The Merchants of Buenos Aires 1778-1810
Family and Commerce
The Merchants of Buenos Aires 1778–1810
THE SERIES

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La región del Plata se ha revelado como una colonia de meros comerciantes.

Viceroy Croix, 1789
Acknowledgments

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Susan M. Socolow
Glossary

abadesa  
Aduana  
agregado  
aguardiente  
albacea  
alcabala  
alcalde del barrio  
alcalde de primer voto  
alcalde ordinario  
alcalde de segundo voto  
alférez  
alférez de fragata  
alférez real  
alguacil mayor  
almacenero  

abbess  
Customs house  
assistant  
hard liquor, literally ‘fire-water’  
executor of an estate  
sales tax  
neighborhood magistrate  
chief municipal magistrate, mayor  
municipal magistrate  
second municipal magistrate, vice-mayor  
ensign  
lieutenant in the Royal Navy  
Cabildo officer  
Cabildo officer, head constable  
retailer of food products, greengrocer  
indigo dye  
agent, proxy  
fee  
handsel, bride price  
high court of justice  
shipping taxes  
financial backer (also called habilitador)  
sloop  
vice-regal edict  
street peddlers (also called mercachifles, mercaderes de bándola)  
neighborhood  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Glossary</th>
<th>xi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bombilla</td>
<td>straw or tube used with the mate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>botica</td>
<td>apothecary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cabildo</td>
<td>city council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cajero</td>
<td>clerk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>capellán</td>
<td>chaplain, recipient of a chantry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>capellanía</td>
<td>chantry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>capital</td>
<td>husband's worth at time of marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>carretas</td>
<td>large wooden carts widely used for transportation in the La Plata area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cartas de ciudadanía</td>
<td>naturalization papers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>casa cuna</td>
<td>foundling home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>casa de asiento</td>
<td>house which served as headquarters of English slavers in the early eighteenth century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>castas</td>
<td>mixed bloods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cédula</td>
<td>royal decree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>censo</td>
<td>mortgage contract with the Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chacra or chácara</td>
<td>farm, suburban small holding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cofradía</td>
<td>religious brotherhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>colegialas</td>
<td>female day students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>colegio</td>
<td>secondary or comprehensive school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comadre</td>
<td>godmother, fellow godmother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comendadores</td>
<td>prefects of religious brotherhoods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comerciales</td>
<td>a commercial court</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comerciantes</td>
<td>wholesale merchants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>compadrazgo</td>
<td>ritual kinship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>compadre</td>
<td>godfather, fellow godfather</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>concuñado</td>
<td>husband of one's sister-in-law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>consiliario</td>
<td>member of governing board of the Consulado</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consulado</td>
<td>merchant guild and its court</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cuadra</td>
<td>one square block (one block equals approximately one-tenth of a mile)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cuartel</td>
<td>zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cuñado</td>
<td>brother-in-law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>defensor de menores</td>
<td>a member of the Cabildo charged with defending the rights of minors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dependiente</td>
<td>apprentice</td>
</tr>
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</table>
### Glossary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>dobones</td>
<td>Spanish doubloones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don</td>
<td>a masculine title of respect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doña</td>
<td>the feminine equivalent of Don</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>efectos</td>
<td>merchandise, dry goods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>encomenderos</td>
<td>possessors of royal grants to Indian labor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>escribano</td>
<td>notary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>escrituras</td>
<td>formal loan papers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>españoles</td>
<td>Spaniards or whites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>esquina</td>
<td>corner room or apartment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>estancia</td>
<td>ranch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>estanciero</td>
<td>owner of an estancia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>expediente</td>
<td>file, case</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fábricas</td>
<td>Church building funds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>frutos del país</td>
<td>local commodities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gacetas</td>
<td>gazettes, newspapers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gente decente</td>
<td>the respectable, persons of quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gente de color</td>
<td>mixed bloods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gracia</td>
<td>royal exemption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gremio</td>
<td>guild</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>habilitador</td>
<td>financial backer (also called aviador)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hacendado</td>
<td>owner of an hacienda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hacienda</td>
<td>large landed estate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hermano mayor</td>
<td>chief officer of a religious brotherhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hidalgo</td>
<td>gentleman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>indio</td>
<td>Indian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>información</td>
<td>legal brief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juez de Difuntos</td>
<td>judge with jurisdiction over estates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juez de Menores</td>
<td>judge with jurisdiction over minors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>legajo</td>
<td>a bundle of documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>libranza</td>
<td>promissory note, a bill of exchange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>limeño</td>
<td>an inhabitant of Lima</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
madrina  godmother  
mancebos  shop lads  
mandas forzosas  forced contributions to religious funds  
mates  gourd-shaped vessels designed for preparing and drinking Paraguayan tea  
mayorazgo  entailed estate governed by laws of primogeniture  
mayordomo  overseer  
mayordomo de fábrica  overseer of church building and funds  
mejora del quinto, mejora del tercio  special bequests to lawful heirs  
mercachifles  peddlers  
mercader  retailer (also called mercader de tienda abierta)  
mercaderes de bándola  peddlers  
mestizo  Indian–white mixed blood  
mozo  retailer’s clerk  
mulato  black–white mixed blood  

negro  black  
niños expósitos  abandoned children  
obligación  formal promissory note  
oidor  judge of an Audiencia  
padrino  godfather  
padrinos de bautismo  godparents at baptism  
padrinos de casamiento  godparents at marriage  
pagaré  I.O.U.  
pagarés a la vista  promissory notes which can be redeemed immediately  
patrón  patron or overseer of a chantry  
patronato  patronship of a chantry  
peón  laborer  
plata labrada  silverware, silver articles  
pleito  legal complaint  
porteño  an inhabitant of Buenos Aires  
primeras letras  elementary or primary education  
prior  chief officer of the Consulado
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Glossary</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>productos de la tierra</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>pulpería</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>pulpero</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>quinta</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>quinto</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>regidor</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>rejas</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>retablo</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>saladeros</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>síndico</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>síndico procurador general</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>sociedad colectiva</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>subteniente</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>sucesión</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>tejido de oro</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>tendero</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>teniente</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>teniente síndico</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>terceras ordenes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>terciarios</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>tertulias</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>trastienda</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>tratante</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>vaquerías</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>vecino</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>velación</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>viajeros</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>vista de Aduana</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>yerba</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Weights, measures
and money

1 arroba = 25 pounds
1 quintal = 100 pounds or 4 arrobas
1 tercio = 200 pounds or 8 arrobas

1 legua = 3.23 miles (5.2 kilometers)
1 vara = 33 inches (0.835 meters)

1 peso = 8 reales
1 peso = 15 reales vellon
Spanish society in the New World, far from homogeneous and monolithic, was composed of numerous social groups, which varied according to the regions of the Empire. Clergymen, merchants, bureaucrats, artisans and craftsmen, peddlers, innkeepers, and the perpetually unemployed were among the ranks of Spaniards found throughout the colonial realm, especially in urban or semi-urban settings.

Social group differences in the Spanish or white population in the New World were not limited to Lima or Mexico City. In the 1778 census of Buenos Aires, sixteen major occupational and social categories are specifically delineated, and it can be assumed that these groups were present in other small colonial cities as well. The nature of the society in which these varied occupational groups functioned, the amount of interaction between groups, and the degree of social mobility among members of different occupational groups are all matters for study raised by the presence of these disparate groups in Spanish colonial society. This study examines in detail one of these groups, the wholesale merchants (comerciantes) of Buenos Aires.

The choice of time (the late eighteenth century), social group (the merchants), and locale (Buenos Aires) is not accidental. The comerciantes were an especially important and powerful social group in the Río de la Plata, a region which began to emerge from relative isolation in 1750. Merchants were a target group of the Bourbon monarchs who attempted, during the late eighteenth century, to revitalize the economy of the Spanish Empire by overhauling the entire system of colonial trade. In Buenos Aires, merchants were among the major local beneficiaries of the restructured Bourbon political and economic system. Although the literature on colonial Argentina abounds with repeated reference to the porteño merchants and to their status as members of the upper strata of local society, no systematic study has yet attempted to define and analyze the merchant group or to investigate its local social, political, religious and economic roles.
The *porteño* merchants were an urban group, located in the chief city of the region. Economic and political roles can be readily identified, as the merchants were very much a part of the developing economy of the River Plate region. Extensive documentation on the social role of the merchants in the Viceroyalty of Río de la Plata also exists, documentation heretofore neglected by students of Argentine history. Wills, dowries, estate papers, Cabildo and Consulado records, parish records and a variety of legal proceedings involving individual merchants all allow the historian to uncover the social dynamics of the merchant group.

The nature of extant documentation for this group lends itself well to prosopographic, or group biographic, techniques. This approach, resulting in a composite picture of the merchants, is used extensively throughout this study. In addition, a detailed biography of one merchant is included to provide a specific case by which to test patterns suggested by the data for the merchant group at large. Issues of group identity, status, mobility, power and recruitment are critical to a discussion and analysis of the formation and perpetuation of any social group, and are therefore central to this study of *porteño* merchants. Throughout, these issues are approached and viewed from a number of perspectives. Specifically, this study concentrates on group demographic and social characteristics, on inter- and intra-generational mobility and recruitment patterns, on marriage, kinship and fertility, on group identity and life style, and on occupational, religious, property-owning and political roles of the merchant group.

Trade was of paramount importance to the development of Buenos Aires. The Spanish Crown, interested primarily in controlling the flow of silver and foreign goods to and from their American Empire, designated Lima, capital of the Viceroyalty of Peru, as the only city eligible to engage in commerce with Spain in the sixteenth century. This decision postponed for 200 years the commercial development of Buenos Aires. All legal trade to and from the mother country was required to follow the arduous route across Panama to Lima and from there, over the Andes, via Alto Peru to the Argentine pampas. During the seventeenth century, the Crown periodically realized the weakness of this artificially enforced commercial isolation, and allowed fleets to sail to Buenos Aires under special royal licenses (*permisos*) from time to time. Goods legally shipped to the city were specifically earmarked for local use; their re-export to towns of the interior was forbidden by the Crown. But the Crown was never able to control effectively the Buenos Aires trade, and contraband with neighboring Portuguese colonies flourished.

From the earliest days of the colony, it was apparent to the inhabitants
Introduction

that commerce, although severely restricted by the Crown, was essential if settlement was to survive. Buenos Aires, isolated from the major cities of the Spanish colony, and lacking both a large Indian population and native industry, was totally dependent on commerce with Brazil and Europe. The city's very isolation, its proximity to the Portuguese colony of Brazil, and its access, through the backdoor, to Potosí and Peruvian silver, produced an early flowering of contraband trade.

The internal market for both contraband and legal trade was relatively small, and except for periodic crackdowns, relatively unharrassed. The city of Buenos Aires was a minor military outpost, populated primarily by poorly paid soldiers throughout the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth centuries. The Crown viewed the city and its surrounding regions as important to the Empire only because of the strategic proximity of the Portuguese settlements. The Río de la Plata area, although administered by a governor in Buenos Aires, continued to be dependent politically and economically on the distant capital of the Viceroyalty of Peru, Lima.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, the Bourbon conflict with England and Portugal led to a basic shift in Spanish policy. Because of the Anglo-Portuguese threat to her colonies, two new priorities became central to Spanish policy: the need to maintain closer control of the colonies on the fringes of the Empire, and the need to generate additional revenues with which to finance this control. Both political and economic considerations, therefore, were important in the adoption of a new colonial policy by Carlos III. Throughout the Spanish American Empire this policy included an increase in the number of Viceroyalties and a consequent reduction of the traditional power of Lima and Mexico City; the opening of new (often Atlantic) ports in both the Old World and the New; and the adoption of the French-inspired intendant system of local government. An important part of this policy was the founding in 1776 of the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata, with its capital at Buenos Aires, and the extension in 1778 of the Free Trade Ordinance to the city.

The Río de la Plata was of special concern to the Spanish Crown because of its close geographical proximity to Brazil, a major Portuguese colony. In addition, the ouster of the Jesuits from their missions in Uruguay and Paraguay (1767) created a power vacuum which both the Spanish and Portuguese hoped to fill. British interest in the area had also grown since their experience with the Asiento trade (1713-39). For these reasons, the need for strong leadership in the La Plata area was increased in the eyes of the Spanish king. A growing European demand
The merchants of Buenos Aires for bulk export of the area’s commodities, and the evolution of larger, faster sailing ships provided the economic stimulus for a change in the status of the Río de la Plata. A major export of the area, heavy cattle hides, could now be shipped directly from Buenos Aires or Montevideo, Atlantic ports, to Spain and the rest of Europe.

From the second or third decade of the eighteenth century, Río de la Plata commerce had gradually increased, a development played out against the continuous struggle of the city of Lima to limit the power and growth of a rival seaport on the Atlantic. Most active in this struggle were the merchants of Lima, a strong group with important vested interests in maintaining commercial hegemony over the Andean and Platine regions. The limeño merchants sought to control their porteño counterparts and to limit the threat both to their commerce and the primacy of their city. In spite of the efforts of Lima merchants, policy considerations and the changing nature of trade eventually convinced the Spanish Crown of the need to elevate Buenos Aires to a vice-regal capital and to recognize the growth of its commerce.

The founding of the Viceroyalty was of great importance to the continued development of the port of Buenos Aires. In addition to placing Buenos Aires on an equal footing with Lima, the city’s shift from military garrison to commercial center was further encouraged. Buenos Aires was elevated to the long-desired status of an official port, and the populous mineral-producing area of Alto Perú was included in the new Viceroyalty’s domain. Because of the inclusion of Alto Perú, Buenos Aires officially gained control of both a new market for imported goods and a major source of gold and silver for export to Spain. The entire traffic in bullion thereby entered legally into the hands of the porteño merchants. In addition, with the outing of the Jesuits from the mission areas of Paraguay, Uruguay and Corrientes, the merchants of Buenos Aires had more direct access to the Indian populations of the area. This was in effect another new market which could be forced by its administrators to purchase goods. Similarly, following the Jesuit departure, Buenos Aires also gained more direct control in the purchase of the mission area’s major export crop, yerba maté (Paraguayan tea). Of course, Buenos Aires’ new status as a seat of a Viceroyalty, and the consequent founding of an Audiencia in Buenos Aires, produced an influx of government officials and clerks, and a corresponding growth of local purchasing power and demand for luxury goods.

Two years after the Viceroyalty was founded, a new commercial code, the Ordinance of Free Commerce of 1778, opened the port of Buenos Aires to legal trade with the cities of Spain. With the opening of the port,
the merchants of the city could trade directly with the Spanish centers, bypassing the old and arduous Lima route entirely. Although preference in shipping was still given to Spanish ships and licenses were still required for trade with the colonies, duties were lowered and the traditional *flota* system of shipping, which had limited the trade of the New World to large convoys, was ended. Ships now sailed separately, not in fleets. Transportation patterns reflected more directly the needs of the merchants; a ship could sail when it was loaded with cargo, without waiting for other ships to be readied, or for specific dates. Since ships did not leave and land together, it was hoped that the previous disastrous economic pattern of a surfeit of goods followed by long periods of scarcity would be avoided. The risk to the merchant of economic hardship because of a glutted market would be lessened considerably by this new provision of the 1778 Ordinance.

A demise of contraband trade did not follow the opening of the port of Buenos Aires, as trade was only legal if conducted with Spain or other Spanish colonies. Before 1778 Río de la Plata trade consisted of specially licensed ships sailing in fleets, coupled with contraband trade by sea with passing English, Portuguese or French vessels, and by land with Brazil. After the 1778 Ordinance individual sailings replaced the *flota* system, but contraband continued to be an important activity for many merchants.

The principal economic activities of the Viceroyalty of Río de la Plata were the production and export of silver and cattle products. External markets were critical to the development of the local economy. European demand for cattle products, and the relative accessibility of the area's exports after 1778, gave impetus to the production of hides, tallow, and dried and salted meats in the litoral area surrounding the city of Buenos Aires. By mid-eighteenth century, the extractive hunting expeditions (*vaquerías*) had been replaced in the pampas around Buenos Aires by cattle-breeding ranches (*estancias*). Steadily increasing exports of the pastoral products of these ranches encouraged gradual extension of *estancias*, expansion of cattle production, and growth of population in these rural areas.

Even with the growth of pastoral production geared to an external market, it was Potosí and the production of its legendary mines, which continued to supply the major export by value of the La Plata Viceroyalty. But silver mining as an industry did not enjoy the same growth or expansion as did cattle raising. Dependent on traditional forms of Indian labor, characterized by deep mines which were subject to flooding, and low grade ore, this sector of the region's economy failed
The merchants of Buenos Aires to respond to the new climate of economic growth which characterized the Viceroyalty.

In addition to production for external markets, the area experienced a renaissance of production for internal markets. The buying power of Buenos Aires' domestic market increased yearly, as a consequence of both large expenditures of vice-regal funds on defense and bureaucratic salaries, and a rapidly growing population. Increased local demand for foodstuffs caused estancias to earmark some production, especially small grain surpluses, for the porteño market. In addition, a ring of small farms around the city produced food for the growing urban population. The prosperity of the city affected the interior, which also experienced substantial population growth during the vice-regal decades. Demand for goods caused an upturn in production, as the yerba of Paraguay, the coarse woolen textiles of Córdoba, and wines and liquor (aguardiente) of San Juan and Catamarca became basic staples in the growing market places of the Viceroyalty.

Although a majority of the modes of production of the Viceroyalty could be classified as either agricultural or extractive, some small-scale industry did exist. Manufacturing was rudimentary and the market small, but artisan industries supplied local necessities. Artisans produced a variety of goods for internal urban consumption, including clothing, shoes, silver objects, furniture, harnesses, belts, bricks, and bakery products. Some cities specialized in one industry, producing for local consumption and for internal export throughout the Viceroyalty. Tucumán's artisans, for example, manufactured furniture for all of the interior and Buenos Aires.

In addition, expanded river trade in hides and domestic products gave rise to considerable boat building in Buenos Aires, Asunción and Corrientes. To provide land transport, production of wooden carts (carretas) multiplied in Tucumán. Greater demand for transportation of goods increased the numbers of men employed as carters. These men led caravans filled with silver, dried fruits, wines, brandies, flour and cattle products to Buenos Aires; they would return to the interior with European dry goods.

Commercial production for growing external and internal markets was the key to the economic vitality of the La Plata region. By the late eighteenth century, the Viceroyalty and its capital were, more than ever, active members of the Atlantic trading community, prospering when trade was good, suffering when trade was disrupted. In turn, production of the estancias rose and fell with trading conditions. The city served as a link between Spain (and Europe) and its hinterland, which extended
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as far afield as Asunción, Potosí, Mendoza and Montevideo. The merchants of Buenos Aires imported European textiles, hardware and luxury goods for this wide-ranging market, while exporting the production of *estancias*, silver mines and beef-curing establishments from throughout the region.

With the rise of the litoral, the creation of the Viceroyalty, and the institution of ‘free trade’, Buenos Aires became the principal center for overseas trade for the extreme south of the Spanish Empire.\(^{24}\) Supplying local retailers, selling directly to the public, and shipping goods to agents, wholesalers and retailers of the interior, the *porteño* merchant, essentially a middleman between European and American markets, received a high margin of profit. Although dependent on Spanish mercantile houses, the *porteño* merchant took care to insure that he dealt with a number of suppliers, thereby avoiding tight control by any one Spanish firm. In addition, distance and ignorance as to the conditions of the local market put Spanish merchants at the mercy of their *porteño* colleagues.\(^{25}\) *Porteño* merchants took pains to limit the commercial contacts of their agents and clients in the interior. As a consequence, the Buenos Aires merchants enjoyed high profit margins at the expense of their Spanish suppliers and their inland clients.\(^{26}\)

At least three major internal trade circuits converged in Buenos Aires. To the north and west lay the major *estancia* regions – the Banda Oriental (the east bank of the Uruguay River), the Entrerrios area – and the city of Montevideo. Trade with this area centered around the export of hides in exchange for cash, European and locally produced textiles, imported knives, ponchos and other clothing, *yerba* and tobacco. Transportation of goods to and from this region was by river boat.

To the north lay a second trade route, the cities of Santa Fé, Corrientes and Asunción along the Paraná River. Transportation to these cities was also by boat. Asunción, the major exporter of *yerba*, imported a variety of products including European and local textiles, slaves and spices. Corrientes and Santa Fé both exported hides, receiving in payment essentially the same variety of goods as those sent to Entrerrios. In addition, Santa Fé, linked by land to the third major trading circuit, supplied mules for the mines of Potosí.\(^{27}\)

The third trading circuit led from Buenos Aires northwestward across the pampas to the city of Córdoba, and on to Santiago del Estero, Tucumán, Salta, Jujuy, Potosí and the markets of Upper Peru. South of Córdoba, a branch route continued westward to San Luis, Mendoza (and eventually to Santiago de Chile) and then north to San Juan, La Rioja and Catamarca. Each of these cities supplied one or more
commodities to the Buenos Aires market (e.g., coarse textiles, furniture and rice from Tucumán; wine, raisins, grapes and figs from Mendoza), but the silver exported by Potosí was the most important product of the area. Each city also imported European goods, hardware, slaves and yerba via Buenos Aires.

This trade, which marked a commercial golden age for Buenos Aires, was paradoxically undynamic and routine. The market for European
imports was limited by their high price, leading merchants to prefer a low volume of trade combined with high profits. Porteño merchants experimented little with variation in markets or goods, but in spite of their lack of innovation, trade continued to grow. Profits were high, for merchants controlled both the source of imported goods and the price offered for exports. The merchants of Buenos Aires benefited from the Spanish mercantile system, a system which gave the economic advantage to the marketer over the producer.29

Because the region's economy was linked closely to the export of raw materials and silver, and because the porteño merchants held a central position in the colony's trade, a nucleus of powerful merchants came to exercise virtual hegemony over the economic system of the entire Viceroyalty.30 'Free trade' made possible more permanent trading relationships between porteño merchants and Spanish firms, and consequently extended the porteño merchants' access to credit. Credit arrangements granted by Spanish suppliers allowed the porteño traders to increase the volume of goods imported into the city. In turn, the Buenos Aires merchants also extended credit to customers in the interior, thereby enticing clients to make larger purchases. The merchants of the interior, acting as local agents for porteño merchants, or on their own behalf, soon came to be directly dependent on Buenos Aires for both goods and credit.31

Buenos Aires trade grew during the remaining decades of the eighteenth century. Although the continuing European conflicts adversely affected trade from time to time (because of English blockades and the danger of English warships on the high seas), the wars did not always harm the commerce of Buenos Aires. The Spanish king was pressed into allowing a reduction of the traditional restrictions against trade with other nations in order to keep supply lines open to allow the colonies to survive.32 Commerce with neutrals, therefore, tended to replace trade with Spain during periods of protracted international conflict. So successful were the porteño merchants in supplying their markets that over-abundance of imports became a major problem from the mid-1780s.

The creation of the Viceroyalty of Río de la Plata and the consequent growth in size, population, and stature of Buenos Aires, also signaled the beginning of the decline in relative importance of the cities of the interior. Although this decline was not as rapid as many historians have thought,33 the cities of the interior began to feel the combined effects of the relocation of the pulse of the region toward the coast and the increased importation of manufactured goods and food products from Europe. The importation of woven goods from Spain and the rest of
Europe, to mention one example, eventually affected the weaving industry of Córdoba. As trade increasingly became the domain of the porteño merchants, the communication network between the cities of the Viceroyalty came to resemble the spokes of a wheel, all leading back to Buenos Aires.

Population growth and expansion of trade produced a change in the social composition of the city of Buenos Aires. In general terms, the city, by the later decades of the eighteenth century, was prosperous, but far from opulent. By 1773, it was considered the fourth-ranked city of Spanish South America, but compared to the traditional vice-regal capitals of the New World (Mexico City and Lima), the city was both architecturally and socially provincial. There were few fine houses, no opulent churches, no university and little diversion or entertainment. The densely inhabited zone of the city consisted of an area approximately eight by thirteen city blocks; beyond this area lay small farms.

During the seventeenth century Buenos Aires society was characterized by a small military ruling group, some few merchants and low-ranking administrators and a great number of soldiers. Beginning in 1750, the upper social groups were enlarged by growing numbers of civilian, religious and military administrators, and merchants. By 1778 the most prestigious positions in the local Spanish social hierarchy were high-ranking bureaucratic, military and clerical figures of the colony. They were followed closely in social power, and perhaps exceeded in economic power, by the major wholesale merchants. Below these two groups came a growing number of clergymen, less prosperous wholesalers and retailers, lawyers and lesser ranking civilian and military officials. These groups together comprised the colony's upper and middle social sectors. Surprisingly, ranch owners were not generally within the ranks of either the upper or middle sectors of society. Along with artisans, small farmers, peddlers, tavern owners, soldiers and clerks, ranchers were counted among the lower sectors of colonial Argentine society. Below these occupational groups were the peones, day laborers and domestics, and an army of beggars. Beneath the entire Spanish social pyramid were a considerable number of free blacks and slaves, many of whom worked as domestics or semi-skilled artisans or farmed on the outskirts of the city.

Social position in this class structure was determined more by occupation, money and race than by familial status. Family name, although a factor, never rose to a position of primacy; none of the permanent residents of Buenos Aires could claim relationship to important, noble Spanish families. A family's name rested more on its economic power
than on its claim to noble blood. Continued growth and the ascendency of commerce also gave the city a strong flavor of adventurism, as newcomers continued to be drawn to the city from Europe and the interior. This climate of adventurism was further enhanced by a fair degree of geographic and social mobility.

Nevertheless, the structure of porteño society was definitely hierarchical. In 1775 the Cabildo enumerated the ‘estates’ of which the population was composed: the clergy, the armed forces, the merchants, the farmers and the craftsmen. The most important of these groups, the clergy, military, merchants and a growing corps of government officials, took pains to protect their position behind a rigid system of etiquette and titles designed to emphasize society’s hierarchy.

The porteño wholesale merchants were very much tied to the economic prosperity and growth of vice-regal Buenos Aires. An increase in the numbers and wealth of the merchant group affected the patterns of merchants’ lives, their relation to other social groups, and their social, political, economic and religious participation in society. This book focuses on the social roles of the porteño merchants. Their trade and their relationship to the eighteenth-century economic system are touched upon only as they explain these roles.
Although merchants were among the major local beneficiaries of the restructured political and economic system of the last decades of the eighteenth century, the merchant group of Buenos Aires was not created by the new Viceroyalty. Buenos Aires, from the seventeenth century, had a relatively clearly defined and important merchant group, active both in the legal trade authorized by the Spanish Crown, and in contraband dealings with the Portuguese, English and French.  

As early as 1597, only seventeen years after the re-establishment of the port city, Portuguese merchants began to import shipments of dry goods and slaves into Buenos Aires. By 1615 several important merchants and their families were established in the city. Included in this group heavily involved in contraband, were Diego de Vega and his son-in-law, Juan de Vergara. Throughout the seventeenth century, porteño trade (usually contraband) was dominated by Portuguese merchants, although occasionally a Spaniard rose to prominence among the merchant ranks. Such a case was that of Miguel de Riglos, a native of Navarre, and one of the principal merchants of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, who had begun his commercial life through his auspicious marriage to the widow of a Portuguese merchant.  

It is impossible to estimate the number of men involved in commerce during the seventeenth century, for no census with good occupational information exists for this period. The earliest census for the city of Buenos Aires which can be used to calculate the approximate number of merchants, is that of 1738. Although information on occupations in this census is somewhat spotty, the total for all individuals involved in some form of commerce is approximately 75. About 18 to 20 of these men were comerciantes, involved primarily in wholesale importing and exporting. Portuguese influence in commerce was beginning to wane, with the arrival of comerciantes (wholesalers), mercaderes (retailers) and tratantes (provisioners) from the Spanish kingdoms of Galicia, Navarre and Vizcaya.
The merchant population

In 1744 another house census was taken of the city of Buenos Aires. The growth of commerce which this census demonstrates is striking; the total for all individuals involved in some form of commerce was now 222 individuals, an increase of almost 300 percent over an eight-year period. The comerciante group had doubled, increasing from 18 to 36 members, while various mercader groups had increased from 43 to 132. Six years later, in 1750, 36 merchants directly involved in wholesale trade signed a grievance against the merchants of Lima. It can be assumed that these 36 were the most important wholesalers in the city, and that this figure represents a conservative estimate of the size of the wholesaler group.

The merchant population continued to grow in the second half of the eighteenth century, and the vitality of this growth is demonstrated by their numbers in the 1778 census. Of 2,750 male heads of household listed in the 1778 census, 653 or 24 percent were identified as belonging to one or another group within the mercantile community. Another 138 men, or an additional 5 percent of the total white male population, were found under the heading 'commercial and administrative clerks, apprentices'. Only the loosely defined artisan group, with 28 percent of the population, comprised a larger numerical group than men engaged in some form of commerce. Wholesale merchants now numbered 145, a four-fold increase in the less than 30 years since 1750. In the light of this continual increase in all branches of commerce, the founding of the Viceroyalty and the new 'Free Commerce' can be seen, in part, as a Spanish response to the growing importance of the merchants of Buenos Aires.

As trade grew, both the quantity and the quality of the men engaged in it changed; by the mid-eighteenth century merchants found themselves in specific branches of commerce, among the most important of which were: 'Castilian goods' (including all European cloth, iron and luxury goods); local products and those being produced in the interior of the region (yerba maté, hides tallow); silver from the mines of Alto Perú; the slaves. Business acumen was as important to the export or import of these items as the capital for investment, although the latter was never harmful. By the fourth quarter of the eighteenth century a knowledge of market conditions both home and abroad, an awareness of international developments, personal contact with fellow merchants in the home country and in the cities of the interior, and time to travel to Montevideo, Santa Fé, Córdoba, Asunción, or if need be, to Spain, were essential for a commercial career. Men proudly identified themselves as del comercio in all public documents.

Clearly defined groups of merchants engaged in long-distance trading
The merchants of Buenos Aires were a major social and economic group in sixteenth-century Seville, Hispaniola, Mexico and Peru. The porteño merchants were part of this tradition, and as such shared many characteristics associated with merchant groups. For example, although trade patterns and products had varied widely over the past three centuries, the partnership arrangements and bookkeeping had not changed much from the sixteenth century.

Although closely related to earlier Hispanic merchants, by the middle of the eighteenth century an interesting linguistic change had occurred in the Río de la Plata which reflected a social and economic division between wholesaler and retailer. Mercader and comerciante had previously been used interchangeably to refer to long-distance traders, with mercader, the older form, usually preferred. However, in Buenos Aires by 1750 there was a sharp distinction between the economic activity and social status described by these two terms. A comerciante was now 'an individual...who engages in trade and business with the ports of the Peninsula, America and other colonies, and with the cities of the interior of this Viceroyalty and of the Viceroyalty of Peru, exporting silver, local goods, manufactured products, and raw materials, and importing the manufactured goods of Europe'. By contrast, a mercader was 'an individual who owns a retail shop in the city, although he may also sell wholesale. Retail sales include all marketable goods of Europe and America'. As essential to the division between comerciante and mercader as the wholesale versus retail distinction, was the difference between overseas and local trade.

Merchants engaged in overseas trade were the backbone of the economic life of the colony. Although many of them also engaged in retail sales on a small or large scale, their primary function was wholesale importing and exporting of goods. As such they funneled their products through the mercaderes (retailers) in Buenos Aires, through bandoleros (street peddlers), through other wholesale and retail merchants of the interior, through the pulperos (grocers and owners of rural stores), through their own ambulatory agents, to populations in Buenos Aires, Chile, Alto Perú, Paraguay and the Banda Oriental. They also served as the terminus of export products purchased at their point of production, or brought into Buenos Aires by ranchers searching for a good price for hides and tallow.

Preliminary work on the nature of vice-regal porteño society by Moreno has suggested that socially and economically the wholesale merchants were divided into a small group which ranked at the apex of porteño society, equal to or above high-ranking military, religious, and administrative figures, and a larger group which ranked among the small
The merchant population

middle class of the colony. According to their occupational ranking, by 1778, the large-scale importers and exporters (numbering 34), along with the high-ranking military, religious, administrative and judicial personnel (numbering 38) and owners of large rural tracts (numbering 3) formed the upper class of porteño society. All other merchants, whether in wholesale or retail trade, regardless of the products in which they dealt, are ranked eighteenth in Moreno's occupational chart, and included, along with artisans, regular clergy and small rural property owners, in the middle class. Clerks and other dependent personnel are believed to have formed a fringe group, members of the petite bourgeoisie, which defined the lower social levels of the mercantile group.

Moreno's rankings indicate great social diversity within the merchant group. Because of an absence of titled aristocracy in the Río de la Plata area, this social differentiation was based almost entirely on wealth. The merchants, in a position to accumulate wealth or to lose their fortunes, were one of the most mobile sectors of the society. Movement from the ranks of middle group merchants to those of large-scale merchants, movement from middle-class to upper-class groups, and in the other direction, was more possible within the merchant group than in any other group of society.

The census of 1778, an occupational and house census for the city of Buenos Aires, allows us to determine basic social and demographic patterns of the merchant group. In addition, a list of merchants for use in collecting prosopographic materials is supplied by the census. All men who identified themselves as del comercio or comerciante in the 1778 census, and those proved to be active in wholesale trade through their participation in Juntas de Comercio, or who were listed as merchants in notary papers and Aduana records, are included in the basic sample. Mercaderes and pulperos have been excluded from this sample, for these groups were perceived as belonging to a clearly different social and occupational group than the comerciantes.

Of the 653 individuals identified by Moreno as being involved in commerce in the 1778 census, I have calculated that 145, or 22 percent, were merchants engaged in the wholesale importation and exportation of goods. Approximately one out of every four merchants of the city was active in wholesale commerce; using Moreno's figures the group comprised 5 percent of the entire porteño white male working population. The wholesalers were not in the majority among traders, but because of their central role in commerce and their position in porteño society, they represented a far greater concentration of economic and social power than any of the other groups connected with the city's commerce.

In addition to the population of 145 merchants found in the 1778
The merchants of Buenos Aires
census, 9 more comerciantes who died shortly before the census date
and 24 merchants who arrived in the city shortly after the taking of the
census were included in the basic merchant sample. This group of 178
merchants is felt, given some omissions and oversights, to reflect
accurately the group of powerful and prestigious comerciantes in the city
during the 1775–85 decade. Due to the death soon after 1785 of some
of the merchants under study, and to increasing immigration of mer-
chants from Spain, the sample group represents an ever-declining pro-
portion of the entire merchant community for the following three
decades. But many of the merchants included in the 1778 sample
continued to exercise great economic and social power throughout the
vice-regal period, and many of the more youthful merchants in the
sample became men of great importance by the turn of the century. Of
the fifty most important merchants in the city in 1798, thirty-five of them
had been in Buenos Aires in 1778.21 Conclusions drawn from this sample
from one year are, therefore, likely to be generally valid and useful for
describing the merchant population for most of the vice-regal period.

In 1778 the merchant population was overwhelmingly a middle-aged
one, composed of men who had been in the colony for an average of
twelve to fifteen years. Of the 145 merchants present in Buenos Aires
at the time of the census report, 54 percent were in the 35 to 54 year-old
age group. In addition, 12 percent of the group were 55 years of age
or older. This age pattern is understandable given the higher economic
level achieved by the merchants when compared to most other social
groups in the same society. The merchants most probably enjoyed a
better standard of living than others. It is known, for example, that many
of the merchants of the period were treated by doctors during times
of illness.22 Although these medical men did not possess a very sophis-
ticated understanding of disease and its cure, their knowledge was well
above that of the layman.

A surprisingly high percentage of the 1778 merchant group, 12 per-
cent, were below 25 years of age, the age of legal majority. This group
was composed mainly of merchants in their early twenties who were
partners of older, more established merchants. Also included in this
group were the sons of established merchants who, with parental
blessing and economic support, had begun their own commercial
careers.23 The average age of the merchant population in 1778 was
38 years old.

Age distribution and the average length of time in the colony suggest
that the ‘average’ comerciante of 1778 had been born in Spain, and had
come to Buenos Aires sometime between 1763 and 1766. The data point
to the ‘typical’ merchant as migrating to the area at the age of twenty-five.

Although not many data are available on the occupations of the fathers of the Buenos Aires merchants, what information we have indicates that the merchants were primarily sons of the middle and lower-middle groups of Spanish society. (As Appendix B.3 illustrates, of a sample of 95 merchants, chief among fathers’ occupation was that of merchant (37 percent), with government bureaucrat and small landowner also strongly represented (27 percent and 22 percent, respectively).) A mercantile career held little attraction for the sons of professional men, or military officers, for these two occupations were generally viewed as more socially prestigious than that of merchant. Although some of the porteño merchants claimed to be hidalgos (gentlemen) of good birth, purity of blood and known Christianity, these men were all natives of the Basque region, a region where almost all men considered themselves to be of noble lineage. On the other end of the social scale, it appears that sons of craftsmen, laborers and unskilled workers did not usually become merchants, because they lacked the rudimentary education and the small sums of investment capital needed to begin a mercantile career. Merchants were recruited from the middle segments of Spanish society.

Although data are scarce, there is strong relationship between a merchant’s place of birth and his father’s occupation. Argentine-born merchants were usually the sons of traders who had come to the colony earlier in the century. Merchants born in Spain were the sons of lower-level bureaucrats and small landowning farmers. This difference in parental occupation between the creole and the Spanish-born merchants is important, for it points to two very different patterns of intergenerational mobility, based to a large extent on place of birth. The creole merchants were following the same careers as their fathers, that is, they were not experiencing any upward mobility from their parents’ status. The Spanish-born, on the other hand, especially those whose fathers were small landowners, were indeed upwardly mobile when compared to their fathers’ social status. In effect, creole-born merchants were standing still (or perhaps even slipping in status for they tended to be less powerful merchants than their fathers), while Spanish-born merchants were moving up the occupational status ladder. Commerce was not barred to the creoles, but creoles entering trade had to be of a higher socio-economic status than the Spanish-born if they were to succeed.

Another interesting difference between creole and Spanish-born mer-
The merchants of Buenos Aires

chants, tied to parental occupation, was the geographical environment from which they came. The vast majority of the Peninsula-born merchants were not natives of the major cities of Spain, but rather of rural towns such as Ajangí and San Pedro de la Mura in Vizcaya, or Figaies and Huéspeda in Castilla la Vieja. These rural birthplaces coincide with the importance of landowning as a parental occupation for the Spanish-born merchants. The creole merchants, on the other hand, tended to be natives of the city of Buenos Aires.

The existence of creole-born merchants is, in itself, an interesting finding, for the stereotype of the colonial merchant of Buenos Aires is that he was of Basque origin. This view is incorrect in two respects. First, as already mentioned, there was a group of creole-born merchants, who although not in a majority, were nevertheless well represented in the porteño merchant community. Approximately 15 percent of the porteño merchants, one out of every seven merchants, had been born in Buenos Aires. Secondly, the Basque merchants, although important, were equalled in number by merchants from north-central Spain (Castile, Santander, Asturias and Galicia), with both regions contributing 35 percent of the merchant group respectively. Rather than speak of the Basque origin of the merchant group, it is more valid to refer to their northern Spanish origin.

The northern origins of the merchant group is important in understanding the cultural patterns which these men brought with them to Buenos Aires. Northern Spain was an area in which the small family farm was the characteristic form of enterprise. Either owners of their own land (as in the Basque provinces) or secure tenant farmers (as in Santander and Asturias), the northern peasants developed a society permeated by a sense of social equality. The men of the north considered themselves to be *hidalgos* and all the merchants of Buenos Aires entitled themselves *Don* and their wives *Doña*.

The northern areas of Spain had undergone a degree of economic revival during the eighteenth century. The proximity of the sea had brought the peasants and the petite bourgeoisie of the north into an expanding export trade, increasing profits and developing a more cosmopolitan world view. But population increase in the area outstripped economic development and, although the area was prosperous in terms of Spain’s economy, it could not support its burgeoning population. The rural area therefore became an exporter of surplus population, both to the New World and to the large cities of the Peninsula.
The northern merchant did not move directly from his small village to Buenos Aires. Rather his migration was a two-step process: the young man, at 15 to 20 years old, leaving his native village for the larger Peninsula city, and later, after a stay of some years, moving on to the colonies. In some cases a generation elapsed between the initial departure and the final arrival in Buenos Aires, with a young man leaving the village and his son migrating to Buenos Aires, but the general pattern was that this two-step process was accomplished within a span of about ten years. During his stay in Cádiz, Seville, Madrid, Barcelona or Bilbao, the young man often served an apprenticeship with relatives or countrymen who had preceded him to the big city, and who later served as business contacts once he was established in the Río de la Plata area.

Less than 10 percent of the merchants came from southern Spain, site of Seville and Cádiz, the major ports of New World commerce. Southern immigrants, as opposed to the larger groups of northerners and Basques, were natives of large cities such as Seville, Cádiz and Jerez de la Frontera, a reflection of the more feudal nature of rural southern Spain.

Foreigners were theoretically forbidden to enter any of the Spanish American colonies, but natives of France, Italy and England were present in the porteño merchant community. These non-Spanish merchants included such prominent figures as Juan Bautista Lasala, a native of France and the only member of the merchant group to become a member of the Real Orden de Santiago, and Domingo Belgrano Pérez, a native of Oneglia, Italy, prominent merchant and landowner during the 1770s and 1780s, and father of General Manuel Belgrano. All merchants born outside of the Spanish realm had to obtain cartas de ciudadania from the Crown. Petitions for naturalization were granted only when a man had spent many years in the colony, had married a native or Spanish-born woman, and was well established in commerce.

In addition to place of birth, and social origins, legitimacy is an indication of the socio-economic background of the porteño merchants. Legitimacy, given its stress in most legal documents concerned with an individual's personal qualifications, was an important value of Spanish society, especially among the middle and upper social groups. The vast majority of merchants were legitimate offspring, but illegitimacy itself did not prevent an ambitious man from entering the ranks of the porteño merchants. Juan Bautista de Azcuénaga, for example, the natural-born son of Juan de Ormaechea and María de Basteguiete, although
not one of the most prosperous merchants of the city, was a respected member of Buenos Aires society. One of his business associates was José de Ormaechea, his legitimate half-brother who had settled in Salta.39

The most famous porteño merchants of illegitimate birth were the creoles Francisco Antonio and Antonio José de Escalada, sons of Manuel de Escalada, himself a powerful merchant, and Luisa Sarria. Illegitimate birth was more than compensated for by the wealth and social position of their father and both men were able to achieve high social honors and economic position. Francisco Antonio, member of the Cabildo and Consulado (and later active in the Independence government of Argentina) married his second cousin, María Gertrudis Bustillo de Cevallos. Antonio José, active in the Cabildo and the Consulado, was an official of the Audiencia of Buenos Aires in addition to his military and mercantile pursuits. (He also supported the Independence movement and participated in the post-Independence government.) His first wife was Petrona de Salcedo, daughter of José de Salcedo, a local lawyer. Four years after Petrona’s death, Antonio José married Tomasa de la Quintana, daughter of José Ignacio de la Quintana y Riglos, Brigadier General and Marshal of the Royal Army. Both brothers were legitimized by Royal Order of Charles III, but their bastard birth was never denied. On both of Antonio José’s marriage certificates he is listed as a ‘natural son’.40

The merchants of Buenos Aires were one of the more literate groups in colonial society. For the merchants, as for government officials, professionals and clergy, literacy was an occupational prerequisite. A basic knowledge of arithmetic and bookkeeping was also needed for the merchants were required by law to keep four kinds of books.41 Although the merchants were an educated group by eighteenth-century Argentine standards, very few data are available on their actual training. Only in a few cases, usually merchants born in Buenos Aires, is it definitely known that as young men they received some type of formal schooling. After attending church schools of primeras letras, most merchants continued their education through apprenticeships or by working as clerks in Spanish or porteño houses of trade.

A number of the more important merchants of the late vice-regal period were merchant apprentices or clerks at the time of the 1778 census. Martín de Alzaga, listed as a 21-year-old Spanish mercader, living with another 14-year-old Spanish mercader and no servants, had lately been employed as an apprentice-clerk by Gaspar de Santa Coloma.42 As Santa Coloma’s ‘boy’, Alzaga had among his other duties that of locking up the store at eleven at night, opening it early in the morning, and clearing goods shipped to Santa Coloma through customs.43 Unlike
most apprentices and clerks Alzaga did not live in the Santa Coloma store, but rented a room half a block away. Most probably his life as an apprentice was much like that described by Lorenzo de Zavala for his peers in Mexico City:

... poor young men who left the provinces of Spain for America, with no more than a pair of trousers, a jacket, a waistcoat and two or three shirts... They went consigned to some relative who had a business there and entered their novitiate. [In Alzaga's case he was probably placed by Mateo Ramón de Alzaga, a kinsman and perhaps his uncle who was already an established porteño merchant.] Early in the morning they dressed to go to hear daily mass. Then they returned home to breakfast on chocolate and open the shop where they sat reading a book of devotion after settling the accounts. They lunched at nine and at twelve shut the shop to eat and take a siesta. At three they said the rosary and opened the shop until seven at night when they again said the rosary, and some praises to the Virgin... The employees generally stayed with their master and rarely left them. Conversation reduced itself to the price of goods.44

Another young man, living with his uncle, most probably in an apprentice role, is identified in the census. Miguel Fernández de Agüero, aged 13, is listed among the inhabitants of the home of Diego Agüero, merchant of the city.45 As Diego's young wife, Petrona Gregorio Espinosa, daughter and granddaughter of porteno merchants, had at that date borne only one son, it was natural that Diego would turn to his family in Spain to continue the mercantile line. Sixteen years later, in 1794, Miguel, at the age of 29, married his first cousin, Diego's 21-year-old daughter, María Ignacia Agüero. In the capital, which was drawn up six months after their wedding, it is clear that Miguel, a merchant active in trade with Potosí, had been under his uncle's economic tutelage before his marriage.46

Established merchants frequently turned to their parientes when searching for an apprentice. The most common practice was to sponsor a nephew or young brother, bringing him to Buenos Aires and teaching him the rudiments of commerce. 'Some years ago, I had my nephew come to this city at a young age, through Bilbao and Santander, in order to educate him and teach him the trade', stated Joaquín de Arana.47 A pariente apprentice was preferred because he was believed to be more trustworthy; he could be sent into the provinces with some assurance that he would return. Requests abound for passports for brothers and nephews asking for permission to send them to Potosí, Chuquisaca, Córdoba and La Plata with goods. Sponsorship of a pariente was also a natural way for the merchant to help improve the social and economic position of a member of his family toward whom the successful merchant was felt to have some responsibility.

Those young men who were not related to an important merchant
The merchants of Buenos Aires

were most eager to establish a permanent familial relationship whenever possible. It was not unusual for an ambitious apprentice to combine work with an established merchant with marriage into that merchant’s family at a later date. Perhaps the fact that apprentices often lived with the merchant’s family encouraged this practice. They would, by the time of their marriage, have proved their industriousness and dedication, qualities sought both in business and married life. José Ramón Ugarteche is an example of an apprentice who married the boss’ daughter. Listed as a 28-year-old apprentice living in the home of Joaquín Pinto in the 1778 census, he married Pinto’s daughter three years later. She was fourteen years his junior.48

Another pattern of social and professional recruitment, varying slightly from the apprentice pattern, was that of working as a clerk (cajero) before becoming a merchant. A clerk, like an apprentice, could learn the elements of commerce while building up a circle of business contacts.49 Clerks were generally older than apprentices, and from poorer socio-economic backgrounds. While apprentices were being trained specifically to become merchants, clerking could be and often was a man’s lifetime job. If a man were lucky, however, he could benefit from his relationship with a merchant either by joining him in a partnership or by beginning his own business with capital and goods supplied in part by his ex-employer. There are several examples of men who rose from the position of clerk to that of powerful merchant. Julián Gregorio Espinosa began as a clerk for Domingo Basavilbaso, a principal merchant of the colony, and eventually established himself as an independent merchant. He later married into the Belgrano Pérez family. Isidro Balbastro, a merchant who also rose to prominence, began as a clerk in the service of Gerónimo Matorras. By 1771 Balbastro had become a partner of Cristóbal de Aguirre, and in 1798 he was ranked eighteenth in terms of wealth among all the merchants of the city.50 His daughter, Eulalia Josefa, was married to Diego Alvear y Escalera Ponce de León, a teniente del navio in the Royal Navy, in 1804. Serving as godparents were Manuel Gririor, lieutenant general in the Royal Army and ex-Viceroy of New Granada and Peru and his wife.51

Men serving as ship captains and super-cargoes were another common source of recruitment for the porteño merchant group. For example, Juan Angel Lazcano first arrived in Buenos Aires as master of the ship Nuestra Señora de la Aurora, and went on to establish himself as an important figure in commerce with Paraguay. Francisco Segurola arrived in Buenos Aires in 1758 as the master of the ship San Ignacio de Loyola, and later became one of the leading merchants of the Vice-
The merchant population

royalty. Later in the century, Narciso Iranzuaga, Francisco Llano and Juan de Dios Dozo all joined the *porteño* merchant group after first serving as ships’ officers.

Ships’ captains often became merchants gradually; a man would work on a ship while saving enough money to finance mercantile pursuits. For example, Francisco Ignacio de Ugarte was the master of the ship, *San Miguel*. At the same time, in partnership with Vicente de Azcuenaga, he imported Castillian goods into Buenos Aires. After dissolution of the company, Ugarte became a full-time merchant. Other men came both as captains and as agents for Spanish merchants and, after selling their cargo, invested their commissions in their own business. Diego Casero arrived in 1777 as the master and super-cargo of the frigate *San Nicolás Temor de Dios*. The cargo of the ship, owned by the Count of Clonard, a merchant of Cádiz, had been entrusted to Casero. After selling these goods, Casero established himself as a merchant and rancher, and remained in Buenos Aires until his death in 1799.

Twice as common as a ship’s captain joining the ranks of the *porteño* merchants was the movement of *mercaderes* into the wholesaler group. At least 24 of the city’s wholesale merchants had begun as retailers, and had slowly amassed enough capital to participate directly in the overseas trade. Francisco de la Peña Fernández, for example, was a retailer at the time of the 1778 census. Twenty years later he had become a wholesaler, and continued in this profession until after Independence. This movement from *mercader* to *comerciante* was far from universal, with the vast majority of retailers either remaining in the same occupation for their entire lives or dropping out of commercial life altogether. Nevertheless, *mercaderes* did become *comerciantes*. More important, prior occupational background as a retailer was not a stigma once a man had established himself as a wholesaler. Men such as Gaspar Santa Coloma and Martín Alzaga, who had come from the retailers’ ranks, achieved high social and economic standing in the colony.

As mentioned earlier, sons of *porteño* merchants also followed their fathers into commerce. José Riera and his son José María, Eugenio Romero and his son Esteban, and Manuel de Escalada and his sons Francisco Antonio and Antonio José, are all examples of this pattern. Many of these young men learned commerce by working with their fathers in Buenos Aires, but sons of *porteño* merchants were also sent to Spain for experience. Eugenio José Balbastro, son of *porteño* merchant Isidro Balbastro, was sent by his father to Cádiz to train as a merchant.

Sons of Peninsular merchants were also sent to work with *porteño* merchants, business associates of their fathers, and some of them came
to establish themselves in Argentine commerce. These young men, although occupying an apprentice position, were never referred to as mozos or dependientes, but rather, because of their prestigious backgrounds, were called comerciantes immediately. Ventura Miguel Marcó del Pont, for example, was the son of a merchant of La Coruña sent to finish his training in Buenos Aires. Juan Angel Goicolea, a native of Cádiz, was the son of Francisco Goicolea, a merchant with whom Francisco Segurola had done business since 1771. Juan Angel was sent to Buenos Aires to prepare himself for a commercial career, and in 1792 he married Segurola's daughter, Benita Segurola.

Another method of entering the ranks of the porteño merchants, reserved for the most prominent merchants of the city, was coming to Buenos Aires as representative of a Spanish mercantile firm. Agustín Casimiro de Aguirre arrived in Buenos Aires as a factor for the firms of Casa Ustariz Hermanos y Compañía and Ustariz, San Gines y Compañía, both of Cádiz. Aguirre was related through his mother, Michaela de Michele Ustariz, to this powerful merchant family; in addition, his father and brother were Spanish merchants. With this sound economic and social backing Aguirre was able to marry into one of the most socially prominent porteño families, that of de la Jarrota de la Quintana y Riglos.

Although many contemporary observers noted the importance of the porteño merchant group, upper class status was not universal among the local traders. Of the group of 178 wholesale merchants in the city during the 1778-85 period, for example, less than 20 percent were members of the upper segments of porteño society. The overwhelming majority of the porteño merchants were identified with middle socio-economic groups, while only 10 to 15 percent fell into a marginal, lower-middle group classification. This socio-economic picture of the merchants defines them as a middle status group whose most wealthy and powerful members had, because of the economic basis of social standing, entered into the upper ranks of the city's society. Those merchants in the lower-middle socio-economic group were usually either young merchants beginning to amass the capital necessary to enter the mainstream of the merchant group, or older merchants moving out of the merchant group because of economic or personal failures.

As a merchant's socio-economic status was dependent on the scale of his trade, the number or frequency of large economic transactions, and his commercial connections with large Spanish firms, there was some room for movement up or down the socio-economic scale for men within the merchant group. But there was a consistent relationship between
these economic indicators and the occupation of a merchant’s father and father-in-law, a fact which suggests a lessening of social movement once certain personal parameters had been set.

The fact that one-fifth of the merchants of Buenos Aires were among the city’s leading figures in terms of wealth, social prestige and importance is especially interesting. Buenos Aires was sufficiently isolated from major Spanish social centers to permit an indigenous upper class to develop. Commerce itself could provide the status and wealth for its practitioners to be included in this class. There was no social pressure to use commercial wealth as a stepping stone to more prestigious occupations. As noted earlier, unlike Lima or Mexico City, there was little or no influx of titled Spanish nobility to this area of the Crown’s dominions. As in other parts of the Empire, economic success – primarily wealth – was a major determinant of social standing, but because of the absence of titled nobility, the social rank of the merchants was more openly based on the wealth they acquired in business. As early as 1766, an eleven-man listing of the ‘Wealthiest Citizens of Buenos Aires’ contained the names of seven men associated with the city’s commerce. There was little attempt to cover mercantile origins. Mercantile pursuits (even combined with retailing), provided they produced sufficient economic benefits, often created the gentleman.

Many of the merchants displayed a fair degree of mobility in their own lives, progressing from clerk, retailer or ship’s captain to merchant. Did this mobility hold true for their creole-born sons? What were the expectations, training and achieved goals of the sons of the porteño merchants? Information on the training and occupational patterns of merchants’ sons indicates that four areas attracted members of the group – the Church, commerce, law and the military. Although exceptions can be cited, sons of the wealthiest merchants preferred military or legal careers, the Church attracted young men from all segments of the merchant group and commerce was favored by the sons of middle group merchants. The aspirations of the merchants’ sons seem therefore to be closely linked to the socio-economic status of their fathers. Sons of the most prominent merchants sought to enter the traditionally prestigious professions often relocating on a temporary or permanent basis in Spain or another colony. Sons of the middle group merchants chose to continue in porteño commerce and on the whole displayed less social or geographical mobility than their fathers.

There are important exceptions to this pattern, and a strong suggestion that a commercial career, while initially attractive to the sons of successful merchants before the founding of the Viceroyalty, became
less inviting in the latter decades of the century. Manuel de Escalada, Santiago Saavedra and Juan de Lezica, three of the wealthiest citizens in 1766, had sons who continued in commerce, and were well established by the early days of the Viceroyalty. Domingo Basavilbaso's two sons also entered commerce, but were only marginally successful. Commerce became increasingly less attractive to the sons of the wealthy as market glut, uncertain and often interrupted trading conditions, and a never ceasing influx of eager young Spanish-born aspirants became the hallmarks of porteño trade. In addition, vice-regal glitter awoke new dreams of social aspirations in the minds of the wealthy young creoles.

Although little is known about the formal education of the merchants, there are data on the education of their offspring. Many merchant sons completed primary schooling, and more than a few continued studies in theology, logic and metaphysics at the Colegio de San Carlos of Buenos Aires, the only secondary school in the city. Those porteño merchant sons being educated at San Carlos were usually destined for careers in the Church or in law, but occasionally a young man planning to become a merchant also studied at San Carlos. Although enrollment at the Colegio of merchants' sons was never great, and always limited to sons of the wealthiest, their numbers increased in the last decades of the century, another indication of the growing attraction of non-commercial careers for merchants' sons.

Some of the sons of the merchants were also sent to Spain for primary and secondary training; this was especially true of the children of the wealthiest merchants, who were being groomed for military, especially naval, careers. Bonifacio Ramón and José Matías Zapiola, sons of Manuel de Zapiola, were sent to Spain at the age of eight to begin their studies. In 1794, at the age of fourteen, José Matías joined the Royal Navy. Even Zapiola's bastard son, Domingo Antonio, was sent at the age of six to begin studies in Spain and later continued at the University of Córdoba in the colony.

Merchants rarely sent their sons to Spanish universities to study, but a small group of merchant sons received advanced training at schools in Córdoba del Tucumán, Chuquisaca and Chile. Manuel de la Colina's son studied at the Colegio de Monserrat in Córdoba, and Manuel Warnes sent his son to Chile to study. Those sons who did receive advanced training in other cities of the Spanish Empire in most cases were preparing for either legal or Church careers.

All schooling was expensive and costs greatly increased for those who left Buenos Aires. Tuition at the local Royal College was 100 pesos a year. Annual costs for tuition, travel, room, board, clothing and books for merchants' sons sent out of the city to study, could reach a thousand
pesos or more. Little wonder that the sons of middle-group merchants were encouraged to learn commerce.

Of a group of 55 merchants for whom data are complete, half had at least one son who entered a career in commerce. Merchants' sons attracted to commerce usually began as apprentices, joined in a partnership with their fathers, and eventually built up enough capital to begin their own trade. In 1798, for example, Francisco Ignacio Ugarte, Juan Antonio de Lezica, Cristóbal de Aguirre, Bernardo Gregorio de las Heras, Joaquín Pinto, Francisco Díaz Vélez, Juan Viola and Juan Angel Lazcano all had sons working as either apprentices or partners. In 1798, Francisco Tellechea, in an interesting reversal of the usual pattern whereby Spanish merchants sent their sons to Buenos Aires to act as their agents, sent his son, Eladio Pastor, 22 years old, to Cádiz, in order to 'establish himself in that city and be in charge of my business transactions'.

When a merchant died leaving young sons as heirs, his widow was under special pressure to provide a career for the orphaned minor sons and to assure them a life equal to that of their father in social and economic status. These women often encouraged their sons to choose a commercial career, for the profession was both familiar and the training relatively inexpensive. Eusebio Cires' widow, for example, sent one of her sons to Spain to 'instruct himself in commerce and provide himself with a future', while another son already trained in commerce stayed in Buenos Aires managing his mother's share of the business left by his late father. Manuel Caviedes' widow sent her son to Salta to learn commerce when the young man decided that he was no longer interested in studying in Buenos Aires.

A career in commerce, although an obvious choice for merchants' sons, was, as we have seen, not overwhelmingly popular. A full 49 percent of all merchants who had sons, usually the wealthier merchants, had no sons who chose to follow their fathers. These young men used their fathers' wealth to enter more prestigious professions. The military, the Church and the law were in great favor with male merchant offspring. The fact that these professions were open to the sons of the merchants demonstrates the social prestige enjoyed by the merchant group itself. It also attests to the economic success of individual merchants, for entrance into these professions (in addition to costs of schooling) was expensive. Juan Angel Lazcano, a porteño merchant, spent 10,000 pesos to place his son, Juan Eustaquio, as Captain of the Jaén Regiment. Isidro Balbastro spent 2,532 pesos to purchase a position of subteniente for his son Matías.

The degree of success which the sons of the merchants enjoyed in
their non-commercial pursuits was related rather closely to the social and economic prestige of their merchant fathers. For example, the sons of Vicente de Azcuenaga, a prominent merchant, followed successful military careers: José Bruno became a naval officer, and Miguel an army colonel. The sons of Marcos José Riglos, another important merchant, also chose non-mercantile careers and met with a great degree of success: Francisco Javier Riglos became a lawyer of the Royal Audiencia of Charcas and his brother, Miguel Fermín, an army marshal and the Governor of the Province of Chiquitos.

A substantial proportion of the merchants of eighteenth-century Buenos Aires demonstrated some degree of social mobility. Although ascriptive values – family name, inherited wealth, titles – continued to be important in determining a man’s social position, wealth, regardless of how it had been acquired, was the most important criterion. It was easier to marry ‘well’, to have prestigious personal and business associations, and to profit from government connections, if one had an important family name. An industrious unknown could, however, through hard work, accumulation of capital, marriage and kinship, and a bit of luck, work his way into the ranks of the respectable middle group of merchants. Personal achievement allowed for social mobility and produced a society in which there was a constant filtering of members in and out of the middle and upper merchant groups.

Examples of upward social mobility among the merchants are legion. Among the most outstanding cases is that of José Riera, who was able to build his estate from the 300 pesos which he had at the time of his marriage into a home, a café, a chacara in Olivos, eight slaves and the assets of a trading partnership with his son by the time of his death.67 Marcelino Calleja, listed in the 1778 census as an apprentice retailer, is another example of the social mobility which an ambitious young man could achieve in Buenos Aires.68 Calleja, a native of Castile of humble origin, worked his way up from mozo (apprentice to a retailer) to retailer, to merchant, and on 27 April 1785, at the age of 28, was married to Juana Francisca Prieto y Aguirre, daughter of Facundo Prieto y Púlido, a distinguished lawyer, and María Justa de Aguirre.69 Calleja later combined commerce with a career as an escribano (notary).

There is some suggestion that successful merchants did not forget their humble origins, and were willing, when they encountered worthy young men, to help them in repeating the same process of upward social and economic mobility. For example, Isidro Balbastro, a merchant who experienced a great degree of social mobility, no doubt aided Ignacio Rezabal, a young man living in Balbastro’s home and serving as his
dependiente in the 1778 census, to improve his position. Rezabal, a native of Guipuzcoa in the Basque provinces, was married on 30 April 1785 to Francisca Ugarte, daughter of Francisco Ignacio Ugarte, an established local merchant. Rezabal went on to become alcalde del primer voto in the 1805 Cabildo and consiliario of the 1809 Consulado, positions which reflect the social prominence which he had obtained.

Social mobility was not always upward. Prominent merchants and their sons, because of poor business sense, bad fortune, and worsening market conditions, could find their economic and social position slipping. Felipe Santiago del Pozo, a member of the prominent del Pozo family, died in economic and social disgrace. Francisco Basavilbaso, son of the important and wealthy merchant, Domingo Basavilbaso, was such a failure as a merchant that he was forced to rely on advances against his inheritance for money to feed and clothe his family. Before and after his father's death (while his father's estate was still being settled), Francisco bombarded his more successful brother Manuel with pleas for money to pay the shoemaker, to buy cloth to clothe his family, to have the windows of his house repaired, and to purchase a tub for his wife's medicinal baths. As early as 1770, Maria Aurelia Ros, Francisco's wife, penned a note to her brother-in-law explaining that 'I find myself with no money, and therefore must beg you to give me fifty pesos. I would not make this request if it weren't necessary to buy some trifles for my children and to pay the daily household expenses which, because of my large family, are great.' Ten years later, Francisco requested fifty pesos from his father's estate, this time because 'Maria Aurelia is expecting the birth [of a child] at any moment, and she hasn't prepared any clothing for the newborn.' The most pathetic request from Francisco came on 8 March 1784, when he wrote to this brother:

Dear brother, do not ignore my state and that of my wife, for whose cause I have become most sensitive. The youngest of our daughters has died. In order to give her a moderately decent burial, please send as much as seems sufficient to you, and also the 20 pesos for this month. Tomorrow morning I need to borrow your carriage so that her body can go to the church.

At the age of fifty-three Francisco finally accepted his ineptness at commerce and purchased a post as escribano.

Case studies of individual merchant mobility can be further clarified by documentary evidence of a specific individual's economic position at different times during his life. Two documents which indicate the wealth of the merchants, taken individually and studied in conjunction with one another, reflect a degree of accumulation of wealth which reinforces earlier discussions of social mobility for the merchant group in colonial
The merchants of Buenos Aires society. These documents, used to plot mobility and wealth, are the *capital*, a statement of the groom's assets at the time of marriage, and the *sucesión* or estate papers of the merchant, a statement of everything owned by the deceased.

The *capital*, an interesting index of the economic position of a merchant at the time of his marriage, was the masculine equivalent of a dowry. Both *capital* and dowry were usually drawn up at the same time, shortly before marriage. Information is not complete for the entire merchant group, but in those cases where wills or dowries were found, only 76 percent of the merchants drew up a corresponding *capital*. This suggests that almost one quarter of the merchants did not own sufficient property at the time of their marriage to warrant such an inventory. Of those 45 merchants in the sample who did draw up capitales, many were either rather poor (owning goods worth less than 5,000 pesos) or relatively wealthy (capitales of 35,000 pesos or more) when they married. These lists of goods, slaves, property and investments show that many of the merchants were just beginning to establish themselves in a firm economic position at the time of marriage. This fact, coupled with information of later prosperity, points to marriage itself as a principal avenue of social and economic mobility for the merchant group. Of all merchants, 24 percent had no *capital*, and were therefore, in terms of the economic realities of the time, members of the lower-middle groups of society at the time of marriage.

In addition to capitales, estate papers promulgated after the death of a merchant provide interesting information on economic mobility for individual merchants and for the merchant group as a whole. Information as to the total value of the estates of the merchants is scarce, but of those merchants whose estate papers are available, 29 percent ended their lives in bankruptcy. This high percentage reflects the precarious nature of the commerce of the Viceroyalty; a few shipments of inferior goods, combined with loans to others who turned out to be poor risks, could bring economic disaster. The large number of cases is further influenced by the fact that bankrupt merchants had their estates promulgated before the Juez de Difuntos, while other merchants could choose to have their estates settled privately. The documentation for bankruptcies therefore probably makes the phenomenon seem more prevalent than was actually the case.

More than half of the merchants left estates valued at 80,000 pesos or more, including a sizeable group whose estates were between 100,000 and 120,000 pesos. Another 16 percent of the merchants had estates of less than 80,000 pesos. Although data are incomplete, estate values
suggest considerable economic mobility of the merchant class between time of marriage and time of death, although it is obvious that such mobility was always accompanied by the risk of total economic collapse.

By comparing capitales to estate papers, economic mobility is also seen. Of those merchants who were not bankrupt at the time of death, and for whom we have complete capital and estate information, all but two doubled their original capital within their lifetimes. Many of the increases are gargantuan, and were not necessarily made by men who had accumulated large amounts of capital early in their careers. José Santos de Inchaurregui and Francisco Tellechea, for example, both began with very small capitales, and became extremely wealthy men. Their successes must be attributed to equal amounts of good business and marriage sense; both men allied themselves to powerful merchants as fathers-in-law, and both were able to benefit fully from this connection. Of those merchants who were not bankrupt at the time of death, and for whom we have complete capital and estate information, all but two doubled their original capital within their lifetimes. Many of the increases are gargantuan, and were not necessarily made by men who had accumulated large amounts of capital early in their careers. José Santos de Inchaurregui and Francisco Tellechea, for example, both began with very small capitales, and became extremely wealthy men. Their successes must be attributed to equal amounts of good business and marriage sense; both men allied themselves to powerful merchants as fathers-in-law, and both were able to benefit fully from this connection.77 Inchaurregui's estate was 51 times greater than his original capital; Tellechea's was 44 times greater than his capital. Even small scale importers, like Bernardo Pereda, starting with very reduced funds, were able to increase their wealth sixfold. It was this type of social and economic success which constantly drew young men from small towns in the mountains of Vizcaya and Galicia to the flat shores of Buenos Aires.

Business sense, hard work, luck and a good marriage could create a fortune, but death and a fertile wife could destroy it.78 The Spanish inheritance laws, which governed the division of a merchant's estate, made all property acquired after marriage joint property, belonging equally to both marriage partners. At the death of either spouse, the survivor was therefore entitled to one half of the estate.79 The other half was divided equally among all the legal heirs of the deceased, usually legitimate children. Both male and female heirs inherited equally, although dowries and gifts made to one's children intervivos could be subtracted from their final inheritance.

The inheritance laws which governed porteño society did provide for a slight preference of one heir over all others through the mejora del quinto and the mejora del tercio. The quinto allowed a testator to subtract up to one-fifth of his estate from the total of all goods, earmarking the funds for special bequests, funeral expenses and charity; the tercio allowed one-third of the estate to be granted to a favorite child.80 In theory at least the porteño merchant could have favored one of his sons in his will. But while funeral expenses and charity donations were frequently taken out of the quinto of a merchant's estate, the tercio was never assigned to one heir over all others. Although the use of the tercio to improve the position of one child would not have been as effective
as the mayorazgo in maintaining an estate intact, the merchants' universal rejection of the mejora del tercio implies a conscious decision not to use this legal formula. Perhaps this decision reflects many merchants' unwillingness deliberately to leave any of their children in a state of poverty akin to that which they had experienced in their earlier lives in northern Spain. Perhaps as victims of a social system encumbered by entailed farms, most merchants, as second and third sons forced off the land by laws which favored the first-born, subconsciously rejected any system which smacked of inequity. In addition, the merchants were aware that estates containing a mejora del tercio were sure to be involved in lengthy adjudication, thereby destroying the value of much of the estate, and harming all heirs.

Inheritance laws and merchant choice worked for the dissolution, in every generation, of the wealth accumulated by the merchant group. Although the actual percentage of an estate which each child inherited varied because of the amount of the capital and the dowry which had been brought at the time of marriage (these were not considered to be common property and therefore not divided with the surviving spouse), because of the number and amount of special bequests, and because of the number of surviving children, no merchant's heir ever inherited a large percentage of the total value of a merchant's estate.

The effect of the inheritance laws were felt by the heirs of merchants from all socio-economic levels. Francisco Segurola, for example, died leaving a substantial estate of over 395,000 pesos, but each of his nine surviving children inherited less than 18,000 pesos. His wife, a wealthy woman in her own right, left less than 10,000 pesos per child. In the case of merchants who had been less successful, the results of the inheritance laws could be disastrous. Bernardo Pereda's small estate was totally dissolved by its division among his wife and five surviving children.

Although partible inheritance worked to dissolve the fortunes built up over a lifetime, the merchants could do little, short of employing the unpopular tercio, to protect their estates. Unlike their counterparts in Mexico, the Buenos Aires merchants did not establish entailed estates or mayorazgos to guarantee that only one heir would inherit their wealth. Mayorazgos could only be formed with royal permission, permission the Crown was loath to grant. In addition mayorazgos were commonly founded on a base of rural property. The rural lands close to Buenos Aires were not considered to have great inherent value, and were not therefore an acceptable investment for a life's fortune. Other protection was no better. Business could not be converted into a joint-
The merchant population

stock company which could withstand the death of a founder, and interest-paying stocks and bonds were non-existent. Partnerships offered no protection for a merchant's capital, as all partnerships were automatically dissolved with the death of any partner. The merchant's only hope was that a son or son-in-law, whom he had trained, would continue in commerce, albeit with greatly reduced capital, trying, through personal contacts which the deceased merchant had earlier established, to recreate the earlier fortune.

Attempts to recreate the fortune of the founding merchant of the family met with varying degrees of success. At times a son or son-in-law, continuing in commerce, was able to amass a fortune equal to or greater than that which had been made by the older merchant. Juan de Lezica's son, Juan José; Domingo Basavilbaso's son-in-law, Vicente de Azcuénaga; and Azcuenaga's son-in-law, Gaspar de Santa Coloma, are all examples of men who equaled or surpassed the original family fortune. But other merchants were unable to recoup the fortunes of their merchant fathers or fathers-in-law, in part because the original estate was too decimated to withstand the vicissitudes of commerce. A family chain like that of Basavilbaso–Azcuenaga–Santa Coloma, three generations of successful merchants within one family, was exceptional. More typical were the Peredas, a family which failed to maintain its social and economic position past the second generation.

The inheritance laws also produced a society in which all a merchant's male children had essentially the same career opportunities and the same inheritance. The pattern of the first son inheriting the land, and the second son entering the Church did not exist in Buenos Aires. Instead, free choice of careers, given normal social and economic limitations, prevailed. Although partible inheritance did not preserve individual fortunes, the fact that women inherited equally made a merchant's daughter more desirable as a marriage partner. We will explore the importance of marriage patterns to the merchant group in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 2
Women, marriage and kinship

The marriage patterns of the merchants are important as they are linked to their patterns of social mobility. In addition, marriage provided the merchants with a means of cementing individuals and families into kinship groups and clans. Therefore the social and geographical background of the women whom the merchants married, as well as the social and legal position of the women themselves, were crucial to the organization and life patterns of the merchant group.

Not surprisingly, women in Spanish colonial society were thought of as inferior beings simply because of their female status; the very condition of being a woman consigned the female to a lesser rank than that of a man. Although she had limited legal rights (such as the right to inherit), no upper or middle class woman could enter a profession, as she was felt to be incapable of any life outside her home. Only three options were open to the women of Buenos Aires: marriage, spinsterhood, or entrance into a cloistered nunnery.

From reports of travelers to Buenos Aires it is apparent that women who chose marriage or spinsterhood were expected to lead a quiet, genteel life centering on home and church. In their homes and at fetes, women were not expected to display any intelligence, but rather to provide the gracious touch to entertaining – providing sweet and lively chatter, performing Spanish and French dances, playing the guitar and singing. Playing the harpsichord was another mark of female accomplishment. Women were always chaperoned outside their homes, and well-bred women did not mingle with 'common' people. Vidal observed, for example, that respectable women did not frequent the local food markets of the city. Although invited to balls, parties and tertulias, women were excluded from many of the gatherings which made up much of the male social life.

Porteña women, prized for essentially childlike qualities, were also punished like children. The wife or daughter of an upper or middle class man could be interned by her husband or father in a female
religious institution when her conduct was felt to be unbecoming for a woman of her station and class. Women who refused to live with their husbands were usually sent to the Casa de Niñas Huérfanas (Girls’ Orphanage); girls who had defied their parents were also interned there or in the Casa de Ejercicios (House of Religious Retreat). María (Mariquita) Sánchez de Velazco, daughter of merchant Cecilio Sánchez de Velazco, was sent to the Casa when she fell in love against her parents’ wishes.4

In view of their inferior position, some of the porteñas’ legal rights are surprising. Women could be named tutors and guardians of their own children upon the death of their husbands. They could also serve as administrators of their husbands’ estates. There was, however, a general supposition that, although legally competent to fulfill these roles, a woman lacked sufficient knowledge of life in general and of business in particular to succeed. The majority of merchants, therefore, named their wives to the position of first executrice of their estates, but converted this position into a purely honorific one; either another man was named as co-executor, or it was stated that the second and third executors would take on the actual administration of the estate.5 From time to time a merchant would experience a change of heart, first limiting and later enlarging his wife’s executor privileges.6

Occasionally a woman did manage the estate of her husband, and even take over his business, either alone, or in conjunction with a son or brother-in-law. Flora de Azcuenaga, for example, daughter of Vicente de Azcuenaga, a major merchant of the period, and wife of Gaspar de Santa Coloma, another important mercantile figure, successfully completed some of the smaller business transactions left by her husband at the time of his death in 1815.7 María Bernarda de Lezica, daughter of Juan de Lezica, and widow of Francisco de Segurola, also continued some of her husband’s business transactions, making loans to merchants but it is likely that she first sought the advice of her brother, Juan José de Lezica.8

A more typical merchant widow was Catalina de Pizarro. Catalina, an extremely capable woman with good business sense (judging from the legal suit with her son-in-law), petitioned the court to name Diego Agüero, a merchant, as her son’s financial guardian in her stead. Both Catalina and her son, Miguel José Caviedes, agreed that the boy’s inheritance needed a man’s council to be put to profitable use. Miguel José testified that ‘my inheritance cannot achieve the growth and advantageous circulation in business of which it is capable, because my mother, like all women, lacks the aptitude to promote my wealth’.9
The merchants of Buenos Aires

Catalina concurred, stating that 'a woman, because of her very sex and quality, cannot enter into the management and trade which are indispensable for the growth of riches'.

Although women were not encouraged to obtain advanced education, and were not permitted to attend the Colegio de San Carlos, they were allowed to achieve basic literacy. Almost 90 percent of the wives of the porteño merchants were at least able to sign their names, albeit sometimes in a rather childish script. More than one merchant's wife was able to pen legible notes, although again the general impression of the handwriting is that of a child, or an adult with little practice in writing. The effort to sign their names seemingly became too great as the merchants' wives aged. Petrona Vera, wife of Juan José de Lezica, able to sign her name in 1776, claimed 38 years later that she could not sign a document for reasons of no saber.

During the early part of the eighteenth century women were educated at home, but by the decade of the 1770s a new educational institution, the Colegio de Huérfanos, appeared. This school, which taught 'letters, sewing, Christian doctrine and other tasks befitting their sex' to young ladies, was functioning by 1772. Originally founded to educate orphan girls, the school expanded to include the daughters of 'decent and distinguished people' who, although studying the same curriculum as the orphans, were instructed in a separate room, away from inmates of the orphanage. The colegialas were charged a monthly tuition of 2 pesos 1 real. Many of the wealthier merchants enrolled their daughters in this school; among the earlier students was one of Vicente de Azcuenaga's daughters. By 1792, five of the 22 students were daughters of local merchants. In addition, other church schools, such as the San Miguel School, also provided education for young ladies of good background.

Although most merchant wives were at best only barely literate, such rudimentary literacy (i.e., ability to sign one's name) is rather impressive in terms of the society and the times. Literacy in general was not widespread, and was especially unusual among members of the female sex. Women as socially prominent as Inés and Antonia Chauri, celibate sisters and nieces of the Dean of the Cathedral of Buenos Aires, José de Andujar, were totally illiterate. The data, therefore, suggest that the merchant class attached special importance to literacy even to the point of encouraging wives and daughters (future merchant wives) to master at least the more basic skills.

Education, both formal and informal, was designed to prepare a young woman for marriage. Merchants usually married, and as marriage served to mark formal initiation into the merchant group, marriage also
produced a high degree of geographic stability. At the time of the 1778 census, 76 percent of the merchants of the city were married, and almost all had their wives living with them in Buenos Aires. The small group of merchants who had married in Spain and had left their wives in the Peninsula when they came to seek their fortunes in the New World, were usually transients. Only 10 percent of the 1778 merchants remained bachelors during their whole lifetime.

The marriage patterns of the merchants are important because they reflect those status groups open to the merchants, (i.e., those groups which treated the merchants as their approximate equals). The occupational background of the fathers of the merchants’ brides, fortunately, is well documented and it is extremely important in understanding the social mobility patterns of the merchant group. A full 66 percent of the merchants’ wives were daughters of merchants, and almost all of their fathers were in the commerce of Buenos Aires. Only 18 percent of the fathers of merchant wives were high-ranking military officers, and like their husbands, merchant wives were usually not the offspring of professional men or bureaucrats. Unlike their husbands, very few merchant wives had fathers who were landowners. This occupational difference is tied to different geographical origins for the merchants and their wives.

The vast majority of merchant wives were natives of Buenos Aires; their husbands were usually Spanish-born. Only 9 percent of the wives were born in Spain, and the same number were born in other areas of the colonies, primarily in the cities of the interior of the La Plata area or Alto Perú. Wives, therefore, were overwhelmingly of creole birth, connected to established families, with local roots, while merchant husbands were generally outsiders. Marriage served as a vehicle by which the Spanish-born merchant consolidated his position in porteño society. This pattern of the socially established creole woman marrying the newly arrived Spaniard was in Buenos Aires, like in most of Spanish America, the accepted norm; all other patterns were somewhat atypical.

The marriage pattern which united creole women to Spanish men was repeated through several generations during the colonial period. Examples of porteño merchant daughters marrying Spaniards, as did their mothers, are myriad. When a porteño merchant, creole or Spanish-born, married a Spanish-born bride she was always associated through kinship with one of the mercantile families of Buenos Aires. Juan Martín de Pueyrredon’s son, for example, a young creole merchant, married his cousin, Dolores Pueyrredon, a native of Cádiz. Dolores was, of course, related to the Pueyrredon family.
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The relatively young age at which would-be merchants arrived in the colony and their comparative poverty early in life meant that the overwhelmingly majority of merchants came to Buenos Aires as bachelors, began commercial undertakings and, after about ten years, married in the colony. This of course reinforced their choice of porteño women as marriage partners.

The high degree of class endogamy demonstrated by the merchant group gave continuity to the mercantile enterprises of the period. Through the marriage of their daughters to younger merchants, merchants of the colony cemented old partnerships and formed new ones. For the merchant father, marriage of his daughter to a younger merchant promised continuation of the family business, introduction of new energy and capital, and a decent life for his daughter. He had married his daughter to a man whose behavior he could understand and judge, and whose standards of sobriety, hard work and good business sense were his own. To the groom, his marriage to the merchant’s daughter heralded an alliance with an established merchant, extension of business and personal contacts through the offices of his father-in-law, access to goods and lending capital, and acceptance by fellow merchants. The young merchant who married a merchant’s daughter proved himself to be a serious participant in porteño life and trade. His willingness to settle down, coupled with his entrance into an established mercantile family, was the final initiation into the merchant group.

The socio-economic background of merchant wives reveal that marriage was as important as trade in providing an avenue of social mobility for the merchants of Buenos Aires. The merchants tended to marry young women who could provide necessary social and professional connections within the colony. The most prevalent pattern was that of marriage of a merchant into a porteño family which had acquired its fortune in commerce. Only the wealthiest merchants, or sons of established merchants, married creole women from other social groups or geographical locations. These men, more secure in their economic and social position, and (in the case of merchant sons) already having the needed kinship ties to an established merchant, tended to marry daughters of military men, bureaucrats and professionals. Even if the non-commercial families did not provide the economic support of the merchant families, marriage to a daughter of an important military or government man could strengthen a young merchant’s social standing considerably.

Marriage into the upper and middle classes of the city was the goal of all young merchants. For those who had shown commercial talent and
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sense, the local merchants were only too glad to comply with these wishes. Spanish merchants especially were considered to be exceptional husbands, hard-working and dedicated. As a visitor to Buenos Aires noted, ‘families reputed to be of the greatest distinction, are continually welcoming new inhabitants of Buenos Aires to their ranks – outsiders who develop the commerce which this country enjoys’.

Marriage was of commercial interest and the choice of a marriage partner was never left to the woman concerned. It was feared that her decision might be a purely romantic one, disregarding commercial and social interests and, therefore, harmful to the economic and social future of her family. Her father, it was thought, could make a sound decision, choosing a marriage partner who would not only provide for his daughter, but would further the family’s business interests. María Sánchez de Velasco described merchant marriage arrangements as follows:

A Spaniard would come to Buenos Aires to make his fortune. He was helped by the times. His money earned interest, he watched over it, he protected it. He became a merchant... This was a marriage candidate for one of the daughters. The father arranged everything to his liking. He told his wife, and the bride about it three or four days before the wedding. This was the usual way... The poor daughter would not have dared to raise the least objection. She had to obey. The fathers thought that they knew what was best for their daughters, and it was a waste of time to try to make them change their minds. A pretty girl would marry a man who was neither handsome nor elegant, nor fine, and who, besides, could have been her father. But, he was a man of sound judgment and good business sense. That was all that was important.

Merchants frequently chose their clerks or younger partners as husbands for their daughters. Evidence in the capitales demonstrates that it was quite common for the younger merchant to have had some prior business connections with his father-in-law before taking marital vows. Although it was most common for only one daughter to marry a merchant, in many families where there were both large numbers of female offspring and suitable merchant candidates, as many as six sisters were married to their father’s business associates. One such example is the children of Francisco de Segurola and María Bernarda de Lezica, herself a merchant’s daughter. Of their seven surviving daughters, six married merchants, and one became a nun. One of the Segurola sons also married the daughter of a local merchant.

Regardless of the profession of a merchant’s father-in-law, there was a marked difference between the age at marriage for merchants and their spouses. Of the merchants, 58 percent entered into their first marriage between the ages of 25 and 34; 27 percent married between
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the ages of 35 and 44. Only 12 percent of the merchants married before they obtained their legal majority (age 25), and these tended to be native-born sons of established merchants who had guaranteed social and economic security. By contrast, 55 percent of the merchants' wives were less than 20 years old at the time of marriage; 36 percent were between the ages of 14 and 17. After their twentieth birthday, the marriage rate dropped sharply for women—only 15 percent of the merchants' wives were between the ages of 21 and 23 at the time of marriage, and another 15 percent were over 23. The vast majority of merchant wives were legal minors at the time of marriage and, as such, had to obtain parental consent. Any possibility of marrying a man who was not of her parents' choosing was therefore further decreased and the tendency to use marriage as a vehicle for strengthening business connections was reinforced. The average age of a merchant at the time of his first marriage was thirty-five years old; the average age of his bride was eighteen.

The small group of women who married at the relatively late age of between 24 and 29 years of age, usually married men who, from the time of arrival in Buenos Aires to the time of their death, showed great social mobility. It can be hypothesized that these men, poor at the time of their marriage, had to settle for women well on their way to spinsterhood. Examples of this behavior were demonstrated by José Riera, Juan Bautista de Azcuenaga, Bernardo Pereda and Domingo de Basavilbaso, all of whom married older women.

The difference in the respective ages at the time of marriage between merchants and their wives is reflected in the 1778 census. Of the group of 111 merchant couples present in Buenos Aires, 56 percent of the husbands were from 5 to 14 years older than their wives. Another 24 percent of the husbands were more than 15 years senior to their consorts, while in only 15 percent of the marriages were the spouses within the same approximate age group. In only 5 percent of the marriages was the bride older than the groom. In all of these cases the woman had been past the prime marriage age at the time of her wedding.

It is important to note that continuity of professional and familial enterprises in the mercantile community was provided more through marriage of merchant daughters than through merchant sons following the same career as their fathers. One-half of the merchants had one or more sons who followed a mercantile career, but more than two-thirds of the merchants had at least one daughter who married a merchant. Thus it was the son-in-law, not the son, who generally inherited the merchant's economic position, connections and business, for although
the material aspects of the estate had to be divided at death, social and business connections could be maintained. Although not apparent at first glance because of the different last name of a merchant's son-in-law, considerable business continuity between generations was maintained through the female line of the mercantile families. In this manner the large mercantile clans, which were of central importance to the society of vice-regal Buenos Aires, were established.

At the time of marriage, a young woman's father could grant her a dowry, but dowries were far from universal and were not usually a major vehicle for the transfer of wealth. Only three-quarters of the merchants' brides were dowered at the time of marriage and of these one-quarter received dowries of less than 2,500 pesos. Ten percent of the merchants who declared a capital married a dowerless woman. Only 8 percent of the merchants' wives were granted large dowries of more than 25,000 pesos. The generally low value of the dowries suggests that it was not goods which were prized but rather social and business connections which the bride brought to the marriage.

There was little fixed pattern in the relationship between the amount of wealth a man had at the time of marriage and the size of the dowry which his wife received. In some cases, the dowry was larger than the capital (Martín de Alzaga, Inchaurregui, Ruiz Gaona, Wright, Erezcano, Letamendi) suggesting that the bride was probably of a higher socio-economic standing than the groom. In other cases, the amounts of the capital and dowry were more or less the same (Basavilbaso), but in the majority of cases, the capital was far greater than the dowry. Even when a woman's father could not provide a dowry, she remained a socially desirable partner because of her connections with other merchants. Those women without dowries were married to men whose capitales ranged from quite large (Capdevilla) to very small (Pereda). Again there is no clear-cut pattern.

Dowries consisted overwhelmingly of clothing for the bride, but slaves, property, houses, kitchen utensils, furniture, paintings, jewelry, silverware, cloth and holy objects were also commonly included. The wealthiest merchants also included cash settlements in their daughters' dowries. Legally a dowry always belonged to the woman, although its control actually passed directly from the hands of her father into those of her husband, leaving her with no control at all. Only upon the death of her husband was the dowry returned to the woman, in goods (although not necessarily the same goods which she had brought to the marriage) worth the same amount as the original dowry.

Some dowries granted in the merchant marriages were splendid
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indeed by the standards of the time, but dowering, as we have seen, was far from universal, even among the wealthy. Manuela de Lezica, for example, the daughter of Juan José de Lezica, was not given any dowry at the time of her marriage to Francisco Tellechea. Because her husband was wealthy in his own right, because she was his second wife, and because her father felt he could not part with capital at that time, she entered the marriage with nothing more 'than the decency of her person'. Among the larger dowries granted to merchant women were 30,000 pesos in dowry given to Juana de Lezica, 20,029 pesos in dowry given to Flora de Azcuenaga, and 20,000 pesos in dowry given to María Bernarda de Lezica.

Although most dowries were granted at the time of marriage, there could be a long delay before the goods involved were turned over to the new husband. This practice of delayed payment often occasioned complaints from the bridegroom, who was anxious to increase his worldly goods, and eager to have a new source of liquid capital; the practice, however, allowed many merchant fathers-in-law to continue to invest money which legally was no longer theirs.

The dowry was theoretically a portion of the woman's inheritance, and was usually subtracted from her portion of her parents' estate. Some women, who did not bring any dowry with them at the time of marriage, nevertheless eventually brought considerable inheritances to their union. Francisco Tellechea's first wife, Matea de Caviedes, for example, brought no dowry when she married Tellechea, but later inherited about 12,000 pesos worth of real estate, silverware, jewelry and clothing from her merchant father and mother.

The dowry only reflected the total wealth of the bride when both of her parents were deceased at the time of her marriage. Dowered brides could also inherit additional sums of money or goods. The advantage to receiving a large dowry at the time of marriage, instead of waiting for an inheritance, was that it increased the economic power of the groom at an earlier date. Conversely, the bride's father, especially if he were an active merchant, was loath to part with a substantial portion of his working capital during his lifetime, preferring to give social rather than economic support.

Much of a woman's inheritance or dowry consisted of goods, but that portion of the inheritance or dowry which was in cash was usually invested by the merchant husband in commerce or in a commercial loan. For example, included in the dowry of María de la Encarnación Cires, daughter of merchant Eusebio Cires and wife of merchant Gabriel Real.
de Azúa, was 2,000 pesos in cash. This sum, which was received by Real de Azúa on 1 January 1798, was lent by him to Francisco de Escalada, a fellow merchant on 2 January 1798.29

When a merchant's daughter married another merchant, her dowry was often linked to matters of commerce. The dowry could be used by the parents of the bride to transfer commercial transactions to the groom, or to settle outstanding debts between father-in-law and son-in-law. The dowry could also help the groom to solidify his position in porteño commerce. Business was tied to marriage in the dowry of Gabriela Basavilbaso, daughter of Domingo de Basavilbaso, a leading merchant of the period. Gabriela was married in 1753 to Pascual Ibáñez de Echaurri, a partner in a store with her father. As part of Gabriela's dowry, Ibáñez de Echaurri was given 6,752 pesos worth of merchandise, corresponding to her father's share of the business.30 Basavilbaso thereby used his daughter's dowry to sell out his portion of the business, while Ibáñez de Echaurri used it to buy out his father-in-law without becoming indebted to him. Legally Ibáñez de Echaurri was indebted to his wife, but it was a debt without term or interest.

In some cases, large parts of their wives' dowries consisted of debts owed to the women's late fathers. The dowry granted María Magdalena Carrera, daughter of the late Francisco de Carrera and Josefa de Inda, at the time of her marriage to Martín de Alzaga, contained, in addition to 20,665 pesos of clothing (both new and used), furniture, slaves and jewelry, 19,105 pesos of outstanding debts due Carrera's estate.31 Alzaga, a young man just beginning his career in wholesale commerce, agreed to collect this money in his wife's name, and in fact, was able eventually to recover 16,590 pesos.32 Control of these debts gave Alzaga added economic leverage, and helped to improve his own position while continuing commercial ventures begun by Carrera. For the bride's mother there was also a clear advantage in the marriage of her daughter to a merchant. Alzaga had the knowledge of commerce necessary to recoup money due the Carrera estate; debts, which would have been worthless in the hands of Carrera's widow, were turned into working capital by her merchant son-in-law.

Arras, or a handsel, could also be included in the wedding contract, whether or not the bride was dowered. This gift, given by the groom to the bride in tribute to her virginity, purity, virtue and good breeding, was legally never greater than one-tenth of the groom's total wealth. The arras were always assigned a value, and again, did not pass into the hands of the bride until after the death of her husband, when, as with dowries,
she usually received the value of the handsel in the form of goods. Although originally consisting of thirteen pieces of silver, *arras* usually ranged from 1,000 to 16,000 pesos.

The merchants overwhelmingly favored marriage, whether to a fellow merchant or a military officer, as the proper state for their nubile daughters. The vast majority of the merchants’ daughters who survived to adulthood married (82 percent), but of those who did not marry, only a few entered convents and took religious vows. Like women about to be married, prospective nuns were granted dowries by their parents at the time they took their final vows, but in the case of a woman entering a convent, a dowry was mandatory. The dowry given a nun, unlike that granted to her secular sisters, was always in cash, to be turned over immediately to the religious order. For example, María Eusebia de Gainza, daughter of José Blas de Gainza, entered the Order of Saint Catherine in 1795. Her dowry was fixed by the Order at 1,500 pesos. This sum, although not exorbitant when compared to some of the larger dowries granted to women of the merchant group, tended to limit entrance into the orders to daughters of wealthier merchants or those with large amounts of liquid capital.

From the point of view of the merchant, regardless of his piety, a daughter’s entrance into a convent was not highly desirable, for it definitely removed her from the marriage market, and from her function of cementing business ties through matrimony. The prerequisite that nuns be dowered, and that the dowry be in cash, further lessened the attraction of a religious calling in the eyes of the merchants. The merchant could not choose to postpone turning over some of his capital, nor could he use outstanding debts or goods from his store to dower his daughter. Many of the girls who entered convents had genuine religious vocations, but at least one contemporary observer explained the choice of a religious life in terms of a rebellion against marriage to a man for whom they had no love. According to María Sánchez de Velazco, ‘many young women preferred to become nuns than to marry against their personal wishes to men who inspired aversion rather than love in them.’ Nevertheless, comparatively few merchants’ daughters chose the religious life, preferring marriage to religious retreat.

The Catholic marriage ceremony, as practiced in colonial Buenos Aires, was a two-part ritual consisting of a nuptial mass to be said at the time of the actual wedding, followed by a *velación*, or veiling ceremony. The nuptial mass was performed in the cathedral or in one of the parish churches of the city, but the offspring of wealthier merchants were frequently married by the bishop in his episcopal palace.
nuptial mass was private, limited to only close family and friends, but many of the most important merchant marriages of the period, especially those in which important government officials took part, attracted large numbers of participants. Both nuptial mass and veiling included the participation of witnesses who also acted as ritual godparents for the couple. Most often there was only one set of ritual godparents, but different godparents could be named for each ceremony.

Although rare, there is record of secret marriages performed for the merchants of Buenos Aires. Jacobo Adrián Varela, a merchant originally from La Coruña, was married to María de la Encarnación San Gines, daughter of Manuel Alfonso San Gines, merchant and Alguacil Mayor of the Inquisition, on 16 June 1792 in a private, secret service. Although the reason for secrecy is not known, it is evident that the couple was eager to be married; they had received a dispensation from all three banns before their marriage. Nine months later the couple participated in a secret veiling ceremony. At both times the godparents were sworn to secrecy. Two weeks after the veiling ceremony, the Church publicly announced the marriage.

Although never officially sanctioned, there is some suggestion of the practice of trial marriage by some merchants, especially those from lower social and economic backgrounds. These unions were only formalized after the birth of a child, suggesting that the fertility of the woman was of paramount importance to the union. A possible example of trial marriage was that of Joaquín Pinto. Pinto, an immigrant from the Montañas de Burgos, who began as a poor merchant and was able to work his way into the ranks of the medium-scale importers, registered the baptism of his three-day-old daughter, Marcelina Josefina, on 27 April 1764. The mother of the child was Rita Lobo, a native of Buenos Aires. Three months later, on 1 August 1764, Joaquín Pinto and Rita Lobo were married in a private ceremony in the cathedral; they were veiled on 4 September of the same year. Their earlier illicit union did not in any way affect their respectability.

Unmarried merchants sometimes formed liaisons with young women which led to the birth of illegitimate children. These women, although of Spanish descent, were not considered to be socially acceptable as brides for their lovers, perhaps because they had no mercantile connections. Manuel de Escalada and Manuel Joaquín Zapiola, two important porteño merchants, both fathered illegitimate sons early in their careers; Miguel Capdevilla was reputed to be the father of at least three bastard children. All these men made some provisions for their illegitimate children although their willingness fully to accept the paternity of the bastards differed.
Merchant marriage was usually followed quickly by childbirth, and this coupled with the relative age difference between a merchant and his wife, affected the age pyramid of merchants' wives. Childbirth was extremely hazardous, and many women died while giving birth. Risks of death in childbirth were highest at the first birth and when the mother was older than thirty-five. Of those women married to merchants and present in Buenos Aires in 1778, 51 percent fell into the 25- to 39-year-old age group, and 22 percent were in the 15- to 24-year-old age group. Only 27 percent of the women were over 40.

Data do not exist to allow calculation of sophisticated demographic ratios such as the death rate or the average life expectancy for colonial Buenos Aires. It is most probable that the average life expectancy was low, with 35 or 40 being the general age of death of the *porteño* population. Because the merchants were of a privileged economic and social class, and because they did receive medical treatment, the average life expectancy for the adults in the group must have been higher than the population at large.

The data which are available for the merchant population, the age at death of those merchants who survived long enough to establish themselves and set up a family, point to an average lifespan which is surprisingly long, given the age and medical and hygienic level in the colony. The merchants of Buenos Aires lived to an age of 67.5 years, on the average ($N = 52$); the average lifespan for their wives ($N = 40$) was 56.3 years.

Some of the merchants achieved lifespans which, even today, would be very unusual. Cristóbal de Aguirre, for example, lived to the age of 94; Francisco Antonio de Escalada attained the age of 86, and both Gregorio Ramos Mexía and José de Lezica reached 80 years of age. At the other extreme, Francisco de Segurola, Andrés Rincón and Francisco de la Peña all died at the age of 48. Not all merchant wives died young. Several lived to the seventh or eighth decade of their lives, including the consorts of Juan José de Lezica, Francisco de la Peña, Antonio José de Escalada, Gaspar de Santa Coloma, Isidro José Balbastro and Francisco Baldovinos. But childbirth, both directly and indirectly, often led to death at an early age for women. The first wife of Eugenio José Balbastro, the first wife of Antonio José de Escalada, and Francisco Tellechea's first and second wives, for example, all died while bearing a child, and all were younger than 35 at the time of death.

Mortality rates for merchants' wives tended to be approximately the same for all age groups with the only noticeable drop among women between the ages of 45 and 49. These data reinforce the observation that childbirth was a significant cause of mortality among women; only in
that group too old to bear children, but too young to die of illnesses usually associated with old age, is the mortality rate markedly reduced among merchants' wives. Merchants, on the other hand, had no appreciable mortality until the age of 45. Except for a drop in mortality in the 55 to 59 age group, the male mortality rate follows a well-defined curve, peaking at ages 70 to 74, an outstanding lifespan for the eighteenth century.

In spite of the risk of death during or following childbirth, merchants and their wives, in general, enjoyed long marriages. This was especially true considering the short lifespan and consequent short duration of marriages of the population as a whole. Of a group of 54 prominent merchant couples, the average marriage lasted for 26 years. Some merchant couples were married for as long as 55 years (Joaquin Pinto and his wife) while marriages lasting from 40 to 50 years were not uncommon. At the other end of the spectrum, some merchant marriages lasted less than five years, usually terminated by the death of the wife in childbirth. Ramos Mexia, Sancho Larrea and Tellechea were all widowed within three years of marriage because of complications following the birth of a child. The existence of many merchant couples who had been married for a comparatively long time, increased the solid, respectable impression of the entire merchant group; the length of unions also strengthened the ties between a merchant and his wife's kinsmen.

Although the number of children born to a merchant couple was largely influenced by the duration of the marriage, other variables, such as age of the mother at marriage and age of the mother at the onset of menopause, also determined family size. There is no indication of any conscious effort to limit family size among the merchants, but factors such as the general health of the mother, infertility, and a tendency to miscarry affected the number of children born to merchant women. Of the sample group of 54 merchant couples for whom the data are complete, 12 percent of the women married for more than ten years were either infertile, or bore only 1 or 2 children. It should be remembered that this group represented those members of society who enjoyed a better living standard, more varied food and better medical attention than the population at large. Infertility among the general population was no doubt greater. Infertility for the larger merchant group of 115, including middle and lower level merchants, for example, was 8 percent, while another 13 percent of the merchant wives bore only one or two children. In addition, economic status seems to have affected fertility, with the more prosperous families having more children. The average number of children for the group of 54 prosperous merchants
was eight children per family, while for the larger sample of 115 merchants, the average number was seven children per family.

Of the group of 115 merchants, 60 percent of the couples had 7 or more children born during the course of their marriage. Again these data give no indication of a conscious attempt to limit family size. Only the absence of the merchant husband, caused by travel related to commerce, seems to have limited the frequency of intercourse and thus conception.

Most merchant wives bore their first child within the first year and a half of marriage, and continued to produce offspring at fourteen- to twenty-month intervals during the early years of their marriage. The interval between conceptions slowed to twenty to twenty-six months once the woman had passed the age of twenty-six, no doubt caused in part by the physical stress of repeated childbirth. Again the number of children conceived was related to wealth and prestige, with wealthier merchants tending to have the largest families. The age of the wife at the time of marriage also had a bearing on the number of children conceived, but as the general tendency among women was to marry young, this variable was frequently unimportant.

Although an average of 7 children were born to the merchant families, only 4.7 of these children survived to age fifteen (i.e., early adulthood). Almost one out of every three children born to the merchant class died during infancy or childhood. Infertility and high infant mortality combined to leave 15 percent of the merchants without a single surviving heir of either sex, thereby affecting group continuity. On the other hand, 57 percent of the merchants had 3 to 8 children surviving to adulthood, enough progeny to diminish seriously a merchant's estate and to threaten economic continuity. There was a tendency for more male children than female children to be born to merchants, but infant mortality was far greater for boys than girls. The birth ratio was 100.8 male births per 100 female births, but for every 100 daughters who survived to early adulthood, there were only 86 surviving sons.

Seventeen percent of the merchant group had no sons born to them, and another 24 percent had no male children surviving to adulthood. For this large group of merchants the only way to perpetuate business was to marry their daughters to fellow merchants. For another 39 percent (44 cases) of the merchants, only 1 or 2 sons survived to adulthood; these men were also eager to recruit a merchant son-in-law to assure continuation of their mercantile enterprises. As sons were in short supply and often slated for more prestigious occupations, and as the merchants seemed to have an abundance of daughters, the propensity to seek a merchant son-in-law to continue in successful trade was reinforced.
Women, marriage and kinship

There was no social prohibition against remarrying after the death of one's spouse for either men or women. Both merchants and merchants' widows remarried, but it was uncommon for most widows older than thirty-five to find a second husband. The child-bearing capacity of the woman seems to have played some part in her marriage chances. Only socially prominent widows with large commercial inheritances were good marriage candidates regardless of age. María Eugenia de Azcuenaga (widow of Agustín Erezcano) and María Encarnación de Lezica (widow of Manuel Zapiola), for example, took second husbands comparatively late in life. They were 38 and 43 years old, respectively.

In almost all cases of remarriage by women, both the first and second husbands were merchants. Widows of wealthy merchants were more apt to remarry than widows of less successful ones. This was, of course, quite natural, given the fact that the widow brought to her second marriage her dowry (returned to her upon the death of her first husband), her family connections (she was usually also the daughter of a merchant), plus her first husband's business connections and part of his business (in the form of inheritance). These assets made her a desirable partner for a young merchant trying to improve his socio-economic position in society. It also helps to explain why widows tended to have, as second husbands, men closer to them in age than were their first spouses.

Although merchants' widows had the greatest chance for remarriage if they were young and wealthy, there was no clear pattern for remarriage among the merchants, nor was there any tendency to be of a certain age, social group, or origin. Juan José de Lezica, widowed within three years of his childless marriage to María Rosa Anselma de Riglos y San Martín, was married to Petrona Antonia de Vera at the age of twenty-eight. Naturally Lezica, the scion of an important mercantile family, sought to remarry to continue the family line. Both of his wives were from important military families in the area. Tomás Insúa, one of the middle-group merchants who was widowed after 22 years of marriage to Juana Rosa Coles, found a new mother for his six children within three years of his first wife's death. In 1792, Insúa, aged 57, married young Rafaela García. Rafaela, who three years earlier had been a student at San Miguel School, was a close friend of the family, and a confidante of Insúa's first wife. Before Insúa's death in 1802, Rafaela bore him three more children.

Francisco Tellechea, a native of Otanes, in the province of Santander, has the distinction of being the merchant who married most often. Tellechea, who began as a lesser partner of Manuel de Caviedes in 1781, progressed to a full partner after his marriage to Caviedes' fifteen-year-old daughter, Matea, in 1785.
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Tellechea's capital was 7,000 pesos. Matea, who inherited 12,000 pesos after the death of her parents, died in childbirth at the age of thirty-four. One year later, Tellechea, a widower with five children, married Manuela de Lezica, daughter of Juan José de Lezica, a prominent merchant. Manuela, fifteen years old, was given arras of 16,000 pesos by her groom, who was now worth 160,000 pesos. Manuela bore Tellechea one daughter, but within three years of her marriage, she too was dead. Less than a year later, Tellechea married again, this time to María Ana Ballesteros, who was given arras of 10,000 pesos by her bridegroom. In three years she bore him three children.

There is only one case of a widower merchant who took a widow as his second wife. Francisco Ignacio Ugarte, married María Eugenia de Azcuenaga, daughter of Vicente de Azcuenaga and widow of Agustín Erezcano, on 27 November 1800. Ugarte, who had fathered ten children and had been widowed ten months before, was sixty-two at the time of his second marriage. María Eugenia, the mother of six children, was thirty-eight. Seven years later she bore him a daughter who did not survive infancy. Ugarte's first wife, Vicenta Ramona Uriarte, was a first cousin of María Eugenia's father, who, with his wife, had served as godparents for Ugarte's first marriage and for the baptisms of two of his children. María Eugenia, heiress of both her father and husband, and the daughter of a kinsman, was an excellent partner for the elderly Ugarte.

Although not widespread, there are examples of consanguineous marriage among members of the merchant group. Two patterns predominate: marriage between cousins, and marriage between uncles and their nieces. Manuel Arana Torresuri, for example, a merchant from Vizcaya, married Manuela Artechea Torresuri, his first cousin from the same town. Miguel Fernández de Agüero, Eugenio José Balbastro and Francisco Antonio de Basavilbaso also married their cousins.

Two of the sons of Juan José de Lezica married their nieces. Manuel Isidoro de Lezica, a merchant like his father, married Petrona Peña Lezica, the daughter of Francisco de la Peña, a merchant, and Manuel's sister, Juana Ventura de Lezica. His brother, José Faustino, married Robustiana Tellechea, the daughter of Francisco Tellechea and Manuela de Lezica, another of Juan José's children. These marriages, all performed after the end of the vice-regal period, can be linked directly to the Lezica clan's attempt to maintain its social and economic position by preventing any further fragmentation of the family fortune.

Two major patterns of natural kinship existed among the merchants of Buenos Aires. Most prevalent was the pattern of kinship by marriage, or affinal kinship. As noted previously, the marriage patterns of women
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were intimately tied to the social and business life of the colony. The major types of affinal kinship found in Buenos Aires were father and son-in-law, brother and brother-in-law (cunados), and brothers-in-law (concunados) relations. A second pattern, less common but forming a stronger social bond, was consanguineous kinship, kinship by blood. Into this group fell all father-son, brother-brother, and uncle-nephew merchant relationships. The two patterns were not mutually exclusive and often overlapped. Of a sample group of middle and high level merchants active during the vice-regal period, 90 percent had at least one close kinship link to another porteño merchant.

Affinal kinship was a dynamic social force in mercantile society, and social and economic success was based to a great degree on the ability of an individual to establish lines of affinal kinship. There were few important merchants who were not tied to their peers by these bonds. The majority of those men who failed to establish affinal kinship ties were those who failed to rise into the merchant class from the ranks of the mercaderes or cajeros.

Kinship continued to play a major role in strengthening business connections and providing mercantile continuity throughout the vice-regal period. An 1802 merchant census of Buenos Aires lists 136 comerciantes active in all branches of wholesale commerce. Included in this group were 77 men who had entered commerce since 1778: 11 sons of merchants, 30 sons-in-law of merchants and 12 kinsmen (nephews, cousins, brothers-in-law) of merchants, Only 24 of the newcomers had failed to establish kinship ties with porteño merchants, and of these 24, half were transients whose names did not appear in merchant lists before or after 1802. None of the remaining 12 merchants without kinship ties succeeded in becoming important within the mercantile community.

Consanguineous and affinal ties produced clans of merchants who, if not in actual partnership, were loyal to each other and interested in each other's prosperity. It was not uncommon for a principal merchant to have sons, sons-in-law, brothers, brothers-in-law, nephews, cousins, grandsons, and grandsons-in-law tied to each other not only by blood and marriage, but by an ever-extended net of commercial interests. Important merchants such as Domingo de Basavilbaso, Manuel de Escalada, and Juan de Lezica were also the paterfamilias of large numbers of merchants (see Appendix A); they strengthened their social and economic positions through the formation of clans. But the process of clan formation was not limited to the most powerful merchants of the city; merchants such as Juan Martín de Pueyrredon, Francisco de Almandos, Xavier Saturnino Sarasa and Pedro Díaz de Vivar, also established clans.
Because of the central role of the woman in the establishment of the mercantile clans of the city, the extended family had essentially matricentric characteristics. The merchants themselves were immigrants, who in large part had left their blood kin in Spain, and it was to the consanguineous kin of the women, natives of Buenos Aires, to which the family turned for its social contacts. Overwhelmingly, it was the woman’s family, her father, mother, brothers and sisters, as well as cousins, nieces and nephews, who served as the godparents for marriages and baptisms, and who were named executors of estates, or guardians of minor children.

In addition to the high degree of consanguineous and affinal kinship found among members of the Buenos Aires merchant class, individual merchants sought to solidify their social and business position through the use of the compadrazgo or ritual kinship system. This third pattern of kinship, even more prevalent than affinal kinship, was also far more superficial. The compadrazgo system, a pattern of kinship which evolved in the Iberian world, was one by which a special relationship was established between two people through their joint participation in one of a set of religious rituals. In colonial Buenos Aires this extended kinship system was usually associated with the religious sacraments of marriage or baptism. In the case of marriage, the godparents (padrinos de casamiento) took on the duties of protectors of the newly-wed couple. In the case of baptism, the godparents (padrinos de bautismo) not only established a special moral relationship with their godchildren, they became compadres of the children’s natural parents. All godparents had social and spiritual obligations toward their godchildren, but no legal responsibilities were involved.

There was a strong tendency to duplicate ritual kin with consanguineous and affinal kin. Examples of fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, and in-laws (usually related to the woman) serving as padrinos and madrinas at weddings and baptisms, are common. To some degree, ritual kinship was also used to cement friendship and partnerships among merchants not otherwise related. Cristóbal de Aguirre, for example, served as godfather for five of the children of Francisco Ignacio de Ugarte, thus establishing himself as Ugarte’s compadre.56

Ritual kinship was also used to link merchants of lower and middle statuses to those in the upper classes, as well as to join upper class merchants with important bureaucratic and military figures. As such, the institution of compadrazgo served as a channel for upward social aspiration. Domingo de Basavilbaso, for example, one of the more prosperous of porteño merchants, served as baptismal godparent to the
children of at least 5 fellow merchants. Of those people called upon by the merchant group to serve as marriage or baptismal godparents, 88 percent were fellow merchants. It was also common for one merchant to serve as the godparents for more than one child in the family, or to be both the padrino de casamiento and the padrino de bautismo of the first child of a couple.

While merchants preferred kinsmen, fellow merchants and important bureaucrats as godparents for their children, merchants were often chosen as godparents by clerks, low-ranking bureaucrats and retailers. These members of middle-status groups hoped the merchants would help provide for their children. It was only natural to expect a certain degree of generosity to one's ritual kin, and this expectation did not go unfulfilled. Isidro Balbastro, for example, who had been named godfather by Fernando Giles Bravo, his clerk, continued to help Giles' family after the latter's death. Balbastro lent 1,600 pesos to Giles' widow, interest free, so that she could educate two of her children. It was also to ritual kin that one turned for executors of one's estate after other kin had been named. Juan de Lezica, a compadre of Francisco Rodríguez de Vida, was named as Rodríguez de Vida's third executor because of the 'great satisfaction which I have received from him [as demonstrated by] his zeal and intelligence and Christianity'.

Merchants frequently also became the godparents of niños expósitos, children abandoned on the doorsteps of the more prosperous citizens of the city. Vicente Revuelta found a day-old male child on his doorstep on 30 May 1777; although there was some doubt as to the racial background of his parents, the little boy, Fernando, was declared to be 'español'. Revuelta not only served as the child's godfather, he also promised to be responsible for his upbringing and training. Mateo Ramón de Alzaga did the same for a female child who was left with him, as did Eugenio Lerdo de Tejada for two girl children found outside his house. Merchant generosity toward these children only encouraged the appearance of more little bundles. In desperation the merchants turned to the Hermandad de la Caridad, helping to found a casa cuna responsible for rearing children of unknown parents.

Marriage and ritual kinship linked the Buenos Aires merchants to one another, and formed powerful mercantile clans. Merchant women, daughters and wives, served to recruit new merchants into the clans, thereby perpetuating the merchant group and forging new business alliances.
The merchants of Buenos Aires were a central force in the economy of the city, its surrounding countryside, and the more distant areas of the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata. As traders, moneylenders and investors, the merchants controlled much of the day to day economic life in the colony. In fact, the colonial economy was dominated by commercial capital. The merchants, in their role as local agents of Spanish mercantile policy, sought exports which were in demand in the markets of Cádiz and Madrid. They were also responsible for the movement of goods from one sector of the region to another. The porteño merchants indirectly maintained the entire communication and transportation network of the region.

Several variables determine the status of individual merchants and groups of merchants. The category of trade (i.e., whether it be wholesale or retail) was a major factor in the economic and social status of a merchant. Porteño merchants ranked themselves into three trade categories – wholesalers, retailers, and suppliers of food – based on economic power and social prestige. The wholesalers, the subject of this study, were the most important of the merchant groups, but within this category the scale of trade ranged from large to small. Of a sample group of 90 merchants participating in wholesale trade, 45 were medium-scale merchants, 18 were large-scale merchants, 23 were medium- to large-scale merchants, and only 4 were small-scale importers. Large-scale merchants had invested large sums of money, from 50,000 pesos up, in commerce.

In addition to category and scale of trade, another variable which influenced social and economic position was the geographical area and products of the trade engaged in by the merchants, i.e., whether the emphasis of a wholesale merchant’s activity was in import trade (Castillian and European goods), in export trade or in local trade (agricultural products, yerba mate, hides and tallow). The most powerful merchants were usually engaged in overseas trade, or in a combination
of overseas and local trade. In both of these types of commerce a merchant's personal and professional contacts were of considerable importance in the success of his endeavor. Merchants with a sizeable number of influential associates and friends in Madrid, Cádiz, Seville, or Bilbao were most often also those with the greatest economic and social influence in Buenos Aires.

Of a sample group of 73 merchants engaged in wholesale trade, the largest group, 20 merchants, were engaged primarily in the import of efectos de Castilla (Castillian and European goods). Another 23 merchants combined import of efectos de Castilla with other types of trade. The efectos de Castilla included textiles from Spain, England and France, iron from Vizcaya, and European luxury items which were either placed in the Buenos Aires market or forwarded to Montevideo, Santa Fé, Córdoba, Mendoza, Asunción or Upper Peru.

More than 80 percent of the same 73 merchants of the city were ostensibly engaged in the export of raw material and currency to the mother country and/or the import of finished products from the mother country, two facets of the traditional mercantile pattern of commerce. Small groups of merchants were engaged in the shipping of metals from Alto Perú to Spain via Buenos Aires and in the importation of slaves from Africa. Only 10 percent of the merchants failed to specialize in any one branch of commerce, finding it more profitable to vary activities by demand and season, dealing in a bit of everything, including slaves, hides, yerba mate, and Spanish textiles.

No one merchant, regardless of the emphasis of his trade, could entirely avoid other branches of commerce. Merchants who specialized in the import of Castillian goods usually preferred to export cash, silver and gold in payment for these goods, but specie shortages or a glutted market could force a merchant to settle for bartering textiles for hides. Merchants primarily involved in the export of hides usually exchanged European-produced knives which they had purchased from a local importer, or yerba mate and ponchos which they had procured in the interior provinces for these hides. Cash payment for hides was also common. Whenever possible hide exporters preferred cash from their European clients, but frequently these merchants also received small shipments of Castillian goods.

The exporter of hides and the importer of Castillian goods seldom joined forces; major importers of European luxury products regarded the export of hides as a bothersome trade. Hides were bulky, taxed at almost 100 percent of their value, and expensive to ship. In addition, finding ship space for the hides could often be a problem, for owners
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of commercial vessels gave first priority to the hides they owned before providing the desired shipping space for hides owned by local merchants. If a merchant failed to find shipping, or if a blockade or stoppage of trade caused a decrease in available tonnage, porteño merchants were forced to place hides in warehouses, a risky practice since uncured hides were quickly attacked and ruined by moths. Merchants could find themselves with thousands of hides, and no buyers, at home or abroad, or far worse, with thousands of useless moth-eaten hides. The importing of Castillian goods and exporting of cash was far easier, for pesos could be shipped with relative ease during peacetime, and would hold indefinitely during wartime.

There were of course risks connected with the import and sale of Castillian goods, but the porteño importers served a variety of markets and were able to engage in commercial practices to protect their investments. For example, it was common for importers of Castillian goods to ship those goods which could not be placed in Buenos Aires to the interior after first attempting their sale locally. Often goods which were damaged, shoddy, lacking in variety or in oversupply in Buenos Aires could be sold in areas such as Alto Perú. For example, Manuel de Escalada received a large shipment of dry goods from his Cádiz-based partners which could not be sold on the Buenos Aires market because 'without intelligence and knowledge of adequate goods for these parts', his partners had sent cloth lacking in variety which had arrived at a time of local glut. Escalada was able to ship most of these goods to Potosí, Chichas and Tarija. The letters of Gaspar de Santa Coloma also contain repeated reference to the same commercial practice. In like manner, slaves who proved troublesome were shipped to Alto Perú to be sold to unsuspecting customers.

Regardless of the type of goods traded and the risks associated with these trades, once a merchant established firm contacts in one or two sectors of the Spanish Empire, he preferred to continue commerce through these channels rather than to enter into new activities in relatively unknown areas. Contacts led to choice of regions, and regions to the nature of the commerce conducted. Merchants trading with Paraguay and Missiones, for example, were almost uniformly engaged in the export of yerba mate; those linked to trade with Montevideo were usually in the export of hides; many whose major connections were in the large consumption centers of Córdoba, Potosí, or Salta, were engaged in the import of Castillian goods.

Regional areas of influence and related product specialization were frequently passed from merchant father to merchant son or son-in-law.
Manuel de Escalada's sons, Francisco and Antonio José, continued in the region and trade which their father had pioneered – importation of Castillian goods in exchange for hides and yerba mate sent to Chile. Gaspar de Santa Coloma and Agustín de Erezcano, sons-in-law of Vicente de Azcuenaga, continued their father-in-law's business of importing Castillian goods, which were sold primarily in Paraguay, Jujuy and Córdoba, combined with the export of yerba mate from Paraguay.

In addition to goods traded and location of markets, another important factor in considering the economic activity of the porteño merchants was the structure and form of the mercantile enterprise. Some men were independent agents, drawing upon their own capital to engage in commerce; others joined in partnerships with merchants in Buenos Aires or in other parts of the Spanish Empire.

Only one form of commercial partnership existed in late eighteenth-century Buenos Aires: the sociedad colectiva. This was the only partnership recognized by the Ordenanzas de Comercio de Bilbao of 1737, which provided the legal framework for all porteño commerce. The sociedad colectiva, a non-familiar partnership of unlimited liability dating from the sixteenth century, allowed two or more individuals to join their labor and property, thereby increasing the available amount of capital and manpower. But this form of partnership offered no protection for the personal assets of the partners. All members of a sociedad colectiva were personally liable for all losses incurred by the company. Trust in one's partners therefore was crucial to entering into these commercial agreements.

Although only one basic partnership agreement existed, there were several possible variations. At times, one merchant was willing to provide more capital while his partner provided management responsibility. Manuel de Caviedes and his future son-in-law, Francisco Tellechea, for example, formed a company in 1781 in which Caviedes was to receive two-thirds of the profits, and Tellechea one-third. Almost all of the principal that went into forming the company belonged to Caviedes (6,726 pesos, as compared to Tellechea's contribution of 124 pesos), but Tellechea was to do most of the work. Other partnerships called for equal division of investment, capital, and toil. Generally partnerships were short-term agreements, drawn up either for a specific transaction (i.e., the sale of one large shipment of goods), or for a three- to five-year period. These agreements seldom encumbered the major portion of a merchant's total capital. In Buenos Aires, private incorporated companies allowing for joint-stock distribution were virtually unknown in the world of commerce.
Still another form of economic union was that of a factor or agent of a Spanish mercantile house; factors received a proportionate commission based on trade which they handled for the company. In addition, they could draw upon the prestige and power of the parent company in private transactions. Finally, merchants also traded as agents of the Crown under specific contracts. Such contracts gave a merchant responsibility for providing food for the army, or transporting metals from Potosí to Buenos Aires. Of all the forms of mercantile enterprise discussed, the merchants who served as agents for Spanish firms and those who held royal contracts tended to be the most prominent socially and economically.

The single or partnership entrepreneurial roles were not mutually exclusive. It was common for a single merchant to be, at the same time, a sole owner of one shipment of goods, a partner in one or more other transactions, and perhaps also the agent of a Spanish commercial house. An excellent example of this multi-faceted role activity is that of Agustín Casimiro de Aguirre, one of the most important merchants of the period. Aguirre served as factor for two large Cádiz-based firms. In partnership with his cousin, Juan Pedro de Aguirre in Montevideo, he also exported hides from Argentina and Uruguay. Aguirre, in addition, engaged in business transactions with another pariente, Clemente Echenique of Potosí, with Francisco Borja de Lisaur of Cádiz and with the Conde de Premio Real of Lima. At the same time he represented, for a fee, the Consulado of Cádiz in its Buenos Aires business affairs, and was contracted by the Spanish Crown to export precious metals. Finally, Aguirre, in partnership with his clerk, Andrés de Cazaraville, owned a retail shop in his home. Profits were divided equally between the two men because, although Aguirre owned the stock, Cazaraville managed the store.

Familial relationships were crucial to the partnership arrangements which Agustín Casimiro de Aguirre undertook; two of his longest lasting partnerships were with men who were his blood relations. Aguirre was not alone in his preference for kinsmen as trading partners and sources of credit. Whenever possible a Buenos Aires merchant turned first to his kinsmen, either those who were blood relatives or those related through marriage, for these were the people of greatest trust. Within the Lezica clan, for example, there are numerous examples of cash loans from one member of the clan to another, as well as mercantile transactions undertaken by Juan José de Lezica and one or another of his sons-in-law.

Although little documentation exists, it is presumed that many of the
merchants of Buenos Aires, in addition to their legal trade, also engaged, to some degree, in contraband activity. As the same goods traded legally were also traded as contraband (hides, Castillian goods, European textiles, slaves and precious metals), it is impossible to distinguish legal from extra-legal activity on the basis of merchandise traded. The principal advantages of contraband activity, from the viewpoint of the merchants, was that it opened new markets, allowing one to choose one's supplier and to trade freely, unencumbered by market controls set by the Spanish Crown. Goods traded as contraband were comparatively free of taxes, and as they avoided the import duty imposed on all merchandise legally entering the La Plata region, savings were appreciable. The risks of contraband trade were high, but never high enough to discourage Buenos Aires merchants. Proximity to Brazil and weakly garrisoned land and sea boundaries also made contraband activity attractive. What had been a traditional and important source of trade before the Free Trade Ordinance of 1778 opened Buenos Aires to direct trade with Spain, did not cease once the Ordinance took effect. The Crown's concept of 'free trade' was unlike that of the merchants, and merchants as respectable and loyal as Tomás Antonio Romero and Juan Martín Pueyrredon were implicated in contraband trade at one time or another in their careers. 15

Merchants in all branches of trade engaged in contraband, but smuggling was particularly attractive to those merchants linked to the export of hides. More than any other branch of trade, the limitations and difficulties of legal trade in hides increasingly turned hide merchants to seek extra-legal methods of trade, or to push for the extension of trade to ships of 'neutral nations'. When neutral trade was in force, hides were loaded on Brazilian, English and Anglo-American bottoms, after having been exchanged for sugar, tobacco, rum and slaves. During periods when trade with foreigners was prohibited, contraband was carried on directly from riverside estancias owned by merchants along the Paraguay-Paraná River delta. Again it was sugar, tobacco, rum and slaves that were brought in, for luxury European textiles held little attraction for the estancieros of the La Plata region.

What seems to have been common to both legal and illegal trade was the merchants' expectation of a high margin of profit. The wealthiest merchants were economically the most powerful group of the colony; through their control of trade, the merchants attempted, with varying degrees of success, to exert a virtual monopoly on price and margin of profit. An indication of the gain which a merchant hoped to realize on his investment is found in the capital of Gaspar de Santa Coloma.
listing the value of a shipment of goods purchased by him and in his possession in Buenos Aires, Santa Coloma added an additional 70 percent of the value of the goods to his total wealth. This 70 percent was evidently an acceptable markup, for the document stood uncontested by Cristóbal de Aguirre and Miguel González Noriega, two merchant witnesses, the notary public, and Santa Coloma's future father-in-law, merchant Vicente de Azcuenaga, as an expression of his true financial state.

Merchants, of course, had expenses associated with commerce which had to be covered by their profit margin. Extant ledgers indicate that freight, handling and storage in Montevideo, customs duties, transportation from customs to store or warehouse, and some loss rarely exceeded 10 percent of the value of a shipment. Goods being shipped to the interior also incurred transportation charges and were subject to alcabala tax. These expenses could add from 2 to 200 percent to the value of the goods, depending on the weight, bulk and value of the goods being shipped and the distance from Buenos Aires. Expense of shipping goods inland however was passed on directly to wholesale and retail customers in the interior. Although profits were theoretically high, they were hard to realize, for merchants' clients often failed to pay their bills; even 'good debts' usually took years to collect.

A striking characteristic of the commerce of Buenos Aires was the relatively short existence of most commercial firms. At most a firm's commercial life was synonymous with the life of the individual trader. Incorporation or stock-holding in commercial companies was nonexistent. Business was therefore based primarily on personal contacts. The death of a merchant brought the demise of his company. Spanish inheritance laws calling for equal distribution of an estate among all heirs reinforced the short life of a firm engaged in trade. The upward educational and social mobility of the merchants' sons did the same. Only when a son (or son-in-law) chose to take his inheritance in goods and outstanding debts was there commercial continuity. Even in these rare instances the total economic power of an individual merchant, as noted earlier, was greatly diminished by the required division of the estate under law. The general estate pattern was to liquidate as much merchandise as possible, and then to divide cash, goods, debts, land and all personal property (after appraisal) among all heirs.

Regardless of the specifics of the type, scope, or form of trade, it was common for the wholesale merchants of Buenos Aires, while concentrating attention on commerce, to be engaged in other, often related, work. The most common combination was that of merchant and bureau-
These merchant-bureaucrats served the vice-regal government in a wide range of positions. Their offices were usually purchased from the Crown for specific periods of time, although some were held for a lifetime and a few were passed down to sons. Included in the bureaucratic posts held by the merchant group were Administrador de Correos y Postas del Virreynato del Río de la Plata (Administrator of the Royal Mails), Ensayador Mayor de Metálicos (Assayer of Metals), Administrador de los pueblos de indios guaraníes de Misiones, Uruguay y Paraná (Administrator of Guaraní Indians), and Asentista de Viveres del Ejército Real (Supplier of Food to the Regular Army). All of these offices could be used to further commercial dealing. Supplier of Food to the Royal Army or Navy and Administrator of Mission Indians were posts particularly conducive to improving a merchant's fortune. The latter position guaranteed a captive market for imported goods, a source of native goods and complete control of prices.

Only a small group of merchants was interested in investment of profits in manufacturing activity; three merchants, Francisco de Cabrera, Tomás Antonio Romero, and Francisco Medina, were proprietors of saladeros (meat-curing establishments), and one, Esteban Villanueva, owned and operated a bronze factory. Two merchants also owned small brick-making establishments, but in general merchants showed no interest in local manufacturing, preferring to buy and sell goods produced by others.

From time to time, merchants demonstrated some interest in non-traditional extractive industries, although in most cases interest was short-lived and not very widespread. In 1787, for example, Tomás Antonio Romero, the most imaginative merchant of the period, requested vice-regal permission to undertake catching and salting codfish in the Patagonian port of San Julián. The extraction of salt, although a non-traditional industry, also attracted limited merchant participation. The source of salt was mines, located 130 leagues west-southwest of Buenos Aires, in a desolate area controlled by hostile Indians. As salt was indispensable not only for the daily consumption of the porteño population, but as an essential ingredient in the salting of meat and production of jerked beef, annual military expeditions were organized under vice-regal aegis. In addition to a military commander and troops, two deputies were named by the Cabildo as their representatives and as administrators of the expeditions' funds. Throughout the vice-regal period, at least one, and usually both of these Cabildo deputies were merchants. Because of their business experience, it was felt that these merchants could provide salt 'with greater economy'. Although called
upon at times to underwrite the costs of the expeditions, the merchants
were guaranteed a profit through the sale of the much needed product.25

One fairly large group of merchants, in addition to their wholesale
trade, also engaged in the shipping business, owning ships and boats
which plied the River Plate. Ships were an important investment for the
merchant group, for they were closely related to trade and were natural
extensions of commerce itself. The size of these vessels varied widely
as did the sums invested, ranging from a few hundred pesos for a small
river craft to sail the Parana bringing Castilian goods to Asunción and
returning to Buenos Aires with the products of the Paraguayan trade,
to thousands of pesos for an ocean-going frigate which could participate
directly in trade with Cádiz, Bilbao or Seville.

Many of the ships owned by porteño merchants participated in the
African slave trade, and those merchants who engaged in this branch
of commerce tended to own the largest number of ships.26 Tomás
Antonio Romero and Manuel de Aguirre, both in the slave trade, were
large shipowners. Pedro Dubal, another slaver, owned at least five ships
which were regularly sent to the coast of Africa and the island of
Fernando Po.27

There was a great increase, moreover, in the number of ships owned
by porteño merchants in the last decade of the eighteenth century, due
in part to the growth of the slave trade under Viceroy Arredondo, and
in part to the relaxation of controls on trade produced by the
emergencies of war-time.28 Ship owning was not, however, limited to
slavers. Merchants such as Pablo Ruiz de Gaona and Manuel Joaquín
de Zapiola, involved in the trade of Castillian goods, also owned ships.

Owning a ship gave the porteño merchant greater control of his
commerce; he could determine sailing dates and routes himself instead
of depending upon ships owned and operated by men in Spain. This
was especially attractive to slavers, for their trade bypassed Spain, and
their boats were not in competition with Spanish-owned vessels.
Although the data are incomplete, at least 28 merchants of the city had
sizeable investments in boats or ships.

The merchants of late eighteenth-century Buenos Aires, because of
their control of liquid capital combined with high profit margin, were
one of the major social groups in the colony with capital to invest. Much
surplus capital was reinvested in commerce, in new shipments of
Castillian goods, and in ships. Another favored area of investment for
the merchants was urban real estate. Investment in urban property for
personal or commercial use was seen by the merchants as a sure
investment, without the attendant risks (but also without the high profit)
of investments in commerce.
Urban property was secure; it was not subject to risks of loss at sea, bad loans, or oversupply, some of the myriad problems which beset commercial trade. Real property was mortgageable, and could be used, therefore, to expand credit, or to found a capellania (chantry). It was also one investment which could be easily transferred to one's heirs. All of these benefits attracted merchant capital, compensating as they did for one major drawback to investment in urban real estate — low profit yield.

Ownership of urban property was often related to commerce, for wholesale merchants frequently engaged in retail sales, owning a store located in the central district of the city. There was no stigma attached to combined wholesale and retail trade, and important merchants such as Agustín Casimiro de Aguirre and Francisco Tellechea, as well as lesser figures such as Esteban Romero, owned and operated retail shops. Retail shops, both those which were occupied by merchants themselves and those which were rented to others, were a favorite investment for the porteño merchant. Buildings constructed by the merchants always contained an esquina and its corresponding trastienda which could be rented to some newly arrived Spaniard eager to enter the commercial life of the city. The rent for these shops averaged five pesos per month, not an exorbitant sum and, as the landlord of a series of small retailers, the wholesale merchant profited by a built-in clientele.

In addition, many porteño merchants owned urban property not linked to commerce. Of a sample of 84 merchants, approximately 40 percent owned at least one urban property, one-fifth owned two urban properties, and one-quarter owned four or more properties. Included among these properties were houses, small apartments and rooms for rent, and small shops rented to artisans, others merchants and pulperos. Agustín Casimiro de Aguirre, for example, owned the living quarters rented by Gabriel Contiña y Blanco, also a merchant. Domingo Trillo rented one of his houses to Timoteo Alvarez, a retailer, and Eusebio Cires included among his properties a room used as a pulperia. Property investments ranged from less than 200 to more than 35,000 pesos. The average investment for a group of twenty-two merchants for whom information is complete was 15,616 pesos.

There was a tendency for wealthier merchants to have the largest investments in urban property in absolute value, while middle-group merchants had the largest investments in percentage of the total value of their respective estates. Manuel Joaquín Zapiola owned five houses and Francisco Tellechea owned eight. The average house owned by the merchants earned from 12 to 36 pesos per month in rent (144 to 432 pesos per year), but major properties such as the casa del asiento owned
by the heirs of merchant Vicente de Azcuenaga brought in rent of 1,700 pesos annually.

Houses which were subdivided into 'rooms for rent with their bedrooms and work rooms', were also frequently owned by merchants.33 These buildings, ranging from 2 to 15 units, were the eighteenth-century equivalent of tenements. Each unit contained from 3 to 6 small rooms, and was let out for 1 to 6 pesos per month. Tenants included shopkeepers, tailors, carpenters and shoemakers. Ownership of these rooms was considered to be a secure and profitable investment by merchants. The heirs of Domingo Basavilbaso complained that two contiguous houses which he had left them, although worth 42,240 pesos, lacked rooms of the right proportions to be converted easily into small apartments and therefore were not as fine as houses of much less value.34 Many merchants, even the most prosperous, also rented rooms and stores in their own homes. Francisco Tellechea, Tomás Insúa and Juan Antonio Rodríguez, merchants of the upper, middle and lower-middle economic groups, all rented rooms and esquinas in their quarters.35

Many merchants also invested in semi-rural quintas on the outskirts of the city. The quintas, so named because they consisted originally of one-fifth of a caballería, a basic land grant parcel unit, were used as summer homes. Quintas were also worked as farms and fruit orchards, and sometimes used to graze cattle and sheep. Some of the quintas were located at the very perimeters of Buenos Aires, others as far as the villages of San Isidro and Cañada de Morón. All quintas were regarded as rustic retreats and their buildings as well as their furnishings were simple in comparison to the urban dwellings of the city. Most quintas consisted of four or five rooms, sparsely furnished with catres (cots), cowhide chairs and tables of inexpensive pine.

Quintas ranged in size from plots measuring 20 varas by 64 varas to those of 500 varas by 4,000 varas.36 Their value varied from 300 pesos to over 20,000 pesos; the average value of quintas for a sample of seventeen merchants was 4,362 pesos. The largest and most successfully run quinta was that owned by Pablo Ruiz de Gaona. In addition to the main house, his quinta contained a pulpería, a chapel, various sheds to store farm equipment and two pigeon coops. On sixteen cuadras of land, Ruiz Gaona had planted 34,355 trees including peach, apricot, quince, apple, figs, mandarin oranges, grapefruit, pears, and some grape vines.37 A large vegetable garden also produced sweet potatoes, squash, corn, tomatoes, cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, onions, beans, artichokes, turnips, garlic, parsley, and calabash. In his will, Ruiz de Gaona entreated his heirs to keep the quinta in the family, claiming that 'it produces more
than the interest on 20,000 pesos annually and, in addition, the firewood for the house. Indeed in an eight-month period, the *quinta* produced a profit of 1,260 pesos from the sale of firewood, paling wood, poles, herbs, and pigeons.

Although many merchants invested in urban and semi-rural property, the ranching lands which lay beyond the ring of *quintas* and *chacaras* did not attract significant investment by merchants during the time of the Viceroyalty. Only fourteen merchants of the city were active ranchers. Most of these men, as well as their close relatives, were identified with the export of hides and other cattle products. In 1774, among a list of twenty-one ranchers, six were also engaged in mercantile pursuits. Among the six are examples of the most powerful merchants as well as a number of middle-level merchants. Fifteen years later, in 1791, the merchant groups still represented approximately the same proportion of ranchers. In a petition signed by twenty-one members of the *gremio* (union) of ranchers and cattle raisers, five merchant names appear. Two of the merchants who signed this document also signed the 1774 list, demonstrating some continuity on the part of those merchants who combined mercantile activities with ranching. Three new names, all lower middle-level merchants, are also listed, suggesting perhaps that the prestige of ranching had declined.

In general, the merchants were urban men with urban interests. The open range, the herds of wild cattle, the hostile Indian population, the vague boundaries of *estancias*, and the low value given to ranch lands, held little interest for merchants looking for investments which either brought large profit or were directly related to the commerce of the city.

Some merchants occasionally speculated in ranch lands, but even those merchants who combined wholesale and retail trade with ranching tended to invest rather small sums of money compared to amounts invested in commercial goods and urban property. Owning rural land was neither a good nor a prestigious investment, and therefore attracted little capital. Antonio Obligado, for example, one of the merchants who invested most heavily in ranching, owned two *estancias* along the Paraná, at Rincón del Espinillo, 35 to 40 *leguas* from Buenos Aires. The larger of the two *estancias*, consisting of a parcel of land one *legua* by five, was purchased complete with house, equipment, slaves and cattle for 5,100 pesos. The adjoining ranch, one *legua* square, was bought for 2,000 pesos. The small investments in rural properties by the merchants of Buenos Aires is in marked contrast to the behavior of the merchant group in other regions of the Spanish Empire, such as Mexico, where much mercantile capital was invested in rural land.
In addition to their economic roles as exporters and importers of goods and investors in real property, merchants were extremely active in the crude banking functions undertaken in the colony. Large regions of the Viceroyalty suffered from permanent monetary scarcity, and merchants were the only large group in society in possession of liquid capital (theirs or another party's) and financial ties with Spain which could provide lines of credit. Many merchants engaged in money-lending on a local scale, and a few were so involved in money-lending that they deserve the label of primitive bankers. Clients of both groups were other merchants, ranchers, government bureaucrats and, in times of need, government and semi-official institutions. Often loans were granted in the form of credits on goods sold, i.e., a wholesale merchant would sell a consignment of goods to another merchant, receiving in payment a promissory note to be repaid within a stipulated period of time, and at a specified rate of interest. The normal interest rate for these transactions was 6 percent per annum, but occasionally higher or lower rates were granted. In addition to local loans, the large merchants, those who were representatives of powerful Spanish mercantile houses or who had extensive dealings with these houses, acted as banks in inter-colonial transfers of money. These arrangements were often quite complicated, and most had a makeshift aura about them. A wealthy merchant was often called upon by a Spanish house dealing with more than one colony, to grant credit, to collect outstanding debts, and to settle accounts among a group of debtors and creditors. In these instances the merchant, of course, was awarded a commission on the transaction.

A few merchants, after accumulating large capital resources through trade, and after establishing strong ties in Spain, came to dedicate themselves almost exclusively to banking activities, including loans to fellow merchants in Buenos Aires and the interior. Although still identifying themselves as merchants, men such as Bernardo Sancho Larrea and Manuel Rodríguez de la Vega redirected their strong commercial connections with Spain and their access to liquid capital to banking. This group performed an important function in a society devoid of banks or formal credit arrangements. Given the conditions of a pre-banking economy and the resultant confusion between financial and commercial activities, this gradual cross-over from merchant to banker role is understandable.

Although dependent on the production of the mines of Alto Perú to furnish the specie which they exported to Spain, the porteño merchants, because of their distance from the mines, did not take an active role in financing miners and mineral production. Instead they left investment
in mines and minerals to their clients, the local merchants of Potosí.\textsuperscript{47} Occasionally the Buenos Aires merchants did act as \textit{habilitadores} or \textit{aviadores} (financial backers) of local government officials in the Alto Perú area; this still was the exception, not the rule. Evidence indicates that the \textit{porteño} merchants did not act on their own behalf in these few transactions, but were rather agents of Spanish merchants who supplied the funds needed by government officials to hold office. Such was the case when Gaspar de Santa Coloma undertook the \textit{abilitazion} of José Fuentes González Bustillos, \textit{oidor} (judge) of Cuzco. The 40,000 pesos lent to González Bustillos at 6 percent interest were charged to the account of Juan Tomás Micheo, a Cádiz merchant and business associate of Santa Coloma. Santa Coloma himself had little use for this type of investment, referring to the financing of government bureaucrats as ‘an always bothersome transaction’. In a letter to Micheo, he added, ‘I think this \textit{oidor} plans to pay you back, and God willing I will collect, but these types of gentlemen who come to America, I know them only too well. I want nothing to do with them except when I am acting on behalf of and at the request of my friends.’\textsuperscript{48}

The end of the eighteenth century, a period of great commercial expansion and prosperity for the city of Buenos Aires, was also, paradoxically, a period of protracted European wars continually disturbing normal patterns of trade. From 1779 to 1809, the Bourbon kings of Spain and all their dominions were intermittently engaged in conflict with England, and Spanish commercial vessels became easy targets for the strong British armada. The effects of this long period of war on commerce in Buenos Aires were numerous. Trade was periodically legalized with Portugal and Brazil when conditions in the colonies became so desperate that there was no other way to maintain the flow of goods to and from the Spanish empire. In 1781 and 1782, for example, more Portuguese merchant ships than Spanish ones arrived in the Río de la Plata area.\textsuperscript{49} Some merchants were able to profit initially because they were well supplied at the time conflicts began, but in general, the wars in Europe were not beneficial to the merchants of Buenos Aires (especially those who dealt in Castillian goods) nor to their business affairs.\textsuperscript{50}

Depressed trade, produced by almost continual conflict in Europe, produced a high level of economic instability and insecurity among the merchant groups of Buenos Aires. Many marginal traders were wiped out at the beginning of each war, for with the stoppage of trade to and from the Iberian peninsula, these merchants were forced to default on loans which they had taken out to finance their transactions. When wars
The merchants of Buenos Aires were prolonged wealthier merchants also were affected, but usually the wealthiest had enough liquid capital on hand to wait out the war while maintaining their economic position. The net effect of the wars was to consolidate the position of the wealthiest merchants, while thinning the ranks of the middle and lower groups. Few middle-level merchants who had suffered bankruptcy during wartime were able to make an economic comeback. Wealth, therefore, tended to become concentrated in the hands of a few powerful merchants, at the same time as the merchant group was growing in absolute numbers because of continual migration from Spain.

The opening of trade to neutrals also tended to profit those merchants previously engaged in contraband, as they had established lines of communication which served them well when traditional lines were cut. These periods of neutral trade also undermined the continual attempt on the part of the Spanish-linked monopolist merchants to control supply and price.

Bankruptcy was a common feature of the economic life of the merchants and, although war was its main cause, there were other factors inherent in the Spanish pattern of commerce which led to economic instability. Receipt of a shipment of goods which were not saleable was one of the most common reasons for loss. Merchants dealing in Castillian goods generally sent written orders to their Spanish agents, but because these orders were often vague as to quality, color and composition of goods desired, many times goods were received which could not be sold in Buenos Aires or even in the interior. Still another danger was the risk of over-ordering specific goods. Although the end of the 'fleet' system of sailing tended to end the flood of a market with a single product, there were repeated examples of men overstocking one product, or receiving merchandise already in large supply in the local markets. Moreover, goods frequently arrived badly damaged (although goods could be insured against loss at sea, they could not be insured for water damage). These factors contributing to the unsaleability of goods, and consequent bankruptcy, were even more frequent when a merchant, acting as a factor or agent of a Spanish commercial firm or another individual, received a shipment. In these cases, the merchant factor in Buenos Aires had no control over the type of goods which he received.

In addition to the quality and condition of goods, business was made even more precarious by dependence on unknown or undependable agents in the interior. Merchants of Buenos Aires often consigned goods to wholesale or retail merchants in the cities of the interior. However,
these merchants frequently failed to live up to their agreements. Often merchants in the interior were more eager to sell those goods which they owned outright than those on which they received only a commission. Even consignment to parientes could not guarantee responsible action on their part. Goods consigned to retail merchants were usually sold to the wholesaler on credit, and when the retailers were tardy in selling these goods, wholesalers were forced to default on loans or to protract greatly the period of repayment. Dependence on unreliable wholesalers and retailers forced the porteño wholesaler into a dangerous economic position, unable to pay debts because others defaulted on debts due him.

There is only one example of a merchant who went bankrupt because of his own dishonesty. But through business associations with public servants who were found to be dishonest, merchants did suffer economic setbacks. Still another pitfall, which led to many bankruptcies, was that of overextending capital by engaging in too many transactions at the same time. Some merchants placed themselves in situations of extreme vulnerability whereby default by one of their debtors produced consequent default to their creditors.

Vice-regal trade, characterized by growth and prosperity, was based, nevertheless, on highly unstable factors. The instability of structural aspects of trade was further exacerbated by the cumbersome legal machinery of the Spanish Empire. Legal action against a dishonest partner or a fellow merchant brought years of litigation, during which time the assets involved were under official embargo. Although the creation of a Consulado court speeded up commercial justice after 1794, to protect against litigation, and to guarantee investment, merchants often called upon kinsmen when seeking business agents or partners. The high risk of doing business with people outside one's clan was intensified when dealing with merchants outside of the same geographical region. The large number of legal proceedings instituted by the merchants on grounds of fraudulent business dealings or non-payment of outstanding debts indicates that merchants were far from successful even when engaging in transactions primarily with kin or familiar associates.

Economic instability, inherent in the business patterns of the porteño merchants, naturally led to social instability. A merchant who, through hard work, frugality, a good marriage and some luck, managed to rise from the rank of clerk to that of a respected member of the community, was always aware of how easily he could meet his downfall. If a man from as established and respected a family as Felipe Santiago del Pozo
could die in social and economic disgrace, every merchant was vulnerable to the same fate. If a merchant who had begun on a small scale, and had gradually built up his business and social reputation, becoming one of the leaders of the merchant group, like Domingo Belgrano Pérez, could be subject to house arrest, embargo of his property, forcible sale of portions of his estate, and the saddling of his heirs with the repayment of outstanding debts, social and economic disgrace could come to any merchant. Knowledge that beyond the boom sometimes lay the bust, was never far from the minds of the merchants of the river city.
CHAPTER 4
Life style

The *porteño* merchants by occupation, investment patterns and life style were overwhelmingly an urban social group. They engaged in an urban occupation, lived in the very heart of the city, and invested heavily in urban property in the form of homes, shops and buildings. Commerce and investments provided the merchants with capital to undertake a life style commensurate with their local status. All facets of merchant life reflected the comparative sophistication and luxury enjoyed by this group.

Much information on the life of the merchants, information of both a quantitative and qualitative nature, is contained in the pages of the estate papers of deceased merchants. In addition to listings of urban and rural real estate, including descriptions and value, estate papers contained inventories of the personal possessions of the merchants and their wives. Dress, jewelry, silverware, crockery, books, furnishings, luxury goods, and slaves are documented in great detail in these pages. Dowry papers and *capitales* also contain information of much the same nature, and afford us a rich picture of the general life of the merchant class. Additional information, moreover, in the 1778 census of Buenos Aires is helpful in reconstructing the residential patterns of the merchant group.

The *porteño* merchants inhabited a city which in modern times would be little more than a rural town. In 1778 the total population of the city of Buenos Aires was 24,363. The city, whose population at mid-century had been 9,656, reached a population of 44,731 inhabitants by the end of the colonial period. Rapid population growth was accompanied by increased commerce and movement, and by a noticeable improvement in the amenities of life in the city. In 1778 the city consisted of eleven principal streets running north to south, with twenty-five streets running east to west. Although the city grew little in size during the next two decades, the period brought the beginning of paved city streets, the installation of lights on main thoroughfares, the expansion of educational institutions, and the opening of a local theater.
The merchants of Buenos Aires

The city of Buenos Aires was divided into 6 zones (cuartels) for the purpose of the 1778 census, but the merchant population was overwhelmingly concentrated in only two zones: 1 and 3. These two zones, considered to be the most elite districts, were in the center of the city, and surrounded the central plaza, the Cabildo, the cathedral and the fort. In Buenos Aires, as in other Spanish cities, those persons with prestige, wealth and power tended to have homes close to the central plaza. Royal administrators and bureaucrats, professional men, high-ranking military officers and prominent clergy, made their homes in these two zones as well. Zones 2, 4, 5 and 6, by comparison, were inhabited by artisans and contained small factories and quintas.

Of a total of 132 merchants, more than one-half, or 74 merchants, lived in the first zone, the district bounded by Calle del Cabildo to the south, San Juan to the west, San Gregorio and Retiro to the north, and the Bajo del Río to the east. More than a third of the merchants populated the third zone, an area bounded by Cabildo to the north, the Bajo del Río to the east, Santa Bárbara to the south and San Juan to the west. In spite of the fact that many prominent merchants lived in zone 1, there was a tendency for the most successful to live in zone 3. It was also in zone 3 that the most important government bureaucrats resided.

Twenty years later, in a map of the city showing the residence of merchants, clerks, retailers, shop assistants, food suppliers and porters, all men connected with trade still chose to live in zones 1 and 3 of the city. Moreover, from the same map, which sub-divides the zones into smaller districts, it can be seen that merchants were not evenly distributed within either zone 1 or 3, but rather clustered in specific sub-sections of these zones. Although the merchant population had grown during the twenty years, the most popular residential districts for merchants were still those immediately adjacent to the central plaza. Merchants, retailers, food suppliers and their respective clerks all lived in close proximity to one another, all favoring the same districts for both their homes and shops.

By the standards of the time, the homes of the merchants of Buenos Aires were among the largest and most elegant residences in the city. They were built of adobe and brick, with tile roofs; many homes had small rear gardens, and barred windows (rejas) overlooking the main street. Most homes followed a uniform pattern of construction consisting of an entrance hall which led to a large patio from which the living room, dining room and bedrooms were approached. Colonial architecture featured rooms surrounding a series of two or three interior patios in the more distinguished residences. The majority of houses were one-story
dwellings, but some merchants, such as Pedro Dubal, Manuel Caviedes and Manuel Joaquin de Zapiola occupied two-story manses. The average number of rooms, excluding servants' quarters, in a sample group of eleven dwellings occupied by merchant families was sixteen. The average value of a merchant home for a sample of twenty-five merchants was 16,222 pesos. Houses usually included an entrance hall, a drawing room, a dining room, three or four bedrooms, rooms for servants, pantries, a kitchen, an outhouse, an enclosed yard for chickens, and in the case of the wealthier merchants, a carriage house. Merchant houses boasted such luxuries as fine rejas and glass windows. Within these elegant houses, the merchants and their families lived in ample quarters, with an average of less than one occupant per room. Servants, however, did not enjoy the same comfort; approximately five servants occupied each servants' room.

The merchant dwellings, especially those located in the center of the city, served as both a home and a place of business. Many of the most prominent merchants of the city did business in the esquinas (corner shops) and trastiendas (back rooms) located in their homes. The esquinas and trastiendas, used by the merchants as shops, usually were outfitted with the tools of trade. Tomás Insúa's esquina, for example, contained 'shelves for cloth, scales, and iron weights for measuring out tercios of yerba'. Francisco Tellechea's store was complete with 'large cabinets worth 530 pesos, an English desk, a writing table, shelves, and a glass fronted case containing all the shop's tools'. Investments in homes were to some degree, therefore, also business investments. This combination of home and business under a single roof also explains the popularity among merchants of homes on or close to the central plaza.

Another factor affected the location chosen by a merchant for his home and business. Merchants tended to live in quarters geographically close to other members of the same mercantile clan. Compounds of two or three generations of the same mercantile family, including merchant in-laws, sons, and cousins were thus formed. For example, five families of the Lezica clan lived on or near the Calle del Cabildo. This pattern not only strengthened family ties, it also allowed for easy exchange of merchandise among merchant kinsmen.

The merchants of Buenos Aires, especially those who were married and well established in commerce, were heads of large households. In the 132 merchant households contained in the 1778 census, the average number of occupants was 13 persons; 67 percent of the merchant households contained 10–19 people. Included in the average household were the merchant, his wife and children, kinfolk (most commonly
cousins, nephews, mother-in-law), clerks, orphans, and Spanish girls who served as household aids (agregadas or dependientas). Also included were slaves and free servants. The largest households, ranging up to forty members, often included married children and their offspring as well. The size of the merchant household is associated, not surprisingly, with marital status and wealth; the more prosperous merchants, in general, were those with the larger establishments. The smallest merchant households were those of the newly arrived Spaniards, yet unmarried, who had only recently begun to participate in porteño commerce.

The more prosperous merchants enjoyed a higher child survival rate (as well as a slightly higher birth rate), and also had large numbers of slaves and/or free servants in their employ. Moreover, prosperous merchants tended to attract large numbers of kinfolk, including brothers-in-law or sons-in-law who were fellow merchants, and cousins and nephews sent to serve apprenticeships with them, and to employ one or more clerks to aid in commercial dealings.

Occasionally, two merchant families, related by blood or marriage, lived together. For example, Eugenio Lerdo de Tejada and his wife shared their living quarters with Bernardo Sancho Larrea, widower and concuñado of Lerdo de Tejada. Sancho Larrea's daughter, his nephew, and a nephew of Lerdo de Tejada, as well as a clerk and seventeen slaves, also lived under the same roof.15

Sharing living quarters with other Spaniards, who were not nuclear family members, was a common practice. In 1778, 67 percent of the merchants included persons not in their immediate family in their homes. A third of all merchant households contained at least 1 or 2 non-nuclear family members and as many as 23 percent of the households had 4 or more non-nuclear members. Legal and blood kin, such as cousins, nephews, wife's parents (usually a widowed mother) and siblings were often present in a merchant household. Clerks and apprentices, agregadas, and orphans were other large groups of non-nuclear family residents. The average number of clerks or apprentices found in a merchant's home was 1, although 21 merchants had 2, 3 or 4 clerks and apprentices living with them.

Many young, unmarried merchants banded together to form a common household with other young merchants, none of whom was related. In the 1778 census, for example, 9 unmarried merchants, all between the ages of 20 and 40, were sharing a house in zone 4 of the city with 4 adult slaves.16 In addition, Simeón Martínez, a 36-year-old merchant whose wife was not in Buenos Aires, shared a house with José
Vila, a 19-year-old bachelor also in commerce; they had no slaves. In these cases, as in the case of apprentices or clerks living with a merchant's family, living patterns were based on profession rather than kinship. So strong was this pattern that there were no cases of merchants living in the homes of people of other professions.

Approximately 10 percent of the merchants raised orphans, usually girls of European parentage, in their homes. These girls, often the daughters of deceased merchants or kinsmen, were taken into the family either because of personal promises to the child's parents or as an act of piety. They were found in the homes of childless couples as well as couples with their own children, although the former tended to raise more than one orphan at a time. Although they were usually referred to as 'adopted children', the orphans were not considered to be legal heirs. Nevertheless, many of these girls were treated like the natural children of the merchant couple, and were given dowries and allowed to use the merchant's family name.

As Figure B.3 in Appendix B (p. 192) illustrates, a comparatively small merchant group of 145 men supported 1,652 other members of their households; the ratio was therefore 1 merchant to 11 other household residents. The merchants needed to be economically prosperous to feed and clothe these numbers. The size of the household was in part a product of prosperity and in part a stimulus to continued economic achievement.

In addition to clerks, orphans and kinsmen, merchant households contained large numbers of black and mulatto slaves. Because merchants owned many slaves, the racial composition of the merchant household differed greatly from that of the majority of households in the city of Buenos Aires. Although people of Spanish descent (españoles) comprised 66 percent of the entire city, only 44 percent of the members of the merchant households were españoles. The españoles represent the largest single element in the merchant households, but the combined total of the castas (negro, mulato, mestizo and indio) in these households outnumbered the españoles. That there were fewer españoles than castas in most merchant households may account in part for the fear and distrust of the gente de color which was expressed frequently by members of the merchant group.

Not all servants were slaves, but the majority of those employed in domestic, industrial and agricultural pursuits by the merchants did fall into this category. Although 35 of a group of 145 merchants (24 percent) had at least 1 free servant, free servants only accounted for 11 percent of the total servant population. Of the 999 servants employed by the 145 merchants, only 92 were free.
Free servants tended to be either racially Indian or mulatto. Non-nomadic Indians, it should be remembered, could not legally be enslaved. Of the 27 Indians living in merchant households, 24 are listed as free servants or laborers. They could not be bought or sold, or included in a merchant's estate as part of his inheritable goods, but these people were nonetheless dependent on their Spanish masters for subsistence. Ten percent of the entire mulatto population found in merchants' households was free, but only 2 percent of the blacks enjoyed this status. The merchants, like other slave-holding groups throughout colonial Latin America, were clearly more prone to free the already acculturated mulatto than the African-born black.

Ownership of slaves was associated, not surprisingly, with socio-economic status; 100 percent of the large-scale importers and exporters were slave owners, while only 32 percent of all those engaged in commerce, including retailers and peddlers, as well as middle-level merchants owned slaves. In addition to a positive correlation between occupation and ownership of slaves, there was also, as one might expect, a relationship between a merchant's marital status and age and his ownership of slaves. Many of those merchants without slaves at the time of the 1778 census were young Spaniards who had recently arrived in Buenos Aires and were living alone or with another young merchant in one- or two-room quarters. Few unmarried merchants owned slaves at the time of their marriage, but slaves were often included in their wives' dowry. Once married and settled into a larger establishment, ownership of slaves became essential to the management of the household. Many merchants, who did not own slaves at the time of the 1778 census, therefore, came to own them in later years.

The average age of slaves owned by the merchants was 25 years old; there was no significant age difference for male and female slaves. Sixty-three percent of the slaves were between the ages of 15 and 50, while 28 percent were younger, and 9 percent were older. Slightly more females were found among the household slaves (53 percent of the total slave population). The merchants preferred female slaves for they were felt to be most fit for domestic work, and capable of procreating and thereby increasing the numbers of slaves owned by a household. Approximately 20 percent of the merchant households which contained slaves had at least one slave family present. This family, usually consisting of a mother and child, could also include a father and numerous siblings.

Male slaves, especially those with skills such as plastering and barbering, were often employed as day workers by the merchants. Other males were employed in warehouses and shops; those merchants owning
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quintas near the city also tended to have large numbers of male slaves employed as laborers and brick-makers. Slave labor was used in those few industries owned by the merchants, and many of these men, like those found on the quintas, were highly skilled workers. Both male and female slaves were used as cooks on quintas and in the merchants’ city homes. In the household, female slaves were usually trained in such domestic arts as washing, sewing and ironing; males were used as coachmen; and children were taught to help in serving and to act as pages.

The value of a slave varied from 25 pesos to 450 pesos, depending upon age, health and skills, as well as tractability. Many merchants had investments of 1,500 to 3,500 pesos in their personal domestic slaves, as well as additional sums invested in slaves as commercial commodities. Slaves owned by merchants were of both African and American origins, the former usually imported from the Congo or Angola and the latter born in Buenos Aires, Colonia or Córdoba.

It is difficult to judge the quality of inter-personal relationships between the merchant slaveowners and their slaves. Some slaves rejected their condition of servitude, becoming chronic runaways; others seem to have established warm relations with the merchant family, turning to them even after their bondage had ended. Some merchants undoubtedly treated their slaves harshly, while others established close relationships with them, leaving gifts of personal items and small sums of money in their wills.

Merchant–slave relations could be strangely ambivalent. Eugenio Lerdo de Tejada, for example, brought criminal proceedings against his ex-slave, Juan de Dios, after Juan had purchased his freedom and that of his wife and child, and had set up a small pulperia. Lerdo claimed that the man had stolen the money used to purchase his freedom from Lerdo’s home and store. He stated that his slave did not have permission to work for day wages, and could not legally have earned the money for himself. He had been freed under the pretext of being purchased by another Spaniard, and Lerdo de Tejada now demanded that he be returned to his former state of slavery. Juan de Dios countered that he and his wife had sold fur riding-cloaks and stockings which they had made themselves, had made small profits on the purchase of candles bought for Lerdo’s house, and had borrowed money from a brother, the slave of another porteño merchant. He argued that it mattered little who had purchased him, Lerdo de Tejada had been reimbursed fairly.

Although Juan de Dios was imprisoned for more than three years
during the course of the legal proceedings, and all the goods in his pulperia were sequestered by the government, Lerdo stubbornly objected to Dios' release from jail, insisting vehemently that Dios had robbed him and that his freedom was therefore fraudulent. Arguing that he was a 'powerful merchant, of merit and vast recommendation', and that his testimony was therefore more valid than that of a black, Lerdo de Tejada finally obtained a court order ordering the ex-slave to leave the jurisdiction of Buenos Aires within three days. The same Lerdo de Tejada, however, made ample donations in his will to those slaves whom he considered faithful, including manumission of seven of them. Instead of the harsh attitude which he had taken toward Juan de Dios, in his will he showed himself to be deeply concerned for the welfare, education and dignity of those who had served him well.

The ultimate gift that could be made to a loyal slave was his manumission, but voluntary freeing of slaves, although not uncommon, was far from universal. Freeing of a slave during the owner's lifetime was extremely rare, but slaves were manumitted by merchants in their wills. Of a group of 45 merchants, 11 percent granted total freedom to one or more slaves to begin on the first day after the merchant's death. Another 36 percent of the merchants granted freedom to one or more of their slaves only after they had met a set of specified conditions. The conditions under which a slave could eventually gain freedom varied; most often freedom was contingent upon continued enslavement for a period of two or three years after the owner's death. At times a slave was enjoined to continue in servitude until the death of the merchant's wife. Freedom could even be tied to continued economic prosperity of a merchant. Linking freedom to the lapse of a certain time period, or to the life span of a particular person, assured surviving members of the family continued service, but it also could serve to render freedom worthless, as when an elderly slave found himself dependent on the death of his master's young widow for his freedom.

Even among that segment of the merchant group which provided for the manumission of slaves, the actual number of slaves to be set free was always small. Only one merchant, Antonio García López, freed all his slaves (with conditions) at the time of his death. Freedom was viewed by most merchants as a special prize, a gift given only to one or two deserving servants. Rita Dogan, widow of Juan Martín Pueyrredon, for example, freed one slave 'in payment for her having been a good and faithful slave', while ordering her other six slaves to continue in bondage. Even Juana Rosa Bozo, widow of Juan Bautista Azcuenaga, who freed four of her seven slaves in her testament, instructed the other
three to remain ‘under the control of my brother who can decide to give them their freedom as soon as they prove by their honesty and probity that they deserve it’. Only 2 of the 21 merchants who freed any slaves, freed 6 or more servants in their wills. It is impossible to determine the age of slaves at the time of manumission; however, manumitted slaves were usually female *mulatas*.

Manumission was not always the beneficent act which it first appeared to be. Many slaves freed in their masters’ wills found themselves without shelter, food or protection. This was especially true in the case of elderly or infirm servants. It can even be hypothesized that freedom was often used to rid a merchant family of a non-productive slave who was not only unable to serve the family but also acted as an economic drain. This process, which deprived a slave of old-age benefits, was not uncommon. Francisco Baldovinos, reacting to this evil, specifically willed that his *mulata* slave, María Paula, was not to be freed upon his death, but rather was to be cared for in her old age.

In general, regardless of good personal relationships between a merchant and one or two of his slaves, relations between merchants and slaves, as between all Spaniards and slaves, were tinged by mistrust and fear. To the merchant, the black was firstly a commodity to be purchased, transported and sold either in Buenos Aires or the northern provinces. Secondly, he was a servant and a newly converted Christian in need of guidance in both roles. The blacks, on their side, demonstrated an unwillingness to accept placidly the total obliteration of their culture, thereby frightening those merchants who demanded respect for religion, propriety, social class and personal property.

Publically the Spanish merchants subscribed to a stereotypic view of the blacks – the black as an irresponsible savage, to be feared by all respectable citizens. A memorial presented by Francisco Ignacio de Ugarte, merchant and *sindico procurador* of the Cabildo, for example, decried the dances and celebrations of the blacks, and stated that allowing ‘the multitude of free blacks and slaves to meet, play their instruments and dance’, contradicted both human and divine laws and was prejudicial to religion, the state and the public. Ugarte, criticizing the blacks for offending decency, noted that their dances ‘are nothing more than true brothel gatherings where concupiscence has the principal place, where all indecent and obscene movements, which could not be done in any other way, are executed’. Even worse, he claimed, black men obviously stole from their masters for these dances and for gifts for their women. The blacks were so ‘entirely perverted by their many vices [learned at these pernicious dances], that they not only failed to
serve their masters faithfully, but were also in a state of continual unrest, abandoning their duties and thinking of nothing else but the next dance'. 37 Religion, he felt, was also endangered by the dances as the blacks 'forget the beliefs of the Holy Catholic Religion [and]...renew the rites of the pagans'. 38

Ugarte's description of the licentious blacks also contained the usual element of fear. Blacks, said Ugarte, were 'people who with their corrupt customs pervert peace and are the cause of many of the disorders which are occurring'. 39 Ugarte warned, moreover, that as the number of blacks in the city grows, one must pay much attention and treat them with care, guarding their conduct, and never letting them out of sight, not letting them get away with any excess, because by their character and propensity, they are inclined to all which is evil, [and] one must live with them with the greatest distrust. 40

All six members of the Cabildo (five of whom were fellow merchants) agreed fully with Ugarte's findings. In forwarding his report to the Viceroy, they stressed that 'the blacks have some expenses which they must definitely meet through robbery and thievery'. 41 In addition, they criticized disorder and excess which result from too much freedom, and the insolence with which all blacks and mulattoes treat all whites, taking undue liberties with an excess never before seen, [showing] a lack of respect and veneration due all [white] people, principally those decorated and distinguished by their quality and estate. 42

The Cabildo concluded that 'the blacks must be kept in a state of submission, aware of their lowly state and the manner with which they must treat others'. 43

Fear of slaves, however, did not keep the merchants from investing in blacks as commercial and luxury goods. They also invested in a number of other luxury goods, for themselves and their homes, which, like slaves, conveyed an impression of their wealth and their high social status to society at large. Data on these luxury goods also are found in estate papers and wills.

The homes of the merchants were furnished in the heavy Baroque style of the period. Although considered to be sparsely decorated by some European visitors accustomed to even greater splendor than were the colonials, the merchants' homes were amply furnished with elaborate tables, chairs, side tables, beds, desks, bureaus and sideboards, all made of jacaranda woods imported from Brazil. 44 The highly valued jacaranda furniture was usually displayed in the drawing rooms and dining rooms; other less expensive pieces of furniture, made of walnut, pine and
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cowhide were also found in merchant homes, as were occasional pieces made of mahogany, but always in less public rooms. In addition, rooms were adorned with religious pictures in ornate gilded frames, mirrors, candelabras and cornucopias. Wealthier merchants owned other items such as pianofortes, fine clocks, grandfather clocks, rugs, draperies, damask hangings and painted screens. All homes were lit by locally produced tallow candles, which were reputed to be of high quality.

In addition to furniture, cooking utensils, pottery jugs, fine china, glassware, silverware, mates and, in some cases, silver cups and plates reflected the wealth of the merchant class. The wealthiest merchants tended to have the largest investments in such goods. Martín de Alzaga, for example, owned silver plates, silver bowls of various sizes, several silver trays, silver teapots, and 24 silver spoons, forks and knife handles together worth 2,311 pesos. The average merchant investment in silverware for his family's personal use was 2,325 pesos. Another 200 pesos were invested in kitchenware and china. On the whole, all merchants had sizeable investments in personal property. The average value of all material possessions in the households of a group of 24 porteño merchants was 5,155 pesos, but the most prominent had up to 23,000 pesos invested in furnishings, clothing and luxury goods.

Private libraries also were frequently found in merchant homes. Most books were of a religious nature, but there were some interesting exceptions. Of the books listed in the library of Joaquín Pinto, for example, 95 percent were religious tracts with such titles as Bossuet's Defensa del clero, Pérez' Elogio de los santos, Marrilón's Sermones and Kempis' Imitación de Cristo. The libraries of Tomás India, Eusebio Cires and Juan José Lezica were much the same, but more than half the volumes in Domingo Basavilbaso's library were secular in nature. Included were books dealing with government (Leyes de Indias, Leyes de la Provincia de Guipuzcoa, Marquesas y Livertades de Vizcaya, Zavala's Representaciones al Rey sobre Tributos, Vida de varios monarcas, Suplemento de la ordenanza de escribanos), commerce (Comercio y Fabricas, Rapsodia Económico), novels (by Cervantes, Camerino and Madame Fonquet), and Echard's Historia Romana, Geographia de los Niños, Arismetica by Corachan, El filósofo sueco, and a volume in Portuguese on cavalry instruction. Pablo Ruiz de Gaona, a very devout merchant, with a large collection of religious books, also owned Aventuras de Gil Blas, Ciencia para las personas de Corte Espada y Toga, Ordenanzas de la Provincia de Alava, Ordenanzas del Consulado de Bilbao, Viaje a la America Meridional by Jorge Juan and Antonio de Ulloa, La Educación by Rosell, Ordenanzas Militares, an atlas, Secretos de Naturaleza, Comercio y Marina by Uztáriz, Compendio de Contratos, Espectáculos de la Naturaleza, Cartas de un Español a un
American and Romántica Heroico dada a luz con motivo de la reconquista de Buenos Aires. It appears, therefore, that at least some of the merchants continued their eduction through personal libraries.

The merchants were among their own best customers for the fine 'articles of Castile' which they themselves imported. Imported china was used by the porteño merchants. Also listed among their personal possessions were fine linen, sheets of Brabant linen, damask bedspreads and hangings, pillowcases of fine Brittany lace, and rugs imported from Spain.

Both men and women also used imported materials for their apparel. Their dress displayed the wealth of the merchant class, for a man in trade had to clothe himself and his wife in a style befitting his social position. The style in dress and fashion in Buenos Aires was much the same as in Spain. The wardrobe of an average merchant consisted of several waistcoats, dress coats, Cordovan shoes, pants, hats and wigs, and had a value of approximately 375 pesos. Naturally the wives of the merchants were well dressed, for they were of the upper and middle classes of the city. In addition to dresses and skirts of embroidered cotton, petticoats of flowered silk, and shawls of fine wool or muslin for everyday use, their wardrobes included velvet skirts, dresses of embroidered or pleated silk, lace-trimmed dresses, silk shoes, and silk or taffeta shawls trimmed in gold shot lace. Like the women of Spain, the wives of the porteño merchants wore silk mantillas; the only concession to native style was the use of a poncho by both men and women when riding in the countryside. The average wardrobe of a merchant's wife was worth 893 pesos.

Important among merchant possessions were jewelry and various articles of personal adornment. Both men and women owned comparatively large amounts of silver jewelry; gold adorned only the wealthiest merchants. Pearls were most highly prized, and rings, bracelets and necklaces were usually set with the less valuable diamonds, emeralds, topazes or garnets. Gold rosaries, small gold boxes, gold buttons, mother-of-pearl fans, gold hair ornaments, gold or silver buckles, and gold pocket watches were also found among the possessions of upper- and middle-status merchants. The average value of jewelry owned by the merchants was 1,424 pesos. Their wives had jewelry worth an average of 2,152 pesos, but some of the wealthiest merchants' wives had splendid jewelry collections of far greater value. Flora de Azcuenaga, wife of Gaspar de Santa Coloma, owned jewelry valued at 4,440 pesos. One of her necklaces, worth 1,369 pesos, contained more than 200 diamonds, and had been imported from Spain. (See Appendix c, p. 194.)

Ornate saddles, complete with silver galloons, silver stirrups and
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spurs, silver or gold swords and silver mates were also owned by the most prominent merchants. Juan José de Lezica, for example, owned a gilded sword, a silver sword (its blade decorated with silver and its hilt of horn), a gold sword, two sets of silver stirrups and a silver breastplate for his horse worth a total of 496 pesos.56 Velvet saddles, embroidered with gold and silver threads, and fine pistols with silver decorations were the property of the most prosperous. Francisco Tellechea, for example, owned five saddles and breastplates of velvet, all embroidered with gold and silver.57 Silver mates, important luxury articles as they were, were not without their price in personal sacrifice. Vidal, noting that ‘wealthy families have the cups [mates] elegantly ornamented with silver and the tube [bombilla] of the same metal’, added that this was ‘very unpleasant, [as the tube became] extremely hot to the lips’.58

The religious life of the merchants also called for highly specialized additions to their wardrobes. Members of the terceras ordenes (Third Orders) owned the robes of these orders, robes used for all solemn church functions, and as their own burial garments. In addition, women dressed for mass in black silk dresses, worn with black silk stockings and white silk shoes.59 Listed on several inventories of clothing were also small church rugs used by the women to sit in the pew-less sanctuaries of the city.

One of the most important items of luxury found among the possessions of the wealthiest merchants were carriages, at times drawn by horses, but more commonly mule-drawn. In 1773 a visitor noted that there were not more than sixteen carriages in the entire city; Vidal later added that only two or three of the native families owned modern English carriages, and that all other coaches were in the fashion of the seventeenth century, and in general, miserably out of repair.60 Regardless of condition and origin, these carriages were important symbols of social status. Owned by only the wealthiest merchants, the more elegant carriages were worth about 800 pesos.61 Given the usually dreadful condition of the streets and roads in and around the city, they were also important for personal transportation.62

In addition to their fine dress, jewelry and carriages, the merchants of Buenos Aires enjoyed a luxury of table seldom equaled in Spain itself. Both the profusion and low cost of food in Buenos Aires was noted by several European visitors. The merchants, as one of the wealthiest groups of society, could well afford the variety of goods available locally.63 Beef, hens, quail, some fish, some mutton, bacon, ham and pork were common items of diet. Those merchants who owned ranches or large quintas often had meat delivered directly from their ranches.
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85 to the city to feed their households. Most vegetables and fruits, with the exception of peaches, were expensive, but vegetables and fruits were, nevertheless, available in the Buenos Aires market. Again, merchants owning quintas near the city provided their households with a variety of locally grown fruits.

An upper-class prejudice against eating mutton lasted throughout the colonial period. Mutton was fed to slaves, but beef was preferred for the merchant's table. Bread and biscuits were usually available except in times of wheat shortage, and local butter was made of the drippings of beef fat. Except for some local sweet dishes, the cuisine of Buenos Aires was similar to that of Spain, although spicier because of the addition of chile peppers. Merchants could also afford to supplement their diets with imported luxury goods, including Spanish and Chilean wines, chocolate, sugar, coffee and tea. The ubiquitous yerba mate, brought down from Paraguay, also played an important part in the diet of the porteño merchants.

Firewood was a universal problem in Buenos Aires, as no large stands of wood grew close to the city. Some country people used fruit trees for firewood, selling their surplus to the homes of the city. But good firewood had to be brought from the coastal areas of the Paraná and Uruguay rivers, and its transportation by boat or wagon made it comparatively expensive. Some merchants who owned rural properties were able to supply their own firewood, but fulfilling this need for both cooking and heating was, for most, a considerable expense.

The merchants' entertainment, travel and access to medical treatment, like their homes, personal goods and variety of foods, attest to the elite status of the group in colonial Buenos Aires. The evening tertulia was a favored form of entertainment among the merchants, and much of the merchants' social life revolved around these weekly gatherings, where a man could meet with friends and fellow merchants to discuss commerce, local politics and the latest news from Spain. Gaspar de Santa Coloma, for example, was a regular participant at a tertulia attended by merchants Isidro Balbastro, Pablo Beruti, Francisco Perafán and Juan José de Lezica. These gatherings of friends, usually of no more than five or six men, also featured card games (renegado and malilla) and checkers. The tertulias in which merchants participated were attended by other leading citizens of Buenos Aires, such as lawyers and escribanos. Merchants receiving letters, gazettes and announcements from Spanish colleagues traded information on Spanish politics, foreign development and trade at these weekly meetings. In addition, religious festivals and royal ascensions were the cause of widespread general festivities,
complete with fireworks, processions and balls in which the merchants' as leading citizens, took an active part.

The small size of Buenos Aires, its small-town atmosphere, and the wit of its inhabitants, gave rise to the popularity of satires, comic verses and lampoons and to one of the more famous social scandals of the era. Shortly after writing and circulating 'scurrilous verses' was prohibited by Viceroy Vértiz because of their seditious nature, a Notizia individual de los sujetos que mas chocan en esta ciudad de Buenos Aires (General Notice of Those Subjects who are most Disagreeable in the City of Buenos Aires), signed by a mysterious F.A.M. Triangulipicommatifis, was read at a tertulia held in the home of the merchant Francisco Escalada. All present at the gathering were later questioned and all gave the same story of a paper being thrown mysteriously through an open window into the room where a group of merchants and friends were playing cards. The group, afraid that the mysterious paper was a lampoon on 'the good harmony of marriage', delayed a day before reading the satire, but the next morning all present at the previous tertulia found themselves invited once again to the home of Francisco de Escalada 'to read the paper and laugh a bit.' The list, which mocked some of the more respectable citizens of the town, including mechants, royal officials and army officers, was judged by the men who had discovered it to be amusing, and copies of it were passed on to friends and acquaintances. The Viceroy, believing that any type of satire was injurious, irritating and inflammatory, began an investigation into the authorship of the lampoon as soon as he was informed of its existence. Although not accused of authorship, four men were convicted of circulating the dangerous paper, and given fines of 2,000 pesos. Among this group were three merchants, Francisco de Escalada, his brother, Antonio José de Escalada, and Agustín Wright.

Merchants were worldly and well traveled. Many had been born in Spain and had visited other areas of the Spanish world on their way to Buenos Aires. There was also a continual movement of merchants to Spain and back in order to undertake business transactions. Manuel Caviedes, for example, sailed to Spain in 1783 'to advance his business'. He took with him 9,000 pesos which he invested in Castillian goods shipped back to Buenos Aires. Trips were also undertaken for special reasons. Antonio José de Escalada, for example, traveled to Cádiz to straighten out the estate of his late father and to propose marriage in the name of his brother to María Getrudis Cevallos, his first cousin once removed. Some merchants traveled to improve their health. Juan Esteban de Anchorena journeyed to Spain in 1786 for a health cure, but
when this failed he returned to Buenos Aires. Merchants, because of the nature of their occupation, were also aware of political and economic developments throughout the Spanish Empire and Europe. Through letters and *gacetas* received from Spanish friends and colleagues, the merchants were kept up to date on subjects as diverse as the French Revolution and Russian-Turkish relations.

Many merchants planned to return permanently to Spain once they had made their fortunes in Buenos Aires, but few ever realized their dream of retirement in their native villages. Once settled in Buenos Aires, they found their business and personal lives so complicated and demanding of personal attention that they could not return permanently to the land of their birth. Gaspar de Santa Coloma, for example, repeatedly wrote to friends, relatives and business associates of his desire to return to Spain, and of his inability to conclude his business in Buenos Aires, a pre-condition of such a move. In July 1788 he wrote, ‘every day it is more painful to me not to be able to plan my trip [to Spain] because of the business transactions which surround me; I cannot humanly abandon Buenos Aires for this would be to lose half of my fortune which I have worked so hard to obtain’. Three months later he complained, ‘I am working incessantly to arrange my business, but in spite of my efficiency, I cannot conclude it as I would like. Because of the backwardness of all these Provinces in matters having to do with our commerce, leaving is to risk my entire fortune.’

Travel to other parts of the Spanish Empire, for periods of a few weeks to a few months, was common. The merchants and their *dependientes* regularly traveled to Chile, Potosí, Arica, Mendoza, Paraguay, Córdoba, Salta and Montevideo as part of their business itinerary. Merchants also corresponded regularly with other merchants throughout the Spanish Empire, thereby adding still another dimension to their cosmopolitan status.

In addition to travel, fine dress, jewelry, and luxury goods, merchants were also able to afford medical services. There is evidence that many merchants, their wives and families, and even their slaves, received some professional medical treatment. Merchants called upon physicians for serious illnesses, contagious diseases, and for less critical discomforts. Tomás Insúa, for example, was under the care of a doctor during his fatal illness. The wives of Eusebio Cires and Pablo Ruiz de Gaona were treated by doctors during their final illnesses; Ruiz de Gaona’s wife also received drugs and medicines. Doctors were used by merchants to administer vaccinations, both to their families and slaves, and to treat household members who were ill.
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Merchants’ wives were also attended by doctors or midwives during childbirth. Doctors, for example, were present at the births of José Clemente Agüero, son of Diego de Agüero and Petrona Gregorio Espinosa, and María Josefa Ituarte, daughter of Juan Bautista Ituarte and Magdalena Pueyrredon. Infant mortality and death of the mother resulting from complications of childbirth continued to be high, but most probably were even higher for the population at large.

Mercantile life, because of its constant pressures and the ever present threat of bankruptcy, was a hard one, and the merchants of Buenos Aires complained of a multitude of physical ills. Gaspar de Santa Coloma, a merchant burdened by the estate of his father-in-law, Vicente de Azcuenaga, the tutorship of five of Azcuenaga’s children, and poor market conditions, complained of a weak pulse, shaking hands, flatulence and short-sightedness at the age of forty-seven. In 1788 he wrote to a business associate, ‘with my health becoming worse, I found it necessary to consult the doctors and having determined to put me on a rigorous diet, depriving me of all drink, I have, for the last month, achieved the return of my sight and my pulse, and am entirely recovered from my attacks. They also advised me to stop being cooped up in my office and to get out and ride a horse’. Complaints of dropsy, palsy, rheumatism, and failing vision were also quite common.

The pressures of mercantile life also produced cases of alienation and insanity. Miguel Larrea, a nephew of Bernardo Sancho Larrea, who had come to Buenos Aires to learn commerce from his successful uncle, remained in the city after his uncle’s return to Spain to continue in business with Eugenio Lerdo de Tejada, Sancho Larrea’s brother-in-law. Miguel, at the age of thirty-three, was unable to cope with the pressure of his chosen profession, even though he had been in commerce for the past ten years, and he soon entered a state of intense depression. Although attended by a doctor, two years later, a friend noted that

Our Don Miguel is still in the same state without any hope of recovering his entire sense of judgment. [This is] not because he indulges in any excesses but because he continually is saying that he is worthless now that his head is no good... He does not leave the house but is always worrying about the business, torturing himself because he is not selling anything and cannot pay you as he would like.

Gabriel Contiña y Blanco, a young merchant doing business in a room which he rented from Agustín Casimiro de Aguirre, was another victim of insanity. On 15 November 1786, one of Contiña’s debtors reported that ‘he has gone out of his mind, and is completely raging’. Because Contiña was unmarried, he was turned over to a kinsman for medical
care, and the goods in his store were carefully inventoried and put under lock and key. A doctor, Juan Manuel Sobrino, was called in to treat Contiña, and he diagnosed the patient as suffering from 'a violent maniacal fit'. Doctor Sobrino administered a cure consisting of two blood lettings and drugs, and within eight days declared that Contiña was restored to his 'sanity and natural judgment' and could return to the administration of his goods. A local notary agreed with the doctor, stating that although Contiña was previously demented, he had returned to a state of reason; Contiña's creditors, among them Juan Antonio de Lezica, concurred with both the doctor and the notary.

The life of the merchant class varied from one of comfort to one of opulence. The merchants chose to invest large sums of money in personal property, an investment which was not usually economically productive. Only slaves, especially those used to work in factories, quintas, or for daily wages, could be considered to be productive property. The decision to invest profits in luxury goods for personal consumption rather than to reinvest them in business, urban land, or ships, was made by a group of men actively engaged in amassing fortunes, men usually more interested in making money than in spending it. Nevertheless, merchants were attracted by elegant clothing, furniture and jewelry, an indication that they held values common to all prominent people in the Hispanic world.
CHAPTER 5

Religious participation

The interaction of the merchant group with the Church is especially significant in view of the overriding importance of the Church, and the religious nature of colonial society. This interaction was expressed at several levels: individual support of various churches or religious orders, leadership as directors and organizers of Church finances, and participation in religious associations.

The merchants of Buenos Aires were one of the most devout groups in colonial society. Religious participation provided them with greater social recognition, which benefited the individual, his family and the merchants as a whole. In return the merchants provided economic support for the Church, often financing church construction and expansion. An outstanding example of Church support was that of Juan de Lezica, who as a devotee of the Virgin of Luján, was the main sponsor of a new church in that town. Domingo Basavilbaso served for many years as the majordomo of the Cathedral of Buenos Aires, and in this capacity supervised the rebuilding of the church. His work was continued by his son, Manuel Basavilbaso, and then by Gaspar de Santa Coloma, a member of the Basavilbaso clan. These four men, wealthy and respected merchants, set examples of piety and generosity.

Special devotion to one or more saints was common among the merchants. Eugenio Lerdo de Tejada, for example, was a devotee of San Antonio de Padúa, and requested that he be buried at the foot of the saint's altar. He also had a special devotion for Nuestra Señora de Belén, and in 1789 signed an 800 peso contract with a local master woodcarver for a retablo in honor of the saint to be placed in the Capuchinas Convent Church. Eusebio Cires, a devotee of San José, sponsored a monthly mass in honor of the saint; he also tended the altar of Nuestra Señora de Coluna located in the Merced Church.

One of the most important religious functions performed by the merchants was that of sindico (treasurer) of the religious orders of the city. The religious orders were deeply involved in such economic
enterprises as the management of the land and money which they had received as donations from the faithful; their frequent choice of merchants as sindicos was propitious. The merchants of the city had the knowledge of business conditions, as well as the organizational expertise, to run at a profit the orders’ churches, their associated fábricas (building funds), and their property holdings. They also had the necessary connections to market the animal and vegetable products of the farms and ranches controlled by the religious orders, as well as to lend church funds at profitable rates of interest. Loans of funds were often made to other merchants, persons for whom the sindico could attest, or with whom he had done business. Of course, the practice of enlisting merchants as church sindicos also brought returns to the merchants, for in addition to giving individual merchants close ties with a powerful and prestigious institution, the merchant’s total economic power was greatly increased by control of large sums of church money.

Porteño merchants served as representatives of religious orders in the interior as well as in Buenos Aires. Again merchants were chosen because of their knowledge and ability successfully to invest church funds, much of which found its way into commerce. Juan Antonio Endeiza, for example, was the representative in Buenos Aires of the Catalina nuns of Córdoba.5 Merchants were also agents of individual members of religious orders, and sometimes their debtors. Juan José de Lezica, for example, lent money belonging to María de Ojeda, a nun of the Order of Santa Teresa in Córdoba, to Bernardo Gregorio de las Heras and Pablo Ruiz de Gaona. Lezica and Ruiz de Gaona were also executors of the nun’s estate.6

In addition to close alliances forged between specific merchants and specific religious orders or their members, some of the more powerful merchants of Buenos Aires were allied to the Holy Office of the Inquisition. Examples of merchants who served the Inquisition include José Blas Gainza, Familiar of the Holy Office, Francisco Rodríguez de Vida, Alguacil Mayor of the Inquisition, and Manuel Alfonso San Gines, also Alguacil Mayor. Although the Inquisition was no longer as powerful an institution as in the seventeenth century, it was still an important socio-religious body which exercised control over the moral and religious life of the colony. These men gained in prestige from their close ties to this body.

An honor, often reserved for the merchants of Buenos Aires, and of a religio-civil nature was the sponsorship of the festivities in honor of the patron saint of the city and the bearing of the Royal Standard through the streets of the city on this day. This honor was usually
The merchants of Buenos Aires accorded to the alférez real of the Cabildo, often a wealthy or prestigious merchant. In the fifty-year period from 1760 to 1810, merchants were in charge of the Royal Standard for at least forty-eight years. Juan de Lezica, for example, headed the festivities in 1766, 1770, 1772, and again in 1774. In addition to joining the most exalted representatives of the Church and State at the head of the procession which paraded the Royal Arms and a statue of Saint Martin through the finest streets of the city, the sponsor of the Saint’s Day was expected to finance fireworks and feasting, both traditional practices of the day. Other expenses undertaken by the sponsor included payment for sermons and masses, and decorations for the altar of the cathedral. Merchants also underwrote the expenses of minor holidays.

In addition to sponsoring religious celebrations, the merchants were active members of a variety of religious associations. These groups, affiliated with the Church through their special devotion to a particular saint, were by definition of a lay nature; they served to organize laymen into effective groups of support for the clergy.

The most common lay organization in the Spanish colonial world was the cofradía, or religious brotherhood. The main purpose of the cofradía was to promote public worship through the sponsorship of rites such as masses, adoration processions and public recitations of the rosary. These groups, devoted to a specific saint, and associated with local parish churches, provided bonds of spiritual and social union and served as mutual aid societies for their members. They also provided the Church with a core of dedicated lay workers who served as an example of religious piety to others, and occupied themselves with tasks such as the dressing of the local saints and the funding of special feast days.

Cofradías were such an important part of colonial religious life that as early as 1609 two were already in existence in the Buenos Aires settlement: the Cofradía de San Martín y Ánimas del Purgatorio in the parish church of San Nicolás and the Cofradía de Nuestra Señora del Rosario in the Santo Domingo convent. By 1623 there were thirteen cofradías in Buenos Aires, and these groups were joined by others as the population of the city grew.

The data suggest, however, that there was a steady decline in the prestige of some cofradías. Correspondingly, the membership of the cofradía was increasingly composed of individuals of lower socio-economic standing during the eighteenth century. For example, by 1783, the Archicofradía de Nuestra Señora del Rosario was composed almost entirely of artisans, and only one member of the governing board of the group could sign a good hand. The decline in the prestige and
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attraction of the cofradía probably was affected by the attraction which the cofradía organization had for the growing Negro population of the city and the consequent growth of black brotherhoods.

Less than 8 percent of the merchants of the city were associated with cofradías by the decade of 1780. Most of these merchants held positions of leadership, and they were sometimes the only literate members of the religious group. In the late eighteenth century, cofradías had a special appeal to the most socially mobile merchants; Miguel Capdevilla was a member of the Cofradía de Dolores and José Francisco Vidal joined the Cofradía de Santa María del Socorro. In addition, first Domingo Belgrano Pérez and later José González Bolaños served as hermano mayor of the Cofradía de Ánimas, and Francisco Tellechea was sínaco of the Cofradía de San Benito de Palermo for a period of twenty-one years.

The decline in popularity of the cofradía among the elites did not leave wealthy merchants without a vehicle for lay religious participation. Another religious institution, the tercera orden (Third Order), emerged as the major means of special religious affiliation for the upper- and middle-status merchants, military officers, and civil servants. The terceras ordenes were the lay counterparts of the regular religious communities. Unlike the cofradías, they were not attached to parish churches, nor under the guidance of secular clergy; rather they were part of the regular order and under the aegis of the provincial of that order. This gave a more cosmopolitan aura to the tercera orden. In addition, a merchant who had originally joined a group in Spain could continue to participate in the same order's activities in Buenos Aires.

The major goal of all the terceras ordenes was personal striving after Christian perfection through observance of a papally approved rule under the direction and in the spirit of the religious order. More than a grouping of religious citizens, the tercera orden provided the framework for a way of life. Although composed of lay people, both male and female members of the terceras ordenes vowed to fulfill certain religious obligations, to lead a pious life, and to undertake other religious exercises. Membership in a tercera orden included a series of rights and obligations such as the wearing of a scapular, burial in the chapel of the orden, and the right to be buried in the traditional habit of the religious group.

The most important terceras ordenes in Buenos Aires were associated with the Orders of the Regular Franciscans and the Dominicans. In addition, the Mercedarians had a tercera orden with headquarters in La Merced Church and the Betlemitas (Bethlehemites) had another located
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in the Church of the Hospital de Hombres. At least 40 percent of the merchants of the city belonged to one of the terceras ordenes. The Tercera Orden de Nuestro Venerable Padre San Francisco was by far the most popular among the merchants, with a full 51 percent of those who belonged to any tercera orden participating in its activities. A number of merchants belonged to the Tercera Orden of Santo Domingo which enjoyed the reputation of being a more demanding religious group. (The Dominicans were felt to be adherents of the most severe rules of conduct, and their tercera orden was naturally a stringent one.) The Dominican terciarios included among their members the highest ranking military officers of the city, as well as top civil servants; it was the most prestigious tercera orden of the city.

All of the terceras ordenes were theoretically open to any devout Spaniard of good breeding and economic means, but there was a strong tendency for particular families to have close ties to one or another of the ordenes. The Basavilbaso-Azcuenaga clan, for example, was closely identified with the Tercera Orden de San Francisco. Again, as in the case of cofradías, merchants often provided leadership for the terceras ordenes, by serving as comendadores, síndicos and mayordomos. Francisco Ugarte, for example, Comendador of the Tercera Orden de la Merced from 1785 to 1790, was followed by a fellow merchant, Felipe Arguibel.

Membership in the terceras ordenes was also open to women, and 20 percent of the merchants’ wives were active in these groups. It was not uncommon for man and wife to join the orden together, usually in the latter part of their lives. The distribution of women among the terceras ordenes tended to be roughly the same as for men; of the women, 42 percent were members of the Tercera Orden de San Francisco and another 29 percent were members of the Tercera Orden de Santo Domingo. Wives of prominent merchants not only joined the terceras ordenes, but also played important lay leadership roles in these groups. Flora Azcuenaga, wife of Gaspar Santa Coloma, for example, served as the abadesa of the Tercera Orden de San Francisco, and as such was in charge of the adoration and cult of the Santo Cristo sponsored by the orden. The overwhelming tendency was for the merchant’s wife, if she did join a tercera orden, to join the same one as her husband, but there were some exceptions. In some cases a woman joined the tercera orden with which her family had been strongly identified, even when her husband preferred another group or failed entirely to identify with an order.

Among the merchants of the late eighteenth century, there is only one merchant who took religious vows in later life. This is Pablo Ruiz de
Gaona, who in addition to being a member of the Tercera Orden de Santo Domingo, was, towards the end of his life, also a member of the *primera orden* of the same community. Ruiz de Gaona’s piety was somewhat exceptional, and it was noted in an inventory of his belongings after his death that, instead of a bed, he had spent his last years sleeping in a wooden coffin. Perhaps Ruiz de Gaona’s excessive devotion was caused by his age (he was 80 at the time of death), and the fact that he had outlived his wife, his only child who survived to adulthood, his son-in-law, and some of his grandchildren.

Besides membership in religious orders, many of the most devout merchants supported the Casa de Ejercicios (House of Religious Retreat), a place for the exercise of spiritual devotion run by the Beata (holy woman) Sor María de la Paz y Figueroa. In addition to economic support, many merchants and their wives participated in retreats under the guidance of this woman, and several of the most powerful merchants such as Francisco Ugarte and Antonio José Escalada, as well as middle-group merchants, such as Bernardo Pereda, showed their support of the Beata by naming her godparent of their children. The kinship relationship thus formed between individual merchants and the Beata aided both parties; the merchants gained prestige and an air of holy sanctity and the Beata made powerful allies to protect her from jealous clergymen.

Charitable activities were another important dimension of colonial religious life. Merchants were one of the most active groups in the religious charities of Buenos Aires. Charity was performed on an individual basis, with merchants donating funds to the Hospital de Hombres, the Hospital de Mujeres, the Casa de Ejercicios or to a local parish church for distribution among the parish poor. Charity was also undertaken by the Hermandad de la Caridad (The Brotherhood of Charity), an organization of outstanding, wealthy citizens whose main function was to provide assistance to the needy.

The Hermandad de la Caridad, founded in 1743, was composed of high-ranking civil servants, lawyers, notaries, priests, military men and merchants. Its original purpose was to give spiritual counsel to criminals facing death sentences, and to provide decent Christian burials for these men. In 1755 the work of the Hermandad was greatly enlarged after the Bishop of Buenos Aires suggested that the Hermandad could extend its social utility ‘while continuing to aid the poor convicts of Jesus Christ’, by founding an orphanage for girls. The *hermano mayor* at the time, a merchant named Francisco Alvarez Campana, was as aware as the Bishop of the need for this type of institution. A Casa de Niños Expósitos (also
The merchants of Buenos Aires called the Casa de Niñas Huérfanas) was eventually established by the Hermandad. This orphanage became the depository for unwanted or illegitimate children, although some infants were still left at the doorsteps of wealthier citizens soon after birth. In addition to the expenses of feeding, clothing and providing shelter and some rudimentary education to the older girls, the Hermandad was also responsible for hiring nursemaids for the younger charges.

The responsibilities of the Hermandad continued to grow and, within a few years of the founding of the orphanage, a Hospital de Mujeres (Hospital for Indigent Women) was established. The Hospital de Mujeres and the aforementioned Hospital de Hombres run by the Bethlehemite order were the only public medical facilities in the city. Attached to the Hospital de Mujeres was a botica (pharmacy) also under the supervision of the Hermandad de la Caridad. In addition, the orphanage expanded into feminist education, providing a separate schoolroom where paying day-students could learn catechism, reading, arithmetic, sewing and other womanly arts. All economic and administrative responsibilities of the school were assumed by the Hermandad.

The primary concern of the Hermandad, after fulfilling its spiritual responsibility by tending to 'the poor of the Lord', was the supervision of the finances of its multiple charitable activities. Members of the Hermandad continued to attend to the execution and burial of criminals, but collection of funds to sponsor the Hermandad and its associated institutions became the overriding concern, especially for the governing board. Many methods of collecting funds were used; brothers were posted in front of the churches of the city every Tuesday to beg alms for charity. Entrance fees and dues were also collected from Hermandad members, but both alms and dues were insufficient to support the mounting expenses of the Hermandad.

After the expulsion of the Jesuits from all Spanish possessions in 1767, the Junta de Temporalidades (Commission to Govern the Jesuits' Worldly Goods) gave the Hermandad a number of ranches which had formerly belonged to the ill-fated order. In addition, yerba mate from northern ex-Jesuit areas was occasionally shipped to the Hermandad to help finance its charitable activities. Although possession of the ranches allowed the Hermandad to move toward more financial stability, it also greatly complicated the duties of its members, especially the governing board. The Hermandad was now responsible for clothing and supplies for the peons on the ranches, for purchase of slave labor, for transportation of hides and other cattle products which the estancias pro-
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duced, for sale of these products, and for the general management of its properties. Of the merchants of Buenos Aires, at least 22 percent were members of the Hermandad; these men were overwhelmingly upper-class merchants. In addition to the much needed funds which they brought to the Hermandad, the merchants often called upon their business expertise in the management of these funds. Of the officers of the Hermandad during the 1788–1808 period, for example, 56 percent were merchants. In addition, merchants served as hermanos mayores during twelve of the twenty years. They often benefited both in prestige and local power by their association with the Hermandad. Almost without exception those merchants who took the most active part in the work of the Hermandad were also those who were so well established in commerce that they could afford to devote time and money to charity.

All officers of the Hermandad attended regular meetings of the charity, during which time attention was given to mundane matters of supervising the ranches, requesting food and goods to be sent to Buenos Aires, filling the requests of ranch foremen for provisions from the capital, paying boatmen for transporting goods, feeding orphans, keeping the pharmacy well supplied, and tending to the myriad details of their wide operations. In addition to meetings of the Hermandad, the officers were expected to be in constant touch with their charges, and much time was spent outside the chapel in Hermandad-related activities.

It was especially in the areas of finance, transportation of goods, sale of goods to the ranches and sale of the ranch products to the outside world that the merchant members of the Hermandad were most useful; it was also in these areas that the same merchants profited. Juan Antonio de Lezica, Juan Viola, Manuel Crespo, Ventura Miguel Marcó del Pont, Antonio de la Cagigas and Tomás Balanzategui, all Hermandad members, purchased hides from the Hermandad’s ranches for shipment to Europe. Francisco Baldovinos handled transportation of goods to and from the ranches on his boats, and attempted to sell one of them to the Hermandad. Merchant members also stocked the pulpería located on the main ranch, receiving their customary profits.

Merchants in the Hermandad were also called upon to grant short-term loans until the sale of produce could be realized. These loans, such as that of Tomás Balanzategui for 1,000 pesos, were always made at the normal lending rate of 6 percent interest. Antonio José de Escalada lent 3,000 pesos to the Hermandad so that the Hospital de Mujeres could be expanded and the urgent needs of the Hermandad could be met.
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Escalada's membership in the Hermandad helped him receive full repayment, for when he complained that payment was not being met to his satisfaction, he was appointed treasurer with the understanding that he was to retain the post until fully reimbursed.

Some of the more outstanding administrators of the Hermandad and its affiliated institutions were merchants. Juan José de Lezica, for example, served as administrator of the Women's Hospital from 1796 to 1807. Lezica, a member of one of the city's most important mercantile families, was also the hermano mayor of the Hermandad in 1794 and 1795. In 1799, he lent 3,000 pesos at ½ percent interest per month to the Hermandad.

Another outstanding member of the Hermandad, also an important merchant of the city, Martín de Sarratea, was charged by the Viceroy with the responsibility of directing the Casa de Niños Expósitos. Sarratea served as administrator of the orphanage from 1778 to 1783. He also busied himself collecting rents from rooms which had fallen to the Hermandad after the departure of the Jesuits. In 1783, Sarratea complained to the Viceroy that his duties were becoming too time consuming and therefore detrimental to his business. He explained that:

I have been able to make this great effort [for charity] during the past four years because trade had been slowed down by the war, [and] my own business transactions did not require much time. Today because of the peace, commerce is again open and I cannot take the time, because both my good name and my reputation in fulfilling my business agreements and contracts demand my attention... It would not be possible for me, without causing a setback in my business, to continue in the above-mentioned charitable work. I am also certain that my personal fortune can no longer suffer these out-of-pocket expenses and that I cannot continue to pay the expenses and salaries which I have done up to now to contribute as much as possible to Your Excellency's pious intentions.

Sarratea, wishing to be freed of his responsibilities and to return to a more active commercial life, requested that the money which he had lent to the Hermandad for its day-to-day needs, be repaid in order that he might invest these monies in commerce. He claimed that he had supplied the Hermandad with 4,285 pesos during the past four years, in order to meet the expenses and salaries of the orphanage's nursemaids.

Another important member of the Hermandad, Manuel Rodríguez de la Vega, was one of the few unmarried members of the merchant group. Rodríguez de la Vega worked as treasurer of the Casa de Niños Expósitos from 1779 to 1795. During his life and after, he was one of the major benefactors of the Hermandad, as well as other religious organizations in the city. Rodríguez de la Vega left his sizeable estate...
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to the Church and its charities; his will named the Hermandad as the executor and prime benefactor of his estate.\textsuperscript{30}

One of the more dynamic merchants of Buenos Aires, Tomás Antonio Romero (a man who had amassed a vast fortune through his success in obtaining government contracts for transportation of metals from Potosí to Buenos Aires, and who later became one of the major slave importers of the colony), served in 1796 and again in 1798 as hermano mayor of the Hermandad. Romero was concerned with the conditions at the orphanage which he felt had seriously deteriorated. In 1796 he complained to the Viceroy that the Casa de Niñas Huérfanas had become a house of reclusion or jail 'to contain disorders or punish excesses and crimes of adult women'. He noted the case of a woman interned in the orphanage because of 'unpleasantnesses and disagreements that she had had with her husband', and mentioned that two sisters-in-law of Manuel de la Piedra, a merchant and Hermandad member, were living in the orphanage because of 'domestic disturbances'.\textsuperscript{31} Romero feared that the orphans' contact with these women, combined with their absence from school for long periods under the pretext of illness, was robbing the orphan girls of their innocence.

Romero's other major concern was the condition of the Hospital de Mujeres. In dealing with this problem, he demonstrated his fund-raising skills by appealing to the wealthier women of the city to help in hospital financing. Romero sent a printed circular to the most socially prominent women of the city (half of whom were merchants' wives and daughters) asking that each one undertake to feed the inmates of the hospital for at least one day of the year (at a cost of five pesos per day) or to provide and maintain a bed and linen (at a cost of twelve pesos per year). Response on the part of the women was excellent; Romero had appealed directly to them, giving them an opportunity to participate. The women could also fulfill their devotion to special saints by providing food to the hospital on saints' days. Romero cleverly published a list of the 'ladies who, with great charity, have taken charge of providing beds for the fifty-one cells to be used by the sick poor', thereby acknowledging the charity of these ladies and assuring future donations from them.\textsuperscript{32}

Although merchants formed only 20 percent of the Hermandad in a year such as 1791, they formed 48 percent of the governing body. When, in 1797, Tomás Romero circulated a letter to all brothers who had had positions of importance in the Hermandad asking them to donate any papers pertaining to the institution to its archives, 10 of the 15 brothers addressed were merchants.\textsuperscript{33}

Merchant leadership did not always make for harmonious relations
among members within the Hermandad. In 1796 José Martínez Elizalde, for example, the new merchant treasurer of the Hospital de Mujeres, complained bitterly and repeatedly of the trouble which he had in obtaining the old accounts of the hospital from Antonio José de Escalada, a fellow merchant. Concern for charity, moreover, did not lessen merchant interest in turning a good profit. Gaspar de Santa Coloma, for example, son-in-law and executor of the estate of Vicente de Azcuenaga, purposely stalled in fulfilling Azcuenaga’s donation of a 6,000 pesos capellanía (chantry) to the Hermandad, at the same time offering the hard-pressed Hermandad a short-term loan of 4,000 pesos at a high rate of interest. Had Santa Coloma honored the request of his deceased father-in-law, the Hermandad would have had no need to borrow funds from him.

Another merchant, Domingo Belgrano Pérez, had the most questionable dealings involving the Hermandad. Belgrano Pérez served as treasurer of the Hermandad between 1769 and 1788, when he was replaced by another merchant, Francisco Antonio Escalada. By 1788 Belgrano Pérez had begun to suffer serious economic reverses; implicated in an embezzlement charged to the Administrador de la Real Aduana, he was placed under house arrest. In addition, a royal embargo was placed on all of Belgrano’s goods. After new elections in the Hermandad, major irregularities in Belgrano’s handling of funds became apparent. From 1769 to 1788 the Hermandad had neither taken nor been given an accounting of their cattle ranches. Moreover, no report had been made of other funds which were under the care of the Hermandad’s treasurer.

It soon became evident to the Hermandad that sizable sums of the orphanage’s bequests were missing. The new treasurer, Escalada, and the new hermano mayor, Manuel Basavilbaso, ordered Belgrano to produce the Hermandad’s economic records, but because of the embargo on Belgrano’s property, this was not done. For the next ten years the Hermandad wrangled, first with Belgrano himself, and after his death in 1795, with his son and executor, Francisco Belgrano, for an accounting of funds. As late as 1798, Francisco Belgrano wrote to Tomáš Antonio Romero, then hermano mayor, explaining that because of the legal complications of his father’s estate, he was still unable to clear up accounts between the Hermandad and his late father.

In addition to active participation by merchants in charity, many also provided financial support through bequests and monetary gifts. Capellanías were a singularly common form of gift giving in the late eighteenth century, and the Hermandad received its share of such gifts.
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Capellanías were grants made to churches, religious institutions or individual priests. They were unique in that the grant, although assigned to the Church, continued to be managed by the donor or by a specified patrón. Only the annual interest went to the designated religious institution. There were many varieties of capellanías, but all had the following characteristics: a specific sum of money was designated as the principal; a patrón, either clerical or lay, often the donor of the chantry was named; and a capellán, or recipient of the interest was indicated. In some instances, capellanías were drawn up for a specific period of time, at the end of which they were redeemed by the donor; a number were also perpetual, in which case provision was made for the continuation of the patrón and the capellán. Interest generated by the capellánía (usually 5 percent of the principal) was to be used for specific intentions (e.g., masses for an individual soul, a priest for a chapel, the costs of the education of a seminarian) or for more general programs (e.g., religious training for future descendants who might be interested in joining the clergy). The principal was often lent by the donor of the capellánía to himself, or to a close member of his family. Among the merchant group, the principal of many capellanías was lent to other merchants. Whoever borrowed the principal of the capellánía was responsible for paying the interest to the capellán. Essential to the loan of capellánía funds was security usually in the form of a mortgage on urban property in good repair. Rural property was never considered to be of sufficient value to be used in the founding of a capellánía.

Among the larger capellanías was a bequest of 6,000 pesos made to the Hermandad by Vicente de Azcuenaga, merchant, son-in-law of a merchant, and father-in-law of another merchant. Azcuenaga’s capellánía stands out because of the large sum involved and the great detail of its clauses. Azcuenaga was quite specific in the provisions of his capellánía as to the aim of his work of charity. The 300 pesos accruing annually from his bequest were earmarked for the salary of a chaplain to attend to the spiritual needs of the poor and infirm in the Hospital de Mujeres. The chaplain was obligated, by the terms of the capellánía, to say daily mass for the poor sick women, to administer all sacraments to them, to aid them in whatever they needed, and especially to comfort the dying.

Although Azcuenaga reserved the patronato of the chantry for himself during his lifetime, and personally named the first chaplain, he worried that the intent of his pious work would be perverted after his death. Consequently, Azcuenaga carefully stipulated those duties to which the priest must attend to receive his stipend. Failure to comply with these
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duties was to lead to an automatic change of chaplain. As Azcuenaga’s
generation had witnessed the disappearance of the powerful Jesuit order
by a stroke of the royal pen, Azcuenaga’s capellánía reflects a strong sense
of insecurity about the future of the Hospital de Mujeres and the
Hermandad itself. He therefore included a provision for the continua-
tion of the capellánía should the Hospital de Mujeres cease to exist.

Unfortunately Azcuenaga could not control the actions of his ex-
cutors after his death. He had wanted the capellánía to be founded
intervivos, but he died soon after drawing it up, and thirteen years later
his son-in-law, Gaspar de Santa Coloma, had not yet turned over the
grant to the Hermandad. It was only after a judge of the Juzgado de
Difuntos ordered Santa Coloma to begin paying the Hermandad, that
Azcuenaga’s pious work finally got under way.

The capellánía was favored among merchants because it allowed for
continued use of the principal by the donor of the chantry or the
recipient of the principal. Even when the capital was loaned to another
party, management of the gift was maintained by the donor’s right to
name the patrón. Merchants frequently assigned the chantry’s principal
to themselves and also named themselves patrón during their lifetime,
thereby assuring that the gift remained fully in their control. Not
uncommonly, the merchant named his descendants in perpetuity as
patrones after his death, thereby maintaining the capellánía in family
hands. The average principal of a capellánía was between 1,500 and
2,000 pesos. There were no limits to the number of capellanías which
could be drawn up by one individual, and often the more prominent
merchants and their wives funded three or four such grants.

The founding of large capellanías, in addition to demonstrating
religious piety, brought several secular gains. The ability to finance
a capellánía was itself a demonstration of high social status. The almost
universal election of non-clerical patrones also allowed the merchants and
their kin some control over those clergymen chosen as capellanes, and
a consequent increase in merchant influence within the Church. To a
certain degree, capellanías were used as a substitute for mayorazgos in an
attempt to maintain certain property undivided in the hands of the
family and to provide employment for clan members. But capellanías
were far less efficient than mayorazgos, and did not provide the hoped
for continuity. Firstly, the formation of a capellánía did not ensure that
a property would not be sold. Sale of property encumbered by capellánía
mortgages was frequent, the only stipulation being that the new owner
either redeem the capellánía (if it were a temporary lien) or assume it
(in the case of perpetual grants). Although the capellánía might remain
Religious participation

in one family's hands through the family's control of the *patronato*, the property itself could easily be transferred to others. In addition *capellanías* failed to provide a great degree of employment for members of the family; the position of *patrón*, usually kept within the family, did not carry a monetary remuneration; the *capellán* or recipient of the *capellánía* interest was not always a member of the donor's family. Moreover neither the total amount of the *capellánía* grant (usually 1,500 pesos) nor the annual interest paid to the *capellán* was large. No merchant encumbered a large proportion of his entire estate with *capellanías*; total grants never ran to more than 5 percent of an estate. And the average yearly income of 75 pesos was scarcely enough for a priest to maintain himself in a decent life style; it was a welcome supplement rather than the sole source of income.

Regardless of its failure as a substitute for *mayorazgos*, the merchants group was strongly attracted to the *capellánía* as a form of religious gift-giving because of its similarity to a business loan. Like a loan, the *capellánía* involved principal and interest. The principal could always be invested in commerce, and in some cases it could be redeemed and the *capellánía* cancelled. The chantry's yearly interest was viewed as a constantly self-perpetuating investment akin to interest accruing from any commercial loan. As mortgaged urban property was the collateral of the *capellánía* (much the same as it was for monetary loans made by the merchants) the merchants could easily verify the value of the property to be mortgaged. In its broadest sense, the *capellánía* was a loan in which the profit fell to God, but it was nevertheless a loan, drawn up in terms familiar to the merchant group.

One of the more interesting uses of the *capellánía* was to encourage study for the priesthood by merchants' sons or descendants and to provide funds for a suitable life style (*congrúa vida*) once the novice had been ordained. The priesthood was a most prestigious occupation in colonial society, and at least 7 percent of the vice-regal merchants had one or more sons who entered the service of the Church. It was socially advantageous to have a son in the clergy, and to ensure his economic support during the long years of study. Therefore, many *capellanías* were set up naming a young seminarian as chaplain. As the student himself could not say mass, he in turn used funds provided by the yearly interest from the *capellánía* for masses said by another priest, saving the larger part of the *capellánía*'s interest for his tuition, clothing and housing. Upon ordination he reserved the entire *capellánía* and officiated at mass. Examples of such *capellanías* were drawn up by Eusebio Cires and Fernando Caviedes.40
The total effect of the large numbers of *capellanías* granted by the merchants was the encumbrance of much of the urban property of the city with long-term or perpetual mortgages. These mortgages were transferred with the property to a new owner who in turn undertook to pay the annual interest due the *capellania*. Although ideally one piece of property was used for one *capellania*, by the end of the eighteenth century the popularity of the *capellania* had forced merchants, among others, to place multiple mortgages on each of their properties. Some merchants, such as Felipe Argüibel, warned of the disastrous effects which perpetual interest liens could have on property, but this did little to deter enthusiasm for founding chantries. The long-term effect of *capellanías* on property was to burden the owner with interest payments to the point where he failed to invest in the upkeep of his property. The use of urban property for *capellanía* mortgages eventually led to the decay of the property or its forced sale to meet the obligations of the chantry.

Besides *capellanías*, the merchants of Buenos Aires gave much economic support to the Church both in life and after, through their substantial contributions for masses, burial fees, and donations to the *mandas forzozas*. Fees were not arbitrary, but were determined according to detailed lists of aranceles or charges. For example, the aranceles of the Cathedral included burial fees according to the grandeur of the funeral, the number or type of masses, and the race of the deceased. Also listed were charges for masses, nuptial masses, veiling ceremonies and baptisms.

In addition to fixed aranceles, a merchant could assign up to one-fifth (the quinto) of his estate for the purchase of masses for his soul, and those of his wife, parents, and others to whom he was spiritually indebted. Burial expenses were also paid out of the quinto, and many merchants left detailed instructions for their own burials, specifying numbers of candles and candle holders, attendance of religious congregations at the funeral mass, special masses to be sung, and the number of masses to be said in a specific church on the day of the burial, the day of honors, and the anniversary of their death. A man of means had to be buried in a ceremony reflecting his status, and although a few merchants rejected the customary pomp associated with the funerals of the wealthy (specifying that they be buried simply 'without pageantry or ostentation'), many merchants, both those who could and who could not afford it, spent huge sums on their funerals. Among those who could afford it was Vicente Azcuenaga, one of the wealthiest merchants of his day, who specifically requested that his burial follow the latest French
Religious participation

A total of 3,260 pesos was spent on his funeral and associated expenses.

The largest religious contributions made by the merchants were made posthumously, for all merchants of means, regardless of the gifts they had made to the Church during their lifetime, wanted masses said for their souls when they died. In addition to monies for masses, donations to charitable institutions were also made in the merchants' wills; an average legacy of 200 pesos was provided for each charity, to be used by the institution at its discretion. Some of the most pious merchants made provisions in their testaments for special religious gifts. Domingo Basavilbaso, for example, willed 2,000 pesos for a retablo to the Sacred Heart to be placed in the cathedral of the city.

Although common, provision for religious contributions in one's will was far from universal among the merchants of Buenos Aires. Approximately 32 percent of the porteño merchants failed to leave sums for religious use. But, while a third of the merchants made no religious contribution, 45 percent willed more than 1,000 pesos to religious organizations. Included in the donations were monies for terceras órdenes, for the Hermandad de la Caridad, for specific churches, altars and religious ceremonies, as well as funds for priests and nuns. The general tendency was for the merchant group, regardless of the social and economic standing of individual merchants, to make either large religious contributions, or no contribution at all.

The data suggest that the largest religious contributions were usually made by childless merchants. For example, Antonio García López, one of the few bachelor merchants, left a total of 29,100 pesos to various religious institutions. Included in this sum were 4,000 pesos donated to the Men's Hospital, 2,000 pesos apiece to the Women's Hospital, the House of Religious Retreat, and the Convent of Nuestra Señora de las Mercedes, and 11,000 pesos for masses for his soul.

In addition to gifts to religious institutions, merchants used their wills to leave bequests to family, friends and faithful servants. There was a close relationship between religious and non-religious gift-giving practices, although non-religious gifts tended to be slightly lower in value. Neither practice was universal. Childless merchants, or those with few children, again tended to be most generous. Some merchants provided small monetary gifts for loyal slaves, hardworking clerks, and loving godchildren; others provided for siblings and other parientes who had remained in Spain.

Gifts were not always of money. It was common, especially among merchants' wives, who were perhaps more reticent about dispensing with
cash funds, to leave articles of clothing, religious statuary, and jewelry to friends, godchildren, and trustworthy servants. Merchants sometimes made a gift of the rent on one of their properties for a specified period to their favorite tenants. Antonio García López, for example, in addition to monetary gifts totaling 3,450 pesos made to ritual kinsmen and newly freed slaves, stipulated that 'he leaves to Doña Ana María García [the rent on] the house in which she lives, so that until the end of her days, she may live in it without his estate collecting any rent', and 'to the family which lives in the San Cristobál house, a gift of the four pesos a month of rent shall be made to them for two years'.

One of the more generous gifts made by a merchant in his will was that of Francisco Tellechea to the city of La Rioja. On a visit to La Rioja in 1811, Tellechea was taken ill. In gratitude for his recovery, in his will he donated 4,000 pesos to the local Cabildo; the annual interest of 200 pesos was to be used to pay the salary of 'a teacher of first letters' who would instruct the children of the city in 'the rudiments of our Holy Faith and its explication, to read, to write and to count'. Although this will was later invalidated by another drawn in 1812, Tellechea's widow honored the intention of the earlier testament by declaring the legacy of 4,000 pesos to be valid.

The merchants of eighteenth-century Buenos Aires were generally men of great outward piety. They provided leadership for several prestigious religious organizations (and even the less prestigious cofradías) as well as economic support for the Church and its activities. To impute purely economic motives to the participation of all merchants in religious organizations would be cynical, for some of these men were also inwardly pious, concerned with their own salvation and that of their families. Nevertheless, their participation in Church activities and their alliance with the local church, brought them important social and economic returns. The merchants and the Church supported each other. The Church provided eternal salvation and social status; the merchants provided their expertise in the management and investment of Church funds. The merchants, as agents for the churches, convents and monasteries of the city and the interior, increased their economic and social power through their control of these Church monies. In effect, the merchants used their economic know-how to form an important alliance, a union which increased their status and power in colonial society.
CHAPTER 6
Political and social awareness

Eighteenth-century Spanish America was a society based on notions of caste and the functions of various estates of the realm. Although the social position of the porteño merchants was based primarily on wealth (and secondarily on race) the merchants adhered to a conception of society as hierarchical, composed of different and unequal groups in which they were most definitely among the gente decente.

Privilege played a role in defining the position of the porteño merchants; the merchant group of the Río de la Plata enjoyed special favors as a result of the Crown’s new interest in the area. To generate new revenues through an expansion of Platine commerce, Upper Peru and the city of Potosí were included within the parameter of Buenos Aires trade, and special tax exemptions were provided to encourage new trade through Buenos Aires. But these privileges were economic rather than social; unlike the clergy or the military, the merchants were always simply vecinos (ordinary citizens) of Buenos Aires.

In addition to being the beneficiary of favorable trade policies, the merchant group, because it was literate and aware of conditions in other sectors of the Spanish Empire, and at times of the world, was able to lobby effectively before the colonial administration. Along with high administrators, leading churchmen, and professional men, the merchants were among the most cosmopolitan members of the city’s society. In constant contact with their peers in the interior, in Lima, in Montevideo, and in Spain, the merchants were aware both of general political conditions, and of the special state of the mercantile community in other parts of the Empire. And, aware of the law, they were not afraid of petitioning the Viceroy, the Cabildo, the courts, or even the Crown for what they considered to be just. As the merchants were men of means, they could afford legal disputes; on the whole, they did not hesitate to defend their rights.

Although the merchants of the La Plata region enjoyed a favorable tax policy under vice-regal government, the entire mercantile com-
munity or specific sectors of the community continued to petition the Viceroy for special treatment whenever the government acted in a manner which the merchants felt harmful to their commerce. In 1799, for example, a group of fifteen individuos del comercio involved in the yerba maté trade from Paraguay to Mendoza via Buenos Aires petitioned Viceroy Gabriel Avilés (via the Consulado) to nullify his decree forcing them to use the new 'Cerra' road and to pay a toll of ten pesos per wagon to Francisco Cerra. In their petition, the merchants noted precedents for vice-regal protection of their trade. Viceroy Juan José de Vértiz, in 1780, had exempted the yerba maté trade from a tax on 'Castillian goods and native products' which were transported along the Sauce and Saladillo routes, and Viceroy Nicolás Arredondo had, in 1791, cancelled a tax of two reales per tercio of yerba maté which was being collected in Saladillo: 'those interested in the commerce called out, and we were heard, [the Viceroy] having ordered said extraction to be suspended'.

Merchants were capable of united action based on common economic interests but there was also much dissension as a result of social differentiation among various groups of merchants. There were several types of commerce and strong antipathies between groups engaged in different aspects of trade. The most prestigious and powerful group of merchants were those primarily in the wholesale trade of the colony. Although all groups engaged in trade identified themselves as del comercio, it was the wholesale importers and exporters who could also boast the title of comerciante. Often members of this group both maintained a wholesale house and sold to local merchants and merchants in the interior. In Buenos Aires the comerciante's clientele included mercaderes de tienda abierta and tenderos mercaderes (shopkeepers), the retail merchants of the city who maintained a variety of retail shops for the general public. Both wholesale and retail merchants established links with the interior through dependientes whom they had set up in retail outlets on the outskirts of the city and in nearby towns. The retail dry goods merchants lacked both the social prestige and political power of the wholesalers, but enjoyed a higher social ranking than the third merchant group, the almaceneros de caldos y frutos (retailers of food products). All three merchant groups commonly employed salaried assistants, variously called dependientes, mancebos or mozos. The social ranking of the assistants followed that of their employers. Within each of the mercantile groups, of course, there was an internal ranking depending largely on the bulk, gross trade and profit.

In addition to wholesalers and retailers, the city of Buenos Aires also supported a corps of mercachifes or mercaderes de bándola. These were the peddlers who roamed the streets or set up stalls in the public
markets. They were among the poorest and least prestigious groups engaged in commerce. They sold Castillian goods and small items for household and clothing use which they had in turn purchased from wholesalers or directly from the incoming merchant ships. Of approximately the same social ranking were the *pulperos*, owners of *pulperías* or public bars, which also served as outlets for retail sale of dry goods and notions.

Within each merchant group there was a strong feeling of solidarity, strongest in times of crisis and during times of direct threat to the interests of the group. Like the wholesalers in the Mendoza yerba mate trade, 13 *pulperos* of the city of Buenos Aires, in 1788, calling themselves ‘owners and outfitters of various shops of supply for this capital’, joined together to award their power of attorney to a lawyer who was to act on their behalf in any lawsuits which might be forthcoming against the *pulperos* of the city.9

Threats to a specific group of merchants often came with new government policy, but they could also be the result of the action of another merchant group. Each group of merchants in colonial Argentina felt their unity as well as their economic and social position threatened by the group immediately below them on the status ladder. For example, in 1773, a group of 53 retail merchants brought suit against the peddlers of the city in an attempt to prohibit their commercial activity.10 The retailers complained that the peddlers ‘stopping in the streets, houses, plazas, country houses, and general environs of the city, do not allow any buyer to arrive at our doors’.11 They were also accused of being responsible for the growing and frivolous ‘luxury, adornment and expense’ of the women of the city; the peddlers entered homes with their trays laden with wares and enticed women and servants to purchase expensive frivolities, often without the knowledge of their husbands.12

In their defense, the peddlers stressed that they were honorable men, hard-working and of European stock. With surprising frankness about their social position and the possibility of mobility, they noted that their profession was ‘the most decent, appropriate and common for poor Spaniards to work their way up to the career of wholesale and retail merchants’.13 The peddlers pointed to at least five of their number who had recently entered the ranks of retail merchants.

Testimony presented by peddlers proves, beyond a doubt, that social mobility existed among the ranks of the merchants of Buenos Aires. Mobility up the mercantile ladder took place step by step. Each man hoped to complete at least one step during his lifetime; peddlers worked to become retailers, and retailers strove to enter wholesale commerce.14

To further strengthen their case the peddlers called witnesses from
the ranks of the wholesalers;\textsuperscript{15} as the peddlers were usually customers of the wholesalers, the latter could only gain from coming to their defense. In the eyes of the wholesalers, the peddlers were honest, hard-working ‘honorable young men applying themselves to making [their] fortune’.\textsuperscript{16} In addition, they did not deal in true luxury goods, such as silks and galloons, and therefore could not be accused of fostering a growth in the consumption of luxury goods by women. In the end, the peddlers, with the powerful alliance of the wholesalers, were successful. They were allowed to continue selling their wares in the streets of the city.

The social implication of a victory for the retailers would have eliminated one channel for upward mobility, for they would have deprived the peddlers of the economic means to work their way into a higher social group. It is interesting to note that among those testifying against the peddlers, and in favor of a complete cessation of peddling activities, was a former peddler who had become a retailer.\textsuperscript{17} Although his testimony was not as damaging as that of other retail merchants, it was an attempt to halt social movement through the very channel which he himself had used.

Just as retailers attempted to defend their economic and social position from the encroachment of the peddlers, so the wholesalers worked to defend their position from the designs of the retailers. In 1789 the wholesale merchants assembled to elect two new deputies who would join Martín de Sarratea in petitioning the court for a Consulado.\textsuperscript{18} Shortly after the election, a group of wholesalers directed themselves to the Viceroy, asking that the election be declared null and void, and charging irregularities because ‘many who should not have attended the meeting, were there’.\textsuperscript{19} Their main complaint was that at the meeting ‘the votes of all who attended were counted, without examining if all present had the necessary qualifications to vote according to the Consulado rules of Seville, Bilbao and Lima; [these rules state that to vote] one must be a shipper, importer, owner of a wholesale house, or have paid avería’.\textsuperscript{20} They pointed out that many of those casting votes ‘lacked all these requirements, and were brought to the meeting to fill the room and to obtain a premeditated vote’, and that in fact many ‘clerks and dependents’ and owners of retail shops had taken part in the vote.\textsuperscript{21} They requested that the Viceroy draw up a list of those merchants qualified to vote, expressly excluding retail merchants and clerks. The signers of this petition, although clearly meeting their own specifications for voting in the election, were not among the most powerful wholesale merchants of the city. These men were precisely
those who had most to fear from the social progress of the shopkeepers, as they themselves were on the lower rungs of the wholesale ladder.

Their charges were answered by Francisco Ignacio de Ugarte and Agustín Antonio de Erezcano, who pointed out that the dissenting group was looking at the Consulado rules for the election of officers, rules which did not hold for Juntas generales de Comerciantes y Mercaderes or for cities which did not have Consulados. In addition, Rodríguez de la Vega and Sarratea claimed that 'the meeting of the wholesalers and the retailers had been called in the same way as prior ones, and that the qualifications for voting, which were being requested, had never been asked for [in the past]';²² both wholesale and retail merchants (and even their clerks) had traditionally been allowed to vote in merchant meetings, and had, in fact, composed the group which had last elected representatives in 1782. They also argued that the dissenting group was not competent to judge whether or not an individual was entitled to vote as they had no proof of the size of any merchant's trade, nor a record of the taxes which he had paid. These arguments convinced Viceroy Arredondo to allow the election to stand.

Although troubled by dissension and factionalism, the wholesale merchants were strongly united in their conception of the world and their role in it. They continually stressed their contribution to progress, their utility to the Empire, and their loyal support of the Spanish king. They viewed the king as the source of the happiness of his subjects, happiness based directly on the king's encouragement of 'improvement, progress, and the success of all arts and manufactures'.²³ Commerce was the key to national prosperity ('the soul of society, the nerves of the monarchy') and was essential to progress. A good monarch, the merchants reasoned, was primarily a patron of commerce; his major role was to develop trade by all possible means. The merchant profession, according to this view, was the only profession which 'produces abundance, augments the Royal Treasury, maintains the great military and political families of the State...and gives all the vigor, the energy and the opulence [to society]'.²⁴ It was a most honorable profession which produced 'unlimited advantages to the Nation'.²⁵ Its practitioners were, by extension, members of a 'distinguished and ennobled class' and were above all the most useful and honorable group of the reign.²⁶

A group composed of 'most useful persons', dedicated to business and enterprise, and providing the soul and life of the nation, were of course deserving of special treatment by the Crown's agents. As a group of merchants warned in 1798, 'whatever small blow is given to the [merchants], often causes imponderable harm which is not discovered
The merchants of Buenos Aires because one does not stop to think about it. Perhaps without knowing it, [this blow] becomes the reason for the end of commercial expansion.\textsuperscript{27}

The end of commercial expansion would endanger the nation and perhaps produce its very demise. The monarch was enjoined to protect the merchants' honor and their 'freedom.' to dedicate themselves to their business... the security of their fortunes and the rapid circulation of their capital...\textsuperscript{28} A good king, according to the merchants' political theory, allowed the merchants of his realm freedom of activity, while protecting them from any unduly harsh taxation, legislation, or service which would in any way restrain their trade. And a good king, such as Charles III in his Royal Order of 17 March 1773, recognized the merchants as an elite, in the same privileged category as the nobles, the lawyers and the notaries.

In addition to a strong sense of their own worth, the Spanish-born merchants of Buenos Aires shared an overwhelming sense of European regional identification. Many of the colonial merchants viewed themselves primarily as natives of the Basque region, or Seville, or Cataluña. In Buenos Aires they sought out other merchants from their province and clerked, apprenticed or established their first business contacts with these men. Regional origin also determined marriage patterns to some degree, for the merchant frequently chose a younger merchant from his native province for his daughter's husband. Even religious practices were influenced by provincial origin. A group of Galicians, for example, many of them merchants, joined together to purchase two effigies of Santiago Apostol from their native province; these statues were kept in an altar dedicated to the saint and used in saint's day celebrations.\textsuperscript{29} Local identification often went even further, to the point that merchants considered their prime loyalty to the small Spanish town or district in which they were born. A town or a province, not Spain, was their patria. Although the merchant had traveled thousands of miles, had married in the colony, and had scant hope of actually returning to live in the town of his birth, this town was always in his thoughts.\textsuperscript{30} Although few merchants ever returned to Spain permanently, once established in the colony, dreams of such a return did not cease. The merchant, perhaps the most cosmopolitan element in the colony, was also deeply provincial in the truest sense of the word, rooted in thought and action to a locality or province. They were members of a mobile generation, products of a population explosion which, combined with the beginnings of industrialization in some regions of Spain, produced a widespread movement to the major cities of Spain, and from there to the colony. Nevertheless the merchants did not lose the highly localistic mentality which has governed the isolated towns of Spain since the Reconquest.
Although the merchants of Buenos Aires often contributed to the foundation and support of institutions in the colony, some institutions, especially those of a progressive economic nature, were supported in Spain, but not in the colony. One such example was the economic support given by the Basque and Navarre merchants residing in Buenos Aires to the Basque Society of the Amigos del País. In 1773, 44 Basques and Navarrans were sent a copy of an essay explaining the ‘useful work...dedicated to the betterment of the [Basque] region’, and asked to provide economic support for the society.31 Because of their ‘natural love of their home region’ and the ‘jealousy for its interests’, the merchants were willing to help ‘this establishment which brings so much glory to the [Basque] provinces’.32 Among the Basques and Navarrans on the list of contributors, 29 of 44 were merchants, including members of the major mercantile families of the colony.33 These men, interested in the work of the Society in northern Spain, failed to work for the formation of such a progressive group in the colony in which they had made their home.

The merchants did contribute in a number of ways to local political alliances. At one level, their role was negative, protecting their legal and social advantages from those from whom they feared encroachment. The suit challenging the election of the 1789 Junta de Comerciantes was such an action. As civic leaders, however, the merchants of Buenos Aires were capable of positive action. Because of their wealth, the merchants were often called upon to aid the floundering local finances of the Cabildo. In 1777, for example, the Cabildo, acting on a suggestion from Viceroy Cevallos that the stone from the about-to-be-demolished fortifications in Colonia be used for the construction of a dock in Buenos Aires, called an open meeting to raise money to transport the stone. Voluntary contributions from the merchants, ranging from 6 to 300 pesos, totaled 6,000 pesos.34 Merchants were also called upon to contribute to the progress and defense of the Empire. In 1771, for example, 53 of the city’s merchants answered Governor Vértiz’ call for funds to meet expenses incurred by the war with England, by offering to lend 167,500 pesos to the government.35

For these demonstrations of support, merchants expected and received special benefits from the Crown and its administrators. In addition to exemptions from general taxes, which were part of Bourbon policy to develop the River Plate region, as well as periodic exemptions from specific taxes, a special court for cases involving a merchant or a mercantile problem existed.36 This commercial court, Comerciales, reflected royal encouragement of trade, for in theory merchants would argue their case before a judge specially equipped to understand the
The merchants of Buenos Aires

problems and complexities of trade. After 1794, the interests of the wholesale merchants were also represented by the Consulado of Buenos Aires.

Although merchants enjoyed several exemptions, until 1801, they failed in their bid to be relieved of one of the most troublesome and demeaning obligations which had been imposed on them: service in the militia of the colony. Merchants, successful in their petitions for economic privileges, made little headway in their requests for military exemptions, even though they dealt with three different Viceroyos about the problem.37 To the Viceroyos, defense of Buenos Aires was foremost, even at the expense of humiliating the 'most useful' merchants.

Militia service had not always been considered onerous by the merchant group. In the decades before and after the founding of the Viceroyalty, at least 42 of the more prominent merchants had served as officers in the local militia, usually achieving the rank of captain.38 Occasionally less important merchants held lesser ranks in the militia (Bernardo Gregorio de las Heras, for example, was a teniente during the early days of the Viceroyalty); but militia rank changed as a merchant progressed economically and socially. Martín de Alzaga, originally an alférez, was later elevated to the rank of captain. By the late 1790s, the expansion of the merchant group combined with the general growth of trade, produced a group too numerous for all its members to hold officer rank; many up and coming merchants were required to serve as common foot soldiers in the militia, and this was greatly resented. Growth of trade had also encouraged men to devote more time to their businesses. A decided change in the merchants' attitude towards service in the militia resulted. Instead of militia service, the merchants now requested blanket militia exemption.

The merchant request to be exempt from militia service was one which enjoyed support from all the ranks of the merchant groups: wholesalers, retailers, food suppliers and clerks. In 1798 they presented a request to the Consulado, which agreed to act on their behalf in petitioning the Viceroy. The merchants argued that, beginning in early 1795, they had, of their own free will, served in the militia (although they enjoyed a gracia (exemption)) because of their extreme patriotism and the need produced by Spain's war with France. They claimed that their loyalty to the king and the nation had been rewarded only by 'harassment, suffering, and insults to their individual and collective honor'.39 At first, so their story went, merchants were kept occupied by incessant patrols and never-ending drills, forcing them to divide their attention between 'caring for their mercantile traffic and the fatigue of the Army'.40
suffering did little more than increase oppression; beginning in August of 1797, every four merchants serving in the militia were forced to pay the salary of one soldier in the regular army. A month after they met this demand, a meeting of the commander and captains decreed a new contribution of from 3 to 6 pesos per merchant, based on what the merchants felt was an arbitrary calculation. The merchants complained bitterly of these demands, which as soon as they had been fulfilled, were followed by additional ones.

In addition to the economic demands, the militia officers made it mandatory for merchants to attend military exercises. This produced the most bitter outcry from the mercantile community. Not only were merchants deprived of their only days of rest, but on holidays they were ordered to 'public places. . . where, mixed indiscriminately with the lazy, and the vagabond, we suffer the humiliation of providing diversion for the common people. Our honored class is made to mix with the vilest populace and we suffer the public and shameful insults of the officers who command us.'41 Worse than the indignity of participating in the exercises was the punishment meted out to those who failed to attend. Merchants who were lax in fulfilling their militia duty were arrested and imprisoned, 'shameful penalties. . . intended only to punish rebels and delinquents'.42 Arrest only further endangered their commerce and dishonored their persons.

The merchants argued that, according to Article 39 of the Royal Order of 22 August 1794, the 'wholesale and retail merchants should enjoy a general exemption [from military service] in the dominion of the Indies, whose commerce must be developed by all possible means'.43 The best solution to their problem, they claimed, was a total exemption from military service. This, they agreed, was only just as they considered Buenos Aires to be among the Spanish colonies where commerce was most in need of development.44 The merchants also cited Reglamento de Milicias de Cuba (Militia Regulations of Cuba) to strengthen their case. These regulations stated that 'as a general rule, the wholesale importers, the retailers, and the clerks and boys whom they employ, whether they be in business with their own funds, by commission, or as consignatories of Spanish merchants, shall be considered exempt from service in regular battalions and militia bodies in these dominions'.45 They therefore requested that the Cuban code be clearly extended to Buenos Aires, further pointing out that the rest of the merchants of the area, with the exception of Buenos Aires, enjoyed 'the peaceful possession of their privileges'. Even in Buenos Aires, they pointed out, the workman, the manufacturer, the government clerk, the noble, the lawyer,
the notary, and his scribes, and all other privileged classes were not subject to the tyranny of the militia. The merchants stressed that they were among the most loyal of the king's vassals; that they were among the first to contribute funds and personal support, but that suffering 'pressures, exactions, reprimands, and humiliations' at the hands of commanders using strict discipline to imbue them with a martial spirit was tantamount to treating them like the paid troops of the realm, and this was clearly unjust.\(^46\)

Viceroy Antonio Olaguer Feliú answered the merchants' petition by pointing out that the Royal Order of 1794 only applied to those Spanish merchants who were transient in the Indies and who resided in a city only long enough to dispatch their ships or goods. In addition, he noted that retailers and clerks 'in the shops of considerable means' were exempt from military service under the terms of the Order, but that he needed a list of the major merchants of the colony to determine an individual merchant's standing. He pointed out that he had requested such a list two years before, but had failed to receive it.\(^47\)

While Viceroy Olaguer Feliú awaited the list of important merchants, the members of the commerce of the city continued to suffer insults inflicted by the military officers. On 12 July, Manuel Crespo appeared before the Consulado to report that he had just received an order from Miguel de Azcuenaga, the Viceroy's brother-in-law and the commander of the militia, instructing him to turn over the management of his shop to a 'person of his satisfaction' and to present himself for arrest at the barracks.\(^48\) This demand arose from Crespo's failure to appear at an earlier gathering called by Captain Juan Gálvez on 23 June, the aim of which was to raise funds once again from the merchants. Because he had not attended, Captain Gálvez had first appeared in Crespo's shop with an arrest warrant, and in front of various people had 'injured' Crespo with 'indecent statements' and had 'insulted' him with 'unmannerly handling'.\(^49\) Although the case was under review by the Viceroy, Crespo had received a summons and now asked the Consulado to stop his forthcoming arrest.

Crespo argued that not only was his honor and business at stake, but that the militia leaders were systematically attempting to ruin completely the commerce of the colony. Not only would his imprisonment lead to the abandonment of one store and one man's commercial ventures, but in time to the progressive abandonment of all mercantile ventures and the resultant decay of all the internal and external commerce of the province.

The treasurer of the Consulado, Vicente Antonio Murrieta, argued
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against submitting a list of wealthy merchants to the Viceroy, claiming that there was no businessman who has considerable means according to the literal meaning given in the dictionary of the word 'considerable'—huge or great. Moreover, the merchants noted that their colleagues in Caracas were all exempt from military service, and that they were not all of 'great means'. The treasurer also argued that the Royal Order did not apply solely to wealthy merchants, but to all merchants who paid alcabala. Finally, it was impractical, even impossible, to determine who were the so-called 'wealthy' merchants of Buenos Aires, for those merchants who seemed to be wealthy, who managed large funds, and who had diversified and well-run businesses, might well be working with funds belonging to another party, or might possibly have large debts. The treasurer pointed out that the merchants were not about to make public the true extent of their businesses, nor to publish their ledgers. The only way to draw up a list of the merchants of great means, therefore, was to await the death of a merchant and the inventory of his possessions.

The treasurer's argument was rejected by the Viceroy, who now asked for a list of the most important shops of the city. Once again the treasurer raised a series of objections to any attempt to classify the merchants of Buenos Aires by their economic standing, pointing out that a shop and its owner were not intimately tied, and that by looking at the shop one could not actually distinguish between those goods which belonged to the owner and those which were the property of another party. He suggested, in addition, that debts, other business dealings, and other property owned by the merchant could not be calculated by a mere inspection of his shop. Only a careful scrutiny of the books of each merchant would accurately reveal who the wealthy merchants of the city were, and this, of course, was impossible.

Although the Consulado stubbornly argued that a list of wealthy merchants would not reflect reality, hoping thereby to force the Viceroy to order complete exemption from military service for all merchants, the Viceroy refused to be so coerced. On 24 November 1798, the Consulado finally presented a 'Relación de los Comerciantes, y Comiszonistas de España y el Reyno'. This list, prepared by the officers and members of the Board of the Consulado, divided the merchants into three groups in order of importance, and ranked the merchants by their 'merit and wealth' within each group. Although the list included many errors and duplications, it fulfilled the demands of the Viceroy.

Ironically the treasurer's arguments concerning the impossibility of listing the wealthiest merchants, and therefore the injustice of exempting
only some merchants on the basis of such a list, won the support of the new Viceroy. On 4 July 1799 the Consulado was informed by the Marqués de Avilés that, instead of exempting some merchants from militia service, a Battalion of Urban Militia, composed solely of ‘merchants of large fortune and their clerks’ would be formed.52 This group, to be called the Batallón de Milicias Urbanas del Cuerpo de Comercio (Battalion of Urban Militia of the Merchant Body), would fulfill military service by taking part in ‘military parades and in covering the defense of the Plaza’ in case of invasion.53 In addition, the officials of the Battalion could already be in the militia. Within two weeks, Francisco de Llano and Manuel Crespo, now acting as the proxies of the merchants, again requested that the 1794 Royal Order exempting merchants from military service be put into effect.54 Until the Viceroy changed his mind, they also carefully thanked him for creating a special battalion for the merchants, ‘who hold the most noble and greatest of nature’s and society’s obligations’.55 In case the Viceroy missed their self-praise, Llano and Crespo later mentioned that their profession was ‘the... most noble, useful and advantageous in the Nation’.56 In addition, they requested that the new Merchant Battalion be excused from military service when parades were held because this was not an urgent priority, and because this service amounted to ‘taking away from the merchants all the freedom and liberty which His Majesty wants them to have [in order to] exercise their profession’.57 The merchants further stated that ‘their business is hindered by making them serve on occasions which are only for pomp, ostentation and display. Truthfully this service is not useful to the State’.58 They also requested that merchants be allowed to program their own drills, arranging the ‘time, manner and form of the instruction’, and that the battalion be directly under the protection of the Viceroy, thereby bypassing the command of other militia officers.59

Once again the Viceroy failed to respond to the merchant cries for justice. On 7 October 1799, the Marqués de Avilés replied that none of the above-mentioned requests could be granted.60 He pointed out that merchants could only learn to be soldiers by being subjected to regular militia officers, for in this way they would acquire the necessary knowledge through doctrinal and general exercises. They were not to be excused from parades and display, as these too were indispensable for instruction and good order.61

Although the militia problems of most merchants seemed to have been solved with the creation of the Merchant Battalion, on 3 October 1801 a group of 40 merchants once again addressed themselves to the Viceroy.62 They mentioned that the Viceroy had been considering the
extension of the 1794 Royal Order for four years, without reaching a final decision. They also complained that the new body of merchant militia was only called ‘urban militia’; in fact, they insisted, nothing but the name had changed. The merchant corps still had the same ‘duties and burdens’ of the provincial militia including, above all, mandatory attendance at acts of ‘pure ostentation and display’ and drilling in public places. This last factor had been the ‘root of the depression and diminution of the esteem and honor of their profession, the cause of the complaints of the entire commerce’. The merchants again complained bitterly that they had been put on display in front of the whole populace, in a manner of ‘little decorum’ and had been made ‘the object of the diversion and contempt of the public’. Llano and Crespo, representing the merchants, stressed the public humiliation which their group suffered:

The principal cause, from which our repeated petitions have originated, has always been the depreciation and scorn which [the men of] trade have suffered because of public meetings for instruction in the use of arms held on holidays, the only days which the merchants have for rest from their most tiresome pursuits. In these meetings the noble and honorable merchant serves as a diversion for the common people...who usually gather in these places. The merchants incur further disdain because of public arrest with which their failings and mistakes are usually reprimanded.

The new petition also mentioned that the merchants who failed to show up at the military exercises held on the preceding Sunday were being held under arrest at a local barracks, the Ranchería. Among these merchants were members of the Cabildo. The picture which they painted of merchants and their families was bleak indeed:

We find our business dealings detained, the dispatch of some boats interrupted, our interests abandoned, our fortunes exposed to loss at any moment, and our houses and families in a state of desolation and fear and without the small help which the clerks who have been arrested with the merchants might have given.

Finally, in response to these complaints, the Viceroy agreed to free the merchants under arrest and to review all papers dealing with the militia problem. In addition, he turned for information to the Sub-Inspector of the Militia, who pointed out that since October 1799 ‘the absences of the merchants at military exercises have been repeated. These merchants, as members of a battalion of urban militia destined for the defense of the city, should not have attempted to withdraw themselves from the instruction necessary to defend the city especially in times of war’. In a strong letter to the Viceroy, the Sub-Inspector stressed that the merchants had been drilled in a closed place ‘with
gentleness and good methods'. In conclusion, the Sub-Inspector accused the merchants of trying to avoid the militia service while hypocritically proclaiming their willingness to sacrifice their lives and fortunes. The merchants continued to protest that it was not the exercise of arms, but rather the mistreatment which was objectionable to them, and that they were not trying (as in 1798) to exempt themselves from the militia, but rather to improve their treatment. Their arguments fell on deaf ears, until the arrival, in 1802, of the Royal Order of 28 April 1801 exempting all merchants from militia service in time of peace.

What is obvious from the merchants' battle with the Viceroy and the militia officers is that the merchants at the turn of the century were less interested in military service than they had been twenty or thirty years earlier. Men like Juan Lezica, Vicente de Azcuénaga and Domingo Basavilbaso had proudly served as militia officers, but by the 1790s a higher degree of specialization had entered into porteño life. Most merchants, especially those struggling to establish or maintain themselves in an ever-changing market, had no wish to become military men. The garrison conditions which had earlier existed in the city had disappeared, and the idea of military service was no longer attractive to the businessmen of Buenos Aires. In addition, with the growth of commerce and the merchant group, more men with middle-class aspirations had become merchants. They considered themselves to be above the common foot soldier, at the same time as they rejected the noble concept of the warrior-leader.

Although they attempted to avoid military service, the merchants played an important role in day to day governing of the city and its surroundings. Merchants served as comisionados (city district officers) from the inception of the office in 1772 until the end of the colonial period. As such they were granted the power to apprehend any criminal found in flagrante delicto. The comisionados were also charged with maintaining public order, ensuring that gambling places were closed for evening prayers, checking local pulperías and markets to assure equity of prices in the sale of foodstuffs and fair bread weights, and maintaining the streets in a state of comparative cleanliness.

Among the original 32 comisionados named in 1773, 17 were merchants. Included in this number were some of the most important members of the merchant group – Agustín Casimiro de Aguirre, Juan de Lezica, Manuel de Escalada, Bernardo Sancho Larrea and Cecilio Sánchez de Velasco. It is doubtful that the comisionados were able to attend to all the business charged to them, but these local officials did aid the government officials in their quest for efficient local control.
Because they were among the wealthiest and most respectable citizens of the city, merchants obtained other positions of administrative importance. Individual merchants were also named to special local commissions. In 1775, for example, Manuel de Basavilbaso and José de Lezica, two important merchants, were appointed as Jueces Subdelegados (subdelegates and judges) in charge of the review and registration of all land in the region surrounding Buenos Aires.71 Chief among administrative positions was membership in the Cabildo, which allowed merchants to exercise local political control. Merchants held both elected and appointed posts in the Cabildo, but some of those who purchased their positions tended to retire from active commerce.

Merchant participation in the Cabildo of Buenos Aires grew from the middle of the eighteenth century onward. During many of the years from 1770 to 1810, the merchant faction comprised such an overwhelming majority of the town councillors that the Cabildo became in effect a merchant council. In addition, merchants usually held at least one of the two alcalde ordinario positions in the Cabildo. The merchant-councillors have been accused of incompetence because they were unable to solve the complex problems of administration of a growing city, but the colonial government itself was not prepared to solve the problems of building, public works, hygiene, finance and justice which accompanied the dramatic increase in the size of the population of the city.

As members of the Cabildo, two positions also frequently filled by merchants, were those of Defensor de Pobres (Defender of the Poor) and Defensor de Menores (Defender of Minors). These men served as official guardians of the legal rights of these respective groups. Although lawyers would have seemed to be more logical choices, merchants were especially preferred for these posts because the main duty of the defenders was to protect property. Of the two positions, Defensor de Menores was the more rigorous, involving participation in the settlement of any estate of which a minor was an heir.

Merchant members of the Cabildo were often careless in attending to their duties as town councillors. They often missed sessions of the Council because of more pressing business commitments; most of the business of the Cabildo was conducted with more members absent than present. As in flourishing towns everywhere, the Cabildo came to be viewed as a prestigious club, composed of leading merchants and their supporters. Cabildo members were totally without responsibility to the city they were elected (or appointed) to govern. As this view was basically in accord with the desires of the Viceroyos, governors and
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During the 1760s, when the city of Buenos Aires was still essentially a small town, the merchants of the city showed great interest in procuring Cabildo positions, most probably for prestige. On 11 October 1766, for example, Eugenio Lerdo de Tejada, a merchant who was serving as Procurador (attorney general) of the Cabildo, began the public auction of three Cabildo positions. Because of the death of several town councillors who had failed to renounce their office, Buenos Aires lacked the number of councillors needed for its 'greater glory and better government'.

Juan de Lezica, another merchant and alcalde ordinario del primer voto (First Councillor) presided over the bidding, and within a few days Manuel Joaquín de Tocornal, a merchant, purchased a perpetual council position for 400 pesos. Within the next four months two other council positions were sold to Juan de Osorio and Fernando Caviedes, both merchants, also at a price of 400 pesos each.

Purchase of offices often led to lack of public responsibility on the part of the proprietary councillors. Holders of offices which had been bought at public auction were usually even more lax in their attendance at Cabildo meetings than other members. In addition, there was little control against the sale of offices to incompetent or dishonest men. The sale of offices worked to encourage dishonesty in the Cabildo, as the purchaser was eager to recoup his investment and realize a profit. Merchants were no exception. Juan de Osorio, for example, used his perpetual councillor position to hold the post of mayordomo of the Cabildo in 1770, 1771 and 1772. Unfortunately when called upon by the Cabildo to account for the group's funds, he could produce neither accounts nor funds. Osorio continued to hold his Cabildo seat until the governor forced him to vacate it in 1773.

After the complexity of city life increased, bringing with it an increase in the Cabildo's work load, many of the more prominent merchants of the city became reluctant to serve on the town council. The wealthiest merchants, far from seeing the Cabildo as an avenue to greater prestige, by the 1780s began to shun this form of public service. Claiming bad health, pressing business, or overwhelming family responsibilities, the merchants attempted to avoid the posts to which they had been elected. In what amounted to open bribery they offered to purchase their way out of civil service. Although no longer attractive to the most powerful merchants of the city, the Cabildo continued to be composed of middle and upper-middle level traders.

Once the merchants had become a dominant force in the town council, the amount of Cabildo support enjoyed by any specific governor
of Buenos Aires depended to a large degree on how vigorously he pursued commercial policies favorable to the merchants of the city. Perhaps the greatest merchant support was shown for Pedro Cevallos, the first Viceroy of the area, who worked actively for freer commerce and increased political power for Buenos Aires. Cevallos relied on the support of the Cabildo to initiate his new policies, and the Cabildo (which in 1778 was composed of eight merchants) fulfilled his expectations. Cevallos' relationship with the Cabildo and its merchant councillors was so good that on 9 April 1778, upon being notified of the impending departure of the Viceroy, the Cabildo issued a statement imploring Cevallos to remain in Buenos Aires while an extension of his term of office was sought. In the words of the Cabildo:

We have been notified by the Treasurer of the City that each day the immediate departure to the Kingdoms of Spain of the Excellent Señor Don Pedro Antonio Cevallos, Viceroy, Governor and Captain General of this new Vice-royalty, and known benefactor of the City, draws nearer. This illustrious Cabildo believes it is its indispensable obligation to make known to Your Excellency the state of orphanhood and great mourning that these Provinces will endure because of your departure. We therefore beg you to remain until the King has told us the reason [for your recall]. We shall petition for your remaining in these Provinces for as long as the King shall allow. Only in this way is there promise of greater growth and general happiness in this flourishing kingdom whose progress comes from the fervor with which you have incessantly attended to its needs.77

Of the eight town councillors who signed this plea, five were important members of the merchant community.

Unfortunately the Cabildo's support became public after an announcement that the next Viceroy was to be Juan Vértiz. The Spanish Crown therefore interpreted the Cabildo's plea as an affront to the honor and reputation of the new Viceroy, and a questioning of the royal will. Only strong royal action could avoid a repetition of this 'so pernicious example'.78 On 28 May 1779, José de Gálvez, Ministro de Indias, acting in the name of the king, sent a secret Royal Order to the new Viceroy informing him that Judas José de Salas, a lawyer now in Madrid, was to be banished to the Malvinas (Falkland Islands) for one year.79 Bernardo Sancho Larrea, another merchant considered to be a promoter of the Cabildo plea, was given the same sentence, and both men, upon the completion of the year, were exiled indefinitely to Mendoza. Nine other Cabildo members (including Francisco Antonio de Escalada and Manuel Joaquín de Zapiola, two merchant members who had not been present at the 9 April meeting) were punished for their crime by being deprived of public office for six years.80

In addition to taking an interest in the selection of the La Plata
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Viceroy, the merchant members of the Cabildo were active in the continued fight of the Cabildo for jurisdiction over its own elections. On 1 January 1776, in a close and heated election, Juan José de Lezica and Ramón Martínez, both merchants, were elected as alcalde del primer voto and alcalde del segundo voto respectively. In addition, Manuel Antonio Warnes was elected to serve as procurador general and councillor. A week later Governor Cevallos refused to approve these three elections, although accepting the election of all other Cabildo officers. On 13 January members of the Cabildo of 1775, who felt that their voting rights had been infringed, joined with the unseated officers to petition the Royal Audiencia of Charcas and the Royal Court in Madrid about the governor’s failure to approve the Cabildo’s original election.

As still another avenue by which they could express their power, the merchants of Buenos Aires also participated in the Junta de Comerciantes y Mercaderes. This group met sporadically, upon the request of the Viceroy or governor, or when merchants themselves asked the Viceroy to call a meeting. A major preoccupation of the Junta was to petition the Court in Madrid for a Consulado in Buenos Aires. The Junta thereby worked for the establishment of an institution which would strengthen the merchants’ special privileges.

The merchants began to press for a Consulado in 1782 when they elected three of the most prestigious wholesale merchants to represent Buenos Aires commerce and to petition for formation of the commercial body. In 1785 the Junta del Comercio met again to reaffirm its election of Bernardo Sancho Larrea, Manuel Rodríguez de la Vega and Martín de Sarratea, and to elect a body of 15 other wholesale merchants to serve as an advisory body to the three representatives. Both groups were embodied to work for the prompt establishment of the Consulado, which in turn would provide for the ‘greater increase, security and ordering of our funds and business transactions’. Four years later the Junta met again, this time to elect new proxies. When the Consulado of Buenos Aires was finally set up in 1794, the Junta de Comerciantes was dissolved, and the new body became the official organ of the merchants in the Viceroyalty.

Although united in their defense of commerce and of special privilege for merchants, the ranks of the wholesalers became increasingly rent by friction, caused by differing concepts of trade, the question of government limits on commerce, and personality conflicts. The first of these controversies revolved around the slavers, a small group of merchants who rose to economic and social prominence during the decade of the 1780s. The slavers, including Tomás Antonio Romero, the most famous,
most daring and most enigmatic of porteño merchants, were challenged by a group of more traditional merchants who interpreted the rising prosperity of the slavers as a threat to their social and economic position.\textsuperscript{84}

The traditional group of merchants (including José Martínez de Hoz, Jaime Alsina y Verjes, Diego Agüero, Joaquín Pintos, Esteban Villanueva, Joaquín de Arana and Luis Gardeazabal) began its opposition to Romero in 1784. Romero had planned to engage in a triangular trade with Spain and Africa, exporting hides in exchange for slaves. Romero argued that this trade was legal, as hides fell into the classification of frutos del país (local commodities), products which had already been sanctioned in the slave trade. His opponents, joined by the hacendados, contended that hides were not frutos del país and were therefore forbidden for use in the slave trade, thereby beginning one of the longest arguments in the history of colonial commerce.\textsuperscript{85}

The merchants of the traditional trade (with the help of the Consulado after 1794) continued to fight Romero and his fellow slavers (Pedro Dubal, Nicolás Acha, Manuel de Aguirre) for the next twenty years, first on the hides question, and later on the matter of importation of slaves into the colony in foreign boats.\textsuperscript{86} The major issue underlying these long conflicts was whether the slave trade or the more traditional Castillian trade was to be the most important commerce of the La Plata area. The monopolists saw Romero and his group not only as a threat to their commerce, but also as a social menace, for the slavers were, in the main, ambitious men from the lowest sectors of Spanish society who had made good in a trade fraught with economic disasters.

The creation of the Buenos Aires Consulado did not end dissension among merchants, but rather came to reflect opposing concepts of trade. At first the Consulado acted to defend the interests of the monopolists. But gradually, because of changes in the membership, the personalities of members of the Consulado, and the increasing power of hide merchants and slavers, conflict emerged within the council itself. Controversy and dissension grew under the directorship of Martín de Alzaga, which began in June 1799. Alzaga, a self-made man, identified strongly with the commercial interests of Spain in all questions related to trade. He was unduly sensitive about his honor and dignity, while he had little regard for the dignity of his fellow merchants.

Shortly after Alzaga took office, the Consulado split over their response to the Royal Cédula of 20 April 1799, abolishing trade with neutrals. Trade with neutrals, one of a series of liberal trading policies adopted since 1791, had been legalized by the Crown in 1797 to provide
alternative trading outlets to colonies cut off from Spain by the European wars. These new policies had produced an economic revival for those groups of merchants primarily engaged in the export of hides, but for those tied to Spain as a source of European goods, neutral trade had been a ruinous experience. Those who opposed the new Royal Order (including the sínodo Antonio de las Cagigas, and consiliarios Francisco Herrera, Domingo Igarzabal, José Mateo Echevarría, Benito Olazábal, Agustín Wright, Cecilio Sánchez de Velasco and José González de Bolaños) were successful in calling for vice-regal review to prolong neutral trade over the objections of Juan Echichipia, Martín de Sarratea, Manuel de Arana, Francisco Castañón and Martín de Alzaga. Alzaga defended a return to traditional mercantile trade, contending that the interests of Spain were always more important than the needs of her American colonies. He reacted personally to the Consulado's rejection of the new Royal Cédula, and soon began a determined campaign to rid the Consulado of Cagigas and those whom he considered to be Cagigas' allies. For the next two years Alzaga persecuted all members of the mercantile community whom he believed to be sympathetic to Cagigas (including the consul moderno, Ramón Román Díaz, ex-partner of Cagigas, Ventura Marcó del Pont and Ventura Llorente Romero). Alzaga also presented a series of damaging reports to the Consulado, attempted to gain Consulado election for his loyal friends, fellow monopolists José Martínez de Hoz and Diego Agüero, and vented his fury on all who disagreed with him in any way. He only succeeded in alienating a large number of merchants who had initially been sympathetic to his ideas. So serious was the division created by Alzaga that, when his term ended in 1801, the Crown ordered all reference to the Alzaga–Cagigas quarrel stricken from the records of the Consulado and 'perpetual silence' imposed regarding the dispute.

'Perpetual silence' failed to quiet dissension among the merchants on one of the major issues of the late colonial period, the benefits of the neutral trade which began during the wars of the 1790s. A few merchants had made handsome profits by taking advantage of Royal permissions to trade with neutral ports. Ostensibly engaged in the export of frutos del país (especially flour, meat and hardtack) to Brazil, and the import of sugar and/or slaves, merchants such as Pedro Dubal, José de María, Manuel Aguirre and Ventura Marcó del Pont, prospered under the new regulations. Not only did they introduce the legal goods, they also took advantage of trade regulations to bring in cloth and dry goods, either in partnership or as a front for foreign merchants.

The increase in the import of dry goods caused a glut on the local
market, a situation much resented by those merchants who had received their stock from Spain. The merchants with Spanish stock found their goods were unsaleable, because of both higher prices and a more limited selection. Although Alzaga had alienated many merchants who might have supported monopolistic trade, in 1802 a group of 44 merchants, approximately one-third of the merchant group, accusing their fellow traders of perverting the spirit of the Royal permissions to serve their own self-interest, petitioned the Consulado and the Viceroy to return Buenos Aires to the pre-1791 system of 'free trade'.

Citing abuse which had been contained under the monopolistic system, the merchants accused their colleagues of using Royal permission as 'a cloak' for illegal importation which was 'the ruin of the state, the annihilation of the nation and the destruction of commerce'. The merchants opposed to neutral trade declared that the Royal Cédula of November 1791 and those which had followed had failed because of the greed of individual merchants in their original intent, the supplying of slave labor for local agriculture. Instead of importing slaves, merchants were returning to Buenos Aires 'with a small number of blacks and large quantities of goods'. In the main, payment for these goods was not made by the export of frutos, but by specie. 'Exchange of frutos have been nothing more than a disguise, a deception... they cried, 'and has ruined our commerce, our merchant marine, and caused a continuous drain of silver and gold from our land'.

To support their contention that export of frutos was a front for large-scale import of contraband, the merchants appended a model account to their expediente. Figures showing the expenses and profits involved in the export of 1,500 quintales of frutos to Brazil and the subsequent import of the same amount of Brazilian agricultural products were drawn up. The simulated account showed that a merchant exporting dried meat, flour and hardtack, and importing sugar could only hope to make a profit of 210 pesos on an initial investment of 4,000 pesos. Obviously a ship had to be exporting more than frutos, and importing more than sugar, if it were to return the type of profit expected by the porteño merchants.

The merchants' complaint about the unfair competition which their Spanish goods faced was documented by another model account, outlining expenses and profits on the import and sale of 100 pieces of Silesian linen purchased in Hamburg. If these goods were imported to Buenos Aires via Spain, paying all duties, commissions and shipping expenses along the way, and if they were to be sold at the same price which merchants operating under Royal permissions were offering
similar goods, a profit of less than 12 percent would be realized. But Silesian linen purchased in Hamburg and sold in Buenos Aires at the same price would, if it were brought in under Royal permission, avoid payment of 8,334 reales vellon of charges, and realize a profit of 60 percent. Clearly foreign merchants and those operating under the Royal permissions were at an advantage.

The teniente sindico of the Consulado, merchant José Hernández, forwarded the merchants' plea to the Junta de Gobierno with his comments. He agreed with the merchants on most major points, and added a warning that, if action were not forthcoming, Brazil would soon take over the entire Río de la Plata trade. He accused Brazil of already controlling the trade with Havana, Caracas and Cartagena which had formerly been in porteño hands. Hernández agreed that local merchants were not turning to Spain for their supply of dry goods when they could obtain these goods at lower prices from Brazil. He pointed out that porteño merchants were suffering 'the sacrifice of abundance, when they had planned to enjoy the advantages of scarcity'. The trade to Brazil in frutos was a sham, according to Hernández, proved by the fact that the Brazilians had no need for Argentine wheat as they were more than self-sufficient in rice and farina. This trade served only as a cover-up for illegal transactions. Hernández, while calling for the end to Royal permissions granted because of war, advised that slave importation be continued. But any attempts to rescind the Royal permission were nullified by the effects of the 1806–7 English invasions of Buenos Aires.

Although at first it would appear that only the most successful Spanish-born merchants were those pressing for a return to more stringently controlled market conditions, a review of the backgrounds of merchants who signed the request to return to more monopolistic trade patterns proves this was not the case. Among the signatories of the 1802 petition were merchants, mercaderes and three men who had entered commerce after first serving as ship captains. Most of those who signed were Spaniards, from the Basque areas, Castille and Catalonia, but at least one of those who agreed that trade to Buenos Aires should be limited was a native son. There was a wide variety of ages represented in the group, but most of the signatories were younger than 45; more than half were relative newcomers to Buenos Aires, having arrived within 10 years of the date of the petition. Of those who had been in the city longer, not one was a major merchant. The group seems therefore to represent the moderately, rather than the extremely, successful merchants in alliance with newcomers struggling for a position in the porteño market. Neither of these groups were powerful enough to compete for Royal
licenses; neither were wealthy enough to withstand trading reverses while seeking new commercial investments. Both the older merchants and the newcomers were prepared for an economic reality based on Spanish monopoly of trade; they saw the destruction of their economic future in the continuation of trade with neutrals. Two-thirds of the merchant group did not sign the petition; they either profited from the new system or were able to accommodate themselves to it.

Opposition to free trade continued to unite the more traditional merchants during the rest of the tumultuous decade of 1800 to 1810. The English invasions and the consequent large-scale importation of English goods into the area placed those merchants dependent on the Cádiz trade in an ever-worsening economic situation. These men, represented by the Cabildo, supported local initiatives undertaken by Martín de Alzaga to oust the English, and contributed heavily to pay for the Cabildo's wartime expenses. But the successful military campaign against the English failed to produce a return to monopolistic practices; Liniers, the new Viceroy, was sympathetic to neutral trade and contraband. Cisneros, his successor, was warmly greeted by the merchants and by the Cabildo, for it was believed that he would return a city on the brink of social and economic chaos to its former stable condition, and rid the city of foreigners. Within two months of his arrival in Buenos Aires, Cisneros, faced with mounting public debts and commercial paralysis, suggested that the Cabildo consider opening the port of Buenos Aires to free trade with the English.

Cisneros' free trade proposal produced much discussion and dissenion among the Cabildo members, who were for the most part Spanish-born merchants. First to speak was Luis Gardeazabal, alcalde de primer voto, and a merchant tied to the traditional Buenos Aires–Cádiz axis. Gardeazabal was strongly opposed to British trade because it would be 'prejudicial and ruinous to the Nation in general, to the Metropolis and to ourselves'. His arguments demonstrate that 18 years of freer trading with neutrals had not modified the monopolists' fear of this trade to any noticeable degree. Gardeazabal spoke at length of the wisdom which the Spanish kings had had in protecting trade, and warned of the economic ruin which would follow were the English allowed to trade freely with Buenos Aires. 'This commerce will load us up with goods, and will produce a loss of all our cash; it will demolish our factories, manufactures, and industry; it will impoverish us, and will make England, which today is our friend, but tomorrow could be our enemy, opulent and powerful...with our commerce with Spain ruined...England will arbitrarily decide the price of the goods which she imports.' Pointing to
Río de Janiero as an example of the disastrous consequences of free trade with the English (‘many of the merchants are reduced to seek refuge in the countryside, for they no longer have the means to sustain themselves in the city’), Gardeazabal warned that the official entry of England into the La Plata trade would benefit contraband, and the fraudulent merchants and shopkeepers who failed to pay duties would be able to sell at a lower price, thereby harming honorable merchants. Trade with the English would ‘produce the lamentable bankruptcy of many good citizens’ as well as ‘the total ruin of the artisan group, and therefore the ruin of the entire city in general’. English goods were more attractive to the consumer, because of their ‘better perfection, their greater neatness and splendor, their longer-lasting quality, and their fairer prices’, and just these attractions would produce a situation in which, within a year, the people of the region would have sold their last silver candlestick to English foreigners. In the face of this imminent disaster, Gardeazabal could only suggest that the merchants, shopkeepers and peddlers extend a loan to help the government meet its most urgent expenses. The same opinion was expressed by alcalde Francisco Tellechea.

But not all members of the Cabildo were in agreement with Gardeazabal’s traditional stance or with his weak alternative suggestion, for hide merchants were also represented in the Cabildo. Manuel Obligado, alcalde del segundo voto, a Spaniard closely tied to the export of hides, felt that English commerce ‘under certain conditions and limitations’ should be allowed. Miguel Mancilla, alguacil mayor, agreed with Obligado, pointing out that English commerce could hardly harm a metropolis whose factories were already occupied by the enemy. Entry of English goods was a necessary evil, but if duties were paid on these goods, they would aid the local treasury and help avoid contraband. Mancilla pointed out that use of loans to tide over the government was a precarious remedy, and one subject to ‘pernicious consequences’. Mancilla’s solution was to tie English trade to the export of hides, while assuring the monopolists continued prosperity by placing all of this new trade only in the hands of firms headed by Spaniards.

Gabriel Real de Azúa, another regidor, and a merchant linked to the hide trade, agreed with the Obligado-Mancilla position. He suggested that English trade could even be further limited by allowing the introduction of only those goods whose duties would produce the funds needed by the Treasury; by forbidding the English from setting up their own business firms, warehouses and shops and requiring them to consign all goods to known merchants of the city; and by forbidding
the importation of all manufactured clothing and furniture. (An indication of the sophistication and responsiveness of English industry is found in Real de Azúa's mention of 'ponchos, blankets, coarse cloth and surcingles which the English are already manufacturing, copies of goods produced in this country'. Furthermore, duties on goods imported by the English, it was suggested, should equal those paid by merchants in Spanish commerce, thereby making Spanish products competitive in price with English goods. Real de Azúa also suggested that two-thirds of English exports be in hides and frutos; export duties should be paid on frutos, but the duty on the export of hides 'which is already so great' should be removed.

After lengthy discussion the Cabildo advised the Viceroy to allow English commerce 'under the limitations, modifications and of the types expressed herein' to begin. Acceding to this 'necessary evil which we must embrace to avoid other greater evils', the Cabildo thereby endorsed trade with the English. On 6 November 1809, Viceroy Cisneros decreed the port of Buenos Aires opened to allied and neutral vessels bringing cargo of any kind. The monopolists had lost another major battle.

The English invasions and the stepped-up entry of English goods into the Río de la Plata destroyed whatever trade was still in the monopolists' hands. At the same time, local attempts to oust the invaders were supported by large contributions made by some of the very same merchants whose commerce was suffering so severely. Although merchants had been called upon to contribute to the local Cabildo throughout the colonial period, these loans became more frequent from 1806 to 1808. During this period, the Cabildo, left on its own to raise an army and defend the city, turned to local merchants for loans to offset the tremendous costs involved. In August 1806 the Cabildo called for a voluntary contribution of all citizens to pay for the expenses of the first invasion. Within the next five months a total of 118,878 pesos was pledged, and at least 76,710 pesos of this amount came from the merchants of the city.

In addition to individual contributions, loans were solicited from the most prosperous porteño merchants. Francisco Antonio Letamendi lent 10,000 pesos (8,000 of which belonged to his wife Dolores Segurola) at 5 percent interest to the Cabildo early in the war; Esteban Romero and Manuel de Arana also lent 10,000 pesos each at the same interest. Funds collected early in the battle failed to meet expenses of the troops, and on 22 January 1808 the Cabildo requested a massive loan of 200,000 pesos from Martín de Sarratea, local representative of the Compañía de Filipinas. Sarratea offered the Cabildo 50,000 pesos, pointing out...
that the Company 'has interned many of its funds, and I find myself with a draft of 500,000 pesos accepted against my account without the cash available to cover it because of present circumstances'.

Although sympathetic to the plight of a fellow merchant who was also suffering business reverses because of the English invasion, the Cabildo, fearing a military uprising, impounded 200,000 pesos from Sarratea.

Loans to the government had ceased to be a means for individual merchants and the merchants group as a whole to exert gentle pressure on the government. Because of the pressing needs engendered by the English invasion, loans became forced extractions from those very merchants who themselves were suffering from the break in Spanish trade. And, in return for these loans, merchants were no longer receiving special benefits, and were quickly losing ground to the advocates of free trade.

The English invasions and their aftermath exacerbated the split between those merchants who supported free trade and those who wished to return to a Spanish monopoly. Once again Martín de Alzaga came to the fore as the most vocal defender of the monopolists' cause. Reacting to the English invasion and the cowardly conduct of Viceroy Sobremonte in fleeing the city, Alzaga personally organized and financed the Voluntarios Patriotas de la Unión, a militia division instrumental in the defeat of the English.

Elected alcalde del primer voto of the 1807 Cabildo, and re-elected to the same position a year later, Alzaga was the Cabildo's leading spokesman in its feuds with the politically suspect Viceroy, the Frenchman Liniers. Dissatisfaction with the Viceroy, breakdown of the monopolistic trade, and fear of the growing strength of a group of young creole revolutionaries politically abhorrent to him and fellow Spaniards, forced Alzaga to attempt a coup d'État against Liniers on 1 January 1809. The revolution failed and Alzaga and a small group of fellow regidores were banished. He and his followers were later brought to trial and acquitted by the new Independence government. Banished again, in 1812 Alzaga was arrested for treason and executed for his crimes during a period of intense anti-Spanish activity.

Many of Alzaga's goals throughout the 1806–9 period when he was a central political leader in Buenos Aires are unclear. It is not certain, for example, whether his abortive revolution was intended to oust Liniers in favor of a more loyal government, or to establish an independent pro-Spanish regime. What is clear is that Alzaga, a successful merchant who had begun as a clerk under Gaspar de Santa Coloma, was a staunch supporter of the Spanish monopolistic trading system, and
an intransigent enemy of all trade with foreigners. So important to Alzaga was a return to Spanish monopolistic trade that he planned personally to hold the position of Director General of Commerce were his 1809 coup successful.\footnote{Alzaga extended his hatred of free trade to a hatred of foreigners, and held them responsible for what he perceived as the breakdown of society.\footnote{Alzaga, an elitist of modest background, also feared the creoles, especially the mobs who supported Liniers, Saavedra and the 1810 Revolution.}} Alzaga was believed to be the leader of the Spanish party, but his supporters were not uniformly Spanish-born. He was also believed to represent the monopolistic merchants of the city, but again, not all support came from the traders. A few of the more visible followers of Alzaga were indeed Spanish-born merchants (Esteban Villanueva, Juan Antonio de Santa Coloma), but Alzaga's appeal was only to that group of Spanish merchants tied to the more traditional patterns of trade. Although many of the merchants of Buenos Aires might have been sympathetic to Alzaga and his cause, few outwardly supported him. Nevertheless, as an aftermath of Alzaga's unsuccessful 1809 coup, all Spanish-born merchants became suspect of revolutionary activity.

Those men who joined Alzaga's party were a mixture of Spanish-born and creoles, powerful merchants and middle-group merchants, all dependent on the success of monopolistic commercial policies for their social and economic gains. Those who chose the Revolutionary party which was successful in May 1810 were a mixture of Spanish-born and creole merchants, and creole bureaucrats who were dismayed by the corruption of the Spanish government and who favored free trade. The two most important merchants associated with the Revolutionary government, Domingo Matheu and Juan Larrea, were both Catalans, and were somewhat excluded from the dominant group of Northerners who controlled the commercial life of the city. Both were relative newcomers, and neither had been especially prosperous in commerce. Another merchant associated with the Independence movement was the creole Cornelio Saavedra, who was closely tied to hide-trade interests and favored free trade with England; another native-born merchant, Juan Martín de Pueyrredon, had personally witnessed the corruption of the Spanish court and had been imprisoned by Alzaga while attempting to report his experiences to the merchants of Buenos Aires.

Many other creole revolutionaries were not merchants, but rather sons of Spanish merchants who had been placed in bureaucratic or military
The merchants of Buenos Aires

careers. Such was the case of Miguel Azcuenaga, son of Vicente de Azcuenaga; of Gerónimo Lasala, son of Juan Bautista Lasala; of Manuel Belgrano, son of Domingo Belgrano Pérez. These sons of successful merchants had seen their economic power decline while Spanish-born brothers-in-law had succeeded in their fathers’ footsteps.

Still another group of revolutionaries were the sons of lesser merchants, men such as Hipólito Vieytes, son of Juan Vieytes; Antonio Luis Beruti, son of Pablo Beruti; Martín Jacobo Thompson, son of Pablo Thompson. These men, sons of marginal merchants who had failed to achieve the same social and economic status as fellow immigrants, had been left with even fewer worldly goods and less prestigious bureaucratic posts than their peers. They had even more reason to resent the poor Spaniards who had prospered in the colony. And Martín de Alzaga, a poor clerk who had combined business acumen and marriage to become the most vocal defender of the monopolistic loyal Spaniards, was a most dramatic representation of that which the revolutionaries despised.

The defeat of Martín de Alzaga after the abortive coup of 1 January 1809 left the monopolists without a spokesman, and fearful for their lives and their remaining property. By the time of the historic Cabildo Abierto meeting called on 25 May 1810 to discuss the position of the colony vis-à-vis the forced abdication of the Bourbon king of Spain, the Spanish monopolists were too cowed to continue their fight. At first glance the merchants, with 70 representatives out of a total of 251 participants, seem to have been in a commanding position at the meeting. They certainly outnumbered the military (59 members) and the clergy (27 members) in second and third positions respectively. But, although some upper- and middle-status wholesalers were present within the merchant contingent, retailers and shopkeepers predominated. Only 13 percent of the merchants at the 1810 Cabildo Abierto were large-scale importers and exporters. Many powerful merchants chose not to attend this meeting, believing that an anti-Spanish posture was a foregone conclusion. Other merchants, after being present at the initial sessions, withdrew without waiting to vote. Of those few who remained to vote, traditional merchants linked to Seville and Cádiz demonstrated continued loyalty to the Spanish Crown and its mercantile policies, while hide merchants, slavers and retailers were in favor of the election of a new ruling Junta.

To a great extent, the merchant vote reflected a social division between successful merchants and those who had failed, a split which also had Spanish-creole overtones. Those merchants born in Spain, successful
and with close ties to the mother country, generally approved of Spanish policy, and wished to continue as loyal subjects of the Spanish Crown. The American-born merchants, the hide merchants, and some less successful newcomers, on the other hand, were far more critical of colonial government, more interested in opening their trade to all countries, and generally more eager to break ties with Spain. Although the creole merchants were in the main sons of successful Spanish-born merchants, they were usually not as successful nor did they support the Spanish mercantile policy as fervently as did their fathers. Rather they, like the hide traders and slavers, felt unfairly burdened by taxes which were shipped back to the motherland instead of reinvested in the commerce of the colony. Creole merchants also resented policies which they felt gave advantages to Spanish-born merchants with closer familial and commercial ties in Spain. Experience with the commercial advantage of free trade with England produced a strong dislike for any threatened return to monopolistic trade. A declaration of independence was one way of assuring that free trade would not be revoked. The majority of merchants, however, did not favor total independence. Only men like Francisco Antonio de Escalada and Francisco Belgrano, both creole-born merchants, advocated complete independence; the Cabildo Abierto itself voted to oust the Viceroy and rule in the name of the deposed Spanish king. Not until 1816 was the Viceroyalty officially to declare itself free from Spain.
CHAPTER 7

Gaspar de Santa Coloma, merchant of Buenos Aires

Earlier chapters have looked at the merchant group of Buenos Aires in an attempt to discern universal patterns of group origin, recruitment, training, marriage, and kinship. This chapter provides a comprehensive view of an individual merchant’s life, the life of his family and that of his firm.

Gaspar de Santa Coloma’s economic position, commercial career, and trade patterns make him perhaps the very best merchant to study in detail. He was a moderately successful man, an example of the ‘typical’ porteño merchant. He figured neither among the few merchants of fantastic wealth nor among those who failed dismally in commercial life, but rather within the upper-middle group of wholesalers. In addition to his moderate success, Santa Coloma is an excellent candidate for close study as his commercial life spanned the entire vice-regal period. His business records run from 1778 to 1815, the year of his death, and even beyond. We can therefore trace, with some degree of success, the career of one merchant and one mercantile firm throughout the entire vice-regal period. The patterns of Santa Coloma’s trade also make him one of the more interesting merchants to study for he was involved in trade with Spain and with several provinces of the interior.

Don Gaspar de Santa Coloma was born on 6 January 1742 in Casería del Campo, Campijo, a small town near Arciniega in the Basque province of Alava. Born on the Day of the Three Kings, the future merchant was named for one of the Wise Men. Juan Antonio de Santa Coloma, Gaspar’s father, was a small landowner who was supported later in life by his porteño merchant son.1 Gaspar’s mother, María Antonia de Sollano y Santa Coloma, was presumably a niece or cousin of her husband.

At the age of 12, Gaspar was taken by his father to Orduña (Alava) where he was enrolled in the Jesuit colegio. He never returned to his birthplace, although his parents continued to live there. From Orduña, Gaspar was sent to Madrid to work for Señor Escovedo, a corregidor, and then to Cádiz, where he was apprenticed to Señor Articona, a merchant.2
Gaspar de Santa Coloma

In 1767, at the age of 26, Gaspar de Santa Coloma arrived in Montevideo en route to Buenos Aires. On 11 August 1767 he requested permission from the governor of that city to travel to Buenos Aires accompanied by two young boys and one slave. At that time Santa Coloma declared his only belongings to be his clothing and bed. The slave, who did not belong to Santa Coloma, had been placed in his care to ensure safe arrival in Buenos Aires.

Santa Coloma arrived in Buenos Aires with some prior commercial training, and a small sum of money. He soon set up a retail store in the center of the city. Through good fortune he came under the tutelage of Bernardo Sancho Larrea, a respected porteño merchant who was to serve him as surrogate father, friend and guardian. Sancho Larrea in turn introduced him to another man who was to be instrumental in his life, a friend and fellow merchant, Vizente de Azcuenaga. By 1769, only two years after his arrival, he was prosperous enough to employ a 12-year-old fellow Basque as his clerk. Three years later, at the age of 31, he went into partnership with Gonzalo Doblas, another young immigrant merchant five years his junior. Together they purchased goods from local wholesalers and shipped them to the interior provinces. By 1776, nine years after his arrival in Buenos Aires, Santa Coloma began to engage directly in wholesale trade with Spain. He also continued to run his retail store with the help of his clerk, Martín de Alzaga.

By 1776, the 34-year-old bachelor merchant was a respected member of porteño society, invited to parties at the home of Don Facundo Prieto y Púlido, a well-known local lawyer. He was also prosperous enough to be the victim of a knife attack ("eight wounds, small ones and those of some size") and attempted robbery perpetrated by two masked men while he was asleep.

During the following year, 1777, Santa Coloma made a 50 pesos contribution to the Cabildo's planned dock improvements, a gift close to the average donation of 47 pesos. Although clearly not among the richest merchants in the city, he was enjoying moderate success in his combined retail-wholesale venture.

The 1778 census found him living on the Calle de San José in zone 1 of the city, two blocks from the central plaza. He is described in the census as a 37-year-old bachelor, Spanish and a comerciante. Like that of many of the merchants of the period, his home was directly behind his store; in point of fact the store was the front room of his living quarters. Sharing the same house with him were a 14-year-old agregado, Francisco Llanos (Martín de Alzaga, Santa Coloma's clerk from 1769–77, had become an independent businessman and is listed elsewhere in the census as a mercader), and three unmarried black slaves. Among Santa
Coloma's neighbors were fellow merchant and former partner Gonzalo Doblas, merchants Ventura Llorente and Carlos García, silversmith Alonso Benites and pulpero Francisco García.

On 13 June 1781, at the age of 39, after 13 years in Buenos Aires, Gaspar de Santa Coloma got married. Although at least five years older than the majority of his fellow merchants at the time of their marriages, his wait had been worthwhile. In a cathedral ceremony attended by many of the leading citizens of Buenos Aires, he was married to 16-year-old Flora de Azcuenaga, daughter of Vizente de Azcuenaga, one of the city's most important merchants, and the late Rosa Basavilbaso Urtubia. Vicente de Azcuenaga served as compadre de casamiento; his cousin Vicenta Uriarte, wife of town councillor and merchant Francisco Ignacio de Ugarte, was madrina.

Santa Coloma's marriage well reflects the merchant marriage patterns of the time. As noted in an earlier chapter, marriage served as the final mark of entry into the merchant group, linking the newcomer to an established merchant clan, and providing extended business connections. Flora's father, 64-year-old Vizente de Azcuenaga, had been in the Buenos Aires trade since mid-century. Within a period of forty years, Azcuenaga, related through marriage to the merchant family of Basavilbaso, amassed one of the larger mercantile fortunes of the era. He also occupied a wide range of positions in local government, serving as alcalde del segundo voto, alcalde del primer voto and regidor. In addition, from 1765 he served as captain of cavalry in a Spanish unit of the local militia, and for many years, as síndico of the Regular Franciscan convent of the city.

Santa Coloma was not the only merchant to marry an Azcuenaga daughter. Three years before his marriage to Flora, her elder sister, María Eugenia, had married Agustín Antonio de Erezcano, a 37-year-old Bilbao-born merchant. Erezcano, like his father-in-law, was involved in the Castillian trade, and although worth only 11,954 pesos at the time of his marriage to María Eugenia in 1778, evidently impressed Azcuenaga as to his commercial ability and dedication. The dowry given to 16-year-old María Eugenia by Azcuenaga totaled 20,000 pesos.

By marrying Flora de Azcuenaga, Santa Coloma joined one of the principal mercantile families of the colony. His industriousness and success, apparent by the time of his marriage, no doubt made him an acceptable member of the Azcuenaga–Basavilbaso clan. (For the entire clan, see Appendix A, p. 180). On 8 June 1781, five days before his marriage, he appeared before a notary and, in documents witnessed by his future father-in-law, Vizente de Azcuenaga, and two other porteño
merchants, Miguel González de Noriega and Cristóbal de Aguirre declared his total wealth to be 83,827 pesos 2½ reales, a large, but not exceptional capital. Very little of the bachelor's total wealth was tied up in household goods, property or slaves. At the time of his marriage, his small store-home was worth only 6,600 pesos. His slaves, now 5 in number, were worth 300 pesos a piece for a total of 1,500 pesos. In addition, only one dresser worth 60 pesos, 3 small gold chests valued at 224 pesos and silverware worth 1,020 pesos were included in the inventory. Of goods and credits totaling 99,975 pesos, only 9,404 pesos (9 percent) were invested in personal property.

Flora de Azcuenaga, his bride, was given a dowry of 20,028 pesos 6½ reales by her father. This dowry, only slightly larger than that previously given to her sister, is among the more sizeable dowries of the time. Included in it were 249 pesos worth of linens, clothing worth 1,093 pesos, jewelry worth 4,440 pesos, furniture totaling 1,256 pesos, 450 pesos of silverware, a slave girl worth 300 pesos, and 12,000 pesos in cash (see Appendix c, p. 194). The jewelry included in the dowry was lavish, and featured several pieces made in Spain. Doña Flora's clothing was elegant and expensive as was her furniture; a double bed of jacaranda with carved pillars, probably brought from Brazil, was valued at 400 pesos. But her bridegroom undoubtedly appreciated the large cash payment most of all; 12,000 pesos (equal to 14 percent of his total wealth) represented a considerable amount of new capital to be invested in commerce.

Unlike her sister, María Eugenia, who had earlier married the merchant Agustín Antonio de Erezcano, Flora did not receive a house as part of her dowry. In part this no doubt reflects the preference of her bridegroom, who valued cash above urban property at this point of his commercial career. In addition to her dowry, Santa Coloma, in gratitude for his bride's 'virginity, purity, and virtue' pledged 8,000 pesos in arras to Flora, to be forthcoming upon his death.

Although his bride's dowry contained no urban property, marriage soon forced Santa Coloma to move from his cramped quarters on the west side of Calle San José (behind his store) to a larger house on the east side of the same street, between Calle de Las Torres and Calle Cabildo (present-day Calle Florida between Avenida de Mayo and H. Irigoyen). This house, purchased from Francisco Ignacio de Ugarte, ex-partner, pariente, and friend of Vicente de Azcuenaga, Santa Coloma's father-in-law, was located directly behind the Cabildo, adjacent to the home of another merchant, Juan de Osorio.

Ten months after marriage, on 2 April 1782, Flora de Azcuenaga gave birth to her first child, a boy baptized Juan Francisco, who failed to
survive infancy. A second child, a girl named Rosa Margarita, was born on 23 February 1784, but she too died shortly after birth. Four years later, 24 October 1788, Flora delivered another male child, christened Rafael José.17 His birth was announced in a letter of 1 November 1788 to Agustín Arrivillaga: ‘on the twenty-fourth of last month, Flora gave birth to a little boy who we have named Rafael. His godfather was my benefactor Don Eugenio Lerdo de Tejada. Mother and child are in good health’.18 But nine months later, in a letter dated 1 September 1789 to his father, Juan Antonio de Santa Coloma, Santa Coloma sadly informed him of the death of still another child: ‘On the first day of August, the day before the day of Our Lady of the Angels, at twelve o’clock noon, God was served to take to him, through the smallpox epidemic, our Rafael, who had become so charming. We remain saddened, but in conformity with God’s will that it is not fitting that we have children’.19

The next year, 1790, Flora suffered a miscarriage. Only a fourth child, Francisco de Asis Martín, born on 4 November 1792, survived to adulthood.20

Santa Coloma’s marriage not only brought him money and increased prominence, it also eventually led to his establishment as the leader of the Azcuenaga clan. On 17 August 1787 his father-in-law, Vicente de Azcuenaga, died.21 His will named his two sons-in-law, Gaspar de Santa Coloma and Agustín Antonio de Erezcano, and his son, Domingo de Azcuenaga (a priest) as executors of his estate. In addition, Santa Coloma was named sole tutor and guardian of Azcuenaga’s three minor children, Vicente, a 13-year-old student of philosophy at the Colegio de San Carlos in Buenos Aires; Ana, a 16-year-old daughter, and José Bruno, aged 22, serving as alférez de fragata (ensign) in the Spanish navy. Santa Coloma was chosen as chief executor by his brothers-in-law. He quickly realized that the final settlement of the estate would be a long, complicated, and arduous task, and petitioned the Juez de Bienes de Difuntos to be relieved of this new duty, citing his poor health and lack of time, and suggesting that his brother-in-law Erezcano be named in his stead. His request met with little sympathy, and for the next eight years he was involved in the settlement of his father-in-law’s estate, an estate from which his wife eventually inherited more than 20,000 pesos.

The Azcuenaga clan, after the death of Don Vicente, proved, much to Santa Coloma’s despair, to be a quarrelsome lot. As chief executor he fought first with his cuñado, Miguel de Azcuenaga, and later with his concuñado, Erezcano, over inventories and accounts connected with Azcuenaga’s vast holdings. In addition Azcuenaga had begun legal proceedings to institute a mayorazgo, another complication which pro-
vided Santa Coloma with endless legal problems. He complained bitterly of the troubles caused by the attempt to form this mayorazgo, and of the consequent delay in the settlement of Azcuenaga’s financial and business affairs. In a letter to his friend and business associate, Agustín Wright, dated 1 July 1788, he wrote:

I'm still trying to get out of the mayorazgo mess; no one has wanted to decide any of the issues, and the Royal Audiencia has spent all year trying to decide the case. They do not want to allow the formation of the mayorazgo, causing a great scandal to all the vecinos of this city. I have had some bad times with the mayorazgo but rest assured that it won't harm my business obligations. The business of my father [-in-law] under my supervision would be as clear as daylight, if it weren't for the damn mayorazgo mixup.²²

In addition to the mayorazgo problems, Santa Coloma, as executor of his father-in-law's estate, was responsible for settling Azcuenaga's vast business transactions and managing Azcuenaga's property. Among Azcuenaga's real estate holdings was the casa del asiento, a large building located on the central plaza which had formerly served as headquarters for the British asiento. In 1785, Santa Coloma finally rented most of the building to the Aduana, while continuing to use some space to store his own goods. Because of the press of daily business, he found himself unable to attend to this property, and by 1789 named José García to manage it.²³ The casa de asiento continued to be occupied by the Aduana for the rest of the colonial period.

Trouble for Santa Coloma caused by Azcuenaga's property did not end with the casa del asiento. In December 1789 he let a house belonging to the Azcuenaga estate to Don Juan Francisco Vilanova and his son, Don José de Vilanova, vista de Aduana (Aduana inspector) and Oficial Mayor de la Contaduría de la Real Aduana (Chief of the Accounting Section of the Royal Customs) respectively. Santa Coloma, acting as executor and heir of the late Azcuenaga, and the Vilanovas agreed on a monthly rent of 35 pesos, to be paid promptly from the one-third of the Vilanovas' salary which was left as a guarantee in the Royal Treasury. Because he was therefore assured of payment, he was less than conscientious in collecting the rent. Only in 1793, after José Ignacio Taybo, another merchant, began proceedings against the Vilanovas for repayment of debt, did Santa Coloma step forth demanding outstanding rent of 1,540 pesos.²⁴

For the next two years Santa Coloma and Taybo wrangled with one another over who should receive preference in the repayment of the Vilanovas' debts. On 10 December 1795 the court ordered Santa Coloma to be repaid first. Taybo, dissatisfied with the decision, requested that
the case be transferred to the Royal Audiencia. The high court con-
considered the problem for another three years, and reversed the lower
court findings on 3 January 1799. Four months after repayment was
made to Taybo, Gaspar de Santa Coloma received the first rent from
the Vilanovas, who had continued to live in the house during the
lengthy legal proceedings. Still another house belonging to Azcuenaga's
estate was rented to the newly established Consulado in 1794.

Another problem left to Santa Coloma at the time of Azcuenaga's
death was marriage negotiations under way between Antonio Olaguer
Feliú, Brigadier General of the Royal Army and Inspector General
of the Viceregal Troops, and Azcuenaga, for Azcuenaga's youngest
daughter, Ana. A month before his death, Azcuenaga began presenta-
tion of documents proving the 'good birth, purity of blood, known
Christianity and noble status' of his family, a necessary step before the
marriage of his daughter to a high ranking military officer. Azcuenaga
presented proof of baptism and marriage going back three generations,
character references and a listing of all Cabildo offices held by him and
members of his family. In addition, Azcuenaga called on four fellow
merchants to attest to 'the legitimacy of his daughter, her education as
befitting her station, and her nobility'.

Azcuenaga died before the conclusion of the información and left Santa
Coloma and Erezcano to finish the proceedings. In addition, Santa
Coloma undertook to provide Ana with a dowry and to make arrange-
ments for the wedding. On 2 June 1788, 17-year-old Ana de Azcuenaga
was married before 'a multitude of persons' to Olaguer Feliú. The
ceremony took place in the church of San Francisco (her parents had
both been members of the Third Order of San Francisco and were
buried at the foot of the altar of Our Lady of Concepción); official
witnesses for the couple were Francisco de Paula Sanz, Caballero of the
Order of Charles III, Superintendent of the Royal Hacienda and
Interim Governor of the La Plata Viceroyalty, and his wife, Josefa Ortiz.
Within the month Santa Coloma wrote to Agustín Wright: 'on the second
of last month Anita married Olaguer and I handed over 30,000 pesos
in silver and 5,000 pesos in clothing and furnishings. I still have the two
youngest children to finish up with.' A year later, Flora de Azcuenaga,
Santa Coloma's wife, served as godmother at the confirmation of
Olaguer's and Ana's first child.

Familial connections and friendships with powerful men such as
Olaguer Feliú, Bernardo Sancho Larrea, Francisco Ignacio de Ugarte
and Vicente de Azcuenaga were, in most instances, beneficial to Santa
Coloma; at times, however, these connections backfired. His pleito with
Taybo, for example, was heard by the Royal Audiencia during the Viceroyalty of Olaguer Feliú, and because of the Viceroy's obvious interest in the outcome of the case, he was forced to absent himself from taking part in the decision. Olaguer Feliú's unpopularity with the Audiencia may have colored the judges' decision to reverse the lower court which had originally found for Santa Coloma.

Family connections also prevented Santa Coloma from signing the merchants' petition to be exempted from military service, although he was admittedly eager to be relieved of militia duty. His brother-in-law, Miguel de Azcuenaga, was the militia commander to whom the merchants objected most vehemently; Olaguer Feliú, another brother-in-law, was one of the three Viceroyes to review the merchants' pleito. Even if he had been sympathetic to the merchants' demands, his family situation no doubt prevented his expressing any opinion in this case. And the absence of Santa Coloma, a fervent monarchist, from the famous Cabildo Abierto of 1810, can in part be explained by the fact that Miguel de Azcuenaga was one of the most vocal supporters of the local Junta.

Although he worked hard to maintain a public posture of harmony with the Azcuenaga clan, his personal relationships with three of his brothers-in-law – Miguel de Azcuenaga, Agustín de Erezcano, and Vicente de Azcuenaga – were often troublesome. As early as 1787, while engaged in the initial settlement of the Azcuenaga estate, he and Miguel de Azcuenaga disagreed on procedures. Miguel began legal action, which he insisted on following through the Royal Audiencia. The Audiencia, like the local court, ruled for Santa Coloma. The pleito further complicated the Azcuenaga estate and forced Santa Coloma to draw upon his personal funds to fulfill some of Vicente de Azcuenaga's bequests.

Santa Coloma had respect for Miguel, but he saw Erezcano as a ne'er-do-well, continually involved in deceptions, always in arrears in his business dealings. A letter to Bernardo Sancho Larrea shortly after Erezcano's death best illustrates his low opinion of his brother-in-law, Agustín:

Don Agustín de Erezcano, my brother-in-law, has died suddenly, without any sort of will. [He was] deep in legal suits, entanglements and in known arrears. He gave me and my father [-in-law, Azcuenaga] so many disagreeable experiences, that God, our Lord, will have to pardon him, as I have done, for all the offenses which he caused me.29

Brother-in-law Vicente de Azcuenaga, the younger, was still another problem. Shortly after his father's death, Santa Coloma, acting as the
boy's guardian, sent Vicente to Spain to purchase a military post. By February 1791, Vicente was complaining that his 'attacks and illnesses' prevented his continuing in a military career; little sympathy was aroused in Santa Coloma who suspected Vicente of being lazy and profligate:

From this city, from Montevideo and from Cádiz, I have been receiving word of your immoderate conduct...you have the same temperament and behavior as your brothers and sisters; [you] dissipate that with which so much love and special requests your father left you...I hope to hear nothing more of your conduct, which is your perdition. Do what you like but don't complain about your life to anyone.30

Although he continued to think of Vicente as a 'lost lad', he instructed Ramón Moya, a business contact in Madrid, and Bernardo Sancho Larrea, to arrange for the purchase of a captaincy or lieutenancy for Vicente, 'cost what it may.31 By June 1792, Vicente was successfully placed in one of the new Catalonian batallions with the rank of captain, at a cost of 7,500 pesos. Arrangements were made for Sancho Larrea to turn over an extra 25 pesos per month, which in addition to his salary, Santa Coloma hoped would maintain Vicente in a comfortable life style. After advising him that he would receive 10,000 pesos of maternal inheritance when he reached the age of 25 (Vicente was then 19 years old), he warned Vicente to follow his advice, lest he end up lost like his siblings, and other wealthy young Americans.32 Communication with Vicente was sporadic during the next two years, and Santa Coloma often complained both that the young man had forgotten his family and homeland, and that he was ungrateful. Nevertheless, he was proud of Vicente's military career, and had just begun to move, again through the auspices of Ramón Moya, to have Vicente promoted to lieutenant colonel, when he received news of the young man's death while stationed in Urgel.33

To Santa Coloma, a man born to a struggling middle-class family, a man who had worked hard to build up his fortune, a man who guarded each peso carefully and would take business associates to task were their accounts off by one or two reales, the free-spending creoles, like Vicente de Azcuenaga the younger, were a race apart. The sons of Vicente de Azcuenaga, and all native-born by extension, were prodigals to this Basque merchant, foolishly wasting what their fathers had worked so hard to gain. Although he was personally acquainted with creoles like Juan José Lezica, men as successful and conservative as their fathers, his stereotype of the native born was based on his wanton brothers-in-law and others like them.
In a letter to Ursula Arteana, a niece of the late Vicente de Azcuenaga, dated 20 November 1792, in which he complained of the delay and expense caused by Miguel de Azcuenaga's opposition to the settlement of his father's estate, he related his true feelings for his creole in-laws:

The only son who gave him [Vicente de Azcuenaga] pleasure in this life was me; all the others caused him grief as everyone knows. No one in the family has done as much as I, nor has looked out for the family's interests, as in the placement of Anita and Vicente. Not he [Miguel] nor all his brothers can take away the glory in life and death which I have from having fulfilled [Azcuenaga's] wishes like a good son. I have no other sin nor crime than having acted like a righteous man. The sons of the deceased are capital enemies of righteous actions.34

Another brother-in-law, Domingo Azcuenaga, ran through his inheritance within five years, dramatic proof of Santa Coloma's words.

Santa Coloma not only perceived himself as the principle guardian of the immediate Azcuenaga family, he also felt himself responsible for the well-being of assorted clan members, including Azcuenaga's cousins, aunts and uncles. In June 1794, for example, Manuel Basavilbaso, brother-in-law through marriage to the late Vicente de Azcuenaga, died, leaving, in addition to a debt-ridden estate, an unmarried daughter of twenty-seven. Santa Coloma held himself personally responsible to provide for the girl, Justa, until permanent arrangements could be made for her. Acting without delay he chose as a suitable husband for her (although she was well past the optimal marriage age), none other than her first cousin and Santa Coloma's brother-in-law, Miguel de Azcuenaga. Miguel was persuaded by the benefits of this match, which included the inheritance of Manuel Basavilbaso's position as administrador general de Correos (General Administrator of the Royal Mails). On 6 February 1795, nine months after the death of Manuel Basavilbaso, Justa and Miguel were married in the Buenos Aires Cathedral, with Flora de Azcuenaga, Santa Coloma's wife serving as madrina.35 In a letter to family friend, Bernardo Sancho Larrea, dated 28 July 1795, Santa Coloma expressed his satisfaction with this marriage arrangement:

...since Manuel Basavilbaso died, I have spoken of nothing else with my brother-in-law, Miguel, than how important it was that he marry Justita, who is worthy of a prince. I took many things into consideration before promoting this match, and I considered it fairly and thoroughly. In our family there was no one else who could redeem and help her if not him...he is a man free of financial entanglements and at last I have the consolation of seeing him as head of the house, protecting the girl; I am dedicated to doing what I can for her comfort.36
The merchants of Buenos Aires

His compelling obligation to supervise the fortunes of the Azcuenaga family was not atypical for a man of his time or social position. To be effective the mercantile clans of Buenos Aires each needed a leader, a man to guard the family's fortunes, honor and women. Santa Coloma, as executor of the estate of Vicente de Azcuenaga and as a successful businessman, was the obvious heir to the father-in-law's position in the clan. The same pattern of leadership passing from merchant father-in-law to merchant son-in-law is found repeatedly among the vice-regal comerciante group.

Like other merchants of the time, social participation and responsibilities went beyond even the extended family. In addition to his relationships through marriage to the Azcuenaga-Basavilbaso clan, he formed new kinship bonds through participation as godfather in the religious rites of marriage and baptism. He and his wife served as godparents to a small group of fellow merchants, including José Antonio Dorrego and Gregorio Ramos. They were also godparents to blood kin such as their niece, María Eugenia Erezcano (both Gaspar and Flora served as padrinos de bautismo), and her brother Juan Pablo Erezcano (Flora served as madrina de bautismo).37

In choosing godparents for their children, Santa Coloma and Flora always turned to members of the Azcuenaga family or to respected merchants. Vicente, Flora's father, and Ana, her sister and future wife of Olaguer Feliú, served as godparents for the first two children, although Ana was only eleven years old at the time of the birth of Santa Coloma's first child.38 Agustín de Erezcano and his wife María Eugenia Azcuenaga were chosen as godparents for Rafael José, with merchant and friend Eugenio Lerdo de Tejada also named godfather.39 Fellow merchant Isidro Balbastro and his wife served as godparents for Francisco de Asis.40

In addition to duties to clansmen, ritual kinsmen and friends in America, Santa Coloma never forgot his responsibilities to blood kin in his home town. He continually provided monetary support to both his father and his nephew Vitores, and brought Vitores' son, Juan Domingo, to Buenos Aires to train him in 'the pen and accounts'. Again family loyalty was felt more deeply than any personal misunderstandings. Although he had fought bitterly with his sister María and her husband over the final disposition of his father's small estate, when María's daughter, Manuela María, expressed a desire to enter a convent, he came to the aid of the impoverished girl, granting her 12,000 pesos for her dowry.41

He extended the most aid to his nephew Juan Antonio de Santa
Gaspar de Santa Coloma

Coloma, namesake and son of his late beloved older brother. In 1787, after the death of three of his children, he sent for his nephew, Juan Antonio. Soon after his arrival in Buenos Aires, Juan Antonio, with funds supplied on credit by his uncle, purchased a store-full of goods belonging to Francisco Llano and Manuel Ventura Haedo, two of Santa Coloma’s business associates. Shortly after, with Santa Coloma supplying the capital, Gaspar and his nephew joined in a limited partnership. Juan Antonio was included in the 1798 list of comerciantes, although he ranked only 86th as compared to his more prominent uncle, who was 25th on the list. Again in 1802 both uncle and nephew appeared on a list of the principal merchants of Buenos Aires. In 1804, Juan Antonio de Santa Coloma was elected regidor of the Buenos Aires Cabildo, also serving as alférez real for the first three months of the year. And in 1808 he served again as regidor. Unlike his uncle, who wished to avoid Cabildo office, Juan Antonio seems not to have held municipal service in disdain.

Juan Antonio, following the traditional pattern of securing social position gained through moderate commercial success, married the porteño-born daughter of another merchant. On 29 April 1794 he married Ana María Lezica, the fifteen-year-old daughter of Juan Antonio de Lezica and Rosa de la Torre Tagle. The marriage was fully approved by Juan Antonio’s uncle Gaspar. In a letter dated 1 December 1793, he announced the forthcoming marriage to Agustín de Arrivillaga: ‘today [Juan Antonio] has become engaged to the daughter of our friend Don Juan Antonio Lesica, which has given me the greatest satisfaction’.

Within a year Ana Maria gave birth to their first child, a girl named Magdalena. Two other daughters were born to the couple in 1802 and 1809, but the younger girls failed to survive to adulthood.

Juan Antonio de Santa Coloma’s marriage to Ana María Lezica linked together two of the most important mercantile clans of the Viceroyalty: the Basavilbasos and the Lezicas. These two powerful and influential families had always been friendly; the clan founders, Domingo Basavilbaso and Juan de Lezica y Torrezuri, both Basque, had ‘frequent communication and entered often into [one another’s] houses’. On at least one occasion they had been partners. Only the relative predominance of daughters to sons in both families, and the persistence of traditional patterns of choosing Spanish-born merchants as husbands for their daughters, and women from more established families as wives for their sons, can explain the delay in effecting an inter-clan marriage.

Juan Antonio de Santa Coloma was not the only young man to benefit from his uncle’s success. Providing lifetime professions for young men –
kinsmen and sons of friends—was a frequent preoccupation for Gaspar de Santa Coloma. As a respected merchant he had a network of mercantile connections, both in Spain and in the colonies, which facilitated placement of young creoles in their chosen profession. He also helped place the sons of Spanish merchants in Buenos Aires. Interestingly, his letters show the overwhelming attraction of military and clerical careers for the porteño-born sons of Buenos Aires merchants. Their desire to enter high prestige occupations was reinforced by their merchant fathers, who regarded commerce, especially given the danger of blockades during wartime, to be a hazardous choice of careers for their own sons. Santa Coloma reflected this opinion in a letter to his brother-in-law Vicente de Azcuenaga: ‘Jose Bruno [another brother-in-law] will be leaving for Cádiz next month in a war frigate, taking two of Erezcano’s sons with him. [The boys] are going to be put into the Navy because there’s no place for them here. Business as an occupation is unprofitable and all other careers are unpromising.’ Spanish merchants, on the other hand, continued to send their sons to Buenos Aires to apprentice as merchants, refusing to believe the dismal state of the porteño market.

Many of the young men helped by Santa Coloma were Basques, for he divided Spaniards into two groups: fellow Basques and all others. He had close friends who were not Basques, but there was a special warmth reserved for fellow ‘countrymen’. Even the creole-born sons of Basques were considered to be ‘one of ours’ for Basque identity could be passed from father to son. Just as Santa Coloma took pains to identify fellow Basques, he often referred to Spaniards from other regions by their origins. In a letter to Bernardo Sancho Larrea, he notified his friend in Spain of the marriage of the widow of fellow-Basque Manuel Joaquín Zapiola, to ‘a hot-brained fellow from Santander’; another letter referred to ‘the Catalans’ who were renting Sancho Larrea’s quinta.

Santa Coloma also perceived of a regional distinction between those merchants who were deeply involved in contraband and those who were loyal to government policies. In a letter of 6 June 1792 to his partner, Agustín de Arrivillaga, he complained ‘there’s no business in this city, like that of the Gallegos [who are] deeply involved in contraband goods... with the Catalans in pursuit’. Regional identification could or could not be perjorative, but it was important to social relationships among the porteño merchants.

Like many of his fellow merchants, Gaspar de Santa Coloma joined in limited political action to protect and defend the rights of Buenos
Gaspar de Santa Coloma

Aires commerce. He consistently took an active, although not leading part, in causes important to the merchant group. In 1780, he and a group of five other merchants ‘having dealings and business with the provinces of Peru’ petitioned for a lessening of restrictions which impinged upon the growth of provincial commerce. He also attended the *juntas de comerciantes* of June 1785, and voted for three representatives to work for the establishment of a local Consulado. A month later his name appeared as one of 15 merchants sitting on a Junta General de Comerciantes, an advisory board elected to review proposals and progress of the three appointed merchant representatives. At the same time, he, along with several others, officially granted power of attorney to the three delegates ‘to promote the founding of a Consulado’. Four years later, on 17 October 1789, Santa Coloma again joined with a group of merchants, this time to request vice-regal permission to hold new elections to replace two of the three merchant representatives. Two days later he joined others to request postponement of the elections for 24 hours. The meeting, which finally took place on 24 October, produced a contested election, and although he attended this meeting, he took no part in the disputes which followed. His brother-in-law, Agustín de Erezcano, led in defending the validity of the original vote, a vote which had elected Miguel de Azcuenaga, Santa Coloma’s and Erezcano’s brother-in-law, as one of the new deputies.

Again in 1790, Santa Coloma joined in granting a new power of attorney to the merchants’ representatives still working for the establishment of a local Consulado. Although interested in the creation of a Buenos Aires Consulado, Santa Coloma never served in the body, finally formed in 1794, in any major capacity. Nevertheless, he did not lack influence in the Consulado, for his friend and future brother-in-law, Francisco Ignacio de Ugarte (second husband of María Eugenia Azcuenaga), served the Consulado as *consiliario* from 1794 to 1796 and from 1806 to 1807, and as a prior from 1803 to 1805. Santa Coloma’s ex-clerk and good friend, Martín de Alzaga, a powerful merchant by the last decade of the eighteenth century, was also an active Consulado member.

In addition to joining with fellow merchants to forward their common interests, Santa Coloma, like other merchants of the period, served on the town council. In 1782, a year after his marriage, he was elected *regidor* and *defensor de menores* (defender of minors) of the Buenos Aires Cabildo. Three years later, in 1785, he was again elected to the position of *regidor*. But Santa Coloma had little regard for voluntary municipal service; Cabildo office could bring little additional prestige to the son-in-law of Vicente de Azcuenaga. Indeed, he looked upon Cabildo office
as an unnecessary waste of time, a disagreeable duty which prevented him from attending to his commercial interests. When in 1787 he was faced again with possible election to the Cabildo, he appeared before the local magistrates, and offered to donate 5,000 pesos to be used for the construction of an altar dedicated to San Martín, the patron saint of Buenos Aires, in return for a permanent exemption from Cabildo office. He requested this exemption on the grounds of failing health. (He had recently been ill, and had complained in letters to friends of flatulence, shortsightedness and a weak pulse.) But before his petition had been finally granted in 1790, by his own admission, he reported to a friend that he had ‘completely returned to a state of good health. My sight and pulse are back, and my major ills have disappeared.’ In another letter to a friend he spoke more openly of his wish to avoid Cabildo service:

In order to free myself of the Cabildo drudgery, I have made an...offer to pay for the altar to Our Patron Saint...The Cabildo has happily embraced the idea, but the approval of the Viceroy and the King are still needed. I hope to gain final approval this year. If I fail, I won’t be able to escape the offices of Alcalde and Alférez Real, two jobs which don’t agree with me.

The offer of an altar is particularly fitting in the case of Santa Coloma, for he, like many other merchants of the time, was intimately involved in the religious life of the city. He belonged to a third order, although the order which he chose, the Bethlehemite order, was not popular among the merchant group; his wife, like her parents, was a member of the Third Order of San Francisco. In addition to membership in a third order, he was active in the administration of the city’s cathedral, serving a mayordomo de fábrica from 1794 to 1800. As mayordomo, he was required to oversee income and outlay, to keep the inventory of church possessions, and to attend to ordinary expenses and provisions for the church. The position of mayordomo brought honor to the man who held it, but the duties were often time-consuming and tedious. Various donations, including the forced contributions, fell under the purview of the mayordomo, and detailed accounting for these various funds was required.

In addition to his administrative service to the Church, Santa Coloma appears to have been a deeply religious man. Annually he sponsored the 14 September celebration of the Santísimo Cristo, donating fourteen pesos for a sermon, ten pesos for masses and six pesos for incidental expenses. Like many of his peers, Santa Coloma established a religious annuity (censo), in this case a censo of 600 pesos on the house of Dr Mariano Medrano in the barrio of San Miguel, to provide funds for this religious undertaking. After his death, Flora de Azcuenaga, his wife,
Gaspar de Santa Coloma continued to serve as patrona of the Santísimo Cristo. Beginning in 1806 and to his death, Santa Coloma also sponsored three annual masses in Arciniega, the parish of his birth. These masses were said on his birthday (and patron saint’s day), his anniversary, and on 24 November, San Juan Bautista day, the patron saint of Arciniega.61

Charity, an extension of religious activity, was another area in which he was actively involved, but his donations were overwhelmingly to institutions in his native land, not in the colony where he had made his fortune. Although he never joined the Hermandad de la Caridad in Buenos Aires, more than any other porteño merchant Santa Coloma continued throughout his lifetime to aid the people of his birthplace. His strong identification with the Basque country was no doubt intensified by frequent letters to his father, who continued to live in Arciniega until his death in 1792 at the age of 90. As early as 1788, Santa Coloma arranged through a Cádiz merchant, Agustín Arrivillaga, for the transfer of funds earmarked for the construction of an emergency granary in his birthplace.62 At the same time he supplied funds for the village church, and for the creation of a public school of primeras letras in Campijo, the nearest market town. Beginning in 1791 he sent yearly donations to this school, and much of his correspondence with his father and his nephew, Vitores Gutiérrez de Santa Coloma, from this date on is concerned with the finance and management of the project. On 6 December 1802, after informally supporting the school for 11 years, he drew up a donación y fundación to perpetuate the school.63

Gaspar de Santa Coloma’s social and religious life demonstrates many of the patterns of origin, recruitment, marriage, kinship, religious participation and charity prevalent among the porteño merchant group. His business career also sheds much light on the economic life of a merchant in the Platine colony. Entry into wholesale transactions, trade arrangements, credit facilities, partnerships, goods traded, and secondary services provided by merchants can all be documented in Santa Coloma’s letter books and ledgers.

He began his commercial life as a retailer: soon after his arrival in Buenos Aires he joined Gonzalo Doblas, another young merchant, purchasing goods from local wholesalers and reselling them to the porteño public or to provincial merchants. One of the suppliers of the Santa Coloma–Doblas partnership was the company formed by Vicente de Azcuenaga and Francisco Ignacio de Ugarte.64 It was probably through this business acquaintance that Azcuenaga came to know his future son-in-law, for Azcuenaga could not but be impressed with the young Basque’s dedication and success. In September 1772, for example,
Santa Coloma–Doblas purchased more than 1,000 pesos of goods on credit from Azcuenaga–Ugarte, promising to repay within a year. The young partners not only repaid this loan a month before it came due, but in September 1773 they made a much larger credit purchase of over 26,000 pesos of goods. This debt was repaid within the next two years, an indication of at least moderate business success. By 1778, the Santa Coloma–Doblas partnership dissolved and both men returned to independent commerce.

In 1779, Santa Coloma entered into his first venture as a wholesale importer dealing directly with Spanish-based merchants. That year he purchased a shipment worth 25,800 pesos from Agustín Arrivillaga, a Cádiz merchant who had previously resided in Buenos Aires. Like the majority of his future transactions with peninsular merchants, these goods were purchased on credit. The terms called for repayment of half the debt within one year and the other half six months later. This transaction marked the beginning of a long business relationship, both as partners and as individual traders, between Santa Coloma and Arrivillaga, which continued until 1791. That Santa Coloma entered the import trade at the time of the founding of the Viceroyalty and the opening of the port was not accidental. He clearly believed that the economic prospects of Buenos Aires would continue to improve as the city increasingly became a supplier of the markets of the interior.

His account books document this shift from retail merchant and middlemen, purchasing goods from porteño importers, to independent importer, dealing directly with the exporters of Spain. From 1778 to 1782 he bought goods worth more than 178,000 pesos from porteño merchants while directly importing only 25,800 pesos of goods. Beginning in 1783, with a massive purchase of over 200,000 pesos, until he retired from active commerce in 1791, the total value of goods directly imported by Santa Coloma was 683,000 pesos, while 242,000 pesos of goods were purchased from porteño peers. The direct imports, varying in value from 1,000 to over 200,000 pesos per shipment, were bought on credit from the merchants of Cádiz and La Coruña at terms which ranged from one to three years. The trade system was based on credit to such a degree that only twice during these years did Santa Coloma import goods which he owned outright. These goods totaled only 10 percent of the total value of goods purchased after 1783.

Santa Coloma also acted as the consignee for goods owned by Spanish merchants wishing to sell in the La Plata region. In his role as agent of a Spanish merchant, he received commissions varying from 2 to 8 percent of the resale value of the goods; it was therefore in his interest
to sell these goods at the highest price possible. Santa Coloma most frequently served as a local agent for Agustín Wright, a porteño merchant who had settled in Cádiz. Manuel Moral, another Cádiz merchant, also frequently consigned goods to him. Of all his transactions with Spanish merchants during the period 1783 to 1791, 73 percent of the shipments were on credit, and 17 percent were on consignment. The value of the former was 497,000 pesos and of the latter 118,000 pesos.

Throughout the fifteen-year period when he was most active in trade with Spanish-based merchants (1779–94) Santa Coloma repeatedly turned to the same wholesale suppliers. Some of these suppliers were personally known to him, acquaintances from the days of his apprenticeship in Spain, or merchants who had lived in or visited Buenos Aires. These suppliers tended to be the most trusted. Other business associations were formed through the intervention of a third party, either a merchant friend of the Azcuénaga clan or an already established Spanish contact. Chief among the peninsular traders with whom Santa Coloma dealt were Agustín Arrivillaga, Manuel Moral and Juan Micheo in Cádiz, and José de Llano and Antonio Piñero in La Coruña.

Although his friend Pedro Dubal was one of the major slavers of the period, Santa Coloma was not active in the wholesale importation of slaves into the colony. Occasionally, however, he dispatched one or two slaves to Potosí or a city of the interior. Some of these slaves were sent at the behest of associates, often for personal use, and were part of a service which Santa Coloma offered to his most important clients. Other slaves, owned by Santa Coloma, were consigned to provincial merchants. But the sale of slaves was always a minute part of Santa Coloma’s trade; his primary concerns were the importation of Spanish goods and the exportation of silver and local products.

Another growing branch of trade which Santa Coloma tended to avoid was the large-scale export of hides. He looked upon hide export as a bothersome business, because of the bulk of the export which required ship space often difficult to book, especially in times of war, problems of storage, damage by moths, and uneven quality. Santa Coloma also feared that the Buenos Aires hide supply would quickly outstrip demand. Although willing to export hides when acting on a commission for Spanish-based importers, Santa Coloma seldom invested his own funds in hides either for speculation or for payment of Spanish goods. Occasionally the lack of customers with cash forced Santa Coloma to exchange goods directly for hides, but he very much preferred to send cash payments in the form of silver pesos for Spanish imports. He made this choice of silver whenever possible because of its dependable value.
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and comparative lack of bulk. Gold cloth (tejido de oro) from La Paz, doblones and silver articles (plata labrada) were also sent to Spain to balance accounts. Only rarely did the export of vicuña wool or hides figure in Santa Coloma’s accounts. His remittance of silver was applauded by his Spanish suppliers, for specie payment was direct reimbursement. But while making Santa Coloma a popular Buenos Aires merchant in the eyes of his Spanish associates, large-scale export of silver only helped to aggravate the colony’s chronic shortage of ready money.

Although Santa Coloma imported large quantities of goods directly from Spain after 1783, he still found it necessary to improve the selection of goods which he offered to his clients by purchasing from other porteño merchants. Again, as in the case of goods purchased from Spanish merchants, these were usually credit transactions. Although at times he signed escrituras (formal loan papers drawn up by an escribano and witnessed by three men), with terms ranging up to one year for repayment, he more commonly made use of the pagaré, an unWitnessed I.O.U., promising to repay local creditors within 3 to 18 months. Some goods were also paid for with pagarés a la vista, chits which a merchant promised to honor whenever presented for payment. These pagarés a la vista, the colonial equivalent of personal cheques (without a bank’s endorsement) could be presented immediately, but there was usually a two-to-three-month lapse between the date a pagaré was issued and the date it was redeemed. Pagarés were often used instead of cash in settling debts among the merchants, and Santa Coloma’s pagarés were frequently passed on by his creditors to third parties, who in turn redeemed them. Cash, yerba mate, and libranzas (drafts against another merchant) were also all used to repay local creditors.

Among the goods purchased locally, efectos (dry goods) figure most prominently, but there are also occasional purchases of iron, knives, anil, and yerba mate. On the local scene, Santa Coloma continued to buy goods from both Vicente de Azcuenaga and Francisco Ignacio de Ugarte, as well as from Francisco Antonio de Escalada, Eugenio Lerdo de Tejada, Diego Agüero, José Blas Gainza, Antonio García López, Matías Abaroa Barrena, and a host of other prominent local merchants. Between 1783 and 1791, in addition to 683,000 pesos of goods imported from Spain, Santa Coloma purchased 242,000 pesos of goods from local merchants.

The majority of goods received by Santa Coloma were resold, usually on credit, at a markup of 20–80 percent to wholesalers and retailers in the interior. Among his clients were merchants in Rosario, Córdoba, Santa Fé, San Juan, Paraguay, Salta, Tucumán, Santiago del Estero, and Montevideo, major population centers of the Río Platense area, and
smaller towns such as San Nicolás and Pergamino. In addition to goods shipped to established merchants in the interior, Santa Coloma sold a large quantity of goods to viajeros (traveling salesmen) on their way to the inland cities. Among the viajeros were local merchants about to undertake extended business trips, provincial merchants returning to the interior from Buenos Aires, and several itinerate merchants, who traveled between the port and the cities of the interior.

Among the merchants with whom he dealt in the interior, Santa Coloma maintained a special relationship with Pedro José Otero, a merchant who served as his apoderado in Salta. Santa Coloma sold goods outright to Otero, but more frequently he sent goods on consignment to him. Otero also acted as Santa Coloma's agent in collecting debts, and in recruiting new merchant clients.

In addition to offering goods to his clients in the interior, Santa Coloma provided several auxiliary services to these merchants. He most frequently lent cash, shipped items for personal use, and settled accounts with other porteño merchants (thereby assuming outstanding debts) for the growing group of men who purchased goods from him. These services were intended to entice new clients and to maintain their loyalty, for honorable merchants who promptly met their obligations were hard to find in the specie-poor colony. 'This commerce grows worse each day for there's nothing but chicanery, overdrafts and bankruptcies; one no longer knows who to trust...' 68

Initially money-lending was linked directly to the purchase of goods; from 1778 to 1783, for example, most loans to fellow merchants were in the form of a credit against goods sold by Santa Coloma. Terms of repayment varied from 2 to 18 months, with interest rates as high as 8 percent. In addition to cash, repayment was made in hides, yerba, local commodities, libranzas, silver articles and gold. 69 The goods received in payment were often sold by Santa Coloma to another porteño or inland merchant. By 1779, for example, Santa Coloma sold yerba received as payment for goods sent to Paraguay to a merchant in Tucumán. 70 Paraguayan yerba was also sent to Chile and ponchos received from Salta were sold to the merchants of Montevideo.

For Santa Coloma as for many merchants, barter of goods was necessary because of the endemic scarcity of capital in the Río de la Plata region caused by legal and illegal export of silver. Scarcity of capital also forced Santa Coloma to seek cash loans wherever available to finance his growing business. In addition to purchasing goods on credit, Santa Coloma borrowed cash totaling 173,000 pesos from fellow porteño merchants. These loans varied in principal from 1,000 pesos to 37,000 pesos.
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...the average loan was 11,500 pesos; interest rates also fluctuated between 4 and 8 percent per year. Whether money had been borrowed by obligación or pagaré, the stipulated repayment time was usually 1 year to 18 months.

Prior to the official opening of the Buenos Aires port, Santa Coloma received only one loan from a fellow merchant, the comparatively small sum of 1,000 pesos borrowed from Luis Gardeazabal in 1775. The opening of the port produced a flurry of economic activity, and a greatly expanded need for liquid capital. From 1779 to 1782, for example, Santa Coloma borrowed a total of 41,000 pesos from fellow merchants. All these loans were promptly repaid, either before or upon the stipulated date, but loans were not necessarily repaid in cash. Both goods and libranzas charged directly to the creditor or a third party were used to settle accounts between him and his porteño merchant creditors. In addition to fellow merchants, cash loans were solicited from others seeking to invest excess funds. Manuela Galain, a widow, twice loaned cash to Santa Coloma: her loan of 2,000 pesos in 1778 was followed by a larger loan of more than 10,000 pesos the next year. Both loans were made for a one-year period, at an interest rate of 8 percent.

From 1783 on, these comparatively short-term loans failed to satisfy Santa Coloma's need for capital for he was, by then, entering directly into large-scale importing. In December 1783, a sizeable inflow of capital was produced when Santa Coloma accepted a capellanía founded by the Viceroy, Juan José Vértiz. In return for a loan of 10,000 pesos from the Viceroy, Santa Coloma promised to provide the yearly interest on the principal to a chaplain chosen by the Viceroy. As security, Santa Coloma mortgaged his two houses in the city. Two aspects of this loan made it particularly attractive to the up-and-coming merchant: the principal of the capellanía (chaplaincy) was not to be called back for several years, and the interest rate on the principal was a low 5 percent per year. Santa Coloma, by becoming the recipient of this capellanía, had obtained a large sum of liquid capital on a long-term low-interest basis. Not until November 1798 did Santa Coloma turn the principal of the Vértiz capellanía over to three new recipients.

Two years after he made the Vértiz agreement, Santa Coloma received an even larger infusion of working capital in the form of a loan from his father-in-law Vicente de Azcuenaga. On 1 December 1785, Santa Coloma borrowed more than 37,000 pesos from Azcuenaga to cover outstanding debts in Cádiz. The loan, made at the rate of 8 percent per annum, was followed within a month by another of equal size. It is the second loan which is rather astounding. On 3 January 1786,
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Azcuenaga placed 37,218 pesos at Santa Coloma's disposition, 'in his cashbox' with the understanding that he could recall the money at any time, but that while the money remained in Santa Coloma's possession, he could use it absolutely interest free. Here is a dramatic example of the economic benefits which his fortuitous marriage had brought, economic benefits which were repeated for many porteño merchants with familial connections in the Buenos Aires trading community. Between 1783 and 1786, Santa Coloma borrowed a total of 118,000 pesos from Azcuenaga.

Azcuenaga's loan was not the only example of economic advantage gained through kinship. In 1782, Santa Coloma had borrowed 25,000 pesos from Francisco Ignacio de Ugarte, a kinsman and ex-partner of his father-in-law. Again, he received rather flexible terms, as the principal was not due on this loan until 'the present war is over'. Two sizeable loans were also facilitated by Bernardo Sancho Larrea, Azcuenaga's close friend, in 1785.

In 1786, Santa Coloma's reputation for honesty coupled with his important familial ties, led to the deposit of more than 6,000 pesos in his cashbox by the treasurer of the Hermandad de Dolores, fellow merchant Manuel Joaquin de Zapiola. As a condition of the deposit, Santa Coloma was required to provide, at cost, the wax used in religious ceremonies by the Hermandad. The Hermandad could call upon these funds whenever needed, but no outlays against the Hermandad account were made for a year and a half, and after four and a half years he still held more than one-third of the original deposit. He had, in fact, received an interest-free loan from the Hermandad.

A major weakness of the porteño trading system was the scarcity of capital which forced traders to rely on credit in both the purchase and sale of goods. Long delays or failure to receive repayment from debtors constantly threatened the merchants' ability to repay their creditors. Delay and default by debtors became more frequent from 1789 on, because of the oversupply of all markets and the consequently sluggish sales, the disadvantageous competition of less expensive non-Spanish goods imported as either neutral goods during wartime or contraband, and the collapse of silver production in Potosí. These three factors greatly reduced the scope of Santa Coloma's business, for the rate of repayment by his debtors was severely curtailed and his ability, in turn, to repay his creditors was threatened. Unlike several other porteño merchants, Santa Coloma was never forced to declare bankruptcy, a fact of which he was rather proud, but profits were less than satisfactory.

Santa Coloma, because of both his conservative nature and his long
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established links to Spanish suppliers, failed to take advantage of the opening of *porteño* trade to neutral vessels decreed in 1797. He had by this date changed the basic nature of his commerce to that of commission agent, and was either unwilling or unable to establish accounts with the newly arrived North American and English traders. Instead, Santa Coloma chose to wait for a return to previous market conditions, a return which he continually hoped ‘God willing’ would not be long in coming. Although some of the established *porteño* merchants did react positively to the change in market conditions (for example, his friend Francisco Antonio de Ugarte), Santa Coloma’s attitude was more typical of the monopolist merchants.

It is impossible to determine whether Santa Coloma ever engaged in illegal commercial activity. His account books covering receipt of imported goods scrupulously list payment of all taxes, and his letters complain bitterly of smuggling and the harm it caused his trade. If he did engage in contraband trade, it was a most well guarded secret.

Weak market conditions caused him to be involved more and more in the collection of past debts due his Spanish-based associates, a time-consuming task which often failed to yield any results. ‘I’m working on five different attempts to be repaid, including yours’, he reported to Bernardo Sancho Larrea on 25 October 1794. ‘They are the accounts of the late Aguirre, Don José Gurruchaga [a bankruptcy], Don Juan Costas [another bankruptcy], Don Benito Gayera and you, and all are following the same pattern...very little or nothing is being paid...’

Santa Coloma’s usual advice to Spanish creditors was to have patience, but many Spanish merchants were themselves in debt and could little afford to heed his words.

Although well respected by all with whom he dealt, in 1791, Gaspar de Santa Coloma began to withdraw his own funds from commercial ventures. He had been considering this move for at least two years prior to undertaking it, and was no doubt influenced by continued poor market conditions. He did not, however, completely retire from commerce. Rather, from this point on, he became, increasingly, a commission agent for both Spanish merchants and merchants of the interior. Santa Coloma ceased purchasing Spanish goods in his own name, preferring to earn an established commission from goods placed in the American market for Spanish merchants. By 1791 he had come to believe that the market was too risky to warrant the investment of his own funds. Nevertheless, he continued to make loans to American merchants, to act as a banker and broker of funds sent to him by the merchants of the interior, and to dispatch goods to merchants in Salta,
Tucumán, Paraguay and Chile. From 1793 to 1796, for example, he invested funds sent by a Chilean merchant in the Paraguayan yerba trade.

As a commission agent and a merchant he frequently received funds from the merchants of the interior to be used as credits against which he could charge goods sent upriver. Much as in banking today, debts to third parties were also charged against funds held by Santa Coloma for merchant depositors. Reputation and geographic location combined to make Santa Coloma and other important porteño merchants natural choices for these banking functions. He received at least two advantages from this investor-banker role; he increased the amount of interest-free cash at his immediate disposal while earning commission of 3 to 6 percent on the money which he managed.

As a broker-banker Santa Coloma served the merchants of the interior as an agent in paying Spanish-based creditors and in remitting funds to Spain. He also served the Spanish merchants in their attempts to recover payment from overdue debtors. His personal advice, given repeatedly in his correspondence with Spanish merchants, was to avoid legal proceedings against debtors, even at the cost of business losses. He viewed pleitos as a waste of time, money and energy, and often referred to himself as 'an enemy of lawsuits'. Judges, in his opinion, were 'professors of the twisted', men lacking common (and business) sense. Nevertheless he did not hesitate to enter into legal dispute when so instructed by his most trusted Spanish peers, even when the sums involved were insignificant.

Although most of Santa Coloma's capital was initially involved in merchandize and later in banking and loans, he did engage in a limited number of other investments. The largest of these investments was in urban property, a pattern also demonstrated by many of his fellow porteño merchants. During his long residence in Buenos Aires, Santa Coloma owned three pieces of real estate: his home, his shop and warehouse, and two rooms in a building on Calle de las Torres which provided a limited rental income. These three pieces of property were all located in the most central, heavily urbanized district of the city. Santa Coloma had no investments in rural estancias, but he did own a semi-rural chacra on the San Isidro coast of the Río de la Plata, which his wife had inherited from her father's estate. This chacra was a favorite weekend and summer retreat for the merchant and his family.

Other investments were extremely limited, and were often, at least indirectly, tied to commerce. These investments usually took the form of short-term loans. In 1779, for example, he loaned over 1,100 pesos to Domingo Villafano of Tucumán to finance a mule train. In 1804
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he loaned 2,200 pesos to Bruno Reinal to purchase a sloop (balandra).\(^87\) No funds were ever invested in local industry.

Santa Coloma's many roles must have kept him fairly busy, for from the beginning of his independent commercial career in Buenos Aires, he employed one or more agregados (assistants) to aid him in business. Occasionally trusted agregados were sent to the interior by Santa Coloma to conduct his business. Thus in 1787, Santa Coloma sent Francisco Villota to Chile and a year later Francisco Luis de Gertal was sent to Potosí.\(^88\) In 1788 Juan Esteban de Capdevilla was also sent by Santa Coloma to La Coruña in order to straighten out some problems which had arisen in Santa Coloma's trade.\(^89\)

In addition to agregados, Santa Coloma employed a series of clerk-apprentices or dependientes. These young men were often the sons of Spanish merchants or friends, sent to learn trade with the hope of eventually establishing their own commerce in America. An agregado's length of service varied, but the young men who apprenticed themselves to Santa Coloma often served at his side for five to eight years. Martín de Alzaga apprenticed to Santa Coloma for ten years; Francisco Llanos worked for Santa Coloma from 1778, when at the age of fourteen he entered his service, until 1784.\(^90\) From 1784 to 1788, Félix Llanos, Francisco's cousin, was also employed by Santa Coloma.\(^91\) Juan Bautista de Echeverría worked for Santa Coloma from 1802 to 1815.\(^92\)

Apprentices received a salary (up to 250 pesos per year) in addition to room and board. Frequently Santa Coloma also promised future aid in setting these men up in business when their apprenticeship was over. Such an arrangement was no doubt made by Santa Coloma with Martín de Alzaga; young Alzaga was lent 61,000 pesos in the form of goods by Santa Coloma immediately after leaving Santa Coloma's store. Félix Llanos was also apprenticed to Santa Coloma under the same arrangement, and when Santa Coloma failed to help him set up his own business, Llanos filed a civil complaint requesting back payment of salary for more than four years.\(^93\)

Llanos' petition provides some interesting details on recruitment and treatment of apprentice-clerks. According to the merchant, he originally engaged Llanos because the young man was recommended by his father, Juan Antonio de Santa Coloma. Llanos had evidently known Juan Antonio in Spain, and had come out to the colony with the older man's encouragement.\(^94\) Santa Coloma described the role of apprentice-clerk as 'service in my house, while learning accounts and the management of trade'.\(^95\) He further stated that 'once [an apprentice-clerk] has achieved the necessary instruction and correct behavior, he would be
rewarded, as I have done with all those who have entered at my side. While working for me, I have provided them with upkeep and board until I saw in them proof of performance, interest and a desire to enter into trade'.

Obviously a merchant demanded more of an apprentice-clerk than business sense; correct, semi-servile behavior was also necessary. The apprentice was the student-worker, and the merchant was the master. Although Santa Coloma complained that Llanos' bent was not toward commerce, his major justification of the poor treatment given to his apprentice rested on Llanos' supposed 'pride, arrogance and poor manners...as much as I corrected him his answers were still full of little respect'.

The Santa Coloma–Llanos pleito provides much information on the salaries paid by merchants to their apprentice-clerks. According to Santa Coloma a young man who entered a merchant's employ without any prior instruction was paid from 8 to 12 pesos a month when he began (96 to 144 pesos per year). As soon as the lad became more proficient at his duties his salary was raised to 200 to 250 pesos a year. Included in this salary were bed and board, but clothing was paid for by the apprentice himself. According to Llanos' testimony, an exceptional clerk could sometimes earn even more than 250 pesos a year. These salaries do much to explain a young man's eagerness to enter into the service of a merchant like Gaspar de Santa Coloma, a merchant who, in addition to yearly salary payments, provided initial capital for the apprentice to embark on his own business deals. (Even if we were to calculate on the basis of a salary of 250 pesos per year, making minimum deductions of 10 pesos a year for clothing, it would take an apprentice from 10 to 15 years to amass enough capital to enter trade.) Far more important to a far-sighted apprentice than annual salary were training, merchant sponsorship, and possible marriage to a merchant's daughter.

An interesting picture of the monopolist merchants' reaction to the economic realities of the time is found in the correspondence of Santa Coloma. These letters also reflect both the limited benefits of the Spanish system of 'free trade' and the fluctuating economic fortunes of the period. Santa Coloma's letters, usually concerned with trade, include frequent commentary on politics and international political developments.

Many of his business letters contained advice on the composition of shipments to Buenos Aires, his opinion on what would or would not sell in the markets of Buenos Aires and the interior provinces. His general attitude in advising Spanish business associates was a conservative one,
and his conservatism grew with his years. He had witnessed too many bankruptcies, had been pressured too often to place goods on a glutted market, had seen Spanish goods compete unfavorably with legal and illegal European imports to be sanguine about easy disposal of large shipments on the local market.

Santa Coloma's general pessimism about trade was due to several factors. During the decade of 1780, goods became increasingly more difficult to place on the local market because of competition from contraband brought via Rio de Janeiro. In addition, the chronic shortage of metal, produced in part by the poor condition of the Potosí mines and in part by export of silver to Europe, constantly hindered trade in both Buenos Aires and the interior. In a letter to Manuel Antonio del Moral, Santa Coloma explained the situation: 'In this city, there's not even one peso, and if no money is sent down from Peru, we can do nothing. [We must] prepare ourselves to be patient and hold fast, for all we see is this Plaza full of unsaleable merchandise, everyone in debt, and a lack of mind for anything.'100 Another letter, this one to Bernardo Sancho Larrea, added: 'This market is full of bankruptcies, creditors' meetings, conferences and an overwhelming scarcity of metals. If the miners in Potosí do not succeed with their new equipment, everything is lost.'101

In Santa Coloma's view commerce improved little during the following years. Spanish involvement in the Anglo-French rivalry produced an effective blockade of Buenos Aires, first causing Spanish merchants to ship goods to Alto Perú via Arica rather than Buenos Aires. The blockade also endangered shipments of cash to Spain; Santa Coloma himself suspended sending 40,000 pesos to Spanish creditors in the summer of 1791. Bankruptcies continued as the French blockade of the city caused a stoppage of all hide shipments to Europe. On 2 July 1793, Santa Coloma wrote to Agustín de Arrivillaga: ‘I see very little action in hides because of the fall in their price which has occurred.... I've been told that Don Martín de Alzaga has... 10,000 slow moving [hides] and that no one wants even one.'102 By 1795, the general stagnation of commerce was mentioned in all his letters, but it is interesting to note that, according to Santa Coloma, there was no scarcity of goods in the area. The next year brought a gradual improvement of trade, especially in hide exports, but by 1797 Spain found herself at war with Great Britain, and the traditional Buenos Aires trade was once again paralyzed. Instead of trade with Spain, the colony turned toward a combination of consuming local textiles (especially linen goods) and importing goods shipped in neutral boats. By 1798, Santa Coloma spoke of commerce with ships from Genova, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Mauritius and Denmark.103
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Depending largely on commerce with Spain, he viewed the entry of neutral ships as little less than a calamity. In addition, large-scale entry of foreign goods was forcing down the market price. So was the arrival of goods sent from Hamburg under special license from the Spanish king by the Duke of Osuna. In 1799 he surveyed the commercial situation:

This market is continually supplied with textiles, especially common cloth. If in this coming March and April, four or five ships leave Hamburg for this port, which is what is being said and believed, Silesian linen, fine Brittany linen, and Rouen printed cotton cloth will be greatly forced down in price. Therefore please don't send any of these cloths; [send] only those goods which are in short supply... Soon nothing will be scarce, because the Bostoners and the Portuguese will be bringing some goods, and in the future, seeing any scarcity, they will bring even more.104

Commerce continued to worsen. On 13 March 1802 he wrote:

I don't even want to speak of the deplorable state which commerce is in. Right now, between Montevideo and Ensenada, more than 100 vessels can be counted; some have deposited their cargoes in the Customs House, but most of them have secretly unloaded. Every day more ships come into port... From Hamburg several expeditions have arrived with the king's permission, and we are still awaiting another eight or ten more, according to the latest news. This is why no one will buy linen goods at any price, and why for good quality Silesian linen which earlier this year was worth 38 to 40 pesos, we're asking only 15 pesos today, without any takers. As soon as the Hamburg ships arrive, I'm sure that the price will fall to 11 or 12 pesos because we are so glutted with goods, especially linens, that we could supply this kingdom for many years to come. There's also very little silver coming down from Peru, as mining has stopped because of a mercury shortage.105

Lack of silver limited the Potosí market and cut into Buenos Aires' export of precious metal. The mines, already badly mismanaged, were now experiencing a lack of mercury. In May 1802 Santa Coloma described Potosí as a city which was perishing, 'All the mines are ruined... because there's no mercury and no way to produce silver'.106

Santa Coloma saw that the moribund state of the traditional Spanish trade severely restricted chances of commercial success for newly arrived Spaniards hoping to 'make America'. 'I now have great sympathy for all those poor devils who came from the Peninsula with goods believing that they could make a profit after a long war; they now all find themselves ruined forever.'107 A course which had served ambitious young Spaniards for at least forty years was being destroyed by the opening of the Buenos Aires market and the closing of the Potosí mines.

The succeeding years brought the continued flooding of the local market and the market value of imported goods continued to fall. The
early months of 1803 also brought a long, widespread drought to much of the Río de la Plata area, and the drought was followed by widespread disease. Great loss of animals (mainly cattle and sheep) in San Nicolás, Rosario and Montevideo, and poor harvests, forced up the price of many commodities. Drought also produced migration into the city from the neighboring countryside, and soon the rental price of rooms and houses within the city was also rising quickly. Rumors of a new war with England and talk of pirates caused further fear among the merchants. Santa Coloma's letter became even more gloomy, as the market continued to be glutted by goods brought in through contraband, special licenses and the neutral trade. Instead of the controlled market in which he had made a moderate fortune, a trade in which demand far outstripped supply, the old merchant now found himself operating in an economy choked by oversupply. 'We Spaniards are like bees', he complained, 'wherever one lands, we all follow. This is what's happened with knives, so that although no other knife is sent here for the next ten years, we won't be in short supply.' Everything is overstocked, and there are no buyers and no silver.'

For those merchants with close ties to Spanish commerce, trade never improved. War with England followed by the British invasion of Buenos Aires, followed by years of political chaos, only worsened an already oversupplied market. Contraband continued to be the bane of Santa Coloma's commercial life; to these illegal goods were now added goods brought in by the English while they controlled the River Plate area. In 1809 he reported:

Peru is as full of English goods as is this Plaza. No port has escaped from their bringing in large cargoes... You should think of this market as an English colony where with all the impunity in the world, without paying any duties at all, they land their goods at any time they want to, and load up with all our local produce, producing the total ruin of our poor commerce.

The British invasions of 1806 and 1807 and Buenos Aires' final victory brought Santiago Liniers to power as Viceroy. Liniers' government was, in Santa Coloma's opinion, little better than the English, and he later applauded the appointment of Cisneros as the new Viceroy. His dislike of Liniers was based on a combination of hatred for a Frenchman, political difference and social enmity. Santa Coloma believed that Liniers had helped to make several unscrupulous men wealthy; he also feared a band of local ruffians, loyal to Liniers, who threatened to prey on the wealthier citizens of Buenos Aires. Liniers' lax view of contraband and the warm welcome he gave to foreign merchants also increased Santa Coloma's enmity.
His dislike of Liniers increased as Liniers and Santa Coloma's own ex-clerk, the now wealthy merchant Martín de Alzaga, became increasingly alienated from one another. Santa Coloma believed Alzaga to have been the true hero of the Reconquista of Buenos Aires, the organizer of the loyal voluntary regiment which had routed the English while Liniers slept. The successful Reconquest of Buenos Aires was to him the 'ultimate glory which crowns all Spaniards who have been loyal to their Religion, their King, and their Nation', and Alzaga and the Cabildo, not Liniers, were responsible for this victory.  

Santa Coloma contributed generously to the Reconquest; his name figured first among private citizens who donated funds to the Cabildo, making the largest contribution of 3,000 pesos. Flora de Azcuenaga also provided economic support for Alzaga's unit until it was taken over by Liniers.

On 1 January 1809 the Cabildo, led by Martín de Alzaga, attempted to oust Viceroy Liniers. This rebellion was smashed by Liniers, and the outcome produced a personal and political disaster for Santa Coloma.

I have passed through some terrible days since the first of this year, just seeing what has happened in this city. Don Ignacio de Rezabal, Prior of the Consulado and my ex-clerk is in jail; my nephew Juan Antonio [a member of the offending Cabildo] and Don Martín de Alzaga, both of whom I have raised and who have been at my side for many years have been exiled. In addition to this, the house of my friend [Esteban] Villanueva has been sacked, and other countless citizens of this city have been imprisoned...without any just cause or formal motive for these actions being presented to this day. [Liniers and his men] are, without any doubt, the declared enemies of all citizens of this city...Consider the position of us, the quiet and pacific citizens, lovers of good government and of our King, Fernando VII...

Liniers' victory over Alzaga led to a worsening of the position of all Spaniards, especially the wealthier merchants. On 26 August 1809 Santa Coloma described the situation in a letter to Romualdo Pasqual de Tejada, a business associate in Cádiz:

If you could only see what has been and still is happening here [in Buenos Aires]. The last government [that of Liniers] first tried to make us all Frenchmen, and not being able to succeed with this plan because of the opposition of the good loyal Spaniards, then tried to make us independent, forming one large party with the native-born. That is why for the last ten months, we, all of the Spaniards, have suffered from the worst oppression, but he has not achieved any of his plans. With the arrival of the new Viceroy [Cisneros]...everything will be serene again...Things got so bad in the last months that all Spaniards were in danger of having their possessions sacked and losing their lives.

Foreign contraband and free trade had produced a new breed of porteño merchants. Many of those like Santa Coloma who had remained
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loyal, for political, personal, and economic reasons, to their Spanish connections, suffered bankruptcies. By 1809 Santa Coloma reported that there had been 'many bankruptcies, many merchants in arrears, and lately all commerce has been completely topsy-turvy. We can only place locally produced goods because the English don't deal in any of these.'

So complete was the English domination of the porteño market that in February 1810 he reported: 'Free trade with the English has put our commerce in such a deplorable state because all of the English manufactured goods are so cheap; we will be left without any money or silverware.'

Throughout his commercial career he had remained true to his Spanish-based associates, preferring to enter into non-mercantile economic activities rather than to become deeply involved in foreign contraband or English trade. His political views reflect the same loyalty to Spain. On 16 March 1810, writing to Luis Francisco de Gardeazabal about uprisings in Chuquisaca, La Paz, Lima and Quito he complained bitterly: 'These Americans will never put aside the ill-will and antipathy which, without any basis, they have for true Spaniards. The Spaniards are the ones who have splendidly made and are making these vast dominions progress. The Americans, knowing that they are worthless, are consumed with envy.'

The merchant, now 68 years old, failed to attend the Cabildo Abierto held in May of 1810. No mention of the Cabildo Abierto meeting even appears in his letters, for he was well aware of the risks which any criticism of the new revolutionary government would expose him to. Two months after the Cabildo Abierto meeting, Santa Coloma wrote to a merchant in Peru, 'what has befallen this capital should be well known in your Provinces. May God help us... and save us from the afflictions which all we Europeans are now suffering.'

Even communication with Spain itself was risky and those few letters which Santa Coloma wrote to friends and associates after May 1810 were smuggled via Montevideo or London. A letter of 12 September 1811 to associates in Cádiz painted a bleak picture of the situation in which loyal Spaniards now found themselves:

I have not been able to reply to your last two letters because of the unbelievable violence and oppression in which we, all the Spaniards, have found ourselves in for the last 16 months. We are forbidden entirely to communicate with the Peninsula. It is even a serious crime to mention Spain or Montevideo with which this city is in a lively war. I might even add that all letters are opened, and that is why I have not written to you...

A postscript on a letter dated two months later, hinted at worsening conditions. 'We Spaniards find ourselves here worse slaves and more
humiliated than in Algiers. They have forbidden us absolutely to send even one peso back to Spain, or to write to you, for as I have already said even the name of Spain is hateful to these people."\textsuperscript{124}

Santa Coloma was pro-peninsular in his political ideology, but his brother-in-law's strong position in the new government undoubtedly helped to protect him. Although he suffered under the revolutionary government, he did not take an active part in Alzaga's 1812 plot against the new government. He was constantly under suspicion by the revolutionary government, but was neither forced into exile (like his friend the creole merchant Juan José Lezica) nor executed for treason (like his ex-clerk Martín de Alzaga). Completely cut off from commerce with Spain, he continued to be classified by the new government as a merchant, and was subjected to all anti-Spanish legislation enacted in the early years of independence. Especially galling was the proclamation (\textit{bando}) of January 1812, 'the tyrannical decree', which ordered all those with Spanish interest to publicly declare these investments, so that the State could confiscate them. This \textit{bando} threatened severe punishment, including loss of all property, for those who failed to comply. Loss of life was rumored to be another possible punishment, and the Spanish merchants of the city were in fear of being rounded up in an attempt to enforce this legislation. Years later, Flora de Azcuenaga, Santa Coloma's widow, credited her husband with fearless action in the face of such danger: 'My husband, even though he was exposing himself to all those dangers which could result from that difficult situation, was able to hide everything which I, today, have in my possession.'\textsuperscript{125}

In 1813, Santa Coloma was one of the 124 merchants forced to lend the revolutionary government much-needed funds. Merchant levies were set by the government, dependent to a large degree on the reputed wealth of individual traders. Santa Coloma's contribution was set at 5,000 pesos, one of the highest contributions in the group.\textsuperscript{126} Although his trade with Spain and the interior had come to a standstill, to the creole government he was still a wealthy merchant.

On 31 January 1815, at the age of 73, he died in his home in Buenos Aires. He was buried on the same day in the cemetery of the Bethlehemite convent, dressed in the habit of a brother of the Bethlehemite third order.\textsuperscript{127} Before dying he had turned over the power to draw up his will to his wife, Flora, and ten months after the death of her husband, she appeared before a notary to make public his testament.\textsuperscript{128} In addition to over 75,000 pesos which Santa Coloma had donated to religious charities and 'other pious ends' during his lifetime, further legacies were listed. Provision was also made for loyal household servants.
Santa Coloma's only heir was his sole surviving son, Francisco. As executors of his estate, the merchant named his wife, his son, his nephew Juan Antonio de Santa Coloma and Manuel Ortiz de Basualdo, a fellow merchant. Flora de Azcuenaga survived her husband by 31 years, continuing to live in Buenos Aires and to be active in underwriting small loans. She died, at the age of 84, in 1850, a relic of the once prosperous porteño merchant group.129
The emergence of a large and powerful merchant group in Buenos Aires was an eighteenth-century phenomenon, a response to world demand for hides and silver, population growth in the area, and the expansion of trade and commerce. Study of the eighteenth-century *porteño* merchants illustrates many characteristics which can be contrasted to those of other merchants within the Hispanic world. Comparison of the merchants of vice-regal Buenos Aires with those of late eighteenth-century Mexico, and even those of sixteenth-century Lima and sixteenth-century Seville leads to the discerning of some patterns of behavior which were universal for the Hispanic merchant as well as those which were unique to time and place.1

The *porteño* merchants, like other merchant groups, were educated men, knowledgeable in accounting and interest rates, who worked full-time at buying and selling. All merchants traveled to some degree, although merchants tended to become less nomadic in well developed urban centers. Neither the merchant of the sixteenth century nor of the eighteenth century was limited only to wholesale transactions, and all groups engaged in retail sales, moneymaking and credit operations, and debt collection. Partnership arrangements remained the same throughout the colonial Hispanic world, but unlike their peers in Lima, the *porteño* merchants did not engage in currency speculation to any large degree, perhaps because by the eighteenth century the silver peso had become standard throughout the colonies.

The merchants of Buenos Aires, like those of Lima 250 years earlier, tended to be respected members of society. Predominantly Spanish-born, *porteño* merchants represented many of the regions of the Peninsula, but were primarily from the Basque areas and the north. Unlike Lima of the sixteenth century, where none of the major mercantile figures were Basques, many important, powerful Buenos Aires *comerciantes* were from this region.

Kinship networks, so important to the Buenos Aires merchants, also
The merchants of Buenos Aires existed among other merchant groups. In Buenos Aires the family was important in both local and provincial trade. The successful merchants of the city were almost always related to one another, and the most powerful were also often linked to merchants of Spain through familial ties. But unlike the merchants of Lima, the most important merchants of Buenos Aires did not encourage their sons to continue in commerce; instead marriage of their daughters provided commercial continuity. In fact, family continuity among merchants was provided at least as much by marriage as by birth.

Ties to Spanish commercial firms remained important in eighteenth-century Buenos Aires. The factors of large companies were among the most important and powerful merchants of the community. Trade of Buenos Aires, nevertheless, was not as dependent on a single Spanish port as Lima trade had been during the sixteenth century. That Buenos Aires merchants never relied exclusively on one Spanish port is in part related to the dramatic increase in the number of ports allowed to engage in legal trade, in part to the consequences of the periodic neutralization of trade forced upon Spain by the conflicts of the late eighteenth century, and in part to the importance of contraband in the La Plata area. The vast majority of porteño merchants were not factors or agents of Cádiz-based firms; even those merchants who were factors were also involved in other commercial ventures.

Porteño merchants identified closely with the city in which they resided, and few, even among those most successful in commerce, returned permanently to Spain. Unlike earlier Lima merchants, they invested extensively in real estate, owning their houses, their stores and frequently other urban and semi-urban properties. Although liable to property seizure in the case of bankruptcy, porteño merchants did not operate as transient individuals eager to keep all assets in liquid state. Urban land was considered to be a worthwhile investment, for it provided regular rents, and could be used to found capellanías. In addition, the porteño merchants realized that growth of the city continually increased the value of urban property.

The vice-regal merchants, however, did not invest in rural property, for this property was believed to be of little value. Only when, in the early nineteenth century, the opening of the markets to British trade and the entrance into Buenos Aires of British merchants produced large-scale competition, did the porteño merchants turn toward land and livestock to guarantee the survival of their fortunes.

Porteño merchants, like all Hispanic merchants, preferred overwhelmingly to trust family members in commercial transactions. If there
Conclusion

were no family members to turn to, fictive kin, or merchants of the same regional origin were next in order of preference. Commerce was as risky a pursuit in the eighteenth as it was in the sixteenth century, and reliance on kin or ‘countrymen’ lessened the perilous nature of the enterprise.

Unlike the merchants of sixteenth-century Peru or eighteenth-century Mexico, the porteño merchants rarely served as aviadores. The nature of the region’s export products and the great distance of Buenos Aires from the mines of Potosí militated against the investment of porteño merchant capital in underwriting the production of exports. The gathering of hides and tallow did not call for large investments of working capital. In areas such as Paraguay (where yerba mate was cultivated on a large scale) or Alto Perú (where silver was mined), local merchants, rather than the porteño merchants who shipped the products abroad, probably served as aviadores.

Merchants in eighteenth-century Buenos Aires were not free of military duty, and in fact were disgruntled, though active members of militia companies throughout the vice-regal period. War, although of a different nature, was as much a constant threat for the eighteenth-century porteño merchants as it had been for their limeño counterparts, and for both groups it produced disaster for some merchants and rising profits for others. The porteño merchants were also called upon, especially during the period of the English invasions, to finance campaigns through less than voluntary donations to local militia companies.

Like other merchants in colonial America, the merchants of Buenos Aires were frequently chosen by religious organizations to take on the responsibilities of mayordomo. The merchants were, of course, well qualified to handle church property entrusted to them. The most socially prestigious merchants were usually chosen for these positions, and these positions, in turn, enhanced prestige and social standing.

The merchants of Buenos Aires virtually controlled the local Cabildo. Their power in the town council is linked to the social stratification of Buenos Aires, for they were among the most important social and economic groups in the city. In the absence of encomenderos or important hacendados, the merchants, especially those who were most prosperous and those with strong commercial connections in Spain, occupied positions near the top of the social hierarchy. Only high-ranking Spanish bureaucrats, military officers, Audiencia judges, and leading clergymen were of higher social standing. Interestingly, law, the military and the Church were the only areas, outside of commerce, which a merchant encouraged his son to enter, and only marriage of a daughter to an
important government bureaucrat was preferred to marriage of a daughter to a promising fellow merchant.

Economic opportunity in those cities which were important commercial centers produced a merchant group which prospered; economic prosperity led to social predominance and local political power. Linked by real and fictive kinship, the merchants of Buenos Aires engaged in commerce using a combination of traditional partnership arrangements and individual enterprise. Commerce continued to center on the export of raw material and the import of luxury products, with merchants displaying little interest or enthusiasm in sponsoring the growth of local manufacturing.

Throughout this study, attention has focused on the upper group of porteño merchants, the comerciantes, members of the highest ranking groups in the local stratification hierarchy. The most successful porteño merchants tended to be involved in the traditional trade of Castillian articles. This trade expanded greatly with the increased consumption of luxury goods produced by the creation of the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata with its growing bureaucracy and expanded internal markets. In this trade, merchants relied upon their direct and indirect familial connections with Spanish mercantile firms, receiving both goods and credits from these associations. Toward the end of the colonial period, hide dealers and slavers prospered, while the fortunes of the traditional Castillian merchants suffered from changing market conditions, wars, blockades and English competition. In general, the slavers and the dealers in productos de la tierra and hides, were men who had entered these lesser branches of commerce because they lacked the necessary personal connections to enter the Castillian trade.

The social role of the upper group of merchants in porteño society reflects this group's elite status. The prestige and deference due to the wealthiest merchants joined them to the same status group as the most important government officials and military leaders of the colony. Merchants, government officials and military leaders treated each other as approximate social equals, attending the same parties, tertulias, participating in the same religious orders and working together in local charity organizations. The wealthiest merchants and leading government and military leaders also encouraged the intermarriage of their children. The children of powerful merchants such as Vicente de Azcue- naga, Francisco Cabrera and Tomás Antonio Romero, regardless of the social origin of their fathers, were acceptable marriage partners for a Brigadier General of the Royal Army, for the chief administrator of the local Royal Treasury, and for the daughter of an important government official.
Conclusion

The merchants of Buenos Aires, although enjoying local power and prestige, had virtually no power or prestige vis-à-vis the entire colonial empire or in metropolitan Spain. Buenos Aires was viewed as a backwater of the Empire; its trade lacked the importance of the trade of Mexico or Peru. Its merchants, by comparison to their wealthier counterparts in Mexico City or Lima, were also considered to be poor unsophisticated folk. No porteño merchant, for example, achieved the noble rank of the most prosperous Mexican merchants; only three merchants were included in the ranks of the lesser noble orders, Juan Bautista de Lasala in the Knights of Santiago and Manuel Basavilbaso and León Altolaguirre in the Order of Charles III. Nowhere is the porteño merchants’ lack of power in Spain more apparent than in their lengthy petitioning for the establishment of a local Consulado. Only after many years of continued effort, and as part of the mass establishment of Consulados in lesser cities of the New World, did Buenos Aires merchants finally achieve their goal.

A similar mode of life was shared by all the members of the high status merchant group. Wealthy merchants lived in fine houses, owned slaves, dressed themselves, their wives and children well, and proudly displayed luxury goods such as imported clocks, fine jewelry, silverware, carriages and furniture of jacaranda wood, in much the same manner as the most important bureaucrats or military men. Some of their sons attended the Colegio de San Carlos, and the most promising among them continued their studies in law or religion in the universities of Chiquisaca or Córdoba.

The precarious nature of commerce, with its ever present spectre of bankruptcy, worked to endanger the social position of individual merchants, for their entry into the upper class was based, to a large extent, on economic success. Disaster was not uncommon; bankruptcy and the resultant fall was a frequent occurrence among porteño merchants. Even for those merchants who, through a combination of good fortune and good business sense enjoyed consistently high profits, a guarantee of equal status for children and grandchildren was far from assured. The Spanish laws of inheritance which led to the division of large estates into small fractured bequests constantly endangered the fortunes of the sons and daughters of porteño merchants. Lacking the institution of mayorazgo to protect and perpetuate their legacies, the merchants looked to marriage as the surest safeguard against intergenerational status differentiation.

The marriage pattern of porteño merchants, especially the crucial role played by the women of the merchant group, is basic to an understanding of social mobility, recruitment and perpetuation of the merchant
group. Marriage was not the means by which young men began in a commercial career; it was rather the capstone, the passport into the ranks of the respected mercantile community. Those young merchants with good social qualifications could marry the most socially prominent mercantile heiresses, while those with lesser social and economic status settled for the daughters of less powerful merchants. The daughters of porteño merchants were also used, through their marriage to promising younger merchants, to perpetuate a family's commercial interests, permanently linking the fortunes of a young man of talent with those of an established mercantile clan. In a society which valued kinship highly, the creation of these social linkages was vital to commercial success. Familial connections with an established porteño merchant became the sine qua non of economic success; the most prosperous porteño merchants were the sons, sons-in-law, and kinsmen of those previously established in commerce. These marriage patterns produced dynasties, which, although not readily apparent to the modern observer because of change in family name, were of central importance to the commercial and social life in the colony.

That established merchants were willing to aid newer merchants by offering their daughters as wives appears, on the surface, to be counterproductive. During the early years of the vice-regal period, however, commerce expanded, and it was believed that there were sufficient business possibilities for any ambitious, hard-working young man. Daughters had to get married, for the convent with its demand for a cash dowry was not an especially attractive alternative, and single life for a woman would leave her unprotected. So a dedicated young merchant, displaying the same qualities of industriousness, good sense, frugality and intelligent caution which a merchant father was so proud of in himself, was naturally chosen for the young woman. In one sense, merchant fathers constantly strove to marry their daughters to facsimiles of themselves.

In addition to choosing husbands with admirable qualities, men whose social and economic position mirrored their own background, merchant fathers saw the establishment of their new merchant sons-in-law not as business competitors, but as allies. The recruitment of merchant sons-in-law helped to enlarge the clan, and to give it the promise of additional economic power. In the context of a matrifocal society, where the bride's family supplied much of the young merchant's social life, the established merchant and his son-in-law often became like father and son. A son-in-law, a close and trusted member of the family, was an important business associate, not a competitor.
While the daughters of the merchants were used to recruit younger men into established commerce, merchants’ sons, especially sons of the wealthy, were educated and encouraged to move into positions in the military or priesthood, fields which although socially prestigious, proved to be far less profitable than those of their fathers. There was, at the same time, occupational continuity between generations; many merchants were themselves sons of Spanish or porteño merchants. Inter-generational occupational mobility among merchant sons, either upward or downward, existed, but it tended to be limited to occupations close to that of the merchants in the occupational hierarchy.

In addition, there was a fair amount of intra-generational mobility among the merchant group of the city, caused in part by the great expansion of trade beginning in the decade of the 1770s, and by the resultant growth in numbers, economic power and prestige of the merchant class. Moreover, as merchant sons were siphoned into other prestigious occupations, the need to recruit new merchants from other occupational groups increased. Young Spanish immigrants, engaged in peddling, retailing or clerking, or apprenticed to merchants, provided the candidates for merchant positions. Many of these men had already experienced inter-generational mobility, coming from small landowning families of northern Spain and the Basque area. Once in Buenos Aires, those who demonstrated a combination of intelligence, business acumen, personality and luck were able to work their way into the ranks of respected comerciantes. But for every example of a man working himself up from clerk to powerful merchant, there are myriad examples of men who remained clerks for their entire lives.

Recruitment was not always from lower status groups. Ship captains, supercargoes, and sons of Spanish merchants also became merchants. There was an overwhelming tendency for the Spanish-born to be preferred over the native-born as Spaniards were considered to be harder workers, better businessmen, and more desirable husbands. This resulted in the emergence of a society in which relative newcomers encountered less resistance to social acceptability and recruitment into the merchant class than the native-born.

Porteño merchant society encouraged social mobility among individuals who demonstrated certain fundamental qualities: Spanish birth, white skin, legitimate birth, literacy, some education (either formal or in the form of apprenticeship to a merchant), middle-class origins and kinship with Spanish merchants. Some of these qualities were considered to be basic; no one was recruited into the merchant class who was of a non-white racial group. Literacy and some education were also
vital prerequisites of merchant recruitment. Other qualities, such as legitimate birth, Spanish birth and kinship with a Spanish merchant, were not essential, but greatly increased a man’s chance of economic and social success, and of becoming a member of the wealthy merchant patriciate. He could always best enhance his personal qualifications or compensate for their absence by marrying into the merchant group.

Dramatic growth in the number of merchants in Buenos Aires which had begun before the establishment of the La Plata Viceroyalty continued unabated in the years following 1776. By 1778, 145 men listed themselves as wholesale merchants. In the succeeding decades the merchant group continued to grow, even though trade did not expand at a comparable rate. Market glut, disruption of commerce caused by war, and frequent bankruptcies caused by overextended credit, prevented the porteño merchants from encouraging their sons to enter commerce, but did not halt the migration of eager young men, often sons of Spanish merchants, who hoped to establish themselves in the porteño trade. Men continued to arrive in Buenos Aires, believing that there was always room for just one more merchant. The result of this steady immigration was a surplus of merchants. Unable to gain a foothold in porteño trade, and to marry a merchant’s daughter, many of these young men sought to establish themselves in the provinces as traders, or as retailers, unable to make the crucial step up the professional ladder. Others went bankrupt, and still another group, unable to create critical kinship ties, eventually returned to Spain cursing their poor fortune in the Río de la Plata.

This never-abating flow of new prospective merchants is reflected in the continued high numbers of merchants on merchant lists throughout the decades of 1790 and 1800. The transitory nature of many of these careers in Buenos Aires can be seen in the large numbers who appear on one list or another, and then drop completely from the records of the porteño merchant community. From 1777 to 1810, approximately 600 individuals listed themselves in public records as merchants, but of this group, 51 percent failed to remain in the city for a period of ten years or more. Those who failed in commerce were those who also failed to create the critical kinship ties through marriage, the mark of successful entry into the group.

The success of the Independence movement in the Río de la Plata served to hasten the process of disenchantment with mercantile life which had previously affected segments of the merchant community. Even among those merchants who were native-born, support for independence was notoriously lukewarm. Independence implied cutting of
all ties to Spanish commerce, and in turn a drastic reordering of the established patterns of credit, supply and communication. The English invasions had given the powerful comerciantes a bitter taste of the economic consequences of independence, for the English in their short occupation of the city had flooded the market with their inexpensive manufactured goods. Within ten years of the meeting of the Buenos Aires Cabildo Abierto, the major merchants of the city had either died, been executed, returned to Spain, or, in the vast majority of cases, retired from commerce. Although forced donations to the revolutionary cause and antipathy to the Spanish-born no doubt contributed to this flight from commerce, the majority of porteño merchants were forced out of business by English competitors with large selections of comparatively inexpensive merchandise and enlarged facilities for extending credit to their customers.3

Luckily for many of the major mercantile families, English entry into the porteño marketplace coincided with (and to some extent encouraged) the growing importance of rural land investment. The spread of saladeros to the Buenos Aires side of the River Plate, greater access to the Brazilian market, English and Anglo-American demand for hides, all contributed to a rapid upward valuation of land, an investment shunned by the merchants during the vice-regal period. The two decades after Independence witnessed the large-scale movement of traditionally mercantile families to ranching, through purchases of estancias in the province of Buenos Aires, purchases which later were enlarged under the Rosas government.4 Families such as Ortiz de Basualdo, Sáenz Valiente, Anchorena, Ramos Mexía, while continuing in commerce, came to own their first estancias during this critical period. Linking trade with their estancias, these merchant families continued to maintain offices in Buenos Aires, but their offices now existed to sell the commercial products of their estancias to the outside world. The sons of eighteenth-century comerciantes became the estanciero—merchants of the nineteenth century. These families would eventually form the backbone of the landowning upper class of Argentine society, and well into the twentieth century would continue to be defined as estancieros or merchant—estancieros. Those families who failed because of limited resources to invest in land were condemned to fall back and become marginal merchants or storekeepers in a world of commerce dominated by a new group of foreigners.
Selected genealogies of merchant clans

A.1. Alzaga clan
A.2. Basavilbaso clan
A.3. Escalada clan

cevallos

CEVALLOS

= =

Ana Maria CEVALLOS

= =

Antonio ESCALADA

= =

Francisco CEVALLOS

= =

Ignacio CEVALLOS

= =

Ana RABANAL

Isabel RIAN

= =

José CEVALLOS

(b. Santander)

= =

Luisa SARRIA

= =

Fernando ESCALADA

= =

Francisco ESCALADA

= =

Bernardo SANCHO

LARREA

(b. La Rioja,

Castilla la Vieja)

= =

Eugenio LERDO

TEJADA

(b. La Rioja,

Castilla la Vieja)

= =

Alexander JOSÉ

DE MARIA

(b. Cadiz)

= =

Maria Eugenia ESCALADA

= =

Maria Getrudis Francisco CEVALLOS

(b. Buenos Aires)

= =

Antonio José ESCALADA

(b. Buenos Aires)

= =

Petrona SALCEDO

= =

José DE MARIA

(b. Cadiz)

= =

Maria Getrudis Francisco CEVALLOS

(b. Buenos Aires)

= =

Antonio José ESCALADA

(b. Buenos Aires)

= =

Petrona SALCEDO

= =

José DE MARIA

(b. Cadiz)
A.4. Lezica clan
Selected genealogies of merchant clans

[Diagram of genealogical tree with names and relationships]
A.5. Pueyrredon clan
APPENDIX B

Tables and figures

Table B.1
Age distribution of merchants and their wives, 1778

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Number of merchants</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Number of wives</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>0-4</td>
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<td>5-9</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
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<td>35-39</td>
<td>25</td>
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<td>40-44</td>
<td>25</td>
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<td>45-49</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>6</td>
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</tr>
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<td>55-59</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-64</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
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<td>65-69</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-74</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75-79</td>
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<td>80-84</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>145</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>100</td>
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Source: Padrón de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires, 1778.
### Table B.2
Geographical origins of *porteñ*ó merchants and their wives, 1778–85

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place of birth</th>
<th>Number of merchants</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Number of wives</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Spain</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Castile, Galicia, Santander</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andalucia</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cataluña</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basque provinces</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vizcaya</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navarra</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guipuzcoa</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Europe (other than Spain)</strong></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Buenos Aires</strong></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>America (other than Buenos Aires)</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Plata Region</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alto Perú</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other regions</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>142</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>100</td>
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### Table B.3
Occupational background of *porteñ*ó merchants and their wives, 1778–85

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Father’s occupation</th>
<th>Number of merchants</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Number of wives</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Merchant</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military officer</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Government bureaucrat</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawyer, doctor, <em>escribano</em></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landowner</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artisan</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>97</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>100</td>
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</table>
Table B.4
Economic position of selected merchants at time of marriage and time of death, 1730–1823

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Value of capital</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Net value of estate</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Time elapsed</th>
<th>Increase of estate over capital</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. C. Aguirre</td>
<td>60,000</td>
<td>1777</td>
<td>110,000</td>
<td>1790</td>
<td>13 years</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. Azcuenaga</td>
<td>46,000</td>
<td>1752</td>
<td>198,449</td>
<td>1787</td>
<td>35 years</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Basavilbaso</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>1730</td>
<td>222,896</td>
<td>1778</td>
<td>48 years</td>
<td>22.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M. Caviedes</td>
<td>35,380</td>
<td>1770</td>
<td>58,173</td>
<td>1788</td>
<td>18 years</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cires</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>1758</td>
<td>80,335</td>
<td>1786</td>
<td>28 years</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inchaurregui</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>1790</td>
<td>266,597</td>
<td>1811</td>
<td>21 years</td>
<td>51.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insúa</td>
<td>32,509&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1792</td>
<td>79,785</td>
<td>1800</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. J. Lezica</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>1773</td>
<td>161,441</td>
<td>1811</td>
<td>38 years</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pereda</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>1775</td>
<td>17,889</td>
<td>1783</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinto</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1764</td>
<td>66,493</td>
<td>1819</td>
<td>55 years</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruiz Gaona</td>
<td>12,000</td>
<td>1767</td>
<td>132,345</td>
<td>1823</td>
<td>56 years</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Segurola</td>
<td>32,216</td>
<td>1771</td>
<td>395,077</td>
<td>1790</td>
<td>19 years</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tellechea</td>
<td>7,000</td>
<td>1785</td>
<td>308,399</td>
<td>1812</td>
<td>27 years</td>
<td>44.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zapiola</td>
<td>45,039</td>
<td>1771</td>
<td>211,677</td>
<td>1793</td>
<td>22 years</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup> Capital at time of second marriage.

Table B.5
Effect of inheritance laws on estates of selected merchants, 1778–1823

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Total estate</th>
<th>Inheritance per child</th>
<th>Number of surviving children</th>
<th>Inheritance of wife if surviving</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Azcuenaga</td>
<td>1787</td>
<td>198,499</td>
<td>27,279</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basavilbaso</td>
<td>1778</td>
<td>222,896</td>
<td>11,025</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canedo</td>
<td>1812</td>
<td>8,700</td>
<td>378</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3,924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cires</td>
<td>1800</td>
<td>80,335</td>
<td>8,151</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>31,664</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inchaurregui</td>
<td>1823</td>
<td>206,597</td>
<td>7,954</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>55,680</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insúa</td>
<td>1802</td>
<td>79,785</td>
<td>4,340</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>22,654</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. J. Lezica</td>
<td>1811</td>
<td>161,442</td>
<td>9,339</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>44,354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pereda</td>
<td>1783</td>
<td>17,889</td>
<td>1,856</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10,493</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinto</td>
<td>1821</td>
<td>66,493</td>
<td>1,229</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruiz Gaona</td>
<td>1823</td>
<td>132,345</td>
<td>79,802</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Segurola</td>
<td>1802&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>395,077</td>
<td>17,559</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>158,031</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wife</td>
<td>1802</td>
<td>111,619</td>
<td>9,922</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tellechea</td>
<td>1812</td>
<td>308,399</td>
<td>17,047</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zapiola</td>
<td>1793</td>
<td>211,677</td>
<td>15,122</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>105,839</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup> Inchaurregui died in 1811, but his estate was promulgated in 1823.
<sup>b</sup> Segurola died in 1790, but his estate was promulgated in 1802.
### Table B.6
Selected list of capitales and dowries, 1752-1808

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Capital</th>
<th>Dowry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agüero</td>
<td>1769</td>
<td>10,000$</td>
<td>5,519$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aguirre (Agustín)</td>
<td>1777</td>
<td>60,000$</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aguirre (Cristobal)</td>
<td>1779</td>
<td>36,238</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alzaga (Martín)</td>
<td>1780</td>
<td>21,450</td>
<td>39,771</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azcuenaga (Vicente)</td>
<td>1752</td>
<td>46,500</td>
<td>25,751</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balbastro (Eugenio)</td>
<td>1806</td>
<td>31,372</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balbastro (Isidro)</td>
<td>1757</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baldovinos</td>
<td>1766</td>
<td>25,391</td>
<td>6,307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basavilbaso (Domingo)</td>
<td>1730</td>
<td>10,000$</td>
<td>11,373</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capdevilla</td>
<td>1792</td>
<td>75,380</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canedo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1st marriage)</td>
<td>1774</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2nd marriage)</td>
<td>1791</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caviedes (Manuel)</td>
<td>1770</td>
<td>35,380</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cires</td>
<td>1758</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>de la Colina</td>
<td>ca. 1759</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erezcano</td>
<td>1778</td>
<td>11,954</td>
<td>20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fernández de Agüero</td>
<td>1795</td>
<td>37,377</td>
<td>6,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inchaurregui</td>
<td>1790</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instú (2nd marriage)</td>
<td>1792</td>
<td>32,509</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letamendi</td>
<td>1808</td>
<td>20,000$</td>
<td>25,481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lezica (José)</td>
<td>1756</td>
<td>50,000</td>
<td>24,236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lezica (Juan Antonio)</td>
<td>1774</td>
<td>20,113</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lezica (Juan José)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1st marriage)</td>
<td>1773</td>
<td>20,000$</td>
<td>14,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2nd marriage)</td>
<td>1776</td>
<td>25,590</td>
<td>7,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>de la Peña (Francisco)</td>
<td>1798</td>
<td>20,239</td>
<td>4,247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pereda</td>
<td>1775</td>
<td>7,622</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pueyrredon</td>
<td>1766</td>
<td>2,500$</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riera</td>
<td>1775</td>
<td>3,000$</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rincón</td>
<td>1783</td>
<td>23,634</td>
<td>1,148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruiz Gaona</td>
<td>1767</td>
<td>12,000</td>
<td>21,309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sancho Larrea</td>
<td>1766</td>
<td>100,000$</td>
<td>8,500$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Coloma (Gaspar)</td>
<td>1781</td>
<td>83,821</td>
<td>20,028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Segurola</td>
<td>1771</td>
<td>32,216</td>
<td>20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tellechea (1st marriage)</td>
<td>1785</td>
<td>7,000</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thompson (Pablo)</td>
<td>1752</td>
<td>34,702</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wright (Carlos)</td>
<td>ca. 1763</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zapiola</td>
<td>1771</td>
<td>45,039</td>
<td>20,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^a$ Dowry consisted of only cash. Clothing and other goods not included.

$^b$ No formal capital or dowry drawn up.

$^c$ This capital was really a dowry which Juan José Lezica received from his father the day before his marriage to María Rosa Riglos. Included in this grant were a house, mirrors and cornocopiias, pictures, a walnut chest, a dozen walnut chairs, a dozen walnut stools, new underwear, shirts and socks, a gold sword, credit for 6,000 pesos given to him previously by his father and 11,378 pesos in cash. A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 6, 1773, folios 92 v–93 v, Capital de Dn Juan José de Lezica.
### Table B.7
Age at first marriage of merchants and wives, 1778–1810

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th></th>
<th>Women</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-19</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-39</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-44</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-49</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-54</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table B.8
Total urban investments of selected merchants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Total estate</th>
<th>Urban real estate investments</th>
<th>Percentage of total estate in real estate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D. Basavilbaso</td>
<td>222,896</td>
<td>57,091</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Caviedes</td>
<td>29,408</td>
<td>17,921</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M. Caviedes</td>
<td>58,173</td>
<td>43,249</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inchaurregui</td>
<td>206,597</td>
<td>38,558</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insúa</td>
<td>79,785</td>
<td>27,941</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. J. Lezica</td>
<td>161,441</td>
<td>20,227</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pereda</td>
<td>17,889</td>
<td>8,595</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinto</td>
<td>66,493</td>
<td>49,472</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruiz Gaona</td>
<td>132,345</td>
<td>49,054</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Segurola</td>
<td>395,077</td>
<td>36,617</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tellechea</td>
<td>308,399</td>
<td>79,596</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zapiola</td>
<td>211,677</td>
<td>55,823</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendices

### Table B.9
Birth and survival of merchants' offspring

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of children</th>
<th>Born</th>
<th>Number of families</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Survived</th>
<th>Number of families</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-8</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-10</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table B.10
Membership of selected merchants in *terceras ordenes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tercera orden</th>
<th>Merchants</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Merchant Wives</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>42</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santo Domingo</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Merced</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betlemitas</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Francisco, La Merced and Betlemitas</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
B.1. Ages of merchants and their wives, 1778.

B.2. Age at death for selected merchants and wives.
Appendices

B.3. Composition of 132 merchant households, 1778.
APPENDIX C

Dowry of Doña Flora de Azcuenaga, 1781

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of item(s)</th>
<th>Pesos</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One jacaranda double-bed with finely carved pillars</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two mattresses and 4 pillows of printed cotton cloth, with tafetta-lined cases</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two sheets of genuine wide fine Brittany linen, trimmed with fine lace</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four sheets of first quality Brabant linen</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eight pillowcases of genuine Brittany linen</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twelve shirts of genuine wide Brittany linen with sleeves of fine linen</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six petticoats of the same wide Brittany linen</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A pair of fine cambric ruffles, with fine Flemish lace edges</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two fine cambric handkerchiefs with the same lace trim</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One handkerchief of silk serge with figured lace trim</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An apron of fine cambric with Flemish lace</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five fine linen aprons</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One silk brocade robe, gold color, full-skirted, with matching silk lace sleeves</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One dressing gown with a green-edged skirt, trimmed with fine lace</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another dressing gown, identical to that above but in pink</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A silk brocade dressing gown and skirt, sea green</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A dress of silver and gold silk tissue, with its jacket and matching accessories</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A black satin skirt, with narrow lace trimming</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A cloak with bonelace</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A black mantilla of embroidered silk serge</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A white mantilla of silk Serge and flowered silk</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A gauze shawl with fine wide lace trim</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A suit of genuine wide Brittany linen, with flounces of fine cambric</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and a little Flemish lace at the borders</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One pink satin sleeveless cloak with silk lace trim</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another satin sleeveless cloak lined with fur</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One ruffled overskirt of fine silk woven with silver flowers</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two jackets of smooth satin</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One coverlet of Chinese percale</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One mother-of-pearl fan with gold encrustations</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One tortoise-shell fan</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A set of diamond and gold jewelry</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A diamond ring, set in gold</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A topaz ring with diamond chips</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One topaz hair ornament with diamond chips</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dowry of Doña Flora de Azcuenaga

Three strings of pearls
Four strings of Baroque pearls

One set of jewelry (consisting of the following): a necklace in the shape of a diamond branch, mounted in silver with a silver pendant, smooth on the reverse side. [The necklace is made of] stems [held together by] a linking ribbon; the leaves and flowers on the stems are set with 200 slender rose diamonds. The largest rose diamond weighs 13 grains [3¾ carats] and is set on a silver leaf. [The necklace also contains] two rose diamonds, of 3¾ and 2 grains [13/16 and ½ carat] respectively; some medium rose diamonds in the pendant weighing 5 and 4 grains [1¹/₄ and 1 carat]; two medium rose diamonds of 5 grains and 1½ grains [½ carat, and 5/8 carat]; all together, including those [diamonds] not described, these stones are worth, according to their evaluation in Madrid, 19,536 reales of vellon which equals 1,302 pesos 3 reales plus workmanship of 66 pesos 5 reales.

One silver ornament for a woman's headdress, smooth on the reverse side, made of a trunk of gold surmounted with leaves and flowers with a bird with an almond-shaped diamond hanging from its beak. [The bird] is set with 135 rose colored diamonds, has a ruby for its eye, and sits on silver leaves. There are seven large diamonds in the piece, the first of 9 1/3 grains [2¾ carats], the second of 4 ½ grains [1 1/8 carats], another of 2 3/4 grains [11/16 carat], and one of 2 grains [⅛ carat]. All together this ornament including all of the stones of differing sizes and the ruby, and the workmanship, and given its quality, is worth, according to the evaluation made in Madrid 13,270 reales vellon or 884.5 pesos.

A double strand silver necklace, smooth on the back, with little gold links, two clasps and two hanging pendants shaped like leaves and flowers, and set with 180 pink slender diamonds and one deep diamond. The six largest pink diamonds are in the center of the necklace: two of the center stones on the hanging rings are of six grains each [1½ carats]: the two center stones on the clasps are of 1 ¼ grains [3/8 carat] and 1 1/3 grains [¼ carat]; of the two center stones on the hanging pendant, one is more than four grains in size [one carat] and the other is 3½ grains [7/8 carat]. There are also other stones of various sizes. The total value is 10,658 reales vellon which is 717 pesos 1½ reales and workmanship of 900 reales vellon which is 60 pesos.

Two equal-sized waist ornaments [chatelaines] like silver handcuffs, smooth on the reverse side, with a safety catch to open and close the ornaments, in addition to the screw and nut. [These ornaments are] made up of 2 trunks, covered with leaves and flowers and set with 160 slender rose diamonds, the two largest weighing 2½ grains [5/8 carat]. All together the value of these stones, given their quality is 7,590 reales vellon, which is 506 pesos, plus workmanship of 450 reales vellon giving a total of 536 [pesos].

One set of gold buttons set with diamonds for shirt cuffs
One ring with three stones, the largest stone set among diamonds
Another diamond ring, with eight stones set in a circle, one in the center and two at the sides
Another ring with ten stones set in a circle and one in the center of rose-colored diamonds
Another ring with two stones at the sides and one in the center
One rosary with seven heavy beads, mounted in gold, smaller beads of marbled glass and the cross of mother-of-pearl, containing five ounces of new gold, from Europe.
Appendices

One Japan-work clavichord, lacquered and flesh-colored 200
One jacaranda writing desk, carved on the top 200
Another writing desk, walnut with colored inlaids 56
Fifty marks [25 pounds] of silverware 450
One young black girl, named Isabel, 11 or 12 years old 300
Two large mirrors with full pieces of glass measuring one vara, set in carved and gilded frames 200
Two large mirrors, with two sections of glass in each frame, also of one vara length with gilded edges and crystal hangings 200
One new coverlet of scarlet alpaca wool 25
Twelve thousand pesos in silver coin 12,000

Total 20,028 pesos 6½ reales
Notes

INTRODUCTION

1 Facultad de Filosofía y Letras (Universidad de Buenos Aires), Documentos para la historia argentina, Tomo xi, Territorio y población: Padrón de la ciudad de Buenos Aires (1778) (Buenos Aires, 1919).
2 Porteño is used throughout this study to describe an inhabitant of the port city of Buenos Aires.
3 See for example, Ricardo Levene, ‘Funciones económicas de las instituciones virreinales’, in Historia de la nación argentina (Buenos Aires, 1940).
8 Although the flota system was temporarily reimposed during times of war (e.g., 1779-83) permission for individual sailing was granted even during these times.
9 For example, Juan Carlos Wright and Agustín Wright were merchants whose contraband activities continued after the 1778 Free Trade Ordinance. Juan Carlos Garavaglia, ‘Comercio colonial de Buenos Aires, 1778-1785’ (unpublished study, Buenos Aires, 1970), and Archivo General de la Nación (Buenos Aires) – hereafter cited as A.G.N. Inventario de la hacienda y efectos personales que se le embargaron a Juan Carlos Wright y Agustín Wright, padre y hijo, a raíz de una orden superior, Guerra y Marina, 1782, Expediente 22, Legajo 6, ix-23-10-6.
showed total exports of 5,564,704 pesos 3 reales of which 818,770 (or approximately 15 percent) was in hides and other local commodities and 4,745,934 pesos 3 reales was in gold and silver. Almanak Mercantil: Guia de Comerciantes para el año de 1796 (Madrid, 1796), p. 429.


Ibid., pp. 74–5, contains information of such surpluses produced by the Estancia de las Vacas.

For detailed information on population growth see Jorge Comandrán Ruiz, Evolución demográfica argentina durante el periodo hispánico (1535–1810) (Buenos Aires, 1969), pp. 80–115.

Halperin Donghi, El Río de la Plata, pp. 19, 23, 26.


Halperin Donghi, El Río de la Plata, p. 17.


Halperin Donghi, El Río de la Plata, p. 17.


Ibid., pp. 76–8.

Halperin Donghi, Politics, Economics and Society, p. 29.

Ibid., p. 30.

Ibid., p. 31.

Halperin Donghi, El Río de la Plata, p. 36.


Ibid., p. 37.

Ibid., p. 29.

See Lilian Betty Romero Cabrera, José Miguel de Tagle: Un comerciante americano de los siglos xviii y xix (Córdoba, 1973), for an example of the extent of dependence of the merchants of the interior.

Garavaglia, 'Comercio colonial', pp. 134, 136–7. Examples of lessening of trade restrictions are:

1783 – permission to use neutral ships (Portuguese) to export Argentine goods;

1791 – permission for Spaniards and foreigners to import slaves and export local products and silver;

1793 – opening of slave trade to non-Spanish ships;

1795 – permission to export colonial goods to non-Spanish areas;

1796 – permission for Argentine ships to engage in trade with the Peninsula;

1797 – opening of colonial trade to neutral powers.


'I have only known one wealthy ranch owner, don Francisco de Alzaibar, who has an infinite number of animals, divided among several ranches, on the other side of the [Uruguay] river. With all this, it's been a long time since he's seen 4,000 pesos together at one time.' Concolorcorvo, El Lazarillo de Ciegos Caminantes, p. 47.

Halperin Donghi, Politics, Economics and Society, p. 50.
CHAPTER I THE MERCHANT POPULATION

Guillermo Céspedes del Castillo, *Lima y Buenos Aires* (Sevilla, 1947), pp. 16–22. Many more citizens than those who labeled themselves *comerciantes* were involved in the exchange of goods with the interior and the outside world. Among the ranks of those who were interested, directly or indirectly, in the trade of the city, were clergymen, government bureaucrats, and military officers. Although not publicly involved in commerce, these men provided capital for commercial investment, and functioned as silent partners. Their knowledge and business acumen seems to have varied greatly, for all that was necessary to participate in trade was money to invest. 'It can be said that clergy and bureaucrats were powerful in the same measure that they participated in commerce. There is no record of a rich priest who did not engage in trade, and public employees, directly or indirectly – through partnership or bribes – often obtained their great income from commerce.' Céspedes del Castillo, *Lima y Buenos Aires*, p. 15.

Although these non-merchant partners are interesting in understanding the degree to which Buenos Aires was dependent, in one form or another, on trade for the prosperity of many of its social groups, this study focuses specifically on one group which dedicated itself primarily to commerce. While priests, bureaucrats, lawyers and military men continued to invest surplus capital in commerce from 1750 on, their role in commerce was eclipsed by full-time merchants.


Included in this number are *comerciantes* (wholesalers), *mercaderes* (retailers), *dueños de tiendas* (shopowners), *mercachifles* (peddlers), *tratantes* (provisioners), *pulperos* (grocers) and *tendejoneros* (owners of small shops). A crude calculation, the only type possible because of the nature of the 1738 population figures, is that the *comerciantes* were less than one percent of the white male population of the city, while all individuals involved in commerce were slightly more than three percent of the same population.

Facultad de Filosofía y Letras (Universidad de Buenos Aires), *Documentos para la historia argentina*, Tomo x, *Padrones de la Ciudad y Campaña de Buenos Aires (1725–1810)*.

Included in this group are *comerciantes*, *mercaderes*, *mercaderes con tienda* (retailers with shops), *mercaderes tratantes* (retail provisioners), *mercachifles*, *tratantes*, *dueños de tiendas*, and *tendejoneros*.

It is impossible to determine if there was any qualitative difference between
mercaderes, mercaderes con tienda, and mercaderes tratantes. Some of the individuals in each of these groups were later identified with wholesale trade. The numbers of individuals in wholesale trade in 1744 is therefore a conservative estimate, for only those men specifically noted as comerciantes were included in the calculation.


11 Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, (Universidad de Buenos Aires), Documentos para la historia argentina, Tomo xi, Territorio y Población: Padrón de la ciudad de Buenos Aires (1778).

12 José Luis Moreno, ‘La estructura social y demográfica de la ciudad de Buenos Aires en el año de 1778’, Anuario, 8, p. 157.


15 Almanak Mercantil: Guía de Comerciantes para el año de 1802 (Madrid, 1802), p. 399.

16 Ibid., p. 400.

17 José Luis Moreno, ‘La estructura social y demográfica de la ciudad de Buenos Aires’, Anuario, 8, pp. 157 and 163.


19 Facultad de Filosofía y Letras (Universidad de Buenos Aires), Documentos para la historia argentina, Tomo xi, Territorio y Población: Padrón de la ciudad de Buenos Aires (1778) (Buenos Aires, 1919), hereafter referred to as Padrón.

20 The 145 merchants present in the city were not all positively identified in the census as merchants. All of those merchants residing in the third censal district of the city (Buenos Aires was divided into 6 zones for the taking of the census), in fact, all of the residents of that district, lack occupational identification. This is due to the sloppy census gathering of Francisco Antonio Escalada, himself a merchant, who not only failed to list occupations, but also failed to separate individual households, and omitted all street locations within his zone. The census for zone 3 therefore is a long running list of names with little indication as to where one household ends and another begins. For purposes of identification of merchants within this zone I relied on other documents (e.g., notary records, church records) contemporary with the census. In this manner I was able to identify many important merchants who would have otherwise escaped my attention. For division of households, I made the break where dictated by logic, usually after the listing of slaves, as in all other sections of the census, the head of the household was followed in the listing by his wife and children, any Spanish agregados, free servants, and then slaves.


22 For example, Doctor Gerónimo de Arechaga submitted bills totaling 323
pesos for treating Ambrosio Zamudio from 1783 until his death in 1798. A.G.N., Sucesiones 8821, Testamentaria de Don Ambrosio Zamudio, 1798.

23 The practice of setting young sons up in business was limited to the wealthiest merchants of the city. Because of mounting economic pressures, and the increasing availability of non-mercantile careers, few cases are found after the decade of the 1770s. For an example of this practice see A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 2, 1776, folios 141-3 v, Instrumento de emanzipazion de Dn Domingo de Basavilbaso a favor de su hijo Dn Manuel.

24 José Torre Revello, La sociedad colonial: Páginas sobre la sociedad de Buenos Aires entre los siglos XVI y XIX (Buenos Aires, 1979), pp. 94-5.

25 According to D. A. Brading, Miners and Merchants in Bourbon Mexico, 1763-1810 (Cambridge, 1971), p. 109, ‘...in fact these northern hidalgos were frequently little more than farmers whose very poverty drove their sons to seek their fortunes abroad’.

26 Two merchants from artisan backgrounds were Juan Carlos and Agustín Wright, both porteño-born sons of Carlos Wright, a London-born smith (herrero) who had come to Buenos Aires in 1737 under the British asiento. Wright obtained permission to remain in Buenos Aires, and after marrying a woman whose family owned lands in the Gualeguay area, combined limited trade in hides with smithing. As the smith for many of the churches being built in the city, Wright made the acquaintance of Domingo Basavilbaso, one of the wealthiest merchants of the city. Basavilbaso served as compadre de bautismo for at least one of Wright’s children, and was perhaps instrumental in their choice of careers. Francisco Wright continued as an estanciero, while Juan Carlos Wright combined ownership of estancia lands with trade (and was deeply implicated in contraband trade) and Agustín Wright became a merchant, spending time in Buenos Aires and Cádiz.

27 In the case of fathers who were landowners, the small size of their plots of land is demonstrated by the fact that many of the merchants renounced their inheritance of this land in favor of siblings, nephews or cousins who had continued to reside on the Peninsula.

28 These are the respective birthplaces of Manuel Arana, Domingo Basavilbaso, Gregorio Canedo and José Martinez de Hoz. Some merchants such as Agustín Antonio Erezcano and José Antonio Gainza were natives of larger Spanish cities, Bilbao in the case of these two men.
29 D. A. Brading, *Miners and Merchants in Bourbon Mexico, 1763–1810* (Cambridge, 1971), p. 106, reaches much the same conclusion as to the geographical origins of the Mexican merchants. ‘Our evidence...implies that most immigrants came from the mountainous seaboard of northern Spain.’

30 Ibid., p. 106.


33 Ibid., p. 94. Among the highest population densities listed by Herr are Asturias (39 people per square kilometer), Galicia (62), Guipuzcoa (67), Navarre (36) and Vizcaya (35).

34 Large-scale migration into Bilbao is discussed by Mercedes Mauleon Isla, *La población de Bilbao en el siglo XVIII* (Valladolid, 1961), p. 86.

35 See for example the Testament of José Francisco Vidal (A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 3, 1791, folios 365–70); ‘...I left my patria [San Juan de Ortoño, Santiago, Galicia] as a youngster, went to the Kingdom of Andalucia, and from there came to this capital [Buenos Aires]...’

36 Juan Martín de Pueyrredon, although a native of a small French village (Saint Jean d’Issor, Bearne) instead of a Spanish one, is an example of this pattern. Pueyrredon left France at the age of fifteen to join his brother, Diego, who had previously established himself in the commerce of Cádiz. He spent ten years in an apprentice position to this brother, and then at the age of twenty-five came to Buenos Aires where he set up a firm connected to that of his brother. See Hialmar Edmundo Gammalsson, *Juan Martín de Pueyrredon* (Buenos Aires, 1968), p. 20.

37 See *Genealogía: Hombres de Mayo* (Buenos Aires, 1961), p. 208. Although Lasala had been a member of the Order of Santiago since 1776 and a captain in the Army since 1767, he preferred to identify himself as a merchant in the 1778 census. See *Padrón*, p. 41.

38 Juan Martín de Pueyrredon, who had resided in Buenos Aires since 1764, was refused on his first application for citizenship in 1774 although he had married a porteña and was an officer in the local militia. Naturalization was finally granted to Pueyrredon by a Royal Order dated 15 September 1784. See Gammalsson, *Juan Martín de Pueyrredon*, p. 22; see also A.G.N., División Colonia, Sección Gobierno, Interior, año 1785, Legajo 20, Expediente 36, 1x–30–3–5, Real Cédula al virrey de Buenos Aires para que informe la solicitud de carta de ciudadanía española de Juan Martín de Pueyrredon de nacionalidad frances, para vivir y comerciar en Indias.

39 A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 6, 1785, folios 281–3 v, Testamento de Juan Bautista de Azcuenaga.

40 Iglesia de la Merced, Libro de Casamientos, Tomo 5, folios 324 and 466.

41 Jaime Vicens Vives, *An Economic History of Spain* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1969), p. 564. The four books were copy books, ledgers, invoices and copies of letters. After 1783 a day book was also required.

42 *Padrón*, p. 35.

43 A.G.N., División Colonia, Sección Gobierno, Criminales, 1777, Legajo 10, Expediente 6, 1x–52–1–7, Autos criminales que de oficio de la Real Justizia se siguen contra Dn Joseph Joaquim da Silva.


45 *Padrón*, p. 25.

46 Among the sums owing to Miguel are 1,529 pesos which his wife's father owed to him as his 'half of the business which...her husband has had with Diego
de Agüero'. Listed among Miguel’s debts, however, were 24,708 pesos which
he owed to his uncle, money no doubt given to him to help establish himself
in business. A.G.N., Registro de Escribanía 6, 1795, folios 132-3 v, Capital de
Miguel Fernández de Agüero.

47 A.G.N., División Colonia, Sección Gobierno, Licencias y Pasaportes, Libro 2,
Letra Am-Az, Hoja 69-70, ix-12-8-1, Joaquín de Arana, vecino y del
comercio de Buenos Aires solicita permiso para mandar a Potosí a su
sobrino, D. Pedro de Arana, a vender efectos, 31 marzo 1787.

48 Padrón, p. 155, and Iglesia de la Merced, Libro de Casamientos, Tomo 6,
folio 183 v.

49 Brading, Miners and Merchants, p. 111.

50 See A.G.N., Registro de Escribanía 6, 1771, folios 58 v-60, Deuda de Don
Isidro José Balbastro y otro [Don Cristóbal de Aguirre] a Don Pablo Manuel
de Beruti, and A.G.N., Consulado, 1798, Legajo 3, Expediente 10, ix-4-7-5,
Expediente sobre exceptuar del Servicio de Milicias al Comercio. At the time
of his marriage (1757) Balbastro was worth 4,000 pesos, money earned while
he ‘had been managing during a four-year period a very well-stocked store
belonging to the late Don Gerónimo Matorras. The principal of the store
belonged to Matorras.’ Balbastro was given half of the profits. See A.G.N.,
Registro de Escribano 3, 1802, folios 600-2, Testamento de Isidro José
Balbastro. As Matorras went on to become the Governor of Tucumán,
Balbastro’s friendship with him must have proved useful to the ex-clerk.

Iglesia de la Merced, Libro de Casamientos, Tomo 6, folio 193 v.

52 A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 67, 1774, folios 125 v-127, Separación de
compañía... de Don Francisco Ignacio de Ugarte y Dn Vizente de
Azcuénaga.

53 A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 3, 1799, folios 479-558 v, Testamento de Dn
Diego Casero.

54 Peter Marzahl, ‘Creoles and Government: The Cabildo of Popayán’, His-
merchants switching to mining, and then, if possible, acquiring encomienda
grants as they moved into the upper stratum of local society.

55 José Torre Revelo, ‘Noticia de los vecinos más acaudalados de Buenos Aires
en la época del primer gobierno de Pedro de Cevallos (1766)’, Boletín del
Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas: Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Universi-
sidad de Buenos Aires, Tomo vi, año vi, no. 33-6, 1927-28, pp. 498-9. The
wealthy merchant-citizens were Manuel Rodríguez de la Vega (350,000
pesos), Manuel de Escalada (500,000 pesos), Domingo Basavilbaso (200,000
pesos), Juan de Lezica (200,000 pesos), José de Gainza (150,000 pesos) San-
tiago Saabedra (60,000 pesos), and Domingo Lajarrota (80,000 pesos).

56 For examples of merchants’ sons who undertook studies in the Colegio Real
de San Carlos see A.G.N., Biblioteca Nacional, 2157, Libro de Matrícula en
donde se contienen los Nombres de los Estudiantes que han cursado las Aulas
de los Reales Estudios de esta Capital de Buenos Ayres desde el año de 1773.

57 A.G.N., Licencias y Pasaportes, Libro 17, Vi-Z, Hojas 215, 216-18,
ix-12-9-3 and Genealogía: Hombres de Mayo, p. 380.

produsida por Dn Manuel Juaquin de Zapola a favor de su hijo natural don
Domingo Antonio de Zapola, 1789.

59 Genealogía: Hombres de Mayo, p. 111; A.G.N., Licencias y Pasaportes, Libro
17, Letra V, Hojas 185-7, xi-12-9-3, Manuel Warnes pide permiso para
mandar a su hijo Manuel a la Universidad de Chile, 22 de marzo de 1787.
Fernando Caviedes also sent his son to Córdoba to study for his Licenciado
Bachillerato and the priesthood. A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 6, 1773, folios
Notes to pages 26–30

60 v–63 v, Fundación de Cappalania [sic] de Dn Fernando Caviedes a favor de Dn Luis Manuel de Caviedes. Domingo Caviedes, son of Manuel Caviedes, and nephew of Fernando was also sent to Córdoba to study for the priesthood. A.G.N., Sucesiones 5342, Testamentaria de Dn Manuel Caviedes, 1788.

60 Domingo Trillo, for example, spent 1,160 pesos for his son’s study in Chile. A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 6, 1792, folios 257 v–262, Testamento de Domingo Trillo. Francisco Tellechea’s son Pedro spent about 450 pesos per year for study in Rosario. A.G.N., Sucesiones 8457, Testamentaria de Dn Francisco Tellechea, 1812.


63 A.G.N., Sucesiones 4835, Testamentaria de Dn Eusebio Cires y Doña Bernardina de la Cruz, 1860.

64 A.G.N., Sucesiones 5342, Testamentaria de Dn Manuel Caviedes, 1788.

65 A.G.N., Sucesiones 6496, Testamentaria de Dn Juan Angel Lazcano, 1803.


68 Padrón, p. 18.

69 Iglesia de la Merced, Libro de Casamientos, Tomo 6, folio 211 v.

70 Iglesia de la Merced, Libro de Casamientos, Tomo 6, folio 212, and Padrón, p. 33. There was an interesting connection among Rezabal, Riera and Balbastro, all examples of social mobility in the colony, which suggests a sense of camaraderie among men from the same social background. Rezaval, who had served an apprenticeship under Balbastro, chose Riera as his compadre de casamiento. Riera’s compadre for the birth of his first child was Balbastro. The three men were therefore linked through bonds of ritual kinship.

71 A.G.N., Sucesiones 4310, Testamentaria de Dn Domingo Basavilbaso, 1778. Letter of 29 April 1770 from María Aurelia Ros to Manuel Basavilbaso.

72 Ibid., letter of 6 November 1780 from Francisco Antonio Basavilbaso to Manuel Basavilbaso.

73 A.G.N., Sucesiones 4310, Testamentaria de Dn Domingo Basavilbaso, 1778. Letter of 8 March 1784 from Francisco Antonio Basavilbaso to Manuel Basavilbaso.

74 Dowries and capitales were important because of Spanish inheritance law which recognized the existence of common property, but specifically excluded any goods brought to the marriage by the respective partners.

75 The case of Francisco Cabrera, a respected merchant of the city and Royal Supplier of Food to the Army, is an excellent example. Cabrera, who had arrived in Buenos Aires from his native Granada sometime before 1754, had prospered both economically and socially. Both of his daughters had married well – Victoriana to Pedro Medrano, Treasurer of the Royal Treasury of Buenos Aires, and Toribia Francisca to Mateo Ramón Alzaga, another porteño merchant. At the time of his death in 1787, Cabrera was bankrupt. His estate papers read like a tragic comedy of errors. Hides, which Cabrera sent to Spain to be sold for goods to be shipped to Buenos Aires, were turned over to a merchant who soon after went bankrupt, leaving Cabrera with only 17 percent of their value; in a shipment of goods sent on consignment to Buenos Aires, the shot silk had all rotted, and the lustrous silks had arrived
torn and faded (impossible to sell even in Potosí) while the cloaks were of a style not worn in Buenos Aires. Another consignment consisted of two cases of chocolate, ‘all rotten and full of worms’, and baize dressing gowns, ‘stained and moth-eaten’. A third shipment of goods contained ‘fowling-piece barrels, all encrusted with sediment, some rotten wide ribbons, some stones for sharpening razors, the bottom pieces separated from the top and most of them broken’. Flour and biscuits given to a friend to sell in Montevideo were embargosed by a creditor of the friend, bills of exchange given to Cabrera which he planned to use to pay his debts turned out to be worthless, and 30,000 pesos consigned to him by a Potosí merchant for investment in a shipment of slaves, perished in the Great Lisbon earthquake. Cabrera died owing more than 50,000 pesos to creditors in Buenos Aires, Spain and Upper Peru. See A.G.N., Sucesiones, 5342, Testamentaria de Dn Francisco Cabrera, 1787.

76 Legally a judge was required to intervene in an estate if any heirs were minor children (younger than 25) or if the estate was bankrupt, but there seems to have been a universal desire on the part of the merchants to avoid this complication which they felt led only to undue expense, delay, and the devaluation of the goods of the estate. Many merchants leaving minor heirs expressly forbade any interference by a Juez de Menores, but bankrupt merchants were unable to avoid such legal proceedings.

77 José Santos de Inchaurregui married María Josefa Ruiz de Gaona, the only surviving child of Pablo Ruiz de Gaona. Francisco Tellechea’s first marriage was to Matea Caviedes, daughter of Manuel de Caviedes; his second marriage was to Manuela Lezica, daughter of Juan José Lezica.

78 Brading, Miners and Merchants in Bourbon Mexico, p. 103.

79 José María Ots Capdequi, Historia de América: Instituciones (Barcelona and Madrid, 1959), pp. 311–12, 320, 324; Brading, Miners and Merchants, p. 103; and Novísima recopilación de las leyes de España (6 vols.: Madrid, 1805–26), Libro x, tit. 4, 6, 20 for the laws governing inheritance.

80 It should be remembered that the quinto was one-fifth of that portion of the estate belonging to the deceased, or one-tenth of the entire estate. If both mejoras del quinto and del tercio were made, the tercio would only amount to 13.3 percent of the entire estate.

81 ‘Navarre and the Basque provinces are areas with a severe family law, which has forced those not elected to inherit the family’s house to seek their fortune in the outside world.’ Julio Caro Baroja, La hora navarra del XVIII: Personas, familias, negocios e ideas (Pamplona, 1969), pp. 20–1.

82 Four merchants, Vicente de Azcuenaga, Manuel de Basavilbaso, Francisco Antonio Escalada and his brother Antonio José Escalada attempted to institute mayorazgos, but they were all unsuccessful. Torre Revello, La sociedad colonial, pp. 96–7.

CHAPTER 2 WOMEN, MARRIAGE AND KINSHIP

1 José María Ots Capdequi, Instituciones sociales de la América Española en el período colonial (La Plata, 1934), pp. 209–10, 225–36 discusses some legal restrictions on women and mentions that Spanish legislation viewed women as ‘evidently incapable because of sex to participate actively in the life of the state’, p. 234.

2 Concolorcorvo, El Lazarillo de Ciegos Caminantes, p. 41, and Major Alexander Gillespie, Gleanings and Remarks collected during many months residence at Buenos Ayres, and within the upper country (Leeds, 1819), p. 69 and p. 86. Gillespie,
much taken by the porteñas, noted that 'The fair sex are interesting, not so much for their education, than a pleasing address, a facetious conversation, and the most amiable tempers.' p. 67.


4 Mariquita Sánchez de Thompson, *Recuerdos del Buenos Aires virreynal* (Buenos Aires, 1953), p. 13. Mariquita later succeeded in marrying Martín Jacobo Thompson, the young man to whom her parents objected. An indomitable spirit, she also wrote her somewhat tart memoirs of the Buenos Aires of her youth.

5 See for example A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 1, 1794–5, folios 499–506, Testamento de Francisco de Segurola y Bernarda de Lezica. Segurola and his wife, who drew up a joint will, named each other as first executor, but Segurola added that his wife should ask the advice of Pablo Ruiz de Gaona and Juan José de Lezica 'in whose prudence, judgment, learning and kinship I have total confidence'. Presumably his wife lacked the first three qualities.

6 Eusebio Cires named his wife first executrice of his estate, stipulating that she was only to act with the approval and advice of his second executor as 'she has no knowledge of estates [nor]...the accounts of [my] trade'. A.G.N., Registro 2, 1786, folios 137 v–142, Testamento de Dn Eusebio de Cires Fernández de Cocio. Cires later modified this clause because he realized that 'it would be onerous, and also painful... for his wife to have to run about conferring daily on his accounts'; she was now advised to consult with the other executors 'when she felt it necessary'. A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 2, 1786, folios 165–6, Codicilo de Dn Eusevio Zirez.


8 A.G.N., Sucesiones 6496, Testamentaria de Francisco de Segurola y María Bernarda Lezica y Torrezuri, 1802.

9 A.G.N., Sucesiones 5342, Testamentaria de Don Manuel Caviedes, 1788.

10 Ibid.

11 For an example of the notes written by a woman see A.G.N., Sucesiones 4310, Testamentaria de Don Domingo Basavilbaso, 1778, for letters written by María Aurelia Ros, wife of Francisco Antonio Basavilbaso.


16 A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 2, 1789, folios 13 v–16, Venta de estancia de Da Inez y Da Antonia Chauri a favor de Dn Antonio Obligado.

17 Merchants who had left their wives home in Spain sometimes forgot about their very existence. Such a case is that of José Ramos, a native of Cádiz, who forgot he was married already when he took marital vows in Buenos Aires on 1 August 1771. The marriage was annulled by decree of the Bishop in 1775, but his porteña bride, Augustina Almandos, daughter of merchant Francisco Almandos, remained loyal to her husband, remarrying him in 1778 after the death of his Spanish-based wife. Iglesia de la Merced, Libro de
Casamientos, Tomo 6, folio 136; Iglesia de la Merced, Libro de Casamientos, Tomo 6, folio 167.

18 Charles Tilly, The Vendée (Cambridge, Mass., 1964), p. 88. ‘The frequency of marriage between two groups generally corresponds to the warmth and frequency of other, less binding, social relations.’

19 For the same pattern in Mexico, see Brading, Miners and Merchants, p. 112.

20 Francisco Millau, Descripción de la provincia del Río de la Plata (1772) (Buenos Aires, 1947), p. 43-4.

21 Sánchez de Thompson, Recuerdos, pp. 59-60.

22 The six Segurola sisters were repeating the pattern followed by their mother, María Bernarda Lezica, daughter of merchant Juan de Lezica, who had also married a Spanish-born merchant.

23 Among the youngest brides were María Aurelia Ros, married to Francisco Antonio Basavilbaso at the age of fourteen, and María Getrudis Cavallar married to Francisco Antonio Escalada at the same age. Vidal, Picturesque Illustrations, p. 50, noted that ‘The children of both sexes are generally beautiful, but after the age of fourteen years the girls cease to improve in appearance; they marry from that age upwards, and at twenty-five few retain any appearance of youth.’

24 Porteño merchants also influenced the choice of marriage partners for their sons but occasionally true love did conquer, or at least make some effort to be heard. Domingo Belgrano Pérez, for example, threatened to disinherit his grandson and ward, Julián Gregorio Espinosa, because the boy, a minor aged seventeen and a half, wished to marry a young woman of whom his grandfather disapproved. Belgrano argued that the young man ‘has no worldly experience, knows nothing about marriage, and doesn’t know how to manage or treat the business dealings that should form the foundation of his subsistence’. After hearing Gregorio Espinosa’s declaration of love, the court ordered his grandfather to consent to his marriage. A.G.N., División Colonia, Sección Gobernador, Tribunales E, Legajo 6; Expediente 11, 1x-40-9-2. Expediente formado por parte de Dn Julián Gregorio Espinosa, menor de Hdad demandando que su abuelo, tutor y curador Dn Domingo Belgrano Pérez le de el consentimiento correspondiente para contraer matrimonio con Dª María Candelaria Somellera, y en su defecto se supla por la Read Autoridad, 1794.

25 A.G.N., Sucesiones 8457, Testamentaria de Don Francisco Tellechea, 1812. Tellechea, who granted his second wife 16,000 pesos in handel, had to be worth 160,000 pesos at the time of this marriage.

26 A.G.N., Registro de Escritano 1, 1785, folios 248 v-250 v, Carta de dote Dn José Lezica a favor de su hija Dª Juana Nepomucena y Ortega [sic]. A.G.N., Registro de Escritano 4, 1781, folios 161 v-165, Carta de Dote de Dª Flora de Azcuena; and A.G.N., Registro de Escritano 6, 1771, folios 61-2 v, Carta de dote Don Francisco de Segurola a favor de Dª María Bernarda de Lesica. These dowries compare favorably with that given to Juana María de Larrazabal, a member of one of the most prominent families of the city upon her marriage to Rafael de Sobremente, future Viceroy of the Río de la Plata; she was given 19,778 pesos in dowry. Enrique Udaondo, Diccionario biográfico colonial argentino (Buenos Aires, 1945), p. 481.

27 A.G.N., Sucesiones 8457, Testamentaria de Dn Francisco Tellechea, 1812.

28 Examples of women who inherited money after their weddings include María Magdalena Carrera, wife of Martín Alzaga who inherited 4,523 pesos in addition to her dowry (A.G.N., Sucesiones 3472, Testamentaria de Dn Martín Alzaga, 1812); Juana Ventura Lezica, wife of Francisco de la Peña, inherited
Notes to pages 43-45

an additional 5,330 pesos (A.G.N., Sucesiones 6497, Testamentaria de Dn Juan José Lezica, 1811).

29 A.G.N., Sucesiones 4833, Testamentaria de Dn Eusebio Cires y Doña Bernarda de la Cruz, 1800.

30 A.G.N., Sucesiones 4310, Testamentaria de Dn Domingo Basavilbaso, 1778.

31 A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 6, 1795, folios 289-92 v, Renuncia de Sor María Eusebia de Gainza del Monasterio de Monjas Cathalinas a sus padres. Upon entering a convent a young woman renounced all rights to additional legal inheritance.

32 A.G.N., Sucesiones 3472, Testamentaria de Dn Martín de Alzaga, 1812.


34 A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 6, 1795, folios 289-92 v, Renuncia de Sor María Eusebia de Gainza del Monasterio de Monjas Cathalinas a sus padres. Upon entering a convent a young woman renounced all rights to additional legal inheritance.

35 It should be noted that money given to dower nuns was not necessarily withdrawn entirely from commerce. These dowries were turned over to the convent's síndico, often a merchant, who in turn lent dowry funds to other merchants for investment in commerce.

36 Sánchez de Thompson, Recuerdos, p. 60.

37 For example, Rosa Basavilbaso, daughter of Domingo Basavilbaso, and Vicente Azcuenaga were married by the Archbishop in his private chapel on 30 August 1752. Iglesia de la Merced, Libro de Casamientos, Tomo 5, folio 35.

38 One of the more magnificent weddings took place on 4 December 1785 in the Buenos Aires Cathedral. José María de Romero, the son of Tomás Antonio Romero, a prominent merchant, was married by proxy to Francisca Paula Medrano y Cabrera. The bride, fifteen years old, was the daughter of Pedro Medrano, Comisario de Guerra, and Ministro Tesorero Principal de Ejército y Real Hacienda of the Viceroyalty (Head of the Commissariat and Principal Treasury Minister of the Army and the Royal Exchequer), and Victoriana Cabrera y Saavedra. Her maternal grandfather had been Francisco de Cabrera, a porteno merchant. The groom's father was, at the time, serving as Asentista General de la Conducción de Caudales y Azogues de su Magestad (General Contractor for the Shipment of the Royal Monies and Quicksilver) for the vice-regal district. As godfather for the couple, Francisco de Paula Sanz, Caballero of the Royal Order of Carlos III, Intendente General of the Army and the Real Hacienda of the Viceroyalty of Río de la Plata, participated in the ceremony. Witnesses to the marriage included the Contadores Mayores (Chief Accountants) of the Real Hacienda, the parents of the bride and groom and 'many others'. Iglesia de la Merced, Libro de Casamientos, Tomo 6, folio 196.

39 Iglesia de la Merced, Libro de Casamientos, Tomo 5, folio 535.

40 Iglesia de la Merced, Libro de Bautismos, Tomo 12, folio 201. There is some confusion as to the parentage of Rita Lobo. In her will, she claimed to be the legitimate daughter of Sebastián Lobo and Josefa de Acosta, but at the time of her marriage to Pinto she was listed as a girl 'raised in Sebastián Lobo's house' and there was no mention of the name of either a father or mother.
A.G.N., Sucesiones 7388, Testamentaria de Dn Joaquín Pinto y Rita Antonia Lobo, 1821; and Iglesia de la Merced, Libro de Casamientos, Tomo 6, folio 66.

Iglesia de la Merced, Libro de Casamientos, Tomo 6, folio 66. Again, there is some discrepancy between the church records and Rita Lobo’s will; in her will she stated that she had been married since 1762. These slight alterations in her parentage and the date of her marriage might have been an attempt to establish respectability once Pinto had obtained a position of some importance. Marcelina Josefa, the daughter born out of wedlock, suffered no social stigma; she was married at the age of seventeen to José Ramón Ugarteche, a Basque-born merchant. Iglesia de la Merced, Libro de Casamientos, Tomo 6, folio 183 v.

A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 5, 1774, folios 91-3, Poder para testar de Dn Manuel de Escalada a Dn Bernardo Sancho Larrea y otros; Iglesia de la Merced, Libro de Bautismos, Tomo 12, folio 366, Baptism of Domingo Antonio Zapiola; A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 6, 1797, folios 90 v-97, Testamento de Dn Miguel Capdevila.

The highest mortality occurred among the newborn, within the first month after birth. More than two-thirds of all baptismal certificates reviewed mention that the child had been baptised shortly after birth because of ‘a case of necessity’, i.e., the infant was frail and not expected to survive.

A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 2, 1789, folios 312–16, Testamento de Juana Rosa Collis otorgado a su nombre por Dn Thomas Insúa.

When the partnership was formed Caviedes put up 6,726 pesos while Tellechea put up only 124 pesos; the partnership agreement called for the profits to be divided two-thirds to Caviedes and one-third to Tellechea, with Tellechea doing the day-to-day managing of the business. After Tellechea’s marriage to Caviedes’ daughter, the partnership agreement was amended; Tellechea and Caviedes were now to share the profits evenly. A.G.N., Sucesiones 5342, Testamentaria de Don Manuel Caviedes, 1788.

A.G.N., Sucesiones 8457, Testamentaria de Don Francisco Tellechea, 1812.

Iglesia de la Merced, Libro de Casamientos, Tomo 6, folio 183.

Iglesia de la Merced, Libro de Casamientos, Tomo 5, folio 16; Iglesia de la Merced, Libro de Bautismos, Tomo 13, folio 120 and folio 235.

Iglesia de la Merced, Libro de Casamientos, Tomo 6, folio 171 v. Manuel’s mother and Manuela’s mother were sisters named Manuela and Mariana Turrizuri respectively. They were from Ajangi, Vizcaya.

Other examples of uncle–niece marriage in the nineteenth century exist in families such as the Belgranos. Although outside the scope of this study, the phenomenon seems to have been quite common among the Argentine upper class. Diana Hernando, ‘Casa y Familia: Spatial Biographies in 19th Century Buenos Aires’ (unpublished PhD dissertation, U.C.L.A., 1973), pp. 40–1.

Examples of affinal kinship among the merchants include Xavier Saturnino Sarasa and his son-in-law, Francisco Casimiro de Necochea; Manuel de San Gines and his son-in-law, Jacobo Adrián Varela; Francisco de Cabrera and his son-in-law, Mateo Ramón Alzaga (another son-in-law was Pedro Medrano, treasury official); Joaquín Pinto and his son-in-law, José Ramón Ugarteche; Pedro Díaz de Vivar and his son-in-law, Ventura Miguel Marcó del Pont. Included in the cuñado pattern of affinal kinship were Juan Bautista de Azcuénaga and Faustino Bozo. A third pattern of affinal kinship, that of concuñados, of brothers-in-law through marriage to two sisters, included Juan Esteban Anchorena and Cristóbal de Aguirre, related through their marriages to the López de Anaya sisters (Aguirre exercised Anchorena’s
proxy at his marriage to Ramona López de Anaya); Eugenio Lerdo de Tejada and Bernardo Sancho Larrea, related through their marriages to the Cevallos sisters (Lerdo de Tejada had served as proxy at Sancho Larrea’s wedding); Matías Abaroa Barrena and Francisco Moreno Tejada, concuñados through their marriages to the Melgarejo sisters; Ramón Anchors and José Gurrruchaga, brothers-in-law through marriage to the Solá sisters; Francisco de Basavilbaso and Gregorio Ramos Mexía, related through double marriage to the Ros sisters. The father-in-law, son-in-law pattern was at times repeated for three or four generations. Among Francisco Almandos’ sons-in-law was Blas Alonso de Castro, a merchant, who in turn had José Martínez de Hoz as his son-in-law. Domingo Basavilbaso’s sons-in-law were Vicente de Azcuénaga and Pascual Ibáñez de Echaurren, both merchants, and Azcuénaga, in turn, had Agustín Erezcano, and Gaspar de Santa Coloma as sons-in-law. Ibáñez’s son-in-law was Juan Viola, another porteño merchant.

Examples of father-son merchant relationships include Isidro Balbastro and his son Eugenio, Juan Lezica and his son Juan José, and Manuel Escalada and his sons Francisco and Antonio José. The Escalada brothers are also an example of brother-brother merchant relationships. Among those uncle-nephew merchant relationships are Diego Agüero and his nephew Miguel Fernández de Agüero and Manuel Arana and his nephew Sebastián Arana.

Examples of father-son merchant relationships include Isidro Balbastro and his son Eugenio, Juan Lezica and his son Juan José, and Manuel Escalada and his sons Francisco and Antonio José. The Escalada brothers are also an example of brother-brother merchant relationships. Among those uncle-nephew merchant relationships are Diego Agüero and his nephew Miguel Fernández de Agüero and Manuel Arana and his nephew Sebastián Arana.

Almanak Mercantil: Guía de Comerciantes para el año de 1802, pp. 396–9.

For example, Juan Martín de Pueyrredon became, through marriage to Rita Damasia Dogan, the son-in-law of Juan Dogan, a merchant, and the brother-in-law (concuñado) of Andrés del Rincón. Rincón’s daughter married Francisco de Orma, a merchant, while two of Pueyrredon’s daughters married merchants, Anselmo Sáenz Valiente and Juan Bautista Ituarte. Two of Pueyrredon’s sons were trained in commerce, and one of these, Juan Martín de Pueyrredon, first married his first cousin, Dolores Poeyredon, daughter of Jacques Poeyredon, a Cádiz merchant, and later married the daughter of Francisco Tellechea, and granddaughter of Manuel Caviedes. Anselmo Sáenz Valiente, a son-in-law of Juan Martín, the elder, was also a cousin of Esteban Villanueva, another porteño merchant.

Iglesia de la Merced, Libro de Bautismos, Tomo 12, folio 198; Libro de Bautismos, Tomo 13, folio 117 and Tomo 14, folio 3 v; Libro de Bautismos, Tomo 14, folio 35 v.
CHAPTER 3 COMMERCE AND INVESTMENT


4 A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 5, 1774, folios 234–59 v, Testamento en virtud de poder, Don Bernardo Sánchez Larrea y Don Francisco Antonio de Escalada, a nombre de Don Manuel de Escalada. Escalada sent the goods to Alto Perú with Antonio de Rueda who was about to begin his term as corregidor of Chichas and Tarija. Rueda had borrowed money from Escalada to purchase his new post and to equip himself, and was, in return expected to foist Escalada’s goods on the Indians under his jurisdiction. Unfortunately for Escalada, Rueda died shortly after assuming the corregidor post.

5 A.G.N., Gaspar de Santa Coloma, Libro Copiador de Cartas para España, 1788–94, vii–6–5–14, Letter of 20 May 1794 to Juan Pedro de Armentia. ‘Your little black slave has become a pretty piece of rubbish, giving himself up to drinking, thieving and running away. It has therefore been necessary for me to take him from the jail and send him up to Cuzco…’

6 The sociedad en comandita, an older form of partnership which provided limited liability to at least one partner, seems to have fallen into disuse by the eighteenth century. For information on both types of partnerships see Arthur Robert Burns, ‘Partnerships’, in *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, edited by E. R. A. Seligman (New York, 1934), xiii, pp. 3–6.


8 *Ordenanzas de la ilustra Universidad y Casa de contratación de la m.n. y m.l. villa de Bilbao…año de 1737* (Madrid, 1796), Capítulo Décimo, xiii, p. 63. ‘All interested parties in a partnership are bound to endorse and carry out, for either loss or gain, all business agreements which each partner may make and execute in the name of all [partners] with other people and merchants outside of the company; each partner guarantees any losses which may accrue up to the amount of principal and profits which he had invested, and the total assets of the company; but it is understood that that individual or individuals under whose signature the company is formed, will be bound, besides the capital and the profits which belong to the partnership, with all the rest of their goods [both] those now in their possession and those which they shall possess in the future, until all losses are repaid…’

9 A.G.N., Sucesiones 5342, Testamentaria de Dn Manuel Caviedes, 1788.

10 The company drawn up between Francisco Ignacio de Ugarte and Vicente de Azcuenaga, for example, lasted three years. A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 6, 1774, folios 125 v–127, Separación de compañía, transacción y finiquito de todas quentas Don Francisco Ignacio de Ugarte y Don Vicente de Azcuenaga.

11 Joint-stock companies were a feature of Spanish commerce from 1728, when the king allowed the formation of the Caracas Company. These companies, formed to undertake large-scale commercial or industrial development, were few in number and were always established under Royal Charter. James Clayburn La Force, Jr., *The Development of the Spanish Textile Industry: 1750–1800* (Berkeley, 1965), pp. 51–6. The only example of a porteño joint stockholding company was the insurance company, La Confianza, founded...
in 1796 by merchant Julián del Molino Torres. A majority of the company’s 70 shareholders were local merchants. Enrique Wedovoy, *La evolución económica rioplatense a fines del siglo XVIII y principios del siglo XIX a la luz de la historia del seguro* (La Plata, 1966), pp. 202–3.

12 Martín de Sarratea, for example, served as agent for the Royal Phillipine Trading Company, as well as undertaking private commercial transactions.

13 For example, Tomás Antonio Romero acted as *Asentista General de la Conducción de Caudales y Azogues de Su Majestad* (Royal Transporter of Metals) from 1777 to 1807. As such he was under contract to the Crown to import mercury and export silver from Alto Perú.


16 A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 5, 1781, folios 157 v–161 v, Capital de Dn Gaspar de Santa Coloma. Comparing this markup to profits declared by merchants, Santa Coloma’s expectations do not seem unreal. The company formed by Manuel de Caviedes and Francisco Tellechea, for example, declared a profit of 18,464 pesos on an original investment of 6,850 pesos over a four-year period. This was a profit of 270 percent. A.G.N., Sucesiones 5342, Testamentaria de Dn Manuel de Caviedes, 1788.

17 A.G.N., Gaspar de Santa Coloma, Libro Maestro de Facturas, 1787–8, vii–6–5–12.


19 The same inheritance laws encouraged the formation of *mayorazgos* among Mexican merchants; see Brading, *Miners and Merchants*, p. 103.

20 These positions were held by Domingo Basavilbaso (later Manuel de Basavilbaso), Manuel de Basavilbaso, Juan Angel Lazcano (later Diego Casero), and Martín de Sarratea respectively. Francisco Cabrera also held the position of *Asentista de Viveres de la Real Armada* (Royal Supplier of Food to the Navy).

21 Tomás Antonio Romero rented the ranches and *saladeros*, which had belonged to Medina, from his heirs. A.G.N., División Colonia, Sección Gobierno, Solicitudes Civiles, 1794, Libro 6, Letra P–R, ix–12–9–9. Romero later received royal contracts to provide salted meat to the Spanish arsenals and the Royal Navy. Esteban Villanueva, in addition to merchandise worth 65,000 pesos in his stores, had 3,500 pesos invested in the bronze factory's
equipment and 6,400 pesos invested in eleven skilled slaves which he employed there. A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 4, 1784-8, folios 58 v–83 v, Capital de Dn Esteban Villanueva.


23 Santos Martínez, Las industrias, p. 124.

24 Ibid., p. 124.

25 Ibid., pp. 125–26. Among those merchants who acted as Cabildo de deputies in the salt expeditions were Manuel Joaquín Zapiola (1778), Saturnino José Alvarez and Gaspar de Santa Coloma (1784), Manuel del Cerro Sanz (1786), José Martínez de Hoz (1787), Agustín Erezciano (1788), Diego de Agüero (1789), and Agustín Casimir de Aguirre (1789), Casimiro Francisco Necochea (1791), Jaime Alsina (1792), Manuel de la Piedra and Pedro Dubal (1798), Manuel Ortiz Basualdo (1802), Cristóbal de Aguirre (1804). Juan Bautista Elorriaga and Juan de Llanos (1805) and Esteban Romero (1808). In 1789, Diego de Agüero personally underwrote the costs of the expedition, with the Cabildo promising to repay him once the salt was sold. Archivo General de la Nación, Acuerdos del Extinguido Cabildo de Buenos Aires, 1789, Serie III, Tomo 9, pp. 163–5.

26 It should be remembered that some ships registered to merchant owners were, no doubt, the product of last minute espanolizacion. Elena F. Scheuss, La trata de negros en el Río de la Plata, p. 295.


28 A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 6, 1790, folios 73 v–82, Testamento en virtud de poder Da María Josefa de la Jarrota y otro por Dn Agustín Casimiro de Aguirre; A.G.N., Sucesiones 8457, Testamentaria de Dn Francisco Tellechea, 1812; Geneología: Hombres de Mayo, p. 319. The same phenomenon was observed in Mexico: ’these great import houses did not restrict themselves to wholesale commerce. The almacén de Mexico City each maintained a shop in the capital which dealt directly with the public.’ Brading, Miners and Merchants, p. 98.


30 A.G.N., Sucesiones 5341, Gabriel Contiña y Blanco, inventario de sus bienes, 1786.

31 Padrón, p. 370; A.G.N., Sucesiones 4833, Testamento de Dn Eusebio Cires, 1800.

32 For examples of the types of buildings constructed by the merchants see the plans and sketches in A.G.N., División Colonia, Sección Gobierno, Permisos para Edificar, 1785, ix–10–10–8, Legajo 3, Hojas 314–17 (Manuel de Lezica); Hoja 320 (José Riera); see also Torre Revello, ‘La casa y el mobiliario en el Buenos Aires colonial’, Revista de la Universidad de Buenos Aires, 3 (1945), pp. 67–91, and Lámina IV (Antonio José de Escalada).

33 A.G.N., Sucesiones 4310, Testamentaria de Dn Domingo Basavilbaso, 1778.

34 A.G.N., Sucesiones 8457, Testamentaria de Dn Francisco Tellechea, 1812.
A.G.N., Sucesiones 6376, Testamentaria de Dn Tomás Insúa, 1802; A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 1, 1790-1, folios 542-53 v, Capital de Dn Juan Antonio Rodríguez.

36 A vara is equal to about 33 inches.

37 A.G.N., Sucesiones 7785, Testamentaria de Dn Pablo Ruiz de Gaona, 1823.

38 A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 6, 1774, folios 127-8 v, Poder especial de Doctor Dn José de Anduxar y otros hacendados a favor de el Doctor Dn Diego Pereyra de Lecuna y otro. Merchant-ranchers signing this document were Santiago Saaavedra, Francisco Díaz de Perafán, Domingo Belgrano Pérez, Francisco López García and Juan de Lezica.

39 A.G.N., División Colonia, Sección Gobierno, Comerciales, 1791, Legajo 15, Expediente 20, ix–31–1–1, Solicitud de los hazendados de la campaña de hacer una entrada general para el recojo de la hacienda que han salido a los campos aviertos. Francisco Díaz de Perafán and Felipe Argüibel signed both the 1774 and the 1791 documents. The new merchant-ranchers on the 1791 document are Antonio Obligado, Diego Trillo and José Gainza.

40 A legua is a measure of distance equal to three and one half miles.

41 A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 2, 1789, folios 93-6 v, Venta de estancia de Dn Jph Antonio Ibañes a Dn Antonio Obligado.

42 A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 2, 1789, folios 13 v–16, Venta de estancia de Da Inez y Da Antonia Chauri a favor de Dn Antonio Obligado.


44 Esteban Villanueva, for example, loaned 30,000 pesos at 5 percent interest to the Cabildo for the express purpose of providing funds for the Cabildo to continue its public works, especially the Casa de Comedias. A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 1, 1804-9, folios 72–3, Obligación del Cavildo de esta ciudad a Dn Estevan Villanueva.

45 Examples of this type of sale abound in the notary registers. See for example, A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 1, 1804-9, folios 10 v–11, Obligación de Dn Pedro Duval y otro a Dn Estevan Villanueva; A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 1, 1794–5, folios 484 v–485, Obligación Dn Antonio Manuel González a favor de Dn Tomás de Balenzategui; A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 4, 1774–5, folios 156–156 v, Obligación de Dn Manuel Hermúa, a favor de Don José Dacosta Ferreyra; A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 5, 1774, folios 87–87 v, Obligación de Don Esteban de Avellaneda a favor de Don Phelipe Argüibel de cantidad de 2390 pesos 2½ reales corrientes.

46 See for example, A.G.N., Sucesiones 7711, Testamentaria de Dn Felipe Santiago del Pozo, 1776. A letter from Mateo Ramón Alzaga to del Pozo dated 2 July 1772 reads: 'Misters Cadalso and Villanueva have requested that I recover from you what you owe them...'

47 For a seventeenth-century example of Potosí merchant investment in mining see Peter Bakewell, *Antonio López de Quiroga: Industrial minero del Potosí colonial* (Potosí, 1973). The precise role of the merchant-financiers in eighteenth century Potosí has still to be studied, but it is known that the Crown undertook a series of measures to improve silver production in the area including the creation of the Banco de San Carlos in 1751. This institution helped finance the purchase of mining supplies. See D. A. Brading and Harry E. Cross, 'Colonial Silver Mining: Mexico and Peru', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 52:4 (November 1972), pp. 566–8. In addition Lewis Hanke, *The Imperial City of Potosi: An Unwritten Chapter in the History of Spanish America* (The Hague, 1956), pp. 22–4, mentions strong official backing for a search for new mines, the repair of lakes to maintain the water supply, and the improvement of mining techniques.

48 A.G.N., Gaspar de Santa Coloma, Libro Copiador de Cartas para España,
Notes to pages 67–69

1788–96, vii–6–5–14, Letter of 20 February 1794 to Manuel José Micheo and letter of 7 June 1796 to Juan Tomás Micheo.

49 Juan Carlos Garavaglia, unpublished study on colonial commerce presented to the Congreso de Historia Social y Económica (Buenos Aires, April 1970).

50 Eugenio José Balbastro, for example, profited from the breakdown of trade in 1805 and 1806. Balbastro, who had suffered commercial setbacks, which had wiped out the inheritance from his merchant father, found himself with a well-stocked warehouse at the beginning of armed hostilities. ‘Because of the business which I undertook, exchanging hides for Castillian goods … during peacetime, and immediately after, with these goods in my possession, the war started, and during this time I sold these aforementioned goods, and from there came the increase of my fortune.’ Although Balbastro had lost his entire fortune of more than 21,000 pesos during peacetime, he could declare that because of the war, he now was worth 31,400 pesos. A.G.N., Registro de Escribano, 6, 1806, folios 25–35 v, Capital de Don Eugenio José Balbastro.

51 ‘The late [Manuel de Escalada] told us… that he had various accounts pending with Dn Francisco de Cevallos [a pariente], business which had been placed under his care in Potosí, independent of the company which he was in charge of. He [Cevallos] had not given an accounting [of these transactions] for some years now, and had even failed to respond to Escalada’s letters, or to give him a list of sales and payments for those goods under his care. Even though Escalada had made use of several other people to encourage Cevallos to get to work, nothing happened. Cevallos also refused to obey Escalada’s order to send the remaining goods to Cuzco so that they could be exchanged for local products [which in turn could be sold in another market]. Cevallos even refused to leave Chiquisaca, where he had been for several years. He abandoned his business and house in Potosí to a clerk whom he had left there.’ A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 5, 1774, folios 234–59 v, Testamento en virtud de poder, Dn Bernardo Sancho Larrea, y Dn Francisco Antonio de Escalada, a nombre de Dn Manuel de Escalada.

52 See for example A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 3, 1799, folios 479–558 v, Disposición testamentaria de Dn Diego Casero. Casero, acting as the agent of the Conde de Clonard, a merchant of Cádiz, arrived in Buenos Aires in 1767 with a shipload of merchandise to place on the local market. ‘[Because] of the poverty of the local commerce, the abundance of merchandise, and the scarcity of buyers… my work [in placing the merchandise] lasted for the space of six years, in which time, with the exception of some few leftovers, all the merchandise… was sold for hides or on time. The repayment of the credit sales was so slow, that it discouraged one in the hope of reaching a successful end. Although the debtors were so lazy in paying their bills, my pressing need to acquire money to remit to the Count for credit against my pending accounts was more nimble. I came to the point of depriving myself of what was mine in order to satisfy the demands of the Count…’

53 This was Felipe Santiago del Pozo, who dishonestly used money entrusted to him for investment in Castillian goods. Del Pozo died in bankruptcy. A.G.N., Sucesiones 7711, Testamentaria de Dn Felipe Santiago del Pozo, 1776, and A.G.N., Sucesiones 5342, Autos sobre la remisión de la testamentaria del finado Dn Francisco Cors, Capitán que fue de esta guarnición, 1787.

54 The most famous case of a merchant going bankrupt because of connections with a dishonest public figure was that of Domingo Belgrano Pérez who was implicated with Francisco Giménez de Mesa, Administrador de la Real Aduana, of embezzlement of government funds. See A.G.N., Criminales, 1788, Legajo 32, Expediente 13, ix–32–4–5, Actuaciones sumariales contra Domingo
CHAPTER 4  LIFE STYLE

1 Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Universidad de Buenos Aires, Documentos para la historia argentina, Tomo xi, Territorio y población: Padrón de la ciudad de Buenos Aires (1778), is the source of the data on the population of the city in 1778. Rómulo Zabala and Enrique de Gandia, Historia de la ciudad de Buenos Aires (Buenos Aires, 1937), Tomo II, 1719-1800, p. 529, for the mid-century population and Nicolás Besio Moreno, Buenos Aires, Estudio crítico de su población (Buenos Aires, 1939), p. 428, for the estimate at the beginning of the Independence period. See John Lynch, Spanish Colonial Administration, 1782-1810, p. 31, for population estimates for the entire province of Buenos Aires.


3 The Calle de Santísima Trinidad in Zone 1 was reported by Vidal to be ‘occupied by the superior class of inhabitants’. Vidal, Picturesque Illustrations, p. 10. Matías de Abaroa Barrena, Cecilio Sánchez de Velasco and Francisco Escalada lived on this street. Padrón, pp. 162-3. Among their neighbors were the escribano Pedro Núñez, Decano de la Catedral Doctor José Andújar, and Contador Mayor del Real Ejército y el Virreynato Francisco Cabrera. See also James R. Scobie, ‘Buenos Aires as a Commercial-Bureaucratic City, 1880-1910: Characteristics of a City’s Orientation’, American Historical Review, 77:4 (October 1972), p. 1040.

4 Today this district is between Hipólito Yrigoyen on the south, Esmeralda on the west, Santa Fé on the north and Leandro Alem on the east.

5 Today this area is bounded by Hipólito Yrigoyen on the north, Paseo Colón on the east, Cochabamba on the south and Piedras on the west.


7 Evidence of rejas and the entrance hall-patio construction is demonstrated in all inventory descriptions of merchant houses. Mention of this type of construction is also made in José Torre Revello, ‘La casa y el mobiliario en el Buenos Aires colonial’, Revista de la Universidad de Buenos Aires, no. 3 (1945), pp. 59-74, 285-300.


9 Doctor Juan Baltasar Maciel reported in 1767 that a dwelling which could
support a canon 'with dignity', should consist of a drawing room, a bedroom, a dining room, a pantry, a room to store firewood and charcoal, three servants' rooms, a kitchen, an outhouse, a yard for chickens, patio, hall, carriage house and water well. Torre Revello, 'La casa y el mobiliario', p. 67.

10 According to Diego de Alvear y Ponce de León, son-in-law of the merchant Isidro Balbastro, the houses of Buenos Aires were built with small rooms designed for shops and pulperías, facing the street. 'There is no house where something is not sold.' Torre Revello, 'La casa y el mobiliario', p. 67.

11 A.G.N., Sucesiones 6376, Testamentaria de Dn Tomás Insúa, 1802.

12 A.G.N., Sucesiones 8457, Testamentaria de Dn Francisco Tellechea, 1812.

13 Both Pablo Ruiz de Gaona and Manuel Joaquín Zapiola lived next door to their father-in-law, Juan de Lezica (they had received their homes as part of their wives' dowries); Juan Antonio de Lezica lived on the next parallel street, Calle de las Torres, and Juan José de Lezica lived on Calle de San Pedro which ran perpendicular to the Calle del Cabildo and the Calle de las Torres. Padrón, pp. 11-12, 23, 121. Granting a home next to one's own as part of a daughter's dowry naturally tended to reinforce the formation of these clan compounds.

14 The merchant households were considerably smaller than the 25 members (15 family members and 10 servants) mentioned by Scobie as a typical colonial household. James R. Scobie, 'Buenos Aires as a Commercial-Bureaucratic City', p. 1046.

15 Padrón, pp. 496-7.

16 Padrón, p. 509. Of this group, Tomás Balanzategui, Francisco Gurruchaga and Andrés Rincón went on to establish themselves in porteño commerce.

17 Moreno, 'La estructura social', p. 166.

18 Ibid., p. 148.

19 In those cases where unmarried merchants did own slaves, the slaves were always male. Ownership of female slaves was only socially acceptable if a Spanish woman resided in the same household.

20 Using Moreno's age classifications (Moreno, 'La estructura social', p. 167), the age of servants employed by the merchants breaks down as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Merchant slaves</th>
<th>Non-white population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Young (0-19 years old)</td>
<td>38.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults (20-59 years old)</td>
<td>59.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old (60 years old and over)</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It seems that merchants, because of their wealth, were able to purchase more slaves of adult age, the most productive slave group. Only 0.9 percent of the slave-owning merchants did not own at least one adult slave.

21 Bernardo Pereda owned the following slaves:

'One pardo who works in the quinta as foreman... he knows how to hoe and work in the tasks of a quinta...'

'José Gómez... is a master at making and baking brick, small farm tasks and building; he works as a laborer in masonry construction...'

'Miguel... he knows how to cut bricks and load the oven, to work on the quinta in all tasks...'

'Paulo... knows how to work in the quinta...'

'Miguel Antonio... knows how to make bricks and the other duties of his job, load the oven and run it, and equally to work in the quinta in all tasks, and in the work of masonry as a laborer...'

A.G.N., Sucesiones 7712, Testamentaria de Dn Bernardo Pereda, 1783.

22 Esteban Villanueva employed slaves skilled at smelting, casting, mixing metals, molding, welding and polishing in his bronze factory. A.G.N.,
The lowest value given a slave was 25 pesos, for a young woman who was in the last stages of syphilis. A.G.N., Sucesiones 7712, Testamentaria de Dn Bernardo Pereda, 1783. The highest value, 450 pesos, was given to a 30-year-old servant, who, in addition to being a seamstress, washerwoman and ironing woman, was a loyal and obedient slave. A.G.N., Sucesiones 6496, Testamentaria de Dn Francisco Segurola, 1802.

For example, Francisco Segurola owned thirteen household slaves valued at 3,270 pesos. A.G.N., Sucesiones 6496, Testamentaria de Dn Francisco Segurola, 1802.

Antonio García López, one of the merchants who was most kind to his slaves, ‘in repayment for the impertinences which they have suffered, and the good manner in which they have comported themselves’, left monetary gifts ranging from 50 to 500 pesos to each of his eight slaves. A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 6, 1813-14, folios 250 v-255, Testamento en virtud de poder de Dn Antonio García López.

A.G.N., División Colonia, Sección Gobierno, Criminales, 1775, Legajo 8, Expediente 2, ix-32-1-5, Autos criminales que sigue Dn Eugenio Lerdo de Texada contra Cayetano Joseph de la Mota y otros.

A.G.N., Sucesiones 6727, Testamentaria de Dn Eugenio Lerdo de Tejada, 1791.

‘I hereby grant freedom to Antonio, the whitewasher, and to José with the condition that they remain under the command of my executor for one year… ’ A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 6, 1813-14, folios 250 v-255, Testamento en virtud de poder de Dn Antonio García López. ‘His mulato slave, Juan Angel, a barber by profession, shall remain a slave for a period of four years after the death of the undersigned, with the precise condition of paying his executors twelve pesos per month from his day work… ’ A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 6, 1810, folios 199-202, Codicilo de Dn Francisco Baldovinos.

A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 4, 1815, folios 315-319 v, Testamento de Dn José Martínez de Hoz. ‘Freedom to Josefa and her daughter shall be given after the death of my wife.’ A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 3, 1816, folios 198 v-200 v, Testamento de Dn Josef Riera. ‘My slave, María, shall be freed in payment of the service which she has given to all my children, after the death of her mistress, my wife.’

A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 4, 1811-12, folios 49-51, Testamento de Dña Juana Pueyrredon. ‘Freedom shall be given to our slaves… ‘Apolinario, Eusebio and Joaquina with the understanding [that this clause is only valid] if my husband suffers no setback in his fortune due to misfortune in trade or other happenings. If this should happen he may find it necessary to sell these slaves in order to raise capital or to maintain a comfortable way of life.’

A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 6, 1813-14, folios 250 v-255, Testamento en virtud de poder de Dn Antonio García López.

A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 3, 1808, folios 208 v-210, Poder para testar de Dña Rita Dogan al Doctor Dn Feliciano Pueyrredon y otros.

A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 3, 1797, folios 64-66 v, Testamento de Doña Juana Rosa de Bozo.

A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 6, 1810, folios 199-202, Codicilo de Dn Francisco Baldovinos. ‘My mulata slave named Maria Paula, cannot be sold, and is to be maintained with her five children in the house, serving my heirs with love and kindness. I order my heirs to attend to all her needs as I have always done because of her good service, and I do not free her because of my
thoughts of justice, and so as not to expose her to hard work and an old age full of misery.'

36 Ibid., p. 628.
37 Ibid., p. 629.
38 Ibid., p. 629.
39 Ibid., pp. 629-30.
40 Ibid., p. 630.
41 Ibid., p. 624.
42 Ibid., p. 625.
43 Ibid., p. 625.
45 For examples of colonial furnishing see Guillermo Furlong, Historia social y cultural, Vol. iii: El trasplante social, pp. 320-49.
46 Millau, Descripción de la provincia, 1772, p. 59.
47 A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 5, 1780, folios 200 v–206 v, Carta de dote de Da Josefa de Inda a favor de su hija Da María Magdalena Carrera.
48 A.G.N., Sucesiones 7388, Testamentaria de D. Joaquin Pinto y Rita Antonia Lobo, 1821.
49 A.G.N., Sucesiones 4310, Testamentaria de Dn Domingo Basavilbaso, 1778.
50 A.G.N., Sucesiones 7785, Testamentaria de Dn Pablo Ruiz de Gaona, 1823.
52 Merchants' wardrobes ranged from less than 100 pesos to more than 900 pesos. See A.G.N., Sucesiones 4840, Testamentaria de Dn Gregorio Canedo, 1813, and A.G.N., Sucesiones 8821, Testamentaria de Dn Manuel Joaquin Zapiola, 1793.
53 The value of a woman's wardrobe ranged from about 82 pesos to over 1,500 pesos, depending on the economic and social position of her husband. See A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 4, 1794–5, folios 371 v–373, Carta dotal que otorga Da Margarita Melgarejo en favor de su sobrina Da Luiza Melgarejo y Nuñez for a modest wardrobe, and A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 5, 1778, folios 186 v–189 v, Carta de Dotte de Da María Eujenia Azcuenaga for a rather splendid one.
54 Millau, Descripción de la provincia, p. 44.
57 A.G.N., Sucesiones 8457, Testamentaria de Dn Francisco Tellechea, 1812.
58 Vidal, Picturesque Illustrations, p. 108.
59 Ibid., p. 50.
60 Concolorcorvo, El Lazarillo, pp. 50–1, and Vidal, Picturesque Illustrations, p. 105.
61 Francisco Tellechea, for example, owned a carriage worth 800 pesos. A.G.N., Sucesiones 8457, Testamentaria de Dn Francisco Tellechea, 1812. Pablo Ruiz de Gaona's carriage, described as 'a large coach with four seats, upholstered seats and two large pillows, three sets of harnesses and two tame mules', was also worth 800 pesos. A.G.N., Sucesiones 6496, Testamentaria de Dn Pablo Ruiz de Gaona y Da María Elena de Lezica, 1823.
62 'During the rainy season the streets of Buenos Aires are intransitable... people often must go without hearing mass when they have to cross a street to get to church'. Concolorcorvo, El Lazarillo, p. 46. 'This past Sunday, Easter Sunday, when everybody knows the great amount of mud there was in the
streets, we put one of the two horses... to the small coach in order to go to church'. A.G.N., Sucesiones 8821, Testamentaria de Dn Ambrosio de Zamudio, 1798.

63 'At Buenos Aires, luxury of the table consists in profusion.' Vidal, Picturesque Illustrations, p. 44. For a description of the diet and food prices, see Vidal, Picturesque Illustrations, pp. 25-6, and Millau, Descripción de la provincia, pp. 54-7. Millau states that in 1772 an entire side of beef sold for 10 to 12 reales, an entire sheep for 2 or 3 reales, and an entire lamb for 1 to 1½ reales. A hen sold for 2 to 3 reales, a pair of partridges for ½ real, but a pig for 5 to 6 pesos.

64 A.G.N., Sucesiones 8821, Testamentaria de Dn Ambrosio de Zamudio, 1798, speaks of bringing meat from the ranch to a merchant's home in the city.

65 Vidal, Picturesque Illustrations, p. 73 and Millau, Descripción de la provincia, p. 54.

66 Millau, Descripción de la provincia, p. 59.

67 Ibid., p. 58.

68 Pablo Ruiz de Gaona, for example, used firewood from his quinta for household consumption. A.G.N., Sucesiones 7785, Testamentaria de Dn Pablo Ruiz de Gaona, 1823.

69 A.G.N., División Colonia, Sección Gobierno, Criminales, 1779, Legajo 15, Expediente 20, Sobre aboliguar los autos de unos papeles anónimos sediciosos; por el Superior Gobierno, ix-32-2-4.

70 Ibid.

71 Ibid.

72 A.G.N., División Colonia, Sección Gobierno, Licencias y Pasaportes, Libro 4, C-Cl, folios 342-4, ix-12-8-3.

73 A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 5, 1774, folios 119 v-120, Poder para cassigno Don Francisco Antonio de Escalada a su hermano Dn Antonio José de Escalada; A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 5, 1775, folios 192 v-193, Instrumento de Dn Francisco Antonio de Escalada, aprobando en él, la transacción que su hermano Dn Antonio Jph hizo en los Reynos de España en punto a la testamentaria de su difunto Padre Dn Manuel de Escalada Bustillo.

74 A.G.N., Licencias y Pasaportes, Libro 2, Am-Az, ix-12-8-1, folios 19-20, Se le concede a Juan Esteban Anchorena permiso para ir a España, 1786; A.G.N., Reales Ordenes, Tomo 17, 1787, folio 207, ix-25-1-10, La resolución de S.M. dando su permiso a Dn Juan Esteban de Anchorena, comerciante de Buenos Aires, para su regreso a esta ciudad por no haber mejorado su salud en España.

75 A.G.N., Colección Gaspar de Santa Coloma, Libro Copiador de Cartas para España que dio principio en 3ro de julio de 1788[...6], vii-6-5-14. Letter of 1 July 1788 to his father, Juan Antonio de Santa Coloma.

76 Ibid., Letter of 1 November 1788 to his father, Juan Antonio de Santa Coloma.

77 See for example A.G.N., Licencias y Pasaportes, libros 1-17, ix-12-7-9 to ix-12-9-3.

78 For examples of individual merchant's correspondence, see A.G.N., Archivo de Juan E. Anchorena y Sucesores, Correspondencia Oficial y Particular, 1752-1832, vii-4-1-1 through vii-4-4-5; A.G.N., Colección Gaspar de Santa Coloma, 1772-1842, vii-6-5-6 through vii-6-5-20; A.G.N., Correspondencia particular y comercial de Jacinto Castro, 1768-1810, ix-10-7-7, ix-10-7-8, ix-9-3-8; A.G.N., Correspondencia particular y comercial de Manuel Alonso Gil, 1789-1810, ix-18-10-8; A.G.N., Correspondencia particular y comercial de Joaquín Gómez Sanavilla, 1791-1807, ix-11-9-6 and ix-11-9-7; Correspondencia particular y comercial de Juan Llanos, 1792-1809, ix-10-2-9.
79 A.G.N., Sucesiones 6376, Testamentaria de Dn Tomás Insúa, 1802. It was at the order of the attending physician, Miguel Rojas, that all of Insúa's personal effects were burned because of the fear of further spreading of the disease which had killed him.

80 A.G.N., Sucesiones 4833, Testamentaria de Bernardina de la Cruz, 1800; A.G.N., Sucesiones 7785, Testamentaria de María Elena de Lezica, 1823.

81 See for example doctor's bills totaling 68 pesos, including 10 pesos for 'the innoculation of a little negro slave', and charges for visits to the family. A.G.N., Sucesiones 6496, Testamentaria de María Bernarda Lezica y Torrezuri, 1802.

82 Iglesia de la Merced, Libro de Bautismos, Tomo 15, folio 24; Libro de Difuntos, Tomo 2, folio 78.

83 A.G.N., Colección Gaspar de Santa Coloma, Libro Copiador de Cartas para España que dio principio en 1ro de julio de 1788, vii-6-5-14, Letter of 1 July 1788 to his father Juan Antonio de Santa Coloma; Letter of 1 September 1788 to Agustín Arrivillaga.

84 Ibid., Letter of 1 November 1788 to Agustín Arrivillaga.

85 A.G.N., Sucesiones 6727, Testamentaria de Dn Eugenio Lerdo de Texada, 1791.

86 A.G.N., Colección Gaspar de Santa Coloma, Libro Copiador de Cartas para España que dio principio en 1ro de julio de 1788, vii-6-5-14, Letter of 1 September 1788 to Bernardo Sancho Larrea.

87 A.G.N., Sucesiones 5342, Gabriel Contina y Blanco, inventario de sus bienes, 1786.

88 Ibid.

CHAPTER 5 RELIGIOUS PARTICIPATION


2 A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 2, 1766, folios 236 v-239, Poder para testar de Dn Domingo de Basavilbaso.

3 A.G.N., Sucesiones 6726, Testamentaria de Dn Eugenio Lerdo de Tejada, 1791.

4 A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 2, 1786, folios 137 v-142, Testamento de Dn Eusebio Cires Fernández de Cocio.

5 A.G.N., División Colonia, Sección Gobierno, Comerciales, 1784-5, Legajo 12, Expediente 6, ix-30-9-7, Concurso de Acreedores contra Don Francisco Antonio de Ormaechea, 1785.

6 A.G.N., Sucesiones 7275, Testamentaria de Sor María de Ojeda, 1784.


9 Torre Revello, 'Fiestas y Costumbres', p. 414.

10 A.G.N., Orden de la Merced, Archicofradía del Rosario, Acuerdos, 1732-83, ix-7-10-8.


12 A.G.N., Sucesiones 7712, Testamentaria de Dn Bernardo Pereda, 1783 (Belgrano Pérez); A.G.N., División Colonia, Sección Gobierno, Justicia, 1792,
Legajo 31, Expediente 909, ix-31-6-4; A.G.N., Sucesiones 8457, Testamentaria de Dn Francisco Tellechea, 1812. The Cofradía de San Benito de Palermo was one of the more important black cofradías of the city. Louis A. de Bougainville, Viaje Alrededor del Mundo (Madrid, 1921), p. 45.


For an account of the activities and membership of the Third Order of San Francisco see Enrique Udaondo, Crónica histórica de la Venerable Orden Tercera de San Francisco en la República Argentina (Buenos Aires, 1920).


A.G.N., Sucesiones 7785, Testamentaria de Dn Pablo Ruiz de Gaona, 1823. In the inventory of his goods was listed ‘una cujita de madera ordinaria, pintada de color de café, en que dicen dormía y murió dicho finado’.

Iglesia de la Merced, Libro de Bautismos, Tomo 15, folio 312 v; Iglesia de la Merced, Libro de Bautismos, Tomo 16, folio 94; Iglesia de la Merced, Libro de Bautismos, Tomo 15, folio 103 v; Iglesia de la Merced, Libro de Bautismos, Tomo 15, folio 268 v; Iglesia de la Merced, Libro de Bautismos, Tomo 15, folio 258 v.

A.G.N., Hermandad de la Caridad, Acuerdos, Legajo 5, ix-6-8-4.

In the baptism books of the Cathedral (located today in La Merced Church) entries marked cuna (orphanage) begin to appear regularly by 1765.

Begging was perhaps the most spiritually edifying, but also the least effective means of collecting funds for the Hermandad. In 1790, for example, only 174 pesos were collected in three months of begging, although Holy Week was included in the period. A.G.N., Hermandad de la Caridad, Acuerdos, Legajo 1, ix-6-7-9. In addition, feast days, inclement weather and forgetfulness or more pressing concerns of the Hermandad members tended to make alms begging rather irregular.

A.G.N., Hermandad de la Caridad, Acuerdos, Legajos 1-7, all contain information on the administration of the Hermandad’s ranches.

A.G.N., Hermandad de la Caridad, Acuerdos, Legajo 1, folios 313, 483, 573, ix-6-7-9. Merchants who were not members also did business with the Hermandad. In 1791 Juan Martín de Pueyrredon sold 24 dozen knives to the Estancia for use in the ‘harvest of hides’ being carried out on the Hermandad’s ranch. A.G.N., Hermandad de la Caridad, Acuerdos, Legajo 2, folio 198, ix-6-8-1. Tomás Insúa was paid 367 pesos for the yerba maté which he sold to the orphanage. A.G.N., Hermandad de la Caridad, Acuerdos, Legajo 1, folio 463, ix-6-7-9. Other merchant suppliers included Manuel de Aguirre, Vicente de la Rosa and Esteban Villanueva.

For additional information on Rodriguez de la Vega’s work on behalf of the Casa de Niños Expósitos see Municipalidad de la Capital (Buenos Aires), Documentos y Planos relativos al Periodo edilicio colonial de la ciudad de Buenos Aires, Tomo iv-Catedral, Fundaciones Religiosas, p. 468.

A.G.N., Registro de Escribano, Legajo 1, 1804-9, folios 251-3, Testamento de Dn Manuel Rodríguez de la Vega otorgado en virtud del poder por la Hermandad de la Caridad.

A.G.N., Hermandad de la Caridad, Acuerdos, Legajo 5, ix-6-8-4.
32 A.G.N., Hermandad de la Caridad, Acuerdos Legajo 4, ix-6-8-3. Not all merchant wives who were approached were able to provide generous support. Juana Paula Giles, wife of Francisco Baldovinos, donated twelve pesos, but asked to be excused from a larger donation because of illness; Rosa Silva Rios, daughter of the late Juan de Silva Rios, apologized that she could only care for one bed because of her 'lack of funds and the great financial weight of my family', another indication of the precarious nature of mercantile fortunes. Romero's list of the charitable ladies has been published in facsimile in Guillermo Furlong, *Historia social y cultural del Río de la Plata*, Vol. III: *El trasplante social*, pp. 188-9.

33 A.G.N., Hermandad de la Caridad, Acuerdos, Legajo 4, ix-6-8-3.

34 A.G.N., Hermandad de la Caridad, Acuerdos, Legajo 5, ix-6-8-4.

35 A.G.N., Hermandad de la Caridad, Acuerdos, Legajo 4, ix-6-8-3.

36 '...only Don Gaspar de Santa Coloma offered the loan of 4,000 pesos for an eight-month term. And because the bequest which the late Don Vicente de Azcuenaga made to this house of charity was still being ignored [Santa Coloma was the executor of Azcuenaga's estate] the Hermandad realized that it was not easy to find funds and perhaps there would be none to repay the loan.' A.G.N., Hermandad de la Caridad, Acuerdos, Legajo 5, ix-6-8-4.

37 A.G.N., Hermandad de la Caridad, Acuerdos, Legajo 4, ix-6-8-3.


39 A.G.N., Hermandad de la Caridad, Acuerdos, Legajo 1, folios 271-278, ix-6-7-9.


41 The burdening of urban property with *capellanía* mortgages can be seen in the will of Antonio Obligado, a local merchant. Obligado's will, drawn up in 1789, contained in part the following list of his property: 'The house in which I live with its corresponding land and buildings... on which I have a pension of 10,000 pesos at interest of 5 percent... another house on the Calle de las Torres... which has 1,000 pesos on it for a *capellanía* for the Presbitero Dn Matheo Jph Alonso... the main house of the late Fernando Caviedes which is in the San Miguel parish... and which has on it the pension of 2,000 pesos for the *capellanía* of Dr. Dn Luis Caviedes, and 7,150 pesos for [the *capellanía* of the] younger Dn Fernando.' A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 2, 1789, folios 275 v-279 v, Testamento de Dn Antonio Obligado.

42 A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 2, 1802, folios 36-51 v, Testamento de Dn Felipe Arguibel.

43 Diego Casero, for example, mentioned that he had allowed one of his houses to fall into disrepair because the rent earned by the property barely met the annual interest of the *capellanías* on it. A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 3, 1799, folios 479-558 v, Disposición testamentaria de Don Diego Casero.

44 The *mandas forzosas* (forced contributions) were a series of taxes paid from the *quinto* (fifth) of the estate of the deceased. Although the individual contributions to the *mandas* were not always large, ranging from 2 reales to 20 pesos, the sums, collected from everyone who died, did add up. The *mandas forzosas*, although usually grouped together, were actually four in number: money for the Christian captives, for the holy places of Jerusalem, for the Holy Sacrament, and for the Holy Crusade. The collection of the
mandas was occasionally entrusted to merchants; Francisco Almandos, for example, was the treasurer of the monies of the Holy Crusade.

46 A.G.N., Sucesiones 3864, Testamentaria de Vicente de Azcuenaga, 1787.
47 A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 2, 1766, folios 236 v–239, Poder para testar de Dn Domingo de Basavilbaso.
49 Ibid.
50 A.G.N., Sucesiones 8457, Testamentaria de Francisco Tellechea, 1812.

CHAPTER 6 POLITICAL AND SOCIAL AWARENESS

3 John Lynch, Spanish Colonial Administration, 1782–1810: The Intendant System in the Viceroyalty of the Rio de la Plata, p. 44.

4 They were the most geographically mobile group of porteño society and many had personally traveled to Lima, the Caribbean, New Spain or New Granada. Merchant petitions generally made reference to the condition of other merchants outside of Buenos Aires.

5 Lynch, Spanish Colonial Administration, pp. 18–19, discusses these reform policies including the lowering of the alcabala, uniformity of taxes and the lowering of duties on certain goods.


7 Archivo General de la Nación, Consulado de Buenos Aires, Tomo iv, 1799, p. 335. Other examples of merchants organizing to petition the Crown include the petition of Joaquín Pinto, Gaspar de Santa Coloma and Manuel Antonio de Gardeazabal to obtain exemption from the Jujuy customs tax for all merchants trading in that area (A.G.N., División Colonia, Sección Gobierno, Comerciales, 1780–1, Legajo 10, Expediente 7, ix–30–9–5, Instancia de Dn Joaquín Pintos, Dn Gaspar de Santa Coloma y Dn Manuel Antonio de Gardeazabal, sre. que se les permita a los mercaderes que trafican en las Provincias interiores, negociar francamente por todo el Reyno); and a petition signed by Isidro José Balbastro, Francisco Belaustegui, Antonio García López, Luis Gardeazabal, Bernardo Gregorio de las Heras, Juan Antonio Lezica, Francisco de la Peña Fernández, Tomás Antonio Romero, Gaspar Santa Coloma, Francisco Ugarte and others requesting permission to export local products via Brazil because of the British blockade (A.G.N., División Colonia Sección Gobierno, Consulado de Buenos Aires, 1799, Expedientes, Legajo 3, Expediente 30, ix–4–7–5).

8 A.G.N., División Colonia, Sección Gobierno, Consulado de Buenos Aires, Expedientes, 1798–9, Legajo 3, ix–4–7–5, Número 10, Expediente sobre exceptuar del Servicio de Milicia al Comercio, contiene an attempt to list merchants by these three categories and by their internal ranking.

9 A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 3, 1788–9, folios 30–30 v, Poder de los pulperos de esta ciudad a Dn Juan Almey.

10 A.G.N., División Colonia, Sección Gobierno, Comerciales, 1772–3, Legajo 8, Expediente 4, ix–30–9–3, Autos que siguen varios mercaderes de esta ciudad
contra los mercaderes de vandola sobre impedir a éstos que no vendan por las calles.

11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
14 Some of the shopkeepers involved in the suit, later worked themselves into the ranks of the wholesale merchants. Among them were José Gurruchaga, Mateo Ramón Alzaga, Saturnino José Alvarez, Esteban Avellaneda and Eusebio Cires.
15 Ibid., Witnesses for the peddlers included Joaquín Pinto, José Antonio Lazcano, Baltasar Franco and Miguel de Olabarrietta, wholesalers and 'subjects of distinction'.
16 Ibid.
17 See ibid., for the statements made by Adrián Garrido.
18 A.G.N., División Colonia, Sección Gobierno, Comerciales, 1788-9, Legajo 14, Expediente 13, ix-30-9-9, Sobre Elecciones de Diputados de Comercio que remplace a Dn Bernardo Larrea, y substituya a Dn Manuel Rodríguez de la Vega.
19 Ibid., Letter of 26 October 1789 to Viceroy signed by Antonio García López, Saturnino Sarasas, Casimiro Francisco de Necochea, Francisco de Lezica, Luis de Gardeazabal, Juan de Salinas, Andrés de Lista and Julián Hernández Barruso.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
23 A.G.N., División Colonia, Sección Gobierno, Consulado de Buenos Aires, Expedientes, 1798-9, Legajo 3, Número 10, ix-4-7-5, Expediente sobre exceptuar del Servicio de Milicias al Comercio.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
29 A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 1, 1796-7, folios 240-5, Testamento otorgado en virtud de poder por Da Josefa Gabriela de Lascano y el Doctor Dn Benito González Ribadabia.
30 Many merchants, for example, left inheritances to friends and relatives in their patria; donations for masses in the churches of their hometowns, and gifts of religious objects were also very common.
31 A.G.N., División Colonia, Sección Gobierno, Niños Expósitos y Varios, 1771-1809, Legajo 32, ix-7-9-5. For a general discussion of the Amigos del País, see Robert Shafer, Economic Societies in the Spanish World (1763-1821) (Syracuse, New York, 1958). Although it was not difficult to form an economic society, none was founded in Buenos Aires during the colonial period.
33 Ibid., Much the same sense of paisanaje and support of the Amigos del País was found among Mexican merchants. Brading, Miners and Merchants, p. 108.
35 Céspedes del Castillo, Lima y Buenos Aires, p. 22.
36 Types of cases brought to Comerciales included bankruptcy, temporary insanity of a merchant, embargo of goods and mercantile contracts.
37 The Viceroyos involved in this case were Antonio Olaguer Feliú, Gabriel de
Avilés y del Fierro and Joaquín del Pino. Both Olaguer Feliú and del Pino were related, through marriage, to prominent merchant families.

Among the merchant captains in the local militia were Agustín Casimiro Aguirre, Mateo Ramón Alzaga, Saturnino Alvarez, Vicente Azcuenaga, Manuel Antonio Warnes, Domingo Basavilbaso, Domingo Belgrano Pérez, Antonio José Escalada, José Blas Gainza, Antonio García López, Juan José Lezica, José Antonio Lezica and Miguel Sáenz. The awarding of these ranks could occasion dissension among merchants, as, for example, the dispute between Agustín Casimiro de Aguirre and Mateo Ramón Alzaga over who should lead an expedition of porteño militia to Montevideo. A.G.N., Solicitudes Militares, Libro 1, A–C, folio 22, 18 setiembre de 1776, ix–13–1–1.


German O. E. Tjarks, El Consulado de Buenos Aires y sus proyecciones en la historia del Río de la Plata (Buenos Aires, 1962), pp. 300–1. Within four years, the merchants would again be conscripted into the militia, this time to defend Buenos Aires against the English invasions.


Lynch, Spanish Colonial Administration, p. 212.

76 In 1791, for example, Martín de Alzaga, claiming sickness and the great amount of work he had done for the city in the previous year, petitioned the Viceroy to be relieved of the position of First Town Councilman. A.G.N., División Colonia, Sección Gobierno, Solicitudes Civiles, 1790, Libro 1, Letra A–B, ix–12–9–4; and A.G.N., División Colonia, Sección Gobierno, Justicia, 1790, Legajo 26, Expediente 764, ix–31–5–3. Some merchants also attempted to avoid serving in the Consulado, again claiming that their business was too pressing and gave them no time to undertake outside duties. Martín de Sarratea, for example, petitioned the Court for an exemption which was denied 'so as not to deprive the Consulado of such a fine person'. Archivo General de la Nación, *Consulado de Buenos Aires*, Tomo 1, 1785–95, p. 328.


79 Ibid.

80 Ibid., hoja 188.


83 Archivo General de la Nación, *Consulado de Buenos Aires*, Tomo 1, pp. 11–15. The Junta was also empowered to collect funds from the merchants to support its activities in Madrid. These funds were passed to Juan Miguel de Sarratea, a kinsman of the local merchant, Martín de Sarratea, who acted on behalf of the merchants of Buenos Aires at the Court. Upon his death the funds of the Buenos Aires merchants passed into the hands of the Directors of the Cloth Guild of Madrid; in 1790 Rodríguez de la Vega and Martín de Sarratea, in the name of the merchants of Buenos Aires, gave their power of attorney to Bernardo Sancho de Larrea, now a resident in Spain, to recover the funds belonging to the porteño merchants. Archivo General de la Nación, *Consulado de Buenos Aires*, Tomo 1, pp. 98 and 118–19.


86 Scheuss de Studer, *La trata de Negros*, pp. 302–3. Among those signing 'una representación para que se prohibiesen las arribadas de buques estranjeros al Río de la Plata' were Esteban Villanueva, Joaquín Arana, Luis Gardeazabal, José Martínez de Hoz, Joaquín Pinto, Francisco Antonio Herrero and Francisco Llano, all among the monopolist group of porteño merchants. A.G.N., División Colonia Sección Gobierno, Consulado de Buenos Aires, Expedientes, 1800–2, Legajo 4, Expediente 59, ix–4–7–6.


88 Ibid., pp. 112, 887.


90 Ibid.
Notes to pages 127–133

91 The Royal Cédula of November 1791 permitted the import of slaves in Spanish or foreign ships, and the export of frutos to pay for these blacks.


93 Ibid.

94 Ibid.


96 Ibid.

97 Ibid.

98 Ibid.

99 Ibid.

100 Ibid.

101 Ibid.

102 Ibid.

103 Ibid.

104 Ibid., Real de Azúa’s suggestion on the end of export duty on hides was somewhat self-serving as he was a hide merchant.

105 Ibid.


108 Ibid., Cabildo of 22 January 1809, pp. 28–9.

109 Ibid.

110 Williams Alzaga, Martín de Alzaga, p. 10.

111 Four other merchants (Olaguer Reynals, Esteban Villanueva, Juan Antonio de Santa Coloma and Francisco Neyra) were ordered into exile on the Patagonian coast by Viceroy Liniers because of this uprising. The merchants were all rescued from their harsh confinement, where they claimed they were in danger of perishing, by Governor Elio of Montevideo, who was in open rebellion against Liniers across the river. While the merchants remained in Montevideo they appealed for justice to the king, complaining of the evils which they had suffered, including forced separation from their families and the sacking of their homes by officers of the new Cabildo. Esteban Villanueva had fared the worst: 47,830 silver pesos and 11,217 onzas de oro had been taken from his home during its sacking. A.G.N., División Colonia, Sección Gobierno, Proceso por Independencia y sedición, 1º de enero de 1809, ix–23–4–1 and ix–23–4–2; A.G.N., División Colonia, Sección Gobierno, Reales Ordenes, 1809–11, Libro 39, Foja 110, ix–25–3–2.

112 Enrique Williams Alzaga, Dos Revoluciones (Buenos Aires, 1963), argues that Alzaga planned to set up an independent pro-Spanish government.

113 Ibid., p. 25.

114 Ibid., ‘Commerce with foreign countries and the consequent introduction of so many foreigners in these dominions has caused all of our trouble. Until this commerce is prohibited and the realm is cleansed of all this rabble, we will always be surrounded by domestic enemies, by the unfaithful and the traitorous; these dominions will be exposed to capture by the enemy, and finally everything will be lost.’
CHAPTER 7  GASPAR DE SANTA COLOMA, MERCHANT OF BUENOS AIRES

1 In 1792, the year of his death, Juan Antonio de Santa Coloma's estate totaled 51,021 reales vellon, the equivalent of less than 500 Argentine pesos.


3 A.G.N., División Colonia, Sección Gobierno, Licencias y Pasaportes, Libro 14, Rod–San, Hoja 447, ix–12–8–13. A wealthy uncle had lent Santa Coloma 500 pesos to cover passage and serve as a stake in setting up a business.


8 Facultad de Filosofía y Letras (Universidad de Buenos Aires), Documentos para la historia argentina, Tomo XI, Territorio y población: Padrón de la ciudad de Buenos Aires (1778) (Buenos Aires, 1919), p. 139.

9 Iglesia de la Merced, Libro de Casamientos, Tomo 6, folio 182 v.

10 On 10 August 1752, Azcuenaga, aged 37, married Rosa Basavilbaso, the 14-year-old daughter of Domingo Basavilbaso, an important merchant of Basque origin, and María Ignacia de Urtubia. Iglesia de la Merced, Libro de Casamientos, Tomo 5, folio 35.

11 Iglesia de la Merced, Libro de Casamientos, Tomo 5, folios 349 and 379.

12 A.G.N., Registro de Escribano, Tomo 5, 1778, folios 185 v–186 v, Capital de D.n Agustín Antonio de Lazcano [sic] and folios 186 v–189 v, Carta de dotte de Da María Euzenia de Azcuenaga.

13 A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 5, 1781, folios 157 v–161 v, Capital de D.n Gaspar de Santa Coloma. Included in the inventory of goods belonging to Santa Coloma were textiles worth 9,299 pesos 4½ reales wholesale or 15,809 pesos retail (a retail markup of 79 percent over cost). The textiles featured large quantities of bayetas (flannel baize), puntivis (linen), and bretanas (Brittany linen); also listed were bramantes floretes (first quality Brabant linen), clarín ordiario (cambric), angaripolas (striped calico), indíanas (printed calico), paños de 2a (coarse wool stuff), trípes lisos (smooth plush), anascotes (woolen serge), sarguillas (thin serge), melania (Madrid silk), paso (lace), tafetán doble (heavy taffeta) and skirt lengths of black velvet. In addition his stock included 1,900 pesos worth of sundries, among which were 22 reams of paper, 36 rolls of ribbon, two pounds of silk sewing thread, 42 pewter plates, 77 handkerchiefs, and 530 dozen knives.

In addition to these goods, he listed a credit of over 56,150 pesos in outstanding debts due him. The largest debt was owed by Don Pedro José Otero, his agent in Salta, who was in debt for more than 15,000 pesos for a shipment of goods which Santa Coloma had turned over to him eight months earlier. Otero owed Santa Coloma an additional 6,000 pesos in silver, money borrowed so that Otero could pay for goods purchased earlier from Manuel Rodríguez de la Vega, another porteño merchant. Santa Coloma had early perfected the skill and practice, which he would use throughout his
mercantile career, of assuming all commercial debts of major clients in the interior, thereby becoming their sole link to Buenos Aires commerce.

Martín de Alzaga, Santa Coloma’s former clerk, was another of the merchant’s major debtors. Alzaga owed Santa Coloma over 5,200 pesos, representing both cash loans and goods which the older merchant had provided between 1778 and 1780 to help Alzaga establish himself in commerce. The Alzaga debts demonstrate an important and frequent practice of the merchants of Buenos Aires, that of providing loans to worthy clerks to assist them in setting up their independent commercial enterprises.

In addition to monies owed by Otero and Alzaga, other outstanding debts due Santa Coloma totaled 29,698 pesos. These debts, varying from a little over 100 pesos to thousands of pesos, were owed by various people both in Buenos Aires and the provinces. Included among those owing money to Santa Coloma were residents of Santa Fé, Mendoza, Tucumán, Rosario, Córdoba, Maldonado and Montevideo, Jujuy, Salta and Santiago de Chile. Santa Coloma, in the years between his entry into wholesale commerce and his marriage, had created a commercial network linking him to several major regions of the Viceroyalty. The transactions involved in these debts varied; several persons owed money for Castillian goods which they had purchased, goods which he had shipped to the cities of the interior. By 1781, he was also engaged in the resale of products from the interior, especially Paraguayan yerba mate, a trade which he was active in throughout his career.

At least two of Santa Coloma’s debtors owed money through transactions which used a third merchant as middle-man. Don Pedro Carol, a resident of Santiago, for example, owed over 1,500 pesos for goods which had originally been sold by Santa Coloma to Manuel Antonio de Tejada, a resident of Salta. Tejada has forwarded the goods to Carol, with Carol assuming Tejada’s original debt.

Not all of Santa Coloma’s outstanding debts were incurred by merchants who purchased goods on credit. In addition to the money provided Pedro Otero to pay his debt to a rival porteño merchant, Santa Coloma had lent 4,652 pesos to Martín Otero (Pedro’s brother), a resident of Jujuy, to cancel an outstanding debt for goods received from the Escalada brothers, merchants of Buenos Aires. Again, after establishing firm working relationships with trusted merchants of the interior, Santa Coloma followed his practice of assuming at least his clients’ major commercial debts in Buenos Aires. In this manner, he helped to simplify the accounts of the provincial traders, while monopolizing their contacts in the port city.

While he had more than 56,000 pesos due him by fellow merchants, he in turn owed 16,154 pesos to merchants both in Buenos Aires and in Spain. More than 12,000 pesos were owed to Agustín Casimiro de Aguirre and Manuel José Micheo, the amount outstanding on a large shipment of goods (totaling 54,000 pesos) purchased in 1780. Cash on hand totaled 16,705 pesos.

Ugarte’s first wife, Vicenta Romana Uriarte, was a first cousin of Vicente de Azcuénaga; Azcuénaga and his wife served as compadres de casamiento (godparents) for the couple, and were also named godparents for five of Ugarte’s children. Ugarte, after the death of his first wife, married Azcuénaga’s daughter, María Eugenia, herself a widow. Santa Coloma and Ugarte therefore became concuñados (brothers-in-law) after 1800.

Santa Coloma and Osorio did not get along; by 1784 both men entered a long legal suit over Osorio’s proposed improvements to his house. A.G.N., División Colonia, Sección Gobierno, Tribunales, Legajo 54, Expediente 11, IX–35–9–4, Dn Gaspar de Santa Coloma con Dn Juan de Osorio sobre unos
edificios altos de las casa de este; A.G.N., División Colonia, Sección Gobierno, Tribunales, Legajo 9, Expediente 14, ix-35-1-5, Dn Gaspar de Santa Coloma con Dn Juan de Osorio sobre unos edificios altos de las casas de este.

17 Iglesia de la Merced, Libro de Bautismos, Tomo 15, folio 120 v; Libro de Bautismos, Tomo 15, folios 296 v–297; Libro de Bautismos, Tomo 16, folio 202.


19 Ibid., Rafael's death certificate is found in La Merced Church, Libro de Difuntos, Tomo 1, folio 199. He was not the only member of Santa Coloma's household to die during this smallpox epidemic; Martina, an orphan being raised in Santa Coloma's house, succumbed a month later. Iglesia de la Merced, Libro de Difuntos, Tomo 1, folio 203.

20 A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 4, 1815, folios 327–32 v, Testamento de Dn Gaspar de Santa Coloma por su viuda D.a Flora de Azcuenaga, en virtud de poder. Francisco de Asís Martín was inoculated against smallpox in 1793. The infant mortality rate for the Santa Coloma offspring was higher than that for merchants' children as a whole.

21 Iglesia de la Merced, Libro de Difuntos, Tomo 1, folio 94.


23 García held the key to the rooms which Santa Coloma used to store yerba mate. When the Comandante del Resguardo Don Francisco Ortega y Monrroy, under arrest in an adjoining room, escaped through a tunnel burrowed from his prison to Santa Coloma's storeroom, García came under suspicion. Santa Coloma was less than convinced of García's innocence, but he realized that García's large family, claiming that García had been imprisoned while working for Santa Coloma, would soon come to the merchant for money. As García's employer, Santa Coloma petitioned the court to free him, offering to post bond himself. A.G.N., División Colonia, Sección Gobierno, Solicitudes de Presos, P–Z, Libro 11, Hoja 233–233 v, ix-12-9-13.

24 Taybo, acting for the Marqués de Carballo, a Cádiz merchant, was seeking to collect more than 2,500 pesos which Carballo had given to the Vilanovas to cover prior rental of a house in Spain and other debts. A.G.N., División Colonia, Sección Gobierno, Hacienda, 1760–1805, Legajo 68, Expediente 1831, ix-33-7-10, Expediente promovido por Dn Josef Ignacio Taybo en nombre del Marques de Carvallo contra Dn Juan Francisco Antonio de Vilanova, y su hijo Dn Josef sobre el cobre de la cantidad de 2,596 pesos.

25 A.G.N., División Colonia, Sección Gobierno, Tribunales, Legajo A–15, Expediente 13, ix-40-3-1, Vicente de Azcuenaga con Ana Azcuenaga sobre Información de noblesa. Olaguer Feliú would serve from 1797 to 1799 as acting Viceroy of the Río de la Plata.

26 Iglesia de la Merced, Libro de Casamientos, Tomo 6, folio 230.


30 Ibid., Letter of 20 May 1791 to Vicente Azcuenaga.

31 Ibid., Letter of 20 May 1791.

32 Ibid., Letter of 6 June 1792 to Vicente Azcuenaga.

33 Ibid., Letter of 24 February 1796 to Bernardo Sancho Larrea.


35 Iglesia de la Merced, Libro de Casamientos, Tomo 6, folios 298 and 315.
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37 Iglesia de la Merced, Libro de Bautismos, Tomo 15, folio 293 v; Libro de Bautismos, Tomo 16, folio 184.

38 Iglesia de la Merced, Libro de Bautismos, Tomo 15, folio 120 v; Libro de Bautismos, Tomo 15, folios 296 v-297.


42 This partnership was dissolved in 1793, with a net profit of 24,000 pesos divided equally between the partners. Shortly thereafter Juan Antonio purchased 40,000 pesos worth of goods from his uncle on credit and set up his own store half a block away.

43 A.G.N., División Colonia, Sección Gobierno, Consulado de Buenos Aires, Expedientes, 1798-9, Legajo 3, Número 10, ix-4-7-5, Expediente sobre exceptuación del Servicio de Milicias al Comercio.

44 *Almanak Mercantil: Guía de Comerciantes para el año de 1802* (Madrid, 1802), pp. 397-8.


54 Santa Coloma was named alternate to the second Consul in the 1794 Consulado, but never took office. Emilio Ravignani, 'El Virreinato del Río de la Plata', in Ricardo Levene, *Historia de la Nación Argentina*, Vol. IV, p. 182.

55 A.G.N., División Colonia, Sección Gobierno, Justicia, 1787, Legajo 22, Expediente 624, iv-31-5-3. Legajo obrado sobre oferta hecha por Dn Gaspar de Santa Coloma de dar cinco mil pesos para la construcción del retablo de Señor San Martín Patrón de esta ciudad por que se le exima de cargos consejiles que anualmente elige el Illustre Cavildo.
Notes to pages 150–159

60 A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 4, 1815, folios 327–332 v. Testamento de Dn Gaspar de Santa Coloma por su viuda D.a Flora de Azcuénaga, en virtud de poder.
61 Ibid.
63 A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 2, 1802, folios 631–633 v, Escritura de donación y fundación de una esquela pública por Dn Gaspar de Santa Coloma.
69 A.G.N., Santa Coloma, Libro Maestro de Cuentas Generales, 1778–83, vii–6–5–7, contains much information on trade with the interior. For additional lists of goods sent to the interior see Santa Coloma, Libro Copiador de Ventas y Remesas de Efectos, 1792–1805, vii–6–5–16. For the risks involved in the shipment of yerba mate, see A.G.N., División Colonia, Sección Gobierno, Tribunales, S–7, Expediente 13, ix–42–6–2, Gaspar de Santa Coloma con el apoderado de una piragua de propiedad de Juan Bautista Gregorio Espinosa, por averiguación de las averías ocasionadas en dicha embarcación en el viaje al Paraguay.
71 Ibid., folio 138 v. The money borrowed from Gardeazabal belonged to Juan de Somalo, a military man.
72 Ibid., folios 139 v and 145 v.
73 Ibid., folios 158 v–159.
74 Ibid., folio 158 v.
75 Ibid., folio 162 v.
76 Ibid.
77 Ibid., folio 154 v.
78 Ibid., folios 168 v–169.
80 For example, Don Francisco Manuel de Costas, of Salta, turned over almost
19,000 pesos to Santa Coloma in 1782. During the next two years, Santa Coloma sent Costas dry goods, sewing thread, iron and steel, charging these goods off against the previous cash deposit. A.G.N., Gaspar de Santa Coloma, Libro de Cuentas Corrientes con las Provincias de Tucumán y Paraguay, 1783-91, vii-6-5-9, folios 5-17.

81 An example is the account of Don Blas de Acosta of Paraguay with Santa Coloma. In July 1781, Acosta turned over 1,442 pesos to Santa Coloma, 'money which will remain in my keeping, at his disposition, until he wants to draw against it'. During the next three years, Acosta drew against this account nine times. A.G.N., Gaspar de Santa Coloma, Libro de Cuentas Corrientes con las Provincias de Tucumán y Paraguay, 1783-91, vii-6-5-9, folios 166 v-167. This type of transaction would occur with increasing frequency from 1790 on.

82 A.G.N., Gaspar de Santa Coloma, Libro Copiador de Cartas para España, 1788-96, vii-6-5-14, Letter of 16 November 1789 to Juan Antonio de Santa Coloma.

83 Ibid., Letter of 30 July 1794 to Bernardo Sancho Larrea.

84 In 1792, for example, Santa Coloma acted in the name of Bernardo Sancho Larrea, ex-porteño merchant residing in Madrid, to recover 212 pesos of goods from José Badillo. A.G.N., División Colonia, Sección Gobierno, Tribunales, Legajo L-9, Expediente 15, 1792, ix-41-5-5, Dn Gaspar de Santa Coloma como apoderado de Dn Bernardo Sancho Larrea por cantidad de pesos contra Dn José Badillo.

85 Santa Coloma's store and warehouse, purchased in 1778, was worth 6,288 pesos; his home, purchased in 1782 was, after repairs, appraised at 31,000 pesos. The two rooms, which Santa Coloma bought in 1792 were worth 2,202 pesos, making his total investment in urban property 38,490 pesos. The chacra turned over to Santa Coloma in 1791 was worth 17,000 pesos. A.G.N., Gaspar de Santa Coloma, Libro de Caja Número 1, 1787-1809, vii-6-5-13, Cuenta y razon de las fincas que poseo en esta Capital y fuera de ella...

86 A.G.N., Gaspar de Santa Coloma, Libro Maestro de Cuentas Generales, 1778-83, vii-6-5-7, folio 41 v.

87 A.G.N., Gaspar de Santa Coloma, Libro de Cuentas, 1772-1829, vii-6-5-6, folios 277-8.


89 A.G.N., División Colonia, Sección Gobierno, Licencias y Pasaportes, 1788, Libro 14, Rod-San, ix-12-8-13, Hojas 445-7.


91 A.G.N., División Colonia, Sección Gobierno, Solicitudes Civiles, H-Ll, Libro 4, folios 159-164 v, ix-12-9-7, Felix Llanos suplica se mande a Don Gaspar de Santa Coloma para que lo habilite como le prometió o sino le satisfaga los salarios correspondientes a mas de cuatro años.

92 A.G.N., Gaspar de Santa Coloma, Libro de Cuentas, 1772-1829, vii-6-5-6, folios 99 v and 291 and A.G.N., Registro de Escribano 4, 1815, folios 327-32 v, Testamento de Dn Gaspar de Santa Coloma por su viuda D.a Flora de Azcuénaga, en virtud de poder.

93 A.G.N., División Colonia, Sección Gobierno, Solicitudes Civiles, H-Ll, Libro 4, folios 159-164 v, ix-12-9-7, Felix Llanos suplica se mande a Don Gaspar de Santa Coloma para que lo habilite como le prometió o sino le satisfaga los salarios correspondientes a mas de cuatro años.
94 A.G.N., Gaspar de Santa Coloma, Libro Copiador de Cartas para España, 1788-96, viii-6-5-14, Letter of 10 July 1790 to Juan Antonio de Santa Coloma.
95 A.G.N., División Colonia, Sección Gobierno, Solicitudes Civiles, H-Ll, Libro 4, folios 159-164 v, ix-12-9-7.
96 Ibid.
97 Ibid.
98 See A.G.N., Gaspar de Santa Coloma, Libro de Cuentas, 1772-1829, viii-6-5-6, folios 99 v and 291, for an example of payment of a clerk's annual salary.
99 A.G.N., Gaspar de Santa Coloma, Libro Copiador de Cartas para España, 1788-96, viii-6-5-14, Letter of 1 January 1790 to Agustín de Arrivillaga, is an excellent example of this type of market report. Included in Santa Coloma's comments are statements such as 'Hats from Seville are difficult to sell... because vicuña hats from Peru have been introduced and all others have fallen in price.'
100 A.G.N., Gaspar de Santa Coloma, Libro Copiador de Cartas para España, 1788-96, viii-6-5-14, Letter of 1 January 1789.
101 Ibid., Letter of 1 September 1789.
102 Ibid., and Enrique de Gandia, Buenos Aires Colonial (Buenos Aires, 1957), p. 32.
105 Ibid., vii-6-5-18, Letter of 13 March 1802 to Luis Francisco de Gardeazabal and Gandia, Buenos Aires Colonial, p. 54.
107 Ibid., Letter of 13 March 1802 to Luis Francisco de Gardeazabal and Gandía, Buenos Aires Colonial, p. 54.
112 'If you could see the Company of grenadiers which Liniers has formed, made up of gangs of common laborers, you would find it bizarre to see them learning how to use arms, how to wear a uniform. As for the inclination which these people have toward military service, you would be astonished, for you well know the character of these people.' A.G.N., Gaspar de Santa Coloma, Copiador de Cartas para España, vii-6-5-18, Letter of 15 December 1808 to Juan Angel Molinuevo and Enrique Williams Alzaga, Martín de Alzaga en la reconquista y en la defensa de Buenos Aires, 1806-1807 (Buenos Aires, 1971), pp. 181-2.
113 Ibid., p. 181; ibid., Letter of 1 August 1807 to Antonio Olaguer Feliú and Williams Alzaga, Martín de Alzaga, pp. 189-93.
114 Williams Alzaga, Martín de Alzaga, pp. 92-9.
CONCLUSION


2 Carlos E. Corona Baratech, ‘Notas para un estudio de la sociedad en el Río
de la Plata durante el Virreinato’, Anuario de Estudios Americanos, 8 (1951), p. 106.
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   Tribunales
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