roberto Varela** (Treasurer), **Guillermo Aranda** (Deputy Treasurer), and **Manuel García Tiscornia, José González Cervero, María C. de Lucena and Delia Antonietti** (Members).

The institution first functioned at 1034 Lavalle Street, with an evening and night time schedule, containing little more than 950 books and with **Farancisco Giméniz** as librarian. Lacking space, it was moved to locations in Félix Pagani and Manuel Aizpuru, 62 Félix Pagani and Ocampo and Moreno.

Spanning 8 decades of progress, the following occupied the seat of president: **César Bortolato** (1921-27), **Abel Blasco** (1927), **Dr. José Sanz** (1927-28), **Vicente Leoni** (1928-37 and 1955-67), **Dr. Félix Pagani** (1937-53), **Valentín Terradez** (1953-55), **Dr. Alberto Gabriel** (1967-69), **Dr. Héctor P. Tonella** (1969-99), and **Estela Bondoni** (from 1999 until today).

During the 1920's, the educator **Pablo A. Pizzurno** was given an honorary membership and **Dr. Héctor Pedro Tonella** received the title of Honorary President after 30 years of being President.

In 1935 the library received a Government Grant of 20,000 pesos for construction of its own building, which would be built on a lot acquired by public auction in 1928.

In January, 1937, work began at 232 Moreno, and dedication took place on the 5th November of this year, during the presidency of **Dr. Pagani**, who did an outstanding job directing from home for many years, and who was Minister of Public Works after 1958 and later of Education and Culture under Governor **Carlos Sylvestre Begnis**.

The Board of Directors is now made up of: **Estela Bondoni** (President), **Lilia R. de Albertengo** (Vice President), **Gerardo Álvarez** (Secretary), **Susana Genre** (Deputy Secretary), **Gabriel Combina** (Treasurer), **Dora De Bernardo** (Deputy Treasurer), **Cristian Savy**, **Rosita Ondo Misi** and **Mabel C. de Ulloque** (Members), and **Florencio Guastavino** and **Olga M. de Álvarez** (Editors).

Between 1929 and 1945, the library published the magazine *Cultura* edited by **Vicente Leoni**, which was distributed free, circulating within the country and abroad and in 1937 earned an honourable mention *for its diffusion of ideas and valiant cultural work*, granted unanimously by the Jury of the Grand International exposition of Public Periodicals in the Public Library of Matanzas, Republic of Cuba. Many prestigious writers had a part in this, among them **Félix A. Chaparro**, **Lázaro Flury**, **Gáston Gori**, **Alberto Maritano**, **Diego Oxley**, **Fausto Hernández**, **Angélica de Arcal**, **L. Gudiño Kramer**, **Julio Barcos**, **Natividad Parodi**, **Juan Filloy**, **Juan Lazarte**, **José Cagnín**, **Carlos Carlino**, **María Aguilar de Bilicich**, **Félix Molina Tellez**, **José Berrutti**, **Antonio J. Bucich**, **José D. Forgione**, **Raúl Gardelli**, **Efraín B. Lura Villanueva**, **Salvador Merlino**, **José Ma. Sarobe**, **Ignacio Scapigliatti**, **J. Vidussi** and **Raúl A. Barca Moreno**. The library was supporting much artistic, musical and intellectual work, which had turned it into the most active cultural centre in the city.

On the top floor of the building, there was a large assembly hall, which could accommodate some 200 people, which was donated by "The Swiss" in 1972 and named after **Ricardo Romegialli**, who at the time of the donation was director of this local firm, and who developed interesting and relevant cultural activities. In the exhibition room, artistic, historical and artisanal works were displayed, and in the auditorium there were two concert pianos, a Blüthner and a Bechstein. In the cultural season that lasted from March to November, three or four cultural activities were held each month, and due to the generosity of the collaborating Municipality, the Municipal Historical Museum, Independent Foundation and others, the majority of the programs were held free of charge.

The valuable bibliographic material of the library - some 35,000 volumes - could be taken home by the members, or consulted daily in the reading room, where newspaper archives, videotapes and the Internet service could also be accessed. After many decades the *Vicente Leoni Memorial Library* had been created to house book of dates and memoirs concerning missing persons. Many bibliographic treasures are preserved in the library and the reader can find, for example, the 5 leather-bound volumes of *Los Siete Partidas de don Alfonso de Sabio*, published by **Benito Hortelano** in Madrid in 1844, the *Complete Works* of **Juan Bautista Aberdi**, published by La Tribuna Nacional in 1886, the *Archive of General Mitre* published by the Library of La Nación in 1911, the fifty or so volumes of the *Complete Works* of **Domingo F. Sarmiento**, published by Luz del Día in 1953 or a valuable copy of the first edition of *Fictions* by **Jorge Luis Borges**. Also held in high regard is the album in which illustrious visitors have written their thoughts on this cultural centre. Those who have inscribed thoughts and good wishes include such esteemed intellectuals as **Alfredo Palacios**,

Rodolfo Senet, Pablo A. Pizzurno, Juan Lazarte, Calixto Lassaga, Alfredo Castellanos, Alberto Maritano, Alberto Palcos, Arturo Marasso, Cortés Pla, Alcides Greca, Fausto Hernández, Ulises Petit de Murat, Mario Amadeo, Enrique De Gandía, Eduardo Gudiño Kieffer, Dardo Cúneo, Beatriz Pasquali, María Kodama, Josefina Delgado and Noemí Ulla, and relevant persons of the stage, such as Ires Marga, José Maria Vilches, Tina Helba, Onofre Lovero, Maria Luisa Robledo and Pedro Alejandro, Eloísa Cañizares, Arturo Bonín and Susana Cart, Ana Acosta, Edda Díaz and Rudy Chernicoff and innumerable musical soloists, duos, ensembles, choirs, orchestras and popular music groups.

Amongst the significant notes which are contained within, I would draw your attention to the expression in 1941 of **Arturo Marasso** *In the Biblioteca Rivadavia de Cañada de Gómez, one finds the marvellous, the desire for perfection, the living fire within the spirit.* **Dardo Cúneo** paid tribute, in 1979 with *A very emotional homage to the memory of the founders, those stubborn pioneers, and equal homage to those working toward the future by probing the meaning of country and humanity.* and more recently the eminent actress **China Zorilla** wrote in this album: *How pleasing to see a library and a theatre forge a strong cultural unity! A great, affectionate hug.*

Conscious of the prestigious past enjoyed by the establishment in the city and surrounding area, today we have the difficult responsibility of maintaining this position but also to find methods to continually improve the services that are offered to more than 200,000 members and to all of those attending lectures, knowing that this is the best way to continue igniting the living fire within the spirit, to continue in the cultural adventure developed over almost 80 years and so that the library and theatre continue forming an effective, fruitful cultural unity.

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