



**SECTION: 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF
THE REVISTA DE HISTORIA**



Fecha de recepción: 10/03/2025

Fecha de aceptación: 11/12/2025

Fifty years is nothing... easier said

Cincuenta años no es nada... se dice fácil

Cinquenta anos não é nada... é fácil dizer

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Abstract: 


Drawing from Elizabeth Fonseca Corrales's lecture, this article offers a journey through the past fifty years of the *Revista de Historia*. The article also highlights the journal's role in the history discipline in Costa Rica and Central America. The analysis is organized into two main stages. The first focuses on the period 1975–1985, examining the journal's challenging beginnings at the National University (UNA), overcoming the crises that threatened its continuity. The second stage examines the period beginning in 1985, marked by the consolidation of the project, driven by a 1986 co-publishing agreement between the National University and the University of Costa Rica. The author shares her 17-year experience as an editor-in-chief, detailing the evolution of editorial processes and the technological and thematic challenges encountered. Finally, she reflects on the termination of the inter-university agreement in 2012 and on the journal's legacy in shaping a community of historians in the region.

Keywords: Costa Rica; diffusion; editorial management; historiography; History.

Resumen: 

Con base en la conferencia de Elizabeth Fonseca Corrales, se presenta un recorrido por los cincuenta años de la *Revista de Historia*. Se destaca su papel en la consolidación de la disciplina histórica en Costa Rica y Centroamérica. La exposición se divide en dos etapas principales. La primera (1975–1985) aborda los difíciles inicios de la revista en la Universidad Nacional, superando crisis que amenazaron su continuidad. La segunda etapa inicia en 1985 y se caracteriza por la consolidación del proyecto, impulsada por un convenio de coedición entre la Universidad Nacional y la Universidad de Costa Rica en 1986. La autora relata su experiencia como editora durante 17 años, describiendo la evolución de los procesos editoriales, los desafíos tecnológicos y temáticos. Finalmente, reflexiona sobre el fin del convenio interuniversitario en 2012 y el legado de la revista en la formación de una comunidad de historiadores regionales.

Palabras claves: Costa Rica; difusión; gestión editorial; historia; historiografía.

Resumo: 

Com base na conferência de Elizabeth Fonseca Corrales, apresenta-se uma retrospectiva dos cinquenta anos da *Revista de História*. Destaca-se o seu papel na consolidação da disciplina histórica na Costa Rica e na América Central. A exposição divide-se em duas etapas principais. A primeira (1975–1985) aborda os difíceis inícios da revista na Universidade Nacional, superando crises que ameaçaram a sua continuidade. A segunda etapa começa em 1985

e é caracterizada pela consolidação do projeto, impulsionada por um acordo de coedição entre a Universidade Nacional e a Universidade da Costa Rica em 1986. A autora relata sua experiência como editora durante 17 anos, descrevendo a evolução dos processos editoriais, os desafios tecnológicos e temáticos. Por fim, ela reflete sobre o fim do acordo interuniversitário em 2012 e o legado da revista na formação de uma comunidade de historiadores regionais.

Palavras-chave: Costa Rica; difusão; gestão editorial; história; historiografia.

Introduction¹

I am honored to participate in this event, which commemorates the fiftieth anniversary of the *Revista de Historia*. This is easy to say, but sustaining a specialized scholarly journal for such a long period is an undertaking of immense merit. Achieving such continuity has required confronting numerous challenges, demonstrating institutional flexibility, and, above all, maintaining a firm commitment to resolving the difficulties that inevitably arise in any human enterprise.

For this conference, I have reviewed issues from number 1, published in 1975, through number 48, published in 2003. This review enabled me to structure the presentation as follows. First, I will discuss the origins of the *Revista de Historia*, covering the period between 1975 and 1985. During that decade, there were even certain years—under the administration of Mr. Rodrigo Carazo—when the journal was not published and faced the risk of disappearing. In a subsequent phase beginning in 1985, once the crisis had passed, the project was resumed with renewed vigor. The agreement signed by the rectors of the two public

¹ Lecture on the occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the *Revista de Historia*, Former Rectors' Hall, Joaquín García Monge Library, National University (UNA), Omar Dengo Campus, Heredia, Costa Rica, September 25, 2025.

universities, the National University and the University of Costa Rica, strengthened the initiative. It is at this point, beginning in 1986, that I joined the journal as editor. Accordingly, in the second part of the presentation, I will share my experiences as editor, which in turn allows me to examine other aspects that contributed to the development of the discipline of history, not only in our country but also across Central America. My contribution concludes with a brief epilogue.

The beginnings

Undoubtedly, the greatest challenges in launching a project are encountered in its initial years. Nevertheless, at the same time, significant opportunities arise because many aspects remain to be defined. The inaugural issue of the *Revista de Historia* was published in 1975, less than two years after the School of History at the National University opened its doors. The introduction to that first issue stated the objective to serve as a specialized periodical dedicated to disseminating research on Costa Rican and Latin American history, both within the country and beyond its borders. It also offered its pages to contributions by scholars of continental and global renown. The introduction further noted: “As the institutional expression of a modern historical school embedded within a dynamic and necessary university, the research findings it presents must reach the entire academic community interested in Latin America, as well as the public at large, so that such studies of past structures may contribute to further development in the scientific field and in culture”.

These initial formulations become fully intelligible when placed in the context of the National University’s emergence in 1973 as the “necessary university”, a moment marked by the prominence of Underdevelopment Theory and Dependency Theory throughout Latin America. The intellectuals who took part

in the establishment of the UNA, guided by hope and optimism, believed that the new institution would contribute to the generation and dissemination of the knowledge necessary to overcome those conditions. Numerous foreigners—particularly Chileans and Argentines who had sought refuge in Costa Rica from the military dictatorships in their home countries—joined this task.

The back cover of the first issue of the *Revista de Historia* shows how the publication was organized. It had a responsible director, Dr. Germán Tjarks, an Argentine national; an executive secretary, Jeffrey Casey, M.A.; and an editorial board composed of three members: Dr. Oscar Aguilar Bulgarelli, Carlos Luis Fallas, M.A., and Jeffrey Casey, M.A. That inaugural issue contained two articles on Latin America, two on national topics, and a documentary section devoted to Chinese migration. The articles included charts and maps but lacked illustrations. One thousand copies were printed, and the issue was produced by the National University's Department of Publications.

Issue number two, published in the first semester of 1976, opens with an article by Ciro Cardoso and Héctor Pérez, Brazilian and Argentine, respectively. Both had settled in Costa Rica and provided a substantial impetus to the modernization of the discipline in the local context. Their study, "Dependencia y metodología de la Historia en América Latina" [Dependence and the Methodology of History in Latin America], offers an important reflection on the ways in which historical research topics and issues are selected, as well as the methodological approaches employed, within a subcontinent characterized by cultural dependence. The issue further includes a paper on Bolivia by Lowell Gudmundson, a study on mining in Costa Rica by Carlos Araya Pochet, and an article on Tucurique by Jeffrey Casey.

Issue number 3, covering the second semester of 1976, includes a preliminary notice and then explores the theme of slavery, incorporating a review of

recent research by Magnus Mörner, an article on the origins of enslaved peoples, and one on the processes of manumission and the dynamics of mestizaje.

Issue number 4 exclusively features articles by international contributors. It notably includes the *Almanaque Histórico de Costa Rica* [Historical Almanac of Costa Rica], prepared by the National Commission for Historical Commemorations and published by Imprenta Trejos Hermanos.

Issue number 5 introduces a documentary section. Its content reflects a significant presence of international authors and a pronounced interest in economic and social history. The volume includes contributions from Héctor Pérez Brignoli and Ciro Cardoso, as well as two American historians, Mark Rosenberg and Jeffrey Casey.

In 1978, issues 6 and 7 were published. These issues feature increased participation from Costa Rican authors, with fresh perspectives and methodologies. They also exhibit a more extensive use of charts and graphics; this clearly indicates a broader dissemination of quantification in historical studies. That same year, Dr. Germán Tjiars stepped down as the journal's director.

Issue number 8 was the only one published in 1979. This journal seemingly reflects the country's challenges during the administration of President Rodrigo Carazo. This issue contains only a few articles and was published on newsprint under the Imprenta Nacional [National Printing Office] imprint.

In 1980, five years after the publication of the first issue, a special double issue, numbers 9 and 10, was released. This strategy was employed to address delays caused by various factors that had prevented it from maintaining its promised semiannual periodicity. For the first time, the journal included an editorial note, which revealed that the editorial board had reflected on the path taken and outlined innovative proposals to be introduced in subsequent issues. This represented a readjustment of the journal's objectives, content, and format to adapt to new conditions and needs. The editors informed readers that the journal

faced severe financial difficulties and acknowledged “a mismatch between the extraordinary richness of historical research being conducted in Costa Rica in recent years and the journal’s role as a vehicle for disseminating those advances”. They further emphasized the emergence of a new generation of historians in the country. The note was signed by the editorial board, composed of José Antonio Fernández, Gertrud Peters, and Lucilla Góngora.

Second stage: The Consolidation of the Project

Issue 11, announced earlier, was delayed in its publication. The journal was not published between 1981 and 1984 and resumed publication only in 1985, under the direction of Dr. Mario Samper. From that moment onward, the journal established an Editorial Board, of which I became a member. A new feature was the introduction of sections. The journal initially featured the sections Latin America, Costa Rica, Debates, Documentary Section, and Bibliographical Critique; in the years that followed, new sections were added, including Interviews, Conferences, Surveys and Perspectives, and Correspondence.

Issue number 11 opened with a debate that was both timely and ongoing at the time of publication. It posed the question: Does a new historiographical generation exist in Costa Rica? Carlos Araya Pochet and Carlos Meléndez Chaverri provided contributions to this initial debate.

In the first half of 1985, the journal published a special issue entitled *Historia, problemas y perspectivas agrarias en Costa Rica* [History: Agrarian Problems and Perspectives in Costa Rica], presenting the results of the eponymous symposium, held July 2–6, 1984, at the School of Social Sciences at the National University. Given the interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary nature of the event, the publication of its proceedings was considered particularly appropriate.

The signing of the UNA–UCR agreement

The double issue 12–13, corresponding to the second half of 1985 and the first half of 1986, includes an editorial note announcing the signing of an agreement between the presidents of the National University and the University of Costa Rica. The agreement aimed to combine institutional efforts to jointly publish the *Revista de Historia*, under the responsibility of the School of History at the National University and the Center for Historical Research at the University of Costa Rica, starting with the subsequent issue. In my opinion, this agreement significantly enhanced the journal's potential to achieve a higher level of academic quality. The position of lead editor was assigned to academics from the National University, while editorial management was assumed by the Center for Historical Research. For practical reasons, printing continued to be handled by the Publications Office of the University of Costa Rica. This collaborative framework remained in effect until 2012, when the agreement appears to have been discontinued as a result of institutional policies adopted by the University of Costa Rica.

Issue 14, corresponding to the July–December 1986 period and representing the first volume published under the agreement, included an editorial note co-signed by Edwin González, then Director of the National University's School of History, and Víctor Hugo Acuña, Director of the University of Costa Rica's Center for Historical Research. The note explicitly attributed the initiative for inter-university collaboration to the School of History at the National University. Both authors expressed the hope that this collaborative effort would contribute to the consolidation and strengthening of the *Revista de Historia* as the primary vehicle for the scholarly expression of the community of historians.

Although I may not be best positioned to evaluate the results of this collaborative work, with the objectivity afforded by a twenty-two-year temporal distance since I concluded my work as journal editor, I venture to affirm that

the initial objectives were indeed achieved. The *Revista de Historia* made a substantial contribution to the formation of a community of historians, particularly among scholars engaged in the study of Central America. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the organization of Central American history conferences also served this purpose. They facilitated the exchange of methodological experiences and research findings and, no less importantly, enabled members of the profession to meet in person and establish collaborative relationships. The first congress took place in 1992, following an initiative of the School of History at the National Autonomous University of Honduras, to commemorate the fifth centenary of Columbus's arrival in the "New World". Since then, the congresses have been held biennially, hosted in rotation by universities across the region.

Another factor that fostered close interaction among historians was the arrival of foreign professors and students from various nationalities, who came to pursue their master's or doctoral studies at the Central American Graduate Program in History at the University of Costa Rica.

My work as journal editor

When I began my role as an editor for the *Revista de Historia*, I had no clear idea of what the position entailed. I gradually learned on the job. My editorial work required attending meetings of the Editorial Board; obtaining materials for publication with the assistance of colleagues; reading submissions and proposing style and content improvements—a task in which recommendations are not always well received by authors, who often feel their work is being questioned—and forwarding articles to the reviewers designated by the Editorial Board to obtain their corresponding recommendations. Once the reviews were completed and publication was approved, the following steps included organizing the materials, preparing the table of contents, writing the abstracts, and designing the cover by

selecting the color scheme and image for each issue. Finally, the complete materials were delivered to the unit responsible for printing, the Publications Office at the University of Costa Rica. It was my responsibility to review the layout repeatedly once it was complete, ensuring that it was correct and that all materials were complete. Only then did I grant final approval for printing.

I served as editor of the *Revista de Historia* for seventeen years. One of the most memorable aspects of this work was the technological transformation of printing. Early in my role as editor, the Publications Office provided what were then known as “galley proofs”, preliminary versions that showed how each issue of the journal would be typeset. My task was to review the materials once again to ensure that nothing had been omitted—whether a line, word, paragraph, table, map, or figure—that words were properly divided, titles correctly centered, and all images included.

Using a blue correction pencil, I marked errors and returned the materials to the person responsible for the journal’s layout at the Publications Office. When an error involved a single letter or number, the incorrect section was physically cut out with a sharp blade, and the correction was inserted into the gap and secured with adhesive tape on the reverse side of the page. This may invite laughter, yet it was highly efficient. When the corrected material was returned to me and everything was in order, I authorized printing.

The major change occurred with the introduction of personal computers, when we—authors, editors, and staff at the Publications Office—were all required to learn how to work with the new technology. Although this device was invented in the early 1980s, it took several years to reach universities in our country. I still remember the day when a visiting American researcher showed us a remarkable novelty at the Center for Historical Research of the University of Costa Rica: her laptop computer. In truth, I still laugh to myself when I recall the image of researchers

gathered around, watching how the device worked. This inevitably brings to mind the scene in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* in which people assemble to see ice.

In the latter half of the 1980s, we, as researchers, began transitioning from typewriters to portable computers. By the following decade, the transition was already widespread. Initially, this transition meant that some authors submitted typewritten manuscripts, while others delivered digitally produced texts stored on floppy disks. Since the Publications Office staff was also learning the new technology, the editor's work became considerably more complex and burdensome. At first, I had to review each issue three or four times, as new errors continued to appear. Even so, some mistakes escaped detection. On one occasion, after considerable effort, I believed that the *Revista de Historia* had finally been published without errors. My colleague Víctor Hugo Acuña opened the issue and asked me, "What makes you think 'Universidad de Costa Rica' should be written in lower-case?". I initially thought he was joking; however, that was not the case. On that occasion, I learned that no matter how meticulous I was, the editing of a text is never perfect. As the Salvadoran poet Roque Dalton once observed, "typos have the ubiquity of fungi". Today, the review process has become easier thanks to automated correction tools.

During my tenure as editor, I was responsible for issues 14-47 of the *Revista de Historia*, from July–December 1986 through the first semester of 2003. I began my tenure working with Mario Samper as lead editor. Subsequently, José Antonio Fernández assumed this role, followed by José Manuel Cerdas and, finally, Gertrud Peters. With all of them, as well as with the other members of the Editorial Board, I consistently maintained an excellent professional relationship, as we shared a common commitment to making the *Revista de Historia* a publication of recognized quality.

In addition to technological challenges, we encountered numerous other difficulties over those years. The most significant was meeting the journal's stated

publication schedule of one issue per semester. Another significant challenge was sustaining high content quality while introducing new sections to address the interests and needs of authors and readers—faculty and students of history and other social science disciplines, both within the country and abroad. We also agreed to implement changes to typography, cover design, and image publication, among other improvements.

Contents

I do not intend to undertake a detailed historiographical review, but merely to outline specific trends that become readily evident when perusing the issues under my editorial responsibility.

Within the Latin America section, Guatemala is the country addressed in the greatest number of articles. This constitutes a clear indication that, at the Central American level, history as a discipline was more fully developed in Guatemala and Costa Rica. Regional topics are rarely analyzed; such approaches appear more often when studies focus on the colonial period. Since Chiapas was part of Central America during that period, this geographical area, now part of Mexico, is therefore included in the analysis. Articles on South American countries appear sporadically, notably those dealing with Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, and Ecuador.

In the Costa Rica Section, most articles focus on economic and social history. The prominent themes include agricultural history, coffee cultivation history, agrarian conflicts, and indigenous resistance. Studies on migration and mestizaje likewise reflect the particular interest of historians—both male and female—in this field. Works on political history illustrate a renewal of perspectives. There are also articles devoted to the history of mentalities and cultural history, addressing topics such as mortuary rites and patterns of consumption.

The Book Review Section aimed to publish critiques of newly released books. Together with the Balances and Perspectives section, these sections were intended to help historians stay up to date in a discipline undergoing rapid growth and constant renewal. The Interviews section was conceived to highlight the contributions of distinguished individuals to historical research. The first interview appeared in issue 15 and featured Héctor Pérez Brignoli, addressing the topic “Quantification in History”.

In the Debates section, we sought to promote discussion on controversial topics such as the relationship between literature, history, and society, as well as text, reality, and discourse analysis. Debates were also organized around major commemorations, including the Centenary of Costa Rican Democracy and the Quincentenary of the Discovery of America.

The Documents section included materials of considerable value to scholars, such as lists of theses, bibliographic compilations, and parish statistics, among others. The Conferences section began in the year 2000.

Obviously, the number of sections that could appear in any given issue of the journal was limited, depending on the materials received. For instance, issue number 47 could have been considered a special edition, as it was published based on lectures delivered at an event organized by the School of History at the National University (UNA) in 2001, entitled “Encounters for History”.

Publishing materials from conferences, symposia, and other academic events helped us ensure that the publication remained current. By way of illustration, issue 30 includes papers presented at the symposium *Technological Modernization, Social Change, and the Coffee Crisis*, organized by the School of History at the National University.

Epilogue

In 2003, I concluded my work as editor of the *Revista de Historia*, and in 2005, I entered retirement to devote my full efforts to political activity. My numerous commitments prevented me from adequately following up on academic events. For this reason, my personal collection of the journal has remained incomplete since 2003. I was also unaware at the time, in 2012, of the termination of the agreement that had initiated the joint publication of the *Revista de Historia* by UNA and UCR. I regret that decision. I am a firm believer that cooperation, rather than competition, is the factor that enables a project to achieve greater success.

Today, on the occasion of the journal's fiftieth anniversary, I can only wish the *Revista de Historia* many more years of scholarly life, even as its publication is now assumed solely by the School of History at the National University.