

Gen. Francisco de Miranda

A Latin American in the Revolution



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Recently I had the opportunity to visit the city of New Bern, the second oldest city of North Carolina. It was named by the German and Swiss settlers after the Swiss capital, Bern. Funded in 1710 by German explorer Baron Christopher de Graffenried; later New Bern was also North Carolina's first capital.

Also New Bern is the birthplace of one of the famous soft-drinks. In 1898, a pharmacist invented the drink, first known as Brad's Drink, now popularly known as Pepsi-Cola. In this city there are a lot museums and historical sites. One of them is called Tryon Palace. It was a state house during the colonial times and accommodated several illustrious people in the history of North America.

During the visit of this site I was trying to find out more details about this sensational building. But I observed that the person who guided the tour mentioned several times the name of Gen. Miranda, an eminent Venezuelan patriot who participated in some battles in North Africa as an officer of the Spanish Army and also he had a notable participation in the French Revolution.

But, who was this illustrious person and how he was involved in the American Revolutions?

Francisco de Miranda was born on March 28, 1750 in Caracas, Venezuela. Son of Don Sebastian de Miranda y Ravelo from Canary Islands and Francisca Rodriguez Espinoza, his was a family who

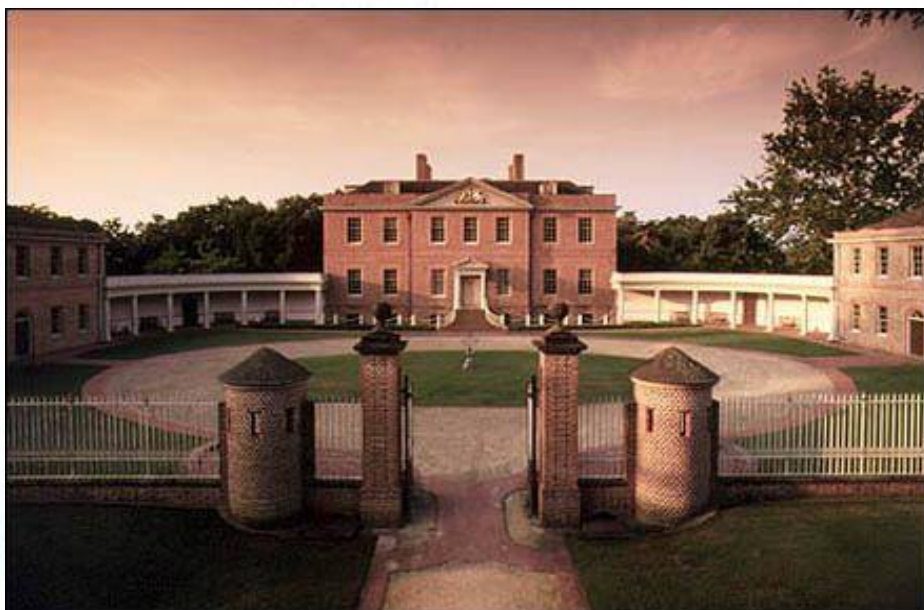
were living in Venezuela for several generations. Early in life he entered the Spanish Army and went to Madrid supplied with ample funds and letters of introduction. He bought a captaincy and began to keep the dairy which in time became the nucleus of an immense archive. His military career was not fortunate. Accused of neglect of duty, he was eventually cleared and was sent to Cuba, where he again fell out with the authorities.

Before Miranda championed the independence of the Spanish colonies, he involved himself in a number of adventures. In 1781, he left the Spanish Army and fled to the United States. He served under Bernardo de Galvez in the Spanish attack on Pensacola and Miranda received the surrender of the British and cooperated in the capture of New Providence in the Bahamas, when Spain was ally of the rebels in the American Revolution.

In 1783, Miranda arrived at New Bern, N.C. He had the opportunity

to visit Tryon Palace which combined the governor's residence and statehouse, containing the assembly hall, council chamber and public offices. This royal palace is considered the most beautiful building in the colonial times in North America with the pure British style. Miranda noted that the palace "really merits the traveler's attention." The architect John Hawks gave some documents and letters to Miranda that year. An historian discovered it in the Venezuelan archives in 1992. The engraving of Tryon Palace appeared on \$ 5.00 bills issued in North Carolina in 1775.

Henceforth, Miranda was in open rebellion against the Spanish Crown. Spurred by the example of the 13 colonies that had achieved independence from England, he aspired to set up an independent empire in Hispanic America. He later visited Philadelphia and Boston. Among his friends in the United States were such men as: George Washington, Alexander



Tryon Palace — view from the Pollock Street entrance gates to the palace. The entrance drive was originally lined in the 18th century with fences and trees on either side.



This engraving of Tryon Palace appeared on \$5 bills issued in North Carolina in 1775. It clearly shows the roof ornaments described in architect John Hawks' letter found in Venezuelan archives in 1992: "a parrapet wall and an Ornament vase [vase] at each corner Brake and center of the pediment."



Hamilton, Thomas Paine and other notables.

Miranda traveled widely in Europe. Constantly hounded by Spanish agents he visited England, Prussia, Austria, Italy, Turkey. In Russia he became a favorite of Catherine II (the Great) who allowed him to wear a Russian uniform and use a passport of this European country.

In 1790, he offered his services to the French Army. In September 1792, as a general of division, he served under Charles Dumouriez on the historic field of Valmy. Another victory, this time at Antwerp, was followed by a debacle of the Republic's armies at Neerwinden. Tried in charges of treachery after his defeat, Miranda was acquitted triumphantly. Later his name was inscribed at the Arc of Triumph in Paris and Miranda has become the unique Latin American who appears in this solemn monument among those of the great captains that fought in this revolution.

When Napoleon won control of France, Bonaparte said about him:

"Miranda is like a Quijote, except for the madness;" however Miranda went back to London. In 1797, he founded the American Lodge in London, whose members swore their allegiance to democracy and were to work for the independence of the Spanish American colonies. In 1803, Miranda discussed his plans with Prime Minister William Pitt and he received the support to carry out this important mission.

In 1806, Miranda organized an expeditionary force in New York, with American, English, French, and Irish volunteers to invade Venezuela. He embarked in three ships with a group of 200 soldiers. Informed of his intent, the Spaniards met and defeated Miranda in the Caribbean Sea. Miranda escaped to the West Indies where he prepared another expedition. Within a few months after his previous defeat, he was able to take the city of Coro. He expected the Venezu-

elans to welcome him and rise against Spain in imitation of the American, French and Haitian revolutionaries, they did not find the necessary support and a very hostile response from the locals at Coro, the mission failed. Miranda called the whole thing off and took refuge in the Antilles and then in London, England.

While in London, Miranda taught mathematics, for he had originally been a mathematician. Among his students were some of the future leaders in the fight for South American independence, such as:

Bernardo O'Higgins, Antonio Nariño, Andrés de Santa Cruz, among others. Miranda was living on Grafton Street No. 27, London and with Sarah Andrews who was his housekeeper had two sons: Leandro and Francisco. Napoleon's invasion of the Iberian Peninsula (1808) set the stage for uprisings in Hispanic America.

In addition, Miranda was creator of the Venezuelan flag and later Colombia and Ecuador adopted the same colors and it symbolized emancipation from Spain when it was hoisted in his ship "Leander" (this name inspired his first son's) on March 12, 1806.

In 1810 he met the envoy of revolutionary Venezuela, Simón Bolívar. Bolívar induced Miranda to come back to his native country. They returned together on December 5, 1810 to Caracas, where Miranda organized the government that had its origin in the revolution

The assignat notes were used during the French Revolution and it was the inspiration for the first paper money in Venezuela.





1 peso (1811)



of April 19, 1810.

Gen. Miranda became Vice-president of the Venezuelan Congress and suggested to issue some bank notes (which were inspired by the "assignat" of the French Revolution) of the following denominations: 1, 2, 4, 8 and 16 pesos. In November of 1811 those notes were put into circulation but dated August 27, 1811. Those bills were printed by Juan Baillio and Luis Delpech, official printers of the government of the first and second republic. This first issue had the signatures of three notable Venezuelans such as: Juan German Roscio, Bartolomé Blandin and Martin Tovar Ponte and those bills were known popularly as "Roscio, Blandin and Tovar," printed on sealed paper of the republic.

One of these notable statesmen, Juan German Roscio, was born in Caracas in 1769. He graduated in

law from the University of Caracas in 1795, joined the revolutionists and was elected deputy to the Congress of 1811, edited the manifesto of the confederation of Republic of Venezuela, assisted in forming the Federal constitution, and in 1812 was appointed a member of the Federal executive. In 1818 Roscio published in Philadelphia his work entitled "Triumph of the Liberty over the Despotism."

During these times, there also appeared a lot of counterfeits and the government issued new bills with the legend "Death Penalty to the Counterfeiter." The Republican paper money was not so popular. Venezuelan humor made jokes with this — for example: "Roscio, Blandin and Tovar were equivalent to sota, horse and king, in the deck and the game of golf." Other phrases: "I sale a Roscio or the three reunited" or "If Roscio evicts me, Blandin shrouds

me and Tovar buried me."

On February 7, 1812 the republican government put in circulation a second issue with the signatures of Lorenzo de Sata, Jose Alustiza and Jose Joaquin de Yarza. Other legends on this bills were: "United States of Venezuela" and "First Year of the Independence." A third issue replaced the second with the signatures of Sata, Yarza and Salicrup but were in circulation just two months because the royalists took control of the country and those bills were burned in the city of La Victoria. Thus Venezuela became the first country which issued paper money in Spanish America.

After the eloquent speeches of Miranda and Bolívar, the first republic in South America was proclaimed in Caracas on July 5, 1811. When the royalist armies threatened to destroy the young republic, Miranda was elected



5000 bolivares (1999). Scene of the Declaration of Independence (April 29, 1810) at center.



1000 bolivares (1991). Scene of the signing of the Declaration of Independence (July 9, 1811) at center.



5 bolivares (1989). Bolivar at left and his friend Gen. Francisco De Miranda at right.



5000 bolivares (2000). Gen. Francisco De Miranda at right.

generalissimo and virtual dictator. But disunity among the Venezuelans, the effects of a disastrous earthquake, and the fall of the fortress of Puerto Cabello forced him to capitulate to the royalists headed by Monteverde on July 25, 1812. Miranda was taken prisoner and he was sent to Cadiz, Spain in 1813.

Gen. Miranda died in the dungeons of the inquisition with a chain around his neck on July 14, 1816, the 27th anniversary of the fall of the Bastille.

His remains never returned to his native country. When Gen. Guzman Blanco was president of Venezuela,

over sixty years after Miranda's death, he built the National Pantheon to honor Venezuela's heroes. A marble monument to Miranda, in the form of a coffin, was placed in the Pantheon.

On the 5 bolivares note (1968) Bolívar is at left and Miranda at right. A view of National Pantheon is on back. Recently, Banco Central de Venezuela issued a note of 5,000 bolívares (2000) where appears Francisco de Miranda at right. The portrait is an inspiration of a work of the French painter Georges Rouget (1783-1869) which is in the National Museum of Versailles, France. This bank note is in tribute of this

notable patriot who eventually took part in revolutions on three continents.

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Collaborators: A. Velasco and M. Balladares



5 bolivares (1973). National Pantheon at Center on back.

