

SCIENTIFIC INSTITUTIONS IN LATIN AMERICA

THE MUNICIPAL LACTARIUM OF BUENOS AIRES (LACTARIUM MUNICIPAL)*

Buenos Aires

Dr. Saúl I. Bettinotti, Director

The Municipal Lactarium (Breast Milk Center) of Buenos Aires is a government institution at which surplus mothers' milk is extracted, preserved and distributed, on a non-profit basis. This Argentine center was originated in an attempt to do away with the health-hazards of the old wet-nurse system while providing mothers' milk for children whose own mothers were unable to nurse them. It differs from the earlier "mothers' milk stations" or collection stations (Salas de Lactantes), such as existed in Argentina in 1920, and elsewhere about the same time, in that only the surplus milk is extracted in the Lactarium. Milk would be taken from the wet-nurses attending the collection centers three and four times a day.

The women attending the Lactarium are known as donors, rather than as wet-nurses. They are given periodic clinical, radiological, and serologic examinations, and their family history is also studied. It has been found that a considerable quantity of milk may be obtained by using the surplus milk of a normal mother, since this surplus may amount to 200 to 300 grams for each mother. Yet the donor's child is not deprived of his mother's milk—in contrast to the risk run by the child of the ordinary wet-nurse. "The child is entitled to his mother's milk" is the guiding principle of the Lactarium.

The Buenos Aires Lactarium had its origin in October, 1928, when milk collected in the Maternity Institute of Buenos Aires was sold for the use of a premature infant being cared for at home. The money, amounting to about 1 peso per 100 grams, was placed in a special fund of the Children's Department of the Maternity Institute. Soon thereafter the Municipal Lactarium was founded, to serve as an intermediary between milk donors and milk receivers, affording proper protection to the children of both.

The Lactarium operates through social workers, who keep in close contact with the families of both donors and receivers and assist in solving their problems. It is felt that expansion of the work of the Lactarium should be somewhat cellular in nature, i.e., on the basis

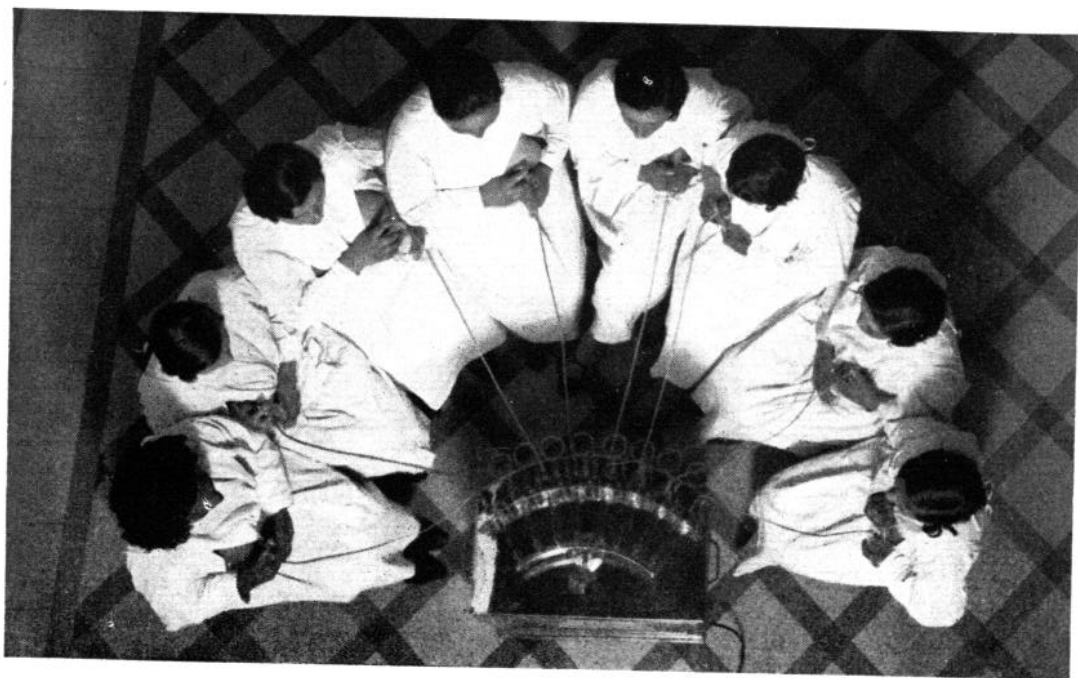
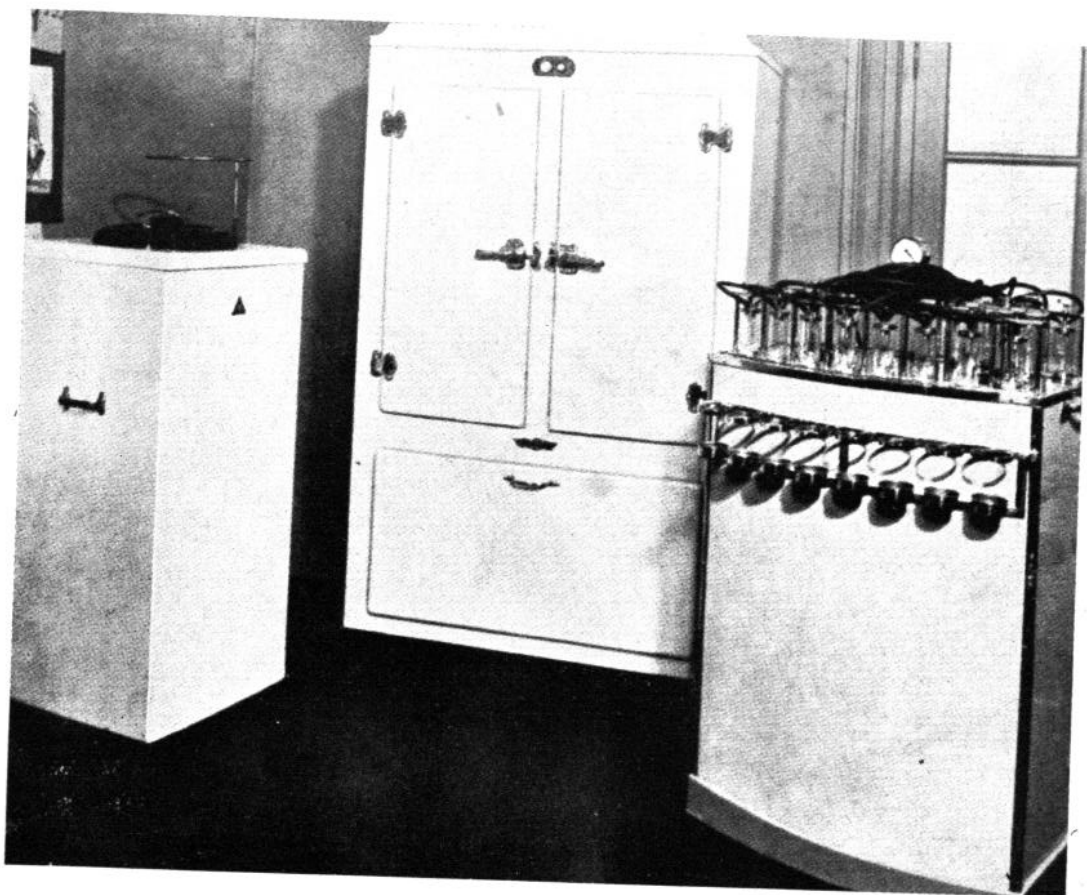
* One of a series of papers describing the principal scientific institutions in Latin America.

of the number of donors and recipients which may be supervised by each social worker, rather than through developing a single large institution.

During the year 1940, 346 donors passed through the Municipal Lactarium, and 1,237 families received milk from the institution. The families receiving milk included 155 wealthy families, 423 in comfortable circumstances, 213 in fair circumstances, and 231 needy families. In addition, 215 children were sent by Municipal Institutions and received free milk. Of the total number of recipients it has been calculated that 231 would have been unable to secure mothers' milk for their children, and 444 would have found great difficulty in securing it, without the services of the Lactarium. During the year a total of 5,289 liters of milk were extracted, of which 2,853 liters were furnished gratis. The price charged ranges from a maximum of \$8.00* a liter, down to no charge at all, according to the ability of the recipient to pay.

In addition to receiving and distributing the surplus milk, the Lactarium, as has already been mentioned, maintains contact with the donors and recipients through social workers, and furnishes clothing, food, toys, financial aid, assists in obtaining legal action in some cases, conducts educational classes, provides hospital care for mothers and children, and applies smallpox and diphtheria vaccination. In 1940, 211 diphtheria inoculations and 404 smallpox vaccinations were given.

* Argentine pesos.



Municipal Lactarium of Buenos Aires.—Above: 16-outlet extractor; dry ice container and refrigerator. Below: Milk can be extracted at the same time from 32 donors in four groups of eight persons in the same room.



Facultad de Medicina de Montevideo, fundada en 1875. Su actual sede fué inaugurada en 1914, a un costo de \$620,000. Funcionan en este edificio el Decanato y las Oficinas Administrativas; Biblioteca; Salón de Conferencias; y los Institutos de Anatomía, Fisiología, Anatomía Patológica, Medicina Experimental, etc.



Facultad de Odontología de Montevideo, inaugurada en marzo de 1940 a un costo de \$400,000, y que forma parte del Centro Médico.