BLOG: Pandemic Realities: In-Person Research at the Archivo General de Puerto Rico under COVID. Phase 1: Preparation by Rosa Cordero

Blog Post published by Gretchen Pierce on Sunday, March 13, 2022

Today I am pleased to present the next entry from the “Teaching with H-Latam’s Research Corner Blog” series. Are you a graduate student (or an advisor of one) who has recently used archival materials, whether in person or online? This is a great way to provide advice for future patrons and to get an early publication on your CV. With that said, we welcome entries from scholars at all stages of their careers (or archivists/librarians) who would like to contribute to the greater good. Please email me at gkpierce@ship.edu or fill out this Google Form to express your interest in blogging.

Rosa Cordero is a Ph.D. student of Latin American and Caribbean History at Rutgers University. Before starting grad school, she was a Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellow and member of the University of Puerto Rico-Río Piedras campus’s Honors Program. It was during her time as an undergraduate that she completed her honors thesis titled “Negotiating Power: Women, Sexual Violence, and the Law During Puerto Rico’s Colonial Transition (1880-1920).” Her current project expands on her previous work while focusing on rural, black, and working-class intimacies, kinship, and personhood during late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century Puerto Rico. Research undertaken for this project informs this post.

Pandemic Realities: In-Person Research at the Archivo General de Puerto Rico under COVID. Phase 1: Preparation

The Archivo General de Puerto Rico (AGPR), located on Avenida de la Constitución in San Juan, is an excellent source of information for those studying Puerto Rico, the Spanish and U.S. empires, the Caribbean, and the Atlantic world more generally between the early nineteenth and late twentieth century (see Figure 1). However, it is essential to know what to do before physically going to the archive (its contents are not yet digitalized).

1-1-agpreentrada.png
Since COVID-19, the archive has adopted strategies to ensure public safety. Consequently, the days of operation and number of people allowed per day are limited. Individuals are asked to reserve a spot and request materials via email. As a result, researchers need to be strategic with their time and **take note of all information** that helps archivists locate the required documentation. This first part of my two-part blog series details the preliminary steps one needs to take before their in-person visit.

The first thing to find out is what collection to access, the archive’s operation times, and what people to contact. For this, one needs to access the AGPR’s general [website](https://www.agpr.gobierno.pr) (see Figure 2). Once there, you will scroll down and see the descriptions of the different collections which include the Archivo de Música y Sonido (it contains approximately 15,000 musical pieces by more than 700 composers and 10,000 recordings), the Archivo de Fotografía (its collection consists of 150,000 records, including photographs in various techniques, negatives, slides, and a special collection of postcards), and the Archivo de Imágenes en Movimiento (it has approximately 4,000 film titles and 2,000 videotapes) (see Figure 3). The one unit that is left out from these descriptions is the Sala de Estudio y Referencia. It includes notarial records and newspapers.
Figure 2: AGPR’s Homepage. [https://www.icp.pr.gov/archivo-general/]. Accessed December 16, 2021.

Figure 3: Descriptions of three of the four units are seen in this section of the AGPR’s website.

Once you identify the unit, you will scroll back up on the homepage towards the section labeled Servicios Limitados (see Figure 4). It contains a green hyperlink. Follow the link. The hyperlink will lead you to a PDF. At the bottom of the document’s first page, you will see a table containing the name of the section, the number of individuals allowed in each area, and the days of the week the unit is open for visitors (see Figure 5). Plan accordingly. At the bottom of the PDF’s third and final page is a table containing the contact information of every unit (see Figure 6). Take note of the
contact information needed. Once you have gathered the information required to request your materials, you can contact the department.

![1-4-apgrservicioslimitados1.png](image)

Figure 4: This is the first bit of text on the archive’s home page. It contains the link, under Servicios Limitados, that leads one to the contact information.

![1-5-agprdiasdeservicio.png](image)

Figure 5: Table found on the first page of the PDF detailing the archive’s rules during the pandemic. It includes the number of individuals allowed and the days of service.
Once you have this information, head back to the [archive’s general page](https://www.icp.pr.gov/archivo-general) and scroll down until you find in the left corner a section titled Recursos de búsqueda (see Figure 7). Click on it. Search for the unit that interests you. It should appear in bold and be located at the beginning of a five-column table. As an example, I will focus on the Sala de Estudio y Referencia (see Figure 8).

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**Figure 6:** Table with the names of the individuals in charge of the units and their contact information.

**1-7-agprindice.png**

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**Figure 7:** Index located in the archive’s general page.

**1-8-agprsaladereferenciayestudio.png**
Each unit has a table with five columns. The first column contains the name of the *fondo* or collection. The second describes the research resources (including the section or *sub-fondo*), the third column notes the period covered by that finding aid, the fourth offers a brief description of the resources and the final column includes a hyperlink to a PDF document. You will need to look at the first four columns to identify the section(s) that will serve your research. Once you pick your section(s), take note of the information on the columns. **Do not forget to do this.** You will need it when you send out your request. I will focus on the Fondo Judicial del Tribunal de Arecibo (see Figure 9).

![1-9-agprfondojudicialdearecibo.png](1-9-agprfondojudicialdearecibo.png)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fondo Judicial</th>
<th>Judicial; Serie:</th>
<th>Años Inclusivos</th>
<th>Contenido</th>
<th>Archivo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Judicial, Serie:</td>
<td>Tribunal General de Justicia, Sociedad, Tribunal Superior de Arecibo,</td>
<td>1839-1953</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inventario de documentos procedentes del Tribunal Superior de Arecibo (1839-1953)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After writing down all information about your section, click on the hyperlink containing the PDF. That PDF is the catalog of your area. Some catalogs will include a description of the section and a table of contents (see Figure 10). If that is the case, read the description to confirm your interest in researching that unit and look at the table of contents to further define the sources you will request. For example, the table of contents for the Fondo Judicial de Arecibo contains a *sub-serie* of civil cases and another of criminal cases (see Figure 11). Write down the name of the sub-serie you’ll research and turn to the pages listed.
PROCEDENCIA Y NATURALEZA

El lote documental que forma objeto de descripción se origina en la actividad judicial que se despliega en Arecibo y la región circundante de la cual éste ha sido cabeza de distrito tradicionalmente. Esta actividad comienza luego de la creación de la Real Audiencia Territorial de Puerto Rico en el año 1832 y ha continuado ininterrumpidamente hasta el presente.

El actual Tribunal Superior de Arecibo es heredero y continuación del antiguo juzgado de la audiencia. El material que conservamos no sólo es pertinente al propio Arecibo sino a varios municipios aledaños pues no solamente el juzgado de Arecibo fue donde se dilucidaban las causas pertinentes a los habitantes de estos municipios sino que más tarde cuando se crearon juzgados propios en algunos de estos otros municipios, éstos aparentemente estaban acreditados, por lo menos en lo administrativo, a la cabeza del distrito judicial que era de Arecibo.

No existiendo una historia particularizada sobre las instituciones judiciales del país que nos informe en detalle sobre su trayectoria organizativa, jurisdicciones, creación de juzgados, supresión de los mismos, etc. solamente podemos señalar aquí, atendiendo a los propios documentos, los municipios que en algún momento o de una forma u otra fueron parte de esta jurisdicción judicial. Estos fueron por lo menos: Arecibo, Barceloneta, Camuy, Ciales, Hatillo, Manati, Moraíta, Quebradillas y Utuado.

Este lote documental consta de unos 800 pies lineales de material. Cubre desde la década de 1830 en que se creó la Audiencia hasta mediados del presente siglo aunque el grueso del material se concentra en las últimas décadas del pasado siglo y las primeras del presente.

Figure 10: Description for the Fondo Judicial de Arecibo
You will notice that the boxes listed in the catalog are **numerically** organized by date (see Figure 12). Consequently, a researcher's next step is to identify the period of study. Take note of all the boxes that cover your period. For the moment, **the AGPR is only allowing researchers to access three boxes per day.** Divide your list of materials accordingly. The final step is to email your section contact with the information you have gathered and include the dates you wish to reserve space. Figure 13 is an example of an email sent to the archive.
Figure 12: boxes listed under the sub-fondo Expedientes Criminales

1-12-agprexpedientescriminales.png

1-13-agprejemplodeemail.png
Figure 13: I wrote this email on December 8, 2021, requesting materials for January 4, 2022.

The AGPR contains thousands of state-produced documents (plans, maps, notarial records), printed matter (newspapers, magazines), and privately produced materials (drawings, photography, films, and recordings). Hopefully, this blog will encourage and help you explore what it offers. The second part of this two-part series will expand on what was discussed here by explaining what happens after your in-person visit has been booked. However, if you are still unsure about how to navigate the archive’s resources, you can email the archivists at salderef@icp.pr.gov asking for an orientation.