

Una Luz Que Llego Para Quedarse: Comienzos del Alumbrado Electrico y su Introduccion en Cuba.

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Luis Pumarada-O'Neill

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REVIEW

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Reviewed by:

Reviewed by

Luis F. Pumarada-O'Neill (bio)

***Una Luz que Llego para Quedarse: Comienzos del Alumbrado Electrico y su Introduccion en Cuba.* By José Altshuler and Miguel Gonzalez. La Habana, Cuba: Instituto Cubano Del Libro, Editorial Cientifico-Tecnica, 1997. Pp. xi+395; illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$18.00.**

Una Luz que Llego para Quedarse (A light that arrived to stay), narrates the development of the technology and business of illumination in the Western world, emphasizing electric lighting, and their introduction and diffusion in Cuba. It is authored by two electrical engineers, José Altshuler and Miguel Gonzalez. The first is president of the Cuban Society for the History of Science and Technology, and both have been publishing for many years on the subjects covered by this book.

The first three chapters of the book cover the development of lighting technology and its indoor and outdoor applications. This thorough and technically oriented presentation begins in prehistoric times with the use of fire and ends in the early twentieth century with the global competition among American and European lighting fixture technologies and merging manufacturers. Next the authors turn to the introduction of illumination technologies and lighting companies into Cuba. This section begins with the use of lightning bugs for illumination by the native inhabitants of pre-Colombian Cuba and ends with the nationalization of the American-owned electric monopoly by Fidel Castro's regime in 1960. The rest of the book is made up of unconnected sections that expand on the Cuban material: a chronology of events, diffusion of lighting technology and electric companies to the Cuban hinterland, applications in the sugar industry, and interactions with the island's scientific and educational establishments.

This book's main original contribution resides in its presentation of the introduction of gas and electrical lighting technologies into Cuba, mainly by Spaniards and Americans. However, the first part of the book is so thorough, so clearly written and illustrated, that it is also valuable. It delves into all relevant aspects of lighting, from the cultural implications of light and dark to lamp-carrying pages and the development of fixture

types and manufacturers. Thus, the reader is made familiar with the technologies and the competitors who entered the Cuban scene during the nineteenth century. The rich chronology helps to place Cuban dates in the context of world trends and events.

It becomes evident that the Cuban market was most attractive to businessmen from the developed world ever since the late eighteenth century when sugar fueled the island's economy. In 1816, when London was the only capital with a gas illumination system, the American chemist Gabriel Prendergast installed an experimental gas system in Havana and was awarded a contract to provide gas lighting to the lighthouse at the El Morro **[End Page 414]** fortress. In the late nineteenth century, a firm of American managers and Cuban investors displaced a stagnant Spanish gas company, but its American board of directors refused for years to render account to its Cuban stockholders. In 1882, as Thomas Edison was initiating his first electrical lighting systems in the United States, his Edison Spanish Colonial Light Company named an agent for Cuba and demonstrated an incandescent electric lighting system there. After the 1898 American intervention against Spain in the Cuban War of Independence and the U.S. takeover of Cuba until 1902, an American consul general, backed by American investors, took over the Havana Electric Railway Company and became its general manager. In 1919, chocolate magnate Milton S. Hershey built a large sugar mill in the island to provide cane sugar for his chocolate candies, and along the way he built the world's first electric railroad dedicated to cane sugar freight. Between 1924 and 1926, the Cuban Electric Company, a subsidiary of the American utility holding company Electric Bond and Share, acquired the island's various electric utilities and railways. This monopoly and its high rates provoked many controversies until the government takeover in 1960.

The book's notes are very effective, as are the sections on the sugar industry and the indexes. However, the town-by-town presentation of the internal diffusion of electric and lighting technology should only elicit...



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[+1 \(410\) 516-6989](tel:+14105166989)
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