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Free

Mexican Lottery

The Spanish conquerors introduced a taste for cards into Mexico. Cortés himself was a great card player, according to Bernal Diaz. The soldier-chronicler also relates that a certain Pedro Valencia was the first to make cards in New Spain: he used to paint them onto pieces of old drum leather. During the long nights of encampment, Don Hernando allowed his men to play dice and cards, so as to keep them awake and ready to leap into action at any unexpected Indian assault. However, the soldiers were not always peaceful players, content to win or lose on the swings and roundabouts of luck; they fell into frequent quarrels that would end in fist-fights and stabbings.

As the capital city grew, so did the immoderate passion for gambling. Gaming dens sprang up everywhere: the setting for brawls and violent face-offs between dubious winners and their challengers. In one of the patios of the viceregal court itself, there was a permanent area for cards, among other games, and here a throng of excitable addicts milled day and night, for the place was never closed.

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Lottery ticket vendor.

This vice, or time-honored habit—intelligently channelled towards good, so that it might benefit the poor and deprived, relieving them in their distress—is what gave rise to the lottery. Good engendered by evil: this was the idea proposed by the kindly King Charles III, who founded the lottery in his dominions of New Spain.

In the Metropolis, as in America, the loteria and the raffle although forbidden, were common practice in almost all townships and usually held in wine stores and taverns, which were the venue for most activities frowned upon by the authorities. Castilian legislation included two laws concerning the lottery, numbers 17 and 18 of Book XII, section XXIII. These banned playing the lottery board in public places, and the introduction of foreign games into the

kingdom. The latter derived from the official establishment, by royal decree on September 30, 1763, of the lottery in Spain. Its first grand draw was held in Madrid on December 10 of the same year. The law was repeated, exhorting strict adherence, in a royal warrant circulated on August 23, 1774, but was probably ignored,

“ As the capital city grew, so did the immoderate passion for gambling. Gaming dens sprang up everywhere: the setting for brawls and violent face-offs between dubious winners and their challengers. ”

since another reminder had to be issued on April 12, 1783.

To the West Indies—as to anywhere that a colonizing

people brings its virtues—the Spaniards also brought their vices and other questionable customs. Lotteries and raffles were thus widespread, long before the ruling authorities set them up for their own ends.

Lima, the City of the Kings and

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Mexican Lottery

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Children shouting in a lottery contest.

capital of the great viceroyalty of Peru, was the first place to have an official lottery, in response to an earthquake that reduced many of its finest buildings to rubble. The Viceroy, Count of Superonda, and the Archbishop Don Pedro de Barraeta established it without waiting for royal permission in order to rebuild St. Bartholomew's hospital with the profits. The Hospital de Amparadas subsequently requested that the profits be turned over to them, since the hospital no longer needed them;

this was granted by decree in 1766. A contractor rented the game, with the agreement to pay 8,000 pesos a year. Mexico was the second country to establish a legal lottery.

Around 1767 Don Francisco Xavier de Sarria landed in Mexico to seek his fortune, like so many other Spaniards who were under the impression that in these parts, fortunes were there for the taking. This gentleman was not, however, one of those unscrupulous adven-

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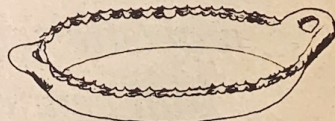
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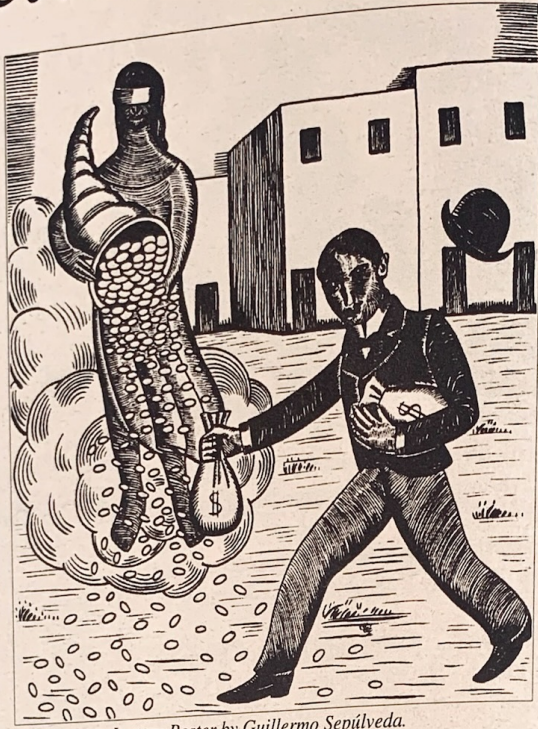
Mexican Lottery

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turers equipped with nothing more than ambition, audacity and a sword. Don Francisco Xavier was an intelligent man with great initiative—today he would be described as dynamic.

He carried letters of commendation for the Viceroy, Marquis de Croix, and ample introductory letters for Don Jose de Galvez, the General Inspector of the Realm. So it was that in April 1769, Charles III sent an order to New Spain stipulating that a lottery was to be established there, that Don Francisco Xavier was to be responsible for designing the game and its rules, and that no one but Don Francisco was to act as its director.

The first draw, with funds of 84,000 pesos, was held on May 13, 1771; the second took place on July 13,



Lottery Poster by Guillermo Sepúlveda.

with three grand prizes of ten, eight and six thousand pesos, while tickets had dropped in price to only four pesos. After the third draw, the Viceroy de Croix decided that, in view of their growing success,

they should be held every 40 days, rather than every two months, which would amount to a total of five draws a year. Things could not have been better; the business was booming, indeed it was "excessively credit", according to the Viceroy himself.

The capital was the place where the greatest number of tickets were sold, although many investors bought only to make a guaranteed profit. They acquired them from the principal official outlet before turning their homes into merry raffling dens, by which means they obtained "reprehensible profits and gains," amid the inevitable "disorders and offenses to Our Lord and to the State, not to mention the irregularities, rudeness, disturbances and chimera resulting therefrom." Such names were excellent sources of revenue for the rich, for whoever won a ticket obtained it at a lesser price than

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Mexican Lottery

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A lottery vendor with his family.



the official one; the person dealing in the tickets also profited, for he earned twice or three times what they had lost him.

This constant and unwarranted exploitation by the powerful was most displeasing to the Viceroy Bucareli, who vented his anger in a ban "forbidding such raffles and draws under penalty of a 1,000 peso fine which will be claimed, without possible remission, from any who contravene this order." There was even the threat of imprisonment. However, His Excellency was unable to eradicate the practice from private residences, the elegant homes where under cover of a soiree or a gathering, gambling went ahead with impunity.

The grand prizes were not always for the same amount, but whether they were large or small, all tickets always sold out and profits kept rising. In 11 years, the lottery yielded a total of 714,354 pesos, a considerable sum at the time. Viceroy Don Martin Mayorga decreed

that two percent of the funds should be give to the Hospice of the Poor, as well as 14 percent which had previously been deducted for the Treasury. This was the Lottery's first charitable deed. But the amount earmarked for the Hospice was subsequently deemed over-generous, and it was only given 12,000 pesos a year. This sum was itself considerable, which suggests how much the Hospice would have received before the authorities had second thoughts.

Since this was clearly a lucrative business that could only expand, similar lotteries began to blossom all over Mexico, including "mini-lotteries" managed by the clergy (and piously named after saints.) Even gentle nuns were not above holding money raffles, and the Viceroy himself, Revillagigedo, wanted to start another lottery with handsome prizes, destined for public works. But Charles III rejected the proposal dispatched by His Excellency, in spite of its many explanations and the fine

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Mexican Lottery

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reasoning that graced its lengthy exposition. The Crown was doing so well from the existing arrangement that it made half a million pesos profit in nine years.

The able Don Francisco Xavier Sarria also benefited handsomely. And although he had already increased and flourished in every way, he soon demanded an increase in wage, for he could barely subsist, he pleaded, on so miserly an income. But while he was making this touching case for a decent standard of living, the good gentleman was discovered to have embezzled 25,750 pesos, and found himself in jail. He did not languish for long, however, but promptly emerged to continue the good work in his old position, with the King's blessing and the salary increase he had sought. There is no doubt that this Sarria was an intelligent and perspicacious character, who always had luck on his side and was to prosper in each and all of his undertakings.

In 1803, the Director and Treasurer were caught in a sophisticated counterfeit ticket fraud, involving a certain racket with numbers which were about to expire; in any case, they had made a very satisfactory killing from it. The scandal caused some public loss of confidence, but this was temporary, and before long the draws had risen from 52,000 pesos to 90,000. The business continued to grow, forging ahead like a trusty ship with the wind at its sails over a bouncing sea.

The War of Independence, with all its sanguinary upheavals, had a depressing effect on the Lottery as on many other institutions; there was a great loss of money as a side-effect of the merciless confrontation be-



Lottery Contest

tween royalists and insurgents. An important draw—the 522nd to be exact—had to be cancelled 33 days after the outbreak of the insurrection in the village of Dolores. Up to that glorious date, the Lottery had made liquid profits of more than three million pesos.

Such was the Lottery's prestige and the certainty of making money from it, that in 1815 the notorious Don Félix Maria ordered "two compulsory lotteries" to be held, one in the capital and one for the rest of the territory, as fund-raisers toward the noble cause of trouncing the rebels. Public employees were virtually the only ones to accept this "invitation" to buy tickets... Or else.

When Independence was achieved in 1821, the Lottery had fallen into a sorry plight, virtually bankrupt despite its successful financial history and the great sums it had yielded, if not precisely to im-

prove the lot of the poor in hospitals and hospices, at least to swell the royal purse. By that time its offices had fallen into a state of sordid neglect, judging from the inventory which was drawn up on November 30, 1820. They were in such bad condition because none of those who were addicted to the game could afford it any longer, since the civil war (that still held the country in its grip) had affected the entire population. There was no less general bewilderment and disorganization than during the early days of Independence.

Soon the Lottery was resurrected and its misery transformed into power once more.

The Constitutive Congress recreated it under the name of State Lottery, the money began to flow again, and by 1831 it was functioning regularly with the same success that the Royal Lottery—of which it was the direct descendant—had achieved. Due to shady dealings, though, it quickly fell into discredit, and what had once been a steady source of income, had now become a burden, as well as everyone's daily bit of gossip. In 1843, so as to save it from

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Mexican Lottery

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discredit, Governor Valentín Elizalde decided that it should become a dependency of the San Carlos Academy of Fine Arts, where it would be managed by honorable persons so that it would sustain the establishment with its profits.

Thanks to clean doings, the Lottery was once again favored by the public and its name soon forgotten, causing it to reap even newer and greater profits. In spite of the nation's never-ending political upheavals, the San Carlos Academy, as it was called, did not suffer. In fact, it kept improving. "On account of its honesty, the Lottery resisted the furious and constant turbulence that the country underwent from 1843 to the triumph of the Reform in 1861."

Benito Juárez instituted the National Lottery and prohibited any other of its kind throughout the nation. In this way, it passed from the hands of the San Carlos Academy to be used once again to profit the government. If failed, however, to achieve success.

During the times of Sebastian Lerdo de Tejada numerous "mini-lotteries" were once again instituted and began to invade the city. In addition



Lottery Poster. May 1958.

to those run by the Toluca Railroad, the Lancaster Company, the Conservatory, were 28 to 30 more, with different names and causes. With what the government collected from this "garden of lotteries" it supported several institutions for public welfare.

In the wake of the disgraceful French intervention, other lotteries were established to cover the cost of public welfare, and the National Lottery was strictly used to help the

increasing cost of the government.

In 1915, and with the Constitutionalist Revolution under way, Venustiano Carranza, the First Chief of the Constitutionalist Army and Head of the Executive Office, suppressed the Lottery for political and moral reasons; Adolfo de la Huerta, the Provisional president re-established the lottery in 1920 for the very same reasons, and the enormous profits earned were destined for public welfare.

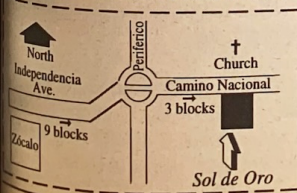
The offices of the National Lottery were once to be found on the Plaza de Carlos IV, in the palace that belonged to Ignacio de la Torre y Mier, a building that was constructed on a part of the lot that was once the famous Paseo bull-fighting ring. That mansion has since been razed to construct a large building for the National Lottery. Meanwhile, the Lottery is presently housed in the lovely old mansion which belonged to the Count of Buenavista.

The Lottery's boom over the last ten years is due to the modern and scientific methods employed by the organization.

Written by Artemio Arizpe.

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