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## Landed but not Powerful: The Colonial Estancieros of Buenos Aires (1750–1810)

CARLOS A. MAYO

**I**N most of the regions studied in colonial Spanish America, the hacendados have been portrayed as wealthy and powerful members of the elite. In New Spain the nobility invested heavily in land, and in León, in the Bajío, hacendados staffed the local cabildo and were at the apex of the rural social structure. Venezuela by the late eighteenth century also had developed a powerful hacendado class: the cacao planters were, in fact, the most important members of the local oligarchy. Already in the late sixteenth century in Peru, *heredados* dedicated to viticulture built substantial houses in Arequipa, bought public offices, and presided over the social hierarchy. By the middle of the seventeenth century, Chile had a full-blown landed aristocracy of *encomenderos* and *nonencomenderos*, while a century and a half later the intendencia of La Paz had a thriving and internally stratified hacendado sector with the most prosperous members—the owners of multiple haciendas—enjoying full elite status. A recent study of the Lambayeque region in Peru identifies the hacendados there as the true source of power. Summarizing the existing literature on colonial large landowners, Susan Ramírez has characterized the hacendados as members of a wealthy, urban-based elite who played multiple social roles, lived lavishly, and exerted considerable influence.<sup>1</sup>

I wish to thank Zacarías Moutoukias for his comments on an earlier draft, Eduardo Saguier for his generous cooperation, and Judith Sweeney for her help with my English. Alicia Vidaurreta and my colleagues in the Centro de Estudios de Historia Americana Colonial at the Universidad Nacional de La Plata have also provided valuable insights.

1. For New Spain, Doris M. Ladd, *The Mexican Nobility at Independence* (Austin, 1976), 39–46; for León, D. A. Brading, *Haciendas and Ranchos in the Mexican Bajío* (Cambridge, 1978), 115–116; for Venezuela, P. Michael McKinley, *Pre-Revolutionary Caracas: Politics, Economy and Society* (Cambridge, 1987), 78–88; for Peru, Keith A. Davies, *Landowners in Colonial Peru* (Austin, 1984), 141–150; for Chile, Mario Góngora, *Encomenderos*

The traditional vision of social relations on the late colonial pampa, held until recently by most historians, also proclaimed the existence of a powerful and rich *estanciero* class in prerevolutionary Buenos Aires. Writing in 1917, Miguel Ángel Cárcano, himself a landowner, depicted a colonial agrarian structure dominated by latifundios and a wealthy class of *estancieros* composed of bureaucrats, merchants, and military men. Prudencio C. Mendoza, in the late 1920s, also portrayed a countryside where big cattle estates and powerful *hacendados* were the norm. Even though Mendoza admitted that small *estancias* existed, he considered the latifundio to be the prevailing form of land ownership. Indeed, he divided rural society into two separate and contrasting layers—the rich *estancieros* at the top and the poor, *gauchos* and Indians, at the bottom. The same vision of the colonial latifundio lingers on in Richard Slatta's recent study of the *gaucho*.<sup>2</sup>

How did these huge cattle ranches develop? Apparently by the progressive accumulation of *suertes de estancia* (the typical unit of measurement for grazing lands in Buenos Aires) in a few hands. Only a tiny group of influential landowners, the story goes, was able to secure legal titles to the lands they held. Thus an influential class of big *estancieros*, most of them absentee owners, developed in the late viceregal period.<sup>3</sup>

Tulio Halperín Donghi was the first noted historian to challenge, in passing, the dominant version. He warned that *hacendado* status in the late eighteenth century was not as important as it would be in the post-independence years; the age of *hacendado* dominance came only after the 1820s with the expansion of the cattle frontier. And yet no significant proof has been offered to substantiate this less grandiose vision of the colonial porteño *estanciero*. The reason for the lack of substantiation is apparent: the colonial ranchers as a social group still remain in the shadows. Rela-

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*y Estancieros, 1580–1600* (Santiago, 1970), 112; for La Paz, Herbert S. Klein, "The Structure of the Hacendado Class in Late Eighteenth-Century Alto Perú: The Intendencia de la Paz," *HAHR*, 60:2 (May 1980), 211–212; for the Lambayeque region and Spanish America generally, Susan Ramírez, *Provincial Patriarchs, Land Tenure and the Economics of Power in Colonial Peru* (Albuquerque, 1986), 243–273, and "Large Landowners," in *Cities and Society in Colonial Latin America*, ed. Louise Schell Hoberman and Susan Socolow (Albuquerque, 1986), 19–40.

2. Miguel Ángel Cárcano, *Evolución histórica del régimen de la tierra pública* (Buenos Aires, 1972), 7–8; Prudencio C. Mendoza, *Historia de la ganadería argentina* (Buenos Aires, 1928), 95, 98; Richard W. Slatta, *Los gauchos y el ocaso de la frontera* (Buenos Aires, 1985), 161.

3. Horacio Giberti, *Historia económica de la ganadería argentina* (Buenos Aires, 1970), 47–48. Like Mendoza, Giberti claims that by the end of the eighteenth century no more than six landowners held unquestioned legal title to their lands. See also C. A. Assadourian, G. Beato, and J. C. Chiaramonte, *De la conquista a la independencia* (Buenos Aires, 1972), 321.

tively little has been written about them, and much of what has been published deals only with the history of their guild, the Junta de Hacendados.<sup>4</sup> We still lack a comprehensive study of their patterns of behavior and of the internal dynamics of the colonial estanciero sector at the regional level, a lack this article aims to remedy for the sixty-year period that preceded the wars of independence. In discussing the estancieros I will talk about some of the relevant themes that historians have used to study other colonial social groups—their regional origins, the degree of their literacy, their patterns of marriage, their investments and their residence, their entrepreneurial activities, their life-styles, their relations with the church, and finally the extent of their power.

This study is based on a sample of 249 estancieros, taken from wills and probate records. While information about properties and investments exists for the entire group, I was only able to secure data about the personal lives of 115 of them. I have also consulted colonial censuses, travelers' accounts, and biographical dictionaries. Following the prevailing usage of the colonial period, I have considered an estanciero to be anyone owning or exploiting a ranch in Buenos Aires.

### The Cattle Economy

The combination of growing markets for hides in Europe and for salted meat in Brazil and Cuba, together with the more liberal commercial policies fostered by the Bourbons, favored the expansion of ranching in the littoral region of the Río de la Plata during the late eighteenth century. The export of hides, for instance, rose from an annual average of 446,757 units for the period 1779–84 to 758,117 units for the period 1792–96. During the period of maximum expansion, the countryside around Buenos Aires accounted for approximately 30 percent of the total number of hides sent to Europe, clearly lagging behind other ranching areas of the region, notably the Banda Oriental. This should not surprise us, since during the viceregal period what Emilio Coni called “el corredor porteño” was not considered the most appropriate land for cattle ranching, in part because of its shortage of firewood, its poor drainage, and the Indian menace.<sup>5</sup>

4. Tulio Halperín Donghi, “La expansión ganadera de la campaña de Buenos Aires,” in *Los fragmentos del poder: de la oligarquía a la poliarquía argentina*, ed. Torcuato di Tella and Halperín Donghi (Buenos Aires, 1969), 41–45. On the Junta, see Raúl Osvaldo Fradkin, “El gremio de hacendados en Buenos Aires durante la segunda mitad del siglo XVIII,” in *Cuadernos de Historia Regional*, 3 (Apr. 1987); Dedier Norberto Marquieghi, “Estancia y poder político en un partido de la campaña bonaerense (Luján, 1756–1821)” (Tesis de licenciatura, Universidad Nacional de Luján, 1988); Eduardo Azcuy Ameghino and Gabriela Gressores, “Problemática y organización de los hacendados bonaerenses” (ms., 1988).

5. On hide production, Juan Carlos Garavaglia, “Economic Growth and Regional Dif-

By 1810 the area between the city and the Salado River consisted of ten *partidos*, or districts. Settled in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the countryside around the port city was one of the oldest ranching areas in the littoral. Cereal production was relevant too, not only in the *partidos* closer to the city (such as Conchas, Matanza, and Costa) but also in the north (Areco), in the west (Luján), and even in the southern district of Magdalena. But by the mid-eighteenth century cattle ranching was predominant in the northern *pagos*, and it tended to increase in the southern *partidos* of Magdalena and San Vicente during the last decades of the colonial period. As rural production expanded, so did rural population—from 6,033 inhabitants in 1744 to 12,925 in 1778 and 41,168 in 1815. The hacendado population grew considerably during the same period. The 1778 census for rural Buenos Aires does not clearly specify the occupation of the heads of household, but the 1789 *padrón* of hacendados includes a total of 577 hacendados/estancieros in the *partidos* of Pilar, Areco, and Magdalena. Magdalena alone had 63. By 1815 the total number in the province of Buenos Aires had risen to 1,469, with Magdalena accounting for 146 of them.<sup>6</sup>

During the last decades of the colonial period the cattle ranchers of Buenos Aires were far from being a homogeneous class. On the contrary, they were a rather heterogeneous and internally stratified lot, due in part to the differing degree of their control over the means of production, especially of land. Some owned land outright; others were renters or occupied the land of unknown owners; and some exploited fiscal lands. In spite of this stratification the words *estanciero*, *criador*, and, to a lesser extent, *hacendado* were used with a laxity that bothered the wealthier members of the group. The labels were applied almost without distinction to both rich ranchers and poor ones, whites as well as those of mixed ancestry. The 1778 census for the city of Buenos Aires, for instance, includes as *estancieros* Nicolás Arriola and Matías Barragán, Spaniards, and Francisco Albarracín and Francisco Cortés, mestizos.<sup>7</sup>

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ferentiations: The River Plate Region at the End of the Eighteenth Century," *HAHR*, 65:1 (Feb. 1985), 53–54; on suitability for cattle ranching, Halperín Donghi, "La expansión ganadera de la campaña de Buenos Aires," 41.

6. On cattle ranching, Garavaglia, "Producción ganadera en la campaña porteña: 1700–1820," in *El mundo rural rioplatense a fines de la época colonial: estudios sobre producción y mano de obra* (Buenos Aires, 1989), 26–35. On Magdalena hacendados, 1789 *padrón de estancias*, Archivo General de la Nación (hereafter AGN), IX-9-7-7; Eduardo Azcuy Ameghino and Gabriela Martínez Dougnac, *Tierra y ganado en la campaña de Buenos Aires* (Buenos Aires, 1989); 1815 census for rural Buenos Aires, AGN, X-8-10-4.

7. On land exploitation, Garavaglia, "¿Existieron los gauchos?" in *Anuario IEHS*, 2 (1987), 43. For the census, "Padrón de la ciudad de Buenos Aires, 1778," in Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, *Documentos para la historia argentina* (Buenos Aires, 1913–), XI. By the beginning of the nineteenth century a certain distinction began to be made between hacen-

If a majority of the import-export merchants were Spanish, with creoles forming a solid minority, among the estancieros creoles predominated. Out of 75 whose place of birth is known, 60 were creoles and 14 peninsular Spaniards. This predominance of the locally born is confirmed by the 1815 census, according to which only 9 out of 325 estancieros in the partido of San Vicente, the most heavily populated in the Buenos Aires countryside, were born in Spain.<sup>8</sup> The vast majority of the creoles were born in Buenos Aires, while the Spaniards came from different parts of Spain, especially from Galicia, Andalusia, and Catalonia. The countryside was thus firmly in creole hands. The Spanish immigrants apparently lacked interest in the cattle-ranching sector of the local economy—another sign of its relatively unimportant status and of the existence of better alternatives for upward social mobility.

### Marriage Patterns

Typically, in the process of becoming an estanciero, the ownership of cattle came first, and later the acquisition of land. Indeed, some ranchers never achieved land ownership and remained renters throughout their lives. Parents bequeathed cattle to their children when they married, starting them in the business. Antonio Romero, a cattle rancher from Magdalena, gave 600 head of cattle to his son Lucas, and Félix Ramallo bequeathed a drove of cattle to his son Miguel.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, many estancieros married with no personal belongings other than livestock. That was, for instance, the case of Andrés Lozano, who brought with him when he married 100 head of cattle, 100 horses, and some mares. Fermín Peña had only 40 head of cattle when he married María Isidora Solomón.<sup>10</sup>

Dowries, when they existed, were limited to a few items—some cattle, a few clothes, other personal belongings, and maybe some land or a slave. (See, for example, Table 1.) Ninfa Lagos and Felipa Gómez de Saravia brought only cattle to their marriages. Felipa's dowry consisted of 7 head of cattle, 7 calves, and 50 sheep. María Margarita Jiménez's dowry was a little more substantial, consisting of 400 head of cattle, 1,000 *varas* of land, a slave, and household goods.<sup>11</sup> Only a few estancieros could come

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dados and estancieros. Thus the 1815 census uses both terms—*hacendados* seem to be more substantial ranchers and are frequently called "don" by the census takers.

8. On creoles as merchants, Susan Socolow, *The Merchants of Buenos Aires 1778–1810: Family and Commerce* (Cambridge, 1978), 16–17. For the 9 out of 325 figure, 1815 census for rural Buenos Aires, AGN, X-8-10-4.

9. Protocolos Notariales, AGN, Registro 2, 1778; Registro 3, 1790/93, 120.

10. *Ibid.*, Registro 6, 1754, 323v.

11. *Ibid.*, Registro 3, 1775/76, 356v.

TABLE 1: The Dowry of Antonia Isarra

Description of items	Value in pesos
Forty head of cattle, both cows and bulls	Not valued
One red skirt made of serge with silver ribbons	14
One blue skirt made of <i>sempiterna</i>	7
One scarlet skirt made of taffeta with a silver ribbon	30
One coat made of fine linen	10
One doublet made of <i>granilla</i>	5
A blue skirt made of <i>sempiterna</i> with a gold extremity	7
A blue blanket with red stripes	4
A blanket with an extremity of fake gold	5
Two small silver boxes	9
One box	6
Total value	97

Source: AGN, Sucesiones 6447.

up with *capitales* and dowries comparable to those of the big merchants. One such case was that of Juan de San Martín and Gerónima Avellaneda: he brought 24,000 pesos to the marriage and she, a dowry valued at 8,000 pesos. In his will, Juan de San Martín, one of the richest *estancieros* of Buenos Aires in the early 1750s, left a house in the city, two *chacras*, and four *estancias*.<sup>12</sup> Another exceptional case was that of Josefa Alvarado, the widow of the wealthy merchant and rancher Miguel Riglos. Josefa's dowry was worth 24,000 pesos.<sup>13</sup> These cases, however, were extremely rare. The humble origins of many *estancieros* come clear in the biographies of those who married without property, who brought to their weddings only "la decencia de sus personas." In 32 out of 115 cases one or both of the marriage partners were propertyless.

Cattle ranching represented for these unknown newlyweds a potentially valuable channel for upward mobility. An illegitimate son of Alejo Pessoa y Figueroa and of Juana Gómez, Fermín Pessoa married Gregoria Navarro, and after her death he wed Juana Chaleco. Neither of them had property. But when Pessoa died, he left three *estancias*, a *chacra*, three urban properties, and nine slaves. No less spectacular was the rise of Manuel Pinazo. He started out as a *pulpero* in Pilar and entered the rural militia. His military career was extremely successful—he rose from *cabo de escuadra* to *maestre de campo*. As such he became a leading personality on the frontier; his opinions in matters dealing with Indian policy were always listened to by the authorities. He also elaborated different

12. Ibid., Registro 1, 1755, IX-49-2-9.

13. Ibid., Registro 1, 1770.

plans to advance the frontier and commanded several expeditions to the salt deposits. In 1748 he was appointed *alguacil mayor de la hermandad*, and later he served as *alcalde ordinario* of the cabildo of Luján, where his influence was decisive. When he married Polonia Amarilla neither had any property, but when he made his testament in 1794, Pinazo left two houses, two urban lots, 22,000 *varas* in Escobar, an estancia in Luján, a mill, and twelve slaves.<sup>14</sup>

Most of the estancieros studied were married; only 9 out of 115 cattle ranchers remained single throughout their lives. Although their marriage patterns deserve a closer scrutiny, the evidence we have thus far reveals that they tended to marry women of the same social standing, preferably the daughters of other estancieros. The case of Tomás Arroyo is by no means exceptional. He married Ignacia Giménez de Paz, the daughter of a well-known rancher. Their daughters, Bartola and Martina, married respectively the estancieros Pedro Díaz de Chávez and Clemente López Osornio, the grandfather of Juan Manuel de Rosas. Arroyo's son married Mercedes López Camelo, a member of a traditional family of cattle ranchers.<sup>15</sup> In Luján the Peñalbas and the Aparicios were linked by successive marriages.<sup>16</sup> The estanciero José Burgos married Francisca Jimena Gutiérrez, herself a cattle rancher.<sup>17</sup>

The purpose of this endogamous behavior is clear. By marrying within the group estancieros tried to obviate the pulverizing effects of their own inheritance practices. None of them established *mayorazgos*, and so with each new generation their lands tended to become more fragmented. Endogamy also enlarged their circles of influential relatives and in-laws. This does not mean that the estanciero group remained entirely closed. Victoria Antonia Pessoa, the daughter of Fermín Pessoa, and María Nieves Estela both married merchants. Agustina López Osornio married León Ortiz de Rozas, a military officer.

### Education and Life-Style

A clear indication that most late colonial estancieros of Buenos Aires did not belong to the elite was their extremely limited educational background. Out of 75 estancieros whose degree of literacy can be determined, 35 were illiterate. Moreover, 67 percent of the cattle ranchers of the Magdalena district were unable to sign their names on the certificate that

14. *Ibid.*, Registro 3, 1794/95; Marquieghi, "Estancia y poder político," 63–65.

15. Fradkin, "El gremio de hacendados."

16. Marquieghi, "Estancia y poder político," 70.

17. *Protocolos Notariales*, AGN, Registro 4, 1765/66, 252.

registered their brands. By the same token, 78 percent of the *criadores* of La Matanza could not sign their names.<sup>18</sup>

Not surprisingly then, most estancieros did not read books. Only 2 or 3 out of 101 had books among their personal belongings. One of these exceptions, Francisco Álvarez, had eleven books on his estancia. The other libraries were even smaller. The contrast with the Peruvian hacendados of Saña in the second half of the seventeenth century is certainly striking; in Saña almost all landowners were functionally literate, and a quarter had advanced degrees.<sup>19</sup> Given the low educational level of most of the porteño estancieros, it would not be surprising to discover that only a few of them kept systematic records of their income and expenses.

The life-style of the porteño hacendados was not as sophisticated and lavish as that of the great import-export merchants. While the average value of a merchant's home in the city was 16,222 pesos, that of an urban-dwelling estanciero was only 2,261 pesos.<sup>20</sup>

On the colonial estancia itself, both the living quarters and the facilities were generally as modest as many of their owners. Out of a total of 101 estancias, 54 had houses and 53 *ranchos* (huts).<sup>21</sup> The houses were small and unpretentious, their prices most often ranging between 6 and 60 pesos, though occasionally they were valued at 300 pesos or more. Houses of 1,000 pesos were extremely rare, and only the big estancieros could afford them. Most were made of bricks and had thatched roofs; only a few were roofed with tiles. The *ranchos* were even poorer. Their value was normally under 10 pesos, although some fetched 40 pesos. In some estancias the kitchen was separated from the main house and constituted a separate hut.

The furniture of the estancias was simple—ordinary tables, inexpensive chairs, humble cots, and occasionally a chest. A rug such as that reported for Pedro Benavídez in his rural dwelling was an exception.<sup>22</sup> Chapels were extremely rare.

Some estancias had ovens to bake bread, a circumstance that modifies the widespread belief that meat was the only food eaten on the pampa. Wells, *pozos de balde*, were not infrequent, but corrals were far more common. A few estancias had mills, *atahonas*. A humble house or a mud hut, an oven, a well, and one or more corrals were thus the simple facilities of the typical cattle ranch of colonial Buenos Aires.

18. Garavaglia, "¿Existieron los gauchos?" 48.

19. On Alvarez, Sucesiones, AGN, no. 3862. On Saña, Ramírez, *Provincial Patriarchs*, 176.

20. Socolow, *The Merchants of Buenos Aires*, 74. My figures are based on 19 houses.

21. Carlos A. Mayo and Ángela Fernández, "Anatomía de la estancia colonial bonaerense, 1750–1810" (ms., 1988), 2–3.

22. Sucesiones, AGN, no. 4364.

The estancieros did not raise only cattle. Most of them bred horses, mules, and, surprisingly, sheep. But Juan Manuel de Rosas typified the colonial estanciero in his distaste for raising domestic fowls; few estates had chickens, ducks, and turkeys. Very often ranchers combined cattle raising with agriculture, mostly wheat and corn. In the northern districts some hacendados produced textiles, too.<sup>23</sup>

Regardless of such diversification, the estancieros' main income came from the sale of cattle, hides, grease, tallow, and mules, linking the colonial estancia to three markets—the city of Buenos Aires (meat), Upper Peru (mules), and Europe (hides). Some estancieros marketed their cattle directly and at their own risk, while others resorted to intermediaries.

Although some very large rural estates existed, they did not seem to predominate. Medium-sized and small estancias were the norm. Out of a sample of 88 estancias, only 20 had a frontage of more than half a league (3,000 varas or 2.5 kilometers) and were thus probably larger than a *suerte de estancia* (1,875 hectares). A *suerte de estancia* could produce only ninety hides a year. At the same time, land ownership was more extensive than the traditional version would have us believe. Nearly 46 percent of all the hacendados registered in the 1789 census had some legal claim to the land they held. The degree of legal ownership, of course, varied from *pago* to *pago*. Restricted to 30 percent in Areco, it rose to 76 percent in Magdalena. In my sample, 88 out of the 134 estancieros for whom data were available had some legal claim to their lands. Nor was the ownership of ranch lands restricted to wealthy estancieros. Not atypical was Juana Aragón, for instance, who left a piece of property that had only 112 varas of river frontage on Cañada de Escobar.<sup>24</sup>

Investment in buildings, facilities, equipment, livestock, land, and slaves was not high. Investment in land ranged between 1 percent and 20 percent of the total value of an estate, and investment in slaves between 10 percent and 40 percent of the total value. The average capital investment of the 101 estancias sampled was low, amounting to a little over 2,217 pesos.<sup>25</sup>

The wardrobe of the estancieros reflected their rural lives. Ponchos, waistcoats (*chupas*), and a special type of trousers called *calzones* were by far the most popular clothing among the cattle ranchers. Socks and shoes were uncommon. With few exceptions, the poor estancieros lacked forks and spoons, although most owned *mates* and implements for roasting

23. Mayo and Fernández, "Anatomía de la estancia colonial bonaerense," 2, 4.

24. On land ownership in Areco and Magdalena, Garavaglia, "¿Existieron los gauchos?" 45; 1789 *padrón de estancias*, AGN, IX-9-7-7; Azcuy Ameghino and Martínez Dougnac, *Tierras y ganados*. On Aragón, Sucesiones, AGN, no. 3867.

25. Mayo and Fernández, "Anatomía de la estancia colonial bonaerense," 7.

TABLE 2: Number of Slaves Owned Per Estanciero

Number of slaves	Number of estancieros (%)	Total number of slaves
0	95 (38)	0
1	33 (13)	33
2	24 (10)	48
3	14 (6)	42
4	10 (4)	40
5	14 (6)	70
6	16 (6)	96
7	7 (3)	49
8	9 (4)	72
9	3 (1)	27
10	5 (2)	50
11	2 (1)	22
12	3 (1)	36
13	3 (1)	39
15	1 (—)	15
16	1 (—)	16
22	1 (—)	22
Unknown	8 (3)	—
Total	249 (99)	677

Source: AGN, Sala IX, Protocolos Notariales y Sucesiones.

meat (*asadores*). The inventories of the belongings of some cattle ranchers included a guitar.

Slave ownership among the big and middling estancieros was frequent but not as widespread as among the rich merchants of the city. All of the latter owned slaves while 62 percent of the estancieros studied here had slaves (see Table 2). The majority of the estancieros had between one and six bondsmen. The wealthier owned more than ten blacks, and José de Andújar left twenty-two when he died.<sup>26</sup> The poor members of the cattle-ranching group owned no slaves, and they clearly predominated. In San Vicente by 1815 only 20 percent of the *criadores* possessed slaves.

The life-style of the cattle ranchers thus varied greatly according to their incomes. The rich tried to imitate the life-style of the elite while the rest led austere lives deprived of luxuries and even comfort. Perhaps the best way to illustrate this range is to examine in some detail the personal belongings and properties of three estancieros—the wealthy Januario Fernández, the humble Santos Basualdo, and the poor Fausto Gómez.

Januario Fernández, who died in 1791, left an estate valued at 52,788 pesos 5½ reales. He owned a comfortable home in the city valued at

26. Protocolos Notariales, AGN, Registro 2, 1783, 504.

7,053 pesos and a stone house worth over 1,000 pesos on one of his two estancias. His urban properties included two vacant lots and two quintas. Fernández's two estancias stretched a total of eight leagues along the Río Sanborombón. He had 4,969 head of cattle and 16 slaves. The furniture of his urban home included at least 6 tables, 30 chairs, 2 desks, and other items. His wardrobe was impressive for an estanciero: 6 waistcoats, 5 trousers, 3 vests, 1 cape, 1 cloak, 2 hats, 5 shirts, 4 pairs of pants, 2 ponchos, a pair of boots, a pair of shoes, 4 pairs of stockings, and 1 handkerchief. The total value of his clothing was 192 pesos 2 reales. In addition, he left a carriage worth 300 pesos and silver items totaling 266 pesos.<sup>27</sup>

Santos Basualdo, on the other hand, left an estate worth only 710 pesos 6 reales. He lived in a mud hut valued at 4 pesos, owned only 2 chairs, and no slaves. His small estancia contained a total of 150 cows, 24 stallions, 225 mares, 6 mules, and 6 oxen. He owned no land. Apart from the clothing of his wife, Basualdo left only 1 hat, 2 ponchos, 2 *calzones*, 1 waistcoat, and 1 bow tie.

The situation of Fausto Gómez bordered on real poverty. His estate was valued at only 192 pesos 5½ reales. His *rancho* was falling apart when he died. He left no clothing other than that in which he was buried and had 146 head of cattle, 9 stallions, 29 mares, and 21 sheep. Fausto Gómez, of course, owned neither land nor slaves.<sup>28</sup>

Like the merchants of Buenos Aires the estancieros were deeply religious people. They too participated in the third orders and the several *cofradías* that functioned in the city. Over 50 out of the 115 cattle ranchers studied were active in these ecclesiastical institutions (see Table 3). Those affiliated with the Franciscan third order predominated, followed by those connected with Santo Domingo, then those with La Merced. In general, a positive correlation seems to have existed between the wealth of the hacendados and their affiliation with a religious third order. Among the *cofradías*, those of the Santísimo Rosario and of the cathedral were the most popular.

The possibility of joining a third order or a *cofradía* was limited to those estancieros who had a permanent or almost permanent residence in the city. The rest, confined to more limited forms of religious devotion, practiced piety even in the most isolated and distant rural areas. Chapels were exceptional on the estancias, yet estancieros rarely failed to have statues or images of their favorite saints—especially of St. Anthony, St. Joseph, and St. Francis. Crucifixes were popular and so was the cult of the Virgin Mary. At the hour of their death, the hacendados showed a clear

27. Sucesiones, AGN, no. 5873.

28. *Ibid.*, no. 4303, no. 5901.

TABLE 3: Third Order and Cofradía Affiliations of Porteño Estancieros

Institution	Number of estancieros (%)
San Francisco	22 (41)
Santo Domingo	13 (24)
La Merced	11 (20)
Cofradías	8 (15)
Total	54 (100)

Source: See Table 2.

preference for burial in the chapel of the Franciscan monastery. (Only rarely did members of third orders request to be buried in a church other than that of their order.)

Even though the estancieros founded *capellanías* and sometimes sent their sons into the priesthood, they did not serve the church in an administrative capacity with the same frequency as the export-import merchants did.<sup>29</sup> Only Francisco Rodríguez de Vida, a merchant-rancher, became *síndico* of a religious order.

### Investments

Nothing better reveals the internal stratification of the estanciero group than their different patterns of investment. As already noted, the levels of investment required for ranching itself were generally modest. In addition, a minority of wealthy estancieros, like the church and the merchant elite, diversified their sources of income by investing in different sectors of the local economy. Investment in urban property was not uncommon among the very rich. They acquired houses, lots, and quintas. A handful of estancieros bought houses in the city for rental income. An outstanding example of this was Nicolás de la Cruz, who owned ten rooms for rent in Buenos Aires.<sup>30</sup>

Fourteen estancieros out of 249 had more than one house in the city. Twenty-two owned *chacras* in addition to their estancias. A few cattle ranchers, like most of the male religious orders, had brick kilns on the outskirts of the city or on their rural estates.<sup>31</sup> Thirty-one estancieros owned mills. The ownership of a mill meant an investment of up to 400 pesos and was an attempt on the part of the estanciero to control both the production and the processing of wheat.

29. Socolow, *The Merchants of Buenos Aires*, 91–106.

30. Protocolos Notariales, AGN, Registro 4, 1770/71, 97.

31. Mayo, "Convento, economía y sociedad en el Río de la Plata, 1748–1822" (Ph.D. diss., University of California at Los Angeles, 1984), 209–210.

TABLE 4: Number of Estancias Per Estanciero

Number of estancias owned	Number of estancieros
1	213
2	17
3	5
4	4
Unknown	10
Total	249

Source: See Table 2.

The richest landowners had more than one estancia, but only a few owned three or four and were thus linked to more than one rural district. The majority had only one rural landholding (see Table 4).

The great majority of estancieros, especially the middling and small ones, lacked the capital to diversify their properties and relied on the income from their rural estates. In other words, the lower in the internal hierarchy of the hacendado group, the higher the frequency of occupational specialization. The procurador of the city was, in general, correct when he claimed that "the hacendados of this district, with the exception of those that have other business interests, are poor men with no other ways and means of living than those derived from their haciendas."<sup>32</sup>

### Residence and Social Roles

Residential patterns also reveal the lack of elite status of the great majority of the cattle ranchers. It is well known that elites in colonial Spanish America were urban-based. Most Buenos Aires hacendados, however, certainly most of the middling and small ones, lived permanently or almost permanently in the countryside, contrary to a commonly held assumption.<sup>33</sup> Contemporary observers did not fail to notice this fact. Francisco de Aguirre, for example, stated in 1783 that the great majority of the estancieros resided on their rural estates because of the low income that the estancias produced. Only those few ranchers who had other business interests lived in the city.<sup>34</sup>

The 1778 census of the city listed only 19 estancieros in Buenos Aires.<sup>35</sup>

32. Quoted by César García Belsunce, dir., *Buenos Aires su gente 1800-1830* (Buenos Aires, 1976), 218.

33. Assadourian et. al, *De la conquista a la independencia*, 321. The authors claim that the estancieros did not reside on their estancias.

34. "Diario de Aguirre," *Anales de la Biblioteca*, 4 (1904), 173.

35. "Padrón de la ciudad de Buenos Aires, 1778," in *Documentos para la historia argentina*, XI.

TABLE 5: Other Occupations of Porteño Estancieros (N = 115)

Occupations	Number of estancieros
Military men	7
Merchants	8
Pulperos	3
Clergymen	3
Artisans	1
Notaries	1
Total	23

Source: See Table 2.

In fact 91 out of 134 cattle ranchers lived permanently on their estancias (“su estancia y morada,” state the sources). Some, like Francisco Sierra of Arrecifes, lived part-time in the countryside and part-time in the city, while others were absentee landowners who left their estates in the hands of majordomos.

The hacendados were the most multifaceted group in colonial Spanish America, exercising multiple social roles.<sup>36</sup> But in Buenos Aires, only the more prominent *criadores* simultaneously played other roles (see Table 5). Seven out of 115 who did so were militia officers with ranks of captain and above. It is, of course, possible that the number of military men of one sort or another among the cattle ranchers was higher than this.<sup>37</sup>

Although all the male religious orders had estancias in the Buenos Aires countryside, only three of the individual estancieros were clergymen. Two of them, Miguel de Riglos and José de Andújar, were members of the elite, and Andújar was one of the wealthiest men in the city. Once again the contrast with Saña is striking. In that region at least half of the ecclesiastics were hacendados.<sup>38</sup> Even more noteworthy is the almost total absence of high-level bureaucrats in our sample. One was a notary and two or three were members of the cabildo of Luján.

The merchants who owned estancias were a special sector in the estanciero group. Merchant-hacendados such as Antonio Obligado, Antonio Romero, Felipe de Arguibel, Juan J. Lezica, Joaquín Cabot, and others were different from most of the cattle ranchers; they were urban dwellers, members of the elite, and active in the cabildo, the consulado, and the hacendados’ guild.<sup>39</sup> The life and career of Antonio Obligado epitomizes

36. Ramírez, “Large Landowners,” 29.

37. Mayo, “Sociedad rural y militarización de la frontera en Buenos Aires, 1737–1819,” *Jahrbuch für Geschichte von Staat, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft Lateinamerikas*, 24 (1987), 254, 260–261.

38. Ramírez, *Provincial Patriarchs*, 132.

39. Fradkin, “El gremio de hacendados,” 91.

that of a merchant-rancher in viceregal Buenos Aires. The son of Pedro Obligado and María de la Cruz Rosa y Pinedo, Antonio was born in the archbishopric of Seville. He married and had eight children and served on the *cabildo* and in the *consulado*. He was a leading member of the *hacendados'* guild and became its *apoderado*. Antonio Obligado was also active in the Franciscan third order. He bought two *estancias* along the Paraná River at Rincón del Espinillo. The larger, measuring one league by five, was purchased for 5,100 pesos and the adjoining ranch, one square league, for 2,000 pesos. In addition to his rural estates, Obligado left three houses in the city and was the founder of a dynasty of *estancieros* that still owns fractions of the original tract.<sup>40</sup> Yet commerce and not cattle ranching had been Obligado's, and most of the merchant-ranchers', source of capital accumulation. If they happened to be members of the *porteño* elite, it was because they were merchants and not because they owned land in the countryside.

The typical merchant-*estanciero*, then, first made money through commerce and later in his career bought a ranch.<sup>41</sup> In any case, merchant-*estancieros* were a small minority, constituting only 8 out of the 115 *porteño* cattle ranchers. Although the number of *estancieros* in the sample who operated in the commercial sector of the economy may have been somewhat higher, Susan Socolow's study of the *porteño* merchant confirms that commercial capital was reluctant to invest in ranching.<sup>42</sup>

### Political Power

What about the political power of the *estancieros*? With the possible exception of the *cabildo* of the small town of Luján, which was dominated by cattle ranchers, their power rarely went beyond the *pago* or district where they lived. As *alcaldes de la hermandad*, *estancieros* functioned as rural justices for the *cabildo* of Buenos Aires, but the *cabildo* itself was not controlled by them. The almost total absence of prominent bureaucrats among their ranks severely limited their influence beyond the local level. If the municipal authorities paid some attention to their demands, it was because, as cattle suppliers for the urban market, they had an impact on the *abasto*, a major concern of the *cabildo*.

It is true that the big *estancieros* were able to create a guild of their own, the *Junta de Hacendados*, but they had limited success in the pursuit of their main objectives. Established in the 1770s and functioning inter-

40. On his Franciscan association, *Protocolos Notariales*, AGN, Registro 2, 1789, 265v. On the larger ranch, Socolow, *The Merchants of Buenos Aires*, 65. On the Obligado dynasty, María Sáenz Quesada, *Los estancieros* (Buenos Aires, 1980), 301.

41. These data were kindly provided by Eduardo Saguier.

42. Socolow, *The Merchants of Buenos Aires*, 65.

mittently until the end of the century, the junta had two principal concerns. At first the hacendados were particularly interested in controlling the supply of cattle to the urban market, but in the 1790s they lobbied for a favorable position in the marketing of hides. Although the guild should have been governed by a board of ten members, most of its business was transacted by its *apoderado*. Indeed, the junta was unable to establish itself on a permanent, orderly, and autonomous basis. Under these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that the hacendados were also unable to exert much influence on the consulado.<sup>43</sup>

Between 1736 and 1785 the frontier experienced a long, intermittent period of war with the Indians. Indian raids were particularly severe in the 1730s and early 1750s. These *malones* took a heavy toll in cattle and captives. The frontier thus had to be militarized; a rural militia was organized and a chain of forts established. The estancieros formed part of this rural militia. Some of them—such as José Vague, Diego Trillo, and Clemente López, to name only a few—were commanders of frontier forts. Their power over the militia ranks, however, was more nominal than real. Rural society effectively resisted militarization, and rebellions and mass desertions were common. In the 1760s Clemente López in a typical complaint reported that the militia, “making fun of the officers,” wanted neither to serve nor to participate in the drills. José Vague considered a call to arms useless because ordinarily peasants failed to attend, particularly at harvest time. In fact, some hacendados tolerated the lack of discipline of the rural soldiery because they needed them to work on their own *estancias*.<sup>44</sup> In a region where labor was scarce the cattle ranchers had to make some compromises with the rural poor, even though, as *alcaldes de la hermandad*, they could also deal brutally with them. Some historians have recently disputed the contention that labor was scarce, but their crude estimates of the supply and demand of rural labor are open to serious criticism.<sup>45</sup> Different sources and the growing legislation against vagrancy

43. Fradkin, “El gremio de hacendados,” 74–87; Azcuy Ameghino and Gressores, “Problemática y organización de los hacendados bonaerenses,” 14. (Azcuy Ameghino and Gressores tend to exaggerate the power of the estancieros.)

44. On general resistance, Mayo, “Sociedad rural y militarización de la frontera,” 253–263. See also Clemente López to the governor of Buenos Aires, AGN, IX-1-4-5, Comandancia de Fronteras; José Vague to the governor of Buenos Aires, AGN, IX-1-6-1, Comandancia de Fronteras. On hacendados’ need for soldiers’ labor, Mayo, “Sociedad rural y militarización de la frontera.”

45. See Jorge Gelman, “New Perspectives on an Old Problem and the Same Source: The Gaucho and the Rural History of the Colonial Río de la Plata,” *HAHR*, 69:4 (Nov. 1989), 727–728, and the remarks on his calculations made by Ricardo D. Salvatore and Jonathan C. Brown, “The Old Problem of Gauchos and Rural Society,” *ibid.*, 735–737. Gelman does not take into account the frontier army’s siphoning off of manpower from the *estancias* and *chacras* of Buenos Aires. Also his calculations for labor demand of the *estancias* fail to consider that ranchers hired peons not only to tend cattle but also to drive wagons, to herd sheep, and

prove that labor was scarce in at least certain districts of prerevolutionary Buenos Aires.<sup>46</sup>

Perhaps the most important limitation on the power of the hacendados was that even during the late eighteenth century access to land and the means of subsistence was not completely closed to the lower classes of the pampa. The big *estancieros* had too many competitors in the countryside, and their attempts to eliminate the small and middling *criadores* through legal means failed miserably. In 1775 at the request of the hacendado guild it was established that no one with less than a *suerte de estancia* could own an estancia or be considered an *estanciero*; those who did not have the requisite lands were to sell them to those who were willing to buy them.<sup>47</sup> However, there is no evidence that this measure was ever seriously enforced.

In the postindependence period the international market's driving demand for hides, the ruin of rival cattle-ranching regions, the effects of free trade, the decision of commercial capital to invest heavily in rural land, and the access of the new landowning class to political influence all would reshape power relations in the Buenos Aires countryside, especially after the 1820s. Even then the *estancieros* and their political allies had to resort to legal measures of coercion to discipline a scarce and unruly labor force.<sup>48</sup>

### A Deviant Case

It is apparent that the great majority of colonial *estancieros* did not belong to the elite and that, if anything, they formed an intermediate sector in local society. They were neither as powerful nor as rich as their successors in the postindependence period. The *estancieros* ranked below the great import-export merchants of Buenos Aires in the viceregal social structure. They also came off less well in power, prestige, and wealth than the hacendados of the central areas of Spanish America.

The porteño *estancieros* were not a homogeneous group. On the con-

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to dig ditches. Labor scarcity was even more acute in the Banda Oriental, where *estancieros* had to recruit peons in Buenos Aires and then transport them to Uruguay.

46. I have discussed these sources at length in "Estancia y peonaje en la región pampeana en la segunda mitad del siglo XVIII," *Desarrollo Económico*, 92 (Jan.-Mar. 1984). This article initiated an expanding and ongoing debate on the functioning of the rural labor market in the River Plate area.

47. On lower-class access to land, Mayo, "Estancia y peonaje," 609-616, and "Sobre peones, vagos y malentrenidos: el dilema de la economía rural en la época colonial," *Anuario IEHS*, 2 (1987), 27-29. On the guild regulations, Azcuy Ameghino and Gressores, "Problemática y organización de los hacendados bonaerenses," 8.

48. On the forces reshaping power relations, Halperín Donghi, "La expansión ganadera," 24-25. On the legal measures, Slatta, *Los gauchos y el caso de la frontera*, 188-189.

trary, they were an internally stratified sector within local colonial society. Both the large hacendado—owner of several estancias, urban properties, one or two *chacras*, and a dozen slaves—and the poor mulatto who possessed a few cows and no land of his own were *estancieros*. This stratification reveals two characteristics that the cattle ranchers shared with other groups: as one descends within the internal hierarchy, the degree of both occupational specialization and rural residence tends to rise. A relative minority of *criadores*, the wealthiest, had several sources of income and like the church and the large merchants had diversified their investments. The majority, however, relied exclusively on the income derived from their ranching activities. The marked degree of specialization of the *estancieros* is thus a key element. If anything, it tends to prove that, contrary to what has often been suggested, merchants and *estancieros* formed, with few exceptions, different and separate sectors in the local society.<sup>49</sup> In this sense, the porteño *estancieros* stand out as a deviant case in the history of colonial Spanish America. Historians of the hacendados generally have found it difficult to characterize them as a single, separate class precisely because merchant capital all too frequently blended in with land ownership to produce mixed types that resist simple occupational labeling.

The Buenos Aires cattle ranchers differ from the model of the big hacendado recently portrayed by Susan Ramírez.<sup>50</sup> If we want to find a similar case, we should look into colonial Antioquia, Colombia, where the landholders were a subordinate class and where land was not an attractive investment for the local elite.<sup>51</sup> Unlike the farmers of Antioquia, porteño ranchers had access to an external market, but land still was not a source of power and prestige. One reason was the cheapness and availability of rural land. At one or two reales the vara, land was so cheap and so abundant that, normally, only the river frontage was valued in late eighteenth-century inventories; the value of the rear was ignored. Livestock and not land was the most important capital outlay required to exploit an estancia before the independence period.<sup>52</sup>

The legal ownership of land was more widespread than previous studies have indicated, and access to its usufruct was even ampler and open to the rural lower classes. Big estates tended to be exceptional. Moreover, there were important reserves of fiscal lands on the frontier that were open to all.<sup>53</sup> It was the very existence of fiscal lands that contributed to the de-

49. Fradkin, "El gremio de hacendados," 90.

50. Ramírez, "Large Landowners," 19 and *passim*.

51. Ann Twinam, *Miners, Merchants, and Farmers in Colonial Colombia* (Austin, 1982), 109.

52. Mayo and Fernández, "Anatomía de la estancia colonial," 1–4.

53. Mayo and Amalia Latrubesse de Díaz, "Sociedad, tierra y vida en la frontera bonaerense" (ms., 1986), 99–109.

pression of land prices during the colonial period and prevented land from becoming a source of prestige and regional power. In addition, the Indian raids that continued until 1781 and the scarcity of labor made ranching a risky endeavor.

Although this study helps to establish the secondary status of the porteño hacendados, other issues remain to be studied—among them how the hacendado group originated and developed, whether the hacendados were able to perpetuate themselves in spite of their near universal adoption of partible inheritance, and how they operated within the market. What is clear is that the powerful estanciero class that emerged in nineteenth-century Buenos Aires was not a legacy of the colonial period.