

= Santa María de la Cabeza castle =

Santa María de la Cabeza castle is a colonial castle built in the seventeenth century by the Spanish monarchy in the center of the city of Cumaná , Venezuela . It was built as a replacement for the San Antonio de la Eminencia castle . Its construction was ordered by Sancho Fernando de Angulo y Sandoval , governor of the Province of Cumaná . The building was designed using the trace italienne style popular during the seventeenth century , with a proportional geometric floor design . Bastions were used as the main defensive elements . The castle housed a garrison of 250 soldiers , and was the seat of government for the Province of Cumaná .

Construction began in 1668 when Angulo y Sandoval 's predecessor , Juan de Urtarte , wrote a memorandum to the King of Spain stating that the San Antonio de la Eminencia castle was unfit for defense . Several years later ( and without proper authorization ) , Angulo y Sandoval began construction of a fortress that would be more useful for the defense of the city than the two existing fortifications . The castle underwent several renovations to repair damage caused by severe earthquakes . A 1684 quake severely damaged the castle and another in 1929 left the structure in ruins . The castle was declared a cultural and municipal asset in May 2005 .

= = Description = =

The Santa María de la Cabeza castle is a fortress built c . 1669 ? 73 in the city of Cumaná on the orders of Sancho Fernando de Angulo y Sandoval , governor of the Province of Cumaná , as a replacement for the San Antonio de la Eminencia castle . It is located in the center of the city next to St. Agnes Church , about 400 metres ( 1 @ , @ 300 ft ) from the San Antonio castle , on a small hill . The castle is square with bastions ( designed by Angulo y Sandoval ) at its corners . It has been described as having minor defensive capability .

The castle was built using the trace italienne style popular during the seventeenth century ; its floor has a geometric design , and bastions are the main defensive elements . However , unlike other permanent bastioned fortifications , its defensive walls were designed as two sections : the lower part of the wall is vertical ( perpendicular to the base ) and the upper part , above the string course , is inclined inwards . This design makes the fort unique in Venezuela ; in most castles , the lower portion of the walls inclines outwards at the base and the upper parts are vertical ( perpendicular to the base ) .

The primary material used to create the bricks for the castle was margosa limestone ( a type of sedimentary rock composed of limestone and clay ) . The front of the castle is oriented to the east , and there was a ditch around the entire perimeter , including between the castle and the Plaza de Armas ( Weapons Square ) . As of 2008 the building had lost its parapets and shelters , but the main defensive structures and walls have been preserved . The fort housed a garrison of 250 soldiers , and was the residence of the governor of the Province of Cumaná .

= = Origins = =

On 22 November 1668 , Don Juan de Urtarte ( governor of the province from 9 June 1668 to 26 July 1669 ) wrote a memorandum to the King of Spain stating that Fort Santiago was unfit for defense because of its round shape and its mud and stone construction . Several years later , Governor Don Sancho Fernando de Angulo y Sandoval began ? without authorization from the war council ? construction of a new fortress with the rationale that the San Antonio de la Eminencia castle did not meet the city 's defensive requirements , as it is located on a hilltop far from the city and the coast . The governor claimed that the castle also lacked a suitable water supply and accommodation for soldiers , and thus was unable to resist prolonged sieges .

Unlike his predecessor Urtarte , who requested financing to supply and improve San Antonio , Angulo y Sandoval decided to build a new castle , one better able to defend the city than the two existing fortifications . The resulting fortress was called Santa María de la Cabeza ; the governor then requested that the two older structures be demolished .

= = History = =

On 4 May 1684 an earthquake devastated the city , severely damaging the Santa María castle . A road linking the Santa María de la Cabeza and San Antonio de la Eminencia castles was mentioned by Agustín Crame in a 1777 proposal for the defense of the city . Crame opposed the idea , but stated that if a road were built it should be a gravel one . The Santa María de la Cabeza castle was partially destroyed in a powerful earthquake felt throughout the state in 1797 .

After an earthquake in 1853 , the reliquary enclosing an image of Nuestra Señora del Carmen ( Our Lady of Mount Carmel ) , originally situated at the Mount Carmel chapel , was moved to the Santa María de la Cabeza castle , where Santos Berrizbeitia built a new chapel in 1912 to protect the image ; it was later moved to St. Agnes Church . The ditch was filled in for construction of the Mount Carmel chapel and the deteriorated parapets were demolished . The original slopes and terraces present on Diaz Fajardo 's 1737 map were probably also buried in the process . The chapel in the castle was the final resting place for Berrizbeitia ; his remains , originally interred at Holy Trinity Cemetery ( which he had built ) , were exhumed and moved five years after his death .

Between the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries , Cumaná experienced an increase in population . The areas around the castles and the Manzanares River became densely populated . New buildings were constructed that were attached to the castle walls , completely closing off the perimeter and making direct access impossible . Another earthquake in 1929 left the structure in ruins and rendered it unusable . The offices of the seat of government for the Province of Cumaná were moved elsewhere and the building was abandoned . The castle was declared a Cultural and Municipal Asset in May 2005 by the state Cultural Assets Institute .

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