

## **MARIQUITA SÁNCHEZ (1786–1868)**

### ***MEMORIES OF LIFE IN VICEREGAL BUENOS AIRES (1860s)***

Buenos Aires was the seat of the viceroy, the *audiencia* [high court], and other royal officials.

People liked to be laid to rest beneath the church floor and considered that a sign of religious devotion. The nearer to the principal altar, the more expensive the niche. They would place the body in the earth directly, without a coffin, pack the dirt tightly over it, and replace the paving stones without mortar, so that eventually the bare bones could be removed. You can imagine the odor that pervaded churches, especially near the altar, and yet people resisted the creation of cemeteries as a matter of religion.

The city of Buenos Aires was divided into seven parishes. There were two convents for religious women and four orders for men . . . Events organized by the church constituted the principal social activities of the city. Basically, praying and eating (on days not designated for a fast) is what we did. What a gentle, tranquil life, you may say, but you would be wrong. There was plenty of discord within convents and rivalry among parishes. When a parish organized a procession, everybody in the neighbourhood participated, delighted to overshadow the efforts of a rival neighbourhood. They would spend a pile of money and go all out, partly from religious devotion and partly from pride.

When Lent came, everybody had to buy indulgences from the church, both for the living and for the dead. On the second Sunday of Lent there was a procession in which families showed off the documents that proved their purchase of indulgences. A man would hold the paper up with both hands for everyone to see or pin to his chest during the procession . . . On Palm Sunday, the Viceroy and members of the *audiencia* and the *Cabildo* [town council] heard a sermon preached in the cathedral. Another was preached in each of the parish churches on Sunday afternoon. The biggest sermon of all, though, was preached in the city's main square, in front of the portico, usually by one Father Montero, who had a voice you could hear four blocks away.

Those older than I talked about the “blood processions” that were a big deal before my time. The men in the procession dressed in white, with their faces hidden and their backs uncovered. During the procession, they scourged their own backs with whips. And because the whips had bits of glass or metal points at the tips, the streets where this procession passed got splattered with blood. Some even wore reins and bridles like horses and went accompanied in the street by a man who periodically jerked on the reins, drawing blood from the mouth of the penitent. I never actually saw this, thank God.

Let's finish with Holy Week. . . . People lined the streets from early in the morning. The procession carrying images of Christ's passion and crucifixion arrived at the church of its destination, and that was when priests dressed in white lowered Christ from the cross and there was a big sermon.

**Taken from Mariquita Sánchez, “Madame Mendeville Recalls Viceregal Buenos Aires,” in *Latin American Independence: An Anthology of Sources*, trans. and eds. Sarah C. Chambers and John Charles Chasteen (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2010), 15, 21, 23–24.**