

The Glette Mansion: historical background

A Mansão Glette: contextos históricos

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Abstract

In an old aristocratic zone of São Paulo, close to the Campos Elíseos palace, head office of the State of São Paulo Government in past times, the Glette mansion has been referred to as the birth of Geology of the University of São Paulo. It remained in that address from 1957 until 1969, when the undergraduate course moved permanently to the distant campus of Butantã, then still in construction. In the decade of 1970, the mansion was demolished, and the entire area converted into a parking lot which continues to operate to present day. Only the fig tree, *figueira*, an exuberant tree growing up on the ground, was left behind as a symbol of old times. A sad ending for a rich past, recording living conditions of students in the city. This work aimed to revive the history of the mansion, since it was used as residence until its more important moments as an educational center due to the installation of the old Faculty of Philosophy, Sciences, and Letters.

Keywords: Geology; Alameda Glette; Faculty of Philosophy, Sciences and Letters.

Resumo

A mansão Glette, localizada numa antiga zona aristocrática de São Paulo, próxima ao Palácio dos Campos Elíseos, na ocasião sede administrativa do Governo do Estado de São Paulo, é citada como o berço da Geologia da Universidade de São Paulo. Ela permaneceu nesse endereço de 1957 a 1969, quando então o curso de graduação foi transferido em definitivo para o distante campus do Butantã, então ainda em fase de construção. Na década de 1970, a mansão foi demolida e a inteira área transformada em estacionamento para carros, que permanece em operação na atualidade. Somente a figueira, uma exuberante árvore presente no terreno, foi preservada com um símbolo dos velhos tempos. Um triste final para um passado rico de valores, que registrou as condições de vida de estudantes na cidade. O presente trabalho objetivou reviver a história da mansão, desde o seu uso como residência até os momentos mais importantes como centro educacional com a instalação da Faculdade de Filosofia, Ciências e Letras.

Palavras-chave: Geologia; Alameda Glette; Faculdade de Filosofia, Ciências e Letras.

INTRODUCTION

Research carried out on the address “463 Glette alameda” at the Municipal Archive indicated that no official document exists on the origins of the Glette mansion. Despite this fact, it is thought to have been constructed by the end of the XIX century. The architect is unknown, and details of the construction are not available. However, it is certain that Firmiano de Moraes Pinto, a former mayor of São Paulo (1920–1926), was living there in 1906. In 1916, he sold the property to Jorge Luiz Gustavo Street, giving way to the long history that would include relevant and multiple aspects of the Universidade de São Paulo.

Jorge Street, who held a degree in Medicine, was an affluent cotton and jute weaving industrialist and an active member of organizations such as the Federation of Industries of the State of São Paulo. Also an influential politician in the 1910s and 1920s, his instrumental role as a main negotiator for the Ministry of Labor during the first presidential term of Getúlio Vargas contributed to the enactment of federal labor laws in Brazil. A highlight in the social reach of Jorge Street’s influence came in 1912 with the development of Vila Maria Zélia, a small labor village in the area known as Belenzinho, consisting of some 200 housing units of varied sizes where residents shared a common health, social and educational infrastructure. Even a church was made available for the entire community.

The first remodeling

The original front façade of the Glette mansion is depicted in Figure 1. A comprehensive restoration that took almost two



Figure 1. The Glette mansion as seen from the homonymous alameda possibly in 1919.

years to complete and extended its usable area to 539 m² was conducted after 1920 by engineer and architect Hippolyto Gustavo Pujol Júnior. The most remarkable modification consisted of an additional floor used as an attic in the remaining residential period of the property (Figure 2). Depicting the west wall of the mansion, Figure 3 draws attention to other important modifications, such as the *loggia* and *portico* constructed as weather protections to the main entrance. Other modifications included the adaptation and redistribution of spaces, decorative works on walls and windows, and a pantographic-door elevator, one of the first of its kind to be installed in São Paulo.



Figure 2. Front wall of the Glette mansion in 1926 as viewed from Glette alameda, with the considerable modifications introduced upon its first major reform.



Figure 3. West wall area of the main Glette mansion building showing *loggia* and *portico* installed during the first reform of the property.

In the external west wall area, the interventions consisted of a tennis court and an indoor swimming pool delimiting two blocks reserved for staff accommodation (Figure 4). A three-car garage was built at the rear of the mansion. In the east wall area, in the vicinity of Guaianazes street, janitor accommodations were erected near the fig tree.

Of unknown authorship, all images presented in Figures 1 to 9 date back to 1926–1927 and were reproduced from Jorge Street's personal family archives.

The mansion was very comfortable and richly decorated, as can be noticed from Figures 5 to 8. Numerous valuable and sophisticated items included hand-made furniture, a Bohemian crystal chandelier, wainscoted walls, beveled mirrors, Persian rugs, and Carrara stairs with wrought iron handrails.

The severe impacts of the 1929 global economic crisis forced Jorge Street to pledge the Glette mansion as security for a loan from the Sul America Insurance Company.

The year 1934 marks a significant event in Brazil, the founding of the Universidade de São Paulo, with the Faculty of Philosophy, Sciences, and Letters representing its most important unit for the development and dissemination of knowledge and education. However, two major challenges would soon be faced: a shortage of faculty members for the planned courses and the lack of facilities to properly accommodate lecture rooms, faculty, and students.

A mission conducted by the first director of the faculty, professor Theodoro Augusto Ramos, was sent across Europe to recruit additional faculty members, mainly from France, Germany, and Italy. Humanities-related specialists were hired from the former country, while occupants for positions in sciences were mostly from the latter ones. The mission resulted in 13 faculty positions being filled, six from France, three from Germany, and four from Italy. In the following years, faculty members were hired either for new



Figure 4. Lateral annex to the Glette mansion with an indoor swimming pool and two adjacent accommodation units for a staff of 15 employees.



Figure 5. Main social room of the Glette mansion.



Figure 6. Dining room of the Glette mansion. To the left, the lunchroom and a colorful stained-glass window facing Guaianazes street.



Figure 7. Main entrance hall of the Glette mansion and its Carrara stairs with wrought iron handrails.



Figure 8. A small visitor's room connected to the main entrance by two doors, featuring an exquisite chandelier suspended from the ceiling's central point.



Figure 9. Lateral annex after the replacement of the swimming pool with a new, intermediate block (see Figure 4 for comparison).

academic programs or as substitutes for those returning to their countries of origin. Some names became involved with the nascent university deeply enough to leave remarkable contributions to its establishment. Examples are Heinrich Rheinboldt (University of Bonn, Germany) in Chemistry; Felix Kurt Rawttscher (University of Freiburg, Germany) in Botany; Ernest Gustav Gotthelf Marcus (University of Berlin, Germany) in Zoology; Gleb Wataghin (University of Rome, Italy) in Physics; and Claude Lévi-Strauss (Ph.D. by University of Sorbonne, France) in Sociology. In Geosciences, two Italian professors joined the Universidade de São Paulo experience: in 1935, Ettore Onorato (University of Cagliari, Sardegna) in Mineralogy; and later the Baron Ottorino De Fiori di Cropani (University of Catania, Sicily) in Geology and Paleontology. The first was responsible for the creation of the Museum of Mineralogy, the installation of the X-ray diffraction laboratory, and the collection of crystallographic and crystalline structure models. The second was responsible for the organization of important collections

for teaching ends (rocks, mainly of volcanic types, and geological maps).

Except for the activities related to Physics and Mathematics, which continued to be performed in facilities of the Polytechnic School, the general administration of the Faculty of Philosophy and the sections of Philosophy, Sciences, and Letters were temporarily accommodated in the spacious building of the Faculty of Medicine at 455 Dr. Arnaldo avenue, erected shortly before with funds from the Rockefeller Foundation. However, a crisis situation erupted in June 1937 between these academic institutions that would thereafter be referred to as “The Fall of the Philosophy Tower.” At that time, construction works were underway for an additional floor to the main faculty building, which was to be temporarily allocated for the extraneous activities. In fear that the occupation might be made permanent, medical students protested the administrative action by bringing down the construction scaffolds. The unfortunate incident led the directors of the Philosophy and Medicine faculties,

professors Antonio de Almeida Prado and João Aguiar Pupo, respectively, to submit their resignations to the university dean, Reinaldo Porchat. A drastic decision was made that the Faculty of Philosophy administration and the humanities-related activities were to be immediately relocated. Due to their imperative need for laboratory facilities, activities related to Natural Sciences and Chemistry remained in the building for an extended period of time.

The incident at the Faculty of Medicine brings us back to the physical infrastructure issue. Appointed as the third director of the Faculty of Philosophy, Sciences, and Letters by São Paulo's State Secretary for Education Cantídio de Moura Campos, Ernesto de Souza Campos, a prestigious professor holding academic degrees in both Medicine and Engineering, assumed office with the challenge of ensuring that new accommodations were arranged for the relocating activities before the new academic term begun in early July that year. An old building that was to be demolished to give place to the Mário de Andrade Library was promptly adapted to accommodate the students. The debate on finding proper accommodations for the nascent institution continued throughout the new term, the recently appointed director of faculty having to confront the possibility of buying or renting the space needed for that purpose. The building was vacated in December 31st. The final decision was to buy an existing property, with three alternatives being considered. Financially, the Glette mansion, then a property of the Sul America Insurance Company, was the most convenient option, with the further advantage of being located near the Campos Elíseos palace: it could, for that reason, be used for state purposes if necessary. The mansion was acquired in 1937 for an amount equivalent to 850 million *réis*, which was lower than its market value at the time. The physical remodeling of the building for its new use was authorized by the owner company before completion of the administrative procedures and public agency approvals involved in the transaction, a remarkable concession given the urgency of the situation.

The second remodeling

The second major restoration of the mansion was less pervasive than the first one and primarily focused on the external areas. In the lateral annex, the main modification involved replacing the swimming pool with a third intermediate block, featuring a large lecture room on the ground floor and space for a library and offices on the first floor (Figure 9). The tennis court was demolished, and the front area of the annex occupied by a greenhouse (Figure 10). The annex at the rear wall area of the mansion was converted into a long building with two floors, the lower one suited for classes and the upper one for faculty offices. The janitor accommodations were reconfigured to serve as a snack bar.

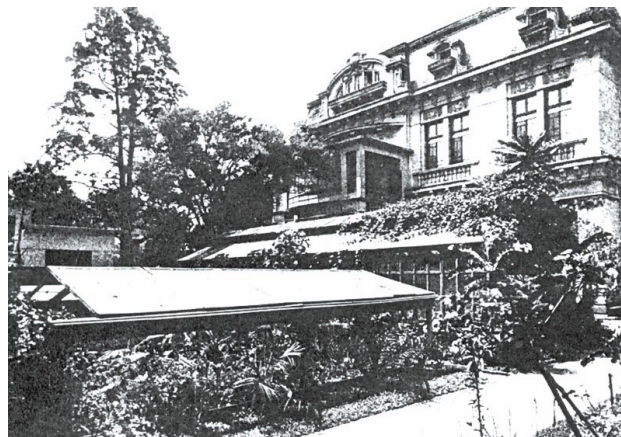


Figure 10. Greenhouse and the west wall area of the Glette mansion.

The internal modifications were less pervasive, involving mainly the removal of walls and doors. Administrative-, library-, and humanities-related activities of the Faculty of Philosophy were transferred to the Glette mansion in the second semester of 1937. Social rooms (Figures 5 to 8) were suited to office and meetings use. Administrative spaces such as the treasury, the storage room and the records office were assigned to the first floor. Faculty accommodations remained in the Glette mansion for a short period, being relocated in 1938 to more comfortable installations at the Caetano de Campos Institute, a school building located in Republic Square. Another relocation was made in 1949, to the iconic building on Maria Antonia street, the setting of the famous 1968 riots involving students of the Faculty of Philosophy and Universidade Mackenzie. The final relocation to the Butantã campus took place in the 1950s. As seen, the administrative facilities, library, and humanities sections of the Faculty of Philosophy, Sciences, and Letters occupied different locations in the capital: the Faculty of Medicine building, Consolação street, the Glette mansion, the Caetano de Campos Institute; 294 Maria Antonia street; and, finally, Lago street in the Butantã campus. After the transfer of academic activities, the main social rooms of the Glette mansion remained home to the Museum of Mineralogy of the Universidade de São Paulo.

Despite the improvements introduced over the years, the mansion and its annexes suffered severe physical limitations, such as the small number and size of lecture rooms, poor visibility and air circulation, and insufficient space for the students. An important measure taken by the new director professor Souza Campos was the construction of a three-floor annex adjacent to the Glette alameda covering an area of 400 m² (Figure 11), which would be reserved for the Chemical Sciences and expanded with some modifications a few years later. Its construction began in January 1938 and was shortly concluded. The section of Chemical



Figure 11. The Glette mansion's annex reserved for the Chemical Sciences.

Sciences was transferred there from the Faculty of Medicine building in January 1939. Further minor adaptations were made to the mansion annexes, providing more comfortable Geology and Paleontology facilities.

Physical occupation from the 1940s to 1956

Upon the relocation of administrative and most humanities-related programs and Chemical Sciences activities being restricted to their own building, the Glette mansion became almost exclusively dedicated to the Natural Science and Geology courses, which occupied both floors, attic, and annexes.

At that time, the use of space in the mansion was extremely irregular and inconsistent. Activities dealing mainly with Biology occupied its basement for an extended period of time. Mineralogy permanently occupied the ground floor. The first floor was allocated to Zoology and Physiology activities prior to their being relocated to the Butantã campus in January 1955. The attic was assigned to Chemical Sciences for a few months and, from the second half of 1938, to Biology. The ground floor of the lateral annex served Botany purposes, while its first floor was dedicated to Geology and Paleontology. The annex in the rear wall area of the mansion also hosted activities related to these two disciplines.

The most significant modification implemented during the period was a basement excavation performed with the main purpose of providing faculty and students with better accommodations, by increasing the building's useful area, ceiling height, and door apertures. The works extended in various steps from 1942 to 1954, and the laboratory facilities installed permitted important biological research to be carried out. With funding from the Rockefeller

Foundation, world-class geneticist Theodosius Dobzhansky, from Columbia University, and his wife Natasha Sivertzer conducted research on *Drosophila* species in the years 1948–1949. Main collaborators included professors Crodowaldo Pavan, Antonio Brito da Cunha, and Hans Burla from the University of Zurich, Switzerland. Owing to its intense activity, the laboratory gained widespread recognition for its scientific outcomes.

In the 1940s, the geological activities saw an increase in the number of collaborators, with Reynaldo Ramos de Saldanha da Gama and Rui Ribeiro Franco being the first additions. Subsequently, Josué Camargo Mendes and mining engineer Luciano Jacques de Moraes joined the Faculty of Philosophy, the latter as a substitute for the Italian professor Ottorino De Fiori, who returned to Europe for reasons linked to the outbreak of World War II. Luciano Jaques de Moraes would be replaced in 1945 by Kenneth Caster, from the University of Cincinnati. These names were followed by William Gerson Rolim de Camargo, Ruy Osorio de Freitas and the German geologist Viktor Leinz. The 1950s represented a transition period, with several graduates in Natural History bringing their foreign-earned experience in geology to both the Mineralogy and Petrography (José Moacyr Vianna Coutinho and João Ernesto de Souza Campos) and the Geology and Paleontology (Sérgio Estanislau do Amaral, Reinholt Ellert, Alfredo José Simon Björnberg, Henry Mau and Evaristo Ribeiro Filho) departments. These specialists would play an important role in the education of future geologists.

Occupation after 1957

The arrival of the Geology course to Glette alameda in 1957 did not bring significant modifications to the physical occupation of the mansion and annexes at that time. More substantial modifications would occur later, following the relocation of the Botany (1957) and Biology (1959) departments to the Butantã campus at Matão street. Upon the relocation of the Botany course, demolition of the greenhouse allowed spaces in the annex areas to be reassigned the Department of Geology and Paleontology. A larger, more comfortable and newly constructed lecture room commonly referred to by students as “the middle room” would be used mainly for Economic Geology and Prospection classes in the early 1960s, after the greenhouse was demolished. Basement spaces cleared with the relocation of the activities related to Biology were occupied by the Department of Psychology and its experimental laboratory in the early 1960s. In the attic, the relocation provided library and office spaces to the Department of Chemistry from 1960 to 1965 and, subsequently, the Department of Mineralogy and Petrology. The ground floor of the Glette mansion continued to host the Museum of Mineralogy

and other facilities, while through the years 1957 and 1958 the first floor was assigned to the Department of Geography, now dismembered from the Department of History. After the withdrawal of activities pertaining to the Chemical Sciences, now mainly confined to its own location, and the aggregation of Psychology- and Geography-related facilities, the Glette mansion was mostly impacted by the two geological departments.

Since its beginning, the Geology course was conducted with the participation of foreign professors due to the lack of experienced people in the country. Carl W. Correns (University of Göttingen, Germany) was invited to teach Sedimentology and Geochemistry; Henno Max Martin (Ph.D. by the University of Bonn, Germany), Structural Geology; and the mining engineer Rudolph Kollert (University of Freiburg, Germany), head of research of the Abem company in Sweden, Applied Geophysics. An agreement signed between the Brazilian Government and the United States Geological Survey made it possible to count on the presence of retired professors Cordell Durrel (University of Cornell), Russel Gibson (University of Harvard) and John Thomas Stark (Northwestern University) and of the geologists Gene Edward Tolbert and Norman Herz to lecture some subjects.

The final period

After the two geological departments were finally relocated to the Butantã campus in 1969, the Glette mansion and annexes, which occupied an area of 2,685 m², were leased to the State Secretary for Public Security to house, from July 1969 to May 1972, units of the São Paulo State Department of Police. Without effective control or regular maintenance service from the University, the area became a gathering place for unoccupied people and illicit activities, especially drug trafficking. With an authorization from the highest administrative council of the University, the property was acquired in September 1973 by an associate corporation of the Folha da Manhã Group S.A., the Frical Administração de Serviços Ltda., for an amount equivalent to approximately 5 million reais (as adjusted for the period between December 1973 and December 2006). For unknown reasons, the entire mansion and annexes were demolished in the 1970s. Only the Australian fig tree shown in Figure 12 was untouched. The São Paulo City Council's administrative actions on the Preservation of Historical, Cultural and Environmental Patrimony in 2007 contributed to that protection due to the designation of the historic *figueira* as a public propriety. Seedlings from it were planted in the Butantã campus, in areas of the three units most intensely involved with the history of the Glette mansion: the institutes of Geosciences, Psychology, and Biosciences.



Figure 12. The fig tree standing exuberantly over the former Glette mansion grounds despite the poor environment conditions (a bus station across Guaianazes street). Image taken in June 2020.

As of September 1969, amid important organizational modifications underwent by the Universidade de São Paulo, Exact Sciences, Pedagogy and Psychology would no longer correspond to branches of the Faculty of Philosophy, Sciences and Letters. Instead, base institutes would be established for activities related to Biosciences, Chemistry, Geosciences, Mathematics and Statistics and Physics on the part of Exact Sciences, while activities pertaining to Pedagogy and Psychology would be encompassed by the Faculty of Education and the Institute of Psychology, respectively. The remaining disciplines of Philosophy, Social Sciences, Geography, History and Letters would be assigned to the newly established Faculty of Philosophy, Letters and Human Sciences (FFLCH).

Particularly, in the case of the Geology course, it became part of the Institute of Geosciences and Astronomy at the time, later changed into Institute of Geosciences. The two geological departments (Mineralogy and Petrology/Geology and Paleontology, presently defined as Mineralogy and Geotectonics/Sedimentary and Environmental Geology) held provisory spaces in the campus until the early 1980s, when they were relocated to their own building at 562 Lago street (Figure 13). A very comfortable and large construction occupying an area of 16,470 m² in 2007 and having wide



Figure 13. Front view of the Institute of Geosciences building in the Butantã campus in 2007.

spaces for a library (1,222 m²), museum (550 m²) and various laboratories in contrast to the restricted conditions existing in the Glette mansion and annexes. During the period of activities in the old address (1957–1969), 326 geologists were graduated by the Geology course of the Faculty of Philosophy, Sciences and Letters.

Beginning in the Glette alameda, the Geology course graduated a total of 2,208 geologists until December 2022. They have played an important role in the development of geological knowledge of the country. The Institute of Geosciences consolidated its position as one of the most recognized centers of geology of the nation, having a highly qualified faculty team, a sophisticated analytical infrastructure and being responsible for significant scientific production. In 2004, the unit expanded its activities by creating a new undergraduate division, the Teacher's Diploma in Geosciences and Environment Education. It was proposed as an evening course and intended for the formation of teachers for schools, science centers and other institutions. A total of 208 professionals had graduated until December 2022.

Ades et al. (2014), Campos (2004), Carvalho (2014), Gomes (2007), Motoyama (2006), Osorio (2014), and Vilela (2014) provide additional information on various aspects of the Glette mansion and its annexes.

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