

Speech given by Don Juan Periche Vidal
on November 13, 2008 at the Dominican-German Cultural Centre

ORIGIN OF THE CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE

In my capacity as President, Chamber of Commerce, Agriculture and Industry of Santo Domingo, and as Vice President of AICO Caribbean, during 1981-1982, I had the opportunity to be present at several meetings and events all touching commercial and business topics, with the attendance of fellow businessmen and entrepreneurs, in different countries, where I found two separate and interesting issues, which I will now try to recall and relate to you: first, the origin of the Chambers of Commerce; and, second, the antiquity of the Chamber of Commerce of the Dominican Republic.

At a meeting of AICO (Latin American Association of Chambers of Commerce), celebrated in Bogota, Colombia, on February 9, 1982, the illustrious congressman, Dr. Gastón Abello wrote a book about the history and origins of Chambers of Commerce, a copy of which he gave to me, book, which, after reading, I delivered to the Library of the Chamber of Commerce, to be consulted by all members, due to the important information on its contents.

The author goes back thousands of years, where Archaeologists found in Mari, city founded after the devastating flood occurred 4,000 b.C., in Mesopotamia, around the river banks of the Euphrates River, a foreign relations office, and a business centre, complete with messages written in tables.

Years later, in Babylon, 600 b.C., exchange rate and price were to be established for merchandises, and by doing so, persons tied by the sharing of the same art, profession or ability would meet, thus, the first associations and corporations were integrated as a means of protecting rates and quantity of merchandise exchanged.

In the 4th Century new modalities of organizations, with greater and much more important functions on the commercial associations were opened and entrusted, resulting in the so called Consular Courts. Consuls were constituted into Judges, which resolved conflicts and were sent to foreign lands to protect their associates in case of conflicts, to assist them, and even help them in case of any health issues, therefore creating Consular Laws as an initial development of Commerce Law, and as a technique, related to any merchant activity, as they, at the same time, were responsible of maintaining and taking care of the routes of communications: land and ports. In the 16th Century, merchant gremial organizations evolved, stimulating all types and sorts of commerce, thus, forming the first Chamber of Commerce.

Merchants from all around the world agreed that the first organization of commerce saw the light in the city of Marseille, in 1599, and that its name 'Chambre' was taken from the French word meaning 'chamber, room or quarter' where merchants used to have their meeting, and as time passed, name of use was left and fixed to the Institute which grouped all merchants, and not to the meeting place where they conducted their businesses.

Amongst participants of the meetings were retailers, manufacturers, shippers and French marine merchants, whom were tied to each other as they exercised similar or related activities, and founded the first characterized permanent association to protect the interests of commerce, industry and navigation.

The concept: Chamber of Commerce expanded to Europe, and by 1765, a group of businessmen in York founded their first Chamber of Commerce to protect themselves from the 'Stamp Act', which was being recognized by King George of England in 1768. In the United States, it was created in 1773, in Charleston, South Carolina.

In 1874, a congressional organization was conformed in Mexico, but it was not until 1908 when same was legalized as such. In Colombia, in May, 1877, a provisional committee founded their first Chamber of Commerce as of October 6, 1878. From that date forward, many chambers of commerce are founded, in different regions, following the European pattern of official or public chambers, and others private, and some mixed, public and private.

Now, I will recount the antiquity of our own Chamber of Commerce:

When taking over the Presidency of the Chamber, the coin collector Isaac Rudman, Vice President of Radiocentro, presented me with a 1848 \$1 bill, paper money which had a nominal value equivalent to 0.40 cents, on which one may observe that the Chamber of Commerce signed the legal value of the document, conjointly and together with the Administrative Council in position at that time. This was the first document in which the Chamber was confirmed as being established.

At such AICO meeting, both myself as Lic. Aquiles Farias, Directive Member of our Chamber, who accompanied me, nosed up proudly when we read the birth date of our own institution. We then both commenced divulging our antiquity, having found, true even today, that our Chamber is the most ancient of all others founded in Latin America - from Mexico to South America.

Even more, with great enthusiasm we started to look for files, from our own Independence date: February 27, 1844 on, and found a collection of Laws, Decrees and Resolutions coming both from the Legislative as from the Executive Power, edited by *Listín Diario* Press, 1927, were two important legal instruments of the times made themselves present: Law #116 dated July 2, 1847 on the circulation of coins, which on its Article 8 the Executive Power is authorized to manufacture and disposes a new emission of paper money to be signed by the General Account, the President of the Administrative Council and the President of the Camber of Commerce; and Law #120 dated July 7, 1847 on the Maritime Commerce of the Republic, which on Chapter First deals on the habilitation of ports.

In Chapter Two, on the Rights of Ports, in its Article 5, Numeral 3, reads: "All other rights will be entered on the boxes of the public collector, as established by City Council, which will assign Chamber of Commerce, after it has been established, the practice, watch and wharf, as to create a fund or balance whereupon to take care of wharves, cleaning, and to the needs of other companies that will facilitate and promote marine commerce", so that to the Camera task assigned is to collect harbor tax to ships that reach ports in the capital city of the Republic.

That Law follows, up to Chapter XI, with a total of 116 Articles, all concerning to the new Regime of Customs, Coasting Trade, as Harbour and Marine activities, related one to the other by International Commerce.

In Article 73, we found that the Executive Power is authorized to name a Chamber of Commerce, conformed by five traders, recognized as Importers, on each and every one of the Ports in Santo Domingo and Puerto Plata, and in others as it is deemed convenient.

We must continue researching old documents and are yet to find the Presidential Decree in order to know the exact dates in which the Chamber of Commerce of Santo Domingo and Puerto Plata were named, at least.

Those laws were sanctioned by the Preservative Council as determined by the Constitution, on June 26, 1847, given at the Presidential Palace on July 7, 1847, and authenticated by the Minister of Housing, Commerce and Foreign Relations.

This is why the Administrative Council, which appears on the paper money, is the entity which emits same, and the Chamber of Commerce is the one which signs, as part of the embryonic commercial development of our country.

Having voiced the information given above, one can now observe the fine and narrow relationship and interaction between the cities developed by the Chambers of Commerce in the various ports, conjointly with governmental entities, same relationship and precedents which is still in force, when the Chamber of Commerce is a part of the Administrative Council of the Dominican Port Authority, as of other many shared organizations.

Around 1889, Mr. Arturo J. Pellerano Alfau and Julian Atilés S. published on a single sheet the names of the ships that entered and exited from our port, and it was this sketch which was known as *Listín Diario Marítimo*, which latter developed, as other information were added, to *Listín Diario*, same which much latter became the local and most read newspaper, a history that is published, every 1st of August.

Under the Presidency of Eng. José Ml. Armenteros, the Chamber of Commerce printed, with the permission of the Central Bank, the obverse of that bill, one that is handed to Diplomats, Consuls, Comrades of other Chambers which visit our Chamber of Commerce, as well as to honour personalities whom emphasize and dedicate their efforts to the greater good. Precisely, at the 35th meeting of AICO, celebrated in Santo Domingo, on May of 2006, a token was presented to the distinguished comrades chamber men: George Arzeno B., Jose Ml. Bonetti G., Juan Vicini Cabral, Carlos Fuentes and José A. León Asencio, whom have had an outstanding record of service in their respective companies, as propulsor of social and commercial developments, and whom have supported our Chamber, both personally as throughout activities developed.

Our Chamber has kept strong due to the daily strive of its Directors, Executives and Employees, whom maintain the commercial and productive activities developed: service amongst public

and private sectors, in defense of small and middle companies, and creating other similar organizations.

I can remember when Dr. Rogelio Pellerano Romano left the Chamber to create the mother organization known today as CONEP; Don Horacio Álvarez, founder of Association of Industries; Eng. Gustavo Tavares Espailat, founder of APEC; and Lic. Felipe Auffant, founder of Bolsa de Valores, amongst other organizations founded by chamber men, as of the Dominican Federation of Chambers of Commerce (FEDOCAMERA), events which are also very interesting and should be compiled for one another occasion.

Last, but not least, may I show my appreciation to the Dominican-German Chamber of Commerce for having received me on this their Cultural Centre. Perfect is now the time to address the origin of this institution. At the time of Dr. Edmund Duckwitz, German Ambassador in Santo Domingo, at the beginning of the 90's, gathered some of his countrymen into forming the German Chamber of Commerce, and immediately, the Federation of European Chambers of Commerce, with the experience of having created a similar Federation on his previous position in Djakarta, Indonesia.

Amongst the Europeans whom worked in such activities, I can recall Wilhelm Brower, Hans Rothe and Karsten Windeler - who today honors us with his presence - and by 1995 first Expo Europe is organized at the Dominican Fiesta Hotel, one that is celebrated every year on the month of October.

In addition to these two Federations, other bi-national chambers as new provincial chambers created by law exist, which conform an umbrella of institutions dedicated to the development of production, and which, conjointly with the use of technology and services, share the same mission: to strengthen foreign trade and benefit their respective countries and communities

My most sincere thanks, both for your presence as for the support showed. May the effort used in the necessary research for this presentation, serve as a stimulant for other to continue researching the origins of our society.

Good night !

Juan Periche Vidal