

## Behind the vignette...: Gabino Barreda

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**Note:** The translation into English is carried out through the use of software, so there may be discrepancies with the usual use of this language, we appreciate your understanding in this regard.

**“... freedom, order and progress cannot exist in Mexico as long as men continue to magically explain the universe to themselves.”**

When in a country troubled by conflicts, economic problems - total disorder in a few words - with two generations suffering internal wars and even a foreign invasion, it is like a breath of fresh air that the best men meet and work for the common good. Today I talk about Gabino Barreda (Fig. 1), a thinking, prepared individual, with a vision for the future and a sense of belonging to a community, in solidarity with his country and who manages to support education from the public sector, leaving his country better than as he found it, whom Benito Juárez had the good sense to bring to his government, when the Republic had just been restored, in 1867.



Fig. 1 SC# 1228 (1981)

### **His background.-**

Barreda was born in the city of Puebla in 1818, he studied law in Mexico City, but he completed them without graduating, it is said that due to his disagreement with unverifiable knowledge, and he leaned towards the natural sciences, studying chemistry at the College of Mining and in 1843 (some sources say 1845) he entered the National School of Medicine; he participated as a military doctor during the North American invasion (1846-1848) without graduating; in 1847 he went to Paris and there he met Pedro Contreras Elizalde, (who would later become Juárez's son-in-law when he married his daughter Margarita) and invited him to study the doctrine of positivism (1) with **August Comte** his creator, **a philosophy that defined all his subsequent professional work**. In 1851 he returned to Mexico and concluded his medical studies the following year. He obtained by competitive examination the chairs of Medical

Physics, Medical Philosophy and Medical Natural History, which he taught until 1863, when he moved to Guanajuato where he practiced his profession as a doctor. It is in Guanajuato where he delivers a speech known as **Civic Prayer (2) to the Republic**: "... on September 15, 1867, Dr. Gabino Barreda... delivered his famous Civic Prayer in the city of Guanajuato, a masterful oratory piece intended to reorient the governmental policy of the republican State headed by Juárez and to transform, from its roots, the national objectives, channeling them towards an unlimited search for order as an instrument, peace as a means and progress as a goal, end and ultimate reason of national being..." (3).

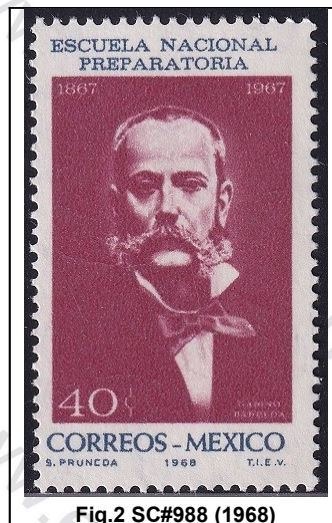
#### **Education reformer in the government of Juárez.-**

"Instruction and teaching were of particular concern to the government, because everything was expected from them: "the assimilation of the Indian, the redemption of the peon, completing the victory over the Church, the success of colonization, the general wisdom of the country and its international life in a plan of equality with other nations"" (4).

As a result of the aforementioned Civic Prayer and being Minister of Justice and Public Instruction Antonio Martínez de Castro, Barreda was summoned to be part of and chief of a commission in charge of preparing an educational reorganization plan of which were also part Pedro Contreras Elizalde (5), Francisco Díaz Covarrubias (6), Ignacio Alvarado (7) and Eulalio María Ortega (8). Once its work was completed, on **December 2, 1867**, the Organic Law of Public Instruction in the Federal District (DF) and Mexican territories was published. (9).

The law was ambitious in its objectives, it established compulsory and free basic education (10), eliminated religious instruction, defined a curriculum for the secondary level and ordered the creation of a secondary school for young ladies (11), it was also decreed the founding of the **National Preparatory School (ENP)** that would provide the necessary studies to enter higher education schools and **considered Barreda's essential work**. The law was not implemented in its entirety, the country was isolated, mired in serious economic problems, depopulated in some areas; this law was a serious, professional and orderly approach to everything that was needed in educational matters and that over many years was fulfilled, with other faces, with other decrees, and sometimes, unfortunately, even going backwards.

**December 17, 1867**, Dr. Barreda is named the first director of the ENP. The ENP was located in the old Colegio de San Ildefonso and opened its first course on **February 3, 1868**. (Fig. 2) with 900 students, 200 of them internal because they were foreigners, the study plan considered 5 annual cycles and 34 subjects to be taken in a mandatory order (12). Given the magnitude and diversity of the ENP curriculum, Barreda faced tough opposition, even from the liberal side. The regulatory law to the Education Law, issued on **January 24, 1868**, established specialized high schools according to the professional studies to be carried out later, but without drastic changes in the content of the subjects.



**Fig.2 SC#988 (1968)**

Barreda summoned the most cultured men of his time in each specialty to the ENP teaching staff. He taught the Logic class and at the National School of Medicine General Pathology.

The National Preparatory School was Barreda's crowning work; among other illustrious Mexicans, the great educators of the 20th century have passed through its classrooms: Justo Sierra as a teacher, José Vasconcelos and Jaime Torres Bodet as students.

Currently the ENP is part of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) and has several campuses; with data as of 2020, it had an annual admission of new students of 15,500 and re-entry 36,140, that is, a total of around 51,000 students.

### Conclusions.-

Barreda gave a 360° turn to education in the country, **focusing it on science and introducing new research methods**. He was its general director until 1878, when, with Porfirio Díaz in power, he was sent to Berlin as ambassador to Germany, where he was from March 5, 1878 to July 2, 1879. He returned to the country and died in Tacubaya, Mexico City on March 10, 1881, at 63 years of age.

The generation of men who participated in the public life of the country alongside Benito Juárez, from the Constitution of 1857 until the death of Juárez, in the three powers (Legislative, Executive and Judicial) is considered the most brilliant that this country has had throughout its history. At the moment they had to act, they gave legal order to this country, with a vision of the future, the limit was the conditions of a **battered, aggrieved, decimated nation: battered** by so many changes in the political system, since 1821, the year of the consummation of Independence, which unleashed internal war conflicts; **aggrieved** by the loss of half of her territory to the United States of America, the French invasion, and the elevation of a foreign emperor; and **decimated** by what all these events together mean in loss of human life, disintegrated families, social disorder, devastated economy.... and it all happened in **less than 50 years**. Speaking exclusively of education, what they tried was not lost, as an example is the ENP with 156 years of existence, and what at the time could not be achieved served as a lighthouse for subsequent generations.

### Notas:

1 Comte's "positivist" philosophy supports the idea that to truly understand society, the only valid data comes from the senses and the logical analysis of that data. Society, he claims, acts according to laws, just like the physical world of natural sciences. It is the sociologist's task to study it and obtain something from these laws. The beginning of Sociology is formally located in 1838 with the publication of Course on positive philosophy, by August Comte..

2 To read the text Gabino Barreda's Civic Prayer you can go to the following link: [https://divcsh.izt.uam.mx/cefillibe/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Oracioncivica-Barreda\\_Gabino.pdf](https://divcsh.izt.uam.mx/cefillibe/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Oracioncivica-Barreda_Gabino.pdf)

3 Op. Cit.: <https://moderna.historicas.unam.mx/index.php/ehm/article/view/68937/68897>

4 Op.cit by Muriel, Guadalupe, Reformas Educativas de Gabino Barreda citing in turn: Daniel Cosío VILLEGAS, *Historia Moderna de México*, vol. 111. *La República Restaurada. Vida Social*, México, Editorial Hermes, 1963, p. 21.

5 Pedro Contreras Elizalde. He is considered the first follower of "positivism" in Mexico, he was the son-in-law of Benito Juárez and a deputy to the federal Congress.

6 Francisco Díaz Covarrubias, Mexican engineer, geographer, scientist and diplomat. In 1874 he led the group of Mexican astronomers who attended the observation of the transit of Venus across the disk of the sun in Japan.

7 Ignacio Alvarado, doctor, brilliant in his profession since he was a student, he is considered one of the most outstanding physiologists of his time, he was co-author of a study on leprosy, teacher of Gabino Barreda at the National School of Medicine and general practitioner of Juárez until the death of president.

8 Eulalio María Ortega, prominent in literature and a lawyer by profession, polyglot, liberal, he was named by Maximiliano as one of his defense lawyers in the Querétaro trial..

9 Op. Cit. by Muriel, Guadalupe, Reformas Educativas de Gabino Barreda: The federal entities had autonomy to develop their own education law but it was common for them to base themselves on that of the DF and even copy it.

10 Basic education was decreed free for the poor and compulsory for all. The lack of financial resources of the governments, the negligence of many parents and lack of supervision by the authorities prevented the success of the proposal.

11 The secondary school for girls had a smaller curriculum than that of men and with adjustments in some subjects, as did primary education.

12 Op. cit. by Muriel, Guadalupe, Reformas Educativas de Gabino Barreda: The studies had to begin with mathematics and would conclude with logic, passing through cosmography, physics, geography and chemistry, and then the history of living beings. These studies would be a continuous chain that would be linked and in it the previous ones would serve as a basis for the later ones.

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