

ITAPACÍ, BRAZIL: RAPID GROWTH OF A FRONTIER TOWN

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The town of Itapací, Goiás, located 125 miles northwest of the new federal capital of Brasília (Fig. 1), is the product of an advancing agricultural frontier. This paper analyzes Itapací's growth with respect to economic developments which have taken place in its region. Itapací was first studied in 1948 when I described the town on its site and its regional functions (Carmin, 1955). In July 1956, I re-examined Itapací as part of a larger study dealing with the Goiás agricultural frontier (Carmin, 1958).

European occupancy in southern Goiás has undergone two stages—the mining and grazing periods—and during the two times I studied Itapací the area was experiencing a third phase, the rise of commercial agriculture, an activity which dominates grazing in some sections but is only beginning to compete with it in others. With each stage of occupancy, new towns were born and many existing towns disappeared or changed their functions in order to survive.

The development and rapid growth of Itapací has been a response to the rise of commercial agriculture. A combination of many factors—including a rapidly growing national population with a resultant greater demand for farm products, a decrease in production from the impoverished soils of the long-settled areas, and a national focus of attention on southcentral Goiás as an area of promising agricultural value

—all have given rise to a rapid increase in the acreage devoted to crops in Goiás. Much of Brazil's central plateau is covered by *cerrado* (savanna-like) vegetation, but some parts contain *mato*, a semideciduous forest cover. The settlers of the region generally consider the *mato* soils excellent for crops such as coffee, corn, upland rice, cotton, and beans, but feel that the *cerrado* soils must be restricted to pasture land or at best only be used for less exacting crops such as pineapples (Waibel, 1948, p. 550). Thus to greatly simplify the situation, places such as Itapací, which lie within a great forested area, the Mato Grosso de Goiás (Fig. 2), have in recent years attracted growing numbers of pioneers who clear the forest and plant crops. The extension of the Goiás Railroad to Anápolis in 1935 aided the movement of people and supplies into south Goiás and provided an outlet to markets nearer the coast.

Encouraged by these developments, two farmers, in September, 1934, settled on the banks of the Rio São Patricinho near the northern edge of the Mato Grosso de Goiás. Within two years other settlers came to the area and the two farmers platted a small clearing in the forest nearby, lots were sold and Itapací was born. The settlement grew rapidly; in 1939 it became a *distrito* (township) seat and in 1945 it was elevated to the political position of *município* seat—the equivalent of our county seat.

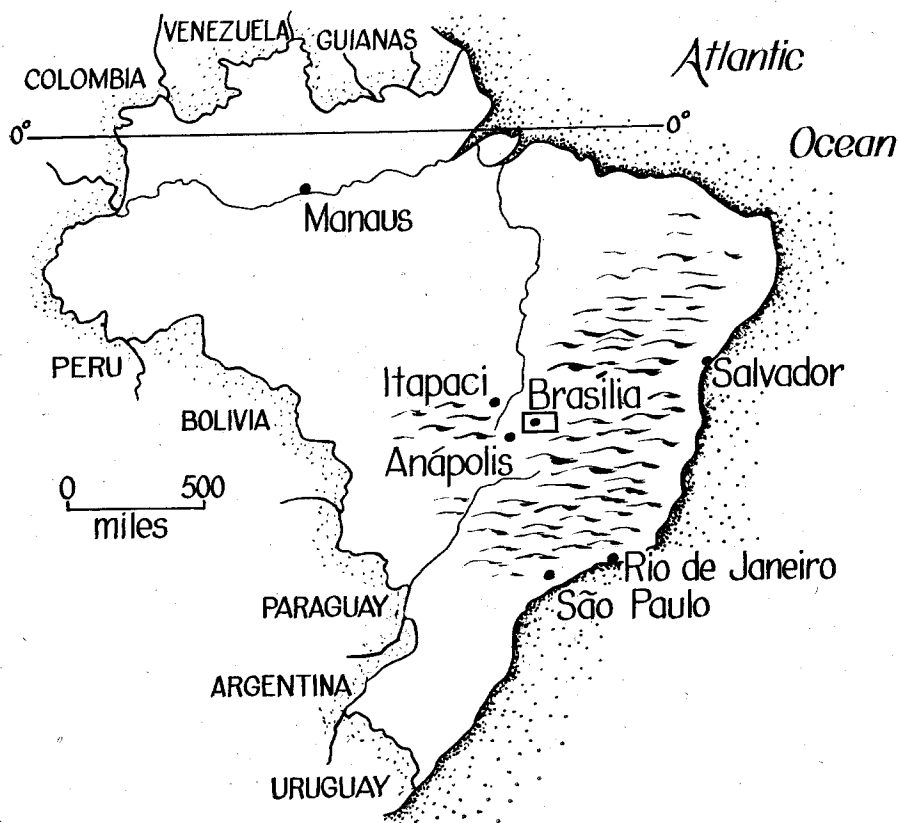


Fig. 1.—Location map.

Itapaci became the political, commercial, and cultural center for the municipio at the expense of Pilar, a decadent gold mining town founded in 1741 during the mining period. Pilar, or Itacê as it is called today, is outside of the forested zone of promising soils, hence settlers searching for productive farm land did not focus on and revive this old town. Instead, Itapaci, situated within the forest, attracted settlers. But Itapaci's growth and new status in the

municipio was closely tied to the regional economic developments considered below.

In 1941 the Brazilian government created an agricultural colony at Ceres (the Colônia Agrícola Nacional de Goiás), 90 miles north of Anápolis (Fig. 2). In effect, the establishment of a colony within the Mato Grosso de Goiás served as a federal stamp of approval on the forest-covered lands. In addition, improved transportation facilities in

the form of an all-weather highway to the Colônia from the railhead at Anápolis stimulated settlement around and beyond the Colônia. The road reached the Colônia in 1945 and at the time of my first field study of Itapaci in 1948, the federal road had been completed through the Colônia and some 44 miles beyond it. Thus a combination of factors caused the forested lands to attract settlers and an improvement in transport facilities made settlement there feasible. However, inaccessibility was still a handicap to Itapaci's growth in 1948 because the final section of the only road to the town

was a very poor single-lane route that turned westward from the good federal road a few miles north of the Colônia (see dashed line, Fig. 2). This rutted, narrow road which bridged gullies by a few hewn logs usually restricted the speed of the bus and truck serving Itapaci to 5 miles per hour when they made their semiweekly run from Anápolis (Fig. 3). During the dry season when the road was at its best these vehicles required about 10 hours of uncomfortable travel to make the 140 mile trip in 1948. Although the road to Itapaci was poor, only oxcart and horse trails extended beyond the

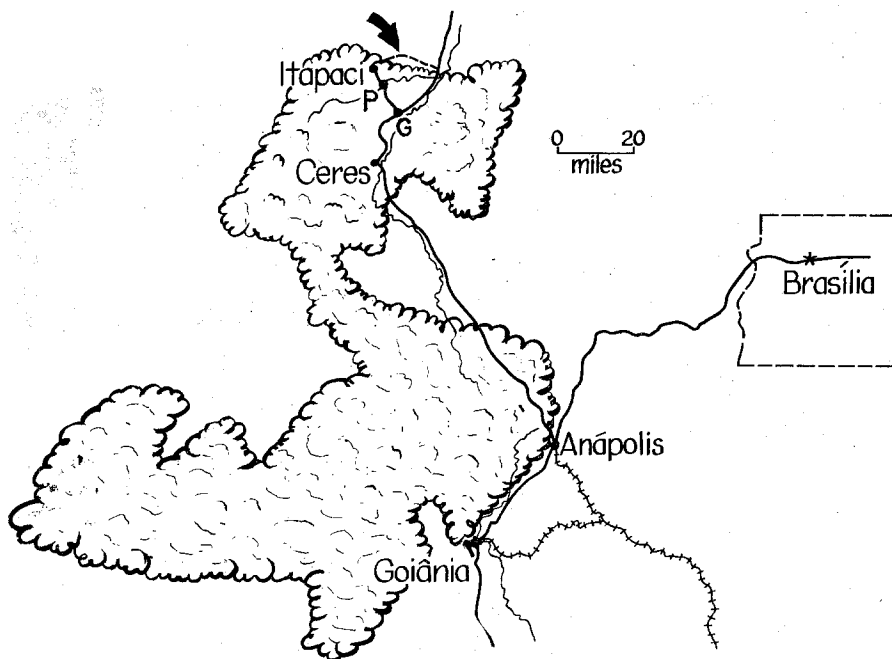


Fig. 2.—Site map. The S shaped area is the Mato Grosso de Goiás, a semi-deciduous forest area. Ceres is the headquarters of a national agricultural colony. The dashed line (arrow) shows the first road to Itapaci largely lying outside the forest zone. The towns of Nova Glória and Nova Ponte are located at G and P respectively.

town. It was truly the end of the road for automotive vehicles.

Figure 2 shows an important fact about Itapací's location. The town is located within but near the north edge of the Mato Grosso de Goiás. This situation made it possible for Itapací to develop in the first place and speeded up its early growth. Although federal funds built a good road beyond the agricultural colony, Itapací's site is 18 miles west of the point where the federal road emerges from the northern extremity of the forested zone. Thus, the incipient town started by the two farmers was isolated by heavy forest on the south and except for the fact that its site was not far from the easily penetrat-

ed *cerrado* vegetation area just to the north, it would not likely have been laid out when it was—or certainly its growth would have been delayed. The first road to Itapací largely went through *cerrado* areas or skirted the edges of the *mato*. Thus fewer and smaller trees were confronted and, in addition, because the *cerrado* vegetation tended to be on the uplands or upper slopes of valley sides, the road was located where surface drainage was good, and only a few crude bridges were required.

Roads of this nature were very poor, but little else could be provided because the tax income was meager due to the small population and high



Fig. 3.—Old road to Itapací, now unmaintained and little used. The vegetation is denser in this small valley than along most of the route which goes through savanna. The rude bridge of hewn logs imbedded and retained only by earth fill was typical of the first road to serve Itapací.

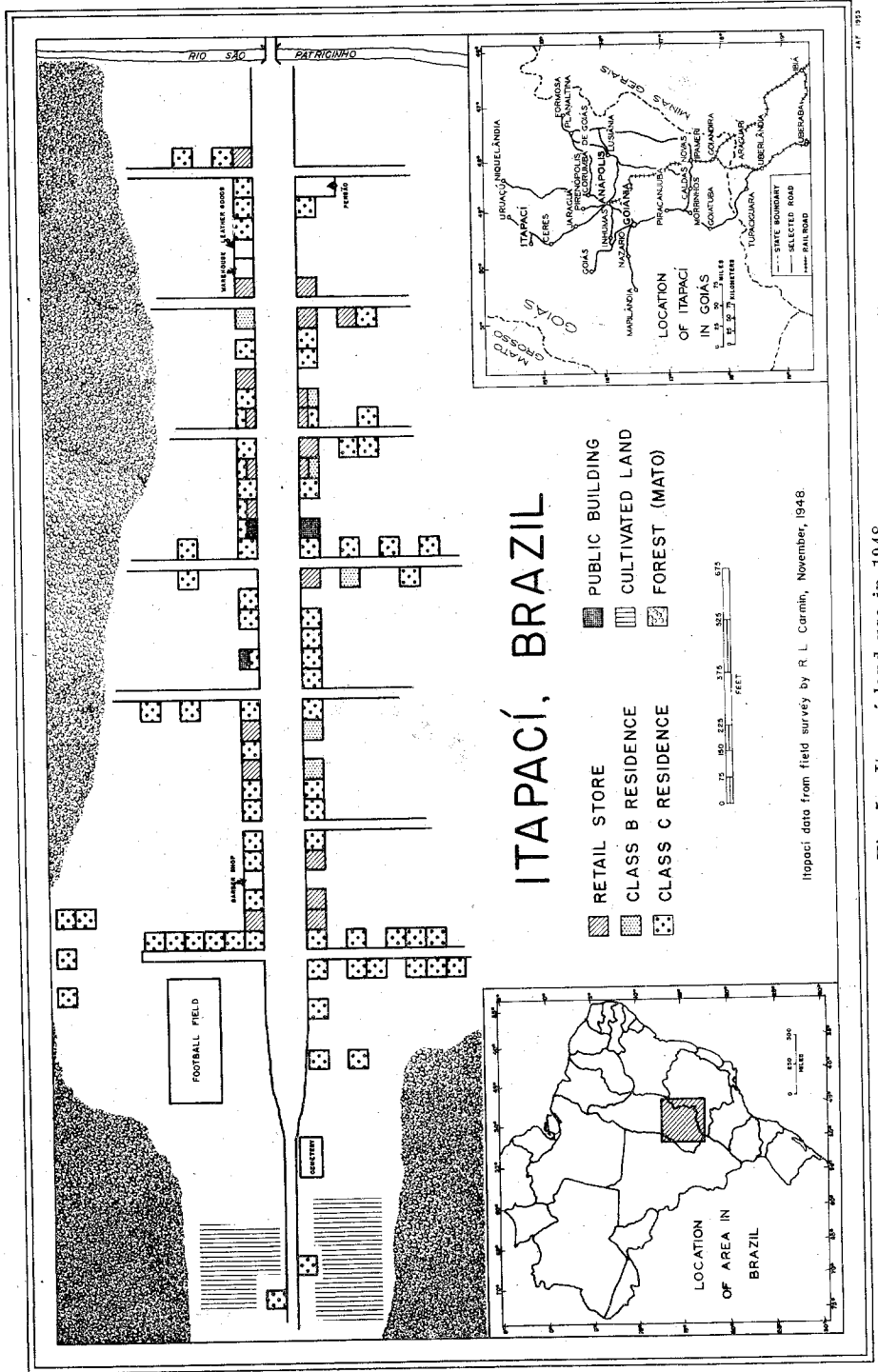


Fig. 4.—New road through forest midway between Nova Glória and Nova Ponte. View, about 14 miles south of Itapací, shows good surfaced, wide road in section where some forest remains.

percentage of undeveloped properties. Although poor, the road did provide Itapací with a degree of access to the railhead, and hardy souls with faith in the future of the community were attracted. This route was enough to start the town on its way, but with such an inferior road the town's growth would be limited

and other areas with similar farm land but better accessibility would surpass it.

Itapací's first road suffered a second handicap—it was round-about. The direct route to the railhead lay through the dense forest which provided two obstacles to easy road-building, namely, large trees to be



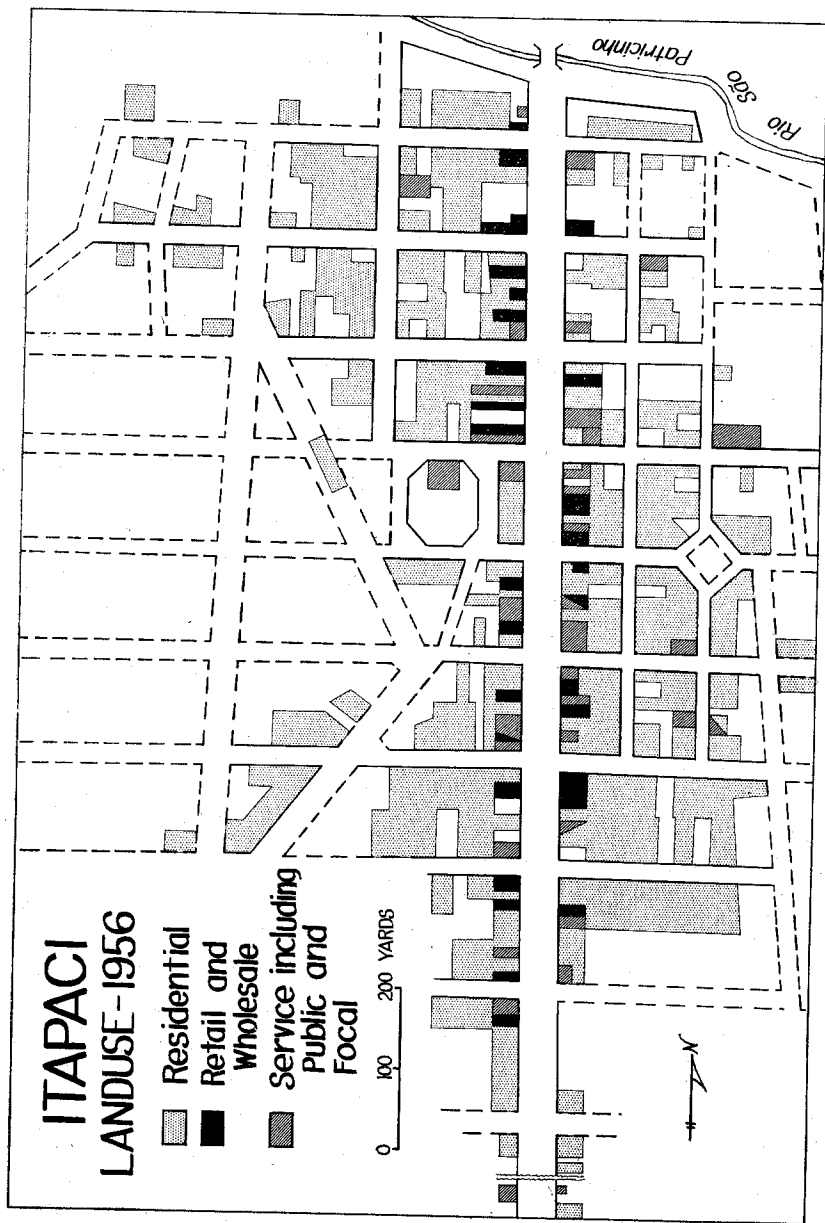


Fig. 6.—Itapaci land use in 1956.

cut and destumped and numerous sizeable streams to be bridged. The meager population of Itapaci Municipio in 1948, with about one person for each two square kilometers, could not afford the cost of building a road through the forest. Furthermore, the forest route would run largely through another municipio and be outside of Itapaci's jurisdiction.

In time, however, the agricultural frontier advanced westward and northward from Ceres, the seat of the agricultural colony, along a more or less solid line through the reciprocal action of land occupance and transportation development. As people moved into the forest, first poor and then increasingly better roads were built to serve them (Fig. 4). By 1951 a road was extended from the federal road through the forest to the Rio São Patricio—just eight miles southeast of Itapaci, and in October 1952, the São Patricio was bridged and this good road reached Itapaci.

No longer was Itapaci dangling at the end of a round-about, poor road—isolated from the relatively solid frontier of producing crop land. Nova Glória, a town of about 200 persons, soon developed at the road junction where the new road to Itapaci turned off the federal road (G in Fig. 2). And spectacularly, the town of Nova Ponte, New Bridge, sprang to life where the São Patricio was spanned (see P, Fig. 2). Nova Ponte had a population of 800 to 1,000 persons in 1956—just five years after the new road reached it. With the new road, Itapaci is still on the outer fringe of urban settlement, but it is now near the front

of the advancing line of agriculturally productive land in the Goiás frontier, and in a position to develop more completely by a sort of symbiotic association with nearby areas of settlement. With only the old, poor road, relatively few truckers, busses, or traveling salesmen bothered to go to Itapaci unless for a special purpose because there were no towns for the whole distance of 54 miles between Ceres in the agricultural colony and Itapaci. Moreover, very few farmers were to be found along the last 25 miles of this route because the *cerrado* areas supported few agriculturists. The new road, on the other hand, passes through two towns, many farms, and by numerous wayside stores where a variety of goods are traded or sold for agricultural produce from adjacent farms. In short, then, the presence of a relatively dense, productive population provides inducements such as bus customers, a market for goods, and a place where truckers can buy from wholesale collectors or the farmers. A trucker or salesman that goes beyond Ceres goes on to the next town, then the next, and so on—as long as the towns or farms are not spaced too far apart. The situation is similar to the clustering effect that occurs in shopping areas of large cities—each ready-to-wear clothing store stands to gain more in sales by being a part of an attractive nucleus than it loses by being in competition with other stores of its type in the area. With the new road, Itapaci no longer dominates an underdeveloped area, but instead it is one of a cluster of towns all vying for a share of a growing, productive region. In time, one of the towns



Fig. 7.—View south along 120 feet wide main street of Itapací in 1956. New road enters town at far end of main street. Arrow shows rickety bridge (see Fig. 6), entrance-way in past via old road seen at left of arrow. Some virgin forest remains in right background.

in the cluster may, through propitious circumstances, outstrip the others in growth and, once a strong lead is taken, tend to restrict the growth of other nearby towns. It is yet too early to tell whether Itapací will be the favored one, but its early lead and its function as município seat give it strong advantages.

What has been Itapací's rate of growth? During the first fifteen years the town accumulated a population of approximately 900 persons. In the next six years, from 1949 to 1954, it doubled its population and in July, 1956, 2,075 persons resided there.¹ Figures 5 and 6 show land

use maps of Itapací in 1948 and in 1956. Space does not permit us to examine in detail the spread of the town on its site or to consider the town's function as reflected in the kind and nature of its urban forms, but an examination of the two land use maps shows much concerning the growth of the town. The forest has been cut back, more streets have been laid out, and many more buildings have been constructed. Retail stores and a variety of services focus on the main street. The broken lines shown on the 1956 map are the original plat lines and they show the planned nature of the layout. Occupance of

¹ Data obtained from interview with Filomeno Luiz Fransa, Statistical Agent for the Instituto Brasileiro de Estatístico, Itapací Município, July 27, 1956.

the site has closely conformed to this layout with but one or two exceptions.

In 1948 Itapací Municipio was underdeveloped considering the proportion of land utilized for crops, and in agricultural productivity per person (Carmin, 1955, p. 116). Evidence indicated that a high proportion of the farms were too new to provide much more than subsistence living for their owners, that is, the farmers had not been on the land long enough to clear sufficient space for producing a surplus beyond their own needs. Today this situation is improved and it is significant that a commercial product, coffee, was harvested from 1,316 hectares in 1955.² Thus to a degree, the Municipio has overcome the space-time limitations on its growth. Enough time has now elapsed and more land is in crops, both subsistence and commercial. Also the new road has helped overcome much of the "space" or location handicap Itapací formerly suffered. In 1947 the Municipio had only .0004 of its area in crops. In 1952 the amount was

.004, and in 1955 it had increased to .013.

Itapací is still a primitive place with few comforts, but there are many indications that the town will grow steadily in an orderly fashion in response to the development of its immediate vicinal area (the municipio), and of the larger, agriculturally productive area of which it is a part. With Brasília, the new federal capital, established in an area of relatively unproductive *cerrado* lands some 125 miles southeast, Itapací and the whole region in which Itapací is situated has a prosperous future ahead as a supplier of a rapidly growing urban market.

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² Agricultural production data from records of Seção de Estatística Militar do Departamento Estadual de Estatística, Goiânia, Goiás, provided by Maria du Glória Fleury, Aug. 10, 1956.