

Don Santos de la Maza and The Mint of de Catorce

By Pedro Coji de la Maza

In view of the difficulties arising in the exploitation of the mining area of Real, due to the depth of the mines and the low content of the ore the larger number of them were becoming unprofitable, Don Santos de la Maza, who had, in 1861 become the richest financier of the town decided to do something to help the town in a practical and efficient way.

Don Santos considered that Catorce was the heart of San Luis Potosi, and so had the Chamber of Deputies of the National Congress. In 1853 they issued a decree calling for the building of a mint in Catorce whenever it were necessary. Without a doubt it would have been built had it not been left pending due to one of many political upsets so that the Senate never completed the arrangements.

In 1857, due to the war, there was unrest in the Mint at San Luis Potosi, and, as a result Don Cayetano Rubio arranged a contract with the President, General Comonfort, for renting the Mint at San Luis, and for establishing another in the mining area of Catorce. Due, however to the Wars of Reform from 1858 to 1860 nothing was done and Rubio ceded his concessions to Garcia and Cortino of Tampico.

In addition to the troubles arising from the very shaky course of the mining area, the people of Catorce had to face up to the cost of transport and

the discounts and commissions for sending their silver paste to San Luis so that all were in favour of having their own Mint and taking the necessary steps to get it.

They tried as well to maintain a price of eight pesos for a mark of silver (225 gms). A Mint there would also help in that silver paste could be exchanged for hard coin and so avoid the delays which frequently occurred in the existing system. Sometimes, if these delays occurred, hard currency became scarce and the price of silver fell to seven pesos fifty so that neither the mine owner nor the unhappy miner would sell. The collector did not buy and, as a result, the mines stopped working together with the refineries and transport systems which brought the people poverty and a crisis in trade.

Don Joaquin Equia way back in 1817 extracted mineral from Catorce and recommended the establishment of a mint there as a result of the successful operation of many plants which had been established provisionally in many places to provide coinage in view of the pressing needs, during the War of Independence, of the provinces in Insurgent hands.

Of these one was established in Catorce in 1811. A few silver eight real coins were struck and some copper cuartillas, but they were later withdrawn from circulation.

In view of all these circumstances. Don Santos de la Maza started the negotiation for a building which would be suitable for the much wanted Mint. He asked the Town Council to sell him part of the principal plaza of the town, opposite the building of the Church authorities and the municipal offices, as this was the safest place against attacks and robberies — a rather necessary condition for a Mint. Up until then the plaza had been called the Coal Plaza as it was where such an important product was sold to the public. It was also used during fiestas for dances.

The Mayor, after long deliberations with his Council and paper work with the Central Government granted the petition of Don Santos, since the project would benefit enormously the whole district, and fixed a price of \$400 for the lot or one peso the square yard. Later Don Santos bought the

whole plaza for double the price and guaranteed to build a Mint with a beautiful facade.

Don Santos financed the construction of the building which put all other buildings in the shade, and he put on a facade of cut stone and included large indoor rooms for the machinery.

It was said in Catorce in 1861 that they had received not the slightest benefit from the government, whilst, on the other hand since 1776, the date of its foundation, Catorce had been of benefit to the Capital. They had consumed its manufactured goods, sustained its mercantile activities, and furnished large amounts for public expenses, together with sending each month a considerable quantity of silver bars from which the coinage was made.

At this time too there were all sorts of political and military troubles. In August 1861, for example, General Márquez arrived with a large body of



troops and occupied the town as if it were war booty, and so many were the assaults, the lootings and the impositions that no body dare go out in the streets and people lived hiding in a state of terror.

Meantime, whilst the negotiations went forward in Mexico City for the permit for the Mint, business just managed to survive the crisis until in February 1863 a large lode of metal was found in the Refugio which brought back enthusiasm, and a certain animation.

In 1863 Don Casimiro Toranzo was outstanding among the mining interests and he was an active competitor of Don Santos de la Maza. He bought part of the Del Refugio and Sr. de la Humildad mine, as well as three lots which General Parodi had in San Ramón together with Santos Varones and the famous Socavón de la Merced.

Don Santos de la Maza, not to be left behind, bought a quarter of a lot in San Agustín which had such a high content that in a very short time he had a regular bonanza.

Don Casimiro Toranzo continued to buy shares in the Catorce mines and became one of the principal owners of the Real although he never went there as there was no security in the area. Troubles were continually happening; Don Angel Manso was kidnapped and had to pay a large ransom to be able to return home; a son of Don José Maria Rodriguez, manager of the mines of Don Casimiro was assaulted and killed when he was taking

the wages from Catorce to La Matoma and assaults and robberies were the order of the day.

When order had been restored the President Benito Juárez granted the permit to put up the much wanted Mint. The machinery was bought in Philadelphia by Sr. Anacleto Terán and shipped to Catorce where it was installed in 1865.

The Mint was established in the building put up by Don Santos de la Maza, a three story house facing the parish church and the shopping street, and arranged in the best possible way. The cost of the machinery was \$80,000 gold. The staff of the plant consisted of Don Anacleto Garcia as Director, Don Francisco J. Estrada as Supervisor, Don Francisco de P. Segura as manager, Don Francisco de P. Rentería as accountant and Don Pomposo Sanabria as tester.

The amount of coinage struck, during the fourteen months of operations from January 1865 to its closure in February 1866 was:

1865	\$ 1,321,545.00
1866	167,360.00
Total	<u>1,489,405.00</u>

On March 20th 1866, the Emperor Maximilian, afraid that the forces of Juárez would capture the Mint and be able to operate it ordered it to be closed. The Town Council and all the principal citizens sent a memorial to the government of His Majesty asking that the decision should be revoked. The decision of the Emperor was

against the interests of the people of Catorce and the Mint was closed, never to reopen, whilst the people were disillusioned to an extreme.

As political troubles continued because of the war, the Governor, Don Santos Degollado imposed a forced loan of \$20,000 on Catorce which the principals of Real refused to give. Don Santos de la Maza was arrested, as he was the principal leader among the Spaniards and native born residents who now controlled nearly all the principal businesses in Real, in order to frighten the rest. These however, did not give in and the arrests continued. A commission of señores Mendizábal, Rodríguez y Velasco went to see Degollado who was in Matehuala and he granted a considerable reduction. The prefect collected the money from the business-men and sent it off and, after receipt the prisoners were released.

The ordinary people who did not want to join the army were thrown into the street, robbed of everything and forced to go with the troops. The situation became critical. So much was done to the residents of Catorce that they rose up and killed Lieutenant Eusebio Acosta and several soldiers with sticks and stones. As a reprisal the hated Duran arrived with 400 dragoons, and, arms at the ready, demanded a new loan of \$35,000. There was, however, no such sum in Real and, in spite of everything, he could not collect more than half. He left Don Juan Ramos as Prefect to calm

down the people as he was a much respected and liked man.

In August 1866 a liberal force under Colonel Pedro Martínez again occupied the town after taking all precautions that they should not be discovered, so that nobody should escape. When the alarm was sounded the poor inhabitants tried to climb the hill from which they were dislodged or chased with rifle fire. The usual loan was demanded and the principal citizens and their dependents put in gaol. The troops sacked the town but could not find more than 300 pesos in cash. They carried off two cases of the more important parts of the machinery in the mint and broke various machines. The prisoners were then carried off although the principals came back soon afterwards after being badly treated. The poor, among whom were various wounded in the morning's shooting and those captured, were carried off in revenge for the earlier defeat.

In view of this calamity all the shops and businesses were closed and a lot of people left for the Capital which was safer, whilst others emigrated to Europe so that the town was practically abandoned for some time. Catorce was replaced as the head of the district of this name which was given to Matehuala. With this loss of category the place acquired a reputation of being unsafe and liable to anything so that a lot of people moved to Matehuala.

When peace came again with the triumph of Juárez all wanted to be

able to work the mines again, which through being abandoned during these dreadful years had flooded as, with the blockage of the drains water had accumulated and filled the workings. Little by little, as peace became consolidated, repairs were made as everybody was interested in recovering lost time. Many new people were interested in following the old workings and to extend them, so that a new spirit was abroad, businesses were reopened and people went back to their houses. Even without the Mint, which was destroyed, work went on apace. So began the best period of Real, which was to reach in years to come, a development which it had never had before, due to the peace and security which the country enjoyed under the government of General Porfirio Diaz.

Of all the mining areas in the State, Catorce was, in 1888 the most important. It was stable and its commerce, its explorations, its large firms, metallurgical mills and costly machinery together with fabulous investments, and an enormous production gave it a great influence not only on mining but also social and mercantile so that it had, great prospects for the future.

The building where the coining machinery had been was allotted to Don Santos de la Maza, who occupied it with his offices and home, when it became known as the "Casa Maza". Sr. Trinidad Garcia says, in his account of a Presidential visit to the mining

establishment of Santa Ana in 1895 the following about Don Santos:

"I could not conscientiously fulfil my mission if I did not say a few words about the fortunate and brave Spaniard who founded the Casa Maza in Catorce. With this he helped many others to found large fortunes, by helping them in their commercial, agricultural and mining ventures from his abundant financial resources, whilst, at the same time he made himself a millionaire several times over.

"Don Santos came to Catorce in 1822 and devoted himself to trade with such ability and intelligence that he amassed a considerable capital in quite a short time. He then went into mining and formed a great fortune with his profits. In 1865, now a widower, he went to live in Seville, with his two small sons where he died without having come back to Catorce.

"The old Maza house, controlled first by its founder Don Santos and afterwards by his brother Don Francisco and since 1870 by Don Joaquin de la Maza, has been and will continue to be a stroke of providence for Catorce by reason of the important services it has provided and will continue to provide for the inhabitants of the district.

"The brilliant name of the daring miner Don Santos de la Maza, can take a dignified place alongside the famous miners Don José de la Borda and Don Pedro Romero de Terreros who reached fame in the eighteenth century in Mexico.