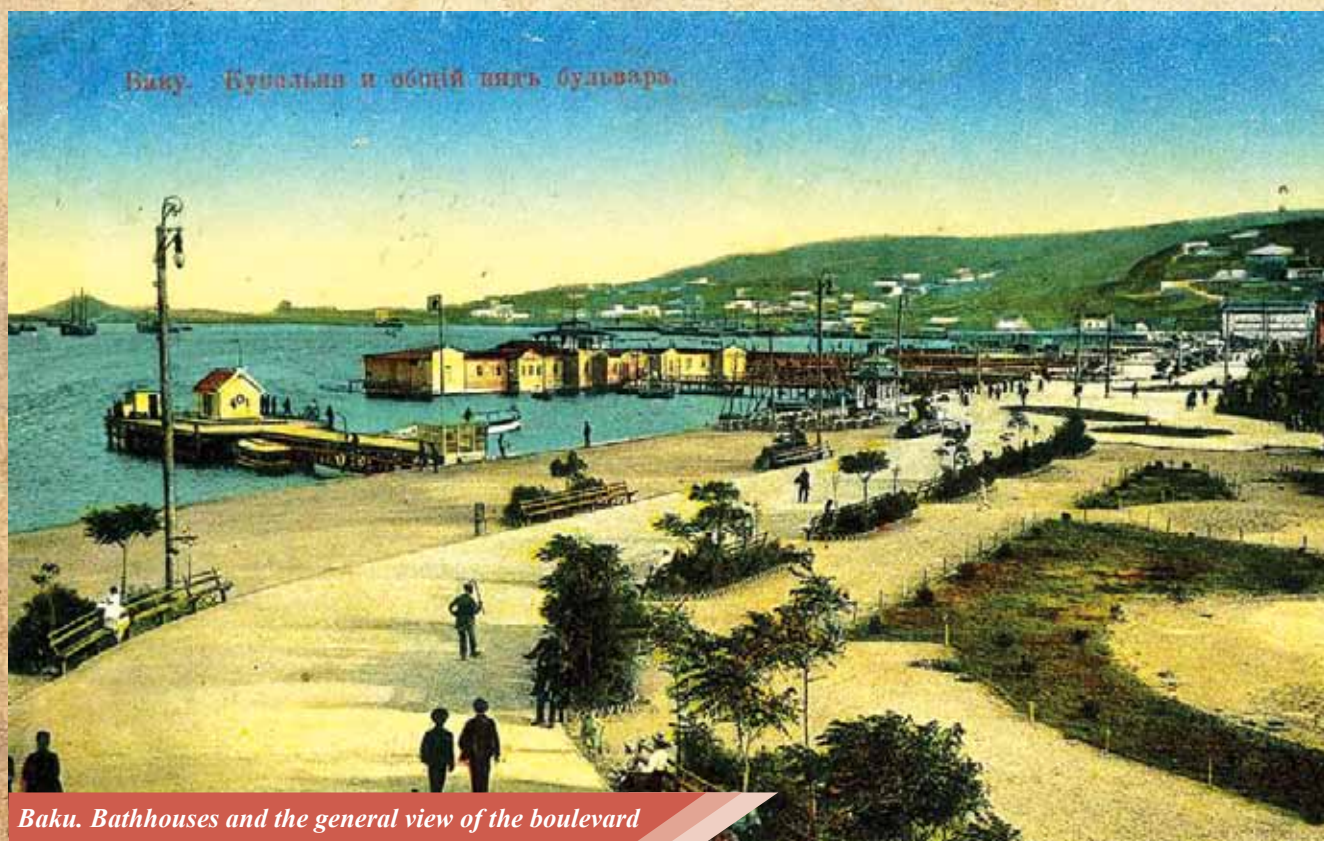


BAKU

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EMBANKMENT

IN THIS ARTICLE WE WILL TALK ABOUT ONE OF THE MOST REMARKABLE PARTS OF THE AZERBAIJANI CAPITAL, ITS SEA FACADE - THE BAKU EMBANKMENT, WHICH HAS BEEN THE ICONIC SYMBOL OF THE CITY FOR THE LAST TWO CENTURIES. IN 1865, THE MILITARY GOVERNOR AND DIRECTOR OF THE CIVILIAN PART OF BAKU, LT-GEN MIKHAIL PETROVICH KOLYUBYAKIN GAVE THE PERMISSION TO KNOCK DOWN THE USELESS OLD WALL THAT WAS SEPARATING THE CITY FROM THE SEA AND ALSO "HAMPERING THE FRESH AIR".



Baku. Bathhouses and the general view of the boulevard



View of Baku from the sea

The free area was then sold for 44,000 rubles and the money was used to establish small elegant stone embankment where a number of pretty private houses appeared soon.

Early landscaping works in Baku were carried out by architect Karl Gustavovich Gippius who despite suggestions managed to defend the Shirvanshahs Palace from turning it into prison. He also contributed the appearance of a number of streets and the design of the first houses on the Embankment. The connoisseurs of the Azerbaijani capital will remember his water color paintings of Baku houses of the time.

The building that used to be the Medical Workers' Club during the Soviet times was constructed approximately in 1865-67. Also known as the "gubernatorial house" (the building of the Azerbaijan National Conservatory in Neftchilar Avenue has been knocked down), it was then acquired



View of the embankment

by millionaire Seid Mirbabayev who leased it out to the Baku governorate that did not have its own residency.

According to the initial plan, the 18-meter-wide street was to be established between the city walls and the buildings. Framed by a dead city wall on one side and rear façades on the other, the street could not play a

significant role in the city and would have been architecturally inexpressive.

However, after the city wall had been knocked down, the need emerged for changing the architectural appearance of the embankment from the seaside. As part of the new plan, the street by the city



View of Baku from the sea, 1880s, A. Mishon

walls was to be removed and a large pavement lined up with trees was to be set up on the emerging free area. Private possessions were to be separated from each other by 13-meter intersections. As a result, the planning of the city wall proved more successful. Thanks to the establishment of a number of main road intersections, some amazing views of the expressive architecture of the old Baku emerged. In 1882, a boulevard designed by architect A. Kroshinsky

was to be built in the lower part of this area.

The embankment was in the spotlight of city authorities also because the residency of the city governor was located there. It is worth indicating that first steps towards landscaping the embankment were taken by remarkable Azerbaijani architect Gasim-bey Hajibababekov (1811-1874). He did significant engineering and planning work to landscape the embankment, dealt with

construction issues and fresh water infrastructure. In 1867, a fountain and other facilities were built here on his design, which led to the embankment receiving the status of a boulevard. According to contemporaries of the time, the boulevard became one of the city's biggest adornments.

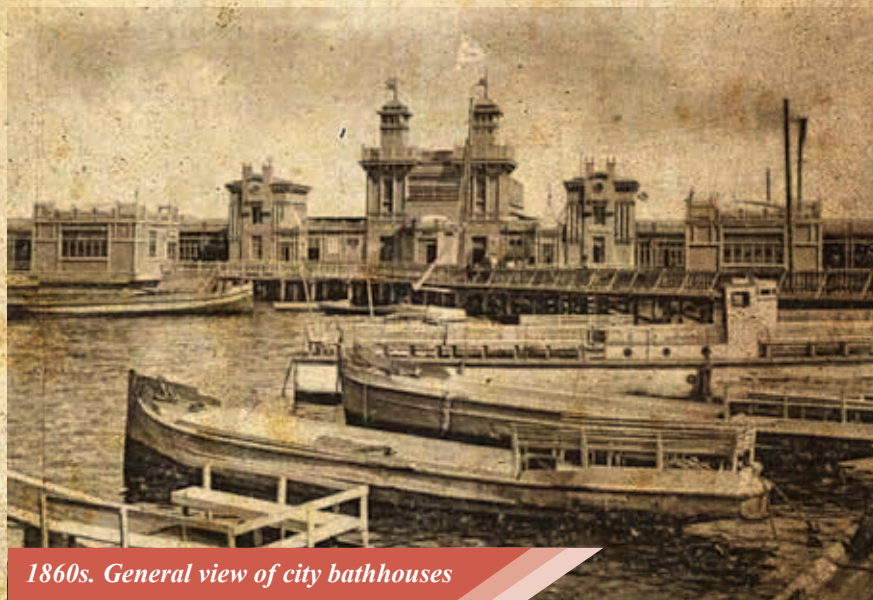
In 1890, the "Caucasus and Mercury" shipping company built a pier and a number of other facilities on the embankment, thus dividing the coast line into two parts: the Alek-



Embankment panorama from the current Azneft Square

sandrovs kaya embankment located along the city walls and Petrovskaya, eastwards to the Bolshaya Morskaya Street. Therefore, a barrier was built in 1897 to separate a 50-meter area from the sea. As a result, the boulevard emerged as a standalone piece of architecture. On 9 November 1923, a fire broke out at the warehouses of the "Caucasus and Mercury" and the embankment was badly affected.

In 1990, the city's Garden Commission passed the decision to build a nursery garden of ornamental trees on the embankment. That decision signaled a start to the planting of greenery on the boulevard. A detailed plan of such planting reflecting the width and length of all the alleys, species of trees and shrubs to be planted, etc. was designed by a civil engineer K. Skurkevich in conjunction with municipal gardener Vasilyev. In 1909, further contribution was made to the landscaping of the boulevard. Even though it was already quite attractive, the embankment was pretty much in the grip of



1860s. General view of city bathhouses

numerous piers and quays. These issues were dealt with by engineer M. Hajinsky, the head of the construction department of the city council. Talented architect A. Eichler was contributing to the project managed by Hajinsky. Large pavilions, fountains and alcoves were built on the boulevard and a staircase leading right into the sea set up.

In 1914, **Aleksandrovsky bathhouses on stilts were built opposite the boulevard designed by Nikolay Grigoryevich Bayev (1878-1949). He was a civil engineer and the chief architect of Baku' at the same time. According to many, they had a very peculiar architectural design.** The wooden bathhouses erected amid a multitude of





Baku boulevard today

busy piers transformed the appearance of the seaside.

After the foundation of the boulevard had been laid, widespread construction started on the lands adjoining the eastern section of the city wall. From an architectural standpoint, construction on this best part of the city was not very expressive and largely consisted of uniform two-storey houses with intersections between them. By then, Nikolayevskaya Street already had much more interesting and architecturally more significant buildings. However, the embankment represented a broad spatial composition, and this part of the city was very picturesque combined with the boulevard and the greenery of the trees. It was also the busiest part of Baku. Therefore, it was no coincidence that contemporaries of the time were saying that the embankment was the most remarkable part of Baku.

On the initiative of the Baku city council, a 70-meter parachute tower was made by the Bakinsky Rabochiy mechanical-engineering plant. On 28 April 1936, the tower was installed on the boulevard. Everyone

interested in trying themselves in this sport were free to do it at the tower. The tower was also used by future soldiers as a training facility for parachute jumping. The jumping altitude was 20, 25 and 60 meters. The tower's operation could be stopped only if any accident registered. However, it wasn't knocked down and is still there on the boulevard both as a reminder of the past and serving a useful function: an electronic board installed at the top showing the time, wind speed and the temperature in Baku.

In post-war years, due to the rising level of the Caspian and partial reconstruction of the boulevard, the bathhouses were removed. By the early 1950s, the seaside boulevard was already stretching to a distance of 2.7 km along the Caspian – from the Paris Commune shipyard to the new seaport. In 1966, an open area was established in Azadlig Square on a design developed by M. Huseynov. This area had approach ramps to the sea that were decorated with parterre greenery, flowerbeds and cascade of fountains. In 1967, the same author designed a project on the re-

construction of the entire boulevard. Considering the significant fall of the Caspian level that hit its all-time low in 1977 and the exposure of the large area of the seabed, works carried out on establishing a second lower terrace of the seaside park. Alleys, lawns and fountains were set up on the lower terrace.

In the 1990s, the rising Caspian waters flooded the walking flyover, the motorboat quay and the yacht club. As a result, the lower terrace of the boulevard had to be raised.

In 1988, following a decree of Azerbaijani President Heydar Aliyev, the Baku Boulevard received the status of the National Park, while under a decree of President Ilham Aliyev in 2007, a department dealing with National Park issues was established under the Cabinet of Ministers.

Major reconstruction work is currently under way on the Baku embankment. The National Park has become even bigger and more beautiful, while many of its facilities have been restored and refurbished. A new yacht club noted for its wonderful finishing and design has been established instead of the old one.



Baku boulevard today

One musical fountain has been opened in the Azneft Square, another outside the Museum Center, while the third one that has no analogues in the world, is on the embankment opposite the Government House.

On the initiative of Mrs. Mehriban Aliyeva, President of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, the Mugham Culture Center has been established near the Venice in a place formerly occupied by the Samed Vurgun outdoor cinema. The Center has hosted a number of contests and concerts of Mugham trios. The architectural design of the building is reminiscent of the traditional Mugham instruments (Tar, Kamancha and Tambourine).

Construction of the Carpet Center named after L. Karimov is currently under way. The building of the Carpet Museum is expected to resemble a folded-out carpet.

The building of the Business Center has been designed in a manner very appealing to the eye. The renovation and landscaping work on the boulevard was followed by the construction of the Park Bulvar (Boulevard) shopping mall which features the shops of many renowned brands.

There is an amusement section for kids and a number of fast food cafeterias representing different cuisines. There is an underground car park and a grocery store on the ground floor of the mall.

Battery-driven vehicles looking like steam locomotives run along the seaside much to the delight of children. There is a 6D cinema on the boulevard as well.

Although the appearance of the national park is undergoing change, project designers intend to preserve its architectural style. Namely, this concerns the facilities of historical and architectural significance. These include the Mirvari restaurant, the Bahar cinema, the children's outdoor theater, the parachute tower, etc.

Stretching to a distance of several kilometers along the Caspian coast, the Baku Boulevard has always been a popular place for family walkabouts, dating place of those in love and recreation of the elderly. In fact, the greenery of this part of the city included such a broad spectrum of floral species that the boulevard was rightfully described as a national asset.

Today, the embankment we are talking about is only surviving in the memories of the Baku natives. Once some sort of a "spirit" of the city and one of the world's most beautiful sights, the Baku embankment will continue to be a source of pride for the people of Baku for many more years. ■

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