# Economic Activities of the Porteño Merchants: The Viceregal Period 

SUSAN MIGDEN SOCOLOW*

During the final decades of the eighteenth century, Buenos Aires and the La Plata region experienced dramatic economic and political change. The La Plata area before that time had been kept in a state of economic and political underdevelopment, both by Spanish mercantile policy and, during the seventeenth century, by the ascendency of Lima over the commerce of the entire area south to Córdoba. Brenos Aires, had been legally forbidden to enter directly into Spanish trade. Spanish policy, motivated by the need to create a strong bulwark against Portuguese expansion into Missiones and the Banda Oriental, began to shift slowly during the early decades of the eighteenth century, despite strong opposition from Lima merchants. ${ }^{1}$ Beginning in 1721, the number of Spanish ships authorized to stop and trade in Buenos Aires grew, albeit with occasional setbacks. ${ }^{2}$ The commercial policy culminated when the decree of "Free Commerce" was extended to Buenos Aires in 1776, and the interior provinces were included within the commercial sphere of the city in 1778 . Paralleling the new commercial standing of Buenos Aires, the provinces of the River Plate achieved administrative autonomy with the founding of the Viceroyalty of Río de la Plata in 1777. The new viceroyalty's headquarters were in Buenos Aires.

A growing European interest in the agricultural products of Buenos Aires, as well as a corresponding search by England for new markets, added impetus to the commercial development of the area. The growth of Buenos Aires's trade and the corresponding influx of Euro-

[^0]pean goods into the entire viceroyalty marked the beginning of a decline of local industries of the interior, as well as of commerce initiated by the merchants of the provinces. ${ }^{3}$ As Buenos Aires gradually became the single source of luxury goods for the entire area, the merchants of Buenos Aires emerged as leaders in the commerce of the viceroyalty.

This study focuses on the economic and professional activities of the comerciantes, or wholesale merchants of Buenos Aires. The merchants emerged as an especially powerful and influential group in porteño society during the last half of the eighteenth century. The merchant group is especially interesting because its position of social prominence and economic power was a unique phenomenon of the viceregal period. The stature of the group, a product of the viceregal economic system, reached its zenith during the viceroyalty and declined shortly after Independence. This analysis of the economic behavior of the group is limited to the period from 1778 to 1798 . In an effort to illustrate both the importance of the group, and its multiple economic roles, this essay will portray the trade patterns, commercial arrangements, and goods traded, as well as the extra-mercantile activities of wholesale merchants. It will also focus on the gradual split in the merchant group as a result of an ever-increasing demand for hides outside the Spanish Empire.

The porteño merchant group, composed of Spanish immigrants from the Basque provinces-Castile, Galicia and Santander-as well as a sizable contingent of native-born sons, was among the principal local beneficiaries of the Bourbon political and economic reforms of the late eighteenth century. Directly influenced by a flurry of activity, which included the expulsion of the Jesuits from the Indian missions, the founding of the viceroyalty, the new commercial code, and the consequent growth of markets, the merchants-a group which had been growing in numbers and strength since the middle decades of the century-flourished. The merchants controlled the trade of the growing port, a trade that linked Buenos Aires to Montevideo, Asunción, Córdoba, Tucumán, Jujuy, Salta, Potosí and the Andean mining areas, and Chile.

Although there is a tendency to view all merchants as a socially and economically homogeneous group, it should be noted that the merchants of Buenos Aires divided themselves into five distinct categories, according to varying economic functions, commercial power, and social prestige. By their own definition, the most presti-
3. Tulio Halperín Donghi, El Río de la Plata al comenzar el siglo XIX (Buenos Aires, 1961), pp. 21-22.
gious and powerful group of porteño merchants was that of the comerciantes, those engaged in the wholesale trade of the area. ${ }^{4}$ Wholesale trade encompassed commerce with Spain and the other colonies, as well as shipment of goods to the interior and later to Brazil, England, and the United States. ${ }^{5}$

Another group of merchants, the mercaderes-of lesser status than the comerciantes-owned retail shops that specialized in the sale of cloth, cloth goods, and a variety of European imports and locally produced items. ${ }^{6}$ Many mercaderes also engaged in wholesale trade with the interior, and there was some movement of individuals from the ranks of the mercaderes to those of the comerciantes. Essential to division between comerciante and mercader, however, was participation in overseas wholesale trade.

Almancenistas formed still another group of merchants. These men were the owners of retail shops specializing in the sale of food, china, and glassware. Below the almacenistas, both in social prestige and economic power, were the bandoleros, or mercaderes de bandola abierta, the ambulatory vendors, whose wares were those of a peddler. The fifth group, the pulperos, were owners of small shops that dispensed drink, food, and assorted dry goods.

Not surprisingly, within each group involved in trade, there were significant variations in economic and social standing, usually closely allied to the scale of trade and the assets of the particular individual. Of a total of 145 comerciantes in Buenos Aires in 1778 , sufficient data on scale and frequency of commercial transactions made it possible to categorize a representative group of 90 merchants. ${ }^{7}$ As can be seen in

[^1]Table I. Scale of Commerce of Porteño Merchants, 1778-1785.

|  | Number <br> of <br> Merchants | Percent | Average <br> value of <br> transactions |
| :--- | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| Large-scale merchants | 18 | 20 | 50,001 pesos \& up |
| Medium-large-scale merchants | 23 | 26 | $20,001-50,000$ |
| Medium-scale merchants | 45 | 50 | $5,001-20,000$ |
| Small-scale merchants | $\underline{4}$ | $\underline{4}$ | below 5,000 |
| Total | 90 | 100 |  |

Table I, the majority of porteño wholesalers were regularly engaged in transactions of from 5,001 to 20,000 pesos. The majority of porteño merchants were not, from the evidence supplied by the scale of their commerce, men of imposing wealth. To the contrary, on the whole they were individuals of moderate means, engaging in medium-sized commercial transactions.

In addition to category and scale, another important variable influencing a merchant's economic position was the geographical area and products of the trade in which he specialized, i.e., whether the bulk of a wholesale merchant's activity was in efectos de Castilla (Spanish goods and European reexports), or in agricultural products, yerba maté, hides and tallow. In the early years of the viceroyalty, the most powerful merchants were usually engaged primarily in the importation of efectos de Castilla. As the demand for hides grew and new markets were explored, merchants linked to the exportation of hides became more important. In all types of trade a merchant's personal and professional contacts were of considerable importance to the success of his endeavor. Merchants with a sizable number of influential associates and friends in Madrid, Cádiz, Seville, or Bilbao were most often also those with the greatest economic influence in Buenos Aires.

Of a representative group of go merchants engaged in wholesale trade, 24 merchants were engaged primarily in the import of efectos de Castilla. (See Table II.) Another 29 merchants combined import of efectos de Castilla with other types of trade. The efectos de Castilla

[^2]Table II. Type of Commerce Undertaken by Porteño Merchants, 1778-1785.

|  | Number of Merchants | Percent |
| :---: | :---: | :---: |
| Efectos de Castilla | 24 | 27 |
| Local Products | 11 | 12 |
| Efectos de Castilla and local products | 19 | 21 |
| Efectos de Castilla, local products, and hides | 10 | 11 |
| Hides | 9 | 10 |
| Metals | 1 | 1 |
| Slaves | 3 | 4 |
| No specialization | 9 | 10 |
| Other | 4 | 4 |
| Total | 90 | 100 |

included textiles from Spain, England, and France, iron from Vizcaya, and European luxury items, which were either placed in the Buenos Aires market or forwarded to Montevideo, Santa Fé, Córdoba, Mendoza, Asunción or Upper Peru. ${ }^{8}$ Payment for these goods was made by exporting currency to Spain or by shipment of local products and/ or hides.

More than 80 percent of the merchants of the city were engaged in the export of raw material and currency to the mother country and/ or the import of finished products from the mother country, the traditional mercantile pattern of commerce. Small groups of merchants were engaged in the shipping of metals from Alto Perú to Spain via Buenos Aires, and in the importation of slaves from Africa. Only 10 percent of the merchants failed to specialize in any one branch of commerce, finding it more profitable to vary activities by demand and season, dealing in a bit of everything, including slaves, hides, yerba maté, and European textiles.

There was a low incidence of change in the geographic focus of a merchant's major markets. Once a merchant established firm contacts in one or two sectors of the Spanish empire, he preferred to continue trading through these channels rather than risking new activity in relatively unknown areas. Contacts led to choice of regions, and re-

[^3]gions to the nature of the commerce conducted. Merchants trading with Paraguay and Missiones were almost uniformly engaged in the export of yerba maté; those whose main center of activity was Montevideo were usually in the export of hides. Many whose major connections were in the large consumption centers of Córdoba, Potosí, or Salta, were engaged in the import of Spanish goods and reexports.

Regional areas of influence and related product specialization were frequently passed from merchant father to merchant son or son-in-law. Manuel de Escalada's sons, Francisco and Antonio, continued in the region and trade that their father had pioneered-importation of efectos de Castilla, coupled with exportation of hides to Spain and yerba maté to Chile. Gaspar de Santa Coloma and Agustín de Erezcano, sons-in-law of Vicente de Azcuenaga, continued their father-inlaw's business of importing efectos de Castilla (which were sold primarily in Paraguay, Jujuy, and Cordoba) and combined with it the export of yerba maté from Paraguay.

Still another important factor affecting the economic activity of the porteno merchants was the structure and form of the mercantile enterprise. Some men were independent agents, drawing upon their own capital or credit to purchase goods and engage in commerce; others joined in various types of partnerships, usually with fellow merchants in Buenos Aires, although at times with peers in other parts of the Spanish Empire. Partnership arrangements were of two types, the sociedad colectiva and the sociedad en comandita, but variations within these forms were possible. ${ }^{9}$ At times one merchant was willing to provide more capital while his partner provided management responsibility. Manuel de Caviedes and his future son-in-law, Francisco de Tellechea, for example, formed a company in 1781 in which Caviedes was to receive two-thirds of the profits, and Tellechea one-third. ${ }^{10}$ Almost all of the principal that went into forming the company belonged to Caviedes ( 6726 pesos, as compared to Tellechea's contribution of 124 pesos), but Tellechea was to do most of the

[^4]work. Other partnerships called for equal division of investment, capital, and toil. Generally partnerships were short-term agreements, drawn up either for a specific transaction (i.e., the sale of one large shipment of goods), or for a three- to five-year period. ${ }^{11}$ These agreements seldom encumbered the major portion of a merchant's total capital.

Another form of mercantile enterprise was serving as agent for the merchants of Potosí, Córdoba, and Paraguay, as well as for other individuals with surplus capital to invest in commerce. For example, 30,000 pesos were turned over by Don Pedro Maquiarin of Potosí to Francisco Cabrera, for investment in either a shipment of slaves to be sent from Buenos Aires to the interior, or merchandise to be purchased in Spain. ${ }^{12}$ Francisco Cors, a captain in the Royal Army, remitted sizable shipments of cash to Spain, through such merchants as Manuel de Escalada and Juan de Lezica. ${ }^{13}$ Escalada and Lezica, in conjunction with Juan Antonio de Zeballos, a merchant of Cádiz and Escalada's pariente, invested these funds in goods to be sold by them on the Buenos Aires market. Later, Felipe Santiago del Pozo, another porteño merchant serving as Cors's agent, made cash purchases worth over 99,000 pesos of efectos de Castilla. ${ }^{14}$ In addition to acting as investment counselors for Cors and returning a profit on his money, all of the merchants involved benefited from a five percent commission on the value of all goods that they imported and sold for the Captain. These arrangements, especially when fairly large sums of money were involved, worked to strengthen a merchant's financial position in his own private commercial transactions.

Merchants also served as consignees for goods shipped by Spanish merchants. As such, they either returned silver to the Spanish merchant or exported hides that the merchant on the Peninsula would sell to balance accounts. The usual commission for a porteño merchant acting as consignee was eight percent of the retail value of the goods. Consignments varied greatly in size and value, and were usually sent by the merchants of Cadiz in the case of dry goods, or Bilbao, in the case of iron. Francisco Cabrera, for example, received two cases of

[^5]goods on consignment from Juan Jacinto Palomo, a Spanish merchant, with orders to sell the goods and return a cash profit. ${ }^{15}$ Manuel de Zapiola received shipments of "bars and sheets of iron" under basically the same conditions. ${ }^{16}$ Porteño merchants could also serve as consignee for ships and their entire cargo. Under this arrangement the merchant took upon himself an even greater responsibility, for he was in charge of selling the imported goods, obtaining hides or other goods to return to Spain, obtaining all necessary sailing permits for the continuation of the voyage, supplying any missing crew members, and provisioning the ship. ${ }^{17}$

Goods were also shipped to Buenos Aires by individuals seeking a quick profitable investment in the transatlantic trade, and the porteño merchants also served as agents for these speculators. Francisco Cabrera, for example, received a shipment of notions from Pedro de Castillo, a doctor of Cádiz, with instructions to sell the goods as soon as possible because of Castillo's cramped economic position. ${ }^{18}$ Unfortunately Castillo's shipment arrived in a state of extreme deterioration. His dream of quick profit surely collapsed when he received only fifty pesos for his goods.

Trade with speculators was highly sporadic and tended to be fraught with risks caused by the type and condition of goods sent to Buenos Aires, the perils of shipment, and the casual relationship of supplier to consignee. Lack of explicit instructions on the part of both consignee and supplier often led to commercial confusion. Nevertheless, goods continued to be shipped to Buenos Aires on consignment throughout the colonial period, although there is indication that the system of small shipments by individuals outside of commerce declined in the later years of the viceroyalty, as commercial ties were firmly established between large Spanish firms and important local merchants. Still, the promise of high profits and lucrative investments for Spaniards with small sums to invest and the possibility, for the less powerful porteño merchants, of extending one's trade connections led to the continuance of this system.

[^6]The most powerful merchants were those who served as factors for Spanish firms, and those who held royal contracts. Factors were personal representatives of one or more important commercial firms, usually based in Spain. At times factors were sent by the parent firm to reside in Buenos Aires, although merchants already living in the colony were also chosen as representatives. When unusually large shipments of merchandise were involved, factors accompanied the merchandise to Buenos Aires, taking up residence there until all the goods were sold and cash profits returned. Diego Casero, for example, arrived in Buenos Aires with a ship's cargo of goods belonging to the Conde de Clonard, a merchant of Cádiz. ${ }^{19}$ As Clonard's factor, he spent six years placing these goods on the market. Factors either received a commission based on the volume of trade that they handled for the parent company, or were awarded an annual salary. They also served as the legal representatives of the Spanish firm in all its dealings within the colony. Factors were allowed to invest their own private funds in commerce and could draw upon the prestige and power of the parent company in independent transactions. Martín de Sarratea, for example, served as factor for the Royal Philippine Trading Company, as well as undertaking private commercial transactions in his own name.

Merchants also traded under specific Crown contracts. Such agreements gave a merchant-contractor responsibility for providing food for the army or transporting metals from Potosí to Buenos Aires. These royal contracts were purchased from the government, and a goodly profit was expected by the merchants for their initial investment. Tomás Antonio Romero, for example, acted as Asentista General de la Conduccíon de Caudales y Azogues de Su Majestad (Royal Transporter of Metals) from 1777 to 1807. As such he was under contract to the Crown to import mercury and export silver from Alto Perú. The long period during which Romero held his contract leads one to assume that it was a highly profitable association.

It should be remembered that the single or partnership entrepreneurial roles were not mutually exclusive; neither were the roles of factor, consignee, purchaser, and contractor. It was common for a single merchant to be, at the same time, a sole owner of one shipment of goods, a partner in one or more other commercial transactions, the consignee of goods shipped by various merchants from Spain, and perhaps also the factor of a Spanish commercial house. An excellent example of this multi-faceted role is that of Agustín Casimiro de
19. Disposición Testamentaria de Don Diego Casero, AGN, Registro de Escribano 3,1799 , fol. $479-588 \mathrm{v}$.

Aguirre, one of the most important merchants of the period. Aguirre served as factor for two large Cádiz-based firms, that of Ustáriz Hermanos y Cía and that of Ustáriz, San Gines y Cía. In partnership with his cousin, Juan Pedro de Aguirre in Montevideo, he also exported hides from Argentina and Uruguay. Aguirre, in addition, invested funds for Clemente Echenique of Potosí, and engaged in business transactions as consignee of imported goods with Francisco Borja de Lisaur of Cádiz and with the Conde del Premio Real of Lima. At the same time, moreover, he represented, for a fee, the Consulado of Cádiz in its Buenos Aires business affairs, and was contracted by the Spanish Crown to export precious metals. Finally, Aguirre, in partnership with his clerk, Andrés de Cazaraville, owned a retail shop in his home. Profits were divided equally between the two men because, although Aguirre owned the stock, Cazaraville managed the store. ${ }^{20}$

Like the forms of mercantile enterprise, credit arrangements played an important part in the colonial commerce. The porteno merchants extended credit to the merchants of the interior and to the retailers of Buenos Aires to facilitate the sale of goods, and were often themselves financed by credit extended by the merchants of Cádiz, Madrid, or La Coruña. Felipe Santiago del Pozo, for example, borrowed 6,000 pesos in cash from Juan de Garay, a merchant of Cádiz. Repayment of this money, which was promptly invested in sixteen crates of merchandise that were shipped to Buenos Aires by Pozo, was promised to Garay within eighteen months. ${ }^{21}$ Review of the balance sheets of individual merchants and commercial partnerships show credit arrangements similar to those established by the porteño partnership of Caviedes and Tellechea. In 1788, seven years after the original partnership agreement between Caviedes and Tellechea had been drawn up, the firm had a total of 14,088 pesos worth of goods on hand.

[^7]In addition to this, they held merchandise credits valued at more than 60,000 pesos, which had been extended to purchasers in Buenos Aires and the provinces. The firm, in turn, owed 12,322 pesos to Spanish merchants for goods that Caviedes and Tellechea had imported into Buenos Aires. ${ }^{22}$

Not all goods shipped to Buenos Aires were bought through credit arrangements with Spanish merchants or shipped on consignment. Naturally, porteño merchants also invested their own funds in the trade, either registering cash to be shipped to a Spanish merchant, or personally sailing to Spain with large sums of cash on hand. ${ }^{23}$ Although personal trips to Spain were costly and time consuming, they were favored by young merchants undertaking transactions that could be critical to their future commercial success. Such a trip guaranteed greater choice in the goods brought to the porteño market, and also allowed the young porteño merchant to make business alliances which, he hoped, would serve him in the years to come.

Travel was by no means limited to occasional transatlantic crossings. Merchants and their dependientes (clerks) also journeyed to the interior, accompanying shipments of merchandise and collecting past debts from the merchants of the provinces. The merchants of Potosí, Córdoba, Montevideo and Tucumán also journeyed to Buenos Aires to transact business with the portenos. A porteño merchant visiting the interior, or a merchant from the interior visiting Buenos Aires, was usually well equipped with poderes (powers of attorney) from his fellow merchants to settle their outstanding accounts. A merchant peer or his trusted clerk was far more dependable in settling business accounts than was a letter.

Although little documentation exists, it can be presumed that many of the merchants of Buenos Aires, in addition to their legal trade, also engaged, to some degree, in contraband activity. As the same goods traded legally were also traded as contraband (hides, European textiles, slaves, and precious metals), it is impossible to distinguish, on the basis of merchandise traded, legal from illegal activity. The principal advantages of contraband activity, from the viewpoint of the merchants, was that it allowed one to choose one's market and supplier and to trade more freely, unencumbered by market controls set by the Spanish Crown. Goods traded as contraband were comparatively freer of taxes, and as they avoided the import duty imposed

[^8]on all merchandise legally entering the La Plata region, savings were appreciable. The risks of contraband trade were high, but never high enough to discourage Buenos Aires merchants. Proximity to Brazil and weakly garrisoned land and sea boundaries, also made contraband activity attractive. What had been a traditional and important source of trade before the Free Trade Ordinance of 1778 opened Buenos Aires to direct trade with Spain, did not cease once the Ordinance took effect. The Crown's concept of "free trade" was, in most instances, unlike the merchants', and merchants as respectable and loyal as Tomás Antonio Romero and Juan Martín de Pueyrredón were implicated in contraband trade at one time or another in their careers. ${ }^{24}$

What seems to have been common to both legal and illegal trade was the merchants' expectation of a high margin of profit, especially on goods not received on consignment. The successful merchants were economically the most powerful group of the colony, and as they controlled trade, they attempted to exert a monopoly on price and profit margin. An interesting indication of the margin of profit which a merchant expected to realize on his investment is found in the capital of Gaspar de Santa Coloma. After listing the cost value of a shipment of goods purchased by him and in his possession in Buenos Aires, Santa Coloma added 70 percent of the stated purchase value of the goods to his total wealth. ${ }^{25}$ This 70 percent was evidently acceptable as a margin of profit, for the document stood uncontested by Cristóbal de Aguirre and Miguel González de Noriega, two merchant witnesses, the notary public, and Santa Coloma's future father-in-law, merchant Vicente de Azcuenaga, as an expression of his true financial state.

A striking characteristic of the commerce of Buenos Aires was the relatively short existence of most commercial firms. At most a firm's commercial life was synonymous with the life of the individual trader. Incorporation or stockholding in commercial companies was nonexistent. Business was therefore based primarily on personal contacts.
24. Autos sobre la participación de Tomás Antonio Romero en el contrabando descubierta al arribo de la fragata norteamericana "Mariana," AGN, División Colonia, Sección Gobierno, Tribunales, 1801, Legajo 94, Expediente 17, IX-36-7-3; Autos obrados con motivo de habérsele aprehendido de Juan Martín de Pueyrredón en su chacra, sita en el partido de San Isidro, 32 barriles de tabaco del Brasil, AGN, División Colonia, Sección Gobierno, Tribunales, 1791, Legajo 16, Expediente 17, IX-35-2-6.
25. Capital de Don Gaspar de Santa Coloma, AGN, Registro de Escribano 5, ${ }^{1781}$, fol. ${ }^{157-161} \mathrm{v}$. Comparing this profit rate to other profits declared by merchants, Santa Coloma's expectations do not seem unreal. The company formed by Manuel de Caviedes and Francisco de Tellechea, for example, over a four-year period, declared a profit of 18,464 pesos on an original investment of 6,850 pesos. This was a profit of 270 percent. Testamentaria de Don Manuel de Caviedes, 1788 , AGN, Sucesiones 5342.

The death of a merchant brought the demise of his company. Spanish inheritance laws, calling for equal distribution of an estate among all legal heirs, reinforced the short life of a firm engaged in trade. The upward educational and social mobility of the merchants' sons did the same. Only when a son (or son-in-law) chose to take his inheritance in goods and outstanding debts was there commercial continuity. Even in these rare instances the total economic power of an individual merchant was greatly diminished by the required division of the estate. The general estate pattern was to liquidate as much merchandise as possible, and then to divide cash, goods, debts, land, and all personal property (after appraisal) among all heirs. ${ }^{26}$

It should be noted that the merchants of the Río de la Plata, unlike their peers in Mexico or Peru, did not attempt to invest their surplus capital in rural land, nor did they attempt to form mayorazgos (entailed estates). ${ }^{27}$ The absence of this traditional institution in the River Plate region is related to the small economic value given to the lands of the Pampas. The ranchlands were, until the very last days of the viceregal period, relatively open and wild, areas of periodic roundups of cattle and horses undertaken by the seminomadic gauchos. There was no large indigenous population in the area to provide the manpower for cultivation of a commercial crop; indeed the pampa was widely thought to be uncultivable; the hostile Indians who controlled border areas were never considered to be docile enough to serve as farm laborers. The lands of the pampa, therefore, were thought to be of small worth, hardly a wise investment for the hard-earned fortune of a prosperous merchant, much less a guarantee against the division of a merchant's estate. In addition, the low ratio of range animals to land, and the huge tracts of land necessary to produce even a modest income from ranching, also militated against large-scale mercantile investment and the formation of mayorazgos. Only after 1810 with the widescale appearance of saladeros in the Buenos Aires area, and the consequent growth of the export of salted meat, was the value of the estancias of the pampa revised upward. ${ }^{28}$

Regardless of the specifics of the type, scope, or form of trade, it
26. D. A. Brading, Miners and Merchants in Bourbon Mexico, 1763-181o (Cambridge, Eng., 1971), p. 103, mentions the same legal requirement for division of property in Mexico.
27. The only porteño merchant who attempted to form an entailed estate, Vicente de Azcuenaga, based the mayorazgo on urban property. Azcuenaga's petition to create a mayorazgo was denied, in part because of royal opposition to a further extension of entailed estates in the New World.
28. James R. Scobie, Argentina: A City and a Nation (New York, 1964), p. 27. The first saladero was built by Francisco Medina, a resident of Montevideo, in the Banda Oriental in the 178 os. Not until the Independence period did saladeros proliferate in the Buenos Aires region.

Table III. Additional Economic Pursuits of Porteño Merchants, 17781785.

|  | Number of <br> Merchants | Percent |
| :--- | :---: | ---: |
| Merchant and retailer | 8 | 11 |
| Merchant and shipowner | 17 | 22 |
| Merchant and official | 26 | 34 |
| Merchant and rancher | 4 | 5 |
| Merchant and manufacturer | 4 | 5 |
| Merchant and financier | 5 | 7 |
| Merchant, shipowner, and rancher | 4 | 5 |
| Merchant, retailer, and rancher | 1 | 1 |
| Merchant, official, and rancher | 4 | 5 |
| Merchant, retailer, and official | 1 | 1 |
| Merchant, shipowner, and official | 1 | 1 |
| Merchant, official, and financier | 1 | 1 |
| Merchant, shipowner, and manufacturer | 1 | 1 |
| Merchant, shipowner, official, |  | 1 |
| rancher, and manufacturer | 78 | $\mathbf{1}$ |
| Total |  | 100 |

was common for the wholesale merchants of Buenos Aires, while concentrating on commerce, to be engaged in other, oftentimes, related work. (See Table III.) At least 78 of the 145 merchants in the 1778 census combined trade with another career. The most common combination was that of merchant and public official. The merchant-officials served the viceregal government in a wide range of positions. Their offices were usually purchased from the Crown for specific periods of time, although some were held for a lifetime, and a few were passed down to sons. Included in the official posts held by merchants were Administrator of the Royal Mails, Assayer of Metals, and Administrator of Guaraní Indians. ${ }^{29}$ All of these offices could be used to further commercial dealing. Administrator of Guaraní Indians was a post particularly conducive to improving a merchant's fortune, as it guaranteed a captive market for imported goods, a source of native goods, and complete control of prices.

In addition to their wholesale trade, one fairly large group of 24 merchants also engaged in shipping, owning ships and boats that plied the River Plate. The size of these vessels varied widely from
29. These positions-Administrador de Correos y Postas del Virreynato del Río de la Plata, Ensayador Mayor de Metálicos, and Administrador de los Pueblos de Indios Guaraníes de Misiones, Uruguay y Paraná-were held by Domingo de Basavilbaso (later Manuel de Basavilbaso), Manuel de Basavilbaso, and Juan Angel Lazcano (later Diego Casero), respectively.
small coasting vessels and boats, used to transport goods to and from the estancias along the Paraguay and Paraná rivers, to oceangoing vessels engaged in transatlantic trade. Another group of ten merchants engaged in retail sales, owning stores located in the central district of the city. Although ownership of retail outlets was not as common in Buenos Aires as in Mexico City, no onus was attached to combined wholesale and retail trade. Important merchants, such as Gaspar de Santa Coloma, Agustín Casimiro Aguirre, and Francisco de Tellechea, as well as such lesser figures as Esteban Romero, owned and operated retail shops. ${ }^{30}$ Only a small group of merchants was interested in investment of profits in manufacturing; three merchants, Francisco Cabrera, Tomás Antonio Romero, and Francisco Medina, were proprietors of saladeros at one time or another, and one merchant, Esteban Villaneuva, owned and operated a broncería (bronze foundry). ${ }^{31}$ Two merchants also owned small brickmaking establishments, but in general, merchants showed little interest in local manufacturing, preferring to buy and sell goods produced by others.

Only 14 of the merchants of the city were also active ranchers at some time during their careers. Usually these men, as well as their parientes, were identified with the export of hides and other cattle products. At least one merchant, Juan de Lezica, speculated in land, buying and selling several estancias in quick succession. Investment in rural properties by merchants tended to be sporadic and limited, in comparison to investments in urban landholding. ${ }^{32}$ The small number

[^9]of merchants who invested in estancias is especially noteworthy, given the rapid growth of the export of hides beginning in $1778 .{ }^{33}$ While other economic activities, including commerce itself, suffered frequent setbacks and periods of relative inactivity, cattle raising was in a period of full expansion. ${ }^{34}$ As early as 1786, Gaspar de Santa Coloma, one of the city's most prominent merchants, remarked that "the export of hides is flourishing, and the estancias from the other side of the river to Corrientes have undergone much development and growth; many people have become rich." ${ }^{35}$

Merchant capital was not generally attracted to rural land, partially because of the low relative value of rural to urban land. Although growth in the export of hides produced the beginning of an increase in the value of estancia land, in 1789 a square league of ranchland was still worth only 2,000 pesos. ${ }^{38}$ In addition, commercial profits were generally considered to be more dependable than those accruing from cattle and horse ranching. Finally, the urban bias of the merchant group, and the comparatively low social status of the estancieros contributed to the low estimation of rural landowning by the merchant group. ${ }^{37}$ Merchants preferred to purchase hides from estancieros rather than to control directly the source of supply.

From time to time, merchants demonstrated some interest in nontraditional, extractive industries, although in most cases interest was

[^10]short-lived and not very widespread. In 1787, for example, Tomás Antonio Romero, the only truly imaginative merchant of the period, requested viceregal permission to undertake catching and salting codfish in the Patagonian port of San Julián. ${ }^{38}$ The extraction of salt, although not a traditional industry of the area, also attracted limited merchant participation. The salt came from mines located 130 leagues west southwest of Buenos Aires in a desolate area controlled by hostile Indians. As salt was indispensable, not only for the daily consumption of the porteño population but as an essential ingredient in the salting of meat, annual military expeditions were organized under viceregal aegis. In addition to a military commander and troops, two deputies were named by the cabildo as their representatives and as administrators of the expedition's funds. Throughout the viceregal period, at least one, and usually both, of these cabildo deputies were merchants. Because of their business experience, it was assumed that the merchants could provide salt "with greater economy."339 Although called upon at times to underwrite the costs of the expeditions, the merchants were guaranteed a profit through the sale of the muchneeded product. ${ }^{40}$

Merchants, because of their credit activities, were active in one aspect of the crude banking functions undertaken in the colonymoneylending. Regions of the viceroyalty suffered from permanent monetary scarcity, and merchants were the only large group in society possessing both liquid capital (theirs or that of others) and the financial ties with Spain that could provide lines of credit. Many merchants engaged in moneylending on a local scale, and some were also involved in deposit banking. Loans were frequently made to fellow merchants, ranchers, government officials, and, in times of need, to
38. Tomás Antonio Romero y José Alberto Capdevila, solicitando se les conceda permiso y algunos auxilios para hacer el ensayo de la Pesca del Bacalao, Sardina y otros peces en la costa Patagónica, AGN, División Colonia, Sección Gobierno, Interior, 1787, Legajo 23, Expediente 14, IX-30-3-8; Pedro Santos Martínez, Las industrias durante el Virreinato (1776-1810) (Buenos Aires, 1969), p. 121.
39. Santos Martínez, Las industrias, p. 124.
40. In 1789 , Diego Agüero personally underwrote the costs of the expeditions, with the cabildo promising to repay him, once the salt was sold. Acuerdos del Extinguido Cabildo de Buenos Aires, 1789, AGN, serie III, tomo IX, pp. 163-165. Among those merchants who acted as cabildo deputies in the salt expeditions were Manuel Joaquín de Zapiola (1778), Saturnino José Alvarez and Gaspar de Santa Coloma ( 1784 ), Manuel del Cerro Sanz (1786), José Martínez de Hoz (1787), Agustín de Erezcano (1788), Diego Agüero and Agustín Casimiro de Aguirre (1789), Casimiro Francisco Necochea (1791), Jaime Alsina (1792), Manuel de la Piedra and Pedro Dubal (1798), Manuel Ortiz Basualdo (1802), Cristóbal de Aguirre (1804), Juan Bautista Elorriaga and Juan Llano (1805), and Esteban Romero (1808). Santos Martínez, Las industrias, pp. 125-136.
government and/or semiofficial institutions. ${ }^{41}$ Cash loans were made, but more often loans were granted in the form of credits on goods sold. ${ }^{42}$ The normal interest rate for these transactions was 6 percent per annum, but occasionally higher or lower rates were granted. In addition to local loans, the most powerful merchants, those who were representative of important Spanish mercantile houses or who had extensive dealing with these houses (a group of approximately 20 men), acted as conduits for intercolonial transfers of money. These arrangements were often quite complicated and included shipping cash, granting credit, collecting outstanding debts, renegotiating credit terms, and settling accounts among a group of debtors and creditors for the Spanish house. ${ }^{43}$ In all instances the merchant was awarded a commission on the transactions.

Some merchants, after accumulating large capital reserves through trade, and after establishing strong ties in Spain, came to dedicate themselves almost exclusively to financial activities, including loans to fellow merchants in Buenos Aires and the interior. Although still identifying themselves as merchants, men such as Bernardo de Sancho Larrea and Manuel Rodríguez de Vega turned their attention to the financing of fellow merchants, relying especially upon their own strong commercial connections with Spain and access to liquid capital. ${ }^{44}$ This group, although small, was powerful and wealthy; they performed an important function in a society devoid of banks or formal credit arrangements. Given the conditions of a pre-banking economy, and the resultant mixture of financial and commercial activities, this gradual shift from merchant to financier is understandable.
41. Esteban Villanueva, for example, loaned 30,000 pesos at 5 percent interest to the cabildo for the express purpose of providing funds for the cabildo to continue its public works, especially the Casa de Comedias. Obligación del Cavildo de esta ciudad a Don Estevan Villanueva, AGN, Registro de Escribano 1, 18041809, fols. 72-73.
42. Examples of this type of loan abound in the notary registers. See for example, Obligación de Don Pedro Duval y otro a Don Estevan Villanueva, AGN, Registro de Escribano 1, 1804-1809, fols. 10v-11; Obligación de Don Antonio Manuel González a favor de Don Tomás de Balenzategui, AGN, Registro de Escribano 1, 1794-1795, fols. 484v-485; Obligación de Don Manuel Hermúa a favor de Don José Dacosta Ferreyra, AGN, Registro de Escribano 4, 1774-1775, fols. $156-156 \mathrm{v}$. In all of these transactions, a wholesale merchant sold a consignment of goods to another merchant, receiving in payment a promissory note, to be repaid within a stipulated period of time and at a specified rate of interest.
43. See for example, Testamentaria de Don Felipe Santiago del Pozo, 1776, letter from Mateo Ramón de Alzaga to del Pozo dated 2 July 1772, AGN, Sucesiones 7711. The letter begins: "Misters Cadalso and Villanueva have requested that I recover from you what you owe them. . . ."
44. Juan Carlos Garavaglia, "Comercio colonial: expansión y crisis," Polémica, 5 (1970), p. 129.

Some merchants participated in a variety of extra-mercantile economic pursuits, combining up to four roles with their principal mercantile career; but unlike the Mexican merchants, who acted as financial backers or aviadores for mining and the production of cochineal, as far as can be determined the merchants of Buenos Aires did not extend credit for the production or processing of raw materials. ${ }^{45}$ Perhaps the merchants of Potosí acted as aviadores for the local silver mines, or the merchants of Asunción as financiers for the production of yerba maté, but Buenos Aires merchants were never directly involved in these relatively distant transactions. The absence of Indian villages and the post of corregidor in the La Plata region also worked against the merchants acting as aviadores. ${ }^{46}$ The export of hides did not involve financial backing on the part of the merchants, for hides were customarily paid for by the merchants at the time of delivery.

Many factors were inherent in the Spanish pattern of commerce that led to frequent bankruptcy. Receipt of a shipment of goods which was not salable was one of the most common reasons for loss. Merchants dealing in efectos de Castilla generally sent written orders to their Spanish agents, but because these orders were often vague as to quality, color, and composition of goods desired, many times goods were received that were impossible to sell in Buenos Aires or the interior. Still another danger was the risk of oversupply. Moreover, goods commonly arrived badly damaged. (Although goods could be insured by Spanish companies, the practice was far from universal.) These factors contributing to the unsalability of goods, and consequent bankruptcy, were even more frequent when a merchant, acting as a factor or agent of a Spanish commercial firm or another individual received a shipment. In these cases, the merchant in Buenos Aires had no control over the type and quality of goods that he received. ${ }^{47}$

In addition to the quality and condition of goods, business was
45. Brading, Miners and Merchants, pp. 98-99.
46. Only one porteño merchant, Manuel de Escalada, through business connections in Potosi, became involved in the outfitting of a corregidor in the province of Chichas, in return for the corregidor's sale of goods to the Indians. It is clear that Escalada turned to this method of disposing of merchandise only after he failed to sell his goods either in Buenos Aires or Potosí. The untimely death of the corregidor caused a failure in Chichas, too. Testamento en virtud de poder, Don Bernardo de Sancho Larrea y Don Francisco Antonio de Escalada a nombre de Don Manuel de Escalada, AGN, Registro de Escribano 5, 1774, fols. 234-259v.
47. Francisco Cabrera, a once prosperous merchant, died in penury, in part because of several shipments of goods that were unsalable. Autos de inventario formados de los vienes que quedaron por muerte de Don Francisco Cabrera, 1787, AGN, Sucesiones 5342.
made even more precarious by dependence on unknown or undependable agents in the interior. Merchants of Buenos Aires often consigned goods to interior wholesale or retail merchants who frequently failed to live up to the agreements of consignment. Often merchants in the interior were more eager to sell those goods that they owned outright than those on which they received only a commission. Even consignment to parientes could not guarantee responsible action on their part. ${ }^{48}$ Goods consigned to retail merchants had frequently been sold to the wholesaler on credit, and when the retailers were tardy in disposing of these goods, wholesalers were forced to default on loans or to prolong the period of repayment. Dependence on unreliable wholesalers and retailers forced the porteño merchant into a dangerous economic position, in which he was unable to pay debts because others defaulted on debts due him. ${ }^{49}$ Still another pitfall, that of engaging in too many transactions at the same time, and thereby overextending capital, led to bankruptcy. Some merchants placed themselves in situations of extreme vulnerability, whereby default by one of their debtors produced consequent default to their creditors.

The end of the eighteenth century, a period of commercial and political expansion for the city of Buenos Aires, was also, ironically, a period of protracted European wars, which continually disturbed normal patterns of trade. From 1779 on, the Bourbon kings of Spain and all their dominions were intermittently engaged in conflicts with England, and Spanish commercial vessels became easy targets for the strong British armada. This long period of war affected commerce in Buenos Aires in many ways.
48. "The late [Manuel de Escalada] told us . . . that he had various accounts pending with Don Francisco de Cevallos [a pariente], business which had been placed under his care in Potosí, independent of the company, which he was in charge of. He [Cevallos] had not given an accounting [of these transactions] for some years now, and had even failed to respond to Escalada's letter, or to give him a list of sales and payments for those goods under his care. Even though Escalada had made use of several other people to encourage Cevallos to get to work, nothing happened. Cevallos also refused to obey Escalada's order to send the remaining goods to Cuzco so that they could be exchanged for local products [which in turn could be sold in another market]. Cevallos even refused to leave Chuquisaca, where he had been for several years. He abandoned his business and house in Potosí to a clerk whom he had left there." Testamento en virtud de poder, Don Bernardo de Sancho Larrea y Don Francisco Antonio de Escalada a nombre de Don Manuel de Escalada, AGN, Registro de Escribano 5, 1774, fols. 234-259v.
49. "Although my debtors were so lazy in paying their bills, my pressing need to acquire money to remit to the Count for credit against my pending accounts was more nimble. I came to the point of depriving myself of what was mine in order to satisfy the demands of the Count. . . ." Disposición testamentaria de Don Diego Casero, AGN, Registro de Escribano 3, 1799, fols. 479-558v.

From 1779 to 1781, trade with Europe almost came to a complete halt; while European goods sat on the wharves of Cádiz, local porteño products waited in the storehouses of Buenos Aires. ${ }^{50}$ Some merchants were able to profit initially because they were well supplied at the beginning of the conflict, but in general the merchant community suffered. Conditions in the colony became so desperate that trade was legalized with Portugal and Brazil (neutral nations) in an attempt to maintain a flow of goods to and from the area. In 1781 and 1782, more Portuguese than Spanish merchant ships arrived in the ports of the Río de la Plata. ${ }^{51}$ These emergency measures failed to return trade to a normal footing, but they did alleviate the situation. In 1783, Martín de Sarratea, one of the more powerful merchants, wrote that "during the past four years . . . trade has been slowed down by the war, [and] my own business transactions have not required much time. Today because of the peace, commerce is again open and . . . my good name and my reputation is fulfilling my business agreements, and contracts demand my attention. . . ."52

Overstocking of Argentine markets followed the period of scarcity. From 1785 on, there were frequent complaints on the part of the porteño merchant community, especially those merchants who specialized in efectos de Castilla, as to an overabundance of merchandise. They repeatedly stressed the difficulty of selling their goods on the glutted market, the scarcity of silver to return to Spain, and a continuous decline in the price that European goods commanded. ${ }^{53}$ In 1789 , for example, Gaspar de Santa Coloma cited "the abundance of goods" as cause of "the deplorable state of trade [that] continues in these provinces, without relief and without a remote hope that commerce will improve." ${ }^{54}$ Santa Coloma blamed "frequent bankruptcies and the continuous loss of accounts in the interior" on oversupply.

The European wars began again for Spain in 1791, and with brief intervals of peace, continued until 1808. The interruption of trade again produced a high level of economic instability and insecurity among the merchants of Buenos Aires. During the entire period, the porteño market fluctuated wildly between periods of scarcity and
50. Villalobos, Comercio y contrabando, p. 56.
51. Juan Carlos Garavaglia, unpublished study on colonial commerce, presented to the Congreso de Historia Social y Económica, Buenos Aires, April 1970. 52. Letter of July 8, 1783 , from Martín de Sarratea to Viceroy Vértiz. AGN, División Colonia, Sección Gobierno, Niños Expósitos y varios, 1771-1809, Legajo 32, IX-7-9-5.
53. AGN, División Colonia, Sección Gobierno, Consulado de Buenos Aires, Legajo 4, Número 37, IX-4-7-6; Villalobos, Comercio y contrabando, pp. 57-59.
54. Villalobos, Comercio y contrabando, p. 57.
periods of overabundance, each producing a series of economic setbacks. Occasional stoppage of trade forced merchants to default on loans they had taken to finance their transactions. Attempts to continue trade through a series of royal cédulas liberalizing the slave trade, allowing commerce in neutral ships, and even opening commerce to neutral powers, usually produced a surfeit of goods, with its consequent harm to those merchants dealing in European goods. ${ }^{55}$

The wars were not harmful to all merchants. In general, the wealthier ones, with a supply of liquid capital on hand, could wait out the period of trade stoppage while maintaining their economic position. Some merchants with capital invested in ships took advantage of the more liberal trade regulations. As hides and slaves were in great demand, those merchants prospered who invested heavily in the slave trade and/or acted as fronts for foreign traders in the export of hides. Their success is reflected in their growing participation in the consulado and in their high ranking in the 1798 merchant list. Men such as Pedro Duval, Cecilio Sánchez de Velasco, José de María, and Julián del Molino Torres came to challenge the economic and social positions of the established efectos de Castilla merchants, the Lezicas, the Escaladas, Gaspar de Santa Coloma, Cristóbal de Aguirre and Martín de Alzaga. The net effect of the breakdown of traditional trade was to threaten the position of the merchants dealing in efectos de Castilla, to improve the fortunes of the slavers and exporters of hides, and to disturb the ranks of the merchant group in general. Few merchants who had suffered bankruptcy during wartime were able to make an economic comeback. More than ever, wealth tended to concentrate itself in the hands of a few powerful merchants (although slavers and exporters of hides now joined their ranks), and at the same time the merchant group continued to attract new migrants from Spain.

From 1791, the European wars also produced an ideological division among the merchants, which was to intensify through the next 20 years. A marked and important rift developed between those merchants eager to expand their non-Spanish markets and end restrictions on colonial trade, and those favoring the return to traditional trade patterns limited to Spain and her colonies. The latter, the so-called monopolistas, resisted any reform they felt would lead to free trade with all nations, for they saw the entrance of foreign goods through neutral channels as the root of all their troubles. The monopolistas supported commerce limited to Spain, commerce of supply, not over-
supply, which would guarantee high prices and high profits. Among the most outspoken critics of any move to liberalize trade were Martín de Alzaga, Manuel de Arana and Martín de Sarratea, merchants whose trade was based on efectos de Castilla, and who as agents of Spanish firms, had strong ties to the merchants of Cádiz and Madrid. They were joined by a small group of merchants and estancieros who participated in the export of hides and cattle products to Spain, Spanish colonies (especially Cuba), and the markets of the interior. ${ }^{56}$ The proponents of freer trade, men such as Cecilio Sánchez de Velasco, José González Bolaños, and Agustín Wright, were merchants and estancieros closely associated with the export of hides and other productos de la tierra to neutral nations (e.g., Brazil), a trade pattern legalized because of the Hispano-English wars. These men naturally encouraged the development of new markets for their products.

The instability of porteño commerce is reflected in part by the constant fluctuation of the number of men identifying themselves in public documents as comerciantes. In 1777, merchants of the city numbered 128, a vivid demonstration of the growth of the commercial class prior to the creation of the viceroyalty. ${ }^{57}$ One year later, the ranks of the merchants had increased to 145 members. ${ }^{58}$ But the following years-a period of European conflict and commercial insta-bility-produced a shift in trading patterns and fluctuation in the number of comerciantes. By 1794, merchant ranks had been reduced to only 113 members, largely a result of bankruptcy caused by a widely changing market. ${ }^{59}$ Four years later, prosperity and growing trade produced an astounding increase in the number of merchants in the city; merchant numbers had almost doubled and now were given as $203 .{ }^{60}$ Only three years later, in 1801, the number of merchants in the city was once again reduced to 138 members. ${ }^{61}$

Instability, fluctuation in trade and in numbers of merchants, and a gradual shift of trade patterns were all characteristics of commerce in viceregal Buenos Aires. The traditional mercantile patterns of the

[^11]colony, which continued through the declaration of Free Commerce, began to change in the decade of the 1790s. Although the region continued to be an exporter of raw materials and an importer of finished industrial products, the major markets of Buenos Aires began to shift from Spain to the so-called "neutral nations" (Brazil, Portugal, United States) and England. The structure of porteño trade did not change. Merchants continued to be engaged in commercial activities as factors, individual traders, partners, and agents of others. But beginning in the 1790 os, merchants became the agents of English, Brazilian, and American traders, in addition to being agents of Spanish merchants. This shift eliminated the Spanish middlemen and allowed the porteño merchants to trade directly with interested markets. The new patterns of trade were intensified during the English invasion of 1806 , and they became permanently enshrined after Independence.

Paralleling a shift in market was a growing demand for hides and related animal products. Suppliers of these commodities rapidly became prominent in the economic life of the area. It was this shift of trade patterns-a change from a Spanish market to a more international one, accompanied by a growth of cattle product exports-which was to be critical to the economic development of post-Independence Buenos Aires. The continual exchange of hides for finished industrial goods reinforced the essentially colonial nature of porteño trade, even after political independence was achieved. Ironically, independence and the institution of free trade produced greater economic dependency on England than had been true of earlier dependence on Spain. All industrial products of the interior were replaced by British goods, and the porteño merchants themselves were soon replaced by English agents of English companies.

Extensive exportation of hides and allied products after independence produced a rise in the value of ranch lands, a rise accentuated by the successful development of saladeros close to Buenos Aires. It is from the post-Independence period that the estancieros begin to assume a strong economic and social role in Argentine history. The descendants of the merchant families of the viceroyalty, forced out of commerce by the influx of Englishmen, turned to the estancias and eventually became the landed families of nineteenth century Argentina.


[^0]:    * The author, a Columbia University Ph.D., is an independent researcher, resident in Plattsburgh, New York, where she sometimes teaches at the State University of New York.

    1. Guillermo Céspedes del Castillo, Lima y Buenos Aires: Repercusiones económicas y políticas de la creación del Virreinato de la Plata (Seville, 1947); Miron Burgin, Economic Aspects of Argentine Federalism (Cambridge, Mass., 1946), pp. 10-11.
    2. Rodolfo Puiggros, De la colonia a la revolución (Buenos Aires, 1957), p. 232.
[^1]:    4. For a self-imposed listing of porteño merchants, see Expediente sobre exceptuar del servicio de Milicias al Comercio, Archivo General de la Nación, Buenos Aires, Argentina (hereafter called AGN), División Colonia, Sección Gobierno, Consulado de Buenos Aires, Expedientes, 1798-1799, leg. 3, núm. 10, IX-4-7-5, fols. 11-49.
    5. The major imports into the viceroyalty were linen, silk, brocade and other textiles, printed cotton goods (indianas), iron, glass, and jewelry. Slaves were also an important commodity during the last decades of the eighteenth century. The major exports consisted of yerba maté, cattle and horsehides, tallow, raw wool, animal skins, horn, flour, and whale oil. During the last years of the viceroyalty, salted meat also began to figure prominently as an export.
    6. Almanak Mercantil: Guía de Comerciantes para el año de 1802 (Madrid, 1802), pp. 399-401, defines the different branches of trade. It should be noted that although comerciante and mercader were synonymous in other parts of the Spanish Empire, there was a definite distinction between these terms in Buenos Aires.
    7. Records of sales, warehouse and store inventories, entries of export and import of goods in the records of the Real Aduana, and records of shipment of specie to Spain were used to assign a merchant to one of the four categories in Table I. Records of sales are found both in Registros de Escribanos, AGN, and in inventories included in merchants' estate papers (Sucesiones). Inventories of goods
[^2]:    are most commonly found in capitales (financial statements at the time of marriage) and in estate papers. The daybooks of the Aduana of Buenos Aires are in AGN, XIII-14-9-1 through XIII-14-9-5. The Registro de Caudales is in AGN, XIII-$15-7-5$, and the Registro de Navios in AGN, IX-4-6-5; both of these documents contain information on the export of specie. My thanks to Juan Carlos Garavaglia for his help in clarifying the scale and category of commerce of many of the porteño merchants.

[^3]:    8. A common commercial practice of the period was to ship to the interior those goods that could not be placed in Buenos Aires, after first attempting their sale locally. See Testamento en virtud de poder, Don Bernardo de Sancho Larrea y Don Francisco Antonio de Escalada, a nombre de Don Manuel de Escalada, Registro de Escribano 5, 1774, AGN, fol. 234-259v, for shipment of such goods to Potosí.
[^4]:    9. The sociedad colectiva was the more primitive partnership arrangement, for it offered no protection for the personal assets of the partners. All members of a sociedad colectiva were personally liable for all losses incurred by the company. The sociedad en comandita, by contrast, provided limited liability to all partners. Arthur Robert Burns, "Partnerships"" in Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, ed
    E.R.A. Seligman, (New York, 1934), XII, 3-6. The only example of a colonial Arthur Robert Burns, "Partnerships," in Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, ed.
    E.R.A. Seligman, (New York, 1934), XII, 3-6. The only example of a colonial joint stockholding company was the porteño insurance company, La Confianza, founded in 1796 by merchant Julián del Molino Torres. A majority of the com-
    pany's 70 shareholders were local merchants. Enrique Wedovoy, La evolución founded in 1796 by merchant Julian del Molino Torres. A majority of the com-
    pany's 70 shareholders were local merchants. Enrique Wedovoy, La evolución económica rioplatense a fines del siglo XVIII y principios del siglo XIX a la luz de la historia del seguro (La Plata, 1966), pp. 202-203.
    10. Testamentaria de Don Manuel Caviedes, 1788, AGN, Sucesiones 5342. economica rioplatense a fines del siglo XVII y principios del siglo XIX a la luz
[^5]:    11. The company drawn up between Francisco Ignacio de Ugarte and Vicente de Azcuenaga, for example, lasted three years. Separación de compañía, transación y finiquito de todas quentas Don Francisco Ignacio de Ugarte y Don Vizente de Azcuenaga, AGN, Registro de escribano 6, 1774, fol. 125v-127. The CaviedesTellechea company, which lasted for seven years, was unusually long-lived.
    12. Autos de inventario formados de los vienes que quedaron por muerte de Don Francisco Cabrera, 1787, AGN, Sucesiones 5342.
    13. Testamentaria de Don Felipe Santiago del Pozo, 1776, AGN, Sucesiones 7711.
    14. Ibid.
[^6]:    15. Autos de inventario formados de los vienes que quedaron por muerte de Don Francisco Cabrera, 1787, AGN, Sucesiones 5342.
    16. Testamentaria del Alferez de Fragata de la Real Armada D. Manuel Joaquin de Zapiola, 1793, AGN, Sucesiones 8821.
    17. Felipe Arguibel, consignatario de la fragata "Nuestra Señora del Buen Suceso," cargada y pronta para salir al puerto de Cádiz, pide se de curso al expediente en que solicita la licencia necesaria para que pueda navegar, 28 de noviembre de 1788, AGN, División Colonia, Sección Gobierno, Licencias y Pasaportes, Libro 2, AM-AZ, IX-12-8-1, fols. 165-169.
    18. Autos de inventario formados de los vienes que quedaron por muerte de Don Francisco Cabrera, 1787, AGN, Sucesiones 5342.
[^7]:    20. Agustín Casimiro de Aguirre y Juan Pedro de Aguirre, Factores en Buenos Aires de la Casa Ustáriz Hermanos y Cía, solicitan se le autorice la salida de los navíos "El Prusiano" y "La Concepción" de vuelta a España, AGN, División Colonia, Sección Gobierno, Guerra y Marina, 1771, Legajo 2, Expediente 6, IX-23-10-2; Agustín Casimiro de Aguirre, como apoderado de Don Juan Pedro de Aguirre solicita pasaporte para despachar a España su paquebote nombrado "Santa Teresa," AGN, División Colonia, Sección Gobierno, Licencias y Pasaportes, Letra A-A11, Libro 1, 1785, fols. 97-98; Agustín Casimiro de Aguirre, a nombre y como apoderado del Real Consulado de Cádiz . . . sobre exhonerarse de la contribución del ramo de guerra de los cueros que tenía acopiados..., AGN, División Colonia, Sección Gobierno, Hacienda, Legajo 15, Expediente 331, IX-33-1-1; Testamento en virtud de poder Dona María Josefa de la Jarrota y otro por Don Augustín Casimiro de Aguirre, AGN, Registro de Escribano 6, 1790, fol. 73v-82v.
    21. Testamentaria de Don Felipe Santiago del Pozo, 1776, AGN, Sucesiones 7711.
[^8]:    22. Testamentaria de Don Manuel de Caviedes, 1788, AGN, Sucesiones 5342.
    23. Don Manuel Toribio de Caviedes solicita regresar a España a continuar su giro, para lo que consta por el adjunto conocimiento haber rexistrado 9,000 pesos, AGN, División Colonia, Sección Gobierno, Licencias y Pasaportes, Libro 4, C-C1, fol. 342-344, IX-12-8-3.
[^9]:    30. Capital de Don Gaspar de Santa Coloma, AGN, Registro de Escribano 5, 1781, folios $157 \mathrm{v}-161 \mathrm{v}$.; Testamento en virtud de poder Dona María Josefa de la Jarrota y otro por Don Agustín Casimiro de Aguirre, AGN, Registro de Escribano 6,1790 , fol. $73 \mathrm{v}-82$; Testamentaria de Don Francisco Tellechea, 1812, AGN, Sucesiones 8457; Geneologia: Hombres de Mayo (Buenos Aires, 1961), p. 319. In Mexico the phenomenon seems to have been even more widespread: "these great import houses did not restrict themselves to wholesale commerce. The almaceneros of Mexico City each maintained a shop in the capital which dealt directly with the public," Brading, Miners and Merchants, p. 98.
    31. Tomás Antonio Romero rented the ranches and saladeros, which had belonged to Medina, from his heirs. AGN, División Colonia, Sección Gobierno, Solicitudes Civiles, 1794, Libro 6, Letra P-R, IX-12-9-9. Romero later received royal contracts to provide salted meat to the Spanish arsenals and the Royal Navy. Esteban Villanueva, in addition to merchandise worth 65,000 pesos in his store, had 3,500 pesos invested in the bronze foundry's equipment and 6,400 pesos invested in eleven skilled slaves that he employed there. Capital de Don Esteban Villanueva, AGN, Registro de Escribano 4, 1784/1788, fol. 58v.-83v.
    32. In 1774 , a list of 21 ranchers included six men also engaged in mercantile pursuits. Among the six are examples of the most powerful merchants as well as a number of middle-level merchants. Poder especial de Doctor Don José de Anduxar y otros hacendados a favor de el Doctor Don Diego Pereyra de Lucena y otro, AGN, Registro de Escribano 6, 1774, fol. 127-128v. Merchant-ranchers signing this document were Santiago de Saavedra, Francisco Díaz de Perafán, Do-
[^10]:    mingo Belgrano Pérez, Felipe Arguibel, Francisco López García, and Juan de Lezica. Fifteen years later, in 1791, the merchant group still represented approximately the same proportion of ranchers. In a petition signed by 21 members of the gremio (union) of ranchers and cattle raisers, five merchant names appear. Solicitud de los hazendados de la campaña de hazer una entrada general para el recojo de la hazienda que han salido a los campos aviertos, AGN, División Colonia, Sección Gobierno, Comerciales, 1791, Legajo 15, Expediente 20, IX-31-1-1. Two of the merchants signatory to this document had also signed the 1774 list (Francisco Díaz de Perafán and Felipe Arguibel), demonstrating some continuity on the part of those merchants who combined mercantile activity with ranching.
    33. Between 1778 and 1783 , a total of 800,000 hides were exported, averaging 160,000 hides per year. Pedro Santos Martínez, Las industrias durante el Virreinato (1776-1810) (Buenos Aires, 1969), p. 66. By 1794, exported to Spain alone were 744,897 hides; Almanak Mercantil: Guía de Comerciantes para el año de 1796 (Madrid, 1796), p. 429. Total export of hides for the 1779-1795 period has been estimated at 6,307,714. Ricardo Levene, "Investigaciones acerca de la Historia económica del Virreinato," in Obras completas de Ricardo Levene (Buenos Aires, 1962), II, 315.
    34. Jaime Vicens Vives, An Economic History of Spain (Princeton, 1969), pp. 545-546; Sergio Villalobos R., Comercio y contrabando en el Río de la Plata y Chile: 1700-1811 (Buenos Aires, 1965), pp. 97-98.
    35. Villalobos, Comercio y contrabando, p. 98.
    36. Venta de estancia de Dona Inez y Dona Antonia Chauri a favor de Don Antonio Obligado, AGN, Registro de Escribano 2, 1789, fols. $13 \mathrm{~V}-16$.
    37. Many estancieros of the period were still barely able to sign their names, as attested by notary records.

[^11]:    56. Puiggros, De la colonia a la revolución, pp. 260-263.
    57. Acuerdos del Extinguido Cabildo de Buenos Aires, 1777, AGN, serie III, tomo VI, (Buenos Aires, 1929) pp. 101-108.
    58. Facultad de Filosofía y Letras (Universidad de Buenos Aires), Documentos para la historia argentina, Tomo XI, Territorio y población: Padrón de la ciudad de Buenos Aires (1778) (Buenos Aires, 1919).
    59. Almanak Mercantil: Guia de Comerciantes para el año de 1796 (Madrid, 1796), pp. 427-434.
    60. Expediente sobre exceptuar del servicio de Milicias al Comercio, AGN, División Colonia, Sección Gobierno, Consulado de Buenos Aires, Expedientes, 17981799, leg. 3, núm. 10, IX-4-7-5, fols. 11-49.
    61. Almanak Mercantil: . . 1802, pp. 396-402.
