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✿ The location of La Colmena in the history of the city.

Back in time when Barcelona was called “Barcino”, the Roman city, we find that the current location of La Colmena was a strategic point. It was at the one of the four entrances of the Roman city, just the beginning of “Cardus Maximus”, one of the two central streets that crossed the Forum.

During the Middle Ages, it became the “Portal Major” (The Main Gate), where legend says “Sant Jordi” entered, and the Franks sieged the city, driving out the Muslims in 801 a. C.

The square today known as “Plaça de l’Àngel” (Angel square) once called “Plaça del Blat” (wheat square) was a wide open space in front of the city gate, conserved its medieval planning until the middle of the XIX century.

The construction of “Jaume I” street began in 1845 and was finished in 1852. “Princesa” street was also finished in 1845. At this time “Portal Major”, “Arc de Santa Eulàlia” and the old prison building (current location of La Colmena) had already been demolished.





The angel of the square

It is named "Plaça de l'Àngel" due to Saint Eulàlia, patron saint of Barcelona. The legend says that in 875 a. C. remains of the martyr were found in "Santa Maria de les Arenes" church. During the transfer of the remains to the cathedral crypt, the procession stopped at the square unable to carry on because of the weight of the remains. After praying all night long, an angel appeared to the bishop.

He was pointing at a clergyman that later confessed he had stolen a finger from the saint. After the confession they proceeded successfully to the crypt.

As a tribute to the legend, in 1616, Felip Ros made a baroque angel, the first decorative monument of the city. The angel was later transferred to the History of the City museum in 1823, when the square got officially the name of "Plaça de l'àngel".

🐝 Orígens de l'establiment

The original owner of La Colmena was called Rosendo Abella (Abella means bee in Catalan), which was why the shop was called “Ca l'Abella” (the bees place). The original location, in 1849, was just in front of the current location. Later in 1868, the Costa family bought the business, moved it and changed the name to La Colmena. Years later, the shop changed owners from “Morató i Sant Pera” in 1912 to “Chocolates J. Camps” in 1921.

In 1927 Josep and Francesc Roig Manubens purchased the business which is now run by his grandson, Josep Maria Roig. Toni Roig, Francesc's great-grandson and Josep Maria's son, is one of the main confectioners working in the kitchen located below the shop. He is the one who makes the typical artisan candies and the famous “Torró de crema cemada”.

From pictures of the Civil war we know that the sign “Casa l'Abella” was placed at the street “Bajada de la Prisión” and La Colmena was in the square.





Family History

The Roig family comes from Vallbona de les Monges, Lleida. Josep and Francesc Roig Manubens came to the city to learn a trade. While Josep worked as a baker at the old “Patisserie de la Mercè”, Francesc, the grandfather of the present owner learned to be a tailor at “Can Vehils i Vidal”. After just one year, when he was only 14 years old he went to America where he spent 10 years before returning in 1916.

The two brothers decided to start a business together and bought “Patisserie l’Estrella” at “Nou de la Rambla” 32. Due to their great success, they were able to expand and take over La Colmena and two of the “Chocolateries Camps”, located on “Ferran” street and “Gran de Gràcia” 15 on 1927.

They converted all the shops into cake shops, spreading the name La Colmena and preserving the most traditional products specially the candies.

Later the cake shops on “Nou de la Rambla” and “Ferran” street changed ownership and the business also, however “La Patisserie l’Estrella” in spite of changing owners continued as a cake shop.

La Colmena on “Gran de Gràcia” street maintained the name and business but belonged to the other part of the family, Josep’s descendents.

✿ La Colmena today

Recently, blueprints of the current structure of the shop made on 1950 have been found. It was designed by César Martinell, known as Gaudí's youngest and closest collaborator.

In spite of the architect's baroque taste and his Gaudinian influence, La Colmena's decor is more similar to the classic taste of the fifties' architects. It can be considered "neo-paladiana".

Even today, the Roig family preserves the spirit of "Ca l'Abella". Despite the years and changes they produce the same kind of products: "bolados", candies, "turrones" or chocolates preserving their traditional essence. The candies produced at "Plaça del l'Àngel" are the oldest home-made candies in Spain.

