

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Name of Property

County and State

Section number _____ Page _____

Name of multiple property listing (if applicable)

SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 100002935

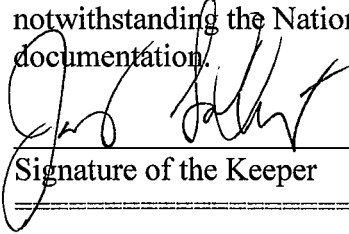
Date Listed: 10/23/2018

Property Name: Instituto Loaíza Cordero para Niños Ciegas

County: San Juan

State: PR

This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.



Signature of the Keeper

10/23/2018

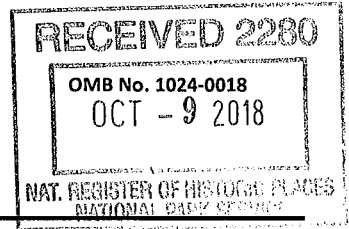
Date of Action

Section 8: Significant Person:

Loaíza Cordero del Rosario is hereby added as a significant person

The Puerto Rico State Historic Preservation Office was notified of this amendment.

DISTRIBUTION: National Register property file; Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)



National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. Name of Property

Historic name Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District / Distrito Histórico Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos

Other names/site number Instituto de Niños Ciegos de Puerto Rico; Instituto Puertorriqueño de Niños Ciegos

Name of related multiple property listing N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & Number 1312 Avenida Fernández Juncos

City or town San Juan State Puerto Rico County San Juan


Not for publication Vicinity

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance: national statewide local

Applicable National Register Criteria: A B C D


Carlos A Rubio-Cancela

September 20, 2018

Signature of certifying official/Title:

Date

Puerto Rico State Historic Preservation Office

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting Official

Date

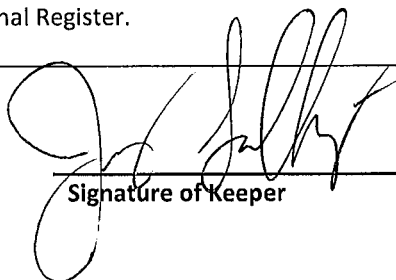
Title

State of Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register.
- determined eligible for the National Register.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain):


Signature of Keeper

10-23-2018
Date of Action

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. Name of Property

Historic name Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District / Distrito Histórico Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos

Other names/site number Instituto de Niños Ciegos de Puerto Rico; Instituto Puertorriqueño de Niños Ciegos

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Carlos A Rubio-Cancela

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Date

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State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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Date

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- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain): _____

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

United States Department of the Interior

National Park Service / National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic

San Juan, Puerto Rico

District

Name of Property

County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

- Private
- Public-local
- Public-state
- Public-federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

Number of Resources within Property (Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
2	0	Buildings
1	0	Sites
1	0	Structures
1	0	Objects
5	0	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions.)

EDUCATION/School

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions.)

EDUCATION/School

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions.)

Mediterranean Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Reinforced concrete, wooden trusses, terracotta tiles roof

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Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic
District

San Juan, Puerto Rico

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Description

Summary Paragraph

The Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District is located on Stop #19 on the southern side of Avenida Fernández Juncos (known during the 1930s as Calle Nueva) in the San Juan Municipality sector of Santurce. At present, it includes two reinforced concrete buildings designed in 1925, built between 1927-1938 in the Mediterranean Revival style (contributing buildings); and allée-like road that serves as principal entrance to the precinct (contributing structure); a playground (contributing site); and a fountain (contributing object) sited at the end of the entrance road. Its distinctive characteristics (designer, style, construction and form) retain historic integrity and illustrate significant aspects of the history of education for the blind in the island, as well as the shared history of Puerto Rico and the USA. The Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District also is an example of a unique and novel 1920s architectural treatment, the product of a creative collaboration between Miss Loaiza Cordero Del Rosario,¹ the woman who made possible the creation and construction of the Instituto and a distinguished American architect, Mr Joseph O'Kelly.



Figure 1. The Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District, San Juan de Puerto Rico.

Narrative Description

The Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District is located in a large urban block bordered by Avenida Fernández Juncos (north), Avenida Las Palmas (PR Highway 42) (south), Calle Hipódromo (east) and Calle Figueroa (west). Its principal entrance faces Avenida Fernández Juncos. (See Photograph 01.) On the eastern portion of the block the Doctors' Center Hospital is located. Several buildings belonging to the Escuela Instituto Loaiza Cordero² (a 1960s elementary public school) cluster close to the clinic occupying the southeast portion of the block. Building C, originally erected to shelter the boys' residence, was destroyed when the elementary school buildings were constructed during the 1960s. Although the principal entrance is along Avenida Fernández Juncos, car access is also available via Calle Feria, a small street that bisects the clinic.

The informal and slightly confusing organization of the hospital and school buildings neighboring the historic district evidences an ad hoc approach to the platting of the originally gigantic plot of land that belonged to the Spanish Crown until 1898. Prior to the construction of the Avenida Fernández Juncos during the 1930s, the block

¹ Miss Cordero's maternal family name appears in varied publications as both Del Rosario and del Rosario.

² When it was created, the Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos was part of the Departamento de Sanidad (Health Department). In 1995, it was placed under the Commonwealth's Departamento de Educación (Education Department) jurisdiction.

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extended from Avenida Constitución (known at the time as Avenida Ponce de León) (north) to the train tracks that roughly aligned along present day Avenida Las Palmas (south). Therefore, until the third decade of the 20th century the historic district sat in isolated splendor on the southern area of this vast piece of land. The Fernández Juncos Avenue transformed the precinct, providing it with an urban “front,” as well as formal entrance. Until the 1940s, a walk that on rainy days turned into a muddy path connected the avenue to the complex. (See Figure 1.)

The Precinct

During the fourth decade of the 20th century an internal road (contributing structure) running from Avenida Fernández Juncos to Building A (contributing building) was paved. (See Photograph 05.) The two lanes road includes a central green area. In addition to creating a processional axis emphasizing Building A as well as a secondary alignment to Building B, the trees on both sides and the central expanse provide the entrance road with an *allée*-like personality. (See Photograph 01 and Photograph 03.) Since now destroyed Building C was sited across Building B, the road made possible for the trio to physically relate. The street runs in straight manner until it curves several feet away from Building A’s in a cul-de-sac. Close to this point, the central green area is anchored by means of a fountain (contributing object). (See Photograph 02 and Photograph 04.) The fountain’s intricate shape is inspired in Moorish examples found in southern Spain and echoes the same inspiration as Building A’s lobulated entrance arch. A small paved plaza separates the fountain and road from Building A’s principal façade.

Building B (contributing building) is sited on the west side of the entrance road. (See Photograph 13.) Research information indicates now destroyed Building C was built during the 1920s to serve as boys’ residence (*residencia de niños*) while Building B was erected during the 1930s as girls’ dormitory.³ In terms of façade design, Building B and Building C were quite similar. The architectural drawings and the locations of Building A and Building B belie the precinct was formally conceived as a trio of edifices.

The Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District also includes a children’s park (contributing site), described in the post 1940 plan as a recreational park (*parque de recreo*).

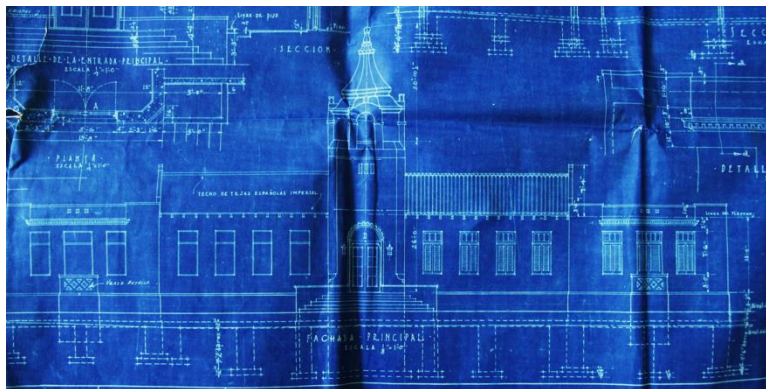


Figure 2. Building A, 1925-1928, Joseph O’Kelly, Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District.⁴

³ The 1938-1939 Commissioner of Health Report mentions that a special appropriation was made on 15 May 1936 for \$10,000 to construct “an additional building in the Blind Asylum at Santurce.” This information appears in a letter signed by José E. Colóm, Commissioner of the Interior, to the Honorable Auditor of Puerto Rico. It evidences the appropriation confirmed by means of the Report of the Commissioner of Health to the Hon Governor of Puerto Rico for Fiscal Year 1938-1939 (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Bureau of Supplies, Printing and Transportation, 1940), pp 194-195. Thanks are extended to Mr José Marull for his help regarding this source.

⁴ “Edificio de Escuela para el Instituto de Niños Ciegos en Santurce, PR,” November 1925, Joseph J O’Kelly, Fondo Obras Públicas, Serie Edificios Públicos, Caja 679, Archivo General de Puerto Rico.

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Building A

Although started after Building B, Building A was designed to be the precinct's most important one. (See Figure 2.) Its principal façade is hierarchically organized and anchored by a complex central tower that frames the door providing access along this façade. (See Photograph 01 and Photograph 05.) Four narrow windows on each side provide the main body of the building with light and ventilation. (The original wooden shutter windows have been replaced with sturdier metal ones, known locally as Miami windows.) The openings' proportions underscore the tower's verticality accentuating its architectural and symbolic prominence. Because the building is organized by means of a long one-floor body, horizontality principally governs the composition in spite of the presence of the central tower. This interest in effectively balancing the composition's vertical and horizontal components reflects a Classicist approach.

The principal façade ends in two avant-corps or pavilions on both sides of the central body of the building, each having three windows that exhibit the same proportions as those in the principal façade. These elements highlight the building's three-dimensionality while providing a formal beginning and end to the facade's organization. Avant-corps were a favorite motif of 19th century architects reflecting the École des Beaux Arts' all-encompassing influence. This French motif became quite common during the Renaissance. In this particular case they are used to complete and balance the composition and to provide a contrast to the central section since they are not covered with a tiled gable roof but sport reinforced concrete flat roofs.

A lobulated arch frames Building A's principal entrance. The multiple lobes effectively decorate the space above the door providing a delicate finishing touch to this wood barrier. Several steps underscore the relevance of the entrance portal. The exotic lobulated arch emphasizes the whimsicality of the elegant tower anchoring the façade. Projecting in three-dimensional manner from the main façade plane, the portal also serves as base or first section of the tall tower. Additionally, it masks the establishment's vestibule, a chamfered irregular octagonal space. (See Photograph 06.)

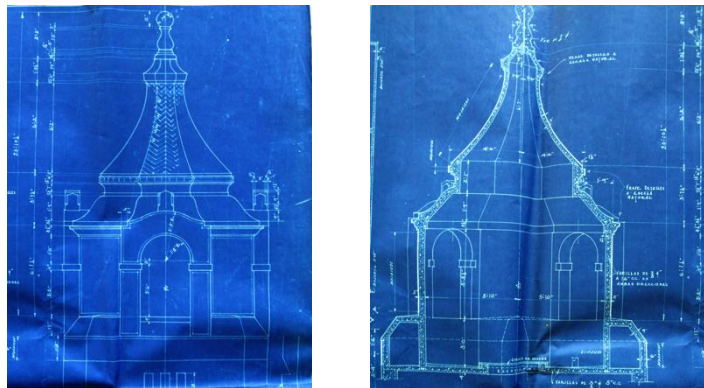


Figure 3 and Figure 4. Elevation and section of Building A tower, 1925-1928, Joseph O'Kelly, Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District.⁵

Building A's tower depicts a complex design that contrasts to the relative simplicity of the rest of the building. (See Figure 3 and Figure 4.) (See Photograph 07, Photograph 08 and Photograph 11.) Its exterior is divided into three sections that become narrower as they go up. While the first section is a chamfered irregular octagon, the second one is a regular octagon. Because it sits atop the first section the four corners evidence the change in shape by remaining void.

⁵ "Edificio de Escuela para el Instituto de Niños Ciegos en Santurce, PR," November 1925, Joseph J O'Kelly, Fondo de Obras Públicas, Serie Edificios Públicos, Caja 679, Archivo General de Puerto Rico.

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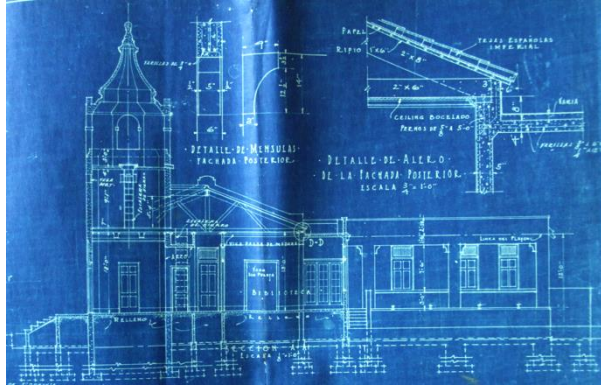


Figure 5. Building A Section, 1925-1928, Joseph O'Kelly, Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District.⁶

Four panels of the second section are arched and open while the other four panels have insets covered in blue and white ceramic tiles. The four arched openings are framed by thick arched encadrements; their upper parts covered with blue and white square tiles while the lower portions have similar tiles but with a different pattern. The second section includes three different tile patterns. A fourth pattern was added by means of a band that is located at the uppermost part of the first section serving as transition between first and second sections. (See Photograph 08.) An octagonal base, a convex fluted element formed by means of eight sides, organizes the third section of the tower. (See Figure 5.) A simple molding marks the beginning and the end of this segment. Covered by blue and white tiles that form chevrons the composition adds movement and polychromatic drama to the tower and façade. Several moldings sit on its top creating a base for the ball that crowns the composition. (See Photograph 07 and Photograph 11.)

Building A's east and west façades are organized with trios of windows that are visually united by means of a dentil molding supporting a narrow cornice on top. (See Photograph 09.) Of Classical extraction, the dentil molding has small, evenly spaced blocks in a repeating pattern. In this particular case, the element organizes the façade into three window units. Its use also underscores the emphasis given to the composition's balance in terms of verticality and horizontality as per Classicist dicta. Finally, the molding echoes the avant-corps rooflines and the dado that serves as visual base for the building. (See Photograph 14.)

Building A has a U-shaped floor plan. One enters via the chamfered octagonal vestibule that leads to a corridor/gallery that hugs the interior part of the U. (See Photograph 10.) The foyer is decorated with tiles forming dados on the upper and lower parts of the walls. (See Photograph 12.) As per its U-shape, two wings organize the back façade surrounding an open patio. Galleries along the three façades make possible for communication between the different rooms. Two small sections were added to the wings, probably during the 1960s. Since they respect the original U-shaped morphology and have not destroyed historic fabric they do not adversely impact the historic integrity of the building.

⁶ "Edificio de Escuela para el Instituto de Niños Ciegos en Santurce, PR," November 1925, Joseph J O'Kelly, Fondo de Obras Públicas, Serie Edificios Públicos, Caja 679, Archivo General de Puerto Rico.

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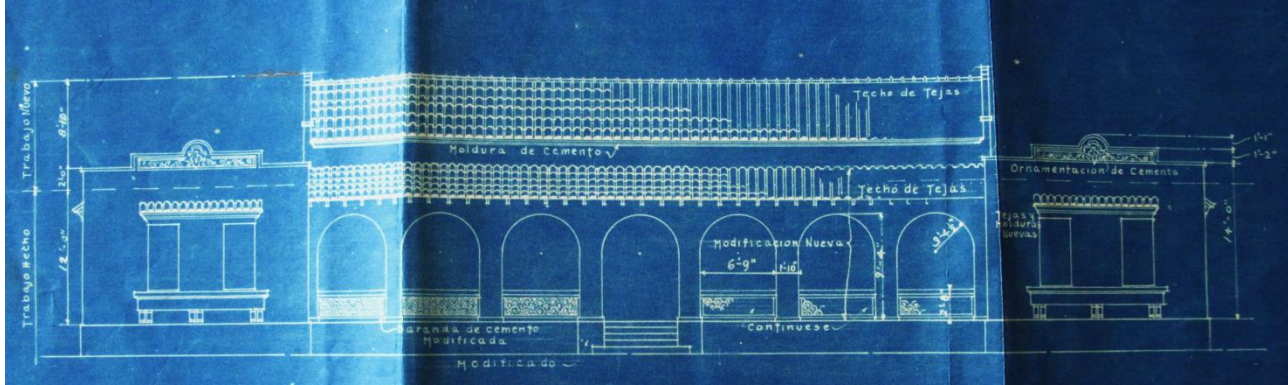


Figure 6. Design used for Building B and Building C, 1925-1928, Joseph O'Kelly, Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District.⁷

Building B

Although Building A, Building B and Building C were designed by the same architect (Joseph J O'Kelly), at the same time (1925), in the same architectural style (Mediterranean Revival), the designs evidence striking differences, particular in terms of their composition and architectural aesthetics. (See Figure 6.) (See Photograph 03 and Photograph 13.) Building A's introverted character is transformed in the designs used in Building B and Building C by means of the arcaded loggia-cum-balcony running along the main façade in the last two ones. This element provides a sense of transparency to the main façade that sharply contrasts with the more introspective character found in Building A. Treating the principal façade in this manner underscores the design's residential function. There were no towers in Building B and Building C in keeping with their secondary symbolic and physical importance.

Like Building A, Building B (as was also the case of Building C) is hierarchically and symmetrically organized with the principal entrance located at the center of the composition. Both main façades are divided into three horizontal units: a dado – visually interpreted as the base or podium – the body of the building and the roof. A tripartite vertical organization is also common to both: a central section framed by avant-corps on both sides. In the case of Building B, the central body includes seven semicircular arches that frame a wide balcony. Proportions are carefully controlled in similar manner in both buildings. The central sections, for example, are twice as wide as each one of the avant-corps. While Building A pavilions have a flat roof, in Building B it is crowned by a reinforced concrete rectangular decorative element centered by means of a semicircular motif. This component has the same width as the two windows piercing the pavilions. Each pair of windows is framed by reinforced concrete planting boxes (*jardineras*) and cantilevered eaves-like sections of roofs (known locally as *aleros*). Although in Building A these elements are found on the side façades, in Building B they also appear on the principal one.

Building B has an E-shape floor plan with wings framing two open patios in the back. This kind of internal organization (a central section with wings projecting from it, whether in U or E shape) was quite flexible and could be used to either organize offices and classrooms (Building A) or sleeping areas (Building B.) Building C apparently had a rectangular layout with a small square jutting from the façade opposite the principal one.

Reinforced concrete was used in all buildings. (See Figure 5.) The material was covered with smooth stucco on both the interior and exterior. The roofs of the central sections were made of wooden trusses covered with Imperial Spanish terracotta tiles (*techo de tejas españolas imperial*). The difference between this type of tiles and

⁷ "Edificio de Escuela para el Instituto de Niños Ciegos en Santurce, PR," November 1925, Joseph J O'Kelly, Fondo Obras Públicas, Serie Edificios Públicos, Caja 679, Archivo General de Puerto Rico.

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Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District

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the so-called Colonial ones is that the first one has a straight lateral border that facilitates its union with neighboring tiles. Although more expensive, the Imperial Spanish system is structurally lighter and easier to install. Therefore, its use resulted in savings in both construction time and structural loads. (At an unknown date, Building A's original roof tiles were substituted by the present system. Because the material, color and shape closely relate to the original design, this substitution has not adversely impacted the historic integrity of the building. It is important to remember that easy repair and substitution was precisely one of the reasons these types of roofs were used in the first place.) Although the architectural plan mentions wood floors for Building A, it is possible the tiled floors that exist at present were changes to the original plans carried out during construction. This is evidenced by the style and type of the tiles used and Miss Cordero's reference in one of the documents.

The designs of the buildings share other similarities. A most relevant one is the collusion of traditional and modern decorative features. Reinforced concrete balustrades, for examples, are used side by side with Classicist-inspired element like garlands, moldings and semicircular finials. During the 1920s, use of reinforced concrete was something of a novelty in both Puerto Rico and the USA. Therefore, traditional insertions can be interpreted as evidence of a desire to decorate the very abstract look created by the material providing it with a more conventional and decorous finish. Also of interest is the use of cantilevered inclined eaves-like sections of roofs (*aleros*) over windows, a possible adaptation of reinforced concrete architecture to the tropical environment. These elements protect from sun and rain and also create three-dimensional decorative features.

The uniqueness of the Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District resides in its introduction of a new type of building (school for the blind) constructed in a novel material (reinforced concrete) that created one of the first buildings using Mediterranean Revival semantics, interpreted at the time as symbols of Puerto Rico's modernity and progress.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "X" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- X A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
X B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
X C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
B Removed from its original location.
C A birthplace or a grave.
D A cemetery.
E A reconstructed building, object, or structure.
F A commemorative property.
G Less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE

EDUCATION

Period of Significance

1925-1941

Significant Dates

1925-1928; 1938, 1941

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

O'Kelly, Joseph J (Architect)

Miró, Manuel L

Del Valle, Demetrio

Department of the Interior

Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration

United States Department of the Interior

National Park Service / National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic
District

San Juan, Puerto Rico

Name of Property

County and State**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph**

The distinctive design and physical characteristics of the Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District grant it state significance. An architectural product resulting from the cultural intersection of an exceptional client, a distinguished architect, and a unique architectural style, the historic property is an icon of an extraordinary period in the history of the island. It is eligible for inclusion to the National Register under Criteria A, B and C for the central role it played in the education of visually impaired Puerto Ricans. Additionally, it is the best historic property associated to Miss Loaiza Cordero Del Rosario, a partially blind pioneer educator who organized and directed the Instituto until 1941 when she retired. Under her leadership, funding was allocated to construct during the 1920s-1930s the precinct that sheltered the first (and only) school for the blind in the history of the Puerto Rican archipelago. From this unique architectural stage, next to where she lived for years,⁸ she worked tirelessly to serve the handicapped, a group that had been ignored for centuries. A three-dimensional symbol of the spectacularly modern milieu existing in the island during the 1920s, the architectural masterpiece incarnates the expectations regarding health and education in a period during which modernization and progress were the principal goals of the social and political agendas. Iconic of social advancement, the historic district distinctly represents the late 1920s local expectations regarding health and education. As such it served as island-wide architectural model inspiring the new school built at the time around the archipelago. The precinct represents the only example of the post-1898 American architectural influence in Puerto Rico (regarding this particular architectural typology) and, as such, one of the earliest buildings to fully evidence the colonial power's impact on the four plus centuries old local culture.

Narrative Statement of Significance**Introduction**

Fifteenth century architect and theoretician Antonio Averlino (also known as Filarete) metaphorically compared buildings to babies. Because of the role played by the architect in nurturing physicality, the Italian equated the designer to the mother of the building. Since the client was needed for the artifact to exist this person was considered the father. The relationship between the pair resulted in a "building-child" conceived as an entity that like humans was symbolic of its historic and cultural context.

A unique set of "parents" fashioned the Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District, a precinct iconic of a particular period in the shared history of the USA and Puerto Rico. A partially blind young woman, Miss Loaiza Cordero Del Rosario, assumed the client's role and a unique designer, Mr Joseph O'Kelly, provided three dimensionality to hear dreams resulting in a unique effort by an enlightened government that, spurred by Miss Cordero, was providing services to blind Puerto Ricans for the first time.

The precinct enshrines cultural goals that cover a wide spectrum of spiritual, utilitarian and aesthetic ambitions. First and last example of a school for the blind in the archipelago,⁹ the property possesses

⁸ For some time, Miss Cordero and members of the staff lived in "cottages" sited around the precinct. It is possible one of the cottages presently houses the Centro Educativo para Ciegos e Impedidos Inc. Although probably dating to the 1920s (if not earlier), the building lacks historic integrity. It is sited outside the historic district.

⁹ At present and in spite of official declarations, Puerto Rico has no special school for the blind. After losing its national accreditation, the Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos deconstructed as an educational center for the blind. Destruction of Building C and construction of a gaggle of school buildings around the historic district were parts of these

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historic integrity and is still able to impart significant architectural, social, civic and historic lessons about Puerto Rico and its cultural and political relationship with the USA.

Miss Loaiza Cordero Del Rosario: Client and Educator of the Blind

Figure 7. Miss Loaiza Cordero Del Rosario, Google, Public domain.¹⁰

Blindness is an ailment that causes much suffering. To lose one's sight when one is an adult, as happened to Miss Loaiza Cordero Del Rosario,¹¹ additionally burdens the afflicted with a past brimful of sensory memories. (See Figure 7.) The remembered visual record creates deep ache for the lost faculty and intense longing for the many reminiscences that will never be experienced again. Rather than retreat from life when fate blinded her, Miss Cordero continued to live a full life, redoubling her efforts to educate by serving the blind. Introducing Braille as a standardized educational instrument in Puerto Rico is one of her many achievements. Adapting Braille punctuation marks from English to Spanish is another one. Her most relevant contribution, however, is being the force behind the creation of the historic district where the blind were educated for the first time in the history of the archipelago following modern and innovative ideals. Miss Cordero's life and work still serve as inspiration to many as a decades-long warrior of darkness.

Así vivimos

*No nos importa que la suerte
Nos haya herido sin piedad
Para sufrir el alma es fuerte
Para luchar hay voluntad.*

*Si nos priva del claro día
De negra sombra el capuz
Nos proporciona gran alegría
Del hacedor la eterna luz*

efforts. Additionally, services were disbanded to the different municipalities. While the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico's few disjointed efforts to educate the blind are still provided from the precinct, the historic district underscores handicapped services inolution, one of the dire results of the peculiar situation experienced by the island at this time in its history.

¹⁰ Thank are extended to Mr Luis Cordero, Ms Loaiza Cordero's grandson, who corroborated identification of this photograph.

¹¹ Miss Loaiza Cordero partly lost her sight at first, experiencing some improvement while at the Perkins Institute for the Blind. She became completely blind at a later stage in her life.

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*Y así vivimos siempre contentos
Siempre cantando siempre buscando
En los misterios del saber lo que los ciegos pueden ver.*

*Quién dio a los airesavecillas
Quién dio los peces a la mar
Quien puso germen en la semilla
Nos puede acaso abandonar.*

*Si se nos priva del claro día
De negra sombra el capuz
Nos proporciona gran alegría
Del hacedor la eterna luz.*

*Y así vivimos siempre contentos
Siempre cantando siempre buscando
En los misterios del saber
Lo que los ciegos pueden ver.*

Loaiza Cordero Del Rosario¹²

The architectural stage from where Miss Cordero's war against blindness and for equality was fought was the Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos (originally known as the Instituto de Niños Ciegos de Puerto Rico) Historic District. Founder of the Instituto concept, she managed to convince the government to allocate funds for the construction of the enclave which she directed until 1941 when she retired. A pioneer on many fronts, at a time when women could not vote¹³ and the handicapped were considered non-productive inhuman beings, Miss Cordero is considered one of the 20th century's most distinguished Puerto Ricans. This dedicated woman lived a full life enlightened with a positive attitude that undoubtedly made possible for others to be inspired by her insurmountable joie de vivre.

¹² "Así vivimos," Centro Educativo para Ciegos e Impedidos Inc Archives, Santurce, San Juan de Puerto Rico. Translation: "*This is how we live. We do not care if luck / has hurt us with no compassion / the soul is strong in suffering / there is will to fight. / If deprived of the bright day / the dark hood's shadow / will provide us with joy / from the Creator of eternal light. / And we thus live always happy / always singing always searching / for the mysteries of knowledge / that the blind can see. / Will the One who gave birds to the heavens / and fish to the sea / made seeds grow abandon us? / If deprived of the bright daylight / the dark hood's shadow / will provide us with joy / from the Creator of eternal light / And thus we live always happy / always singing always searching / for the mysteries of knowledge / that the blind can see.*" *Así vivimos* is one of several poems attributed to Miss Loaiza Cordero. All translations are by Dr Arleen Pabón-Charneco.

¹³ Women obtained the right to vote in the USA on 18 August 1920. It was not until 1929 they were able to do so in Puerto Rico.

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Figure 8. University of Puerto Rico's first graduating class, 1907. Google, Public domain.
Miss Cordero is the third young lady standing from left to right.

Limited information exists regarding the early years of Miss Cordero's life. Born in Yauco, Puerto Rico, on 15 August 1887, it is known she came from a poor family headed by a seamstress mother since her father died when she was a child. In spite of financial limitations, she was part of the University of Puerto Rico's first graduating class (1907), a feat she was able to accomplish thanks to a government fellowship. (See Figure 8.) Founded in 1903 as the Escuela Normal Industrial (Normal Industrial School), the higher learning center in Río Piedras offered a two years Normal Program with a degree as "principal professor" (*diploma de profesora principal*). Upon graduation, participants were qualified to teach in the island's newly minted public educational system. The fact that Miss Cordero was part of this exclusive group evidences her exceptional qualities for only the cream of the intellectual crop was selected to form part of the institution's first graduating class.

Although offered a fellowship to continue studies in the USA, her mother's death – a few months before graduation – forced Miss Cordero to become the family's breadwinner.¹⁴ As a result, she stayed in the island working as a teacher in the towns of Añasco and Yauco. By 1915, she was teaching at the Escuela José Julián Acosta in the Old San Juan Historic District and, a year later, at the Central High School in Santurce. Considered "the most important school built in Puerto Rico during the first decades of the 20th century,"¹⁵ this center's faculty included distinguished teachers from all over the island and mainland.

In 1918, Miss Cordero became partially blind.¹⁶ During a: *baile carnavalesco* (carnival's ball): *inesperadamente, recibió en sus ojos fluido de cloretilo, como consecuencia de unos artefactos que se disparaban con el fin de alegrar más el ambiente. Sus padecimientos de la vista se iniciaron por tal*

¹⁴ Angela Negrón Muñoz, *Mujeres de Puerto Rico Desde el periodo de la colonización hasta el primer tercio del siglo XX* (San Juan de Puerto Rico: Imprenta Venezuela, 1935), p 194.

¹⁵ "The Central High School National Register of Historic Places Nomination" (San Juan de Puerto Rico: Puerto Rico State Historic Preservation Office, 1987), p 3. The building was listed on 4 August 1987.

¹⁶ In an interview that took place in 1955 Miss Cordero stated: *Perdí la vista totalmente dos horas después de recibir la noticia de Lloréns Torres. Lo último que leí con mis ojos fue un poema que dediqué a su muerte y que publicó el periódico Puerto Rico Ilustrado.* Anna E Ortiz Fontánez, "Biografía de Loaiza Cordero Del Rosario" (San Juan de Puerto Rico: Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos, Centro de Recursos Educativos y Asistencia Tecnológica, 2003), p 2. Translation: "I lost my sight two hours after I found out Lloréns Torres was dead. The last thing I read was the poem I wrote upon his death, published in the *Puerto Rico Ilustrado*." *El Imparcial* on 1 July 1955. This refers to one of her blind episodes.

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*situación. [S]us ojos se escaparon de la luz y las tinieblas se apoderaron de sus faros luminosos.*¹⁷ As a result of this accident, Miss Cordero was forced to abandon her teaching position.

Adiós a la Escuela¹⁸

*Desde que fui muy niña, mis ilusiones todas
fueron, escuela mía, ascender hasta ti;
mirábate en la cumbre; pequeña me creía;
pero vence quien lucha, y a la cumbre ascendí.*

*Luché con la pobreza; luché con la ignorancia;
Luché con los pesares; con la envidia luché;
sirviéronme en las lides, de escudos y de lanzas;
el trabajo, el estudio, paciencia y buena fe.*

*Adiós, querida escuela de mis afectos tiernos,
donde felices horas en mi labor pasé;
se quedan en tus aulas, con mis dorados sueños,
mis nobles ideales, mi entusiasmo, mi fe.*

*Adiós, porque la mano terrible del Destino
la luz de mis pupilas de súbito extinguió;
adiós, porque la suerte en sus volubles giros
de mi ideal de gloria por siempre me alejó.
Adiós queridas aulas. Mis buenos compañeros,
discípulos amados, venid decidme adiós;
pero sabed que llevo gratísimos recuerdos
que vivirán conmigo mientras viva yo.*¹⁹

Loaiza Cordero Del Rosario

Describing the school as a summit (*cumbre*), Miss Cordero explained how, as a young girl, she dreamt of climbing the long staircase that presently leads to the building providing this architectural feature with added poignant symbolism.²⁰ She portrayed classrooms as coffers that safeguarded her golden

¹⁷ "Biografía Loaiza Cordero," Centro Educativo para Ciegos e Impedidos Inc Archives, Santurce, San Juan de Puerto Rico, pp 119-120. Translation: ". . . there was an accident and her eyes came into contact with some chlorethyl used in the pyrotechnics. Her eye problems started as a result of this accident." ". . . her eyes hid from the light and darkness substituted her luminous lighthouses." Quoted from Jaime A Carrero Concepción, *Añasco y sus hombres 1475-1893* (Mayagüez: Imprenta y Litografía Torres, 1975), 119.

¹⁸ In her speech on inauguration day, Miss Cordero refers to a poem she wrote when she became blind. It is possible the poem mentioned, *Adiós a la Escuela* ("Goodbye to School"), is the one quoted above. "Discurso leído por la directora del Instituto de Niños Ciegos en la inauguración del Edificio," *El Imparcial* (San Juan, Puerto Rico, 10 April 1928). I thank Mr. José Marull for bringing this article to my attention.

¹⁹ Translation: "Goodbye to School" "Ever since I was a little girl I dreamt / dear school to ascend to you / I saw you on a summit that made me small / but since those that fight obtain things, I was able to ascend the summit. I fought against poverty; I fought against ignorance / I fought against suffering, and against envy / my triumphs served as shields and spears / work, study, patience and good faith. Goodbye, dear school of my loved dreams / where happy working hours I spent / you keep your classrooms with my golden dreams / my noble ideals, my enthusiasm, my faith. Goodbye because Destiny's terrible hand / the light in my pupils suddenly extinguished / goodbye, because luck with its uncertainties / took away from me my ideals of glory. Goodbye, dear classrooms. My good colleagues / beloved disciples, come say goodbye / please know I will carry with me always beautiful memories / that will be a part of me as long as I live." The poem is dated 1-04-1917.

²⁰ This reference to the summit location and imposing flight of stairs must be understood as poetic license since the Central High School did not exist during Miss Cordero's childhood.

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dreams (*dorados sueños*), noble ideals (*nobles ideales*) and enthusiasm (*entusiasmo*). Forced to resign, it must have broken her heart to abandon her career as an educator for, as evidenced throughout her life, teaching was her personal and professional calling. Additionally, her vocation provided her with the means to make a living. Abandoning the scholastic summit must have seemed like the end of the bright future she had imagined for herself.

The respect accorded to teachers at the time inspired many to lend a helping hand and Miss Cordero was not alone after tragedy struck. *Al quedar ciega, la prensa del país colaboró en una campaña de recolección [sic] de fondos, la misma consistió en una velada que se efectuó en el Teatro Municipal de San Juan (en honor a ella), y auspiciada por sus compañeras, con el fin de enviarla a los Estados Unidos para tratamiento.*²¹ In a short article, "Homenaje de Gratitud" (Homage of Thanks), Miss Cordero published in the *La Democracia* newspaper, she thanked all who helped: *De muchísimos pueblos de la isla he recibido demostraciones de verdadera simpatía; pero han sobresalido entre otros: Río Piedras . . . Añasco, ese querido pueblito por cuya instrucción laboré cinco años.*²² Throughout her life and even though she was a native of Yauco she was emotionally attached to Añasco.

Although Miss Cordero received help from friends, she decided to search for a way to earn a living rather than depend on the charity of others. Her personality, described as the embodiment of utmost activity (*suma actividad*²³), led her to learn how to teach the blind. As a result, in 1917, the same year she penned her goodbye poem to the Central High School, Miss Cordero became a student at the Perkins Institution for the Blind²⁴ (also known as the Perkins School for the Blind) in Massachusetts where she enrolled in a special two years program.²⁵

Founded in 1829,²⁶ the Perkins Institute for the Blind was the first educational center of its kind in the USA, counting Miss Laura Bridgman and Miss Helen Keller as two of its most distinguished students. The center pioneered educational opportunities by opening the first kindergarten for the blind and being the first institution to teach the deaf and blind.²⁷ A highly respected academic center, Perkins was a state of the art institution.

Miss Cordero developed a life-long attachment to the institution that became her *alma mater*. Judging by the many times she received assistance from Perkins, it is safe to assume the center considered her an outstanding alumnus whose dedicated work in favor of the blind merited collaboration. Support came in a variety of forms. During the 1920s, for example, the institution granted a fellowship to "a promising student of Porto Rico."

²¹ "Biografía Loaiza Cordero," p 120.

²² *Idem*. Translation: "Many from all over the island have shown their kindness but Rio Piedras and Añasco, that little town where I worked for five years, have excelled above all others."

²³ Angela Negrón Muñoz, *Mujeres de Puerto Rico Desde el periodo de la colonización hasta el primer tercio del siglo XX*, p 194.

²⁴ Thanks are extended to Research Librarian Ms Jennifer Arnott and Assistant Ms Susanna Coit from the Perkins Institution for the Blind's Archives and Research Library. Both ladies assisted research activities providing extraordinary help.

²⁵ Miss Cordero's name appears as a student at Perkins Institution for the Blind in 1917. "List of Pupils at the Upper School," Perkins Institution and Massachusetts School for the Blind, Eighty-Sixth Annual Report of the Trustees, 1917 (Boston: Wright and Potter Printing Co, 1917), p 48. Mention is made of a Miss Hungtinton – *compañera de labores educativas, que consiguió una beca para estudiar en el Instituto Perkins para Ciegos en Watertown, Massachusetts*. Translation: "Miss Hungtinton – a colleague of hers made possible for a fellowship to be given to Miss Cordero. "Biografía Loaiza Cordero," p 120.

²⁶ The center's original name was the New England Asylum for the Blind.

²⁷ Miss Bridgman was the first deaf and blind person to learn how to read and write.

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We now gratefully announce that, while for this purpose more money is wanted, the Fisher Fund, helped by several generous donations, has been built up so that with its aid we have been enabled this year to invite to Perkins a promising student from Porto Rico, who is herself blind and who is preparing to teach others who are blind at home in Ponce. There the pioneer school for such children of Porto Rico has been founded by Miss Cordero who we trained a few years ago, before the time of the Harvard class. This is an example of what such a fund may accomplish. We are very grateful that we can extend our exceptional facilities, and those which exist around us here, to one from a far-away region where nothing similar exists.²⁸

In 1922, it was reported that: "Another method of serving the cause of educating blind children was the provision to receive into the teaching organization student-teachers from other schools. During the year we have had with us from Porto Rico Miss Loaiza Cordero and her assistant, Miss Monsarrate [sic] de Quevedo . . ." ²⁹ Two other scholarships were granted to students recommended by Miss Cordero in 1935. At this time, her work in Puerto Rico was highlighted and described in glowing terms by the Perkins administration.

The Harvard Class, numbering twelve students from different parts of the country and from one of its island possessions, will begin its half-year course on the education of the blind on the 27th of September. All of these young people have an educational background equivalent to college training, which is thus supplemented and augmented by acquiring special methods of teaching the blind. The two members of the class who come from Porto Rico have the definitive purpose of preparing themselves for service in the school of the blind there, which was established some years ago by our former pupil, Miss Loaiza Cordero, and held in affectionate regard as an offspring of Perkins Institution.³⁰

Yet another student exchange took place in 1924 when "the school of Porto Rico spared a teacher for a whole teacher."³¹

Collaboration continued throughout the years. It is obvious, Perkins was extremely proud of its "offspring" and, time and time again, the institution celebrated her achievements:

News comes from Porto Rico that the long-anticipated building of a school for the blind is now assured. An appropriation by the Junior Red Cross, has made possible the building of one cottage, and the Insular Legislature has included in its appropriation and in the provisions for a bond issue a sum sufficient to construct a main school building. It is expected that within a short period construction will begin on this newest of the American schools for the blind. This fruition of the hope and effort of that unusual and most capable woman, Miss Loaiza Cordero, is a satisfaction not only to herself and the Porto Rican devotees of this project, but to those in the United States who appreciate the needs of the blind in our island possession and who know the devoted service of Miss Cordero.³²

²⁸ Report of the Trustees, Perkins Institution and Massachusetts School for the Blind, Ninety-Second Annual Report of the Trustees (Boston: Wright and Potter Printing Co, 1923), p 25.

²⁹ *Year-book of the New York Institute for the Education of the Blind (1921) Eighty-six Annual Report of the Board of Managers – Report of the Principal – General Information* (New York: The Bradstreet Press, 1922), p 29.

³⁰ *The Lantern*, Perkins Institution, Watertown, Massachusetts, Number 16, September 15, 1935, p 3.

³¹ *Outlook for the Blind*, Education of the Blind Graduate School of Education, Harvard University, February 1, 1924, Volume XVII Number 4 March 1924, Published by the American Foundation for the Blind, Inc, New York, p 16.

³² *Outlook for the Blind*, "Editorials Porto Rico" (New York: American Foundation for the Blind, Inc, December 1923), Volume XVII Number 3, p 33.

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The establishment felt justly proud of the work carried out by its “unusual and most capable” alumnus basking in her reflective glory.

A few years later, Miss Cordero described her work within the context of the ever-constant support she received from the mainland in the following manner:

It was the first time in the history of the island that such a campaign was carried out. . . . In Porto Rico, as in many other countries, the problem of the blind has been overlooked, not because of any prejudices against it but because of lack of knowledge and perhaps of means The campaign undertaken by the National Committee was a beginning of a great work to be done. The representatives of the committee visited nineteen towns, holding conferences, exhibiting films, distributing literature, in one word – spreading the teaching of how blindness may be prevented. The people responded wonderfully, and some towns asked us to go there again. In San Juan, for example, four different meetings were held, and the interest of parents and children was great.

Of course, the results of an educational campaign can never be expressed in words or stated in figures but I can assure you that we are very much obliged to the Children’s Bureau and the National Committee for their cooperation in awakening our people to the fact that the problem of blindness can be solved if we take the trouble of working at it and that blindness is not a curse but in most cases the result of ignorance and negligence and poverty.”³³

The relationship between Miss Cordero and her Massachusetts *alma mater* was crucial for it made possible for Puerto Rico to directly benefit from the mentoring of the most advanced center for the education of the blind in the nation. This support and Miss Cordero’s leadership made possible for the archipelago to offer, for the first time ever, a modern and avant-garde education to blind children. (How advanced the project was is evidenced by the fact that, as of today, no similar program exists in Puerto Rico.)

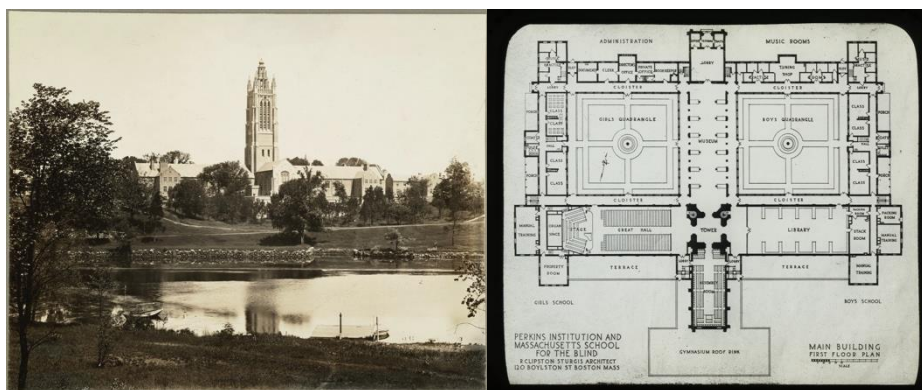


Figure 9 and Figure 10. General View and Floor Plan, Perkins Institution, Watertown, Massachusetts, Google, Public domain.

The Perkins Institute precinct Miss Cordero knew as a student was a fairly new one having moved from its original location to Watertown, Massachusetts in 1912. (See Figure 9 and Figure 10.) A cloister-like Neo-Gothic building closely toed the line regarding appropriate architectural style for an educational

³³ The News Letter “Annual Meeting of the National Committee for the Prevention of Blindness” (New York: National Society for the Prevention of Blindness), Number 39, December 1922, pp 1-2. The meeting took place on 23 November 1922.

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establishment.³⁴ Its principal entrance, hierarchical organization, symmetrical arrangement, main façade tower aiming towards the heavens and secluded courtyard were imprinted in her mind as part of the paradigmatic architectural solution required to provide an ordered and proper environment for blind students. Most of these elements were reinterpreted in Santurce when the time came to construct a similar precinct. In Puerto Rico, a tower also anchors the block-like main façade of Building A, providing the arrangement with an almost sacrosanct air. Deviations from the Perkins design include Building A's U-floor plan rather than the enclosed Massachusetts quadrangle. Additionally, different buildings housed dormitories and classrooms. The scale of the local complex also differed given the fact the Santurce version was a smaller center. Choice of architectural style was the most relevant difference. Rather than make use of Medievalisms of Gothic extraction, the Mediterranean Revival, a 1920s modern architectural expression, was used in order to silently brand the establishment as a state-of-the-art center.

Miss Cordero and the Education of the Blind

Miss Cordero's stay at Perkins lasted two years. The fact that a Spanish native speaker was able to complete the required course load in English in the allotted time further evidences her intelligence and dedication. Upon graduation and return to Puerto Rico: . . . *pensó en los ciegos de su patria, abandonados al infortunio de las eternas sombras, y regresó impulsada por el anhelo de devolverles lo que a ella le había sido devuelto; la nueva aptitud para ganar el pan y sentirse útil.*³⁵ Her dedication to this goal knew no bounds. She orchestrated meetings with the president of the USA, Warren G Harding, and the then governor of Puerto Rico, Horace M Towner. Additionally, she lobbied the local legislature and other institutions, such as the Junior Red Cross. Success came in relatively swift manner. In 1919, just a few months after her return, a law creating the first school for the blind in Puerto Rico was presented to the Puerto Rican Legislature by Cayetano Coll y Cuchí. Approved by the Insular Lower Chamber (Cámara Baja), the new institution was sited in Ponce and was directed by Miss Cordero.

The Ponce school for the blind, Miss Cordero's first effort in her fight against illiteracy, was described in the following fashion:

Perkins entertained for the two school years 1917-1919 a partially blind young woman from Porto Rico. She had had normal training at home and while at Watertown equipped herself to teach blind children. Friends of her and this institution, who have just returned from Porto Rico, report having found Miss Cordero conducting a little school, the pioneer of its kind on the island. It is at Ponce, where there is an asylum for blinded men and women which has an eye infirmary connected with it. In fact, the school is composed of convalescent children who rarely remained at the infirmary over three months. Hence, the class is an ever-changing one; and as such is no poor means of distributing information over the island regarding the possibilities of blind children.

The way this little venture had to begin is alike interesting and instructive. Of course, there was no room: there never is. So a pantry was utilized between meals, then the dining room. But these

³⁴ At the time, Medievalisms were considered the appropriate architectural semantics for academic precincts. Although a mélange of stylistic precedents is evident in the Perkins design, the building's central section is reminiscent of the 1834 Houses of Parliament, London, Great Britain by Charles Barry *et al.*

³⁵ Angela Negrón Muñoz, *Mujeres de Puerto Rico Desde el periodo de la colonización hasta el primer tercio del siglo XX*, p 195. Translation: "[Upon her return] she thought of the blind in her country abandoned to the eternal sad shadows and came back driven by the desire to return to them what had been given back to her: a new aptitude to earn a living and be useful."

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makeshifts being inconvenient to everybody, and the teacher and her friends persistent, a small nearby house was hired: and there the school work has gone on, – three hours in the morning and two in the afternoon, – for nearly two years.

Our visitor report progress and promise, for both the department of health and that of education have become devotedly interested. The heads of these departments were interviewed and assured that Perkins would be glad to entertain another teacher from Porto Rico and in other ways to promote the cause of educating the blind there.

Perhaps the most interesting thing of all is the pledge made by the Junior Red Cross of the island of \$10,000 towards providing a home for the new school.

Miss Cordero's fellow-pupils at Perkins are about to send her \$50, which they have raised, for the benefit of the little school.³⁶

It is probable Ponce was chosen as location because a blind asylum existed in the city since the 19th century. (There is no evidence educational activities took place in the historic institution.) Prior to 1898, the center was housed in the 1897 Hospital Militar. In any case, the existing center was used as an institutional umbrella of sorts for the nascent 20th century facility. While the first classroom was a pantry that could be used only during certain times of the day, soon Miss Cordero overcame this obstacle by renting a neighboring small house. By 1921, the little school was receiving help from the government and the Junior Red Cross. Her travails were many and Miss Cordero described her Ponce work as a Via Crucis (viacrucis)³⁷.

Not surprisingly, her fellow Puerto Ricans admired Miss Cordero's constancy and dedication. By 1923, the *Book of Porto Rico*, a publication that had as goal the presentation of the island as a civilized center where any and all could entertain business opportunities, described her work in the following fashion:

In Ponce women have a school for the blind, founded by Miss Loaiza Cordero, who for a time was blind herself, and was educated in a school for the blind in the United States. When she regained her eyesight she determined to do all the good possible to those deprived of that precious sense. Without means she rented a small house next to the Asylum for the Blind, and by means of personal subscriptions and government aid she is doing the immense good of turning those who were formerly absolutely useless, into useful citizens, capable of earning their own living. This school for the blind is now supported by the government and the Red Cross. Great respect and admiration are due to this woman who has interested several generous persons in her work, and who herself has a silent history of privations and self-denials.

Although admired as a symbol of Puerto Rican modernity, Miss Cordero's behavior was at odds with local traditional female deportment. This is the reason the woman author, after a glowing description of her work, added: "Porto Rican women are cultured, well-educated, homeloving [*sic*] and devoted to music and art. Whatever she does outside of the home is so meritorious, that it may be said that the desire to remedy the misfortunes of others is the only thing that can force her to leave her domestic circle."³⁸ The author seems to silently tell the reader that while it was relatively common for ladies to entertain charity work, Ponce (or the Puerto Rican archipelago for that matter) had never seen

³⁶ Edward E Allen, *Outlook for the Blind A Quarterly Record of Their Progress & Welfare*, "Current Events" "Massachusetts Perkins Institution for the Blind," Spring 1921, Volume XV, Number 1, pp 58-59.

³⁷ "Discurso leído por la directora del Instituto de Niños Ciegos en la inauguración del Edificios."

³⁸ E Fernández García (editor), *El libro de Puerto Rico: The Book of Porto Rico* (San Juan de Puerto Rico: El Libro Azul Publishing Company, 1925), p 819.

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someone as outgoing and steadfast as Miss Cordero. The author seems to excuse her non-traditional behavior by explaining it was the product of her “desire to remedy the misfortunes of others.”

From the moment she first returned to Puerto Rico, Miss Cordero challenged traditional culture. Entrepreneurship and collaborative agreements between institutions and mentoring arrangements were the tools she used time and time again. While assistance from the government and the Junior Red Cross was welcome, she spearheaded a movement to educate the blind without waiting for the church or the government to lead the way.

The Ponce school garnered the attention of many, including Puerto Rico’s military government.

For the first time in the history of Porto Rico provision was made by the legislature for teaching the blind. Miss Loaiza Cordero, a graduate from the normal department of the University of Porto Rico, who had the misfortune of losing her eyesight while in the service as a public-school teacher and who later took a course of training in Perkins Institute, was appointed as teacher and assigned to the asylum for the blind in Ponce. She has overcome difficulties that appeared insurmountable at first because of lack of proper classroom and lack of instructional material. Nevertheless, the results have been very gratifying. Twenty-four pupils, ranging in age from 10 to 22 years, have received instruction. Of this number, 7 were totally and 17 partly blind. The instruction was devoted largely to handwork so as to enable these persons to become at least partly self-supporting. Seven pupils have learned how to read by means of the Braille system and five have learned how to write. The experiment fully justifies the establishment of an independent school for the blind, of whom there are many in Porto Rico.³⁹

The numbers mentioned in the official report are impressive taking into consideration that there was a “lack of proper classroom” and “instructional material.” At this time a visitor described the institution as housed in: *una casita miserable, con cajones por muebles*.⁴⁰ In spite of so many limitations, her experiment convinced the powers that be that an educational center for the blind was something not only needed in Puerto Rico but possible.

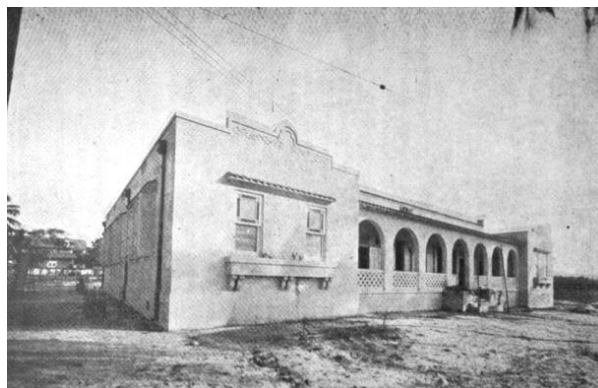


Figure 11. Building C during construction (destroyed), 1925-1928, Joseph O’Kelly, Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District.⁴¹

³⁹ “Report of the Commissioner of Education,” in *Report of the Governor of Porto Rico to the Secretary of War 1920* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1920), p 425.

⁴⁰ Angela Negrón Muñoz, *Mujeres de Puerto Rico Desde el periodo de la colonización hasta el primer tercio del siglo XX*, p 195. Translation: “a miserable little house with seats made of wooden crates.”

⁴¹ Edith M. Irvine Rivera, “Charitable Institutions of Porto Rico under the Department of Health”, *Porto Rico Health Review: Official Bulletin of the Department of Health*, Vol 1, April 1926, No 10, p 7.

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During the second half of the 1920s Miss Cordero decided to put an end to makeshift facilities. Her constant work and dedication made possible the organization of the first formal precinct dedicated to the education of the blind in the Puerto Rican archipelago. (See Figure 11.) The new center was to be located not in a rented small house in Ponce but in a modern precinct sited in up and coming Santurce, a sector of San Juan Municipality. Rejecting the southern city as locale for the institution was a wise move if only in terms of politics. Santurce was an active part of the capital city, a fact that guaranteed contact with the powers that be. There is no confirmed information regarding how Miss Cordero made and kept her contacts, cajoling all – including government officials – to move ahead with the project. Her success was undoubtedly the result of the meetings she held with President Warren G Harding and Governor Horace M Towner, presidential appointee to that position. She was also able to organize support structures for the establishment. In the same year the school for the blind was created, for example, she founded the Sociedad (also called Asociación) Benefactora de Ciegos (Association for the Benefit of the Blind of Puerto Rico). Undoubtedly, officials like first president Dr Fernós Isern and socialites like Ms Isabel Andreu de Aguilar and Ms Beatriz Lasalle, among others, lend a hand in finding funds and patronage making the organization the right arm of the Instituto.

In 1923, the Legislature assigned \$50,000.00 to the project to be built in a four *cuerdas*⁴² Santurce lot ceded two years earlier. The Red Cross, in turn, contributed \$17,000.00. In 1925, the Legislature assigned an additional \$25,080.00 (a year) for the institution's upkeep. By 1927, Miss Cordero was in complete control of the administration, organizing events to benefit the center. A person closely associated to Perkins visited San Juan in 1927 providing an interesting description of some of the activities Miss Cordero planned during his stopover in the island. "Mr Allen's Diary of his and Mrs Allen's Visits to School for the Blind in the West Indies" states she was both director (*directora*) and principal leader of the center.

Introductory Note

Mrs Allen and I have recently returned home from a month's cruise in and about the Caribbean. The *California* gave us two days both at Havana and Port of Spain, Trinidad, and one day in San Juan, in each of which places is a school for the blind. . . . Both in Cuba and Porto Rico we were expected, one teacher at the school in the former and the three at that in the latter having been trained at Watertown; so we were given warm and rather elaborate receptions. The "Loaiza" of my notes is Señorita Cordero, *Directora* of the Porto Rican school. She came to Perkins in 1917 indirectly through Miss Lucy Wright, then superintendent of the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind

Tuesday March 19

Warm but not uncomfortable in lightest summer habit. From 9 to 12 we visit San Juan's chief attractions under guidance of the Superintendent of Schools. Official car, a Lincoln. At 1 o'clock are photographed at the school for the blind. Set luncheon there with its committee of 7 prominent insular officials and their ladies, at Mrs Allen's right the Director of Public Health, and the mine, the Chief Justice of Porto Rico. Committee and *Directora* show us over their plant and convey us to the pier from which we depart at 5 o'clock laden with gifts in Homeric fashion.⁴³

⁴² Four *cuerdas* is approximately 169,209 square feet. Legislature of Puerto Rico through Joint Resolution No. 30 of July 7, 1921 designated a parcel of land in Santurce for the construction of an Asylum-School for the Blind Children.

⁴³ This reference to the coincidentally blind Greek poet brings to mind the Homeric perception that "nobody ever gave anything, whether goods or services or honors, without proper recompense, real or wishful, immediate or years away to himself or his kin." J T Hooker, "Gifts in Homer" *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, December 1989, Volume 36, Issue 1, pp 79-90; 79.

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Several aspects of Mr Allen's description are noteworthy. First, Miss Cordero managed to obtain a posh car – a Lincoln no less! – to stylishly transport the visitors around San Juan. Second, prominent local government officials – the Superintendent of Schools, Director of Public Health, Chief Justice, among others – were in attendance during the lunch offered to the visitors. (Officers' wives undoubtedly added sophistication to the soiree.) This approach highlighted to both visitors and local dignitaries the significance of the occasion. Miss Cordero was able to silently impress upon the locals her important USA connections while imparting upon the mainlanders how powerful her local network was.

Mr Allen described the hybrid administrative character of the center reminding his readers of Miss Cordero's earlier efforts in Ponce: "The Instituto de Niños Ciegos de Puerto Rico, though sponsored by the Association for the Benefit of the Blind of Puerto Rico, is a "state school," the pioneer and only one of its kind on the island. Opened in 1920 at Ponce it is a monument to the resourcefulness and persistency of its *Directora* [Miss Cordero]." It is interesting to note Mr Allen considered the institution a "state school," a status that made its existence and administration a government responsibility. Knowledge of local politics allows the following interpretation. While the center was a "state school" Miss Cordero also had a committee of seven distinguished citizens who participated in all decision-making processes. She probably felt the group's contacts and social distinction would be of help when dealing with local authorities.

The hybrid nature of the institution was reflected in the construction of the new precinct. While one of the buildings was "provided" by the Junior Red Cross (Building C, used as dormitory or "residence"), the second one (Building A, where classrooms and administrative facilities were located) was paid by the government.

Its present realization is: 9 acres of land and 2 buildings (These buildings were uninjured in the hurricane of September 1928.), one being the general residence provided by the Junior Red Cross; the other, erected by the government, a brand-new structure for school and administration, both of them one-story and fireproof, but handsome and adequate in every way. Built on 3 sides of a rectangle, one side for girl, one for boys, it provides in all essentials for a future maximum of 150 pupil; cost only \$33,000. No auditorium as such – but by folding back divisions of 3 spacious classrooms you have one. At present 2 of these rooms contain beds to be used until number of new admissions, which depends on increased appropriations, shall justify another cottage or two.⁴⁴

The building design closely follows the Perkins one in terms of function. Apparently, during the early years, Building A was also used as dormitory while others, including Miss Cordero, lived in "cottages" located throughout the precinct and in Building B.⁴⁵ As mentioned, the principle of the cloistered quadrangle was transformed in favor of Building A's U-shaped floor plan. Designed for a staggering 150 students, Mr Allen makes no mention of recreational facilities or gardens.

Students' desks and the plate-maker to print books came from the mainland. In addition to the architectural influence, the "atmosphere" is described as "essentially that of the parent school at Watertown."

⁴⁴ "Mr Allen's Diary of his and Mrs Allen's Visits to School for the Blind in the West Indies," Perkins Institution and Massachusetts School for the Blind, Ninety-Sixth Annual Report of the Trustees (Boston: Wright & Potter Printing Co, 1927), pp 28-30.

⁴⁵ One of these cottages, housing the Centro Educativo para Ciegos e Impedidos Inc, still exists south of the Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District. As mentioned in Section 7, it is not included in the historic district because the building lacks historic integrity.

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School desks from the United States, also the dozen braille-written in Spanish by a staff member who will soon begin embossing by means of the plate-maker presented by the New York Institute through Principal Van Cleve. As might be expected, the atmosphere is essentially that of the parent school at Watertown. A young man will soon return home from there to be an instructor in manual training and piano tuning. I am gratified to find in full swing here, as in Havana, the principle of pupil self-help; in other words, the training for maximum independence through daily contributory effort on the part of those for whom the institute is conducted.⁴⁶

From the moment of its creation, the most important influence provided by Perkins to the Puerto Rican Instituto was the educational philosophy guiding the center. Just as its mentor institution, the local school was to empower a "self-help" attitude so that each child could achieve "maximum independence."⁴⁷ In an island where the blind lacked the most basic of services, this modern approach struck a chord. The establishment became one more example of Puerto Rico's paradigmatic goal at the time: transforming the island into a showcase of modernity.

Fiscal problems appeared time and time again. In an undated "Department of the Interior Memorandum" directed to Architect Rafael Carmoega, director of the Public Building Division, the following is recorded:

La Legislatura asignó \$50,000 para el Instituto de Niños Ciegos. De esta apropiación se pagó parte del costo del primer edificio y se está pagando el segundo que construye ahora Miró.

El sobrante después de terminado este edificio ascenderá probablemente a unos \$9,000.00. Había la intención de fabricar un tercer edificio pero esta cantidad no será suficiente.⁴⁸

Things further complicated. On 7 May 1925, Demetrio Valle sent a letter to the Department of the Interior Commissioner informing:

Debido a que, según me he enterado, no existen fondos disponibles con que efectuar los pagos correspondientes, por trabajos ejecutados en la construcción del Instituto de Niños Ciegos en Santurce, contratada por el que suscribe, y viéndome imposibilitado a continuar dicha construcción hasta tanto reciba dinero con que financiarla [sic], por la presente deseo comunicarle que me he visto obligado a paralizar dicha obra.

Esperando se sirva notificarme la fecha en que haya conseguido el dinero para la continuación de esta construcción, quedo de Ud . . .⁴⁹

⁴⁶ "Mr Allen's Diary of his and Mrs Allen's Visits to School for the Blind in the West Indies," pp 28-30.

⁴⁷ In 1984, the "Loaiza Cordero Institute for Blind Children," directed by Angel L Quiñones, is listed as a NAC-Accredited Residential School for the Blind and Visually Handicapped *The Lantern*, Perkins Institution, Watertown, Massachusetts, Volume LIII, Number 3, Spring 1984, p 9. The Instituto lost its accreditation at a later time.

⁴⁸ "Department of the Interior Memorandum," Fondo de Obras Públicas, Serie Edificio Públicos, Caja 679, Archivo General de Puerto Rico. Translation: "The Legislature approved \$50,000 for the Instituto de Niños Ciegos. Part of this appropriation was used to pay for the first building and second one under construction." "Probably, there will be \$9,000.00 left of the original amount. Plans called for the construction of a third building but this amount will not be enough."

⁴⁹ "Letter from Demetrio Valle," 7 May 1925, Fondo de Obras Públicas, Serie Edificio Públicos, Caja 679, Archivo General de Puerto Rico. Translation: "I have found out that there are no funds to pay me for the work carried out in the construction of the Instituto de Niños Ciegos in Santurce for which I was contracted and since I am unable to continue work until I receive payment I wish to communicate to you that I have been forced to stop work." "I will wait until you notify me when you have found the funds to continue construction work."

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Throughout the years, financial difficulties characterized the Instituto's progress. No evidence has been found that a formal master plan was ever created for the whole precinct. It is obvious all were aware construction was severely limited by a shortage of funds. This is the reason a third building, a façade quasi-replica of Building C, was erected at a later date.⁵⁰

During the design and construction processes of the Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District, Miss Cordero added yet another talent to her many accomplishments for she fully participated in the design process, making recommendations and penning requests in order to guarantee its correctness. Her initial participation was planned in the following manner:

Según solicitud verbal que hiciera el Arquitecto de ese Departamento Sr. O'Kelly, se le envía con la presente un croquis del edificio para casa-escuela del Instituto Puertorriqueño de Niños Ciegos. Este croquis ha sido trabajado bajo la inspiración de la Srita Loaiza Cordero, Superintendente de Niños de la Escuela actualmente en Ponce y creemos conveniente que antes que se hiciera el trazado final se enviase para que la Srita Cordero tuviese una entrevista con la persona encargada de dicho trabajo y así pudiera darle alguna información que pudiera serle de utilidad.⁵¹

Miss Cordero prepared several "punch lists" (30 September 1924 and 24 July 1925) kept at the Archivo General de Puerto Rico. In one of these documents she finds fault with the color used to paint the interior of the building. *El color de la pintura interior sería preferible crema y no gris.*⁵² In another unmarked piece of paper in the file there appears another similar comment: *Las locetas [sic] de comedor y pasillos y balcón son blancas y negras; han debido ser de tonos verdes y amarillos. Nada hay que hiera tanto a una vista delicada como el contraste del blanco con el negro.*⁵³ Miss Cordero not only made possible the construction of the buildings by lobbying for the Instituto's creation and finding funds to erect the precinct, she also kept close tabs on the design process in order to make sure it was appropriate for its use. Her participation was described in the following manner: *El edificio ha sido construido con planos preparados siguiendo las ideas de la señoritas Cordero que hiciera estudios especiales en esta material cuando habiendo perdido la vista se trasladó a Boston a estudiar nuevamente a leer, a escribir y las otras artes en que pueden educarse los ciegos.*⁵⁴ By means of this collaboration this admirable woman additionally contributed to Puerto Rican culture by bringing attention to the plight of the blind and the relevance good architectural design played in civic buildings. Most importantly, her experience undoubtedly brought a new perspective to the interpretation of the special-needs buildings, as well as educational models.

⁵⁰ In a letter dated 5 January 1938 Jose E Colóm informs the Honorable Auditor of Puerto Rico that a \$10,000.00 has been assigned as per Joint Resolution Number 58 dated 12 May 1937. Fondo de Obras Públicas, Serie Edificio Públicos, Caja 679, Archivo General de Puerto Rico.

⁵¹ "Letter from Dr Pedro N Ortiz, Commissioner of Health to the Commissioner of the Department of the Interior," 15 June 1925, Fondo de Obras Públicas, Serie Edificio Públicos, Caja 679, Archivo General de Puerto Rico.

⁵² "Cambios que deben hacerse en los planos para la casa que dona la Cruz Roja Juvenil, para el Instituto Puertorriqueño de Niños Ciegos," 30 September 1924, Fondo de Obras Públicas, Serie Edificio Públicos, Caja 679, Archivo General de Puerto Rico. Translation: "The color of the interior paint should be cream and not grey."

⁵³ *Ibid.* Translation: "The floor tiles of the dining room, corridors and balcony are white and black instead of tonalities of green and yellow. Nothing hurts a delicate eye as the contrast between white and black." It is probable she was referring to Building B, for architectural plans for Building A establish wood was going to be used.

⁵⁴ "Brillante inauguración del hermoso edificio Esc del Inst de Niños Ciegos," *La Democracia* (San Juan, Puerto Rico, 10 April 1928), p 1. Translation: "The design closely follows Miss Cordero's ideas who carried out specialized studies in Boston when she became partially blind and traveled to this city to again learn how to read, write and learn about the arts blinds can study." I thank Mr José Marull for bringing this article to my attention.

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On inauguration day, Dr Fernós Isern, President of the Asociación Benefactora de Ciegos, reminded those present: *Sí Loaíza Cordero no hubiera sufrido la desgracia de perder la facultad de la vista, Puerto Rico no hubiera tenido la fortuna de contar con Loaíza para que inspirara la obra de la creación de un instituto para el cuidado y educación de los niños ciegos de nuestro país.*⁵⁵ As “father” of the “child-building” – as per Filarete’s metaphor – Miss Cordero made possible for the state of the art institution, sheltered in a beautiful precinct, to serve the education of Puerto Rico’s blind. She not only created the concept of the Instituto and its special curriculum but also cajoled government officials into assigning a plot of land in an up and coming sector of the capital city and funding to construct the precinct, serving as an architectural *sous-chef* of sorts to the architect working in the design.

Miss Loaiza Cordero worked for her special constituency and all islanders via the Instituto until 1941 when she retired. She died on 14 November 1957.

Architecture for the Blind

During the 1920s, in Puerto Rico, once government funding was allocated for an architectural project, the Department of the Interior was in charge of design and construction. A team of local and mainland architects worked together for this agency authoring most of the 20th century stellar Puerto Rican buildings. Due to an absence of academic interpretation, their work presents a complicated professional and creative tangle that makes it difficult to grant authorship to individuals. Even though assistantship, collaborative and cross-referential relationships are unclear most of the buildings designed in this fashion are architectural jewels of utmost relevance to Puerto Rico and the USA, if only on the basis of the colonial relationship forged at this time via architecture. All of the group’s designers favored modern materials, novel construction techniques and imaginative architectural semantics in an effort to create icons of Puerto Rico’s avant-gardism and promise of a great future.

While, at first sight, authorship of the Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District seems unclear, interpretative activities allow us to establish that one of the architects of the uniquely imaginative Division, Joseph J O’Kelly, is the “father” of all three buildings. Contrarily, the granite plaque placed on inauguration day on Building A lists Rafael Carmoega as architect and Manuel L Miró as builder. The text reads as follows:

*Este edificio, destinado a casa-escuela del
Instituto Puertorriqueño de Niños Ciegos fue
erigido en el año 1927 siendo gobernador de
la isla el Hon Horace Mann Towner,
comisionado del Interior don Guillermo Esteves,
comisionado de Sanidad, el Dr Pedro N Ortiz,
presidente de la Asociación Benefactora de Ciegos de Puerto Rico, el Dr A Fernós Isern,
directora del institución y secretaria de la asociación la Srta Loaiza Cordero.
Rafael Carmoega, Arquitecto
Manuel L Miro, contratista.*⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Quoted in: Angela Negrón Muñoz, *Mujeres de Puerto Rico Desde el periodo de la colonización hasta el primer tercio del siglo XX*, p 195. Translation: “If Loaiza Cordero had not lost her sight Puerto Rico would not have had the good fortune to have a Loaiza Cordero to inspire the creation of an institute dedicated to the care and education of blind children in our country.”

⁵⁶ The granite plaque is preserved at the Centro Educativo para Ciegos e Impedidos Inc Archives, Santurce, San Juan de Puerto Rico. Translation: “This building designed to serve as house-school of the Puerto Rican Institute of Blind Children was built in 1927 under the governorship of the Hon Horace Man Towner; Commissioner of the Interior Guillermo Esteves;

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On the cover page of a set of construction specifications, probably dated 17 March 1927, the same attribution is found:

*Departamento del Interior
Guillermo Esteves
Comisionado
Especificaciones
para la construcción de un edificio escuela en el
Instituto de Ciegos en Santurce.
Preparado por la
División de Edificios Públicos
Rafael Carmoega
Arquitecto⁵⁷*

Attributions to Carmoega, Director of the Public Buildings Division, Department of the Interior, as designer are common. In fact, his name constantly appears as sole architect of government-funded buildings during the 1920s-1930s period even though one lifetime would not have been enough to author the many intricate projects he supposedly designed. Interpretation of his role in all these projects uncovers the tangled web of professional activity that characterized the architectural team under his supervision.



Figure 12. Detail of notation included with the drawing of the floor plan of Building A, November 1925 Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District.⁵⁸

In a January 1925 drawing of Building A's floor plan the standard information box, traditionally included in architectural plans, depicts additional information relevant to authorship that is at odds with the above-quoted attributions. (See Figure 12.) Administrative information detailing the agency in charge of the design and its administrator is first provided:

commissioner of Health Dr Pedro N. Ortiz; president of the Asociación Benefactora de Ciegos de Puerto Rico, Dr A Fernós Isern, director of the institution and secretary of the association Miss Loaiza Cordero. Rafael Carmoega, Architect Manuel L Miró, Builder."

⁵⁷ Architectural Specifications, "Edificio de Escuela para el Instituto de Niños Ciegos en Santurce", Noviembre 1925 Fondo de Obras Públicas, Serie Edificio Públicos, Caja 679, Archivo General de Puerto Rico. Translation: "Department of the Interior / Guillermo Esteves / Commissioner / Specifications for the construction of a school building / at the Blind Institute in Santurce / prepared by the / Public Buildings Division / Rafael Carmoega / Architect."

⁵⁸ "Edificio de Escuela para el Instituto de Niños Ciegos en Santurce," November 1925. Fondo de Obras Públicas, Serie Edificio Públicos, Caja 679, Archivo General de Puerto Rico, Archivo General de Puerto Rico.

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*Preparado por el Departamento del Interior
División de Edificios Públicos
Rafael Carmoega
Arquitecto⁵⁹*

Under this information, the box lists the names of the designer (*diseño de*), draftsman (*dibujo de*), reviser (*revisado por*) and copyist or tracer (*calcado por*). The name J J O'Kelly (Joseph J O'Kelly) is written under the first notation. Specific detailing of activities (who designed the building, who made the drawings, who revised the drawings and who copied the architectural plans) belies an interest in accountability regarding the role played by each government employee. They represent the basic stages of an architectural design. In this particular case, this information contradicts official documents and the plaque mentioned above.



Figure 13. Detail of notation included in the drawing of Building C floor plan, January 1925, Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District.⁶⁰

Building B's and Building C's preserved architectural drawings, described as "Donated by the Junior Red Cross" (*Donado por la Cruz Roja Juvenil*), presents the exact same attribution although, in this particular case, O'Kelly's name appears as both designer and draftsman. (See Figure 13.) (It is interesting to note that architectural plans for the other buildings are dated several months before those of Building A. A 1927 handwritten Christmas note in the Archivo General de Puerto Rico confirms this situation. The administration of the Instituto requests that as *Aguinaldo*, a donation or gift made during the Christmas season: *ordene construyan cuando antes el edificio Principal de nuestro Instituto*.)⁶¹

These innocent looking text boxes part of the architectural plans evidence one of the most complex conundrums regarding architectural work in the archipelago. It is no exaggeration to state they are iconic of the most complex issue regarding Puerto Rico's historic architecture. As a result, authorship of most of the early 20th century public buildings is confusingly misrepresented because of these and similar information sources. Since no academic interpretation has been made of the creative interaction existing among the group of architects working for the federal government, attribution for some of the most important Puerto Rican buildings is, at best, a muddled subject.

Regarding the three fine arts – architecture, painting and sculpture – authorship issues are a key concern. Traditionally, authorship of a work of art is granted to the person whose creative input is

⁵⁹ Translation: "Prepared by the Department of the Interior / Public Buildings Division / Rafael Carmoega / Architect." "Edificio de Escuela para el Instituto de Niños Ciegos en Santurce," Fondo de Obras Públicas, Serie Edificio Públicos, Caja 679, Archivo General de Puerto Rico.

⁶⁰ "Instituto para Niños Ciegos Donado por la Cruz Roja Juvenil," January 1925, Proyecto No. 693, Fondo Obras Públicas, Serie Edificios Públicos, Caja 679, Archivo General de Puerto Rico.

⁶¹ "Christmas Note," 1927, Fondo Obras Públicas, Serie Edificios Públicos, Caja 679, Archivo General de Puerto Rico.

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related to most major decisions concerning the artistic artifact. In architecture, as in painting and sculpture, if one individual is responsible for all or most of the relevant creative design activities, then he/she is considered author (designer or architect). If more than one person participate in the creative processes, then all are co-authors (co-designers). In architecture, they are also considered architectural collaborators.⁶² It should be noted draftsmanship and related peripheral activities carried out in an architectural atelier do not necessarily imply collaborative efforts and, thus, architectural co-authorship or collaboration. By the same token, administrative activities are not considered on par with creative input. Taking these basic tenements into consideration, the Carmoega-O'Kelly architectural relationship can be interpreted in several manners. (The same applies to authorship of most buildings designed by the Public Buildings Division's extraordinary team of designers.)

First, it is possible Carmoega exclusively acted as O'Kelly's administrative supervisor. If this was the case, O'Kelly is sole author of the buildings due to an absence of creative participation on Carmoega's part given the fact that management of an architectural project does not qualify as a creative activity for the purposes of authorship. In other words, O'Kelly is the author, designer or architect of the buildings. Second, if Carmoega collaborated in the design process by participating in major decisions, in other words, if his input included creative involvement, he needs to be considered co-designer or architectural collaborator. If this was the case, he and O'Kelly are the authors.

As mentioned, no study exists that academically interprets the architectural relationship between Carmoega and his team of architects (individually or as a group), a complex process that needs to also analyze possible cross-referential collaborative activities.⁶³ Since no clear delineation of creative activities exist – a situation which is repeated again and again in every single building designed by the Public Buildings Division, as well as the Puerto Rico Reconstruction (known as the PRRA) authorship interpretation has been treated in two-fold manner. Either bureaucracy reigns supreme and supervisors and administrators receive sole authorship (accounting for the extraordinary number of projects Carmoega is credited to have authored) or all members of the team are recognized as designers. This last approach is the one assumed by Roberto Segre regarding the Capitolio de Puerto Rico, another one of the gaggle of buildings the team designed. *Sin embargo, la versión definitiva, de 1924, realizada por Rafael Carmoega, William Pendleton, William Schimmelpfenning, Joseph O'Kelly y Albert Nichols, carece de originalidad respecto del repertorio romano – la cúpula del Panteón – filtrado a través de las obras neoyorkinas de McKim, Mead & White.*⁶⁴ Whether one agrees or not with Segre's *ex-tempore* contention that the Capitolio de Puerto Rico depicts no originality, by describing all participants as authors, he is categorizing all as architectural collaborators.⁶⁵

⁶² The role of an architectural collaborator is different than that of an architectural assistant. In the first case, the work needs to be attributed to two or more designers since creative input existed from two different persons. This is not the case in the second type of participation. Assistantship implies a non-creative participation. An example of the second type is a draftsman. Arleen Pabón Charneco, *The Architectural Collaborators of Antoni Gaudí* (Doctoral Dissertation, Northwestern University, 1983).

⁶³ Cross-referential activities refer to collaborative relationships between members of a group, in this case the members of the team that worked under Carmoega. It is possible, for example, such a relationship may have existed between O'Kelly and fellow team member Albert B Nichols.

⁶⁴ Roberto Segre, *Arquitectura antillana del siglo XX* (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2003), p 88. Translation: "Nevertheless, the final version, dated 1924, carried out by Rafael Carmoega, William Pendleton, William Schimmelpfenning, Joseph O'Kelly y Albert Nichols, lacks originality regarding the Roman repertoire – the Pantheon's dome – filtered through the New York works of McKim, Mead & White."

⁶⁵ Since such an analysis requires a detailed study of each one of the works produced by the group, as well as a detailed analysis of each one of the participants' individual works (before and after the collaborative effort), something Segre did not carry out, it is safe to assume he took the politically correct route by naming them all as designers.

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It is important to underscore that O’Kelly is specifically credited as designer in the architectural plans kept at the Archivo General de Puerto Rico. It is highly probable O’Kelly was the architect and designer with Carmoega acting as administrative supervisor. In this role, the second man may have contributed general ideas to the scheme in the manner of recommendations or critiques. On the other hand, he may have also simply acted as supervisor making sure the design complied with government requirements. In both cases, authorship can (and should) be attributed solely to O’Kelly. (This interpretation is underscored by the fact only his name appears over the “designed by” notation.) It is possible the granite plaque and architectural specifications document in which Carmoega is listed as architect was information provided related to the official institution and the people charged with the administration of the Public Buildings Division. (This is not an uncommon situation. It is a well-known fact that many architectural studios use their legal name as “author” even when the designer is one employee of the firm.)

Rafael Carmoega Morales⁶⁶ is one of Puerto Rico’s most outstanding architects.⁶⁷ His leadership, prolific imagination and dexterity in varied architectural semantics made possible for him to direct the construction of many the 20th century emblematic buildings. Joseph J O’Kelly, in turn, is one of Puerto Rico’s architectural luminaries. Both men were part of the group of architects who during the early decades of the 20th century completely transformed local architecture. The team also included: Adrian Finlayson (who directed the Public Buildings Division before Carmoega), William Schimmelpfenning, Albert B Nichols, William Pendleton and Pedro de Castro, among others. The period’s architectural uniqueness and distinction is indebted to this team and to the new path they forged for the art.

In order to better understand the exceptionality present in the design of the Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District it is relevant to briefly analyze the practice of architecture in Puerto Rico during the turn of the 19th century and early decades of the 20th century.

Post-1898 Island Architectural Milieu

Until 1898, architects working in Puerto Rico followed the traditional academic path established by the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando, an august organism that sat in Madrid, Spain. Founded by royal mandate during the 18th century, the institution was charged with both the education and the governing of the practice of the profession. Any and all architects who worked in the island went through an educational and professional system that even required practitioners to submit copies of all architectural plans to the Real Academia’s Madrid repository, among many other professional requirements. In fact, during some periods of the 19th century, all designs, even seemingly unimportant private works by non-architects, were sent to Spain to be examined and approved (or not) by the eminent group.⁶⁸ The principal objective of the establishment was to strictly control the architects’ creative processes putting a stop to the traditional builder guilds preeminence. With the creation of the Real Academia, a more sophisticated and educated group – educated in the practice **and** theory of the profession – was prepared to practice. *Esta fue la responsabilidad fundacional de las academias:*

⁶⁶ As head of the Public Buildings Division, Carmoega led design teams that varied with time regarding participants.

⁶⁷ Several buildings designed by Carmoega, on his own or as part of the group, are listed in the National Register of Historic Places: Capitolio de Puerto Rico, Escuela de Medicina Tropical, among others. The inclusion list of his work is not definitive.

⁶⁸ Arleen Pabón Charneco, *La arquitectura patrimonial puertorriqueña y sus estilos* (San Juan de Puerto Rico: Oficina Estatal de Conservación Histórica de Puerto Rico, 2010), p 138.

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*liberar a los artistas (arquitectos incluidos) del sistema tradicional de las cofradías y los gremios que se entendía asfixiaba la creatividad poniendo límites al talento personal.*⁶⁹

The Real Academia's primary goal, then, was to abolish Baroque expressions and its rhizomes (including the Neo-Plateresque and Neo-Churrigueresque), characteristically used by construction guild members who lacked formal (particularly, theoretical) education as architects. This hostility was described as: *La lucha llevada a cabo por la Academia a partir del 1752 contra el barroco.*⁷⁰ In a world where Sebastiano Serlio, Vicente Scamozzi and Domenico Fontana reigned supreme, Classicist-perfumed architecture was the much-admired end of any and all architectural design processes. While such expression reigned as the epitome of rationality and, thus, civilized architecture, interpretations varied dramatically generating architectural semantics that saw no marked difference between Greek, Roman or Renaissance ideals. Even the 19th century emerging engineering profession abided by this inclination. Regardless of Classicist precedent, official architecture in Spain and its colonies rarely escaped the Real Academia's strict guidelines.⁷¹

No record exists of any Puerto Rican formally studying architecture in Spain prior to 1898.⁷² After this year, however, interested parties could travel to the USA and study in varied schools. At the same time the locals were formed in mainland universities, several American architects came to work in Puerto Rico. During the early years of the 20th century, federal funds empowered, as never before, architectural work. As mentioned, because this bright period and the architectural stars that define it have not been studied in a systematic manner, authorship of varied buildings is muddled, at best. Given the fact the names of Rafael Carmoega and Joseph O'Kelly are related to the buildings of the Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District, the situation will be interpreted by means of a summarized exploration of their careers.

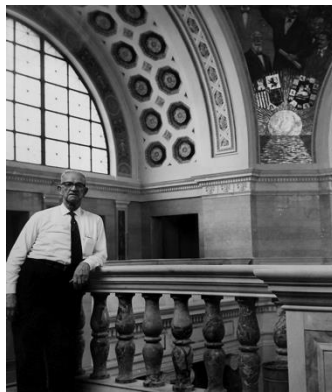


Figure 14. Architect Rafael Carmoega Morales, Capitolio de Puerto Rico, Google, Public domain.

⁶⁹ *Idem*. Translation: "This was the reason academies were founded: to liberate artists (including architects) from the traditional guilds that was felt asphyxiated creativity."

⁷⁰ Claude Bédât, *La Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando (1744-1808)* (Madrid: Real Academia Española, 1989), p 60. Translation: "The battle carried out by the Academy against the Baroque since 1792."

⁷¹ Some of buildings that used a non-Classicist vocabulary served as Spanish pavilions in varied international fairs. When Spanish Renaissance and Baroque semantics were used for such a purpose it was understood they were the exception to the rule, ephemeral exotic designs that had little to do with decorous architecture.

⁷² Roberto Segre, *Arquitectura antillana del siglo XX*, pp 81-82.

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Rafael Carmoega Morales⁷³ was one of the first locals to embrace the new American educational system; a pioneer who walked down unchartered territory establishing an educational trend that was to continue until the first school of architecture in Puerto Rico was created during the early years of the 1960s. (See Figure 14.) For a Spanish-speaking Puerto Rican, moving for several years to the USA was a most difficult thing. Even when possessing the strength of character, not all could follow this route since the cost of such an education was steep. While the Carmoega family paid a matriculation fee of \$5.00 and an infirmity fee of \$3.00,⁷⁴ the times were difficult and not many had the means to pay for these and other expenses that, in the case of the locals, included travelling to the mainland in ocean liners, as well as living accommodations. It is unfortunate there is no information regarding how and why Carmoega and his family selected Cornell.⁷⁵ In any case, he established a trend that created a new type of architecture in the island authored by local talent brought into close contact to the latest architectural expressions in the USA.

Carmoega studied at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, one of the mainland's leading and oldest centers for the study of architecture. Charles Babcock's role as first professor of architecture reflected the institution's tendency towards historicist eclectic designs. His academic publications – *Elementary Architecture* (1876) and *Vaults* (1884) – contributed to his standing within the profession. Cornell University was an impressive institution with a professional school of architecture that included remarkable facilities. Cornell's 1919-1920 catalog described the architectural studies in the following manner:

The equipment and facilities within the limits of the work offered or under-taken are of the highest order. In addition to the library and rooms used for lectures, recitations, exhibition purposes, offices, etc., the College of Architecture has nearly fifteen thousand square feet of floor space in studios devoted exclusively to the work in design and drawing. The large studios for the work in drawing from the antique, still life, from life, art thoroughly equipped with full size plaster casts-several hundred in all of sculpture from the best periods of the art; particularly from the Greek, Roman, and Italian Renaissance, with examples from the Medieval and later Renaissance periods. The equipment for the work in color and modeling, which may be taken only as minor subjects, is also excellent.

Supplementary to the equipment supplied by the University Library there is a very large special library of works on architecture and the allied arts, surpassed by none in its accessibility and direct usefulness as a working and reference. The library contains practically all of the important books on bridge and structural engineering. It also contains a valuable collection of theses, those on original investigations relating to arch bridges being especially noteworthy.

These investigations have been conducted so as to fulfill an extended and closely related series. Their results constitute, an important addition to previous knowledge of the relative strength, stiffness, and weight of different types of construction, and of the method for their investigation and design. Special facilities are available for the study of secondary stresses in bridge trusses. . . .

⁷³ Carmoega was born in 1894 and died in 1968. During the late 1970s, I interviewed his wife at their home in the Condado sector, a Mediterranean Revival residence facing the sea at Carrión Court Street. It is unfortunate the building no longer exists for it was an architectural jewel.

⁷⁴ Cornell University, *Cornell University Official Publication 1919-1920* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University, 1919), Volume X, Number 7, p 14.

⁷⁵ When the first school of architecture in Puerto Rico was created at the University of Puerto Rico during the 1960s, Cornell University consultants participated in the creation of the original curriculum.

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In addition to the books, portfolios, pamphlets, etc., there are several thousand choice photographs covering the entire field of architecture, about one thousand fine color reproductions of the masterpieces of painting, some twelve thousand carefully selected lantern slides, and many original drawings made by masters of design and draftsmanship in architecture, all of which are directly accessible to the student.⁷⁶

Of particular relevance were the 1,000 color photographs of architectural works, an outstanding collection, probably one of the largest ones in the world at the time. These images served as source of inspiration, particularly for those who were unable to travel abroad. Used for both the history of architecture and studio courses, they became stylistic catalogs of sorts that provided examples to follow.

In addition to its excellent facilities, Cornell's School of Architecture took pride in its teaching methodology. "All instruction is by direct and personal discussion and criticism thus giving to each pupil the utmost that his teachers and advisers have to give."⁷⁷ Some professors teaching at the time of publication who may have been there while Carmoega studied at the center were: C A Martin, O H Brauner, A C Phelps, George Young, Christian Midjo, L P Burnham, G R Chamberlain, Sheperd Stevens and H S Gutsell.⁷⁸ These and other professors were in charge of teaching the following courses:

Freehand Drawing; Descriptive Geometry; History of Ancient and Medieval Architecture; Elements of Architecture; Shades and Shadows; Water Color; Painting; History of Renaissance Architecture; Design; Drawing from the Antique; Masonry Construction; Perspective; Historic Ornament; History of Greek Sculpture and Italian Painting; History of Art in Italy; History of Art North of the Alps; Modeling; Planning of Domestic Buildings; Specifications; Working Drawings; Mechanics, Strength of Materials, Structural Design, etc.; Modern Architecture; Advanced Design; Life Class; Historical Seminary; Fire-resisting Construction; City Planning.⁷⁹

As seen, the array of courses was impressive covering varied academic fields including history of Classical art (evidencing a Classicist partiality), descriptive geometry, structural design, working drawings, and city planning, among others. The wide scope of offerings guaranteed a holistic approach to the art.

As a result of this type of education an important philosophical difference existed between the Spanish and American architectural educational systems. The standard approach devised in the mainland percolated and impacted design processes for both Carmoega and O'Kelly, as well as others practicing in Puerto Rico at the time. While in the Spanish system the state controlled architectural education and professional practice using a single system forged during the 18th century under the assumption that only Classicism was adequate for serious architecture, the American system separated both activities (education and the practice of the profession) allowing multiple universities – each one with its own philosophical approach – to educate. This diversity is most relevant for it imbued the future architect with an impressive amount of creative freedom. Evidence of this is the fact that architects were educated with the idea that there were several styles from which to choose. The Iglesia de San Agustín in Puerta de Tierra, San Juan de Puerto Rico, erected during the 1920s, reflects this approach for it is known that "Mr Niggle [architect of the church] first designed the church in Mission style, but

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp 77-78.

⁷⁷ *Idem.*

⁷⁸ *Idem.*

⁷⁹ *Idem.*

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was not effective in so large a building, so he changed to the Neo-Romanesque.”⁸⁰ As a result, graduates from schools of architecture in the USA were extremely competent when working different architectural styles. Both Carmoega and O’Kelly are exemplary regarding this ability. Their Mediterranean Revival and Modern works depict the highest of creative standards. Rather than start design processes with an already chosen vocabulary of Classicist extraction (as the Spanish educational system demanded), the American-educated architect had choices. Historicisms were used for certain buildings, while the Mediterranean Revival was selected as an alternative to Modernism, the third choice in the stylistic catalog. (Art Deco was added to the aesthetics palette during the 1930s.)

Upon graduation, Carmoega returned to the island and worked in the Public Buildings Division of the Department of the Interior, first serving as draftsman architect (*delineante arquitecto*).⁸¹ In 1921, he became state architect (*arquitecto estatal*) of the Division, the first islander to hold that position. He worked for this agency from 1921 to 1936 when he transferred to the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration.



Figure 15. *El Cortijo, Barranquitas, Puerto Rico, 1930s by Rafael Carmoega, Google, Public domain.*

As per his Cornell education, Carmoega was able to produce a variety of compositions based on multiple architectural styles. While his early work is characterized by examples of the Mediterranean Revival – an example being *El Cortijo*,⁸² Secundino Lozana Residence – he was also capable of stridently modern masterpieces. (See Figure 15.) The best example of this approach, unfortunately destroyed some years ago, was the Casino de Puerto Rico in Condado, dating to the 1950s, one of Puerto Rico’s finest architectural masterpieces of all times. Carmoega’s impact to the island’s architecture, then, is twofold. In addition to a distinguished professional career as a designer, he led an extraordinary architectural team.

Architect Joseph J O’Kelly

Joseph J O’Kelly was not born in Puerto Rico although his mother hailed from the island. (See Figure 16.) A native of New York, where he was born in 1890, he attended both the University of Pennsylvania and the Drexel Institute in Philadelphia, graduating from the second institution in 1915.

⁸⁰ “American Marble in Porto Rico,” *Stone* (New York, Volume 39), pp 322-323; 322.

⁸¹ Digital source: <http://aacuprinvestigacion.blogspot.com/2009/09/rca-coleccion-rafael-carmoega.html>, 10 April 2018.

⁸² The property is currently being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places.

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The University of Pennsylvania's School of Architecture, founded in 1868, claims its architectural program is the second oldest in the USA. By the turn of the century, members of its distinguished faculty included Walter Cope, John Stewardson, Frank Miles Day and Wilson Eyre. During the early years of the 20th century, Paul Philippe Cret, an eminent French architect, joined the roster. Landscape architecture lectures were part of the academic curriculum, a relatively novel approach to the teaching of the art.



Figure 16. Joseph J O'Kelly, Google, Public domain.

Founded in 1891, the Drexel Institute of Art, Science and Industry's (known since 1970 as Drexel University) original educational philosophy was to provide experience in practical arts and sciences to students of all backgrounds. Emphasis on practical work and hands-on experience as part of an occupational setting was the basic educational goal. In 1919, the institution introduced a cooperative education program. This unique architectural training fully prepared O'Kelly to excel in the practice of architecture. His design methodology uniquely combined a traditional approach to architecture with a modern functionalist perspective.



Figure 17. Escuela de Medicina Tropical Annex,
Puerta de Tierra, San Juan de Puerto Rico, 1920s,
Rafael Carmoega(?) and Joseph O'Kelly, Google, Public domain.

From 1921 until 1923 O'Kelly worked in several New York architectural offices. In the last year, he became part of the design team working for the Department of the Interior. (Some sources claim he came to the island in 1924.) Laboring for the government for more than a decade, he was involved in

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major projects including the Capitolio de Puerto Rico and Escuela de Medicina Tropical and this building's Annex.⁸³ (See Figure 17.) Carmoega is traditionally hailed as architect of this last building and little mention is made of the fact that O'Kelly designed the Annex. It is possible this duality may be evidenced by the slightly different semantics that can be appreciated when the original building is compared to the wing constructed years later. The striking similarities between Escuela de Medicina Tropical Annex attributed solely to Carmoega and the Puerto Rico Medical Arts Building, sited directly in front of the Escuela and attributed exclusively to O'Kelly, have not been explored academically. (See Figure 21.)



Figure 18. Iglesia del Sagrado Corazón, Santurce, Puerto Rico, 1920s, by Joseph O'Kelly, Google, Public domain.

O'Kelly's imposing Iglesia del Sagrado Corazón in Santurce, depicts yet another interpretation of the Mediterranean Revival. (See Figure 18.) Like Carmoega, the breadth of O'Kelly's architectural aesthetics is spectacularly splendid. While the Iglesia del Sagrado Corazón design can be classified as a rhizome of the California Mission Style,⁸⁴ he was equally adept at using Neo-Classical vocabulary, as seen in the Capitolio de Puerto Rico, a project in which he participated as architectural collaborator. The Escuela de Medicina Tropical Annex, the Puerto Rico Medical Arts Building and sections of the Iglesia del Sagrado Corazón prove he also excelled as a Classicist interpreter via Renaissance aesthetics. He was additionally adept at Modernism as seen in the Kleins Building in Old San Juan. Designed during the 1930s, this uniquely modern building derived inspiration from the Chicago skyscrapers.

It was Carmoega's and O'Kelly's fortune to spearhead and work for the Department of the Interior during the period this organization was involved in the design and construction of some of the island's emblematic buildings. By the same token, it was Puerto Rico's extraordinary good luck to benefit from the work of these and other exemplary designers. The team also had the opportunity to supervise construction of projects designed by other architects. An example of this activity is the University of Puerto Rico Quadrangle, designed by William Parsons in 1924.⁸⁵ Other exceptional buildings produced

⁸³ The Escuela de Medicina Tropical in Puerta de Tierra, San Juan de Puerto Rico was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on 29 September 1983.

⁸⁴ The 1930s Templo del Maestro in Puerta de Tierra, San Juan de Puerto Rico (included in the National Register of Historic Places on 19 April 2016) presents yet another personal architectural interpretation.

⁸⁵ At the time, the firm was known as Bennett, Parsons & Frost, a relatively new name coined after Cyrus Thomas left the group. Until that moment, the studio was known as Bennett, Parsons, Frost and Thomas, Architects. William Parsons worked for the federal government in the Philippines until 1914.

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at the time were the: Capitolio de Puerto Rico, Escuela de Medicina Tropical, the Central High School and the Hospital Psiquiátrico.

Seldom mentioned is the fact that a member of this prodigious team was involved in the design and supervision of buildings sited in the Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District. This fact adds a layer of significance to the precinct. It is possible that, in the final analysis, it is not that important to know whether Carmoega and O'Kelly acted as a collaborative team or individually. The significance of the buildings reside in the fact that they were part of an early experiment with the Mediterranean Revival, designed by USA educated professionals who were searching for an architectural style that could serve as icon for Puerto Rico's pursuit for modernity.

The Instituto's Site

When the first two buildings of the Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District were constructed, the Avenida Fernández Juncos⁸⁶ did not exist. Thus, the historic district was part of a huge tract of land facing Avenida Constitución (north) sited at the southern end of the plot. Because of this, the complex had no formal entrance and the buildings literally sat as if in the countryside. This urban isolation is important for it was considered the appropriate milieu for educational activities to remain in contact with nature. Regardless of shortcoming, Miss Cordero had successfully taken a first step by making the government grant the land where the precinct could be built.



Figure 19. No 9 General Plan of Santurce (Second Section),
Porto Rico Board of Fire Underwriters, 30 January 1918.

During the second half of the 19th century, the Spanish government constructed a building facing Avenida Constitución within this lot. (See Figure 19.) Exhibiting the traditional architectural personality of 19th century civic buildings, it was first used as exhibition hall for the 1895 Exposición de Puerto Rico during which it was pompously labeled Palacio de Exposiciones (Exhibitions Palace). At this time, the following description of the huge tract of land was penned:

Del terreno, en el que se hizo la renovación de todos los hierros y máquinas esparcidos en los terrenos alrededor del edificio, consistentes en cuatro kilómetros de vía de carril con wagonetas, agujas, plataformas, y en varias máquinas de triturar piedra; locomóviles; depósitos de hierros; tuberías;

⁸⁶ The thoroughfare runs in almost parallel fashion to the Avenida Constitución (some sections are five centuries old), being one of the principal roads that connect San Juan Islet to the island of Puerto Rico.

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*cabrias; martinetes ascendentes a unas 500 toneladas; se procedió enseguida a la limpieza del terreno, en el que, durante muchos años, se habían acumulado toneladas de pencas, de cocos y basuras; después se procedió a la regularizar la superficie del mismo, que se hallaba lleno de hoyos y zanjas; se formaron tres avenidas principales, varias calles transversales, poniéndolas en rasantes, construyendo cunetas y afirmándolos; se plantó de césped una parte del terreno contiguo a la parte Sud del edificio; se podó y arregló el arbolado, regularizándolos bastante; se arreglaron y dividieron en jardines los terrenos frente al edificio, y le plantaron flores y arbustos; se construyó un camino especial para coches, con dos entradas; se levantó un almacén . . .*⁸⁷

The account evidences the sector was used as storage and repair area for the train and the trolley that served the metropolitan area. This use was in keeping with Santurce's role during the 19th century. Although it had centuries-old areas, the sector still retained a kind of no-man's land urban personality.

Once the fair ended, the government transformed the exhibitions palace into an orphanage or boys' asylum (*asilo de niños*). Myriad social problems forced the Spanish government to create this and similar institutions during the 19th century. While many of these buildings – the Asilo de Beneficencia and the Asilo de Locos come to mind – where sited in the Old San Juan Historic District, by the 1890s Santurce was thought to be a more appropriate locale for such institutions. In fact, a few blocks away and also facing the Avenida de la Constitución a girls' asylum⁸⁸ was built around this time.

When the Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District was conceived it made sense to locate it in Santurce even when, in 1933, the site was described in the following manner: "It was found that the grounds at the site is a swamp and pile foundations were necessary for this construction. . . ."⁸⁹ Even if marshy, the countryside environment was perfect regarding children's wellbeing. An up and coming urban sector, Santurce was the preferred expansion area of the Old San Juan Historic District. As seen in the 1918 Fire Underwriters Plan, the early 20th century Escuela Labra also was located in this general area. (See Figure 19.) By the 1930s, government buildings – like the Administración de Tierras (Administration of Land Management) – also found a place here. Expansive lots, green areas and varied new buildings made Santurce synonymous with progress and modernity.

On 23 January 1941 Mercedes Carmona de Verdiales, Director of the Instituto, penned a letter to Mr José G Bloise thanking him for paving the main entrance with an "avenue" (*avenida*):

Gracias a su bondad cuenta hoy el Instituto de Niños Ciegos en Santurce, con una amplia avenida asfaltada de acuerdo con los métodos más modernos. Contribuye esto no solamente al

⁸⁷ Alejandro Infiesta, *La Exposición de Puerto Rico Memoria redactada según acuerdo de la Junta del Centenario* (Colombia: D'vinni SA, 2008), p 71. Translation: "An inventory of the terrain was made in order to list all iron elements and machinery that were found in it, there were four kilometers of rails with small wagons, needles, platforms and several machines to pulverize stone, iron deposits, tubes, 500 tons of pile drivers, and the lot was cleared of the accumulation that had taken place over many years during which tons of palm leaves, coconuts and garbage had accumulated; then the surface of the land was flattened (it was dotted with holes); three principal avenues were formed, as well as several streets, flattening them and creating their ditches, grass was planted around the southern side; the landscape was organized; gardens were created in front of the building and flowers were planted and a special road was created for cars with two entrances; a storage building was erected . . ."

⁸⁸ Known as the Asilo de Niñas de Miramar, the building is presently named Escuela Libre de Música de Puerto Rico and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

⁸⁹ "Letter from José E Colóm to the Honorable Auditor of Puerto Rico," 5 January 1938, Fondo de Obras Públicas, Serie Edificio Públicos, Caja 679, Archivo General de Puerto Rico.

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embellecimiento de los terrenos de la Institución, sino que también evita que nuestros niños ciegos en días de lluvia tengan que caminar por estos terrenos pantanosos.⁹⁰

The entrance street covered a total area was 1,890 square meters and cost \$1,378.92. In November 1940, the work was described in the following manner:

Debido a que la entrada no tiene un firme sólido sobre el cual aplicar la capa de asfalto, se hace necesario construir un recargo cuyo costo se estima en \$650.00 y esta incluido en los presupuestos que se acompañan. La lluvia y la necesidad de aprovechar los pocos días buenos en avanzar el asfalto de la Avenida Fernández Juncos no han permitido empezar el trabajo.⁹¹



Figure 20. Aerial photograph of the Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District, 1930.

This entrance road was possible thanks to the construction of Avenida Fernández Juncos during the 1930s. (See Figure 20.) The thoroughfare bordered the precinct along the north side providing it with the first direct and formal entrance since its construction.

The Instituto's Architectural Style

It is relatively easy to mistake the early 20th century Hydra-like architectural style known as Mediterranean Revival (among many other names) as a rejection of Modernism. Roberto Segre embraces this approach describing Puerto Rico's use of the semantics in the following fashion: *la resistencia local a las innovaciones – quizá por una identificación demasiado directa con los Estados*

⁹⁰ "Letter to José G Bloise by Mercedes Carmona de Verdiales," 23 January 1941, Fondo de Obras Públicas, Serie Edificio Públicos, Caja 679, Archivo General de Puerto Rico.

⁹¹ "Memo from S Claudio to the Commissioner," March 1940, Fondo de Obras Públicas, Serie Edificio Públicos, Caja 679, Archivo General de Puerto Rico.

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*Unidos –, en las obras de Pedro A de Castro, Joseph J O’Kelly, Fidel Sevillano, Santiago Iglesias y Pedro Méndez.*⁹² His interpretation and description of the expression as an aesthetic throwback is incorrect missing the mark on several aspects. Segre’s reading owes much to a Modernist (and Socialist) theoretical approach to architecture, a perspective that views this expression as flawless and architectural historicisms as problematic, dysfunctional expressions that seem to be out of touch with reality. The unfortunate conclusion, the result of particular theoretical vantage point, is that 20th century historicist architecture is of secondary importance.

Because this approach reflects a biased 20th century interpretative perspective it needs to be discarded. The state of confusion regarding the architectural semantics, a task complicated by the period’s closeness to the present, has led to the long list of names that purports to distinguish it. An almost infinite catalog exists belying the fact that the style needs to be interpreted in a more insightful manner. Invented terms, like Spanish Risorgimento [*sic*], further obscure the issue. Several misconceptions need to be clarified in order to correctly understand the use of the Mediterranean Revival in Puerto Rico regarding the Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District design and other buildings. Such an analysis is required since it is no exaggeration to claim the style is a most relevant part of the 20th century architectural personality of the archipelago.



Figure 21. Puerto Rico Medical Arts Building, Puerta de Tierra, San Juan de Puerto Rico, 1940, by Joseph O’Kelly, APC, 2017.

Contrary to Segre’s interpretation, during the early decades of the 20th century the Mediterranean Revival was understood as an alternative to Modernism’s at times dry and functionality-laden approach. While, during the 18th and 19th century, historicisms were solutions offered to architects wishing to keep in touch with the past and its romantic and functional associations, during the early years of the 20th century the Mediterranean Revival was chosen as a second way to be modern. (The first mode of choice would have been Modernism.) Most designs were generated by stylistic intersections of varied architectural languages. As a result, there was seldom one stylistic referential precedent. This is the principal difference between the Mediterranean Revival and most revivals: when using the first expression the idea was seldom to copy a particular work of the past but to liberally intersect varied sources of inspiration, providing an aesthetic option to Modernism’s minimalism. The Puerto Rico Medical Arts Building by O’Kelly is an exceptional example of this goal. (See Figure 21.)

⁹² Roberto Segre, *Arquitectura antillana del siglo XX* p 183. Translation: “. . . the local resistance to innovation, probably as a result of the USA’s direct influence, as seen in the work of Pedro A de Castro, Joseph J O’Kelly, Fidel Sevillano, Santiago Iglesias and Pedro Méndez.”

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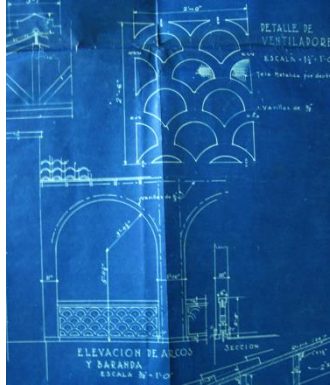
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Figure 22. Reinforced concrete detail of Building B and Building C balustrade, 1925-1928, Joseph J O'Kelly, Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District.⁹³

During the first half of the 20th century, the Mediterranean Revival was considered a modern architectural expression, the perfect language to express avant-gardism. As such, it was a most appropriate style for the first Puerto Rican precinct to offer educational services to the blind. The period understood the education of all, including the handicapped, as a modern activity synonymous with progress and civilized behavior. Intersecting modernity with centuries-old aesthetics, the Mediterranean Revival counterbalanced Modernism's abstract approach to architecture. Evidence of this interest in modern trends resulted in a preference for reinforced concrete (at times named *cemento* or cement in architectural plans) as construction material. The material made possible its use as a structural material and also allowed for experimentations regarding decoration and morphology. Building A's and Building B's reinforced concrete balustrades clearly evidence this last interest. (See Figure 22.) (See Photograph 01, Photograph 02, Photograph 03, Photograph 09, Photograph 13 and Photograph 14.) Use of short angled cantilevered slabs over windows (*aleros*), on the other hand, signal its adaptation to the tropical environment. In spite of its vast potential and apparent complexity, reinforced concrete constructions did not require specialized masons in the conventional manner. Missing the period's understanding of the style and its implied freedom from centuries-old aesthetic traditions is an important misconception derailing the correct interpretation of the Mediterranean Revival.

A second unfortunate misunderstanding regarding the Mediterranean Revival is the idea that the expression was a Puerto Rican vehicle to somehow empower the cultural bond between island and Spain after 1898. This is incorrect on several counts the most important one being that the style was invented in the USA and not in Puerto Rico or Spain. From the mainland it was imported thanks to the architects who – like Carmoega, O'Kelly, Nichols and de Castro, among others – studied in American schools of architecture where the style was in vogue. (Ironically, this was also the case with Spain. During the 1920s and 1930s, this last country embraced the expression not as a “vernacular” interpretation but as a modern approach to architecture, recognized as nascent in the USA, at the time an urban and architectural powerhouse.⁹⁴) Since hundreds (if not thousands) of buildings in the style dating to the early years of the 20th century dot the USA it is – at best – a romantic myth it was invented in Puerto Rico to serve as a culturally “liberating” instrument.

⁹³ “Instituto para Niños Ciegos Donado por la Cruz Roja Juvenil,” Proyecto No 693.

⁹⁴ Arleen Pabón Charneco, *La arquitectura patrimonial puertorriqueña y sus estilos*, pp 357-358.

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Figure 23. Building B decorative detail, 1925-1928,
Joseph J O'Kelly, Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District.⁹⁵

A third inaccuracy repeated *ad nauseam* is describing the style as exclusively “Spanish” in inspiration. (Hence, the use of existing and invented appellations such as Spanish Revival, Neo-Spanish, Risorgimento [*sic*] Español, among others.) Calling the expression by these and similar names implies Spanish architecture exclusively served as precedent. While some architectural examples⁹⁶ from Renaissance Spain on occasion inspired specific solutions – details of the Escuela de Medicina Tropical and the Puerto Rico Medical Arts Building may bring to mind the Palacio del Infantado in Guadalajara, Spain (1480) by Juan Guas – precedents for the Mediterranean Revival also derive from the Italian Renaissance. The University of Puerto Rico Quadrangle is a good example of this aesthetic collusion. Filippo Brunelleschi’s loggia at the Ospedale degli Innocenti in Florence (1419) is the direct precedent for the UPR’s theater arcade while the main entrance to this establishment is inspired in Leon Battista Alberti’s Sant Andrea in Mantua (1472). Italian Quattrocento and Cinquecento examples proved to be great sources of inspiration thanks in part to the enormous amount created during these periods. Building B’s arcade and foliage decoration also evidence High Renaissance inspiration. The curved tendrils and curled ribbon crowning the avant-corps reflect 15th and 16th centuries Italian traditions, specifically inspired in grotteschi decoration. (See Figure 23.) There are no ifs and buts about these sources of inspiration. Therefore, to classify properties like the University of Puerto Rico’s Quadrangle or the Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District Building A and Building B as examples of the Spanish Revival ignores their true architectural precedents. The same applies to all buildings using the Mediterranean Revival semantics and its many rhizomes.

In addition to not taking into account Italian Renaissance precedents, the “Spanish” appellations also fail to acknowledge the many Moorish and Portuguese influences (to name just two of the premier ones) woven into the aesthetics. Manuelino inspired details, for example, are constantly found side by side with Plateresque and Churrigueresque detailing in many buildings examples of the style. In Building A a multifoil arch of Moorish extraction frames the principal entrance while color tiles cover the tower in a manner closely resembling Portuguese and Moorish interpretations. (See Photograph 01, Photograph 02, Photograph 03, Photograph 05 and Photograph 07.) It is important to also note the impact Central and South American Baroque architecture had upon Mediterranean Revival aesthetics,

⁹⁵ “Instituto para Niños Ciegos Donado por la Cruz Roja Juvenil”, Proyecto No 693.

⁹⁶ Other Spanish precedents include the Universidad de Salamanca, Colegio del Arzobispo Fonseca, Salamanca (Diego de Siloé, Juan de Ávala, R G de Hontañón), Palacio de los Guzmanes, León (R G de Hontañón), Hospital de la Santa Cruz, Toledo (Enrique Egas and Alonso de Covarrubias) and the Hostal de los Reyes Católicos, Santiago de Compostela (Enrique Egas), among others.

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particularly Addison Mizner's Floridian interpretation. Since it is known Mizner was inspired by Central and South American Baroque examples, his plural expressions would add other sources of inspiration although – in the final analysis – they would also stem from the Mediterranean basin.

Because of all the above, it is appropriate to use the name Mediterranean Revival (Hispanomediterráneo in Spanish) to label the Puerto Rican varied examples of the semantics. These names convey the fact that there were many sources, not just Spanish ones, influencing the style. It is by now accepted the 1915 Panama-California Exposition celebrated in San Diego, California, celebrated at the same time as the San Francisco's Panama-Pacific International Exposition, introduced the expression to the USA and the world. While the last one embraced Classically inspired semantics, the former incorporated the newly minted style, interpreted as an appropriate Californian expression representing modernity and an alternative to the minimalist approach sponsored by Modernists.

Blank stuccoed walls are contrasted to rich decorative detailing that underscores the elegance and sophistication of the building. Colored terracotta motifs add a sense of elegant luxury to the Classically inspired (principally Italian Renaissance and High Renaissance) organizations. The style was imported from the USA and evidences a desire to be "modern" without abandoning traditional architectural ideals, such as rich decoration and Classicist inspiration. After 1898, designers, an array of American publications and, at a later time, Puerto Rican architects educated in the USA, provided fresh alternatives to traditional architectural semantics.⁹⁷

Architecture is more than a box designed for a use. Being an essential component of humanity, since day one the art has been interpreted in diverse manners. While some architects found Modernism's ascetic approach attractive, other professionals embraced a different methodology for the art even when using modern materials like reinforced concrete. For the second group "Form follows function."⁹⁸ was not the only creative route regarding architectural design. Beauty, as per Vitruvius *venustas* principle,⁹⁹ need not be jettisoned in the aspiration to be modern. Although favored in dozens of residential examples, the use of the Mediterranean Revival was particularly appropriate for buildings housing institutions such as schools and churches. Regarding these architectural typologies the expression granted an air of modernity without jettisoning traditional concepts such as decoration and historicist details. Use of the style provided the building with an air of elegance and substance.

⁹⁷ Arleen Pabón Charneco, "The Puerta de Tierra Historic District National Register of Historic Places Nomination," p 48.

⁹⁸ The phrase is attributed to Louis Sullivan, one of Modernism's architectural pioneers. It directs designers to principally grant attention to the use of the building as design determinant.

⁹⁹ Vitruvius' *De re architectura libri decem*, the earliest preserved architectural treatise, lists *utilitas* (functionality), *firmitas* (structural soundness) and *venustas* (Beauty) as architecture's basic goals.

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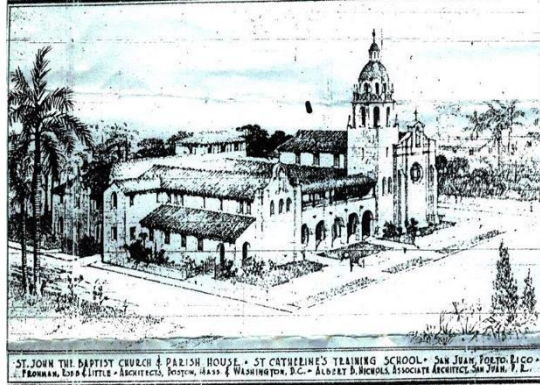


Figure 24 and Figure 25. Catedral Episcopal de San Juan Bautista, 1920s, APC, 2018.¹⁰⁰

Two Santurce churches, constructed during the 1920s-1930s, best exemplify this approach. Both used the Mediterranean Revival as silent communicator of modernity and sophistication. Frohman, Robb & Little¹⁰¹ – with Albert B Nichols as Associate Architect – designed the Catedral Episcopal de San Juan Bautista while, as mentioned, O’Kelly was the author of the neighboring Iglesia del Sagrado Corazón. (See Figure 18, Figure 24 and Figure 25.) Both buildings are in Santurce, a few blocks away from the Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District. Next to nothing has been written about these buildings or their disconcerting similarities, particularly regarding the use of a side tower and Mission Style-inspired curves crowning the façade plane. Since both Nichols and O’Kelly were part of the Department of the Interior, contrast and comparison of their designs allow a better understanding of the use of the architectural style.



Figure 26. Catedral Episcopal de San Juan Bautista, Santurce, 1920s, Google, Public domain.

Not only are the two compositions similar to the point of being derivative, details such as the play of squares and octagons in the bell tower and the use of the blue and white chevron tiles intimately ties the churches to the Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District. (See Figure 26.) (See Photograph 01, Photograph 02, Photograph 03, Photograph 05, Photograph 07, Photograph 08 and

¹⁰⁰ Perspective signed by: Frohman, Robb & Little with Nichols as Associate Architect. Thanks are extended to Mr Pablo Quiñones for sharing his research findings regarding the Catedral Episcopal de San Juan Bautista, incorrectly attributed by some to the eponymous Nechodoma.

¹⁰¹ Philip Hubert Frohman is principally known for his work on the Washington DC National Cathedral (Cathedral Church of St Peter and St Paul).

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Photograph 11.) The rich Mediterranean Revival vocabulary provides three distinct architectural personalities for two completely different architectural typologies (Christian church and school for the blind). It is probable the similarities evidence one of many examples of cross-referential collaboration between members of the team, in this case O'Kelly and Nichols.

Architectural styles are for more than drawers into which buildings can be assigned. During the first decades of the 20th century the Mediterranean Revival was symbolic of something far more complex than aesthetics or the desire to be modern. In a sense, the expression mirrored the colonial relationship being forged at the time between the USA and Puerto Rico. As they brought a new interpretation of architecture to the island, O'Kelly, Carmoega, as well as other members of the team, originated a powerful trend that needs to be understood within the context of colonialism's Third Space. As a result, it is possible to state the Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District's is one of the earliest examples of the cultural transformation that took place in the archipelago during the early years of the 20th century. The architectural style emphatically reflected the acculturation agenda set firmly in place during this period. Architectural semantics deployed by both Americans and Puerto Ricans designers additionally served as transformative instrument during the period. This powerful architectural role proved to be essential in strengthening the cultural ties between Puerto Rico and the USA.

As Puerto Rico and the Philippine Islands became receptors of lavish American interest urban sectors, strikingly different from traditional Hispanic Colonial ones, were furiously planned and carved from the centuries old historic urban landscapes. Buildings of all sorts, in an array of new construction materials and techniques, were erected to shelter myriad activities. Since American narrative focused on empowering civic ideals, transportation, education, and Anglo culture, grandiose urban and architectural venues associated to these goals were produced. According to Ian Morley, the colonial mission programmed by the USA for the Philippine Islands was designed around several goals.¹⁰²

Interpretation of Ian Morley's Philippine Islands' thesis reveals similar urban and architectural objectives were pursued in Puerto Rico as the enculturation agenda took root.¹⁰³ All found corporeal shape in architecture, the cultural instrument that was to transform the island into the USA's Caribbean showcase. For this effort to flourish, sparse and minimalist Modernist architecture had to be jettisoned. According to Morley the following were part of the USA acculturation agenda for the former Spanish colonies (Puerto Rico and the Philippines Islands): (i) freedom of worship; (ii) eradication of the native language, including architectural ones; (iii) transformation by education; and (iv) empowerment of communications.

As known, when astutely manipulated language can be used as both divisive and unifying cultural instrument. Eradication of native language included architecture, a three-dimensional idiom vested with extraordinarily powerful authority. Since language shapes thought, empowerment of architectural linguistics was essential to the of enculturation process.

After 1898, designers, an array of American publications and, at a later time, Puerto Rican architects educated in the USA, provided fresh alternatives to traditional architectural semantics. Massive scale novel architectural typologies like the public school; grand architectural gestures; elegantly rich and

¹⁰² Arleen Pabón Charneco, "The Puerta de Tierra Historic District National Register of Historic Places Nomination," p 107. Ian Morley, "America and the Philippines modern civilization and city planning," *Education about Asia* (Cornell University, Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publication), Volume 16, 2, Fall 2011, pp 34-38; 35.

¹⁰³ Arleen Pabón Charneco, "The Puerta de Tierra, San Juan de Puerto Rico Historic District National Register of Historic Places Nomination," p 108.

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highly decorated façades; luxurious commercial buildings; sumptuous government examples, and grand promenades are but a few examples of imported architectural idioms. A paradigmatic example of architectural novelty was the introduction of the Mediterranean Revival (Hispanomediterráneo) architectural style, a rich and complex expression invented in the USA.

Buildings housing these services and groups were silent signs (communicators) epitomizing the proper manner to “do things,” three-dimensional advocates of “correct” Americanized behavior. Because of their relevance as communicators of the American way of life buildings housing these and similar institutions can be found in both the Puerta de Tierra Historic District and Manila.¹⁰⁴

A most important item in the American acculturation agenda was education. Although some describe what took place after 1898 as a transformation in terms of educational system, in reality no system existed, even though there had been disjointed efforts throughout the centuries.¹⁰⁵ This informal link to learning shattered in Puerto Rico after 1898. The education revolution included education for the handicapped, a group deficiently served in pre-1898 times. It is telling the Instituto Loaíza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District evidences this new approach: not only were new and beautiful buildings created in park-like milieu, everything was specifically designed for use of the blind.

The historic district was the island’s first example of the architectural typology (a school for the blind), as well as symbol of the acculturation process spearheaded by Americans and the locals who admired the American way of life. It is important to understand the new ideals were not an imposition from mainlanders for many locals – like Miss Cordero – aspired to transform the by then four centuries old way of living.

[I]t would be a complete misrepresentation to assume urban and architectural ideas were forced by the “bad” colonial power upon “innocent” subjects. No evidence exists of an enforced, fixed and definitive agenda except for the fluid and ever-constant goal of presenting the benefits of the American way of life in the best light possible. Complicating the issue, there is a need to underscore many locals valued this objective, interpreting it as a positive force to be embraced.¹⁰⁶

A 1928 two-page spread in the *Puerto Rico Ilustrado*, the most important local magazine at the time, described the ceremony that took place on the historic district’s inauguration day by trumpeting “Una Institución que honra a Puerto Rico El edificio-escuela para los niños ciegos.”

Puerto Rico puede sentirse legítimamente orgulloso de la obra que desarrolla en el “Instituto de Niños Ciegos,” a la cual ha consagrado todos sus entusiasmos y toda su abnegación la Directora del plantel, Srta Loaíza Cordero, cuyos afanes se premian ahora en la inauguración de un espléndido edificio para la institución, acto que tuvo efecto la pasada semana.

La lucha que se a prolongado doce años y de la cual ha sido alma la Srta Loaíza Cordero, acaba de culminar en la inauguración del hermoso edificio que ha de ocupar en Santurce el “Instituto de Niños Ciegos,” obra merecedora de los mayores elogios y de la más decidida cooperación.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ *Idem.*

¹⁰⁵ Arleen Pabón Charneco, *San Juan de Puerto Rico Architecture: Five Hundred Years of Urban and Architectural Experimentation* (London: Routledge, 2016), pp 112-140.

¹⁰⁶ Arleen Pabón Charneco, “The Puerta de Tierra Historic District National Register of Historic Places Nomination,” p

101.

¹⁰⁷ “Una Institución que honra a Puerto Rico El edificio-escuela para los niños ciegos,” *Puerto Rico Ilustrado*, 1928, Centro Educativo para Ciegos e Impedidos Archives. Translation: “An institution that honors Puerto Rico The building-school for blind children.” “Puerto Rico needs to feel rightly proud of the work carried out by the ‘Institute for Blind Children,’ a work

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The article tellingly interprets the precinct as a triumph for both Miss Cordero and Puerto Rico. Splendid Building A (*edificio espléndido*) obviously is the protagonist of this triumph that honors the island and its people.

The fact that a new precinct was built for the school and that the most modern of architectural styles was used in its design evidences the establishment was seen as one more step towards Puerto Rico's modernization and embracement of the American way of life which many felt was a better one than the one experienced until 1898. While it would have been possible to locate the new school in one of Old San Juan's historic buildings, a new precinct with a principal building – described as *espléndido* (splendid) and *hermoso* (beautiful) – was created. Evidence of the communal impact this building had at the time is the fact that the governor of Puerto Rico, Horace M Towner, was present on inauguration day making: *uso de la palabra en bellísimos conceptos* (giving a beautiful speech). Another government high-ranking personality, Dr A Fernós Isern, *Sub-comisionado de Sanidad y entusiasta presidente la Asociación Benefactora del Instituto de Niños Ciegos* ("Health Sub-commissioner and enthusiastic president of the Benefactor Association of the Institute for Blind Children"), was also present. He was described by the magazine as: . . . *uno de los más eficaces colaboradores en la altruista labor que realiza con tanto empeño la Srta Cordero*.¹⁰⁸ Miss Cordero and the precinct she inspired are symbols of the dramatic transformations taking place within the educational models of the archipelago. All had a right to education the enclave silently proclaim, even the previously-forgotten special needs groups.

As mentioned, the precinct is the ultimate example of the architectural Third Space, a solution that embraces the colonial power architectural interpretative modes adapting them to local conditions. Architecturally, the solution has little to do with vernacular expressions since it aspired to generate a connection with the metropolis by imitating its architecture. Interestingly, this exercise in colonialism was not imposed but resulted from Puerto Ricans like Miss Cordero and Mr O'Kelly that had been exposed to and impacted by the American way of life. Miss Cordero and Mr O'Kelly obviously believed new educational models required to be sheltered by modern (for the time) buildings, designed in contemporary manner and built of new materials such as concrete.

Building A was designed to house administration offices and classrooms. (See Photograph 01, Photograph 02, Photograph 03, Photograph 05, Photograph 07, Photograph 08, Photograph 10, Photograph 11 and Photograph 12.) As mentioned and in keeping with standard arrangements for this type of institutions (the best example is Perkins), the building is treated as both edifice and precinct. Even if there is no use of the traditional square or rectangle with an interior patio, the U-shape allows for the visual interpretation of a quadrangle of sorts (even if missing one side), a most appropriate morphology for an educational precinct. The U-shaped building created a private green space opposite the main entrance that was framed by galleries providing access to the different areas. Because one entered the building opposite this open space, it was characterized by its sense of intimacy and privacy separating public from more private circulation patterns.

that the director of the school, Miss Loaiza Cordero has dedicated all her enthusiasm and dedication. Her efforts directly resulted in the inauguration of a splendid building during an act that took place last week." "The fight that has lasted twelve years, with Miss Cordero at its heart, culminates in the inauguration of a beautiful building that the "Institute of Blind Children" will occupy in Santurce, a work deserving praise and cooperation."

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

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Figure 27. Principal Façade Main Building, 1925-1928, Joseph O'Kelly, Instituto Loaíza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District, APC, 2018.

A tower, an element that was most commonly used to bring attention to the building, anchors the horizontal composition. (See Figure 27.) (See Photograph 07, Photograph 08, and Photograph 11.) For eons associated to church bell towers, during the 19th century the social meaning of towers was deconstructed acquiring a novel role. In some cases (the Casa Alcaldía in the Old San Juan Historic District comes to mind) they sported a clock to underscore their innovative civic character. In the case of educational typologies towers created an architectural metaphor by means of association with serious activities leading to spiritual transformations. They were a favorite element of 19th century university campuses. During the early years of the 20th century, the University of Puerto Rico Quadrangle introduced this tradition in Puerto Rico. It was not unusual for towers associated to educational centers to have bells or carillons to mark the time and call students to class.

Entrance to Building A is through the tower lower level which projects from the wall balancing the avant-corps on both sides framing the central composition. (See Photograph 01, Photograph 02, Photograph 09 and Photograph 10.) Interest in three dimensionality and height belie an interest in a Picturesque approach to the architectural composition which is forcefully controlled by means of a Classically derived hierarchical and symmetrical organization.



Figure 28. Detail of the arch framing Building A's principal door, 1925-1928, Joseph O'Kelly, Instituto Loaíza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District, APC, 2018.

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The principal entrance reinforced concrete multifoil arch¹⁰⁹ calls attention to the main entry underscoring the tower's exotic personality. (See Figure 28.) (See Photograph 06.) It is interesting to note the arch is not inscribed within a square or rectangle (*alfiz*) as traditional. An arched rope molding separates the arch foils from the tympanum. Two reinforced concrete brackets support the tympanum's lintel providing the opening with a more geometrically complicated profile. All components are made of reinforced concrete evidencing knowledge of how to work the material to obtain complex shapes and forms.



Figure 29. Tower Lantern, Building A, 1925-1928, Joseph O'Kelly, Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District, APC, 2018.

While Building A's body is stark to the point of abstraction (this is particularly evidenced by the principal façade's windows), the central portal and tower provide it with an exotic personality. (See Figure 29.) (See Photograph 01, Photograph 02, Photograph 07, Photograph 08 and Photograph 11.) The colored tiles combine colors and geometric shapes that contrast with the symmetry and hierarchical organization reflective of the traditional approach to compositions. Tiles were a feature of the Mediterranean Revival providing color, subtle textures and delicate design patterns. While there is a tendency to assume the use of such tiles is Spanish in origin, the material and its many possibilities was an Islamic gift to Spain, Portugal and the rest of the Mediterranean basin. Only Portuguese architecture continued to use the material in such a dramatic fashion after 1493. Many small towns in Portugal have scores of houses with façades entirely covered with tiles used not only to decorate and reflect the sunlight but also to prevent cool air from coming into the interior. They were also a way of keeping the houses cold during the hot summer months. Both the chevron motif and the predominant use of white and blue belie the precedents of this decorative technique.

There is a need to also point out that during the late 19th century and early 20th centuries Catalan Modernisme depicted a strong partiality towards the use of tiles as decorative material. Antoni Gaudí i Cornet, Lluís Domènech i Montaner, Josep Puig i Cadafalch and Josep Maria Jujol, among others, used ceramics to create prodigious works of art. Whether broken in fragments, known as *trencadís*, or intact the objective was to provide color and drama to the composition. Exoticism needs to be also considered as is the fact that industrially produced tiles were cheaper than other traditional finishes for the building. They were also considered a great construction material in terms of hygiene. Finally, they added color and texture in a relatively inexpensive manner.

¹⁰⁹ The multifoil arch brings to mind the Templo del Maestro's flamboyant example.

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Figure 30 and Figure 31. Detail of decorative tiles used in the vestibule, 1925-1928, Joseph O'Kelly, Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District, APC, 2018.

While tiles of single colors are used in the tower, combined to form intricate patterns that include the chevron motif covering the lantern proper, in the interior multicolored tiles were exclusively reserved for the entrance lobby located at the lower level of the tower. (See Figure 30 and Figure 31.) (See Photograph 10 and Photograph 12.) Rather than abstract patterns, the interior tiles depict naturalistic ones. They are organized in dado-like manner bordering the lower and uppermost sections of the walls of the octagonal vestibule. This location provides the stark reinforced concrete walls and unyielding juncture of planes with a decorated motif that added a sense of delicacy and elegance to the interior. The octagonal foyer serves as entrance vestibule and, therefore, needed to be decorated appropriately.

The foyer's flat roof is held in place by three beams. While they look like they are made of wood, they are reinforced concrete structural members that have a molding along the lower arises. This delicate fluting is yet another example of the interest in providing decoration to the stark concrete surfaces.



Figure 32. Interior view of the corridor, principal building, 1925-1928, Joseph O'Kelly, Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District, APC, 2018.

Building A's decorated vestibule sharply contrasts with the rest of the interior since there are no tiles or other decorative elements. This minimalism reflects the functional approach that was followed in service areas. (See Figure 32.) Relatively simple transoms formed of delicate wooden elements crown doors. These elements would have helped create airflow currents that would have cooled the interior. The starkness of the interiors was characteristic of the period. Classrooms need not offer any

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distractions since they were interpreted as functional units. Furthermore, the public would not have been ordinarily invited to this part of the building so there was no need for further decoration.

The use of reinforced concrete in these buildings is relevant being an early example of its use in the island. Experimentation was the order of the day for it was necessary to provide the stark material with architectural decorum. Mr John Niggle,¹¹⁰ an architect from New York, also experimented with the material during the early years of the 20th century in the Puerta de Tierra Historic District sector. A professional magazine described him in the following manner:

[A]rchitect, contractor and builder [who] several years ago . . . took up practice in San Juan, Puerto Rico, [where] “[h]e designed a large group of buildings in that city for the Catholics, consisting of a church, school, rectory and convent. These were erected in Puerta-de-Tierra, Carretara [*sic*] in 1914-1915, at a cost of a quarter of a million dollars.¹¹¹

Niggle paradigmatically represents the American and local designers distinguished by their avant-garde architectural approach to the art. His treatment of reinforced concrete finishes in the Iglesia de San Agustín was considered quite novel by a professional journal:

Naturally considerable ornamentation was required and the selection of a proper stone for trim was important. Mr Niggle had worked in Georgia marble, and he made up his mind that this would suit his purpose, used in the way he intended. He buried a piece of the marble in concrete and left it embedded for three weeks. When taken out and brushed off, it was just as white as before, not a stain penetrating the stone. This was the material selected, and ten or twelve carloads of marble, all cut in the finishing plant in Georgia, were shipped by sailing vessel from Savannah. The Georgia marble was used for the door and window jambs, the window traceries and the mullions; belt courses, corbels, etc. The backs and beds of the stones were not painted or protected in any way. The stones were simply placed in the forms and the concrete poured around them. Mr Niggle’s confidence in marble was fully justified, as the buildings are today white and absolutely free from stains. This non-staining quality of Georgia marble is generally recognized. The government specifications for the post office at Morristown, NJ, finished in 1917, called for the coating with waterproof paint of the backs, beds and joints of all stone, “except Georgia marble.”¹¹²

On occasion, it is forgotten reinforced concrete was still a relatively novel construction material during the early years of the 20th century. While similar to stone masonry and in its spite of its flexibility, once cast reinforced concrete lacked the warmth of the more traditional materials such as stone or brick. Architectural style and appropriate decoration were needed to empower its decorum and elegance.

Architects resolved the material’s limitations by using several morphological solutions. Building A and Building B encompass a catalog of these architectural artifices. The material was contrasted to terracotta tiled roofs, ceramic tiles that provided contrasting texture, color and polychromic effect. Cast decoration was added in order to contrast with the bulk of the walls. These included garlands, brackets and foils among others. Pre-cast components, like the balustrade, were also created providing the building with delicacy and elegance.

¹¹⁰ Arleen Pabón-Charneco, “The Puerta de Tierra Historic District National Register of Historic Places Nomination,” pp 137-138.

¹¹¹ “American Marble in Porto Rico,” *Stone* (New York, Volume 39), pp 322-323: 322.

¹¹² *Idem*.

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Figure 33. Detail of reinforced concrete cantilevered roof slab eaves, balustrade, plant box and brackets, Building B, 1925-1928, Joseph O'Kelly, Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District, APC, 2018.

Most importantly was the three dimensional emphasis created by means of a series of elements, such as: avant-corps, cantilevered sections of the roof over windows (*aleros*) and plant boxes (*jardineras*). (See Figure 33.) (See Photograph 09, Photograph 13 and Photograph 14.) All assuaged the starkness and abstraction of the building by providing three-dimensional emphasis and plays of light and shadow. As mentioned, both buildings are organized in tripartite manner with two projecting avant-corps on the sides of the central section. Both compositions pay homage to the new material by expressing the avant-corps as lower in height and having flat roofs instead of the gabled one that crowns the central section. The use of concrete roof slab eaves covered with terracotta tiles is a much-loved solution that characterizes the Mediterranean Revival use in the island. Traditional architecture on occasion used the wooden projecting eaves as protection from the sun and water. The use of a flat reinforced concrete slab and love for the pure geometric parallelepiped made this impossible. The use of cantilevered angled roof slabs over windows was an innovative solution that not only protected door and window openings but also provided three-dimensional emphasis along the façades. By covering them with terracotta tiles the motif and color and texture was repeated in short sections that seem to float over the windows along the wall.

Window boxes for planting are usually found at the base of a line of windows. (See Figure 33.) (See Photograph 09.) The concrete short slabs covered with terracotta on top and the planting boxes now frame openings. Rather than the traditional play of wall – opening – wall, a new superimposed pattern is introduced empowering the window in a novel manner. Since windows at the time were of the louvered kind this was a favorite solution that allowed for nature to be enjoyed in a very direct manner.

Conclusion

During the period when Building A and Building B, as well as now gone Building C, of the Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District were constructed the primary cultural and political agenda was to modernize the Puerto Rican archipelago. Architecture, the language used to silently establish the progressive milieu nurtured at the time, became the instrument of choice, particularly when dealing with education. Persons like Miss Cordero and Mr O'Kelly understood the need to create modern architectural containers that could help accomplish and empower such goals.

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On occasion, a culture's process of involution includes a sense of regression that births unique difficulties. Puerto Rico is presently undergoing such a period. The Loaíza Cordero Instituto para Niños Ciegos Historic District is a highly symbolic architectural icon of a moment in time when the opposite was true. In the island, the 1920s marked a period of dramatic growth, when – in a sense – the sky was the limit in terms of progress. While the historic district served the blind for decades in exemplary manner at present there is no organism in the island to carry out this much needed service. Because of this reality, the precinct is an example of times past, when the Puerto Rican archipelago was a land of opportunities requiring a blanket of modern buildings. This unique historic context, the architectural design's creativity, as well as the stellar architect(s) involved in its design, are contributing factors to its cultural and architectural significance.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)
previously listed in the National Register
previously determined eligible by the National Register
designated a National Historic Landmark
recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #
recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey #

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
Other State agency
Federal agency
Local government
University
X Other (Name of repository)
Archivo General de Puerto Rico

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property Approximately 3.25425 acres USGS Quadrangle San Juan

(Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates. Delete the other.)

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or NAD 1983 or X WGS 1984

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- Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to map.



- Additional items: (Check with the SHPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Photo Log

Name of Property Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District

City or Vicinity Santurce, San Juan County N/A State Puerto Rico

Photographer Arleen Pabón-Charneco PhD JD Date Photographed February 2018

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera.

PR_San Juan_Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District_Building A _01.
North façade of building.

PR_San Juan_Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District_Building A _02.
North façade of building.

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PR_San Juan_Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District_Building A and Building B _03.
Photograph taken looking towards the south.

PR_San Juan_Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District_Fountain on Principal Road _04.
Photograph taken looking towards the south.

PR_San Juan_Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District_Building A _05.
North façade of building.

PR_San Juan_Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District_Principal entrance archway, Building A _06.
North façade of building.

PR_San Juan_Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District_Tower, Building A _07.
North façade of building.

PR_San Juan_Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District_Principal façade, Building A _08.
North façade of building.

PR_San Juan_Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District_Building A _09.
Northeast corner.

PR_San Juan_Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District_Entrance vestibule, Building A _10.
Looking towards the south west.

PR_San Juan_Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District_Tower, Building A _11.
Looking from the south.

PR_San Juan_Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District_Detail of decorative tiles in vestibule, Building A _12.
East side.

PR_San Juan_Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District_Building B _13.
Looking towards southeast.

PR_San Juan_Instituto Loaiza Cordero para Niños Ciegos Historic District_South façade, Building B _14.
Looking towards the north.

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