

Cristobal de la Habana, originally commissioned by the Jesuits and built from 1748 to 1777; El Palacio de los Condes Bayona, the oldest Spanish building on the square, built in 1720; the Marqueses de Arcos residence of 1741; the Palace of Conde Lombillo of 1587; and the palace of the Marqueses de Aguas Claras, who were descendants of Ponce de León who went to Florida looking for the Fountain of Youth.

After the Second World War, the city expanded west and southwest from the initial walled precinct. With this, the port and old Havana became less accessible and this condition worsened with the increase in motor vehicles. As Cuba industrialized after the war, several industrial complexes were constructed around the bay, including the oil refineries, dockyards, a gas plant, two oil-burning power stations, grain towers, cargo railways, a fertilizer plant, the piers along the southern half of old Havana, and a very large garbage dump called Cayo Cruz. The trade winds that once brought air to the city now brought smoke and foul odors from these assorted facilities.

The Master Plan of 1971 emphasized transportation and the construction of shipping terminals around the bay. It also proposed the expansion of port facilities to Matanzas, 100 kilometers east of Havana, and a better deep-water port, and also to Mariel, 45 kilometers west of the city. This dispersal of port activity would mean a consolidation of cargo and industry into a smaller area on the southern border of the bay, clearing the piers of old Havana so that the city could reconnect to the water. Because of the plan, several large port installations were built, including a fishing port. However, the old docks remained and continued to block the southern half of old Havana, in addition, the proposed Traffic Center, which would have removed the old railway terminal and reduced heavy traffic in the inner city, was never constructed.

In the mid-1990s, tourism became a significant source of revenue for Cuba. In response the city renovated one of the three main piers at the Custom Building and turned it into a cruise ship terminal. The success of this project increased the efforts of the City Historian's Office to restore many landmark buildings and plazas in old Havana. The Master Plan for the Comprehensive Revitalization of Old Havana was set up at the end of 1994, at the request of the City Historian's Office. The intention of the plan was to study the problems of the historic center and propose the best alternatives for its renovation. The Spanish Agency for International Cooperation was a consultant and partial financial supporter of these initiatives.

In 1994, the City Historian's Office was granted the special privilege, by the Council of State of the Republic of Cuba, to run businesses and reinvest profits in their own redevelopment and restoration programs, which now includes social programs aimed at improving the living conditions of the local population. The Office is concerned with more than just the physical preservation of Havana. It is engaged in the promotion of the city and the sympathetic commercial potential of the historic center. The historic center has produced more than 70 million dollars in five years (1999). In this period, 95 restoration projects were completed, 58 are underway and 79 more are being planned. The Office's programs are now completely self-financed.

As part of the comprehensive plan, several Autonomous Communities