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Out of the Attic

Domingo Sarmiento's visit to Washington

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Image: Domingo Sarmiento in 1874

Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (1811-1888) was an energetic statesman, a committed educator and a bold public intellectual who was inaugurated president of Argentina on Oct. 12, 1868, just a few months after he was awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Michigan. Like other contemporary statesmen, he embarked not just on governing his native land but also on nation-building.

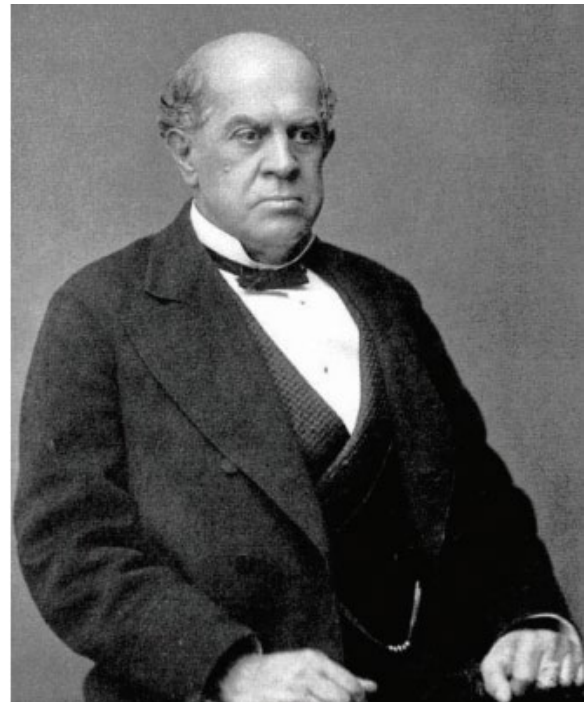
Early in his life, Sarmiento reached the conviction that the newly independent Latin American nation states needed to cultivate more enlightenment to prosper. In 1845, when he published his pathbreaking and polemical "Facundo," an indictment against the Juan Manuel de Rosas caudillo regime, he proposed that the troubles of the Argentine republic could be traced back to the contentiousness between the urban, cosmopolitan national elite and the less urbane populations around the Argentine nation.

From his forced exile in Chile, Sarmiento penned numerous editorials deploring the political situation in Buenos Aires, augmenting the already tenuous diplomatic relations between the two South American neighbors. In October 1845, he sailed from Valparaiso to assess educational practices around the world, eventually landing in the United States, a nation he regarded as an exemplar.

Once in the United States, Sarmiento visited the northeast where he befriended Horace and Mary Mann, among other dignitaries and educators. His travels also took him to Washington, D.C. where he recorded many observations about the city's architecture, way of life, our country's infant democracy and, of course, the workings of government officials.

Reflecting on Sarmiento's visit to the United States has many implications. Sarmiento symbolized many prominent Hispanic people who visited Washington to observe the functioning of our democracy and, in some cases, to lobby for the independence of Caribbean nations. These visits constituted the early encounters that eventually gave way to the more recent Hispanic/Latino migration waves that eventually settled in communities around the Washington region.

Sarmiento also illustrated how, after independence, the United States became a beacon of hope for many state-builders around Latin America. Sarmiento and other observers helped foment the





Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia

complicated inter-state relations that govern the Western Hemisphere. While historians and other students of American exceptionalism have dedicated numerous hours to discern the travel notes of Tocqueville, Sarmiento's eloquent insights remain sidelined, and that omission is to our disadvantage today.

Historic Alexandria is excited to celebrate National Hispanic Heritage Month this year from Sept. 15 to Oct. 15. To learn more about Domingo Sarmiento, please join us for Dr. Pumar's virtual lecture on Oct. 13. You can register at [Alexandriava.gov/shop](https://alexandriava.gov/shop).

"Out of the Attic" is published each week in the Alexandria Times newspaper. The column began in September 2007 as "Marking Time" and explored Alexandria's history through collection items, historical images and architectural representations. Within the first year, it evolved into "Out of the Attic" and featured historical photographs of Alexandria.

These articles appear with the permission of the Alexandria Times and were authored by staff of the Office of Historic Alexandria and invited guests. This week's column is by guest author Enrique Pumar, Ph.D.