

# City of San Jose, the Mountain Capital of Costa Rica



The ox-carts are the drays of the city

(Copyright, 1912, by Frank G. Carpenter.)  
**S**AN JOSE, Costa Rica—I want to show you one of the most interesting little towns of the world. I mean San Jose, this capital of Costa Rica, situated down here in the mountains at the tail-end of our continent. It is high up in the Central American Andes, within 1,000 feet, perhaps of the altitude of Denver, surrounded by mighty mountains which are green to their tops, but whose heads are lost in the clouds. The sky is bright blue and the air is so clear that you can see many miles. The semi-tropical sun paints the clouds on the hills. It brings out the red roofs of the city lying in the hollow below, and shows the gray buildings which are of bright yellow, sky blue, grass green and dark red. The little capital is just about a mile and a half in diameter. It runs up hill and down, covering the area of an amphitheater, the walls of which are the mountains.

San Jose has about 30,000 people. It is a city of one and two-story buildings, with many Catholic churches, a good-sized cathedral, a great theater and some other public structures rising above them. There are a half dozen parks scattered throughout the city. The narrow streets cross one another at right angles, the main one being the Avenida Central, which begins at the national park near the Northern railway station and ends in the grassy polo grounds known as the savannas, at the opposite end of the town.

**San Jose Houses.**  
 The buildings of San Jose are made of adobe with this stucco finish painted as I have described. The roofs extend far out over the walls, and along each is a gutter with drain pipes leading down and connecting with the open concrete gutters which line the sides of the roadway. Along the sides of the street are narrow stone flag sidewalks, and the pavement between is of a combination of earth and rough stones which when the heavy ox-carts move over it gives forth a sound like that of a traction engine on a corduroy road.

The houses are all Spanish style. They have wide doors and windows facing the street and many of the windows are barred. I suppose to keep in the girls. Behind the more pretentious structures are patios or little courts filled with palms and other tropical plants, and in some cases with a foundation or so. The rooms run about these patios and face upon them, and the ordinary fine house is just one room deep all the way around. The poorer dwellings sometimes have a garden at the back, but more often they consist of merely one or two rooms facing the street, and with no back outlet whatever.

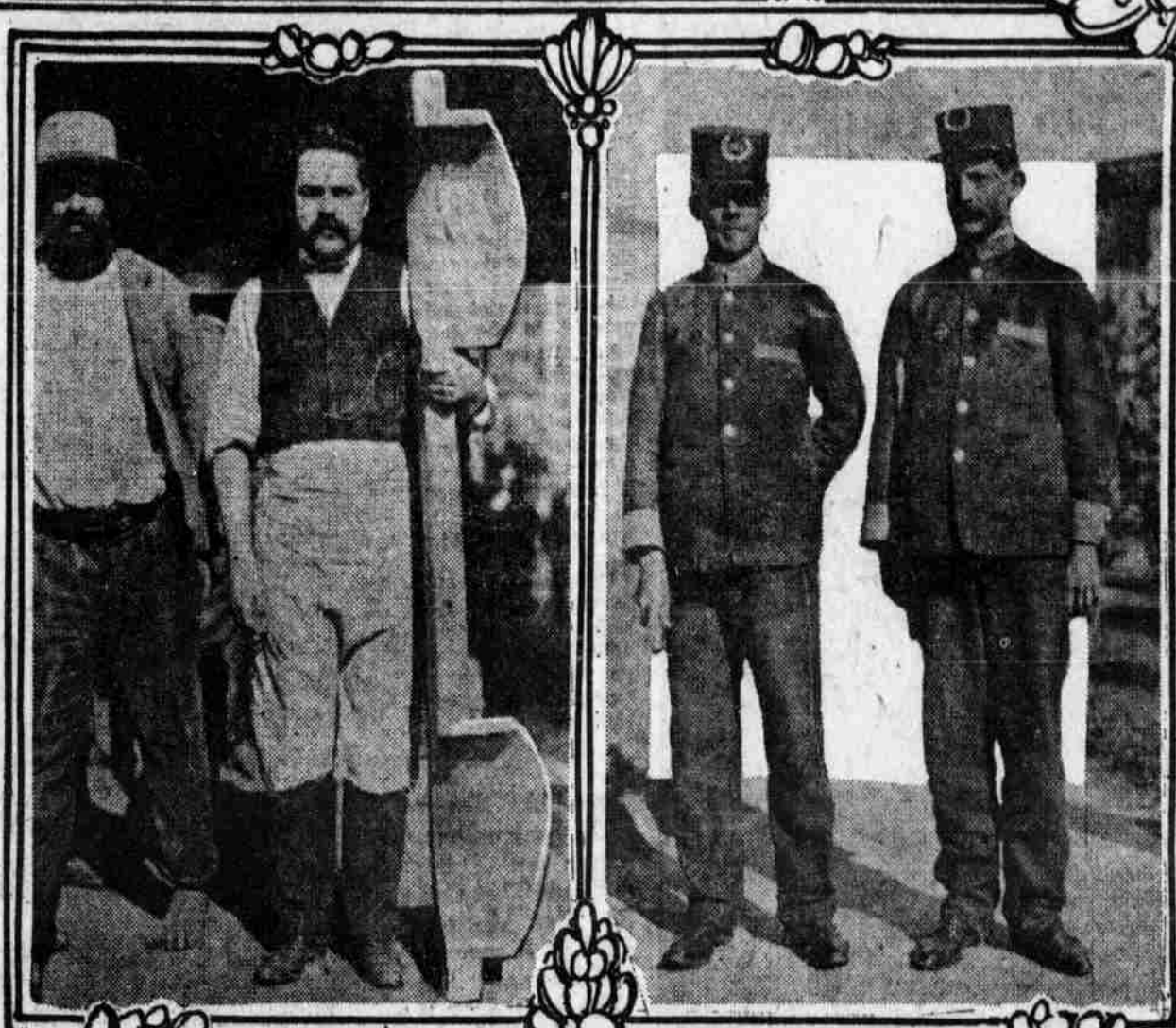
**Business at the Capital.**  
 The stores are scattered all over the town, with the best not far from the postoffice in the heart of the city. There are many large establishments among them. San Jose is the business center of all Costa Rica and the most of the wholesale and retail business is done right at the capital. Not a few of the firms turn over \$500,000 a year and I know of one little drug store which does a business of over \$200,000 per annum.

There are some stores with plate glass windows which would be of credit to any city in the United States of four times the size, and the goods within them, while the prices are double our prices at home, are the best of their kind and have come from all over the world.

Many of the merchants are Germans, some French and some Spaniards, and not a few Cost Ricans. The larger places have fixed prices, and they seem to work on the principle that everything should pay a profit of at least 100 per cent. The necessities of life cost far more here than

**Green Gables**  
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**SANATORIUM**  
 Lincoln, Neb.

This institution is the only one in the central west with separate buildings situated in their own ample grounds, yet entirely distinct and rendering it possible to classify cases. The one building being fitted for and devoted to the treatment of noncontagious and nonmental diseases, no others being admitted. The other Rest Cottage being designed for and devoted to the exclusive treatment of select mental cases, requiring for a time watchful care and special nursing.



The ox yokes must weigh twenty pounds Two policemen

at home, and the luxuries are proportionately higher. Salt costs 5 cents a pound, sugar 10 cents and bread, weight for weight, about three times as much as I pay in Washington city. I bought a half-pint can of strawberry jam this morning to eat with my bread and coffee, which is all one gets for breakfast at the leading hotel. It cost me 45 cents, or three times what I pay at home.

**San Jose's Great Market.**  
 But we can see the native business of this country best in the market. Every town has its large market building filled with stalls and shops of all kinds, and it is there that the common people go to buy and to sell. The markets are much like the bazaars of the orient, or those which were so common all over Europe at the time of the middle ages. The individual store is an evidence of civilization and progress. The business of all savage and semi-civilized people is done in stalls at one common center, and in the evolution of trade it seems that we are coming back to the same conditions. The modern market is known as the department-store, and individual merchants and clerks work for the owner.

The market at San Jose covers a full city block. It is surrounded by rows of wide stores forming the outer wall, with other rows of stores or shops running along narrow aisles through the court within from one side to the other. The outer wall of stores is about thirty feet deep, and those within are much smaller. They sell everything under the sun. One section is devoted to shoe shops, another to wares, including the saddle bags which every Costa Rican peasant carries when he goes to the fields and to the market.

Standing at one end of the market and looking down these covered streets you see that the walls are hung with goods of all kinds. The merchant tailors have their coats and trousers right out on the aisles and the men come and are fitted in the sight of the passersby. In some places the tailors have their sewing machines on the street, and all sorts of work are to be seen going on.

Here is a locksmith. Next door is a girl selling pottery and further on is a section where the men are dealing in nothing but sugar. The sugar is put up in leaves about the size of an Edam cheese and wrapped around with palm leaves and tied with a palm string in the center. It is made from cane in course, brown leaves and it looks not unlike dirty maple sugar. Further on are the grain merchants, and in another street are women selling dresses, lace and notions of one kind or other.

**Among the Costa Ricans.**  
 But let us stop a moment and look at the throng which is buying and selling. We have here all classes of Costa Ricans. There are the residents of the capital and also the small farmers who have come in from the country. The most of the crowd is composed of common people, the rich doing most of their buying in the stores, or sending only their servants to market. As we shall see later this little republic has its well marked social classes, some of which are quite as aristocratic as our four hundred at home.

How well dressed the people are! Every one seems to wear fairly good clothes.

The merchants are natty in comparison with the Panamanians and even the peasants are clean.

Here come two policemen. They have uniforms of light blue, with blue caps. Each carries an ebony club, and I can see their revolvers showing out at the hips. They are nice little fellows and far more polite than the mongrel officials of the Panama republic. I stand two up at a corner and photograph them. They smile and are seemingly delighted to have their faces go to America. Here come some boys selling lottery tickets. This is one of the chief businesses of Central America, and it gives occupation to scores of men, women and children.

**Bareheaded Women.**  
 But look at the bareheaded women. Not one of all those about us has a hat on. The girls part their hair in the middle and wear it in long braids down their backs. It is as black as the wings of the vultures outside the market and in most cases it hangs to the waist or below.

Nearly every girl has on a silk shawl over her dress. This is part of the national costume and these shawls, like the obi or wide silk belt worn by the Japanese women, are often the most expensive part of the costume. The shawls are of silk with a fringe of lace a foot long, and are covered with as much embroidery as the purse of the owner can stand. The older women wear black, but the girls and young women have shawls of the most delicate rose pink or sky blue, of sea green and pale yellows and rich reds. A girl may be in bare feet and bare head and her shirt waist and skirt such as you could buy for \$2.50 in the states, but, nevertheless, this shawl which covers her shoulders would have cost ten times as much. These shawls are gracefully draped about the person. They are so folded that a long letter V hangs down to the knees at the back and so that they cover the shoulders and come down at the front at the sides of the breasts, leaving the arms bare to the elbow. The girls wear elbow sleeves and the shawls set off their finely formed arms and hands.

**How the Girls Look.**  
 At stop a moment. Here come a half dozen young women who are evidently of the better class families. They are typical of these Costa Rican women, who have such a reputation for beauty. They are from 15 to 20 years old and are at their best. They are straight and well formed and walk like queens. Each is bareheaded and her black hair, just a trifle curly and wavy, hangs down in long braids. It is bound at the back of the ears with butterfly bows of the same color as the silk shawl she is wearing. What beautiful eyes! They are large, dark brown and liquid with long lashes and well marked dark eyebrows. The features are regular, the foreheads rather low and the cheek bones perhaps a trifle too high. The lips are red, ripe and luscious, and the teeth which show as the young ladies giggle, are white as slaked lime. The complexion is of light olive with just a tinge of red at the cheeks. These girls wear no paint or powder, although some others in the market show signs of the puff box. Now look

at the shawls. One is of salmon, another is pink, and a third is bright red, and in each case the skirt and shirt waist match.

How refreshing it is to see girls without hats. When I left home, the street headgear of our women was more fantastic than any I have ever seen on the stage. I am told it is even so here with the young ladies who belong to the rich upper crust. But I can tell you a good-looking maiden looks far better with no hat at all, and besides—it costs less.

Now examine the dress of the men. Those of the better classes wear the same costumes that we do at home. The climate here is perpetual spring, and the white ducks and linens of Panama are too cool for comfort. It is only the peasants and farmers who dress largely in cottons. They have on short jackets like roundabouts which reach a little below the waist, and their trousers fit almost tight around their thin shanks. Nearly every man has a pair of saddlebags on his shoulders or back. These are made of leather beautifully embroidered, each bag holding about half a peck.

But few of the men are fat, and many look no better. One striking feature to me is the lack of the razor. The masses do not shave, and the most of the faces are covered with a thin, curly, straggling beard which looks as though its owner had never known the scrape of the razor. Outside this the men are rather good looking. They are white, with but little admixture of negro or Indian blood. Down on the coast the bulk of the population is composed of blacks from Jamaica, but here on the highlands the people are the descendants of some of the best of the Spaniards. They come from the Gallician and the Basque provinces, from the northern part of the Spanish peninsula and the frontiers of France. They are superior to the natives of other Central American republics and are noted as lovers of freedom and peace.

**The Ox-carts of San Jose.**  
 But let us go out of the market and take a look at the traffic. It is composed of foot passengers, milkmen upon horseback and scores of ox carts. The ox carts are the drays of the cities and the farm wagons throughout the country. They are about the only means of transportation, and with the exception of that of the railroad all the freight is carried by them. The carts are of the rudest description. They have beds which, heaped up, might hold ten or twelve bushels, and these rest on a clumsy axle which has two wheels about as large as the wheel of a bicycle. The wheels are made of one solid block of wood, and are bound on iron tires as thick as the lead pencil with which I am writing. The tongue of the cart is almost as large around as a telegraph pole. It is bound to the axle at one end, and at the other is the ox yoke, which must weigh twenty pounds. This yoke is a bar of wood which rests on the necks of the oxen just back of the horns. It is fastened by wide straps to the horns, and the beasts push and pull by the horns. The yoke is so bound that the oxen cannot move their heads from side to side, and they are held like a vise.

These carts are said to be the only vehicles that can make their way over the country. During the rainy season the

ud comes up to axle, and spoke wheels will not cut through as well as those solid disks.

Just now the season is dry and the carts make a hideous noise as they go through the streets. They awake me at 5 o'clock every morning, and at midday I have to shut both windows and doors to hear myself think. Such a jolt will carry a ton when the material is heavy. The driver walks in front with a goad ending in a point of steel a foot long. With this he directs the oxen, giving the great beasts a jab when they do not obey.

**The Land of the Hookworm.**  
 There is one thing that strikes me as I travel among these Costa Ricans, and that is the weak, anemic and unenlivened condition of the people. They are a saved-off race. In this I speak of the peasant classes, and more especially of those of the plateau. The men I venture will not average five feet four inches in height. I am about five feet eight, and nearly every man I meet is a head shorter than I. The boys of 11 and 12 years are not bigger than 8-year-old boys in the states, and they look as though a good squeeze would crush them to bits. The peasants are said to be lazy, but I doubt whether their lack of energy does not come from disease. I am told that the people are largely afflicted with worms, and that they have many intestinal diseases.

Indeed, the hookworm is common, and the government is doing all it can to eradicate it. It has taken advantage of the discoveries which we made in Porto Rico and in our southern states, and any one can have medicine for the asking. Uncle Sam has cured hundreds of thousands of our citizens of this plague and it has made good workmen of them. There is no doubt the same can be done here. One trouble is the bad sanitary conditions. There is no such thing as a sewer anywhere, outside a few cities, and as most of the people go barefooted the parasites get in through the feet, and in time practically the whole nation, except the few rich and well to do, have been thus infected.

The ravages of the hookworm are not confined to the plateau. It exists in the lowlands, as well, and is prevalent also among the Jamaica negroes who work the banana plantations. It is so common among the white natives that it will be some time before it can be eradicated. But if so, the native may return to the strength of his ancestors, and be like the husky, hardy Basques of north Spain. Such a people could make Costa Rica bloom like the rose.

**FRANK G. CARPENTER.**  
 Cause for Consternation.  
 The inexperienced district school teacher had exhausted all other expedients for the maintenance of discipline. Going out into the school yard she broke off a good-sized switch that was growing there and administered primitive punishment to Jimmy Kelly.

There were strange expressions of horrified amazement on the faces of the children, and when school was dismissed at noon they gathered in excited groups and talked in whispers. Finally the teacher's curiosity could stand it no longer. Calling Henry Thomas to her she demanded the cause of the discussions.

"Why—why—why, teacher," he stammered, "that—that switch you licked Jimmy with—that was the tree we set out last Arbor day."—Harper's Magazine.

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